



# CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY FACT SHEET

## US Policy on Syria: War or Diplomacy? A Selection of Critical Views & Proposals

Project on Defense Alternatives

Editor: Carl Conetta

**Updated: 23 September 2013**



## New

['No cease-fire,' vows Syrian rebel leader.](#) Eric Shawn. FoxNews.com, 22 Sept 2013.

[Russia says West exploiting Syria deal to threaten force.](#) Alissa de Carbonnel. Reuters, 22 Sept 2013.

[Gas missiles 'were not sold to Syria.'](#) Robert Fisk. The Independent, 22 Sept 2013.

[Syria Meets First Test of Accord on Weapons.](#) Michael R. Gordon and Nick Cumming-bruce. NYT, 20 Sept 2013

[Syria's chemical weapons stockpile.](#) BBC, 20 Sept 2013

[Sliding Toward Damascus: How Syria's civil war crept into the heart of Baghdad.](#) Jane Arraf. Foreign Policy, 20 Sept 2013. (Free Registration Required).

[Syrian Crisis: Massive Displacement, Dire Needs and a Shortage of Solutions.](#) Elizabeth Ferris, Kemal Kirişci and Salman Shaikh. Brookings Institution, 18 Sept 2013

[Saudis Set Back by US-Russia Deal on Syrian Chemical Weapons.](#) Madawi Al-Rasheed. Al-Monitor, 17 September 2013.

## 20 September 2013

[The Syria Opportunity.](#) Joshua M. Silverstein. The National Interest, 20 Sept 2013.

[Top donor countries failing ordinary Syrians affected by the conflict with Syria appeals falling short by \\$2.7bn.](#) Oxfam, 19 Sept 2013.

[Syrian government says war has reached stalemate.](#) Jonathan Steele. The Guardian, 19 Sept 2013.

[US-backed Syrian rebels being shoved aside by radical Islamists.](#) Roy Gutman. McClatchy, 19 Sept 2013.

[Pentagon proposes training moderate Syrian rebels.](#) Barbara Starr. CNN, 19 September 2013.

**The Spies Inside Damascus: Mossad's secret war on the Syrian WMD machine.** Ronen Bergman. Foreign Policy, 19 Sept 2013. (Free Registration Required)

**Russia will give UN 'proof' of Syria rebel chemical use.** Frank Gardner. BBC, 18 Sept 2013.

**Referring Syria to ICC Could Lead to Peaceful Leadership Transition.** Annie Castellani. Foreign Policy in Focus, 18 Sept 2013.

**Blocking Syria's chemical network.** Brian Finlay and Alexander Georgieff. Stimson Center, 18 Sept 2013.

**Syria groundwork began months ago.** Walter Pincus. Washington Post, 18 Sept 2013.

**Syria crisis: West backs down on demand for threat of war in UN resolution.** David Usborne. Independent, 18 September 2013.

**Thinking Regionally on Syria.** Robert E. Hunter. Lobelog.com, 17 Sept 2013,

**Responsibility to Protect? Why none of the plans for intervening in Syria actually tries to save civilians.** Micah Zenko. Foreign Policy, 17 Sept 2013. (Free Registration Required)

**Beware of Mission Creep in Syria.** Mark Stout. War On the Rocks, 17 Sept 2013.

**Yes, it was Sarin, UN Report Says. Now What?** Peter Bouckaert, Human Rights Watch. Dispatches, 16 Sept 2013.

**UN Data on Gas Attack Point to Assad's Top Forces.** CJ Chivers. NYT, 17 Sept 2013.

**Threats of Force Don't Always Help.** Paul Pillar. The National Interest, 15 Sept 2013.

**Syria: nearly half rebel fighters are jihadists or hardline Islamists.** Ben Farmer and Ruth Sherlock. The Telegraph, 15 Sep 2013.

Text: **The United States and Russia's Joint Framework for the Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons.** Published by Council on Foreign Relations, 14 Sept 2013.

Text: **UN Secretary General Report on Chemical Weapon Use in Syria.** UN, 13 Sept 2013.

[\*\*Syria Is a Legal Triumph.\*\*](#) Emily Bazelon. Slate, 11 Sept 2013.

[\*\*The Wrong Way to Be Right: Obama's shoddy case for striking Syria to enforce international norms.\*\*](#) Micah Zenko. Foreign Policy, 11 September 2013. (Requires Free Registration)

[\*\*Obama bombs in Syria speech.\*\*](#) Christopher Preble. Washington Times, 11 September 2013.

[\*\*With War Off the Table, It's Time for Syria Ceasefire, Negotiations, and Talking to Iran.\*\*](#) Robert Naiman. Common Dreams, 11 Sept 2013.

[\*\*Transcript of President Obama's Sept. 10 speech on Syria.\*\*](#) Washington Post, 10 Sept 2013.

[\*\*Take It and Like It: Why Obama should be thrilled about the Russian chemical weapons deal.\*\*](#)

Edward Luttwak. Foreign Policy, 10 September 2013. (Requires Free Registration)

[\*\*Al Qaeda and the threat in Syria.\*\*](#) Thomas Joscelyn. Long War Journal, 10 Sept 2013.

Al Qaeda affiliates and allied jihadist groups dominate the insurgency in the heart of the Middle East.

[\*\*Syria Accepts Russian Proposal To Surrender Chemical Weapons.\*\*](#) Huffington Post, 9 Sept 2013.

## War or diplomacy?

[\*\*Obama Pledges to Consider Syria Plan, While Keeping Threat of a Strike.\*\*](#) Abby

Ohlheiser. The Atlantic Wire, 11 September 2013.

[\*\*Recycling a Bush Iraq Ploy on Syria.\*\*](#) Robert Parry. Consortium News, 10 Sept 2013.

Syria's tentative acceptance of a plan for putting its chemical weapons under international control opens a pathway to avoid a U.S. military strike, but the Obama administration may use the opening as a new route for winning congressional war authorization and even UN backing.

[\*\*Russia balks at French plan for UN Security Council resolution on Syrian chemical arms.\*\*](#) Will Englund, Michael Birnbaum and Loveday Morris. Washington Post, 9 Sept 2013.

Russia, China, Iran, and Syria give a green light, but French effort to add military attack authority may scuttle the deal.

**Would U.S. intervention do more harm than good?** Col. Douglas Macgregor (USA, ret.). Washington Post TV, 9 Sept 2013.

**US Credibility Requires More than Enforcing Red Lines on Syria.** Robert E. Hunter. Lobe Log, 6 Sept 2013.

The idea that a limited use of force can teach the Assad regime a lesson without escalating the conflict even further and tipping the balance in favor of the rebels assumes precision in the use of military force that has few if any historical precedents.

**Pick Your Poison: America Has Many Options in Syria, None are Good.** Richard Betts. Foreign Affairs, 5 Sept 2013.

Domestic credibility is a dubious justification for bombing another country, but it inevitably looms large for politicians in a democracy.

**Understanding the Syrian Civil War.** William R. Polk. Consortium News, 3 Sept 2013.

America will likely find itself saddled with another long-term, very expensive and perhaps unwinnable war.

**With the Greatest Respect Mr President "Keep Calm and Pursue Diplomacy".** Michael Kay. Huffington Post, 3 Sept 2013.

Despite paralysis at the UN Security Council, the quest for an internationally legitimate solution must still be pursued. Stability in the region requires the support and acquiescence of China and Russia.

**Military Option Divorced from Interests of Syrian people.** International Crisis Group, 1 Sept. 2013.

A successful diplomatic effort requires a two-fold effort lacking to date: developing a realistic compromise political offer as well as genuinely reaching out to both Russia and Iran in a manner capable of eliciting their interest - rather than investing in a prolonged conflict that has a seemingly bottomless capacity to escalate."

**How an Insular Beltway Elite Makes Wars of Choice More Likely.** Conor Friedersdorf. The Atlantic, Sept 2013.

It's true that Washington elites, and a few foreign governments, have exerted increasing pressure on Obama to intervene in Syria. Were the will of the people given its due, there would be more pressure on Obama to refrain from intervening.

**U.S. military officers have deep doubts about impact, wisdom of a U.S. strike on Syria.** Ernesto Londoño. Washington Post, 29 August 2013.

**Former NATO commander: Syria strike a bad move.** CBC Player, 27 August 2013.

**Stumbling Into Syria.** David Bromwich. New York Review of Books, 24 June 2013.

The slide into this war by the US has been gradual, treacherous, and avoidable. It will be a long climb getting back out, and it will need the assistance of countries we prefer not to call friends.

**The wrong 'red line'.** Richard Falk. Aljazeera, 8 May 2013.

The policy about force is being formulated without bothering with the red lines of international law and the UN, giving us back the world of unregulated sovereign states and extremist non-states essentially deciding on their own when war is permissible.

## Intelligence

**Who Ordered Syria's Chemical Attack?** Fred H. Lawson. The National Interest, 11 Sept. 2013.

**White House Mum on Rebel Chem Weapons Use.** Bryant Jordan. Military.com, 10 Sept 2013.

**Obama's Case for Syria Didn't Reflect Intel Consensus.** Gareth Porter. InterPress Service, 9 Sept 2013.

**Doubts linger over Syria gas attack responsibility.** Zeina Karam and Kimberly Dozier. Stars & Stripes, 8 Sept 2013.

**Assad did not order Syria chemical weapons attack, says German press.** Simon Tisdall and Josie Le Blond. The Guardian, 8 Sept 2013.

Assad did not order last month's chemical weapons attack and he blocked numerous requests from his military commanders to use chemical weapons in recent months, a German newspaper reports, citing unidentified, high-level German national security sources.

**Direct Link Between Assad and Gas Attack Elusive for US.** Alistair Bell and Ken Wills. New York Times, 7 September 2013

**Kerry portrait of Syria rebels at odds with intelligence reports.** Reuters, 5 Sept 2013. Mark Hosenball and Phil Stewart.

U.S. and European intelligence sources and nongovernmental experts, who say Islamic extremists remain by far the fiercest and best-organized rebel elements.

**Who Are the Dead in Syria?** Garance Franke-Ruta. The Atlantic, 5 Sept 2013.

According to the pro-opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the Syrian death toll includes 40,000 civilians, 22,000 rebel fighters, and 45,000 Assad military and militia personnel.

**Brutality of Syrian Rebels Posing Dilemma in West.** C. J. Chivers. New York Times, 5 Sept 2013.

Many rebels have adopted some of the same brutal and ruthless tactics as the regime they are trying to overthrow.

**How Intelligence Was Twisted to Support an Attack on Syria.** Gareth Porter. Truthout, 3 Sept 2013.

The unclassified summary of the intelligence assessment made public August 30, 2013, utilizes misleading language evocative of the infamous Iraq estimate's deceptive phrasing.

**Which Syrian Chemical Attack Account Is More Credible?** Jim Naureckas. Fair, 1 Sept 2013.

**To some, US case for Syrian gas attack, strike has too many holes.** McClatchy, 30 August 2013. Hannah Allam and Mark Seibel.

The Obama administration's public case for attacking Syria is riddled with inconsistencies and hinges mainly on circumstantial evidence, undermining US efforts this week to build support at home and abroad for a punitive strike against Bashar Assad's regime.

**Syrian military allegedly used makeshift rockets in chemical attack.** Jane's Defence Weekly, 29 August 2013.

The weapons are broadly similar in layout to what the US military calls improvised rocket-assisted mortars (IRAMs)

## International Law

[Syria attack illegal without Security Council approval, UN warns.](#) Reuters, 3 Sept 2013

[US strike on Syria would break international law.](#) George Bisharat. San Francisco Chronicle, 2 Sept 2013.

“The president does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation.” The author? Barack Obama, as presidential candidate in 2007.

[If America wants Assad to respect international law, it must respect it, too.](#) Rep. Raul Grijalva, Michael Shank. Fox News, 1 September 2013.

The White House came courting to Congress to make the case for military action. What was remarkably lacking was any other tool in their intervention toolkit.

## International & Domestic Support

[Troops oppose strikes on Syria by 3-1 margin.](#) Andrew Tilghman. Army Times, 11 Sept 2013.

[Opposition to Syrian Airstrikes Surges.](#) Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. 9 Sept 2013.

[Poll: Support for Syria strike lower than for any action in 20 years.](#) Mario Trujillo. The Hill, 6 Sept 2013.

[At the G-20, Obama's Syria Efforts Take a Hit as Putin Gains Support.](#) Simon Shuster. Time, 5 Sept 2013.

The clearest blow to U.S. coalition-building at the summit came from the leaders of the European Union. Said EU President Herman van Rompuy, "There is no military solution to the Syrian conflict. Only a political solution can end the terrible bloodshed."

[Arab League Stance Muddies US Case.](#) David D. Kirkpatrick and Mark Landler. New York Times, 27 August 2013.

The leaders of the Arab world have blamed the Syrian government for a chemical weapons attack that killed hundreds of people, but have declined to back a retaliatory military strike.

## **Congressional War Authorization**

[Capitol Hill to the Rescue on Syria? Don't Hold Your Breath.](#) Andrew Bacevich. TomDispatch.com, 9 Sept 2013.

[The Crossroads on Syria.](#) David Bromwich. Huffington Post, 8 Sept 2013. Congress can put a definitive stop to an incoherent policy in Syria.

It can be done by a vote of no confidence in "humanitarian war" which only augments the violence of the warring sects of the Middle East.

[Kerry for Keeping Option Open to Use Ground Forces.](#) Charles Knight. Huffington Post, 6 Sept 2013.

What is most worrisome in the broad scope of this authorization is that it gives the president full permission to take ongoing military action against potential and actual proliferation agents in and beyond Syria.

[The Senate's Syria Resolution Has a Huge Secret Giveaway to the President.](#) Garrett Epps. The Atlantic, 6 Sept 2013.

[How Congress Can Limit Obama's War in Syria.](#) Stephen L. Carter. Bloomberg, 5 Sept 2013.

Whatever limiting language Congress adopts, a determined chief executive will read it to justify pretty much whatever he wants it to justify.

[Possible U.S. Intervention in Syria: Issues for Congress.](#) Congressional Research Service, 3 Sept 2013.

[Bait and Switch.](#) Bruce Ackerman. Foreign Policy, 3 Sept 2013.

Obama's "limited" strikes are just the prelude to massive intervention in the Middle East. And Congress shouldn't fall for it.

## **A Broader Purpose – a Wider War?**

**US weapons reaching Syrian rebels.** Ernesto Londoño and Greg Miller. Washington Post, 11 Sept 2013.

**Pentagon adjusts plans for more intense attacks on Syria.** David Cloud. LA Times, 8 Sept 2013.

Two U.S. officers said the White House asked for an expanded target list in recent days to include many more than the 50 or so targets on the initial list.

**Critics see contradictions in Obama administration's Syria claims.** Paul Richter. LA Times, 8 Sept 2013.

The White House wants to stay clear from suggestions that it is seeking "regime change" with the strikes, because that phrase, associated with the Bush administration, will alarm foreign allies as well as many Americans.

**Pentagon Is Ordered to Expand Potential Targets in Syria With a Focus on Forces.** David E. Sanger and Eric Schmitt. New York Times, 5 Sept 2013.

**Syria's chemical weapons: Pentagon knew in 2012 that it would take 75,000 ground troops to secure facilities.** David Martosko. Daily Mail, 4 Sept 2013.

**The Broader Stakes of Syrian Crisis.** Ray McGovern. Consortium News, 27 Aug 2013.

The broader framework of the crisis involves the Israeli-Iranian dispute and the future of regional peace.

**Large arms shipment reaches Syrian rebels: opposition.** Reuters, 25 August 2013.

**Syrian rebel forces trained by West are moving towards Damascus.** Jerusalem Post, 23 Aug 2013.

## **Military Factors**

**The Syrian regime's military assets.** Gene Thorp, Darla Cameron and Billy Kenber. Washington Post, 7 Sept 2013.

**Armed Conflict in Syria: Background and U.S. Response.** Jeremy M. Sharp and Christopher M. Blanchard. Congressional Research Service, September 6, 2013.

[\*\*Airpower Options for Syria: Assessing Objectives and Missions for Aerial Intervention.\*\*](#) Karl P. Mueller, Jeffrey Martini, Thomas Hamilton. RAND Corp, 2013.

Any of these actions would involve substantial risks of escalation by third parties, or could lead to greater U.S. military involvement in Syria.

[\*\*Syria's Chemical Weapons.\*\*](#) Congressional Research Service, 30 August 2013.

[\*\*The Non-State Militant Landscape in Syria.\*\*](#) Aron Lund. CTC Senteniel, 27 August 2013.

## **Collateral Effects**

[\*\*What an attack on Syria will mean for US-Iran relations.\*\*](#) Geneive Abdo. Al Jazeera, 10 Sept 2013.

A strike on Assad would abort the recent "testing of the waters" between US and Iran since Rouhani's election.

[\*\*Trench Warfare.\*\*](#) Marc Lynch. Foreign Policy, 6 Sept. 2013. (free sign-up required).

The sectarian and political camps across the Arab world are violently divided on Syria. Could a US bombing campaign bring them together?

[\*\*Military escalation in Syria will worsen civilians' plight, says Intl Red Cross.\*\*](#) Reuters, 29 Aug 2013.

[\*\*A Risk Assessment Of A Possible Strike On Syria.\*\*](#) Peter Juul. ThinkProgress, 29 August 2013.

[\*\*How Syria action risks unsettling fragile Middle East balance of power.\*\*](#) Patrick Cockburn. The Independent, 28 August 2013.

The violence has already affected neighboring states and strengthened the hand of jihadists.

## **Cost Factors & Budget**

[\*\*Senator Inhofe Proposes Sequester Exemption For DoD as Part of Syria Measure.\*\*](#) Rick Maze. Defense News, 10 Sept 2013.

**The Cost Of Striking Syria: 4 Lessons From Iraq And Afghanistan.** Linda Bilmes. WBUR Cognoscenti, 6 Sept 2013.

The economic lessons from 12 years in Iraq and Afghanistan are that we underestimated the costs, borrowed all the money to pay for them, and failed to account for where it was all spent.

**Could Syria Lead To Fiscal Armageddon Back Home?** Sahil Kapur. Talking Points Memo, 6 Sept 2013.

**Don't Bomb Us Back to the Fiscal Stone Age.** Ryan Alexander. US News and World Report, 4 September 2013.

Whether one supports or opposes intervention in Syria, it is important to recognize that whatever military action is taken, it will have a price tag.

**Don't Use Syria to Pump Up Pentagon Spending.** William Hartung. CNN, 4 Sept 2013.

## **Policy Alternatives**

**Russian Proposal On Syria's Chemical Weapons Gains Traction Amid U.S.**

**Skepticism.** Hayes Brown. ThinkProgress, 9 Sept 2013.

**Alternatives to the Use of Military Force in Syria.** Stephen Miles. Win Without War, 6 Sept 2013.

Our laws and our values dictate that military action should only be made after all viable alternatives are employed. The choice between military action and doing nothing is a false one."

**An International Solution to the Syrian Crisis.** Oren Barak. e-IR, 6 September 2013.

The past record of the international community in dealing with mass atrocities suggests that there are quite effective ways to overcome the resistance of Syria's allies to measures designed to punish and deter it.

[Six Alternatives to Military Strikes](#). Sarah van Gelder. Yes! Magazine, 5 September 2013.

Our real choice is this: contribute to lawless violence or turn to the rule of law and civility.

[UN Pleads For More Aid To Address Syrian Refugee Crisis](#). Ben Armbruster. Think Progress, 5 Sept 2013.

The United Nations refugee agency and four countries that border Syria on Wednesday urged the international community to provide greater assistance for the refugee crisis that is engulfing the region because of Syria's civil war.

[Between Bombing or Doing Nothing](#). Luis Moreno Ocampo, Former Chief Prosecutor, International Criminal Court. Huffington Post. 4 Sept 2013.

[An Imaginative, Creative Way to Deal with the Syrian Crisis](#). Stephan Walt. Foreign Policy, 29 August 2013.

Why not use the crisis over chemical weapons as an opportunity to launch a new diplomatic initiative?

[In Syria, try banks before bombs](#). Sonni Efron. Reuters, 29 August, 2013.

Aggressive sanctions could be more effective than bombing in hastening the end of the Syrian civil war by imposing substantial financial costs on those who are propping up Assad - without enraging the Arab street.

[Could a pre-emptive sanctions tool increase pressure on Syria?](#) Kimberly Ann Elliott. The Guardian, 28 August 2013.

Sanctions designed to deter investors from doing business with illegitimate regimes, while not a panacea, could be a useful addition to the diplomatic toolbox.

[On Bombing Syria](#). George Kenney. Huffington Post, 27 August 2013.

If the U.S. government feels that it has to do something, the best thing at the moment is to provide assistance to the millions of Syrian refugees and internally displaced, and redouble our efforts at diplomacy.

## **General Background**

[Syria: Overview of the Humanitarian Response](#). Congressional Research Service, 4 Sept 2013.

[\*\*Understanding Syria: How a Cold Front Chilled the Damascus Spring.\*\*](#) Zaman Stanizai. Huffington Post, 28 June 2013.

If the conflict unravels along sectarian fault lines, it will drag the entire region into catastrophic humanitarian crisis triggering global economic dominoes of devastating proportions.

[\*\*Peak oil, climate change and pipeline geopolitics driving Syria conflict.\*\*](#) Nafeez Ahmed. The Guardian, 13 May 2013.

The conflict's future continues to be at the mercy of rival foreign geopolitical interests in dominating the energy corridors of the Middle East and North Africa.

[\*\*The Syrian Heartbreak.\*\*](#) Peter Harling and Sarah Birke. MERIP, 16 April 2013.