



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on September 6, 2013

## Unintended Consequences From Potential Syrian Attack Continue to Grow

Following an informal meeting on Thursday between President Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin, [Putin made clear](#) that he would continue to provide all manner of military aid to Syria's President Assad. Such aid would include completing delivery of the [S-300 defense missiles](#) ordered by Syria but temporarily delayed over payment issues. The S-300 radar system can simultaneously track up to 100 different targets and deploy as many as 12 missiles in retaliation inside five minutes.



Rep. George Holding (R-N.C.) quizzed General Martin Dempsey, chairman of Obama's Joint Chiefs of Staff, about the dangers of such an action: "We can certainly say that Russia would have options to strike us in that theater in retaliation for us striking their ally.... [What would the United States do] if Russia decided to strike at us...?" Dempsey demurred, saying only that "it wouldn't be helpful in this setting to speculate about that." But a retaliatory action of some sort by Russia is one possible consequence of a U.S. attack on Syria.

Another possible consequence came to light when the State Department [intercepted an order](#) from the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Qasem Soleimani, to Shiite militia groups operating in Iraq, telling them that they must "be prepared to respond with force" if the United States does launch an attack on Syria. An attack on Syria would put the U.S. embassy in Iraq's capital city, Baghdad, one of the largest American diplomatic facilities in the world, at severe risk. In addition, Iran's fleet of small, fast, highly maneuverable, and dangerous water craft could target one or more of the American destroyers currently lying off the coast of Syria awaiting instructions from Washington. The U.S. military is taking precautions to aid in the evacuation of American diplomatic compounds in the area, and, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, has already begun "making preparations ... for potential retaliation against U.S. embassies and other interests in the Middle East and North Africa."

Some of those "interests" are located inside Israel, which has promised to retaliate against any attack mounted in response to Obama's "punitive war" against Assad.

Other consequences of Obama's saber-rattling are beginning to show up in polls taken over the Syrian issue. [Just since the middle of July](#), NBC News, CBS News, and Quinnipiac polls have shown Americans' increasing unhappiness with Obama's latest adventure, with the big Mack-daddy of them all, Gallup, showing that 53 percent of those polled disapprove of Obama's foreign policy moves, while just 40 percent approve, a remarkable negative spread of 13 percent.

Such dissent is showing up in Congress as well. On Tuesday the Senate Foreign Relations Committee [voted underwhelmingly](#), 10-7, for a watered-down version of a resolution allowing Obama to proceed with his plans to attack Syria, but with just a 60-day window with a possible 30-day extension before requiring him to cease operations. In addition to the demand for "no boots on the ground," the



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resolution required the White House to come up with plans to install a negotiated settlement of differences between warring parties at the end of those 60 days. Of the 18 members of the committee, five Republicans and two Democrats voted “no” while liberal Senator Edward Markey (D-Mass.) voted “present.”

Liberals in the House of Representatives are also beginning to feel the heat and are [starting to see the light](#). Liberal Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) told reporters, “I am not voting [for] my party. I am not voting [for] my president. I am voting [for] my country.” Echoing that sentiment was Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-Mo.), a prominent member of the Congressional Black Caucus (who also signed a letter last week urging the president to seek authorization before attacking Syria), who said, “If I had to vote today, I would cast a ‘no’ vote.” Liberal Rep. Rick Nolan (D-Minn.) not only is opposing Obama’s adventure — saying, “I am more convinced than ever that this will be a tragic mistake” — but he is also actively working to round up support against such authorization.

The president is sitting on an ice cube that is melting. The [Progressive Change Campaign Committee](#) announced the results of its own poll of 55,000 of its members on Wednesday, showing that 73 percent oppose Obama taking action in Syria. It sent a memo to all Democrats in Congress entitled “Your base opposes military action in Syria” and launched a telephone campaign to those members to pressure them to vote “no.”

When the *Washington Post* conducted a [“whip count,”](#) it found that of the 371 House members it contacted, 204 of them were either against authorization or leaning that way, while it could find but 24 members in favor. And when interviewed by Newsmax, veteran pollster Matt Towery of Insider/Advantage Polling, remarked: “I think the president is in extraordinarily deep trouble, as are the House members [John Boehner and Eric Cantor] who put their necks out on this.”

Obama is finding that there are unintended consequences of his desire to validate his “red line” warning issued last summer by punishing Assad for allegedly murdering more than 1,000 civilians with chemical weapons. He’ll also discover that the quagmire of conflicting interests in the Middle East guarantees him no easy exit without significant damage to his credibility and prestige. In what the *Washington Post* called one of the “most amazing letter[s] to the editor ever written,” well-known Egyptian blogger The Big Pharaoh [explained the president’s predicament](#):

Sir:

Iran is backing Assad. Gulf states are against Assad!

Assad is against the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood and Obama are against [Egypt’s] General Sisi.

But Gulf states are pro-Sisi! Which means they are against the Muslim Brotherhood!

Iran is pro-Hamas, but Hamas is backing the Muslim Brotherhood!

Obama is backing the Muslim Brotherhood, yet Hamas is against the U.S.!

Gulf states are pro-U.S. But Turkey is with Gulf states against Assad; yet Turkey is pro-Muslim Brotherhood against General Sisi. And General Sisi is being backed by the Gulf states!

Welcome to the Middle East and have a nice day.

With Obama’s resolution barely squeaking by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and with mounting opposition to such unilateral adventurism, there are additional unintended consequences.



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[Wrote Democratic pollster Doug Schoen:](#)

Obama will seek to blame the Republicans if he loses the vote on Syria, as he has with issue after issue, time after time. On this occasion, I believe the strategy will fail — if only because as the United States comes to look weaker and weaker, so too will President Obama.

I don't think this will be a history-making failure on Obama's part, because I think his presidency is basically at a point where it is viewed as ineffective and pretty much at its end anyway.

[But] it would be very difficult for Boehner and Cantor to be reelected to leadership in the House, with this sort of revolt on their hands.

With the piling up of unintended consequences over Obama's threatened military action against Syria, there appears to be only one conclusion: Obama's image as savior and statesman will have been irrevocably shattered, Republican leadership in the House will likely have to find other work after the 2014 elections, and Syria will be left to its own devices without the military "assistance" of the United States.

*A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at [www.LightFromTheRight.com](http://www.LightFromTheRight.com), primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at [badelman@thenewamerican.com](mailto:badelman@thenewamerican.com)*



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