

Caveman Credibility and its Costs: Bombing in the Name of Democracy. Triggering a Humanitarian Disaster in Syria

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[War is a Crime](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Sending a bunch of \$3 million missiles into Syria to blow stuff up will kill a great many men, women, and children [directly](#). It will also kill a great many people indirectly, as violence escalates in response — an established pattern recognized even by the war-promoting [Washington Post](#).

Refugees are fleeing Syria in greater numbers as a result of the U.S. government's threat to send in missiles. The refugees have all sorts of opinions of their government, but by many accounts they overwhelmingly [oppose](#) foreign missile [strikes](#) — a position on which they agree with a large majority in the United States.

Not only is President Obama's proposal guaranteed to make things worse, but it risks making things dramatically worse, with threats of retaliation now coming from Syria, Iran, and Russia. The U.S. media is already describing the proposed missile strikes as "[retaliatory](#)," even though the United States hasn't been attacked. Imagine what the pressure will be in Washington to actually retaliate if violence leads, as it so often does, to more violence. Imagine the enthusiasm for a broader war, in Washington and Jerusalem, if Iran retaliates. Risking a major war, no matter how slim you think the chance is, ought to be done only for some incredibly important reason.

The White House doesn't have one. President Obama's [draft resolution](#) for Congress reads, in part:

"Whereas, the objective of the United States' use of military force in connection with this authorization should be to deter, disrupt, prevent, and degrade the potential for, future uses of chemical weapons or other weapons of mass destruction;

"Whereas, the conflict in Syria will only be resolved through a negotiated political settlement, and Congress calls on all parties to the conflict in Syria to participate urgently and constructively in the Geneva process;"

In other words, the missiles have nothing to do with ending the war. The war will only end through peace negotiations. All parties should "urgently" and "constructively" pursue that process. And yet, here come the missiles!

Missile strikes will enrage the Syrian government and encourage the opposition. Both sides will fight more fiercely. Both sides will be more seriously tempted to use any weapons in

their arsenals. Missiles will prolong and escalate the war.

Steps toward ending the war could include: halting CIA and other military assistance; pressuring Russia and Iran, on one side, and Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states on the other, to stop arming the war; and bringing both sides to a peace conference in Geneva. Is the United States urgently and constructively taking these steps? Of course not.

What about basic humanitarian aid? The U.S. government is just not interested in providing it, not on anything remotely approaching the scale of the weaponry flowing into the war.

President Obama's stated objective is to deter the future use of chemical weapons. But missiles may encourage that very thing by escalating the war. There are other steps that could be used to reduce the future use of chemical weapons. For one thing, the United States could stop using, developing, and stock-piling chemical weapons. Most nations do not do so. The White House and the U.S. media have begun saying that Syria holds the biggest chemical weapons supply "in the Middle East," rather than "in the world," as President Obama said last week. The world-record-holder is the U.S. government.

The U.S. government has admitted to using white phosphorous and new types of napalm as weapons against Iraqis. The best way to discourage that behavior is not to bomb Washington.

The U.S. government has used chemical weapons against "its own people" (always far more outrageous in the eyes of the U.S. media than killing someone else's people) from the military's assault on veterans in the [Bonus Army](#) to the FBI's assault on a religious cult in [Waco](#), Texas. The best way to discourage this behavior is not to bomb Washington.

The U.S. could also stop supporting the use of chemical weapons by certain nations, including Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Iranians. The U.S. could sign onto and support the International Criminal Court. And the U.S. could abandon its role as top weapons supplier to the world and leading war-maker on earth. Less war means less use of all weapons, including various internationally sanctioned weapons that the United States both uses and exports, such as cluster bombs and depleted uranium.

Obama's intention to "disrupt," "prevent," and "degrade" can be taken seriously only at the risk of much higher casualties, as sending missiles into supplies of chemical weapons is [extremely risky](#).

CREDIBILITY: LA COSA NOSTRA

The purpose of missile strikes, according to the corporate U.S. media is, of course, not the reduction of chemical weapons use, but the maintenance of "credibility."

We don't all teach our children that when they disagree with another child on the playground they must either murder that child or lose their credibility. But our televisions and newspapers feed that type of message to us nonetheless, through news about the next possible war. Julie Pace of the Associated Press warns:

"For more than a week, the White House had been barreling toward imminent military action against Syria. But President Barack Obama's abrupt decision to instead ask Congress for permission left him with a high-risk gamble that could devastate his credibility if no action is ultimately taken in response to a deadly

chemical weapons attack that crossed his own 'red line'."

And here I would have thought that bombing countries in the name of "democracy" against the will of an overwhelming majority at home was costing our government what little credibility it might have had. Didn't Britain gain in credibility when its Parliament represented its people and said "No" to war on Syria? Doesn't that step do more for the image of democracy in Western Asia than a decade of destabilizing Iraq has done? Couldn't the U.S. government do more for democracy by leaving Syria alone and dropping its support for brutal governments in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, etc.?

THE LAW PROBLEM

And shouldn't a credible enforcer of the rule of law obey the law? Under no possible conception is it legal for the United States to send missiles into Syria. The Kellogg-Briand Pact bans any such action. The most common excuse for ignoring that ban is the U.N. Charter and its loopholes for wars (wars that are defensive or U.N.-authorized). A U.S. attack on Syria is not defensive, and the White House isn't seriously pretending it is. A U.S. attack on Syria is not U.N. authorized, and the White House isn't pretending it is or pursuing such authorization in any way. Other U.S. wars carried out in violation of these laws have put up a pretense of internationalism by cajoling some other countries to help out in minimal ways. In this case, that isn't happening. President Obama is proposing to uphold international norms through an action that the international community of nations is against. France looks like the only possible, and at this point unlikely, partner — not counting al Qaeda, of course.

A president also cannot go to war without Congress. So, it is encouraging that President Obama has now suggested he will try to rise to the standard of George W. Bush and bother to lie to Congress before launching a war. But if Congress were to say yes, the war would remain illegal under both the U.N. Charter and the Kellogg-Briand Pact. And if Congress were to say no, President Obama has indicated that he might just launch the war anyway.

If you look at the [resolution](#) that Obama has proposed that Congress pass, it doesn't grant permission for a specific limited missile strike on a particular country at a particular time, but for limitless warfare, as long as some connection can be made to weapons of mass destruction in the Syrian conflict. The White House has made clear that it believes this will add exactly nothing to its powers, as it already possesses open-ended authorizations for war in the never-repealed Afghanistan and Iraq authorizations, which themselves added exactly nothing to White House war powers, because the president is given total war power through the Constitution in invisible ink that only the White House can see.

Already, there are moves in Congress to re-write Obama's draft, in order to — in fact — give him limited powers to strike Syria. But those limited powers will allow exactly the disastrous action discussed above. And there is no reason to believe the limitation will hold. President Obama used a limited U.N. resolution to do things it never authorized in Libya. Missiles into Syria that provoke a response from Iran will provoke screams for blood out of Congress and the White House, and all laws be damned.

THE LYING PROBLEM

All of the above remains the same whether the Syrian government used chemical weapons

or not. The way to end a war is to arrange a cease-fire, de-escalate, disarm, cool tensions, and start talking. Pouring gasoline on a fire doesn't put it out. The way to uphold the rule of law is by consistent example and through prosecutions by courts, not vigilantism. This remains the case whether the Syrian government has done what President Obama claims or not.

It is important, however, that so few people around the world and in the United States are willing to take Obama's word for it. If Obama's goal is to "send a message," but most people in the Middle East disagree with him on the facts, what kind of message will he possibly be sending? That is, even if his claims happen to be true, what good is that if nobody believes U.S. war justifications anymore?

The super-healthy skepticism that has now been created is not all attributable to Iraq. The world has been flooded with false claims from the U.S. government during the wars on Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and even Syria, as well as during the drone wars. Past claims that the Syrian government used chemical weapons have fallen flat. And the current claims come packaged in lies, including lies about the Syrian government's willingness to allow U.N. inspections, and the speed with which it allowed them. The U.S. government [discouraged](#) the use of inspectors, seeking to rush into war on the basis of its own assertions. The White House has produced a [dodgy dossier](#) lacking in hard evidence. Analysts see [little basis](#) for confidence in White House claims. Insiders are risking "espionage!" accusations to voice their [doubts](#).

And should it be true that someone in the Syrian military used chemical weapons, the White House clearly has [nothing but](#) its own suspicions and desires to suggest that the order came from the top, rather than from some rogue officer with an interest in provoking an attack. Circumstantial evidence, of course, makes that more likely, given the bizarre circumstance of the incident occurring less than 10 miles from the U.N. inspectors' hotel on the day they arrived.

Maybe it's just too difficult to hold a proper investigation during a war. If so, that is not something to be deeply regretted. Obama's proposed response would be disastrous. Our priority should be avoiding it and ending the war. Creating a better climate for criminal investigations is just one more reason to bring the war to an end.

THE MILITARY PROBLEM

While hawks and profiteers within and without the U.S. military favor bombing Syria and just about any other military action one might propose, many are resisting. They include the [Chairman](#) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and numerous officials risking Edward Snowden / Chelsea Manning treatment by talking to the [Washington Post](#), and others to the [New York Times](#). The military does **not clearly understand its new proposed role as punisher of a crime that it itself regularly commits, and it does not share in Obama's claimed confidence that a limited action will remain limited.**

THE CONGRESS PROBLEM

House Speaker John Boehner [asked](#) President Obama these as-yet-mostly-unanswered questions:

- What standard did the Administration use to determine that this scope of

chemical weapons use warrants potential military action?

- Does the Administration consider such a response to be precedent-setting, should further humanitarian atrocities occur?
- What result is the Administration seeking from its response?
- What is the intended effect of the potential military strikes?
- If potential strikes do not have the intended effect, will further strikes be conducted?
- Would the sole purpose of a potential strike be to send a warning to the Assad regime about the use of chemical weapons? Or would a potential strike be intended to help shift the security momentum away from the regime and toward the opposition?

In fact, the White House has been clear that it has no intention to shift momentum in the war.

- If it remains unclear whether the strikes compel the Assad regime to renounce and stop the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people, or if President Assad escalates their usage, will the Administration contemplate escalatory military action?
- Will your Administration conduct strikes if chemical weapons are utilized on a smaller scale?
- Would you consider using the United States military to respond to situations or scenarios that do not directly involve the use or transfer of chemical weapons?
- Assuming the targets of potential military strikes are restricted to the Assad inner circle and military leadership, does the Administration have contingency plans in case the strikes disrupt or throw into confusion the command and control of the regime's weapons stocks?
- Does the Administration have contingency plans if the momentum does shift away from the regime but toward terrorist organizations fighting to gain and maintain control of territory?
- Does the Administration have contingency plans to deter or respond should Assad retaliate against U.S. interests or allies in the region?
- Does the Administration have contingency plans should the strikes implicate foreign power interests, such as Iran or Russia?

In fact, the White House is claiming that none of these disasters will occur. But the Speaker is clearly well aware that they might.

- Does the Administration intend to submit a supplemental appropriations request to Congress, should the scope and duration of the potential military strikes exceed the initial planning?

The proposed limited strikes, using Raytheon's \$3-million Tomahawk missiles (tastefully

named for a weapon of a people the U.S. military ethnically cleansed) is expected to cost many millions and possibly \$1 billion, should nothing go wrong. That money, spent on aid for victims of this war, rather than on escalating the violence, could save a large number of lives. Failure to so spend it is an immoral act.

TAKING ACTION

Over 40,000 people already chose to [click here to tell Congress and the president not to attack Syria](#).

Already it's making a difference. Our actions so far have helped compel President Obama to seek Congressional authorization before any attack.

Now we have a week to work with. We start with a majority of the public on our side. We have to hold off a flood of pro-war propaganda, and we have to compel Congress to represent us. And we can do this.

The first step is to [click here and add your voice](#).

Second, please send this to everyone you think might add their voice as well.

Third, organize locally to pressure your Congress member and senators, while they are in their districts and states this week, to commit to voting "No" on a U.S. attack on Syria.

We who reject arguments for war are a majority now. We are a majority in Britain, where Parliament has already voted "No." We are a majority in Germany, which will not take part. We are a majority in France, where Parliament will be heard from soon. And we are a majority in the United States. [Let Congress hear from you now!](#)

The terrible and widespread killing in Syria will become even more terrible and more widespread if the U.S. military launches an attack. The White House has no proposal to win a war, only to inject greater violence into a war, prolonging and escalating it.

Contrary to White House claims, Congress cannot authorize war and support a peace process at the same time. Escalating the violence will block, rather than facilitate, peace. Congress is going to have to choose.

Albert Camus summarized the choice now before us: "In such a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people, not to be on the side of the executioners."

[Click here to oppose a military attack on Syria, and to urge Congress and the president instead to work for a ceasefire, to pressure Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and Turkey, to halt the flow of weapons, and to pressure Russia and Iran to do the same.](#)

Starting September 9th, if you can, be in Washington, D.C., to prevent this war.

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