

Syria: Has Obama Finally Forsaken the Insurgency?

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Current events surrounding the Syrian conflict appear to be on the brink of a partial agreement toward peace.

Brokered by the United States and Russia, the new quick-fire round of talks in Geneva between US Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov have been promoted as a bilateral effort to disarm Syria's chemical weapons stockpile and move forward with talks to help end the crisis (Geneva II).

Yet parallel to the alleged chemical weapons attack in eastern Ghouta - which subsequently led to the diplomatic breakthrough between Washington and Moscow - a chain of events largely ignored may provide equally justifiable explanations as to why the United States chose to renege on its threats of overt military intervention, and towards public diplomacy and reconciliation.

Analysing the sequence of events leading up to, and surrounding the alleged chemical weapons attack in Ghouta shows that Syria, and its ally Russia, have thwarted a determined attempt by the United States to overtly attack the Syrian Army, in what was a last-ditch effort to save the crumbling insurgency and avoid a regime victory.

The failure of the "Re-branded" insurgency.

Several reports leading up to the alleged chemical attack claim that the United States - [in line with its covert policy of over two years](#) - had prepared and deployed a "rebranded", moderate, non-jihadist battalion of rebel fighters into Syria with the desired objective of creating a buffer-zone in the southern province of Da'raa (birthplace of the insurgency); from which the rebels would regroup and replenish supplies lost in consecutive defeats in preparation for a "Storm on Damascus": a carbon-copy of the CIA's strategy during the overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi - minus the crucial NATO airforce.

[An article from August the 22nd, authored by Yossef Bodansky](#), an Israeli-American political scientist who served as Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare of the US House of Representatives from 1988 to 2004 claims:

Starting Aug. 17 and 18, nominally Free Syrian Army (FSA) units — in reality a separate Syrian and Arab army trained and equipped by the CIA as well as Jordanian and other intelligence services — attempted to penetrate southern Syria from northern Jordan and start a march on Damascus. Two units, one 250-strong and one 300-strong, crossed into Syria and began advancing parallel to the Golan Heights border. Their aim was to break east and reach Daraa quickly in order to prepare the ground for the declaration of Daraa as the capital of a "Free Syria". However, the CIA's FSA forces met fierce

resistance by the unlikely coalition of the Syrian Army, local jihadist forces (mainly the locally-raised Yarmuk Brigades), and even tribal units who fear the encroachment by outside forces on their domain. By Aug. 19 and 20, the FSA units were surrounded in three villages not far from the Israeli border.

Bodansky's article is corroborated by a report published on the 22nd of August in [French daily Le Figaro](#), which also alleges that a similar sized US-trained force, accompanied by Israeli, Jordanian and US commandos, had infiltrated Syria's borders on the 17th of August from Jordan with the objective of creating a buffer-zone in Da'raa. The Figaro report does not state the new commando-escorted units encountered any resistance along the way, the report also fails to explain their whereabouts or justify their now obvious lack of success. In contrast to Bodansky's version of events; Le Figaro purports that the Assad regime may have resorted to the use of chemical weapons due to an increased threat the new rebel units posed on Damascus. Analysis of the previous months of fighting in the Ghouta region, and the continuous gains made by the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) suggest there was zero threat to the Assad regime's seat of power coming from eastern Ghouta - or Da'raa for that matter. The precise opposite was in fact occurring, the SAA had been engaged in a concerted offensive in the Damascus suburbs and countryside for months; leaving rebel units in eastern Ghouta completely surrounded and increasingly desperate for supplies and ammunition. Moreover, the situation for the rebels was similarly desperate in almost the entirety of Da'raa, which had been stalemated for months with no significant gains for either side; the SAA had consolidated and fortified the areas it held in Da'raa whilst opposition rebel commanders repeatedly expressed their dismay at the lack of supplies and ammunition reaching them from Jordan.

The alleged chemical weapons attack.

There is already a plethora of literature and [credible analysis](#) that debunks Washington's allegations surrounding the alleged chemical weapons attack, the claims are most importantly coming from a [lead belligerent and architect of the conflict](#), yet even if one were to wrongly judge Washington as a neutral actor, they are still unverified, circumstantial, questionably sourced (to say the least), and in the words of top CIA officials "no slam dunk", which makes them even-less credible than what turned out to be outright lies emanating from US intelligence sources in the lead up to Iraq. Washington's claims simply don't stand up to any serious scrutiny. Yet contrary to the many outstanding, [and growing](#), contradictions and scepticism of the allegations; many analysts have pushed the theory that the regimes motive to use chemical weapons lay in its desperation to avoid defeat at the hands of the rebels. Incidentally, [this supposed regime motive formed the "analysis"](#) propagated by recently outed fraud "Liz O'Bagy" - a rebel lobbyist paid by the State Department and neocon think-tank the Institute for the study of war; to provide "tailored analysis" in a [months-long propaganda campaign](#) to portray the extremist dominated rebels as "moderate" western-friendly secularists. Yet when viewed with the above context, the supposed motive of a Götterdämmerung act by a regime in its final moments becomes even-less credible than it first appeared.

The regime was arguably in the strongest position it has been since it lost vast swathes of land during the height of the insurgency, not to mention the growing amount of anti-rebel sentiment within public opinion working in the regimes' favour - both inside and outside of Syria.

Conversely, the rebels on the ground in Syria were becoming increasingly desperate, losing

battles with the SAA consecutively for months on end, and increasingly turning to fighting between themselves over the spoils of war, or simply through ethnic intolerance, extremism and fundamentalism. The regime had long been planning a large military offensive in Ghouta to consolidate the [gains it had made in recent months](#) and secure its hold on the Damascus countryside. The few remaining pockets of rebel encampments were largely surrounded from all angles; reports from multiple outlets, including staunchly pro-rebel, spoke of a “siege” in Ghouta and rebels repeatedly being ambushed by the SAA trying to escape. A [Reuters report](#) from August 7th read: “Adra.. in the Eastern Ghouta region,... has been besieged by the army for months.” Accordingly, the situation on the ground prior to the alleged chemical weapons attack was in no way a threat to Assad’s seat of power in Damascus, if any actor had the motive for a [last-ditch attempt](#) at saving their cause it was indeed the rebels, or their regional backers intent on exacerbating and continuing the conflict.

Regardless of who actually committed the attack that occurred on August 21st in Ghouta, its desired outcome from Washington’s perspective (a casus belli - intentional or otherwise - to garner western intervention), did not play out how the administration would have hoped.

UK Parliament set the tone for Congress.

A major blow to Washington’s war-plans came at the hands of the UK general public and Parliament. Unfortunately for David Cameron, earlier this year UK MP’s forced the government to agree to a vote in the commons to determine any future military intervention in Syria. Now, with Cameron threatening immediate military “action” against Syria he recalled Parliament in an attempt to rush through the vote and kickstart the war alongside the United States. Cameron, in typical establishment arrogance presumed the massive public sentiment against military intervention would go unnoticed by the public’s representatives and ministers would vote in favour of war. Cameron was sorely mistaken, the [“shadow of Iraq”](#) provided a platform for a resurgence of anti-war sentiment and low-level activism. MP’s were bombarded with mail and phone-calls from angry constituents demanding a no vote. Crucially, the immediate scepticism of US “intelligence” was brought out into the public realm in real-time and exposed as reminiscent of the fabrications that led to Iraq. Accordingly, on the 29th of August, Cameron lost his vote.

The Obama administration was deeply concerned by the result of the UK vote, their most loyal ally and partner in militarism would no longer be at their side, years of war-plans and covert logistics had fallen apart, and the illusion of the United States “leading the International Community from behind” was crumbling even quicker. [Obama’s surprise decision to gain the approval of Congress](#) for military intervention in Syria came just two days after Cameron’s equally surprising defeat. Yet alongside Obama’s apparent willingness to “have a debate” in Congress and hold a vote to authorise intervention; Obama and a number of his senior aides reiterated their intention to attack Syria with or without a successful result.

Following Cameron’s defeat in Parliament, and facing what looked to be a certain defeat in Congress, Obama’s proposed war on Syria was arguably more unpopular than any before it. [Polls on both sides of the Atlantic](#) regularly showed massive disapproval ratings for any intervention, with numbers only slightly higher even if the White House allegations were proven to be true. Alongside the usual uncritical repetition of US “intelligence assessments” and government stenography emanating from the majority of corporate media; the ever-

growing alternative and independent outlets allowed the public to express their massive scepticism, and more importantly share independent and credible alternatives of information to a wider audience. Obama was facing a humiliating defeat, and was arguably by this point already searching for a way out of his self-imposed ultimatums.

Yet factions within the US alliance have a very different agenda, there are several actors that would prefer the Syrian war to remain “hot” indefinitely. The hawks within Israel are the most obvious candidates to be upset by this turn of events, as has been evidenced by what the IDF have termed their [“optimal scenario”](#) of endless civil war and partition. No doubt Israel will continue to pursue this [overarching policy of subversion and destabilization](#).

There are other US clients that will undoubtedly be equally as miffed if the US has indeed reneged on its regime change policy (for now at least) in return for Assad’s CW stockpile. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have much invested in the “Syrian file”, but Washington calls the ultimate shots when it comes to matters of global affairs, if a deal has been brokered between Putin and Obama, [“Prince Bandar Ibn Israel”](#) will be put back to rest and the King will reluctantly oblige. Turkey, likewise, will also be unhappy at Obama’s apparent change of policy, but Erdogan may be under too much pressure of his own domestically to afford any serious solo effort at subverting Assad.

Last throw of the Dice: missiles in the Med.

On September the 3rd, two days prior to the G20 summit in St Petersburg, the world awoke to [reports](#) that Russia’s defensive radar systems had detected two ballistic “objects” launched from the central Mediterranean on a flight path toward Syria’s eastern coast, where Russian navy ships currently reside; the missiles post-launch had apparently “fell into the sea”. At the time the finger was immediately pointed to Israel – who have attacked Syria at least three times with impunity in the past year alone – or possibly the United States, whose large Naval presence in the Med seemed the obvious primary suspect. Curiously, both Israel and the United States denied responsibility when the Russian reports were first released, then, only a few hours later Israel claimed responsibility for an apparent joint “test” launch with the Pentagon of a defensive missile system. The sheer recklessness of such an act – even if the innocent explanation were true – is hard to explain in such a circumstance. The US eventually confirmed the Israeli line that it was indeed a “test” missile launch with US assistance; after having first denied any knowledge of the incident.

The most likely explanation is Israel or the US were attempting to test Syria’s coastal defenses prior to any possible attack, but to do this without giving any notice to Russia in such a tense scenario seems reckless to say the least. Russian diplomats [have repeatedly hinted](#) that Russia would “help” Syria militarily in the event of a missile strike. It is quite possible that this incident was indeed an Israeli/US provocation in an attempt to garner a response from Syria, and in turn instigate a wider campaign. A report from Lebanese daily As Safir takes it one step further:

A well-informed diplomatic source told [As-Safir](#) newspaper that “the US war on Syria had started and ended the moment those two ballistic missiles were fired,... The source further told the Lebanese daily that “the US forces fired these two rockets from a NATO base in Spain, and were instantly detected by the Russian radars and confronted by the Russian defense systems, so one of them exploded in the airspace and the second one diverted towards the sea.” In this context, the source pointed out that “the statement issued by the Russian Defense Ministry, which stated the detection of two ballistic missiles

fired towards the Middle East, intended to neglect two points: the first was the location from which the two rockets were fired, and the second was their downing. Why? Because the moment the full military operation was launched, Head of the Russian Intelligence Service contacted the US intelligence and informed it that “hitting Damascus means hitting Moscow, and we have removed the term “downed the two missiles” from the statement to preserve the bilateral relations and to avoid escalation. Therefore, you must immediately reconsider your policies, approaches and intentions on the Syrian crisis, as you must be certain that you cannot eliminate our presence in the Mediterranean.”

Whether this account of events holds true or not, at the very least the missile launch appears to be an intentional provocation by either Israel or Washington, in a last-ditch attempt to incite retaliation and salvage the now broken strategy against Assad. Either way, Russia’s decision to quickly publicise the detection and subsequent flip-flop of denial and acceptance from Israel bolsters the theory in the As Safir report: why would Israel accept responsibility for this provocative “test”, yet deny responsibility for every other act of aggression they commit unimpeded? Could it have been to save the face of another defeated attempt to continue the war? It was following this incident, that Obama and Putin were due to meet at the G20 conference. With both leaders eager to go into any negotiations on Syria from a position of power at such a crucial stage, it also adds to the theory that Obama was in a rush to commence the war before opposition became too overbearing; as indeed it now evidently has.

Contrary to Obama’s plans, he entered the G20 summit from a position of weakness, both globally and domestically, opposition to a unilateral US war on another Arab state was only ever-increasing. Obama – or US foreign policy in general – has long-lost the vote of confidence within the UK population, and the Parliamentary vote may indeed yet herald a new era of UK foreign policy. Obama was losing the confidence vote in Congress; his domestic population; and within world leaders at the G20 – the majority of which started to make clear their desire to move towards Russia’s longstanding position based on the Geneva communique. Despite the mass effort western media put into spinning support for Obama, he came out of the G20 further weakened, it is likely by that point Obama had already made his decision that lead to Kerry’s supposed “gaffe”.

John Kerry’s “gaffe” and the bargain.

In the two days following the G20, the US upheld its intransigent rhetoric in its attempts to rally support for war. John Kerry was scheduled to fly around Europe to pimp war on radio shows and TV interviews as any self-respecting humanitarian does – of course Willy Hague was more than eager to stand alongside Kerry to drum up support for a war the UK population has just stated clearly it wanted no part in. It was during this visit that Kerry made his now infamous “gaffe”, in which he flippantly offered Syria a way of avoiding imminent attack by giving up its chemical weapons stockpiles to international inspectors, Kerry said: “if Assad were to turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week,” there would be no US attack. It is indicative that once Russia had pounced on the deal the US chose to immediately play it down – for all of around two hours. The narrative then quickly shifted to what the US is now sticking to: the “deal” on CW was only implemented through the threat of US force. Yet the key point that both media and diplomats are avoiding is this: if the chemical weapons disarmament is due to run until “mid-2014” under the Assad regime and the Syrian Army’s cooperation, and is likely to run into considerable setbacks and require a concerted logistical and cooperative

effort from the government; then that is surely a tacit admission from Washington that Assad will remain in power until at least the proposed operation is over.

In a [revealing interview](#) on Sunday, Obama gave further sign of a shift in US policy and refused to be drawn on the future of Assad. Obama effectively announced the US intention of giving up on the insurgency, and said the “United States can’t get in the middle of somebody else’s civil war.” and reiterated previous statements that “We can’t enforce—militarily, a settlement there.” Has a deal to halt the US-led insurgency been done? [Will the US stop arming jihadists now?](#) Is Russia urging Syria to destroy its CW stockpile the carrot necessary to appease the angry donkey and the 800 pound gorilla (aka: the US military industrial complex & Israel)? In the remote scenario of a solid reconciliation between Russia and the US and a move toward peace; are Washington still able to control their autocratic clients in the Middle East?

Will the White House apply the required amounts of pressure on Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Kuwait, to halt arms supplies and funding to the rebels? Can Obama rein in the apartheid Israeli regime, and its determination to incite and prolong conflict between its Arab neighbours? And will the Obama administration attempt to replicate the Iraq scenario, by infiltrating, obstructing, and subverting the mission of the UN inspectors or the OPCW to engineer a pretext to attack Syria at a later date?

These are questions only time can answer. Regardless of future events and subsequent geopolitical dynamics, there are still thousands of extremists, mercenaries, and outright criminals currently waging war upon Syria and its people. To regain any semblance of stability and peace it is the United States that ultimately holds the levers to end the arms flow and state-sponsorship of the rebels. Tellingly, in a recent interview President Assad revealed a critical precondition of his own on any future CW disarmament deal:

“It is a bilateral process aimed principally at making the US cease pursuing its policy of aggression against Syria and proceed in compliance with the Russian initiative. When we see the US genuinely working towards stability in the region and stop threatening, striving to attack, and delivering arms to terrorists then we will believe that the necessary processes can be finalised.”

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