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Politico

President Obama could lose big on Syria in House

John Bresnahan and Jake Sherman

September 5, 2013 -- If the House voted today on a resolution to attack Syria, President Barack Obama would lose — and lose big.

That's the private assessment of House Republican and Democratic lawmakers and aides who are closely involved in the process.

If the Senate passes a use-of-force resolution next week — which is no sure thing — the current dynamics suggest that the House would defeat it. That would represent a dramatic [failure for Obama](#), and once again prove that his sway over Congress is extraordinarily limited. The loss would have serious reverberations throughout the next three months, when Obama faces off against Congress in a series of high-stakes fiscal battles.

Several Republican leadership aides, who are counting votes but not encouraging a position, say that there are roughly one to two dozen “yes” votes in favor of military action at this time. The stunningly low number is expected to grow a bit.

But senior aides say they expect, at most, between 50 and 60 Republicans to vote with [Speaker John Boehner](#) (R-Ohio) and Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.), who support the president's plan to bomb Syria to stop Bashar Assad from using chemical weapons on his people. That would amount to less than one-third of the House Republican Conference.

That would mean the vast majority of the 200 House Democrats will need to vote with Obama for the resolution to pass. But Democrats privately say that [Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.) and Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) can only round up between 115 and 130 “yes” votes.

High-level congressional sources believe there is some time — but not much — for Obama, Boehner and Pelosi to turn things around. But any vote to authorize an attack on Syria will be extraordinarily close, according to people in both parties with direct knowledge of the political dynamics in the House Republican Conference and Democratic Caucus.

Boehner and Cantor back the president's plan for “limited, proportional” strikes in Syria. [Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy](#) (R-Calif.) is not convinced it's the right decision. McCarthy's calculus seems to be more in line with many House Republicans — he has spoken to many of his allies in the last week, and the support for a U.S. strike on Syria is incredibly low, sources familiar with those discussions say.

House leaders plan to take up the Syria resolution only if it passes the Senate first.

The political climate, of course, can change. Pelosi is a legendary whip and has an uncanny ability to move her members. Since Congress is not in

session, many lawmakers haven't been lobbied by the Obama administration or attended its classified briefings. Obama hasn't taken to the Oval Office to address the nation about Syria — many hope he'll do that when he returns from the [G-20 in Russia](#). The White House has already canceled a planned presidential trip to Los Angeles on Monday so the president can lobby lawmakers.

And rank-and-file House Republicans — especially some key members — are holding back their positions, waiting to see what happens next week when Congress returns.

“Republicans have traditionally tended to break toward the president” on national security and defense issues, noted a senior GOP aide. But this aide estimated that the resolution to bomb Syria has only a “30 to 40 percent chance of passing right now.”

POLITICO reported on Thursday that Obama administration officials have reached out directly to one-third of Congress in the last two weeks — at least 60 senators and 125 House members — with more contacts to come, according to a [White House](#) aide.

And [AIPAC](#), the powerful pro-Israel lobbying group, is poised to mount a major blitz next week in support of the Syria resolution, officials with the group said. AIPAC lobbyists and their supporters have been speaking directly to a number of lawmakers, especially senators, said House and Senate aides.

“At the end of the day, a lot of these Democrats are going to be with the president,” said a House Democratic aide close to the issue. “Because the choice is to vote against [the Syria resolution] and turn the president into a lame duck and destroy his credibility, or swallow it and vote for something that you're not wild about. When you're faced with that kind of decision, most of these fence-sitters are going to come aboard.”

For instance, Rep. Shelia Jackson Lee (D-Texas) said on Thursday that she remains undecided but defended the president, saying Republicans shouldn't vote against a resolution for purely partisan reasons.

“I remain enormously open,” she said. “I think it's important the administration maintains a dialogue.”

Yet the trend lines in the House are clearly not moving in the right direction for Obama, Boehner and Pelosi.

Republicans like Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) — a senior member of the Armed Services Committee and infamously vocal Obama critic — announced he was against military intervention. Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-Fla.) also came out against U.S. involvement in the Syria conflict on Thursday, joining with a number of Florida GOP and [Democratic lawmakers](#) in opposition to Obama.

[Rep. Michael Grimm](#) (R-██████) supported a limited military strike in the immediate aftermath of the chemical attack. Now he feels the moment has passed.

Rep. Adam Smith, a Washington State Democrat who serves as ranking member of the Armed Services panel, returned from a trip overseas and told a local news outlet he didn't think the United States should get involved in Syria. Smith vowed to listen to the administration make its case, and Vice President Joe Biden called him personally to argue for the White House after his negative comments became public, Democratic sources said.

New York Democrat [Rep. Jose Serrano](#) also stated he would vote “no” on Thursday, saying he had “thought long and hard about this decision and have come to the firm conclusion that I cannot vote in favor of war.”

[Sen. Joe Manchin](#) (██████), who was previously undecided, said Thursday he would vote “no.”

In short, no is quickly becoming a default position for many House members regardless of party. It will be up to Obama and party leaders to stem that momentum.

Rep. John Culberson (R-Texas) said he thinks the Senate should vote on the Syria resolution on Sept. 11 and defeat it to “honor the victims of 9/11 by refusing to support al Qaeda”

Culberson said he is hearing overwhelmingly from his constituents in opposition of the resolution. “I don't think it will pass the House,” the Texas Republican said.

“There is no direct American national security interest at stake,” Culberson said following a classified briefing on Syria on Thursday, although he acknowledges that “There is no question the psychopath in Syria has used chemical weapons.

On the Senate side, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and other top Democrats are cautiously optimistic — although by no means sure —

that they can get to 60 votes to overcome an expected filibuster. Democratic leaders only have six hard “no’s” at this point, with another dozen undecided.

Reid, though, will lobby Syria opponents to agree to debate even if they will oppose the resolution when it comes up on the Senate floor. Following the 10-7 approval Wednesday in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Reid will hold a short pro forma session on Friday to file the revised use-of-force resolution crafted by Sens. Robert Menendez (D-████.) and Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), chairman and ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee. Reid will file cloture on Monday on the motion to proceed to the resolution when the Senate officially returns from the August recess, setting up a cloture vote for Wednesday. Another cloture vote could come Thursday or Friday on the actual resolution if Reid wins the first round, depending on how much time opponents take. A final Senate vote could come late next week, or it could potentially even slide into the following week.

If the Senate approves the resolution, supporters of the Syrian campaign believe this will help build some momentum in the House. That will be limited by GOP dislike — and, more importantly, distrust — of Obama. And that logic didn’t work on the immigration bill, which was approved by a bipartisan majority in the Senate and has failed to gain any momentum whatsoever in the House.

Sen. John Cornyn (Texas), the minority whip, is opposed to the Syria resolution and would oppose it if the vote were today, his aides said.

“If the vote were held today, Sen. Cornyn would vote no,” said Megan Mitchell, Cornyn’s spokeswoman. “What he is waiting to see is a credible plan from the administration that will achieve our national security objectives. Specifically, a plan to keep chemical weapons out of the hands of terrorists.”

In a sign of their confidence that the vote will go down, Republicans are already beginning to blame Obama for not working hard enough to win the vote.

Ginger Gibson and Manu Raju contributed to this report

AIPAC to go all-out on Syria

Manu Raju

September 5, 2013 -- The powerful pro-Israel lobby AIPAC is planning to launch a major lobbying campaign to push wayward lawmakers to back the resolution authorizing U.S. strikes against Syria, sources said Thursday. Officials say that some 250 Jewish leaders and AIPAC activists will storm the halls on Capitol Hill beginning next week to persuade lawmakers that Congress must adopt the resolution or risk emboldening Iran's efforts to build a nuclear weapon. They are expected to lobby virtually every member of Congress, arguing that "barbarism" by the Assad regime cannot be tolerated, and that failing to act would "send a message" to Tehran that the U.S. won't stand up to hostile countries' efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction, according to a source with the group.

"History tells us that ambiguity [in U.S. actions] invites aggression," said the AIPAC source who asked not to be named. The source added the group will now be engaged in a "major mobilization" over the issue.

Despite the group's political muscle, it often doesn't get involved in congressional fights over authorizing military action, and it had been mum about intervening in Syria as recently as last week.

But the stepped-up involvement comes at a welcome time for the White House, which is struggling to muster the votes in both chambers for a resolution that would give President Barack Obama the authority to engage in 'limited' military action" in Syria for 60 days, with one 30-day extension possible. The hawkish group also has ties to many Republicans, including ones who have been critical of the Obama administration's handling of U.S.-Israeli affairs.

The top two Senate GOP leaders — Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Minority Whip John Cornyn of Texas — both have already been urged by top Jewish donors and AIPAC allies to back the Syria resolution, sources say. Unlike their House GOP counterparts who endorsed the measure, McConnell and Cornyn have withheld their support. A Cornyn aide said Thursday that the senator currently opposes the Syria resolution, which will be debated on the Senate floor next week.

“If the vote were held today, Sen. Cornyn would vote no,” said Megan Mitchell, a spokeswoman for Cornyn. “What he is waiting to see is a credible plan from the administration that will achieve our national security objectives. Specifically, a plan to keep chemical weapons out of the hands of terrorists.”

Don Stewart, a spokesman for McConnell, said that his boss had yet to announce his position on the resolution. McConnell said earlier this week: “While we are learning more about his plans, Congress and our constituents would all benefit from knowing more about what it is he thinks needs to be done—and can be accomplished—in Syria and the region.”

Indeed, AIPAC and the White House also have their work cut out for them in the House — and among Democrats.

Leaving a classified briefing on Syria Thursday, Rep. Niki Tsongas (D-Mass.) said she was undecided on the issue.

“For me, it’s about what makes sense for this country,” Tsongas said when asked how the security of Israel was playing into her deliberations

[Article 3.](#)

The Washington Post

10 things that could go very wrong if we attack Syria

Ezra Klein

September 5, 2013 -- The White House’s proposed strikes on Syria almost couldn’t be more limited. They’re likely to cost in the millions of dollars rather than the billions of dollars, and no U.S. lives are likely to be in danger. It’s “barely five percent of what we did in Libya,” says Rep. Brad Sherman.

And it’s not just the White House. The congressional authorization of force — if one ever passes — will expressly forbid committing ground troops. So even if the Obama administration wanted to escalate sharply, ██████ need to persuade a reluctant Congress to pass a new law allowing them to do so.

So why is there so much debate over such a seemingly costless endeavor? Because things might go wrong. In particular, these 10 things could go wrong:

- 1) Our strikes could result in heavy civilian casualties. It would be the bitterest of ironies if we struck Syria to punish Assad's barbarism only to end up killing thousands of innocent civilians ourselves. The Pentagon is working up a target list with the express intent of limiting Syrian casualties. But the intelligence behind that list could be wrong — remember when we bombed the [pharmaceutical plant in Sudan](#), or [the Chinese embassy in Belgrade](#)? — and we could hit a building full of civilians. Or a missile could malfunction. Or Assad could move civilians into the way of our strikes expressly to secure a propaganda coup.
- 2) Our strikes could result in Assad killing more civilians. Secretary of State John Kerry was clear before the Senate that he expects our strikes to weaken Assad's position in the civil war. David Ignatius [interviewed](#) a rebel leader who said that the strikes “could change the balance of the civil war in Syria.”

We know that civilian casualties rise when civil wars turn against the regime. So if Assad feels more threatened after the strikes, and his forces begin massacring more innocents in an attempt to break the will of the opposition, what will we do then? Stand by, as long as they use conventional weapons? This is how escalation happens.

- 3) Our strikes could result in Assad killing more civilians with chemical weapons. If the regime is truly desperate and Assad (correctly) believes that the torturous congressional debate and low public support signal a limited appetite for engaging in Syria, Assad might respond to the bombs by doubling down on the attacks. The thinking here could be to telegraph defiance of the United States to his supporters and implacable, unstoppable ruthlessness to the opposition. Is it likely? Probably not. But it could happen. And then what will we do? The arguments being made before Congress certainly suggest that having committed ourselves to defending the ban on chemical weapons once, we have to keep defending it.

- 4) The attacks are so slight that Assad survives them easily and appears strengthened before the world. Sen. James Risch worried about this Tuesday. What “if we go in with a limited strike and, the day after or the week after or the month after, Assad crawls out of his rat hole and says,

‘Look, I stood up to the strongest power on the face of this Earth and I won?’ ” He asked.

Kerry replied that “Assad may be able to crawl out of the hole and say, look, I survived, but there’s no way that with reality and other assessments he’s going to be able to say he’s better off.” But perhaps reality and independent assessments don’t matter as much as the perception inside Syria. And predicting perceptions of the aftermath of airstrikes that haven’t happened yet is difficult at best.

5) “You bombed it, you own it.” The “Pottery Barn Rule” — “you break it, you buy it” — became famous during the Iraq war. “You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people,” Colin Powell told President Bush before the invasion of Iraq. “You will own all their hopes, aspirations and problems. You’ll own it all.” (As it happens, that’s not the Pottery Barn’s rule. They simply write off broken merchandise as a loss.)

Syria isn’t Iraq. But a congressional force authorization followed by a bombing campaign will firmly involve us in Syria. It will make it much harder for us to say that what happens in Syria isn’t our problem. It will mean many more members of the Syrian opposition have contacts with Washington journalists and defense policymakers. The Obama administration believes it can send some missiles and be done with it. That may not prove true.

6) Reprisal. The Syrian army, Syrian army sympathizers, Syrian army allies like Hezbollah, or some other pro-Syrian — or at least anti-American — element could decide to exact revenge for our strikes in Syria by launching a terrorist attack against Americans somewhere else in the world. If 12 American tourists die after a Syria-related terrorist attack on an international hotel in the Middle East, what happens next? Do we mourn? Escalate? Is that a cost we’re willing to pay?

7) Assad falls and the chemical weapons end up in the wrong hands. Maybe our strikes do tip the balance against Assad, either by directly degrading his military strength or by emboldening the opposition. What happens to his chemical weapons then? The opposition almost certainly doesn’t know where they are. But Assad’s top loyalists do. And they’ll need to make some money fast ...

8) Assad falls and is replaced by chaos. One reason the United States has been so careful to plan a limited strike is that though Assad is a monster,

we're not sure that he'll be replaced by anyone better. Maybe our strikes unexpectedly tip the balance against Assad, but what comes next is chaotic jockeying between moderate and jihadist elements of the opposition, with a dose of revenge killings for good measure.

9) Assad falls and is replaced by something worse. Maybe our strikes unexpectedly tip the balance against Assad and the Al Nusra Front, which claims allegiance to al Qaeda, wins the resulting power struggle, or has a major role in the coalition. At Tuesday's hearings, Kerry said he believes that unlikely. He said that recent data show that the number of "extremists" in the opposition is "lower than former expectations." He also argued that "Syria historically has been secular, and the vast majority of Syrians, I believe, want to remain secular."

But what if he's wrong? The United States has officially designated Al Nusra a terrorist organization. Are we really going to be complicit in permitting them, or anyone like them, to take over Syria?

10) Escalation. Almost everything that could go wrong points towards the same ultimate response: Escalation. That could mean more bombing, or actual ground troops, or some combination. But the key fear behind intervening in Syria is that even constrained missions can unexpectedly break free of their limits.

That's why Kerry's early equivocation over whether the authorization of force should expressly forbid ground troops so scared the Senate, and the White House. He quickly walked it back, but it's worth taking his original comments seriously:

In the event Syria imploded, for instance, or in the event there was a threat of a chemical weapons cache falling into the hands of al-Nusra or someone else and it was clearly in the interest of our allies and all of us, the British, the French and others, to prevent those weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of the worst elements, I don't want to take off the table an option that might or might not be available to a president of the United States to secure our country.

This is what we call a "[Kinsley gaffe](#)": Kerry was accidentally telling the truth. If we're involved in Syria and something goes wrong, ground troops might make sense. Escalation might make sense. And that's a major reason so many people are afraid of intervening in the first place.

One caution here is that much of what could go wrong if we intervene could go wrong if we don't intervene, too. But that's where the Pottery Barn rule comes in. Once we're involved, it's a lot harder to say that disastrous outcomes in Syria are simply an awful, regrettable thing happening elsewhere in the world rather than a war we are directly involved in, and that we have some responsibility in guiding toward a successful conclusion.

The fact that things could go wrong in Syria doesn't mean it's not worth intervening. As Max Fisher [points out](#), there's a real argument to be made for enforcing the ban on chemical weapons. But the upsides need to be balanced against a realistic view of the risks in any intervention.

[Article 4.](#)

The Washington Post

Unless he's serious, vote no

[Charles Krauthammer](#)

Sen. Bob Corker: "What is it you're seeking?"

Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: "I can't answer that, what we're seeking."

— Senate hearing on the use of force in Syria, Sept. 3

September 6 -- We have a problem. The president proposes attacking Syria, and his top military officer cannot tell you the objective. Does the commander in chief know his own objective? Why, yes. "[A shot across the bow](#)," explained Barack Obama.

Now, a shot across the bow is a warning. Its purpose is to say: Cease and desist, or the next shot will sink you. But Obama has already told the world — and Bashar al-Assad in particular — that there will be [no next shot](#). He has insisted time and again that the operation will be finite and highly limited. Take the shot, kill some fish, go home.

What then is the purpose? Dempsey hasn't a clue, but Secretary of State [John Kerry says](#) it will uphold and proclaim a norm and thus deter future use of chemical weapons. With a few Tomahawk missiles? Hitting sites that, thanks to the administration having leaked the target list, have [already been scrubbed](#) of important military assets?

This is risible. If anything, a pinprick from which Assad emerges unscathed would simply enhance his stature and vindicate his conduct.

Deterrence depends entirely on perception, and the perception in the Middle East is universal: Obama wants no part of Syria.

[Assad has to go](#), says Obama, and then lifts not a finger for two years. Obama [lays down a “red line,”](#) and then ignores it. Shamed finally by a massive poison gas attack, he sends Kerry to make [an impassioned case](#) for righteous and urgent retaliation — and [the very next day](#), Obama undermines everything by declaring an indefinite timeout to seek congressional approval.

This stunning zigzag, following months of hesitation, ambivalence, contradiction and studied delay, left our regional allies shocked and our enemies gleeful. [I had strongly advocated](#) going to Congress. But it was inconceivable that, instead of recalling Congress to emergency session, Obama would simply place everything in suspension while Congress finished its Labor Day barbecues and he flew off to Stockholm and St. Petersburg. So much for the fierce urgency of enforcing an international taboo and speaking for the dead children of Damascus.

Here’s how deterrence works in the Middle East. Syria, long committed to the destruction of Israel, has not engaged Israel militarily in 30 years. Why? Because it recognizes Israel as a serious adversary with serious policies.

This year alone, Israel has four times conducted airstrikes in Syria. No Syrian response. How did Israel get away with it? Israel had announced that [it would not tolerate](#) Assad acquiring or transferring to Hezbollah advanced weaponry. No grandiloquent speeches by the Israeli foreign minister. No leaked target lists. Indeed, the Israelis didn’t acknowledge the strikes even after they had carried them out. Unlike the American president, they have no interest in basking in perceived toughness. They care only about effect. They care about just one audience — the party to be deterred, namely Assad and his allies.

Assad knows who did it. He didn’t have to see the Israeli prime minister preening about it on world television.

And yet here is Obama, having yet done nothing but hesitate, threaten, retract and wander about the stage, [claiming Wednesday in Sweden](#) to be the conscience of the world, upholding not his own red line but the world’s.

And, incidentally, Congress's — a transparent attempt at offloading responsibility.

What should Congress do?

To his dovish base, Obama insists on how limited and militarily marginal the strike will be. To undecided hawks such as Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham, who are prepared to support a policy that would really alter the course of the civil war, he vaguely promises the opposite — to degrade Assad's military while upgrading that of the resistance. Problem is, Obama promised U.S. weaponry three months ago and [not a rifle has arrived](#). This time around, what seems in the making is a mere pinprick, designed to be, one U.S. official [told the Los Angeles Times](#), “just muscular enough not to get mocked.” That's why Dempsey is so glum. That's why U.S. allies are so stunned. There's no strategy, no purpose here other than helping Obama escape self-inflicted humiliation. This is deeply unserious. Unless Obama can show the country that his don't-mock-me airstrike is, in fact, part of a serious strategic plan, Congress should vote no. John McCain changed the administration's authorization resolution to include, mirabile dictu, a U.S. strategy in Syria: to alter the military equation (against Assad). Unfortunately, Obama is not known for being bound by what Congress passes (see, for example: health care, employer mandate). When Obama tells the nation what he told McCain and Lindsey Graham in private — that he plans to degrade Assad's forces, upgrade the resistance and alter the balance of forces — Congress might well consider authorizing the use of force. But until then, it's no.

[Article 5.](#)

RAND

Airpower Options for Syria (Summary)

Karl P. Mueller, Jeffrey Martini, and Thomas Hamilton

30 August, -- Key findings:

- Destroying the Syrian air force or grounding it through intimidation is operationally feasible but would have only marginal benefits for protecting Syrian civilians.

- Neutralizing the Syrian air defense system would be challenging but manageable; however, it would not be an end in itself.
- Defending safe areas in Syria's interior would amount to intervention on the side of the opposition.
- An air campaign against the Syrian army could do more to ensure that the regime fell than to determine its replacement.
- Airpower could reduce the Assad regime's ability or desire to launch chemical weapon attacks, but eliminating its arsenal would require a large ground operation.

This report offers an operationally informed overview of options for U.S. and allied military intervention in the Syrian civil war using airpower. It does not argue that the United States should intervene in Syria, but seeks to inform discussion of the requirements and risks of various options should such a decision be made. We assume for purposes of this analysis that, as in Libya, deploying ground combat forces would not be part of an intervention. An aerial intervention in Syria might seek to achieve one or more of a variety of goals. Some of these would be purely political, but the main strategic objectives could include

- protecting civilians
- limiting or containing the conflict
- changing the course of the war.

Each of these objectives might be pursued through several different military approaches, and particular strategic actions could contribute to more than one such objective. In pursuit of one or more of these goals, U.S. and partner air forces might be tasked with any of five principal missions:

Negate Syrian Airpower. Maintaining a no-fly zone (NFZ) over Syria, or simply disabling or destroying the Syrian air force, would be relatively easy for U.S. and allied forces, not least because of the likely availability of nearby bases, although prolonged NFZ enforcement could impose significant burdens on the forces involved. Negating Syrian airpower would have only a marginal direct effect on civilian casualties, which have mostly been caused by ground forces. It could significantly assist Syrian opposition forces by denying air support and especially air mobility and resupply to the Syrian army, but the recent trajectory of the civil war

suggests that genuinely turning the tide would likely require attacks against regime ground forces as well. An NFZ would not have to begin with a comprehensive attack on Syrian air defenses, but doing so would greatly simplify the task. Like the other options considered here, even a very limited NFZ would constitute an act of war against Syria and might trigger greater involvement by pro-regime powers such as Iran and Russia.

Neutralize Syrian Air Defenses. The extensive but mostly antiquated Syrian integrated air defense system, while it should be taken seriously, is less formidable than many imagine. U.S. and allied airpower could readily destroy its fixed elements in a major campaign and is relatively well prepared to deal with the residual threat that surviving mobile systems would pose to other air operations over the longer term. However, experience in conflicts such as Kosovo and against less well-armed enemies has demonstrated how difficult completely suppressing even sparse, moderately capable, mobile air defenses can be and how serious the restrictions on U.S. air operations can be as a result. Suppressing air defenses would not be an end in itself, but a means of facilitating other missions over Syria.

Defend Safe Areas. Airpower could play a major role in defending designated safe areas against attack by regime forces, but because these threats would mainly come from artillery and other ground forces, there is a need for effective defensive forces on the ground, either foreign or indigenous. Protecting a large proportion of the threatened Syrian civilian populace would require expansive safe areas, including ones deep in Syria, along with secure logistics corridors to sustain them. Securing such areas against regime forces could be tantamount to full intervention on the side of the opposition, as well as more challenging operationally. Realistically, safe areas should be regarded as a way of providing the civilians within them with improved security, not complete safety, as the United States would not be able to govern the actions of opposition forces controlling the safe areas.

Enable Opposition Forces to Defeat the Regime. If applied with sufficient effort, airpower (along with material and advisory assistance to the Syrian opposition) could alter the course of the Syrian civil war by striking regime forces, particularly armor and artillery. However, tipping the balance on the battle field to the point of enabling the opposition to

stalemate or defeat regime forces would not automatically translate into influence over subsequent political events in Syria, either in the messy aftermath of an opposition victory or in the longer term, as a new postwar order was established.

Prevent the Use of Syrian Chemical Weapons. In spite of often casual rhetoric about “taking out” Syria’s chemical weapon capability, the practical options for doing so have serious limitations, and attempting it could actually make things worse. Locating all Syrian chemical weapon facilities (e.g., storage sites, production facilities) and defining them well enough to design effective conventional air strikes against them would require very precise and detailed intelligence. And depending on the weapons employed in the strikes and the exact nature of the chemical weapons to be destroyed, collateral damage from the attacks could be substantial. Prospects for eliminating Syria’s extensive chemical weapon capabilities through air attack do not appear promising. At the very least, accomplishing this objective would require ground forces, and even then it may not be possible to neutralize the regime’s entire arsenal. Airpower could be used, however, for retaliatory threats or attacks to deter further chemical weapon use. Airpower could also be used to target the regime’s most-efficient ways of delivering chemical weapons, thereby decreasing the regime’s capacity to inflict mass casualties through their use.

Above all, it is essential to note that each of these aerial intervention measures could lead to further, more-extensive U.S. military involvement in Syria, particularly if it did not achieve its initial strategic objectives. Also, it could trigger serious escalatory responses from other parties such as Russia. Therefore, anticipating and assessing potential next steps beyond an initial intervention effort should be central to any strategic planning for using airpower in Syria.

[Article 6.](#)

The National Interest

A Better Syria Option: Cyber War

[James P. Farwell](#), [Darby Arakelian](#)

September 6, 2013 -- As Congress debates strikes against Syria for using chemical weapons against its own people, much attention has focused on using cruise missiles for limited strikes. The risks are evident. Will these be seen as a delayed, empty gesture that inflicts little damage but prods Bashar Assad into stepping up further attacks? Would casualties inflicted merely deepen bitterness between the sides and fuel the bloody conflict? Having declared use of chemical weapons a red line, will limited U.S. action convince other parties—notably Iran, China and Russia—that American threats should be taken seriously?

The United States must, as Steve Yates has observed, act with a sense of purpose and power. We must define the goal. Merely punishing Assad raises a problem. Secretary of State John Kerry has spoken powerfully and eloquently on why Assad should be punished. But a 1994 U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs reported that the United States approved shipments to Saddam Hussein of materials that can be used in the production of biological weapons during his war with Iran. Make no mistake. No matter what they say today, any strike aimed at punishing this Arab regime for will draw criticism from Arabs and others as hypocrisy. That holds especially true if U.S. bombing or missile strikes result in Arab deaths or injury.

A goal of weakening the regime risks drawing the United States into the center of the conflict. For over a year, we have cautioned that the enemies of our enemy may not be our friends. We must tread carefully. Any use of force must define how far the United States is willing to go. There's good reason Winston Churchill noted that sound foreign policy is driven by interests, not friendship. Our key strategic interest lies in ensuring that Assad's formidable arsenal of chemical weapons does not get loose. That poses a threat to the international community. Israel has rightly said that any effort to transfer those weapons is cause for war. Here surfaces another problem.

The United States has declared it won't put American boots on the ground. But containing Assad's WMD arsenal may well require special operations that almost certainly would require intervention by special forces, even if in tandem with Arab partner states.

These considerations mandate that any strike—whether to punish, deter or weaken Assad—eschew what the military terms “kinetic” strikes (e.g.,

using missiles or bombs) in favor of cyber attacks. Taking out Assad's air force and making his runways unusable might be a meaningful option, but there seems no realistic possibility the United States will opt for that. Well-targeted cyber attacks will send Assad and interested parties a strong message that we're serious and put a meat axe into his command-and-control capabilities by sowing confusion, distrust, and chaos into those systems. The key is to direct attacks against Syrian cyber assets. That means find, fix, and finish activities against Syrian Electronic Army operatives – many of whom operate outside of Syria in the Gulf and Maghreb countries – and who can be identified and taken off the battlefield.

Rafal Rohozinski, whose firm the SecDev Group monitors Internet activity in Syria, has it right in observing: "The Syrian conflict is the world's first cyber civil war. Cyber communications are central to strategy and tactics employed by both Assad and the rebels." They are used for command and control; to maneuver forces for operations and tactical engagements; for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; for psychological warfare; and to influence and shape attitudes, opinions and behavior among their own audiences and both Syrian and international audiences.

Says Rohozinski: "It's hard to overstate how heavily both sides depend upon cyber tools to articulate their narrative, stories, themes and message. The war has integrated kinetic and information warfare tactics in unprecedented ways. And while striving to make their own voices heard, each side has battled vigorously to silence the other." Both sides make heavy use of Facebook, Skype and YouTube.

Assad's most prominent cyber tool is the Syrian Electronic Army, which only last week claimed responsibility for hacking a U.S. Marine Corps website. The SEA wages social media war at home and against nations like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The regime employs smaller groups for other cyber attacks. The regime has mounted a huge effort to shut down rebel cyber efforts used for tactical, kinetic operations, as well as to discredit the regime.

Cyber attack is ideal for undercutting Assad's ability to execute strategy, operations, and tactics. Unlike missiles or bombs, it is very unlikely to kill or physically injure anyone. The damage from a cyber attack may be repairable, but the impairment of cyber capabilities can significantly

undercut the ability of Assad's forces to operate effectively. That is merely one line of operation that cyber tools offer. We have many additional cyber options that can be used as appropriate.

Is escalation a danger? The answer is that Assad will attempt to retaliate no matter what we do. Impairing Assad's cyber capability impedes his only strategic capability of striking back. It will prevent, not facilitate escalation. Either alone or with Iran, we should expect an effort. Iran may join Syria in launching such attacks. Iran is already implicated in attacks on Saudi Aramco, Qatar's RasGas, the U.S. National Nuclear Safety Agency, the New York Times, JPMorgan and the Associated Press. By targeting military assets – notably command and control capabilities – the U.S. is limiting the scope of its retaliation while striking meaningfully. A cyber attack that impairs Assad's offensive cyber capability serves vital U.S. security interests by suppressing the best strategic weapon that Assad can use—and has a willingness to employ—to strike back.

Bottom line: Use preparations for kinetic force as a feint to distract and confuse Assad, but cyber tools are what offer the opportunity to take strong action without getting caught in the vise of defining precisely what damage has been inflicted. The harm to Assad will be real and the message that U.S. warnings must be taken seriously will register with interested parties. One critical step that would strengthen this tactic is to secure the visible, active support from partner Arab nations. They can demonstrate support through public statements and by stationing their appropriate military representatives in the right command centers as attacks are launched. That can be achieved without breaching vital security protocols and it would strengthen our ability to make clear that the United States is acting in partnership with allies and not alone.

The Syrian conflict may be difficult. But having thrown down a gauntlet by declaring a red line exists, the United States needs to take action—but only action that has clear purpose, projects U.S. power, and achieves a defined result that advances our security interests.

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its agencies, departments, or COCOM. Rafal Rohozinski of the SecDev Group contributed to this op-ed.

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The Daily Star

Israel and Palestine can be a stable island in a sea of disorder

Anne-Marie Slaughter

September 06, 2013 -- As Egypt trembles on the brink of civil war, with alarming levels of violence and hardening divisions on all sides, it is hard to find a truly bright spot anywhere in the Middle East or North Africa. Syria's agony continues unabated; sectarian attacks in Iraq are becoming more frequent and deadly; the threads of Lebanon's fragile peace are fraying; Jordan is awash in refugees; Libya's militias are running rampant and distorting its politics; Tunisia faces a political crisis; and Turkey's star as the embodiment of Islamic democracy has dimmed. Yet even with this litany of problems, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has decided to focus on Israel and Palestine. His justification – “if not now, never” – is almost certainly true. But there is another, equally strong (albeit often overlooked) rationale: the tremendous potential for an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian economic zone that would drive the entire region's growth and development.

In the immortal words of James Carville, Bill Clinton's campaign manager in 1992, “It's the economy, stupid.” The dismal failure of Middle Eastern and North African economies to deliver the prosperity that their people desperately want is a constant factor pushing people into the streets. It is not the only factor, but rising food prices helped to spread revolutionary fervor from a small group of activists to much of Egypt's population in 2011, and again this year in June, when the most frequent grievance against former President Mohammad Morsi concerned not his ideology but his indifference to ordinary Egyptians' needs.

Against this backdrop, Israel and the Palestinian territories are relatively stable places. Israel's high-quality infrastructure could easily be extended to the West Bank and Gaza if security could be assured, and a young

generation of entrepreneurs and technologists has grown up on both sides of the border. Forbes magazine reports that “hundreds of Israeli[s] and Palestinians are becoming actual business partners and colleagues in startups that are slowly transforming the Palestinian economy, at least in the West Bank.”

This is most true in high-tech industries, the sector in which the Middle East lags the most. The author of the Forbes article describes a scene in Ramallah that is “indistinguishable from one in Austin or San Francisco,” where “20-something Palestinians sip cocktails, their laptops open, their smartphones on.”

All of this activity is taking place against the odds. Alec Ross, a former senior adviser for innovation to former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, argues that the best way to reinvigorate the peace process is to provide 3G Internet connectivity to the West Bank. He quotes a young woman in the audience at Palestine Polytechnic University, who said, to loud applause, “We must have a better economy to have better lives, and we must have 3G to have ... a better economy.”

Without high-speed Internet, foreign investment and indigenous entrepreneurship are almost impossible. The human capital for rapid economic growth is there (roughly 2,000 Palestinians graduate every year with technical skills, yet only 30 percent of them find a way to use such skills in a paying job), as is the will and the investment capital; but the necessary infrastructure is lacking.

A vision of a very different Palestine, and of the Israel beside it, is not hard to find. In 2005, the Rand Corporation, a U.S. research institute, developed the “Arc,” a genuinely inspiring plan to build a transportation corridor that would link Palestine’s principal business and population hubs in the West Bank, then curve across Israel into Gaza, where a long-planned airport and seaport would be built.

The concept behind this vision is that the size and population density of a future Palestine will be roughly the same as in extended urban regions such as the San Francisco Bay area or greater Cairo. Thus, the West Bank should be viewed as “an integrated urban region of independent but connected cities.” Anyone who spends nine minutes watching the video presentation of the Arc will see that its potential is nothing short of breathtaking.

While Palestine would gain economically, Israel would gain politically and socially. The costs of not reaching a peace settlement may not show up in Israel's economic statistics or in formal diplomatic interactions. But young Israelis, in particular, are increasingly aware of the invitations to meetings and conferences that they do not receive – and of the increasing frequency with which their own are not accepted, even by sincere friends of Israel. Bernard Avishai, a distinguished Israeli professor of business and government who divides his time between Israel and the U.S., notes that whatever Israel's young people may think of the Palestinians, they “expect to fly off from Ben-Gurion Airport and land, accepted, in the Western world.” Now they know that the stakes are rising. So are the opportunities. Whereas the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been an island of violence and turmoil in a relatively stable (if oppressed) region, now the tables are turned. An Israel and Palestine that could resolve their differences and live side by side as democracies would become an island of stability and sanity in a sea of political disorder and economic retrenchment. Add a free-trade agreement, or even a customs union with Jordan, and you have the makings of a Middle Eastern Benelux (the grouping of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg that formed the economic kernel of what became the original European Community). A late summer night's dream? Perhaps. But, Iran aside, all of the region's major players – Saudi Arabia and its fellow Gulf states, Turkey, and both sides in Egypt – have plenty of reasons to want to see it realized. And Israelis and Palestinians themselves, with actual or potential civil war on three of their four borders, need no reminders of what could happen if they do not start spreading peace from the inside out.

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