

President Obama Walks Himself Into Syria Impeachment Trap

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Sept. 9—A decisive week in American and world history is beginning as this is written. The Congress returns from August recess today to consider President Barack Obama's demand for authorization to use military force against Syria, over still-dubious charges that the Assad government was behind the Aug. 21 chemical weapons incident in Goutha, a suburb of Damascus. At this time, every major news outlet and intelligence source is reporting that, while the President may narrowly win support from the U.S. Senate (particularly if there is no attempt at a filibuster, which would require 60 votes to pass), the House of Representatives appears to overwhelmingly oppose any authorization of force.

This, in turn, poses a dilemma for the President. If he ignores a Congressional "no" vote and goes ahead with even limited military strikes against Syrian regime targets, he will be acting in clear violation of Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution, which gives Congress the exclusive authority to declare war. If he orders such an attack, it is highly likely that the House will launch impeachment proceedings against him.

While the House of Representatives is strongly opposed to military action, the American public is even more vociferous in its opposition to any further U.S. military engagement in Syria. According to scores of Members of Congress who have spoken to the media in recent days, calls are running 100 to 1 against the

President's demands for military strikes. Obama's effort to win support for military action has galvanized a bipartisan opposition that has broken a long cycle of partisan fault lines on every important issue facing the nation. House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) has told the members of his caucus that they are free to vote their conscience on this issue of war or peace. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has been only half-heartedly pressing Democrats to support the President.

The drive for war by the United States against the Syrian regime is driven by a series of Obama policy blunders and miscalculations dating back more than two years. In mid-2011, Obama declared that "Assad must go," without getting any qualified assessment from the intelligence community or the military on what the actual prospects were for Assad's removal. A year later, Obama declared a "red line" on the use of chemical weapons by Syria, a blunder that no President should ever commit. In effect, top White House aides and other Obama loyalists are arguing increasingly for a war to save the President's credibility, something that no Americans are willing to accept as a justification for a fourth war in a Muslim country since the start of the Bush 43 Presidency. There are no partisan fault lines on this issue. Republicans, Democrats, and independents, in every recent poll, are all opposed by large majorities to another war at a time when the U.S. economy is continuing to decline in



White House/Pete Souza

Despite warnings from the U.S. intelligence community, the military leadership, the Congress, and the American people, President Obama has continued his drive for an armed attack against Syria. Is he also taking steps toward his own impeachment?

real physical terms, when job losses are continuing, and the country is facing a further collapse in basic infrastructure.

Gaps in the Evidence

Despite Secretary of State John Kerry's best efforts to assert that the intelligence on the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons is rock solid, there are huge gaps in the so-called evidence, and the United Nations inspectors who spent a week on the ground in Goutha have yet to complete their preliminary evaluations. Rep. Allan Grayson (D-Fla.), a harsh critic of the so-called dossier, told reporters after receiving a classified briefing this past week, that he remained absolutely unconvinced that there was significant evidence that the Assad government carried out the CW attack. According to one senior U.S. intelligence official, the case against the Syrian government is at best circumstantial, and is based on a triangulation of communications intercepts from German, Israeli, and American signal intelligence agencies.

This week, Larry Johnson, a former CIA officer who also worked on counter-terrorism for the State Department, reported that his friends inside the CIA have stated that both American and British intelligence agencies know that "Assad didn't do it," and are fear-

ful that the evidence will eventually come out, in a replay of the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq invasion, which was based on fabricated and false evidence that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (see below). The group VIPS (Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity) issued a second open letter on Sept. 5, warning President Obama that he was being lured into war on the basis of badly flawed intelligence (see Sept. 6 *EIR*).

Despite these warnings against military action, senior intelligence officials insist that, as of now, President Obama is prepared to order military strikes, *with or without* Congressional approval. They say that the President is convinced, along with the members of his Cabinet, that a clear precedent must be established that any use of chemical weapons will result in crippling punishment. The source reports that both the "humanitarian interventionists" (Susan Rice, Samantha Power, Ben Rhodes) and the realists (Chuck Hagel, Gen. Martin Dempsey, John Kerry) all agree that a failure to act will embolden other chemical weapons states, including North Korea and Iran, to feel they can act with impunity.

That report, however, flies in the face of persistent strong opposition to any military action from Joint Chiefs chairman Dempsey and the entire JCS, as well as a large and growing number of retired flag officers, who all insist that military action should be rejected. During last week's hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations and the House Foreign Affairs committees, Dempsey signaled that he is not satisfied that there is any clear mission behind plans for military strikes.

The White House and Cabinet view, if it prevails, could lead to horrific consequences. The danger of the Syrian action triggering global conflict is very high. At the just-concluded G-20 summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, President Vladimir Putin made it clear that Russia will stand with Syria, and that the U.S. has no authority under international law to carry out any attack against Syria without explicit authorization from the UN Security Council. Putin challenged the accuracy of the U.S. "dossier," and called on the Obama Adminis-

tration to deliver the proof to the Security Council for serious deliberation and debate. Putin pointed out, at the close of the G-20 summit, that a majority of member countries of the group were opposed to U.S. military action.

Even Britain's Cameron government, while backing Obama, has no support from the British public nor from the House of Commons, which voted Aug. 29 against authorization for British participation in any Syrian strikes. Fearing his own removal from office, Cameron publicly declared that he would obey the wishes of the parliament. The last time a British parliament blocked a prime minister from going to war was in 1782, when the parliament blocked any further funding for the war in North America against the Continental Army, effectively ending the American Revolutionary War.

President Putin has backed his harsh words at St. Petersburg with actions, including the deployment of advanced naval ships to the eastern Mediterranean off the coast of Syria. Leading American strategists, including Lyndon LaRouche, have warned repeatedly that U.S. strikes on Syria could trigger a world war that could quickly become a thermonuclear war of extinc-

tion. Legal scholars such as Francis Boyle, Bruce Fein, and Paul Craig Roberts have warned President Obama that any military action without UN Security Council approval would be an act of aggressive war, constituting a war crime and a crime against humanity under the Nuremberg Codes and the UN Charter. Boyle, a professor of international law at the University of Illinois College of Law, in a series of interviews last week, called for impeachment proceedings to be initiated against President Obama today, at the start of the Congressional session, as the only way to prevent World War III.

Obama has walked into a deadly trap of his own making. A week ago, confronted with massive opposition to military action without Congressional approval, the President delayed the strikes to give Congress time to debate and vote. He can accept the Congressional vote outcome and stay within the confines of the law. If, as is widely anticipated, the House votes against authorization, the President could simply say that the will of the people is against war and he will abide by that decision. Whatever the outcome, the coming days may determine the fate of mankind for a long time to come.

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