

Threatened U.S. Attack on Syria

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Foreword

On 8 Sep 2013, I sent [e-mail](#) to my two U.S. Senators and one member of the U.S. House of Representatives, in which I opposed U.S. President Obama's proposed military strike on Syria. Hours later, I decided the U.S. threat of military strikes on Syria was worth preserving, and I began to write this document to collect contemporary facts, opinions, quotations, links to news reports and documents, and add my analysis.

In this document, I often give a link to an original source for the quoted opinion of someone. Other times, I give a link to a credible newspaper or television news channel. I am trying to write a history of this topic, and that requires presenting opinions of people with whom I personally disagree, or who I believe are untrustworthy. The fact that a politician or diplomat says something does *not* make his/her statement true.

Terse History Before 8 Sep 2013

In mid-March 2011, pro-democracy demonstrators in Syria were brutally repressed by the Syrian government, marking the beginning of what is now known as the Syrian civil war. Initially, a simplistic view is that the rebels were Good and the legitimate government of Assad was Evil. This simplistic view eroded as rebel forces engaged in atrocities.

On 23 Dec 2011, the Syrian government blamed Al-Qaeda operatives for two car bombs in Damascus that killed at least 44 people, see *The New York Times* [article](#). On 12 Feb 2012, the leader of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, called for Islamic terrorists to join the rebels in their fight against the Assad regime. The Al-Qaeda endorsement of the rebels was reported by the [BBC](#) and [The Guardian](#). In my view, the involvement of Al-Qaeda in Syria marked a turning point from a pro-democracy struggle to a rebellion by terrorists against a lawful government.

In August 2012, President Obama declared that any use of chemical weapons by Syria would change the U.S. policy of not being militarily involved in the Syrian civil war:

I have, at this point, not ordered military engagement in the situation. But the point that you made about chemical and biological weapons is critical. That's an issue that doesn't just concern Syria; it concerns our close allies in the region, including Israel. It concerns us. We cannot have a situation where chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people.

We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation.

President Obama, White House [Press Conference](#), 20 Aug 2012.

On 4 May 2013, the *The New York Times* published an [article](#) that explained Obama's "red line" was *unscripted*.

On 21 Aug 2013, nerve gas was allegedly used against civilians in Syria by unknown forces. On 24 Aug 2013, U.S. president Obama sent a fifth U.S. Navy warship to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, in preparation for military strikes against Syria, to punish the Syrian government for their possible alleged use of chemical weapons. See *The New York Times*.

The United Kingdom's government proposed to join the USA in a military strike on Syria. However, on the night of 29 Aug 2013, the House of Commons voted against a military strike, 285 to 272. See the [BBC](#) and [The Guardian](#). That vote pulled the United Kingdom out of the coalition being built by the USA, leaving the governments of the USA and France alone in their desire for a military strike on Syria.

Then, on 31 Aug 2013, Obama unexpectedly announced he would ask approval of the U.S. Congress for the military strikes against Syria. Anonymous sources in the French government [said](#) Obama called the French president to cancel the attack only nine hours before the USA/French military strike was to begin. [Congress](#) returned from their summer vacation on 9 Sep 2013. The subsequent history is described [below](#).

I have tersely summarized [attempts](#) to negotiate an end to the civil war in Syria. I believe

peace negotiations are futile with the current conditions in Syria.

Reasons to Oppose U.S. Strike on Syria

There are many reasons to **oppose** a U.S. military strike on Syria:

- It is arrogant for the USA to appoint itself as policeman of the World. Any punishment of nations for use of weapons of mass destruction should come from the United Nations.
- The USA has an unfortunate history of wasting trillions of dollars of taxpayer's money (and debt) — and thousands of american lives — in godforsaken foreign lands like Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq for zero benefit to taxpayers in the USA. These colossal wastes must stop.
- These colossal wastes were justified in the past by what are now known to be lies (e.g., the strategic importance of not letting Vietnam fall to communists; Saddam Hussein having weapons of mass destruction), which eroded the credibility of the office of the presidency of the USA.
- For Obama and the U.S. Congress, the Syrian civil war problem is a diversion from the many serious domestic problems faced by the U.S. Government, such as budget deficits, burdensome taxes, illegal immigration, decaying infrastructure, unaffordable health care, unemployment,
- In an idyllic, simplistic view, the rebels in Syria are fighting for democracy and freedom from a tyrant. But recent history shows that when a tyrant like Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Gaddafi in Libya, or Mubarak in Egypt is deposed, anarchy often follows. The rebels in Syria are fragmented and disorganized, so they do *not* offer a credible alternative to Assad's government. The presence of Al-Qaeda terrorists fighting with the rebels further tarnishes the rebels, and offers the possibility of a repressive Islamic state (e.g., like Iran) in Syria.
- Obama and Kerry have not explained why they are certain the gas was neither (1) stolen by rebels from army stockpiles, nor (2) taken by Syrian soldiers when they defected to the rebels. Surely the rebels know that using nerve gas would cross Obama's self-declared "red line" and invite the U.S. military to strike the Syrian army, thus helping the rebels.

There is no convincing evidence that Assad personally ordered the use of chemical weapons. I have a difficult time believing that professional soldiers in the Syrian army would fire chemical shells at a suburb of Damascus, the capital city, where a shift in the wind could harm the Syrian government. Moreover, why would the Syrian government order the use of chemical weapons at a site only a few miles from where UN inspectors were staying? That would be like deliberately committing a crime in

front of a policeman.

[Médecins Sans Frontières](#) said only 355 Syrians died from poison gas on 21 Aug. This low number of deaths suggests to me that whoever fired the chemical shells had a small supply of chemical weapons, unlike the Syrian army.

- Obama decided to strike Syria days *before* the United Nations inspectors began collecting samples, and almost a week *before* the chemical analyses began. So Obama and Kerry are *not* relying on facts.
- risk of involving the USA in a protracted conflict: (1) risk of war with Russia or Iran, (2) risk of retaliation on innocent americans by Islamic terrorists.
- risk that american military strike will hit innocent civilians or other *unintended* targets (e.g., like the accidental american bombing of the Communist Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999).
- more than two weeks of advance warning of U.S. military strike allowed Assad to move his troops and munitions into civilian areas, to protect Syrian military assets from attack by the USA, making any U.S. strike less effective.
- unlikelihood of preventing future use of chemical weapons in Syria: We can *not* blast Syria's chemical weapons stockpile with bombs and cruise missiles, because that could release a toxic cloud that could kill or injure civilians downwind.
- If one believes Obama and Kerry — and I do not — the alleged use of nerve gas in Syria has killed 1429 people. This is trivial compared to the *more* than [110,000 people](#) killed in the Syria civil war up to 31 Aug 2013.
- If we were really serious about safeguarding chemical weapons, we should support Assad, so his government does not fall and let Islamic terrorists seize Assad's stockpile of chemical weapons.

The White House correspondent for the *Al-Jazeera* Arabic television news network mentioned questions that the mainstream media is **not** asking the White House:

- "Do you know where all the chemical weapons stockpiles are in Syria? A few months ago a top Obama adviser said no. It seems to me if you can't say where they are, you also can't say you are 100 percent certain the Assad government controls the weapons and rockets."
- "The president said his goal was not to erode control of the chemical weapons. How does a US military strike make that more likely and not less?"
- "What is your plan if you launch a strike to send a message of 'don't do it again' and chemical weapons are used again — what will you do then?"

- "The UN charter says force can only be used for self-defence and barring that with the UN Security Council resolution. The president said he needed a UN mandate last week but the administration now says you don't need to go to the UN. How is that not a violation of international law?"
- "War is not a video game, no matter how much the American media sanitises it. The president has been clear his intentions are simply to send a message, not to change the course of the war or topple the Assad government. I think the questions that should be asked are not what he intends, but what are the potential unintended consequences."

Patty Culhane, "Questions Obama isn't being asked on Syria," [Al-Jazeera](#), 29 Aug 2013.

History After 8 Sep 2013

President Obama, and Secretary of State Kerry, repeatedly emphasized the *limited* nature of the proposed U.S. military strike on Syria, as if a small unlawful aggression was a good idea. Here is what Newt Gingrich had to say about that:

[Obama is saying to Assad:] we're going to sort of punch you, but we're not going to punch you too hard, and we really would like you to leave, but we don't want you to leave enough to get rid of you, and we hope there's a political solution, although we haven't got a clue what it is. I mean, that's very hard to build momentum for.

[Meet the Press](#), 8 Sep 2013.

On Monday, 9 Sep 2013, CNN released results of an opinion [poll](#) of 1022 adult americans during 6 to 8 Sep that showed that 59% opposed the proposed U.S. Congressional resolution authorizing military strikes against Syria, and 72% believed air strikes "would not achieve significant goals for the United States".

On Monday morning in London, at a joint press conference with the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary, Kerry was asked a hypothetical question about what Assad could do to avoid a military strike by the USA. Kerry replied:

Sure, he could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week — turn it over, all of it without delay and allow the full and total accounting (of it). But he isn't about to do it and it can't be done.

[The Telegraph](#) 10:58 BST, 9 Sep 2013.

An alternative transcript by the U.S. Government:

Question: And secondly, is there anything at this point that [Assad's] government could do or offer that would stop an attack?

SECRETARY KERRY: Sure. He could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week. Turn it over, all of it, without

delay, and allow a full and total accounting for that. But he isn't about to do it, and it can't be done, obviously.

[State Dept.](#) entire transcript, 9 Sep 2013.

Astoundingly, the Syrian Foreign Minister, the Russian Foreign Minister, and the United Nations Secretary General quickly accepted Kerry's accidental proposal, which Kerry apparently intended only as a rhetorical response to a hypothetical question.

The U.S. State Department immediately retreated from Kerry's accidental and inadvertent diplomatic breakthrough:

Ms. MARIE HART [Deputy Spokesperson]: What Secretary Kerry said, as Jen [Psaki, chief spokesperson for the U.S. State Department] said, I believe, from the road, was that he was speaking rhetorically about a situation we thought had very low probability of happening. What Ben [Rhodes, Deputy National Security Advisor to Obama], I believe, said and what we're saying is that we will have to take a hard look at the Russian statement, which is what's happened since then. And so we understand exactly what the Russians are proposing here. I think that's what we've been clear about.

Clearly, we have some serious skepticism. Everything that Assad has done over the past two years and before has been to refuse to put his chemical weapons under international control. He hasn't declared them; we've repeatedly called on him to do so. And he's ignored prohibitions against them. So I think it's important to keep in mind the context under which this Russian statement and the Syrian statement is happening, that this is only happening in the context of a threat of U.S. military action.

So again, we'll take a step back and we'll look at the Russian statement. We'll see what details lie behind it. But at this point, of course, we have serious skepticism because of everything Assad has done in the course of the last several years on chemical weapons.

QUESTION: What does it mean, "We'll take a step back"?

MS. HART: We'll take a hard look at it. Absolutely.

QUESTION: Well, taking a step back seems to imply that you might not continue with making your case for —

MS. HART: Absolutely not. In fact, the opposite, Matt.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HART: We think this is why it's even more important that Congress votes to authorize the President to use military action against Syrian regime targets. Because we can be clear that if we don't give authorization to do so, and if we don't respond, then Assad will see that as a green light to continue using these chemical weapons.

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: So in fact, we would say the opposite. That's why it's even more important for Congress to move ahead and authorize this use of military force.

....

QUESTION: I'm interested why you keep putting this on the Russians because [Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei] Lavrov did not make this statement until after he found out what the Secretary had said.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm. But the Secretary was not making a proposal. The Secretary was making a rhetorical statement

....

QUESTION: All right. The other thing is I still don't understand why you are so eager to give — to brand this a Russian and Syrian proposal. It is clear —

MS. HARF: Because that's the facts here.

QUESTION: No. Whether what the Secretary said was rhetorical or not, he put it —

MS. HARF: It was rhetorical and hypothetical.

QUESTION: Whatever. Doesn't matter. He put it out there, and the Russians seized on it. So I don't buy —

MS. HARF: But he didn't put it out there as a proposal.

....

[State Dept.](#) daily press briefing, 13:14 EDT, 9 Sep 2013.

On Monday evening, 9 Sep, Obama said in an interview on NBC News that the Russian proposal for Syria to surrender its chemical weapons to international inspectors "could potentially be a significant breakthrough." See [NBC News](#) (17:39 EDT, 9 Sep 2013) and [Associated Press](#).

How U.S. Foreign Policy Looks from England

An article in *The Guardian* (a newspaper in Manchester, England) describes the initial gaffe by Obama that declared any use of chemical weapons by Assad as a "red line" that would trigger U.S. military involvement:

Obama, fielding questions during an August 2012 press conference, described the use of those chemical [weapons] as a "red line" for the US.

The threat reportedly surprised White House advisers who had intended simply to put pressure on Assad behind the scenes rather than box Washington into a corner, but the off-the-cuff use of the phrase "red line" came to define US foreign policy.

"The idea was to put a chill into the Assad regime without actually trapping the president into any predetermined action," a senior official told *The New York Times*, but "what the president said in August [2012] was unscripted."

Spencer Ackerman and Dan Roberts, [The Guardian](#), 18:31 EDT, 9 Sep 2013.

I have traced the quotation from *The New York Times* to an [article](#) on 4 May 2013.

Then, on 9 Sep 2013, Kerry made an accidental remark (also characterized by *The Guardian* as a "gaffe") that — after apparent acceptance by the Syrians and Russians — gave Obama a way to avoid military strikes. Continuing the quotation from *The Guardian*:

Washington's crisis over Syria started with a gaffe. Another gaffe may very well end it.

If the Obama administration's response to Bashar Assad's alleged use of chemical weapons appears erratic, improvised and incoherent, that's because it has been, ever since the president declared the use of chemical weapons to constitute a "red line" that apparently prompted US action. A different improvisation, from his secretary of state on Monday, offered the Obama administration an opportunity to climb back from the brink of a war Obama initially wanted to avoid.

With cruise missile strikes against Assad looming, John Kerry, the secretary of state, fielded a question Monday from a reporter in London about avoiding war by saying Assad could "turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week." Kerry quickly qualified that Assad "isn't about to do it, and it can't be done."

And yet it might be at hand. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov took the remark approvingly, raising the prospect that one of Syria's major foreign patrons was embracing a way to avoid a war that would implicate its own interests.

"We will immediately start working with Damascus," Lavrov said Monday.

Suddenly, the Obama administration faced yet another unexpected challenge over Syria: whether it can take yes for an answer, and avoid a war that the Obama administration has never wanted in the first place — but over the last few weeks the White House has felt little choice but to embrace.

That dizzying maneuver is only the latest in a Syria policy defined primarily by improvisation.

....

Put differently, Obama's fortunes in avoiding yet another Middle Eastern war may live and die by the gaffe.

Spencer Ackerman and Dan Roberts, [The Guardian](#), 18:31 EDT, 9 Sep 2013.

10 Sep 2013

On the morning of 10 Sep 2013, the French government announced it would draft a resolution for the United Nations Security Council on the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria.

On the afternoon of 10 Sep 2013, Kerry demanded that the resolution be binding on Syria, and contain consequences for Syrian non-compliance (i.e., military strikes by United Nations against Syria). Russia promptly opposes the threat of military strikes. Kerry also demanded that Syria's chemical weapons must be transferred to international control and then destroyed.

It is *not* clear how a United Nations resolution can guarantee that the Syrian government will submit *all* of its chemical weapons to international control and eventual destruction. Moreover, it is a major project to destroy what journalists report as *approximately* 1000 tons of chemical weapons. The destruction is even more difficult in the midst of a vicious civil war that threatens the safety of personnel doing the destruction. Destroying all of Syria's chemical weapons will probably take tens of years, as explained [below](#). Kerry was correct on 9 Sep to say the Syrians can *not* surrender all of their chemical weapons on or before 13 Sep, because there is no one to whom to surrender the weapons. But given that the Syrian civil war has existed for 30 months, there is no good reason for an arbitrary end-of-this-week deadline.

At the moment, the Syrians presumably have their chemical weapons stored at dozens of secret locations, under guard by the Syrian army. But after these weapons are surrendered to international inspectors, the location will be public and the security less than before. I worry that surrendering these chemical weapons to the United Nations will make these weapons less secure, and more likely to be stolen by Islamic terrorists. As I write this on 11 Sep, I have not seen this concern mentioned in the mainstream media.

At 21:00 EDT on 10 Sep, President Obama gave a 16-minute [speech](#) from the White House that was carried live over the major television networks. This speech was planned since 6 Sep to convince americans to support Obama's proposed military strike on Syria. Since then, the diplomatic initiative by Russia had rendered that original goal irrelevant.

President Obama in his speech on 10 Sep said:

I have, therefore, asked the leaders of Congress to postpone a vote to authorize the use of force while we pursue this diplomatic path. I'm sending Secretary of State John Kerry to meet his Russian counterpart on Thursday, and I will continue my own discussions with President Putin. I've spoken to the leaders of two of our closest allies, France and the United Kingdom, and we will work together in consultation with Russia and China to put forward a resolution at the U.N. Security Council requiring Assad to give up his chemical weapons, and to ultimately destroy them under international control. We'll also give U.N. inspectors the opportunity to report their findings about what happened on August 21st. And we will continue to rally support from allies from Europe to the Americas — from Asia to the Middle East — who agree on the need for

action.

[President Obama](#), 21:00 EDT, 10 Sep 2013.

Obama made a blatant appeal to emotion, amongst the propaganda in his speech:

... To my friends on the left, I ask you to reconcile your belief in freedom and dignity for all people with those images of children writhing in pain, and going still on a cold hospital floor. For sometimes resolutions and statements of condemnation are simply not enough.

Indeed, I'd ask every member of Congress, and those of you watching at home tonight, to view those videos of the attack, and then ask: What kind of world will we live in if the United States of America sees a dictator brazenly violate international law with poison gas, and we choose to look the other way?

Ibid.

Obama did *not* convincingly explain why suffering from chemical weapons is worse than suffering from conventional weapons. Or why atrocities allegedly committed by Assad's military are worse than atrocities committed by rebels. And the evidence for *who* fired the chemical shells is still in dispute.

Obama ended his speech with an arrogant assertion that it was an "essential truth" that the USA was morally superior to other nations, and that made the USA "exceptional". This moral superiority apparently justifies blatantly unlawful aggression against other nations that the U.S. Government believes are misbehaving.

America is not the world's policeman. Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong. But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death, and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act. That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional. With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

Ibid.

The two mentions of "children" in Obama's conclusion are irrelevant propaganda. Obama admits that "America is not the world's policeman", but then he appoints the U.S. military to punish the Syrian government — *inconsistent positions in the space of one paragraph.*

Remarks after the speech by politicians and commentators suggest that Obama failed to increase support for a military strikes on Syria. Ann [Althouse](#), a law professor at the Univ. of Wisconsin, called Obama's speech "perfunctory". The [Voice of America](#) has quotes from reaction around the world, with links to the original sources. [The New York Times](#) describes reaction. Commentary by the [BBC](#) called Obama's speech "almost entirely lacking in passion and devoid of new arguments." [Charles Krauthammer](#) spoke of "fruits of a diplomacy of epic incompetence."

Incidentally, Kerry made a *second* gaffe at the press conference in London on 9 Sep when he said:

.... And what we have to do is make clear to people that this is — we're not talking about war. We're not going to war. We will not have people at risk in that way. We will be able to hold Bashar Assad accountable without engaging in troops on the ground or any other prolonged kind of effort in a very limited, very targeted, very short-term effort that degrades his capacity to deliver chemical weapons without assuming responsibility for Syria's civil war. That is exactly what we're talking about doing — *unbelievably small*, limited kind of effort.

[State Dept. transcript](#), 9 Sep 2013. (*italics added by Standler*).

U.S. Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.), a supporter of U.S. military aid to the rebels in Syria, [tweeted](#) in response that Kerry's remarks were "unbelievably unhelpful". Even President Obama seemed to disagree with Kerry, when Obama's speech on 10 Sep included the belligerent statement:

Let me make something clear: The United States military doesn't do pinpricks. Even a limited strike will send a message to Assad that no other nation can deliver.

[President Obama](#), 21:00 EDT, 10 Sep 2013.

Putin's Editorial

Russian President Vladimir Putin wrote an opinion-editorial in *The New York Times* that appeared on Thursday morning, 12 Sep. Amongst other points, President Putin said:

The potential strike by the United States against Syria, despite strong opposition from many countries and major political and religious leaders, including the pope, will result in more innocent victims and escalation, potentially spreading the conflict far beyond Syria's borders.

....

Syria is not witnessing a battle for democracy, but an armed conflict between government and opposition in a multireligious country. There are few champions of democracy in Syria. But there are more than enough Qaeda fighters and extremists of all stripes battling the government. The United States State Department has designated Al Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, fighting with the opposition, as terrorist organizations. This internal conflict, fueled by foreign weapons supplied to the opposition, is one of the bloodiest in the world.

Mercenaries from Arab countries fighting there, and hundreds of militants from Western countries and even Russia, are an issue of our deep concern. Might they not return to our countries with experience acquired in Syria? After all, after fighting in Libya, extremists moved on to Mali. This threatens us all.

From the outset, Russia has advocated peaceful dialogue enabling Syrians to develop a compromise plan for their own future. We are not protecting the Syrian government, but international law. We need to use the United Nations Security Council and believe that preserving law and order in today's complex and turbulent world is one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos. The law is still the law, and we must follow it whether we like it or not. Under current international law, force

is permitted only in self-defense or by the decision of the Security Council. Anything else is unacceptable under the United Nations Charter and would constitute an act of aggression.

No one doubts that poison gas was used in Syria. But there is every reason to believe it was used not by the Syrian Army, but by opposition forces, to provoke intervention by their powerful foreign patrons, who would be siding with the fundamentalists. Reports that militants are preparing another attack — this time against Israel — cannot be ignored.

It is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States. Is it in America's long-term interest? I doubt it. Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan "you're either with us or against us."

But force has proved ineffective and pointless. Afghanistan is reeling, and no one can say what will happen after international forces withdraw. Libya is divided into tribes and clans. In Iraq the civil war continues, with dozens killed each day. In the United States, many draw an analogy between Iraq and Syria, and ask why their government would want to repeat recent mistakes.

....

The world reacts by asking: if you cannot count on international law, then you must find other ways to ensure your security. Thus a growing number of countries seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction. This is logical: if you have the bomb, no one will touch you. We are left with talk of the need to strengthen nonproliferation, when in reality this is being eroded.

We must stop using the language of force and return to the path of civilized diplomatic and political settlement.

....

My working and personal relationship with President Obama is marked by growing trust. I appreciate this. I carefully studied his address to the nation on Tuesday. And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that the United States' policy is "what makes America different. It's what makes us exceptional." It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal.

[Putin](#), "A Plea for Caution From Russia," 12 Sep 2013.

I think President Putin was right to point out that:

- the U.S. Government sees the rebels in Syria as some kind of idyllic fighters for freedom and democracy, when the truth is that many of them are Islamic jihadists who we have condemned as terrorists. Further, many of the rebels have engaged in atrocities that makes them *unworthy* of support.
- when Obama threatened military strikes on Syria to punish Syria, Obama — a former adjunct law professor, who ought to know better — threatened to violate international law.
- the U.S. Government does have an unfortunate history of invading other nations (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq), drone strikes in Pakistan, limited military strike against Gaddafi in Libya. Putin *may* be right that such aggression encourages nations like North Korea and Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. On the other hand, North Korea has a long history of belligerence, and Iran wishes to destroy Israel.
- Obama's point about the USA being "exceptional" — and apparently able to ignore international law — is arrogant and dangerous. *No* nation should be above the law.

I am sorry to say that during 10-12 Sep, Putin has distinguished himself, while Obama since 24 Aug has embarrassed the USA with his warmongering and amateurish foreign policy. Putin's editorial is much more convincing to me than Obama's [speech](#). This may be the first time in my life that I have favored a Russian position instead of an European or U.S. position, but I think the Russian position on Syria is more logical than the Obama's position, particularly given the involvement of Al-Qaeda and other jihadists amongst the Syrian rebels.

However, Russia too has a history of unlawful aggression (e.g., its war in Afghanistan during 1979-89, and a few-day war with Georgia in Aug 2008). Putin's opinion that a U.S. military strike on Syria will spread the war beyond the borders of Syria is speculation, *not* fact, but he *may* be correct. I suspect that foreign fighters in Syria will eventually move to other nations and continue their jihad — regardless of whether or not the U.S. has a military strike on Syria. And Putin engages in *unbelievable* self-serving praise when he says Russia is interested in "peaceful dialogue enabling Syrians to develop a compromise plan for their own future" and that Russia is "not protecting the Syrian government, but international law." While I think Putin made a better argument than Obama, Putin's editorial is full of propaganda and hypocrisy, just like other politicians. The truth is that Putin himself has done much to prolong the civil war in Syria, by supplying weapons to Assad and by vetoing United Nations resolutions that might help end the war. Russia's only military base outside the former Soviet Union is a port at Tartus, Syria — so Russia has a military interest in the continuing rule of Assad's government.

Putin seems inconsistent when he claims the *rebels* fired the chemical shells, but Putin wants the Syrian *government* to give its chemical weapons to international control for destruction. It appears that no one in Russia or the USA really *knows* who fired the chemical shells, so *beliefs* replace *evidence*. However, after all of the Syrian government's chemical weapons are destroyed, then those weapons will no longer be available for anyone to use, and the world will be a safer place.

To offer balance to Putin, a former KGB officer, consider what David Stockman, President Reagan's Budget Director during 1981-85, had to say, nine days before Putin's editorial:

Next week Congress can do far more than stop a feckless Tomahawk barrage on a small country that is already a graveyard of civil war and sectarian slaughter. By voting "no," it can trigger the end of the American Imperium — five decades of incessant meddling, bullying, and subversion around the globe that has added precious little to national security but left America fiscally exhausted and morally diminished.

.... Now the White House wants authorization for the last straw: namely, to deliver from the firing tubes of U.S. naval destroyers a dose of righteous "punishment" that has no plausible military or strategic purpose. By the president's own statements, the proposed attack is merely designed to censure the Syrian regime for allegedly visiting one particularly horrific form of violence on its own citizens.

Well, really? After having rained napalm, white phosphorous, bunker busters, drone missiles, and the most violent machinery of conventional warfare ever assembled upon millions of innocent Vietnamese, Cambodians, Serbs, Somalis, Iraqis, Afghans, Pakistanis, Yemeni, Libyans, and countless more, Washington now presupposes to be in the moral-sanctions business? That's downright farcical. Nevertheless, by declaring himself the world's spanker in chief, President Obama has unwittingly precipitated the mother of all clarifying moments.

David Stockman, [The Daily Beast](#), 3 Sep 2013.

Con Coughlin, *The Telegraph's* defense editor, wrote in an editorial:

The introduction of the New York Times's new star columnist, Vladimir V Putin, this morning should provide Barack Obama with a few useful tips on how to make a persuasive argument to the American people about tackling the Syrian crisis.

By contrast with Mr Obama's unfathomable televised address earlier this week, Mr Putin, whose day job is running Russia, managed to set out a lucid and powerful argument on why the West should proceed with caution on Syria.

Con Coughlin, [The Telegraph](#), "Putin shows Obama how to provide decisive leadership," 12 Sep 2013.

12-14 Sep 2013

Kerry met with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Geneva on 12-14 Sep 2013. Both diplomats were accompanied by a team of experts on the Chemical Weapons Convention. They will meet again sometime near 28 Sep, during the annual U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York.

On 12 Sep, [The Washington Post](#) reported that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has been

delivering weapons to the rebels in Syria since 29 Aug 2013. Sending weapons to the rebels just prolongs the civil war in Syria. On the other hand, Russia (and probably Iran) have been shipping munitions to the Syrian government, and some Gulf nations have been shipping munitions to the Syrian rebels.

On 9-11 Sep, acceptance of the Russian proposal by Syria had been communicated by the Syrian Foreign Minister, but *not* by Assad himself. But on 12 Sep 2013, in an interview with the Russian Rossiya 24 television news channel, Assad indicated his acceptance of the Russian proposal. Assad said:

Syria is handing over its chemical weapons under international supervision because of Russia. The U.S. threats did not influence the decision.

Assad, rt.com 12 Sep 2012.

Assad's claim of not being influenced by Obama's threatened military strike is *not* plausible. Further, the Russian proposal was a way to avoid a U.S. military strike on Syria.

Separately, the Syrian government sent a letter on 12 Sep to the United Nations [OPCW](#) indicating that Syria wished to join the Chemical Weapons Convention, something Syria should have done in the year 1993, along with many other nations. Syria proposes to *begin* declaring its stockpile of chemical weapons in 30 days, according to "standard procedures". However, Kerry rejects that usual timetable, because the Syrians have already used chemical weapons, so the Syrian situation is exceptional and nonroutine.

[CNN](#) (17:30 EDT, 12 Sep 2013) reports that the head of the Free Syrian Army claims that Assad's government is moving some chemical weapons to Lebanon and Iraq.

[The Wall Street Journal](#) (21:49 EDT, 12 Sep 2013) reports anonymous government officials are saying that, during the past few months, Syria has been moving its chemical weapons to fifty sites, apparently to make it more difficult for other governments to know the location of the chemical weapons.

At the daily press briefing at the U.S. State Department on Friday, 13 Sep 2013, the Deputy Spokesman noted the progress this week:

MS. HARF: if we take a step back and look even two or three weeks ago at where we were, the Syrian regime still was refusing to acknowledge they even had chemical weapons. They certainly were refusing to admit that they used them. And they were refusing to deal with the international community at all on this issue. And today, only after the threat of U.S. military action — direct U.S. military action — are we at a place where we're having discussions, substantive technical discussions in Geneva. Are we naive about the fact that these may not go anywhere? No. But the progress we've seen just in 72 hours is so — is such a stark contrast to where we were just a week or two ago. So I think it's important to take a step back and actually look at some of the steps that have been taken, because they are quite remarkable if you look at the overall context.

[State Dept.](#), 13 Sep 2013.

The Deputy Spokesman also noted the U.S. disagreement with the "standard process" of joining the Chemical Weapons Convention, in which the Syrian government proposes to *begin* declaring its chemical weapons in 30 days:

MS. HARP: ... As Secretary Kerry has said in Geneva, that we've seen these reports that they suggested that they will sign on to it, that this is part of a standard process. And so I'd make a few points in response to the Syrians: That we believe that there's actually nothing standard about this process at this moment, because of the way the regime has behaved. And not only because of the existence of these weapons, but because of the fact they've been used on such a large scale.

Ibid.

The Deputy Spokesman also noted the continuing U.S. military threat:

MS. HARP: ... we believe there's a chance that this could work. Are we naive? No. Do we have great skepticism? Of course. The Secretary has said that repeatedly. But we have an obligation. If we have an opportunity to permanently destroy a stockpile of chemical weapons that were used by one of the world's worst dictators today, we have an obligation to try, even though it's hard — and in fact, because it's hard. We should try and do the hard things because they're so important. And no one's naive about the logistical challenges. That's why we've said there needs to be a verifiable and credible and enforceable mechanism to do this.

And look, we've always said at the same time, too, that the threat of military action remains on the table, that the U.S. military's in the same posture it was a week ago. They are ready, if we make that decision, to take military action to deter and degrade the Assad regime's capability. That hasn't changed. So while we're pursuing this diplomatically, we're not naive, and we're not going to let it go on forever.

Ibid.

On Friday night, 13 Sep, *The Washington Post* cited anonymous "senior administration officials" in the Geneva negotiations:

The Obama administration will not press for U.N. authorization to use force against Syria if it reneges on any agreement to give up its chemical weapons, senior administration officials said Friday.

The Russians have made clear in talks here between Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Secretary of State John F. Kerry that the negotiations cannot proceed under the threat of a U.N. resolution authorizing a military strike. Russia also wants assurances that a resolution will not refer Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to the International Criminal Court for possible war-crimes prosecution.

President Obama has said that the unilateral U.S. use of force against Syria for a chemical attack last month remains on the table. But consideration of that action, already under challenge by a skeptical Congress, has been put on hold pending the outcome of the Geneva talks.

The Washington Post, 13 Sep 2013.

Note the irony that Putin's [editorial](#) yesterday spoke of his high regard for international law, but today Putin wants immunity for Assad's alleged violations of international law.

In his Saturday morning weekly radio address, Obama said:

And since this plan emerged only with a credible threat of U.S. military action, we will maintain our military posture in the region to keep the pressure on the Assad regime.

And if diplomacy fails, the United States and the international community must remain prepared to act.

[Obama](#), "WEEKLY ADDRESS: Pursuing a Diplomatic Solution in Syria," 14 Sep 2013.

Framework of 14 Sep 2013

On Saturday morning, 14 Sep, the U.S. State Department issued a press release that summarized the agreement between Russia and the USA in the Geneva negotiations:

Taking into account the decision of the Syrian Arab Republic to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the commitment of the Syrian authorities to provisionally apply the Convention prior to its entry into force, the United States and the Russian Federation express their joint determination to ensure the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons program (CW) in the soonest and safest manner.

For this purpose, the United States and the Russian Federation have committed to prepare and submit in the next few days to the Executive Council of the OPCW [Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, part of the United Nations] a draft decision setting down special procedures for expeditious destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons program and stringent verification thereof. The principles on which this decision should be based, in the view of both sides, are set forth in Annex A. The United States and the Russian Federation believe that these extraordinary procedures are necessitated by the prior use of these weapons in Syria and the volatility of the Syrian civil war.

The specific terms of the Framework include:

- ... in the event of non-compliance, including unauthorized transfer, or any use of chemical weapons by anyone in Syria, the UN Security Council should impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
- ... the United States and the Russian Federation have reached a shared assessment of the amount and type of chemical weapons involved, and are committed to the immediate international control over chemical weapons and their components in Syria. The United States and the Russian Federation expect Syria to submit, within a week, a comprehensive listing, including names, types, and quantities of its chemical weapons agents, types of munitions, and location and form of storage, production, and research and development facilities.
- We further determined that the most effective control of these weapons may be achieved by removal of the largest amounts of weapons feasible, under OPCW supervision, and their destruction outside of Syria, if possible. We set ambitious goals for the removal and destruction of all categories of CW related materials

and equipment with the objective of completing such removal and destruction in the first half of 2014.

- The United States and the Russian Federation have further decided that to achieve accountability for their chemical weapons, the Syrians must provide the OPCW, the UN, and other supporting personnel with the immediate and unfettered right to inspect any and all sites in Syria. The extraordinary procedures to be proposed by the United States and the Russian Federation for adoption by the OPCW Executive Council and reinforced by a UN Security Council resolution, as described above, should include a mechanism to ensure this right.

Annex A, item 7 provides a timetable:

The decision should address a schedule for the rapid destruction of Syrian chemical weapons capabilities. This schedule should take into account the following target dates:

- A. Completion of initial OPCW on-site inspections of declared sites by November [2013].
- B. Destruction of production and mixing/filling equipment by November [2013].
- C. Complete elimination of all chemical weapons material and equipment in the first half of 2014.

The shortest possible final deadline, as well as intermediate deadlines, for the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons capabilities should be included into the schedule.

U.S. [State Dept.](#), "Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons," 14 Sep 2013. alternate copy at [Russian Foreign Ministry website](#), 14 Sep 2013. a PDF version at [OPCW](#).

more on 14 Sep 2013

As of noon EDT on Saturday, 14 Sep 2013, it is *not* known whether Syria will agree to this Framework. Note that Russia and Syria prevailed in avoiding explicit mention of military strikes to punish Syria for noncompliance with the Framework. Note that the USA, particularly Kerry, prevailed in imposing an accelerated timetable on Syria. The declaration and destruction of an estimated 1000 tons of chemical weapons in nine months is apparently *unprecedented*, and probably *unrealistic*.

Obama issued a press release in which he congratulated himself on his threat of a military strike on Syria, which motivated the Syrians to agree to destroy their chemical weapons. And Obama again threatened military strikes on Syria, "if diplomacy fails".

While we have made important progress, much more work remains to be done. The United States will continue working with Russia, the United Kingdom, France, the United Nations and others to ensure that this process is verifiable, and that there are consequences should the Assad regime not comply with the framework agreed today.

And, if diplomacy fails, the United States remains prepared to act.
[Obama](#), "Statement by the President on U.S.-Russian Agreement on Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons," 14 Sep 2013.

On 14 Sep 2013, the United Nations Secretary General [received](#) "the formal instrument of accession to the [Chemical Weapons] Convention" from Syria.

Estimate of Time Required for Destruction of Syrian Chemical Weapons

Diplomats and journalists talk about destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, without making clear that such destruction is a *major* undertaking that will require tens of years of effort. For example, in Jan 2004 Libya joined the Chemical Weapons Convention. The [OPCW](#) tells us that Gaddafi declared 25 metric tons of sulfur mustard and 1,390 metric tons of precursor chemicals. By Feb 2011 (seven years later), only about half of the sulfur mustard had been destroyed, plus 40% of the precursor chemicals. The "planned completion date" for the destruction in Libya is Dec 2016, 13 years after the process began.

Note that Syria is estimated to have about 40 times more chemical weapons than Libya.

[National Public Radio](#) on 11 Sep 2013 cites a Pentagon estimate of 75,000 soldiers needed to secure the chemical weapons in Syria, and this number would be needed for at least ten years. Destruction of chemical weapons is going to be a major undertaking by the United Nations.

And that brings me to another point. Everyone seems to be in agreement that destroying all of the Syrian chemical weapons is a good idea. But no one — as of 13 Sep 2013 — mentions the total cost, which is likely to be *very* expensive. This seems to be another example of the U.S. government (and ultimately the U.S. taxpayers) buying a policy or program without knowing how much it will really cost. It seems unlikely that Assad will pay to destroy his own chemical weapons, when he has a civil war to fight *and* a crumbling economy. I hope that we can get Saudi Arabia and the Gulf nations to spend some of their oil revenue on paying for destruction of Assad's chemical weapons, to make their neighborhood safer.

15 Sep 2013

Sunday morning, 15 Sep 2013, the "better" Syrian rebels — *neither* the Al-Qaeda groups *nor* the jihadis — indicated their unhappiness over the U.S.-Russian Framework, and also the absence of U.S. military strikes on the Syrian military.

The head of the opposition Free Syrian Army on Saturday rejected an agreement between the US and Russia to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons stock by mid-2014.

"We cannot accept any part of this initiative," Gen. Selim Idriss told reporters in Istanbul, saying it is a blow to the two-and-a-half-year uprising aiming to topple

Syrian President Bashar Assad.

"We in the Free Syrian Army are unconcerned by the implementation of any part of the initiative ... I and my brothers in arms will continue to fight until the regime falls," he said.

Idriss said the deal would allow Assad to avoid being held accountable for killing hundreds of civilians in a poison gas attack on Damascus on Aug. 21.

[Arab News](#), "Syria fighters livid over Russia-US deal," 03:42 EDT, 15 Sep 2013.

RIA Novosti reported the first reaction from Syria on the Russian-USA Framework:

"We welcome these agreements. On the one hand, they will help Syrians come out of the crisis, and on the other hand, they prevented the war against Syria by having removed a pretext for those who wanted to unleash it [war]," Ali Haidar [Syrian minister of national reconciliation] said in the interview with *RIA Novosti*.

The minister said the deal is "the achievement of the Russian diplomacy and the Russian leadership." "This is a victory for Syria won thanks to our Russian friends," Haidar said.

[RIA-Novosti](#), "Damascus Hails US-Russia Deal on Syria Chemical Weapons," 15 Sep 2013.

In my opinion, this is bravado. The Syrian government should be very unhappy to lose their chemical weapons, for which they spent much money, and which made them a significant military power.

At 12:34 EDT on Sunday, 15 Sep, the Associated Press reported:

There has been no official statement from the Syrian government, and it was not clear whether Haidar's comments reflected Assad's thinking.

Associated Press, "Syrian Official: Chemical Weapons Deal a 'Victory' ," [The New York Times](#), 12:34 EDT, 15 Sep 2013.

After a meeting in Israel with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Kerry once again mentioned the continuing U.S. threat of military strikes on Syria:

Now this will only be as effective as its implementation will be, and President Obama has made it clear that to accomplish that, the threat of force remains. The threat of force is real, and the Assad regime and all those taking part need to understand that President Obama and the United States are committed to achieve this goal. We cannot have hollow words in the conduct of international affairs because that affects all other issues, whether Iran or North Korea or any other.

[Kerry](#), 15 Sep 2013.

The Economist, the influential British weekly newsmagazine, was pessimistic about the Russian-USA Framework actually destroying all of Syria's chemical weapons in nine months.

Unfortunately, though, the chances are that something will go wrong. Even if all sides

enter into the agreement in good faith, the practicalities are daunting (see [article](#)). Any operation to destroy Syria's arsenal could take years. While civil war rages, it will be hard to protect UN inspectors and for them to have access to all Syria's chemical sites. Trust is almost non-existent, so the inspectors will need the freedom to go where they choose when they choose. That will be hard, too.

What if good faith is lacking? Saddam Hussein showed in Iraq how a regime that is minded to be awkward can play cat and mouse with weapons inspectors. The scope for Mr Assad to frustrate disarmament without ever rejecting it outright is almost infinite. Thanks to the past few weeks, he now knows that voters in the West have no stomach for striking Syria. The British prime minister suffered a defeat in parliament. The French president, a hero for dispatching troops to Mali at the start of this year, is apparently a zero for wanting to strike Mr Assad. Mr Obama's efforts to convince his countrymen of the case for going to war seem so far only to have strengthened their desire to stay at home.

....

To succeed in his aim of re-establishing deterrence against chemical weapons, Mr Obama needs to regain the initiative. For that he needs a tough UN resolution, backed up by a vote in Congress authorising force if diplomacy fails. Mr Assad has bombed, shot and poisoned his people. Just this week he denied having chemical weapons, even as his foreign minister admitted it. He is not a man to be trusted. That is why the UN resolution needs to be clear that, if Mr Assad does not keep his word, then a military attack will follow.

The Economist, 14 Sep 2013.

While I think *The Economist* is correct in their prediction, we would never succeed in a difficult project if we listen to the naysayers and pessimists at the beginning. Ideally, the United Nations Security Council should implement the Russian-USA Framework with an explicit authorization of military force if Syria fails to comply with the requirements of the UN resolution. But we don't live in an ideal world.

Jim Picht, writing in *The Washington Times*, notes the irony of an ex-KGB officer (Putin) convincing a Nobel Peace Prize winner (Obama) not to have a military strike on Syria.

United Nations Inspectors

Inspectors from the United Nations arrived in Syria on 18 Aug 2013, to investigate alleged use of chemical weapons. On 21 Aug, a new alleged use of chemical weapons was reported, but the Syrian government would *not* allow the UN inspectors to travel to the site in a suburb of Damascus until 26 Aug. During 26-29 Aug, the inspectors collected samples and other evidence. On 31 Aug, the inspectors returned to Europe, where they performed chemical analysis on samples collected in Syria. Note that the task of the inspectors was only to determine if chemical weapons had been used, but *not* to determine *who* fired the chemical weapons. Finally, on 15 Sep 2013, the inspectors [handed](#) their report to the UN Secretary General. The report was made public on 16 Sep. I downloaded my copy from [here](#). Later the

UN posted a [link](#).

The report (¶ 28) concludes that there is "clear and convincing evidence that surface-to-surface rockets containing the nerve agent sarin were used" in a suburb of Damascus on 21 Aug 2013. "Clear and convincing" is a technical legal term in the USA that indicates a high probability, but *less* than "beyond a reasonable doubt" needed for a criminal conviction in the USA. However, the authors of the report are scientists in Europe who may not know the technical legal significance of this phrase in the USA.

The report (at bottom of page 18) states: "The sites have been well travelled by other individuals both before and during the investigation. Fragments and other possible evidence have clearly been handled/moved prior to the arrival of the investigation team." This tantalizing remark indicates that there was tampering with evidence of rockets.

With their report arriving *after* the Russian-USA Framework, the inspectors' efforts were almost irrelevant. This is *not* the fault of the inspectors, but instead the result of Obama's premature decision to strike Syria *before* the facts in the inspectors' report were known. Note that we still do *not* know with reasonable certainty *who* fired the chemical weapons. Finally, I comment that the U.S. government would be much more credible if it issued reports like this UN report, instead of having the U.S. president and U.S. secretary of state make *unsupported* assertions.

I emphasize that the task of the inspectors was *not* to determine who fired the rockets containing chemical weapons. However, I note on pages 18-19 of the report, Cyrillic letters were seen on the rocket casing. This suggests that the rocket was manufactured in the former Soviet Union, or — more recently — in Russia.

16 Sep 2013

On the morning of 16 Sep, Kerry met in Paris with the French Foreign Minister and the United Kingdom Foreign Minister. Afterwards, Kerry said:

As I said in Jerusalem yesterday, we're now moving to translate into a broader international effort what was achieved in Geneva with the cooperation of the Russians, with the efforts of President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov. But each of us here today are here to emphasize the same thing: that what we achieve in this agreement, as we translate Geneva agreement into a United Nations resolution, has to be strong, and it has to be forceful, it has to be real, it has to be accountable, it has to be transparent, it has to be timely. All of those things are critical and it has to be enforced. If the Assad regime believes that this is not enforceable and that we are not serious, they will play games. And we know that even the UN inspectors, who were there recently, had difficulties getting access in some places. That is why in Geneva, the Russians agreed with us that there should be unfettered, unrestricted access to sites in order to make certain we do this as rapidly as is possible.

What we're talking about here is a effective action, and every one of us understands that our standing here today and the announcement we waited to make in Geneva will

not have meaning until this is ratified at the United Nations in the strongest, most forceful terms possible, and until it is implemented and complied with by the Assad regime. So that's why we have insisted on this unique, very special structure of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons through the Convention on Chemical Weapons to be able to move as rapidly as is necessary.

I can speak for all of us here, and I think for our presidents and prime minister, we will not tolerate avoidance or anything less than full compliance by the Assad regime to the core principles of what has been achieved here. If Assad fails to comply with the terms of this framework, make no mistake, we are all agreed — and that includes Russia — that there will be consequences. The framework fully commits the United States and Russia to impose measures under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter in the event of noncompliance. And President Obama — and I have repeated his statement — has warned that should diplomacy fail, the military option is still on the table.

[Kerry](#), 16 Sep 2013.

In other words, Kerry is hoping to get a *better* agreement from the United Nations Security Council than he was able to negotiate in Geneva with Lavrov. That is likely to make the Russians unhappy, and may trigger a Russian veto of the draft UN resolution. But the situation *may* have changed with the release of the UN inspectors' report on the morning of 16 Sep.

In his cover letter to the inspectors' report, the UN Secretary General said the use of chemical weapons in Syria was "a war crime" and he concludes: "the international community has a moral responsibility to hold accountable those responsible" If the Secretary General's statement is more than mere words, it could signal a change in attitude at the United Nations.

In his remarks to the UN Security Council on 16 Sep, the Secretary General repeated:

This is a war crime and a grave violation of the 1925 Protocol and other rules of customary international law. I trust all can join me in condemning this despicable crime. The international community has a responsibility to hold the perpetrators accountable and to ensure that chemical weapons never re-emerge as an instrument of warfare.

[United Nations Secretary General](#), 16 Sep 2013.

The Secretary General continued:

The Russian Federation and the United States, led by Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary of State Kerry, held intensive consultations in Geneva last week, along with their experts. I welcome the understanding they reached regarding the safeguarding and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. I hope the Security Council and the Executive Council of the OPCW can move quickly to consider and implement this plan. I stand ready to support this plan in every way possible, while also fully realizing the complexities of such an undertaking in the midst of a civil war.

The unity of the Security Council will be crucial. Given the gravity of the situation, I urge the Council to consider ways to ensure enforcement of, and compliance with, the plan through a clear resolution. In that regard, I draw your attention to a significant element in the agreement reached in Geneva, and I quote:

"The United States and the Russian Federation concur that this UN Security

Council resolution should provide for review on a regular basis the implementation in Syria of the decision of the Executive Council of the OPCW, and in the event of non-compliance, including unauthorized transfer, or any use of chemical weapons by anyone in Syria, the UN Security Council should impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter."

I agree there should be consequences for non-compliance. Any use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, is a crime.

....

This is the most significant confirmed use of chemical weapons against civilians since Saddam Hussein used them in Halabja in 1988. The international community has pledged to prevent any such horror from recurring, yet it has happened again.

Ibid.

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria announced on 16 Sep that it was investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria on 14 occasions since Sep 2011. However this Commission has *not* been granted permission to enter Syria to investigate, which frustrates the investigation. This Commission was established by the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva. See: [BBC](#) and [Reuters](#).

The United Nations Human Rights Council website says:

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic was established on 22 August 2011 by the Human Rights Council ... with a mandate to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011 in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Commission was also tasked to establish the facts and circumstances that may amount to such violations and of the crimes perpetrated and, where possible, to identify those responsible with a view of ensuring that perpetrators of violations, including those that may constitute crimes against humanity, are held accountable.

[UNHRC](#)

17-27 Sep 2013

17 Sep 2013

17 Sep 2013 began with propaganda from Syria's foreign ministry, as reported by Al-Arabiya news channel:

Syria's foreign ministry on Tuesday accused Western powers of trying to impose its will on the Syria people following European pressure for a U.N. resolution to rid Syria of chemical arms.

"The United States, France and Britain have revealed their true objective... which is to

impose their will on the Syrian people," the foreign ministry said.

It also condemned the West for "supporting armed terrorist groups linked to the (al-Qaeda-allied) al-Nusra Front," which has joined the rebellion against President Bashar al-Assad.

....

"President Bashar al-Assad is the legitimate president, chosen by the Syrian people, and who will stay as long as the Syrian people want," the foreign ministry statement said.

[Al-Arabiya](#), "Damascus says West trying to impose will on Syrian people," 12:20 GMT, 17 Sep 2013.

There is no doubt that the governments of France and USA, among many others in the world since March 2011, would prefer to see Assad deposed. Encouraging the rebels in Syria, and certainly sending military aid to those rebels, really is meddling in the internal affairs of Syria. And it is undeniable that Al-Qaeda terrorists and other jihadists have joined the rebels. The Syrian foreign ministry makes a good point that Assad was elected by the Syrian people, so Assad's government is *the* legitimate government of Syria.

But the Syrian foreign ministry ignores that the recent activities in the United Nations against the Syrian government concern the possession and use of chemical weapons in Syria. After the release of the UN inspectors' report on 16 Sep, it is becoming increasingly clear that Assad's government — although perhaps not authorized by Assad personally — used chemical weapons in Syria. And that is a violation of international law. Although Western nations *may* have been misguided in their past support for rebels in Syria, the current effort to remove chemical weapons from Syria is a good idea that everyone should support.

In my opinion, the statement by Syria's foreign ministry is an incoherent, rambling diatribe that has no credibility.

Note the differences between (1) Haidar's statement on 15 Sep (quoted [above](#)) that calls the removal of chemical weapons a "victory" for Syria and (2) the 17 Sep statement from the Syrian foreign ministry.

The other major news on this topic on 17 Sep is a dispute between (1) Russia and (2) the USA, France, and the United Kingdom over the content of the draft United Nations Security Council Resolution that will implement the Geneva Framework of 14 Sep.

The Russian [position](#) is that the first Resolution should have no mention of military strikes on Syria or other compulsion. However, the [USA](#), France, and the United Kingdom want to include in the first Resolution the threat of military force if Syria does not fully comply with the Resolution.

The specific text of the Framework says:

The United States and the Russian Federation concur that this UN Security Council resolution should provide for review on a regular basis the implementation in Syria of the decision of the Executive Council of the OPCW, and *in the event of non-compliance, including unauthorized transfer, or any use of chemical weapons by anyone in Syria*, the UN Security Council *should* impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

U.S. [State Dept.](#), "Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons," 14 Sep 2013. (all italics added by Standler)

In my view, the text is clear that military force under Chapter 7 is a consequence of "noncompliance" with the Resolution. However, the Geneva Framework is ambiguous on whether such military force should be included (1) in the first UN Resolution or (2) in a subsequent Resolution after noncompliance by Syria. Given the past history of Assad's government, including stockpiling chemical weapons when nearly all nations of the world were eliminating their stockpiles, I think it preferable to include the threat of military force in the first UN Resolution.

Also, the Framework says the Security Council *should* impose consequences for violation, but does **not** say the Security Council *must* impose consequences. Lavrov seems to see an important distinction here. In my opinion, *should* indicates a moral obligation or an expectation, while *must* is absolutely mandatory.

I suggest the Resolution be symmetrical in that it applies to *both* the Syrian government and the rebels. *If* the *rebels* violate the Resolution (e.g., failure to allow inspectors to go anywhere, either possession or use of chemical weapons by rebels, attack any chemical weapons storage facility, attack UN personnel, etc.), then the United Nations should authorize military force against the rebels. Perhaps making the Resolution symmetrical will mollify Russia, who continues to claim that the rebels used chemical weapons.

18 Sep 2013

On Wednesday, 18 Sep 2013, negotiations continued amongst the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (i.e., France, the United Kingdom, the USA, Russia, and communist China) about a resolution on the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria.

The morning of 18 Sep, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov, was visiting Damascus, the capital of Syria. The Syrian government gave him so-called "new evidence" that the rebels were responsible for the use of chemical weapons on 21 Aug. There was no mention of the content of this new evidence. See reports by the [BBC](#) and [rt.com](#).

My comment is that the situation would be much simpler — and credibility increased — *if* Syria had fully cooperated with the UN inspectors: had allowed them prompt access to the site of chemical weapons use on 21 Aug, and had given any evidence directly to the inspectors. But the facts are clear that Syria did *not* cooperate with UN inspectors. So-called "new evidence" that was discovered about a month after the crime, and submitted indirectly to UN authorities, lacks credibility, because of opportunities for fabrication or tampering. The

Russian conclusory statement about the significance of the so-called "new evidence" is meaningless without also disclosing the alleged "new evidence".

On 18 Sep, the Russian Foreign Ministry continues to push the theory that rebels used chemical weapons in Syria, to provoke a foreign military attack on the Syrian government. [RIA-Novosti](#). The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov, called the UN inspectors' report: "biased", "politicized", "distorted", "one-sided". [rt.com](#)

The spokesman for the Secretary General of the United Nations retorted:

... we are checking with the Russian Permanent Mission to find out precisely what Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov said in Damascus. On the face of it, these reported remarks are an attempt to call into question the Secretary-General's investigation team led by Professor Sellström and the credibility of its thoroughly objective report. We can only stress that the Secretary-General has said repeatedly, including just yesterday, to all 193 Member States in the General Assembly that the investigators are going to return to Syria as soon as practical to complete their work on Khan al-Asal and all other pending credible allegations before completing the team's report.

The Secretary-General has the fullest confidence in the professionalism of his team and their work and findings. They worked impartially and to the highest scientific standards, despite the exceptionally difficult conditions of the war in Syria. And they will continue to do so. And finally, the mission confirmed unequivocally and objectively that chemical weapons have been used in Syria. It detailed the types and trajectories of the rockets used to deliver their lethal payload that led to the deaths of so many civilians. The environmental and biomedical samples demonstrated the widespread nature of the attack. The terrible facts speak for themselves.

[UN](#), 18 Sep 2013.

On the evening of 18 Sep, [Fox News](#) channel in the USA broadcast an 17 Sep interview with Assad, in which Assad says:

- Syria is committed to surrendering and destroying its chemical weapons. Specifically Assad is "committed to the full requirements of this agreement" of 14 Sep between Russia and the USA in Geneva.
- The use of chemical weapons in Syria on 21 Aug is a violation of international law: "That's self-evident. This is despicable. It's a crime."
- The terrorist rebels used chemical weapons, *not* the Syrian military.
- It will cost an estimated US\$ 1 billion to destroy all of Syria's chemical weapons.
- He has invited the UN inspectors to return and finish their work.

In a comment on the interview with Assad, Charles [Krauthammer](#) — a psychiatrist and currently a political commentator — called Assad "one of the great liars of all time." Assad's mention of cost is apparently the first public mention of the cost of destroying Syria's chemical weapons.

19 Sep 2013

I was astounded to read on 19 Sep that the U.S. Defense Department has proposed "training moderate Syrian rebels". CNN says:

The Pentagon has "put a proposal on the table" for U.S. military forces to train and equip moderate Syrian opposition forces for the first time, two Obama administration officials told CNN.

If approved, it would dramatically increase the role of the U.S. military in Syria's civil war and would for the first time put American troops in direct contact with opposition forces.

....

Until now, any training and equipping of Syrian opposition forces has fallen under the purview of the CIA and has not directly been acknowledged by the United States government.

....

The proposal envisions U.S. troops training certain rebels on small arms, command and control and military tactics, according to one of the officials.

Weapons however would not be directly supplied by the United States because legal authority does not exist for the Pentagon to arm the rebels.

[CNN](#), 07:31 EDT, 19 Sep 2013.

It was only five days ago (i.e., the Framework of 14 Sep) that the USA was rescued from Obama's ill-considered proposal for U.S. military strikes on Syria, and now the U.S. government is *again* proposing U.S. military involvement in Syria's civil war. I recall the USA began its involvement in the Vietnam war by supplying "advisers" to the South Vietnamese Army. For those of us who oppose the USA meddling in foreign nations, this continuing desire of the U.S. government for military involvement is exasperating.

Russian President Putin said there was no guarantee that Assad would actually destroy all of his chemical weapons:

Putin also said that he cannot be 100 percent certain that the Syrian government will completely fulfill earlier reached agreements on dismantling the republic's chemical weapons. However, the latest developments have given signs for hope.

"Will it be possible to accomplish it all? I cannot be 100 percent sure about it. But everything we have seen so far gives us confidence that this will be done," he told journalists and experts [at the Valdai Club meeting in Russia's Novgorod Region].

[rt.com](#), 19 Sep 2013.

The same article in Russia Today mentions that Russia has no plans to destroy Syrian

chemical weapons on Russian soil:

Russia has no current plans to destroy the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile on its own territory under the deal reached between Moscow and Washington in Geneva, Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said earlier on Thursday [19 Sep].

"A decision needs to be taken on this," Shoigu told the Interfax agency when he commented on the matter. "We have factories for the destruction of chemical weapons, but there is a big difference between 'ready' and 'willing' to."

Ibid.

Construction of facilities in Syria for disposal of chemical weapons will take time, and be difficult during a civil war. It may be easier to transport the weapons out of Syria and destroy them in an already existing facility that has experience with such large-scale destruction. The nearest such facility is in Russia. Also, Russia probably manufactured the chemical weapons owned by Syria and therefore Russia is already familiar with them. The 14 Sep Framework agreed by Russia and the USA specifically mentions: "We further determined that the most effective control of these weapons may be achieved by removal of the largest amounts of weapons feasible, under OPCW supervision, and their destruction outside of Syria, if possible." So it is surprising that the Russians are not planning to dispose of Syria's chemical weapons.

On 19 Sep, *The Guardian* newspaper reported:

The Syrian civil war has reached a stalemate and President Bashar al-Assad's government will call for a ceasefire at a long-delayed conference in Geneva on the state's future, the country's deputy prime minister [Jamil] has said in an interview with the Guardian.

Speaking on behalf of the government, Qadri Jamil said that neither side was strong enough to win the conflict, which has lasted two years and caused the death of more than 100,000 people. Jamil, who is in charge of country's finances, also said that the Syrian economy had suffered catastrophic losses.

"Neither the armed opposition nor the regime is capable of defeating the other side," he said. "This zero balance of forces will not change for a while."

The Guardian, "Syrian government says civil war has reached stalemate," 14:07 EDT, 19 Sep 2013.

The Guardian article also mentions the chemical weapons attack in Syria on 21 Aug:

[Jamil] said Russia had produced evidence showing the rockets that were identified by the UN inspectors as carrying sarin were indeed Soviet-made. But he said they had been exported from Russia to Syria [Libya?] in the 1970s.

"They were loaded with chemicals by Gaddafi and exported to fundamentalists in Syria after Gaddafi fell," he said.

Ibid.

On 19 Sep, Kerry appeared before journalists at the U.S. State Department and made a statement about chemical weapons in Syria. In summary, Kerry believes the UN inspectors' report is conclusive that the Syrian government launched the rockets containing sarin. Kerry chastised the Russians (and Syrians), saying: "You are entitled to your own opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts." However, as clearly said in the UN inspectors' report [above](#), it was *not* the task of the inspectors to determine *who* fired the rockets. As Jamil said today, the rebels could have acquired the rockets from Libya. And there are other possibilities. The task at hand is to characterize the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile, transfer control to the UN, and began destroying those weapons — *not* to assign blame for the use of chemical weapons on 21 Aug. By concentrating on blame — which is *not* on the agenda — Kerry and others are contributing to delay.

Kerry said:

Please. This isn't complicated. When we said we know what is true, we meant it. And now, before I head to New York for the UN General Assembly, we have a definitive UN report strengthening the case and solidifying our resolve. Now the test comes. The Security Council *must* be prepared to act *next week*. It is vital for the international community to stand up and speak out in the strongest possible terms about the importance of enforceable action to rid the world of Syria's chemical weapons.

So I would say to the community of nations: Time is short. Let's not spend time debating what we already know.

[Kerry](#), 19 Sep 2013. (italics added by Standler)

I think it is arrogant for Kerry to set a deadline for the United Nations Security Council to pass a Resolution on Syria's chemical weapons.

The New York Times summarized the continuing negotiations in the United Nations Security Council:

American, French and British officials have pushed for a strong Security Council resolution, which would provide a basis for imposing punitive measures if President Bashar al-Assad of Syria failed to comply. The United States and France have also said that the threat of force must be maintained to ensure that Mr. Assad follows through.

But Sergey V. Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, has continued to assert that there is no proof the Assad government carried out a chemical attack near Damascus on Aug. 21, suggesting this week that additional investigation was needed before the Council could take any firm action. Russia has also rejected the potential use of force.

[The New York Times](#), 19 Sep 2013.

20 Sep 2013

At 09:27 EDT on 20 Sep, the Associated Press reported that Syria had given a list of chemical weapons to the OPCW in the Hague. Of course, the OPCW will *not* publicly disclose the detailed information, because it could be a guide to terrorists who want to

capture chemical weapons. In a related story, an OPCW meeting on Syria scheduled for 22 Sep has been postponed without a new date being set.

Reuters reported:

"We have received part of the verification and we expect more," an OPCW spokesman said.

A U.N. diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed the details had been submitted, saying: "It's quite long ... and being translated."

[Reuters](#), 15:21 BST, 20 Sep 2013.

RIA-Novosti reported:

Ukrainian experts and equipment could play a role in the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, the ex-Soviet nation's leader said Friday [20 Sep].

"We offer the participation of Ukrainian specialists and equipment to destroy chemical weapons in Syria," President Viktor Yanukovich said at a forum in the southern Ukrainian port of Yalta. "We have the experience and mobile plants that have been patented in Ukraine and have proved their effectiveness in practice, and we are ready to use them to destroy [Syrian] chemical weapons as soon as possible."

A Moscow-based arms expert said that Ukraine does have experts on chemical weapons, but expressed doubt that its equipment is capable of processing the Syrian stockpile within the timetable set out by the US-Russian deal.

"They have experts because they inherited part of the Soviet chemical weapons," Alexander Golts told RIA Novosti.

But "we're talking about 1,000 tons of chemical weapons; no mobile plant can process such a lot of chemical weapons within that timetable," he said. "Or there would have to be dozens [of the units]."

....

Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said [Thursday](#) [19 Sep] that Moscow is ready to help eliminate Syrian chemical weapons provided the international community agrees. If Russia is assigned a role in transporting or eliminating such weapons, "naturally, Russia will participate," Shoigu said, adding that Russia possessed facilities for destroying such weapons.

[RIA-Novosti](#), 20 Sep 2013.

This is interesting, because the previous day the Russian Defense Minister said Russia has no plans to destroy Syria's chemical weapons. These statements raise the possibility that Russia will earn income from the sales of chemical weapons to Syria and again earn money for destroying those same weapons. That's almost like an owner selling the same horse twice.

The Associated Press reported:

For Syria's divided and beleaguered rebels, the creeping realization that there will not be a decisive Western military intervention on their behalf is a huge psychological blow.

President Bashar Assad's regime has gained strength, largely because the world community is concerned that if he is toppled the result may be an Islamist Syria in the grip of al-Qaida.

The immediate result has been an uptick this week in fighting between moderate and jihadi rebels.

....

On Wednesday [18 Sep], gunmen from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, an al-Qaida offshoot, overran a town near the border with Turkey after raging battles during which they expelled fighters from the mainstream Western-backed Free Syrian Army. Zeina Karam, Associated Press, "AP Analysis: US-Russia Syria deal props up Assad," 16:46 EDT, 20 Sep 2013, [Fox News](#), [The New York Times](#).

Note that Assad has gained credibility because nations must recognize Assad as the lawful ruler of Syria in order to dispose of Assad's chemical weapons. Assad also gained credibility by promptly agreeing to dispose of his chemical weapons. We will politely ignore that Assad agreed because he was afraid of a U.S. Navy Tomahawk cruise missile flying through his bedroom window.

If Assad were to disappear, would his replacement (possibly a rebel leader) continue to agree to dispose of the chemical weapons in Syria? No one can be certain of the answer to that question. That makes a victory by Assad better than a victory for the rebels allied with Al-Qaeda.

Russia sees spread of terrorism as main problem in Syria

Also on 20 Sep, Russian officials mentioned that Russians are fighting with the rebels in Syria. Russia is obviously concerned that these experienced terrorists will return home to Russia someday, and bring their terrorism with them.

Some 300 to 400 Russians are fighting in the Syrian civil war as soldiers of fortune, a senior official in Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) told reporters on Friday [20 Sep].

However, as those soldiers return home, it will pose a great danger to Russian security, FSB first deputy director Sergei Smirnov said after a board meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organizations anti-terrorism department. [The SCO is an Eurasian political, economic and military cooperative founded in Shanghai in 2001, which includes China, Russia and the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.]

....

Smirnov's estimate was significantly higher than one made in May [2013] by FSB head Alexander Bortnikov, who claimed that a total of about 200 mercenaries from Russia, Europe and Central Asia were fighting in the civil war.

"Hundreds of Russians Fighting as Mercenaries in Syria — FSB," [RIA-Novosti](#), 20 Sep 2013.

Jumping ahead chronologically, but staying on topic, Russian President Putin spoke of the terrorism problem on 23 Sep:

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned ex-Soviet allies on Monday [23 Sep] that Islamist militancy fuelling the war in Syria could reach their countries, some of which have Muslim majorities.

....

"The militant groups (in Syria) did not come out of nowhere, and they will not vanish into thin air," Putin said.

....

Russian officials have expressed concern that Russian-born militants fighting in Syria could return to Russia's North Caucasus and join an insurgency that claims lives almost daily.

Russia has been one of Syria's strongest backers in a conflict that has killed more than 100,000 people since it began in March 2011, delivering arms to Assad's forces and joining China in blocking Western-backed initiatives in the U.N. Security Council.

Russia, which has echoed Assad's contention that he is fighting al Qaeda-inspired Islamists rather than a popular revolt, has warned the West that military intervention in Syria would play into the hands of the militants.

"Putin says Syria violence could hit ex-Soviet bloc," [Reuters](#), 23 Sep 2013.

See also "Putin Addresses Risks of Terrorism Spilling Over From Syria," [RIA-Novosti](#), 23 Sep 2013.

It is interesting to contrast the views of the USA and Russia about the complex situation in Syria. Some leaders in the USA (e.g., Senator John McCain and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton) focused on the politics, and labeled Assad as a tyrant (Evil), while the rebels were seeking democracy (Good). In contrast, Russia sees Syria as an incubator of terrorism, which could easily spread to other nations, including Russia. Therefore, Russia supports Assad's goal of annihilating terrorists like Al-Qaeda. Each of these two contrasting views greatly oversimplify a complex and evolving situation in Syria.

In this context, I would remind people in the USA of the bombing of the Boston Marathon on 15 April 2013, which was perpetrated by two brothers, both Muslim immigrants from Russia. The elder brother had visited Chechnya (in Russia) before the bombing and may have been indoctrinated in terror there. The concept of terrorism spreading from one nation to

another is real, *not* an imaginary threat. As another example, in the 11 Sep 2001 terror attacks in the USA, 15 of the 19 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, the other four were from United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Lebanon.

I am sorry to say that I believe the Russian view about the spread of terrorism from Syria is more realistic than the idyllic U.S. view about democracy in Syria.

See my additional remarks on Islamic terrorism, [below](#).

21 Sep 2013

On Saturday, 21 Sep, *The Telegraph* in London, England published damning evidence that Assad ordered chemical weapons be used.

[Brigadier-General Zaher al-] Sakat [the former chief scientific officer in Assad's army's fifth division] says he was ordered three times to use chemical weapons against his own people, but could not go through with it and replaced chemical canisters with ones containing harmless bleach.

He also insists that all such orders had to come from the top — President Assad himself — despite insistent denials by the regime that it has never used chemical weapons.

Now he also claims to have his own intelligence that the Syrian president is evading the terms of a Russian-brokered deal to destroy his chemical weapons by transferring some of his stocks to his allies — Hizbollah, in Lebanon, and Iran.

....

Gen Sakat said the regime wanted to "annihilate" the opposition using any means, and said he received his first orders to use chemical weapons in October last year [2012]. On three occasions, he said he was told to use a mixture of phosgene and two other chlorine-based agents against civilian targets in Sheikh Masqeen, Herak, and Busra, all rebel-held districts.

However, under cover of darkness, he said he had replaced the canisters containing the chemicals with ones containing water mixed with dilute bleach which would give off a similar chlorine smell.

At first, his trick worked. "They were completely convinced that this was the same poisonous material," he told the *Sunday Telegraph* in an interview. "In this way I saved hundreds of lives of children and others."

But after the third occasion, in January [2013], his bosses became suspicious at the lack of deaths in his "attacks" and he began to plot his escape to Jordan, where he has been based since the spring [2013].

Gen Sakat believes chemical weapons have now been used 34 times, rather than the 14

occasions cited by international intelligence agencies. But he agrees with a variety of assessments that differing substances and concentrations are used, which would account for the differing death rates, with some attacks killing very few or none.

Richard Spencer, *The Telegraph*, "Syria: 'Bashar al-Assad ordered me to gas people — but I could not do it' ," 19:00 BST, 21 Sep 2013.

It appears that Assad has a very different view of chemical weapons than the military in Western Europe and the USA. The view of chemical weapons in Western Europe and the USA is to reserve them for special occasions, such as when our front line is about to be overwhelmed with a massive onslaught of enemy troops. One can also conceive of using chemical weapons to inflict more than 50,000 deaths against a civilian population, to make a dramatic impression on the enemy — the way the USA used two atomic bombs in Japan in 1945. This is why Western Civilization considers chemical weapons as part of "weapons of mass destruction". In contrast, Assad seems to view chemical weapons as something that can be routinely used in small amounts, to inflict a few hundred deaths. In other words, Assad does *not* appear to have the abhorrence of chemical weapons, the way Western Civilization does. But Assad certainly understands the Western abhorrence of chemical weapons, because Assad has repeatedly and vehemently denied using chemical weapons.

22 Sep 2013

On Sunday, 22 Sep, Russian Foreign Minister, Lavrov, proposed that the rebels in Syria *also* destroy their chemical weapons. [RIA-Novosti](#).

On Sunday, 22 Sep, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger appeared on *Face the Nation* on the CBS television network:

The potential U.S. deal with Russia to put Syria's chemical weapons stock in international control "could be quite a good outcome," former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said Sunday on "Face the Nation."

The resulting outcome, he said, "then becomes a basis for a transition in Syria that leads to relative peace then at the end of the day, however tortuously we arrived at this conclusion, it will have served the interest of the world."

....

Kissinger said he believes Russian President Vladimir Putin has determined extraditing Syria's chemical weapons is in his country's best interest.

Face the Nation, "Syria will comply with '90 percent' of U.S.-Russia deal, Kissinger predicts," 22 Sep 2013.

When asked if we could trust the Syrian government to comply with the chemical weapons agreement, Kissinger said:

KISSINGER: Based on no inside knowledge, my guess would be that they will comply with 90 percent of what they are supposed to do. And that they may hold back a little,

but the risk of holding anything back is very great.

SCHIEFFER [Host of *Face the Nation*]: Can we trust the Russians here?

KISSINGER: You can trust the Russians to pursue their own interests.

On the broader issue of the civil war in Syria:

SCHIEFFER: ... why all of sudden did Russian President Putin want to work with the United States on Syria?

KISSINGER: I would think his biggest security problem is radical Islam. And he does not want the United States to look totally irrelevant in the Middle East, because otherwise he would be stuck with having to deal with radical Islam. So there is part of this competition that is partly inherent in the Russian-American relationship. There is also a necessity for the selfish interests of both sides for cooperation, and especially if one looks at the long-term situation of Russia, its long frontiers and covering a large land mass. In that sense, one can trust him. But not in the sense that he has suddenly been converted to our point of view.

SCHIEFFER: Where do you see this going?

KISSINGER: Well, I have been in the minority that have believed that focusing Syria policy on the removal of Assad was not the best way to go. It did not seem to me to be a fight between Assad and the people, it was a fight between the Alawite Shia group and the Sunni group. And therefore the removal of one man would not solve the problem, but the coexistence of these two groups is an element of peace and therefore, paradoxically, a total victory for one side would lead to the high probability of a massacre. I think we now have a possibility that we can talk about the element of peace and that Russia and we, together with other interested countries, can distill out of this chemical removal — removal of chemical weapons, some sort of peace process.

full transcript, [Face the Nation](#), (page 4 of 8), 22 Sep 2013.

I think Dr. Kissinger is correct to see the Syrian civil war as a religious dispute between two groups who see each other as infidels, and *not* in idyllic terms of a tyrant suppressing a pro-democracy movement. Compromise is *not* likely when the parties to a religious war see their opponent as an infidel. Indeed, Shiites and Sunnis have been battling each other in Iraq since at least 2004, if not earlier. The USA should avoid becoming involved in such protracted religious civil wars.

The Independent, a newspaper in London, England published a comment by Robert Fisk, an independent journalist in Beirut:

While the Assad regime in Damascus has denied responsibility for the sarin gas missiles that killed around 1,400 Syrians in the suburb of Ghouta on 21 August, information is now circulating in the city that Russia's new "evidence" about the attack includes the dates of export of the specific rockets used and — more importantly — the countries to which they were originally sold. They were apparently manufactured in the

Soviet Union in 1967 and sold by Moscow to three Arab countries, Yemen, Egypt and Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's Libya. These details cannot be verified in documents, and Vladimir Putin has not revealed the reasons why he told Barack Obama that he knows Assad's army did not fire the sarin missiles; but if the information is correct — and it is believed to have come from Moscow — Russia did not sell this particular batch of chemical munitions to Syria.

Since Gaddafi's fall in 2011, vast quantities of his abandoned Soviet-made arms have fallen into the hands of rebel groups and al-Qa'ida-affiliated insurgents. Many were later found in Mali, some in Algeria and a vast amount in Sinai. The Syrians have long claimed that a substantial amount of Soviet-made weaponry has made its way from Libya into the hands of rebels in the country's civil war with the help of Qatar — which supported the Libyan rebels against Gaddafi and now pays for arms shipments to Syrian insurgents.

There is no doubt that Syria has a substantial chemical weapons armoury. Nor that Syrian stockpiles contain large amounts of sarin gas 122mm missiles. But if the Russians have indeed been able to identify the specific missile markings on fragments found in Ghouta — and if these are from munitions never exported to Syria — the Assad regime will boast its innocence has been proven.

....

Nevertheless, it also has to be said that grave doubts are being expressed by the UN and other international organisations in Damascus that the sarin gas missiles were fired by Assad's army. While these international employees cannot be identified, some of them were in Damascus on 21 August and asked a series of questions to which no one has yet supplied an answer. Why, for example, would Syria wait until the UN inspectors were ensconced in 18 August before using sarin gas little more than two days later — and only four miles from the hotel in which the UN had just checked in? Having thus presented the UN with evidence of the use of sarin — which the inspectors quickly acquired at the scene — the Assad regime, if guilty, would surely have realised that a military attack would be staged by Western nations.

As it is, Syria is now due to lose its entire strategic long-term chemical defences against a nuclear-armed Israel — because, if Western leaders are to be believed, it wanted to fire just seven missiles almost a half century old at a rebel suburb in which only 300 of the 1,400 victims (if the rebels themselves are to be believed) were fighters. As one Western NGO put it yesterday: "if Assad really wanted to use sarin gas, why for God's sake, did he wait for two years and then when the UN was actually on the ground to investigate?"

Robert Fisk, *The Independent*, "Gas missiles 'were not sold to Syria'," 22 Sep 2013.

I agree with Fisk that use of chemical weapons by Syria is *not* plausible, because of the use of small amounts of sarin and relatively few victims — compared to typical use of weapons of mass destruction. If the rumors reported by Fisk are true, Obama and Kerry will look foolish indeed for their certain belief that Assad was responsible for use of chemical weapons

on 21 Aug. One wonders *why* the Russians are not openly disclosing their evidence that allegedly exonerates the Syrian military? Are the Russians embarrassed by their past sales of weapons of mass destruction?

23 Sep 2013

On Monday, 23 Sep, China Central Television reported an interview with Assad, in which he was asked if he could meet the timeline in the 14 Sep Framework:

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said, "For the Syrian government, right now we need to ensure two things: one is to submit necessary information and data to the OPCW. This has been done days ago. It has been completed last week and the information is credible. Second is to facilitate the work of the UN inspectors who will visit the production and restoration sites of the chemical weapons in the coming month. There is no question to that. Now the only obstacle is the security conditions in some areas, which will make it difficult for the inspectors to enter. We know that those terrorist militants in these areas take orders from some countries, who may instigate them to block the visit of the inspector. And they may even shift the blame on to the government."

....

Reporter: "How many chemical weapons does Syria really have? Some say that there are 1,000 tons. Is it true?"

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said, "Syria produced chemical weapons decades ago. The number is not small. We are a country at war. Some of the territory has been occupied for more than 40 years. However, the Syrian Army mainly fights with conventional weapons."

CCTV, "Exclusive: al-Assad says Syria will facilitate work of UN inspectors," 10:13 Beijing time, 23 Sep 2013.

Assad said his declaration of chemical weapons "had been completed last week" (20 Sep), while the OPCW is still expecting more disclosure from Syria. Note that Assad evaded the question of how many tons of chemical weapons he has. Although the current rebellion began in March 2011, Assad strangely claims some of Syria has been "occupied for more than 40 years." (The 40 years may refer to wars begun by Syria against Israel in 1967 and 1973, which are totally irrelevant to the current civil war in Syria.) Most significantly, note that Assad says his army "mainly fights with conventional weapons", as if he is admitting to *occasional* use of chemical weapons.

24 Sep 2013

The annual United Nations General Assembly meeting, with boring speeches by leaders of nations, begins on Tuesday, 24 Sep.

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, said in his Address to the General Assembly:

The Syrian Government must fully and quickly honour the obligations it has assumed in acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The international community must bring to justice the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria — confirmed unequivocally by the UN Investigation Mission.

The international community must also, with equal determination, ensure the safeguarding and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles and programmes.

But we can hardly be satisfied with destroying chemical weapons while the wider war is still destroying all of Syria.

The vast majority of the killing and atrocities have been carried out with conventional weapons.

I appeal to all States to stop fuelling the bloodshed and to end the arms flows to all the parties.

I look forward to the imminent adoption of an enforceable and binding Security Council resolution on chemical weapons.

[Secretary General](#), 24 Sep 2013.

Note the Secretary General seems in agreement with France, the United Kingdom, and the USA that the Security Council Resolution implementing the 14 Sep Framework must be "enforceable and binding". He also indirectly criticized Russia, Iran, Qatar — and now the USA — for sending munitions to parties in Syria.

Back on 19 April 2012, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton floated a [proposal](#) for an embargo on arms shipments to Syria. This proposal was *not* adopted by the United Nations, perhaps because of opposition from Russia, the main supplier of munitions to the Syrian government.

U.S. President Obama told the UN General Assembly about Syria:

The international community recognized the stakes early on, but our response has not matched the scale of the challenge. Aid cannot keep pace with the suffering of the wounded and displaced. A peace process is stillborn. America and others have worked to bolster the moderate opposition, but extremist groups have still taken root to exploit the crisis. Assad's traditional allies have propped him up, citing principles of sovereignty to shield his regime. And on August 21st, the regime used chemical weapons in an attack that killed more than 1,000 people, including hundreds of children.

....

Today, I want to outline where the United States of America stands on these issues.

With respect to Syria, we believe that as a starting point, the international community must enforce the ban on chemical weapons. When I stated my willingness to order a limited strike against the Assad regime in response to the brazen use of chemical weapons, I did not do so lightly. I did so because I believe it is in the security interest of the United States and in the interest of the world to meaningfully enforce a prohibition whose origins are older than the United Nations itself. The ban against the use of chemical weapons, even in war, has been agreed to by 98 percent of humanity. It is strengthened by the searing memories of soldiers suffocating in the trenches; Jews slaughtered in gas chambers; Iranians poisoned in the many tens of thousands.

The evidence is overwhelming that the Assad regime used such weapons on August 21st. U.N. inspectors gave a clear accounting that advanced rockets fired large quantities of sarin gas at civilians. These rockets were fired from a regime-controlled neighborhood, and landed in opposition neighborhoods. It's an insult to human reason — and to the legitimacy of this institution — to suggest that anyone other than the regime carried out this attack.

Now, I know that in the immediate aftermath of the attack there were those who questioned the legitimacy of even a limited strike in the absence of a clear mandate from the Security Council. But without a credible military threat, the Security Council had demonstrated no inclination to act at all. However, as I've discussed with President Putin for over a year, most recently in St. Petersburg, my preference has always been a diplomatic resolution to this issue. And in the past several weeks, the United States, Russia and our allies have reached an agreement to place Syria's chemical weapons under international control, and then to destroy them.

The Syrian government took a first step by giving an accounting of its stockpiles. Now there must be a strong Security Council resolution to verify that the Assad regime is keeping its commitments, and there must be consequences if they fail to do so. If we cannot agree even on this, then it will show that the United Nations is incapable of enforcing the most basic of international laws. On the other hand, if we succeed, it will send a powerful message that the use of chemical weapons has no place in the 21st century, and that this body means what it says.

....

What broader conclusions can be drawn from America's policy toward Syria? I know there are those who have been frustrated by our unwillingness to use our military might to depose Assad, and believe that a failure to do so indicates a weakening of American resolve in the region. Others have suggested that my willingness to direct even limited military strikes to deter the further use of chemical weapons shows we've learned nothing from Iraq, and that America continues to seek control over the Middle East for our own purposes. In this way, the situation in Syria mirrors a contradiction that has persisted in the region for decades: the United States is chastised for meddling in the region, accused of having a hand in all manner of conspiracy; at the same time, the United States is blamed for failing to do enough to solve the region's problems and for showing indifference toward suffering Muslim populations.

....

The United States of America is prepared to use all elements of our power, including military force, to secure our core interests in the region.

[Our core interests include:]

- We will confront external aggression against our allies and partners, as we did in the Gulf War.
- We will ensure the free flow of energy from the region to the world. Although America is steadily reducing our own dependence on imported oil, the world still depends on the region's energy supply, and a severe disruption could destabilize the entire global economy.
- We will dismantle terrorist networks that threaten our people. Wherever possible, we will build the capacity of our partners, respect the sovereignty of nations, and work to address the root causes of terror. But when it's necessary to defend the United States against terrorist attack, we will take direct action.
- And finally, we will not tolerate the development or use of weapons of mass destruction. Just as we consider the use of chemical weapons in Syria to be a threat to our own national security, we reject the development of nuclear weapons that could trigger a nuclear arms race in the region, and undermine the global nonproliferation regime.

Obama, "Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly," 10:10 EDT, 24 Sep 2013. (Formatting of four "core interests" added by Standler.)

Obama continues his rush to judgment: blaming Assad for the use of chemical weapons in Syria on 21 Aug. Obama has *never* publicly disclosed the evidence that led him to his opinion about Assad using chemical weapons. Worse, Obama actually said "It's an insult to human reason" for anyone to disagree about Assad's guilt in using chemical weapons. This *ad hominem* attack on people with differing opinions — or on those of us who are waiting for public presentation of evidence — simply marginalizes Obama and the U.S. government. Those of us who really believe in law-and-order will wait for Assad's trial in the international criminal court before making a conclusion about Assad's guilt.

Moreover, Obama continues to arrogantly and belligerently assert that the USA can — and will — act militarily "to secure our core interests". Once again, we are willing to kill people to protect the flow of oil. And Obama asserts that "we will not tolerate the development ... of weapons of mass destruction" — but we have tolerated the development and testing of atomic bombs by North Korea since the year 2006. Of course, the reason we tolerate North Korea's atomic bombs is that North Korea is protected by communist China.

Obama is also inconsistent when he told the UN General Assembly:

Nor do I believe that America or any nation should determine who will lead Syria; that is for the Syrian people to decide. Nevertheless, a leader who slaughtered his citizens and gassed children to death cannot regain the legitimacy to lead a badly fractured country.

Ibid.

Obama says it for the Syria people to decide who will lead the Syrian government. But then Obama declares that Assad is *not* an acceptable leader. This is not just one isolated inconsistent statement by Obama, it is a continuing american theme articulated by U.S.

Secretaries of State, Hillary Clinton* and John Kerry, as well as by Obama himself. The truth is that there are a variety of religious sects in Syria, and it will be difficult to find *one* politician who has the respect and confidence of everyone in Syria. I am afraid that once Assad is deposed, Syria — like Iraq, Egypt, and Libya — will have anarchy and a dysfunctional government. Syria, like other Arab nations, may be better with a strong ruler (e.g., a hereditary king or tribal chief) than with a Western-style democracy.

* See following articles containing statements by Hillary Clinton:

- [Reuters](#), 2 June 2011: "The legitimacy that is necessary for anyone to expect change to occur under this current government is, if not gone, nearly run out. If he's not going to lead the reform, he needs to get out of the way. Where he goes, that's up to him."
- [BBC](#), 11 July 2011: "President Assad is not indispensable and we have absolutely nothing invested in him remaining in power. Our goal is to see that the will of the Syrian people for a democratic transformation occurs."
- [Voice of America](#), 11 Aug 2011: "President Assad has lost the legitimacy to lead, and it is clear that Syria would be better off without him"

And see the following earlier statements by Obama:

- [White House](#), 18 Aug 2011: "The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way. His calls for dialogue and reform have rung hollow while he is imprisoning, torturing, and slaughtering his own people. We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside."
- [White House](#), 4 Feb 2012: "Assad has no right to lead Syria, and has lost all legitimacy with his people and the international community."
- [White House](#), 20 June 2012: "And anybody who's seen scenes of what's happening in Syria I think recognizes that the violence is completely out of hand, that civilians are being targeted, and that Assad has lost legitimacy. And when you massacre your own citizens in the ways that we've seen, it is impossible to conceive of a orderly political transition that leaves Assad in power."

[White House](#), 20 March 2013: "... I believe that the Assad regime has lost all credibility and legitimacy. I think Assad must go — and I believe he will go."

25 Sep 2013

On Wednesday, 25 Sep, UN chemical weapons inspectors again arrived in Damascus, to continue their investigations. They are intending to visit seven sites in Syria:

- Khan al-Assal, 19 March 2013
- Sheikh Maqsoud, 13 April
- Saraqeb, 29 April
- Ghouta, 21 August
- Bahhariyeh, 22 August
- Jobar, 24 August
- Ashrafiah Sahnaya, 25 August

[BBC](#).

The Associated Press reports:

Nearly a dozen of Syria's powerful rebel factions, including one [Jabhat al-Nusra, which is listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department] linked to al-Qaida, formally broke with the main opposition group in exile Wednesday and called for Islamic [Sharia] law in the country, dealing a severe blow to the Western-backed coalition.

The new alliance is a potential turning point, entrenching the schism within the rebellion and giving President Bashar Assad fuel for his long-stated contention that his regime is battling Islamic extremists in the civil war.

The Turkey-based Syrian National Coalition — the political arm of the Free Syrian Army rebel group — has long been accused by those fighting inside Syria of being a puppet promoted by the West and Gulf Arab states supporting the Syrian rebellion.

Wednesday's public rejection of the coalition's authority will likely be extremely damaging for its future in Syria, particularly at a time when the U.S. and Russia are pushing for peace talks.

Zeina Karam, Associated Press, "Syrian rebel groups break with exiled opposition," [The New York Times](#), 15:56 EDT, 25 Sep 2013.

Later, [Agence France-Presse](#) reported that "the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)" was *not* part of the new jihadist group. The AFP noted: "The decision by key rebel factions to reject the National Coalition could further diminish the chances of a negotiated solution to the conflict, with the Coalition no longer able to claim it represents the opposition." Alternate link: [france24.com](#), 16:15 EDT, 25 Sep 2013.

The New York Times reports that the new jihadist group makes the "... establishment of an Islamic state a priority over the fight to topple President Bashar al-Assad.

The fractured nature of the opposition, the rising radical Islamist character of some rebel fighters, and the increasing complexity of Syria's battle lines have left the exile leadership with diminished clout inside the country and have raised the question of whether it could hold up its end of any agreement reached to end the war."

Since 2011, the position of the U.S. government has been to advocate the National Coalition as the next government of Syria, after Assad either resigns or is forced out of office by the rebels. Now, the National Coalition is quickly becoming a minority — in addition to continuing being both disorganized and fragmented. The U.S. government now has the *unpalatable* choice of either (1) supporting Assad, (2) continuing to support the shrinking National Coalition, or (3) support jihadist rebels, including Al-Qaeda groups. In my opinion, the USA — and other foreign nations — should *not* have meddled in the Syria civil war, which now leaves the USA with this unpalatable choice, and leaves the Syrian people with a protracted civil war and a future dysfunctional government.

26 Sep 2013

On Tuesday, 24 Sep, *The Washington Post* interviewed Russian Foreign Minister, Lavrov. The interview was published on 26 Sep in the [Post](#), [Russian Foreign Ministry](#), and [Voice of Russia](#).

On 26 Sep, Lavrov makes assertions that the Russians have publicly disclosed evidence that the rebels used chemical weapons on Syria. Lavrov claims the sarin used in Syria was "homemade" by rebels, which differs from earlier claims by Russia and Syria that the sarin came from Russia by way of Libya. [RIA-Novosti](#) and [rt.com](#). I have looked at the Russian Foreign Minister's english-language website and I searched Google, but I can find no published report by Russia. If Lavrov wants to convince skeptics, he needs to publish detailed technical evidence on the Internet.

In a surprising statement, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said that Syria's chemical weapons would *not* be transported to Russia for destruction. However, Russia was willing to supply soldiers to guard the chemical weapons at sites in Syria. [rt.com](#) One wonders if this is a ploy to get large numbers of Russian soldiers on the ground in Syria? Note that the 14 Sep Framework suggests destroying the chemical weapons somewhere "outside of Syria".

At 17:25 EDT on 26 Sep, the Associated Press reported that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have agreed on a Resolution to implement the 14 Sep Framework on Syrian chemical weapons. [AP](#), [New York Times](#), [The Guardian](#). Unofficial copy of the [draft](#) Resolution, another [copy](#).

27 Sep 2013

U.S. Senator John McCain, a leading supporter of the Syrian rebels in the U.S. Congress, told CBS television news that he was "deeply disappointed" with the draft UN Resolution that did not authorize military strikes on the Syrian government if the Syrians failed to fully comply with the Resolution. [CBS](#), 27 Sep.

Later in the day, U.S. Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham issued a joint statement that said:

This resolution is another triumph of hope over reality. It contains no meaningful or immediate enforcement mechanisms, let alone a threat of the use of force for the Assad regime's noncompliance. The whole question of enforcement has been deferred.

[Bloomberg](#), 00:01 EDT, 28 Sep 2013.

See also [CNN](#), 22:43 EDT, 27 Sep 2013.

As of noon EDT on 4 Oct 2013, this statement is *not* posted at the websites of either Senator McCain or Senator Graham.

There is no doubt that Assad would feel more coerced to comply with the Resolution if there were explicit authorization for *severe and prompt* sanctions or military strikes for noncompliance. But it is premature to specify an appropriate sanction or military strikes now, when it is *not* known how Assad will fail to comply. Some kinds of failure to comply (e.g., failure to disclose a small amount of chemical weapons) are worse than other kinds of failure to comply (e.g., using chemical weapons to inflict tens of thousands of deaths). An appropriate punishment for noncompliance should be proportional to the significance of the noncompliance. That is why it is more logical to wait until after Assad fails to comply before discussing appropriate punishment for Assad.

The United Nations Security Council is today (27 Sep) waiting on the OPCW to write a plan for securing and destroying chemical weapons in Syria. The OPCW plan will be referenced in the Security Council's Resolution, which will make the OPCW plan legally binding on Syria. Consequently, the OPCW scheduled a meeting at night on 27 Sep. See [Associated Press](#), 03:34 EDT, 27 Sep, [New York Times](#).

At night on 27 Sep, the OPCW approved a four-page [Decision](#), which says, in part:

- Syria shall submit, not later than 4 Oct 2013, "further information, to supplement that provided on 19 September 2013".

- The OPCW will begin inspections in Syria on 1 Oct 2013. Sometime on or before 27 Oct 2013 "all facilities" in the Syrian list of chemical weapons sites will have been inspected by the OPCW.
- Syria shall "cooperate fully with all aspects of the implementation of this decision, including by providing the OPCW personnel with the immediate and unfettered right to inspect any and all sites in the Syrian Arab Republic".
- "recognise that this decision is made due to the extraordinary character of the situation posed by Syrian chemical weapons and does not create any precedent for the future."

Resolution 2118

At 21:00 EDT on 27 Sep, the Associated Press reported that the United Nations Security Council had unanimously approved Resolution 2118 on chemical weapons in Syria. As Russia demanded, there is neither automatic sanctions nor automatic military action against Syria for noncompliance with this Resolution. As [suggested](#) by Russia, Resolution 2118 is also binding on the rebels in Syria, as the Resolution says (item 5): "that no party in Syria should use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain, or transfer chemical weapons." [The New York Times](#), 27 Sep 2013. See also United Nations [Press Release](#), 27 Sep 2013. Another [copy](#).

While some nations wanted to refer perpetrators of chemical weapons use to the international criminal court, Russia objected, and so the final Resolution (item 15) says only that the Security Council "expresses its strong conviction that those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic should be held accountable."

The official text of [Resolution 2118](#).

28 Sep 2013 to 5 Oct 2013

28 Sep 2013

After the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2118, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov emphasized that the Resolution did *not* authorize military force in Syria.

"The UN Security Council resolution absolutely rules out the use of force or any application of Chapter 7 [of the UN Charter]," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview with Russia's TV Channel One.

Any possible use of force in the future under Chapter 7 will need a new resolution, if there is "conclusive and unequivocal proof" of noncompliance, he stressed.

[RIA-Novosti](#), "UN Syria Resolution Rules Out Use of Force — Moscow," 28 Sep 2013. See also: [rt.com](#), "Russia made sure UNSC Syria resolution leaves no loopholes for use of force — Lavrov," 28 Sep 2013.

In all of the details, it is easy to lose sight that the 14 Sep Framework, and UN Resolution

2118 that implements the Framework, began on 9 Sep as an attempt by Russia to stop the USA from launching military strikes on Syria. Lavrov wants to make certain that the USA understands that the United Nations has *not* authorized any future military strike on Syria.

Interestingly, news stories in U.S. newspapers and television about either (1) chemical weapons in Syria or (2) UN Resolution 2118 were sparse on 28 Sep 2013. The big foreign story in U.S. news media was a telephone call on 27 Sep between Obama and the new president of Iran. The biggest story in U.S. News media on 28 Sep is that the U.S. government will shut down on 1 Oct, unless Congress authorizes additional spending. It may be that journalists believe that people in the USA can not understand the technical details of OPCW work and the UN Resolution.

29 Sep 2013

On Sunday, 29 Sep 2013, the Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Muallem, told the arabic-language *Sky News Arabia* television that Assad had decided to surrender his chemical weapons to international control after the rebels allegedly used chemical weapons on 19 March 2013 near Aleppo, allegedly killing only 26 people. The Syrian Foreign Minister said:

After militants used chemical weapons a few months ago in Khan al-Assal [near Aleppo], [President Bashar] Assad started thinking about the danger of that problem from the viewpoint of protecting the Syrian people.

[RIA-Novosti](#), 02:35 Moscow time, 29 Sep 2013.

This is a nice story, but it is more plausible that Assad agreed to the Russian proposal because he was afraid of a U.S. Navy Tomahawk cruise missile flying through his bedroom window. However, it may be true that Assad fears he will be blamed for *any* use of chemical weapons in Syria, regardless of whether by rebels or by the Syrian army. Indeed, Obama and Kerry have already blamed Assad. Sometime Assad will be retired and Assad will then want to live in a luxury villa, instead of a prison cell for war crimes.

The Associated Press reports that Assad promises to comply with the UN Resolution that calls for destruction of all of his chemical weapons:

Bashar Assad says in an interview with Italy's RAI News 24 TV "of course we have to comply. This is our history to comply with every treaty we sign."

He also says he is willing to discuss a political solution to Syria's crisis, but that he won't talk with armed rebels until they give up their weapons.

[Associated Press](#), "Syria's Assad vows to comply with UN resolution," 10:27 EDT, 29 Sep 2013.

See also [Reuters](#), 15:29 BST, 29 Sep 2013.

On 29 Sep, the OPCW — which is supposed to be a watchdog — becomes a lapdog.

Both parties' [i.e., OPCW and Syria] intention is to develop a relationship based on mutual trust, saying that the OPCW team of experts have no reason to believe that the Syrian government is trying to hide its chemical weapons. The OPCW brief also said that no unannounced inspections of chemical weapons sites are planned, as that would facilitate mistrust between the two sides.

"Syria 'chemical weapons' crisis: LIVE UPDATES," rt.com, 21:13 GMT, 29 Sep 2013.

I think some unannounced inspections would be desirable, to confirm that the Syrian government is telling the whole truth. OPCW seems to believe that it is a guest in the Syrian home, while the proper role for OPCW may be more analogous to police investigating a criminal suspect.

In a little noticed news story on 29 Sep, it was reported that Obama called French President Hollande on 31 Aug — only nine hours before French aircraft were scheduled to depart on a military strike on Syria — and told Hollande that Obama had decided to seek approval of the U.S. Congress for the military strike. That is how close Syria came to receiving a military strike from the French and presumably also the USA. *The Independent* in England said:

French President Francois Hollande called off military strikes against Syria on 31 August following a phone call from the US President only hours before fighter jets were set to take off, a French weekly magazine has revealed.

The report in the *Nouvel Observateur* shows how close the West came to launching a war on Syria over the Syrian regime's presumed use of chemical weapons in a Damascus suburb, before Washington backed down. President Obama announced in a televised speech on 31 August, after informing a "stunned" Mr Hollande, that he would seek a Congressional vote, effectively lifting the military threat.

Rafale aircraft were readied that Saturday for take-off and official statements prepared in anticipation of the strikes, according to the *Nouvel Observateur*. "Everything made us think that D-Day had arrived," a French official is quoted as saying. The magazine said that "this incredible misunderstanding lasted until the end of the afternoon," at 6.15pm, when President Obama telephoned Mr Hollande, who was expecting to confirm the military orders just after the phone call. The strikes had been intended to start at 3am later that night, targeting missile batteries and command centres of the 4th Armoured Division in charge of chemical weapons.

Anne Penketh, "French were 'hours' from military strikes on Syria before phone call from Obama," *The Independent*, 29 Sep 2013.

The original source is: Vincent Jauvert, "EXCLUSIF. Comment Hollande avait prévu de frapper la Syrie," *Nouvel Observateur*, 12:56 Paris time, 29 Sep 2013.

The Jerusalem Post reported:

Rafale fighter jets, armed with Scalp cruise missiles with a range of 250 km, were ready to fire at targets in western Syria, including Damascus, [*Le Nouvel Observateur*] reported. The jets were to attack while flying over international waters in the Mediterranean, avoiding Turkish airspace to prevent Syrian retaliation against its

neighbor.

....

The strike was due to start at 3 a.m. on September 1, while everyone are asleep, to minimize civilian casualties, a government official told the paper.

After receiving indications from the Americans that the strike was imminent in the days leading up to the US president's announcement, Obama called Hollande on Saturday August 31 at 6:15 p.m., telling him he had decided to ask for Congress's approval before going ahead with the strike.

Hollande was stunned, the paper reported, and tried to convince Obama to reconsider, but was unsuccessful.

Jerusalem Post, 29 Sep 2013.

30 Sep 2013

Russian Foreign Minister, Lavrov, vows Russian assistance to destruction of chemical weapons in Syria:

In an interview published by the Kommersant daily on Monday [30 Sep], Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russian experts were "ready to partake in all aspects of future activities — in inspections and in administrative structures that might be set up to coordinate activities between the UN and the OPCW on site, as well as in structures that would possibly be set up to provide [the inspectors'] security."

He also vowed financial support to the future OPCW effort in Syria.

The Russian top diplomat said it was up to OPCW inspectors to decide what types of chemical weapons should be destroyed in Syria and what should be taken abroad.

"This is up to professionals to decide. They should see everything with their own eyes and determine what poisonous substances can be destroyed on site and what [facilities] are needed for this. Possibly, the Syrians have the required facilities, although I doubt it," he said, adding that a part of the Syrian chemical stockpile can be destroyed with the help of mobile facilities that the United States and a group of other countries have.

Lavrov added that the recently adopted UN Security Council resolution on Syria permits taking chemical weapons out of the country — a practice not envisaged by the Chemical Weapons Convention. He described the [UN] resolution, adopted unanimously on Friday night, as a "generally positive" document intended to keep the Syrian conflict settlement within the political dimension.

He said Russia would encourage the Syrian government to observe the schedule, agreed by the UN and the OPCW, but Western powers and their Arab allies supporting the Syrian opposition should "send a clear signal" to anti-government rebels, "so that they

wouldn't dare to undermine this process."

[RIA-Novosti](#), "Russia Vows All Assistance to Syria Chemical Arms Destruction — FM," 30 Sep 2013.

The Russian government is functioning well, and taking a leadership role in Syria. Note that Lavrov — unlike his deputy on 26 Sep and unlike the defense minister on 19 Sep — does *not* mention refusing to destroy Syrian weapons inside Russia.

In contrast, the U.S. government is dysfunctional, mired in a budget stalemate in the U.S. Congress that threatens to shut down the government tomorrow, 1 Oct. Moreover, the U.S. government will reach its legal debt limit on 17 Oct 2013, but the U.S. Congress has *not* passed any bills in an attempt to increase this rapidly approaching debt limit. A significant part of the U.S. debt comes from the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which debt motivates part of my opposition to any further U.S. military involvement in foreign nations.

Permit me to give my personal opinion about recent history in this terse paragraph, which is somewhat oversimplified because of its terse nature. The cold war between the Soviet Union and the USA from the end of World War II until 1990 strained the economies of both nations. The economy of the Soviet Union collapsed first (in 1990), meaning the USA won the cold war, but with massive accumulated debt that will burden future americans. After the Al-Qaeda attack on the USA on 11 Sep 2001, the USA again launched into an expensive, world-wide campaign against the Enemy — now Islamic terrorism, instead of communism — which further increased the accumulated debt of the USA. In addition, the USA voluntarily harmed itself by enacting repressive legislation, which I criticized in my essay on the history of the [PATRIOT Act](#).

UN weapons inspectors who arrived on 25 Sep for a second visit in Syria to investigate use of chemical weapons departed on 30 Sep. [Reuters](#), 16:21 BST, 30 Sep 2013.

Because the Damascus airport is not secure, the inspectors travel by land between Damascus and Beirut, and use the airport in Beirut, Lebanon. That is just one of the many inconveniences of working amidst a civil war.

Meanwhile, a team of twenty UN inspectors who will visit Syrian chemical weapons manufacturing and storage sites will arrive in Damascus on 1 Oct. The incoming UN weapons inspectors told journalists: "It's been good business so far. So far, our interactions with the Syrians have been very businesslike and efficient." [The Washington Post](#), 30 Sep 2013.

Precedent for Israel?

Although the effort to destroy chemical weapons in Syria is just beginning, the Russian Foreign Minister, Lavrov, is already using the "success" of the agreement about Syria as a springboard for his broader campaign to remove *all* weapons of mass destruction from the entire Middle East. [RIA-Novosti](#), 02:49 Moscow time, 30 Sep; [Reuters](#), 30 Sep 2013.

Superficially, removing *all* weapons of mass destruction might sound like a good idea. But such a plan would remove nuclear weapons from Israel. [RIA-Novosti](#), 22:06 Moscow time, 30 Sep 2013.

The events since the year 1948 show that Israel is surrounded by Arab neighbors who are belligerent and aggressive. There were two large wars in 1948 and 1956 between Arab neighbors and Israel. More recently:

- Hamas in Gaza continues to fire rockets and mortar shells into Israel.
- Palestinians in the West Bank continue to sporadically murder Israelis.
- Hezbollah in Lebanon fought a war with Israel as recently as 2006.
- Syria fought wars with Israel in 1967 and 1973.
- Egypt fought wars with Israel in 1967 and 1973, but signed a peace treaty in 1979.
- Since 2006, Iran is believed to be developing nuclear weapons with the openly declared intent of annihilating Israel.

The Israeli government posted a [list](#) of its citizens killed by Palestinian terrorists since Sep 2000. There is another [list](#) that covers the years 1920 to July 2008. This history must not be forgotten.

In short, Israel *needs* weapons of mass destruction, in order to deter large-scale aggression by numerically superior Arab neighbors. Israel, like the USA and Russia, has a history of not using weapons of mass destruction.

See my additional remarks on Islamic terrorism, [below](#).

1 Oct 2013

"The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented the deaths of 115,206 people from the start of Syria's revolution on March 18, 2011 to September 30, 2013." [SOHR](#), 1 Oct 2013. This death toll is approximately 4835 during Sep 2013. See also [Al-Jazeera](#).

One might wonder why all of the fuss during the past 40 days (since 21 Aug) over fewer than 1500 dead in one chemical weapons attack in Syria, while nearly everyone (except Ban Ki-moon) ignores the 4835 dead from conventional weapons in Syria during September. The answer seems to be that the chemical weapons was a *solvable* problem, while the continuing civil war seems *insolvable* by diplomats, as explained [below](#). So, diplomats solved the problem that they were able to solve and ignored the bigger problem that is beyond their ability.

2 Oct 2013

The *Al-Arabiya* website of a television news network based in Dubai, UAE reported: Saudi Arabia has cancelled its address to the U.N. General Assembly citing the international body's inability to resolve pertaining issues to the Arab and Islamic world.

Diplomatic sources said to Al Arabiya that the Saudi decision to cancel its speech at the United Nations General Assembly for the first time in history, reflects the kingdom's dissatisfaction with the position of the United Nations on dealing with the Arab and Islamic issues, particularly the issue of Palestine that the U.N. has not been able to solve in more than 60 years, as well as the Syrian crisis.

The Saudi diplomat also cited "the monopoly of certain countries" over U.N. decision making.

Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist and political analyst, said: "Saudi Arabia is worried about Syria and senses that the U.N. Security Council, with its recent resolution, is taking Syria into a dark tunnel of endless negotiations and procedures to disarm Assad from his chemical weapons, neglecting the Syrian crisis taking place now."

[Al-Arabiya](#), 17:03 GMT, 2 Oct 2013.

On 3 Oct, *Arab News* in Saudi Arabia reported:

In an unprecedented move, Saudi Arabia has not delivered its annual address at the UN General Assembly in protest at the international organization's failure to solve major Muslims issues such as Syria, Palestine, and the Rohingya in Myanmar.

"This is the first time that Saudi Arabia has canceled its UN address. It did not even distribute copies of the speech which was supposed to have been delivered by Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal on Tuesday," said a diplomatic source.

"This reflects Saudi Arabia's displeasure with the way the United Nations handled the Syria crisis and the report of the UN inspectors about the use of chemical weapons in Syria," the source said. The UN Security Council was focusing on the chemical weapons issue, but ignoring the basic issue of Bashar Assad's massacre of the country's people in the last three years.

[Arab News](#), 3 Oct 2013.

The Saudi government made the decision on 1 Oct to cancel the speech scheduled for 2 Oct. [ANSA](#).

This news story was generally ignored in the USA and Europe. Western Civilization can *not* afford to ignore Saudi Arabia, which is the largest oil exporting nation in the world, and the source of gasoline for automobiles, fuel for airplanes, and diesel fuel for trucks and railroad trains.

I suggest there is a rational reason for why Western Civilization tends to avoid so-called "Muslim issues". Christians and Jews in Western Civilization are appalled at the use of terrorism by some Muslims, as briefly — and incompletely — sketched in the following section of this essay.

Islamic terrorism

Beginning in 1948 and continuing to the present day, Muslims (i.e., Palestinians and Arab nations) have attacked people in [Israel](#). The Palestinians invented airplane hijackings and suicide bombings as their signature publicity stunts. And it was not just that some Islamic terrorist strapped on a belt of explosives and detonated in a shopping district or restaurant — the explosives were surrounded with ball bearings and nails maliciously intended to maim more innocent people.

An outstanding example of the depravity of Palestinian terrorists is their attack on the Israeli athletes in the Olympic Games in Munich in Sep 1972. The three surviving Palestinian terrorists were being held in Germany awaiting trial, when two other Palestinians hijacked a Lufthansa airplane with 11 passengers and 7 crew on 29 Oct 1972. The Palestinian hijackers traded the hostages and airplane for the three imprisoned Palestinians. On arrival in Tripoli, Libya the three terrorists and two hijackers were treated as heroes.

A terse and very incomplete history of Islamic terrorism includes:

1. On 23 Oct 1983, a Hezbollah suicide bomber killed 241 U.S. military personnel at their barracks in Beirut, Lebanon.
2. On 26 Feb 1993, a failed attempt to destroy the World Trade Center in New York City kills 6 people.
3. On 7 Aug 1998, the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania were bombed by Al-Qaeda, killing 223 people.
4. Sometime around 2000, Al-Qaeda began an insurgency in Yemen, including an Oct 2000 attack on the *U.S.S. Cole*.
5. On 11 Sep 2001, Al-Qaeda hijacked four airplanes in the USA, flew two of them into the World Trade Center in New York City, and crashed one airplane into the Pentagon, killing approximately 3000 people. This was not just the work of 19 Islamic hijackers, but was endorsed by thousands of Palestinians who [celebrated](#).
6. Beginning in 2004, Al-Qaeda was recognized as conducting bombings in Iraq, which continue today.
7. On 7 July 2005, four Islamic suicide bombers killed 52 people in the London subway.
8. The Al-Shabaab terror group in Somalia is allied with Al-Qaeda since Feb 2012. In Sep 2013, Shabaab attacked a shopping mall in Nairobi, killing at least 67 people.
9. Islamic terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan routinely conduct bombings and assassinations in those two countries.

The Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Al-Qaeda in many nations, gave the Muslim religion a bad name. The Islamic extremists recruited suicide bombers with the theological promise that their souls would go to Paradise if they died while attacking the enemy. The enemy was not only Jews and Christians, but sometimes also members of different Islamic sects — which gives a religious dimension to Islamic terrorism.

If the Islamic militants attacked *only* military and government targets, the militants might be acceptable as guerilla warriors. But history shows that the Islamic militants (especially Palestinians and Al-Qaeda) deliberately choose civilian targets, such as shopping malls, where they kill innocent women and children. The [Geneva](#) Convention explicitly prohibits attacks on civilians (i.e., noncombatants). This Islamic violation of the norms of Western Civilization is *terrorism*. These Islamic terrorists have chosen a strategy that makes them

barbaric, *uncivilized*, and malicious.

Many Christians and Jews in the USA did *not* personally know any Muslim, because Muslims are a small minority in USA. So when the majority of Americans learned about Muslims in the news media, it was usually in the context of some horrible act of terrorism perpetrated by Islamic terrorists (e.g., Hamas or Islamic Jihad in Palestine, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, etc.). This selective exposure gave the Muslim nations, and the entire Muslim religion, a bad reputation amongst Western Civilization. By remaining quiet — or, worse, by celebrating terror attacks on Israel, the USA, and other nations — the mainstream majority of Muslims allowed the minority extremists to hijack the public image of their religion, in the name of terrorism and jihad. (Incidentally, this is not the first time in human history that an aggressive minority has managed to dominate a docile majority.)

This terse discussion of Islamic terrorism was precipitated by the cancellation of the Saudi Arabia speech at the United Nations General Assembly, as the Saudis protested the failure of the UN to resolve problems in Muslim nations. It is a fact that Osama bin Laden came from Saudi Arabia, as did 15 of the 19 hijackers on 11 Sep 2001. In my opinion, Saudi Arabia (and also other Muslim nations) need to abolish Islamic terrorism, including strong condemnation of terrorism by respected Islamic religious leaders. Muslim political leaders — and especially Muslim clerics — are better positioned to persuade Muslim militants to abandon terrorism than either Christian or Jewish leaders.

3 Oct 2013

On 3 Oct, the second full day of OPCW work in Syria, the OPCW announced:

The joint OPCW-UN team mandated to assist Syria with the elimination of its chemical weapons programme has made encouraging initial progress, following the first working day of meetings with the Syrian authorities. Documents handed over yesterday by the Syrian Government look promising, according to team members, but further analysis, particularly of technical diagrams, will be necessary and some more questions remain to be answered.

The team hopes to begin onsite inspections and the initial disabling of equipment within the next week [6-11 Oct], but this depends on the outcome of the technical groups established with the participation of Syrian experts yesterday [2 Oct]. These groups are working on three areas which are key to the mission's success: verification of the information handed over by the Syrian Government; the safety and security of the inspection teams; and practical arrangements for implementing the plan, under which Syria's chemical weapons material and equipment are to be eliminated by mid-2014.

[OPCW Daily Bulletin](#), 3 Oct 2013.

See also "'Encouraging' progress in dismantling Syrian chemical arsenal — UN," [Reuters](#), 19:14 BST, 3 Oct 2013. [Al-Arabiya](#), 3 Oct 2013.

4 Oct 2013

Russia Today reports an unsupported assertion that chemical weapons use on 21 Aug in Ghouta "was done by a black op team that Saudi [Arabia] sent through Jordan and which acted with support of the Liwa Al-Islam group". [rt.com](#), 4 Oct 2013. No evidence is given for this assertion. No mention is made of earlier Russian claims that chemical weapons from Libya were used in Syria.

5 Oct 2013

On 5 Oct 2013 the U.S. military made two daring raids. First, the U.S. Navy attacked a building in Somalia, hoping to capture a senior Al-Shabaab leader, in retaliation for the Shabaab attack on a shopping mall in Nairobi that began on 21 Sep and killed at least 67 people. Second, the U.S. Army captured an Al-Qaeda terrorist on the streets of Tripoli, Libya. The Al-Qaeda terrorist had been indicted in 2000 in the USA for his role in planning the attack on two U.S. Embassies in 1998.

The New York Times commented: "But at a moment when President Obama's popularity is flagging under the weight of his standoff with Congressional Republicans and his leadership criticized for his reversal in Syria, the simultaneous attacks are bound to fuel accusations that the administration was eager for a showy victory."

In my opinion, today's raids were reminiscent of the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan on 2 May 2011, and the abduction of Manuel Noriega from Panama on 3 Jan 1990.

I ended this document on 5 Oct 2013. The initial topic of U.S. military strikes in Syria has evaporated. Diplomats have finished their negotiations on chemical weapons in Syria, and the efforts are now in the hands of technical experts from the OPCW. I do not expect more significant news on chemical weapons in Syria until any of the following occurs:

- the OPCW inspectors led by Prof. Sellström issue their final report on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria during March-August 2013
- the Syrian government stops cooperating with OPCW
- the OPCW team is attacked by either the Syrian military or the rebels
- the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria issues a report assigning responsibility for the past use of chemical weapons in Syria.

For news from 6 Oct 2013 until 31 Dec 2013, see my [second](#) essay.

Why peace negotiations are futile with current status

In June 2012, a peace conference on Syria was held in Geneva which issued a final [Communiqué](#). While representatives of various Arab nations were present (e.g., Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar), neither the Syrian government nor the Syria rebels were represented.

On 7 May 2013, Lavrov and Kerry agreed on the need for a second peace conference, called Geneva2. [RIA-Novosti](#). However, they were unable to arrange for representatives of both Assad's government and the main groups of rebels to attend Geneva2, so the conference has not been scheduled.

During Sep 2013, diplomats continued to speak of the need to have a second peace conference in Geneva in mid-November that brings together the Syrian government and the opposition. Such a conference is an illusion for three reasons:

1. Most importantly, there is no "the opposition" — instead there are badly fragmented and disorganized groups that include:
 - the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) based in Turkey, and their military group, the Free Syrian Army;
 - a new group of 13 Islamic rebel organizations, created on 25 Aug 2013 (see [above](#)); and
 - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which is Al-Qaeda-affiliated.These groups have different purposes and goals, which prevents consensus amongst the opposition.
2. Both the legitimate government and the opposition groups place numerous pre-conditions on any meeting, which prevents any conference that includes *all* of the relevant parties. The legitimate government of Assad refuses to meet with any of the terrorist (i.e., rebel) forces, while the armed rebellion is continuing. More recently, Assad refuses to negotiate with rebels who either (1) are affiliated with Al-Qaeda or (2) supported U.S. military strikes on Syria (e.g., SNC). The rebels refuse to negotiate with Assad, and instead the rebels demand that Assad resign.
3. The third reason is almost never mentioned by commentators or journalists. Both Assad and the jihadists are pursuing a total military victory, in which their opponents are annihilated. The Syrian civil war is a *religious* war, in which each party views the other parties as infidels worthy of extermination. As Dr. Kissinger said on 22 Sep: "a total victory for one side would lead to the high probability of a massacre." But zealots who believe the enemy are infidels can easily justify an otherwise irrational war, making peace negotiations futile.

See, e.g.,

- "Kofi Annan claims it is too late for outside intervention in Syria," [The Telegraph](#), 27 March 2013.
- Mark Urban, "How Geneva II could be worsening chances of Syria peace," [BBC](#), 11 June 2013.
- "Syrian National Coalition to attend Geneva 2 if transitional govt on table," [rt.com](#), 22 Sep 2013.

- "Syrian FM Refuses to Deal With US-Backed Opposition Group," [Al-Monitor](#), 29 Sep 2013.
- "Syrian envoy Brahimi has doubts over the convening of Geneva II," [Al-Arabiya](#), 29 Sep 2013.
- "No conditions for Syria peace talks, says [Syrian Foreign Minister]," [france24.com](#), 30 Sep 2013.
- "Assad Rules Out Negotiations With Pretty Much Everyone in Opposition," [Foreign Policy](#), 30 Sep 2013.
- "West may fail to bring Syrian opposition to Geneva talks in time — Lavrov," [rt.com](#), 1 Oct 2013.
- "Damascus Not Ready for Talks With Radical Opposition — Minister," [RIA-Novosti](#), 3 Oct 2013.
- "Assad Interview: 'West Is More Confident in Al-Qaida than Me'," [Der Spiegel](#), 5 Oct 2013. ("Asked if [Assad] believes a solution to the Syrian crisis could still be negotiated, he counters, 'With the militants? No. Because by its very definition, a political opposition doesn't have an army.'")
- Associated Press reports: "Divergence among Syrian opposition parties has made it difficult to convene the Geneva Conference which aims to bring together representatives from the Syrian government and opposition." [Al-Jazeera](#), 6 Oct 2013.

Am I being too pessimistic? Look at the history of peace negotiations in Syria:

1. On 23 Feb 2012, Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, was appointed UN envoy to Syria.
2. On 9 March 2012, Kofi Annan offered to arrange negotiations between Assad and the rebels, but both parties refused.
3. On 4 April 2012, Annan proposed a six-point peace [plan](#), which was ignored.
4. Kofi Annan arranged a ceasefire to begin on 12 April 2012, and the United Nations sent a team of "observers" to monitor the ceasefire.
 - a. On 1 June 2012, the Free Syrian Army declared it would resume "defensive operations".
 - b. On 16 June 2012, the observers were confined to hotels, because the Syrian army shot at a few of them. The so-called "cease fire" is a fiction.
 - c. On 16 Aug 2012, the UN Security Council formally ended the observers' mission in Syria.
5. On 2 Aug 2012, Koffi Annan quit as UN envoy to Syria. See his [remarks](#) on why he failed:
 - "The increasing militarization on the ground and the clear lack of unity in the Security Council"
 - "... most of all because of the Syrian government's intransigence, and continuing refusal to implement the six-point plan, and also because of the escalating military campaign of the opposition — all of which is compounded by the disunity of the international community."
6. On 17 Aug 2012, the UN Security Council appointed Lakhdar Brahimi, a professional diplomat from Algeria, to be the UN envoy to Syria.
7. On 24 Sep 2012, Brahimi still has no plan to end the civil war in Syria.
8. On 24 Oct 2012, Brahimi claimed he negotiated a four-day cease fire during the Muslim holiday on 26-29 Oct. An Al-Qaeda rebel group violated the cease fire,

followed by violations by the Syrian military.

9. On 24 Dec 2012, Brahimi has his third visit to Damascus. Both Assad and the rebels refused to meet with each other.
10. U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, calls big meeting in Rome on 27 Feb 2013 to discuss Syria. Naturally, Assad's government is *not* invited. The Syrian National Coalition announce they will boycott the meeting, but Kerry bribes these rebels to attend, by offering them "humanitarian supplies". General Salim Idris retorted:

"We don't want food and drink and we don't want bandages. When we're wounded, we want to die. The only thing we want is weapons," he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

[Al-Arabiya](#), [Chicago Sun-Times](#), [CBS News](#), all on 1 March 2013. Note that Gen. Idris commands the mainstream rebels, and he is *not* an extremist by Syrian standards.

Both Annan and Brahimi accomplished nothing, not because they are incompetent, but because of the three reasons given above. Peace is even more elusive with a religion that teaches that fighters go to Paradise for killing the enemy. It is difficult for a diplomat to offer an inducement stronger than eternity in Paradise.

Proceedings in U.S. Congress

On 9 Sep 2013, Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, introduced Senate Joint [Resolution 21](#), titled "Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against the Government of Syria to Respond to Use of Chemical Weapons".

The Senate Majority Leader had originally planned a vote on 11 Sep on a procedural motion to begin formal debate on the resolution, with a final vote on the resolution expected on 14 or 15 Sep. As opposition to the resolution grew, on the evening of 9 Sep the Majority Leader postponed those votes, to give President Obama more time to convince citizens and politicians. See the [Washington Post](#) article on 9 Sep 2013 at 20:36 EDT, and the [USA Today](#) article on 9 Sep at 19:59 EDT, about political opposition to Obama's plan for military strikes on Syria.

On Monday evening, 9 Sep, the Senate Majority Leader said on the floor of the Senate:

Mr. President, tomorrow the President is going to brief the Democratic caucus and the Republican caucus separately. He is going to address the Nation tomorrow night. As we all know, there are international discussions relevant to the matter in Syria.

Normally what I would do in a situation such as this is file cloture today, but I don't think that is to our benefit. I don't think we need to see how fast we can do this; we have to see how well we can do this, so I will not file cloture this evening on the Syria resolution.

.... I think what we need to do is to make sure the President has the opportunity to speak to all 100 Senators and all 300 million American people before we do this.

.... I repeat: I wish to make sure the President has a full opportunity to make his case to the Senate and the American people before we vote on this matter.

159 [Congressional Record](#), page S6288, 9 Sep 2013.

President Obama, in his [speech](#) at 21:00 EDT on 10 Sep 2013, said he had asked Congress to "postpone" their vote on the Authorization for the Use of Military Force, while the U.S. Government pursued the Russian diplomatic initiative.

On 11 Sep 2013, the Senate Majority Leader withdrew the Authorization for the Use of Military Force:

Mr. REID. Madam President, I have spoken with the White House, I have spoken with the Republican leader, and we have agreed on a way forward based on the President's speech last night.

As the President told the Nation last night, the President has asked Congress to postpone a vote to authorize the use of force in Syria and pursue instead a diplomatic path to see if that works.

Tomorrow sometime, in Geneva, Secretary Kerry is meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. So it is right that the Senate turn from the Syria resolution while the Secretary of State pursues these important diplomatic discussions.

As I said this morning, Congress will be watching these negotiations [in Geneva, between Kerry and Lavrov] very closely. If there is any indication that they are not serious, or that they are being used as a ploy for delay, then the Congress stands ready to return to the Syria resolution to give the President the authority to hold the Assad regime accountable for the pain, suffering, and death it caused with those chemical weapons.

....

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to proceed to S. 1392 [an energy efficiency bill] be agreed to, that no amendments or motions be in order relative to Syria or the use of military force during the consideration of the legislation,

....

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.
159 [Congressional Record](#), page S6350, 11 Sep 2013.

**Positions of Congress
10-11 Sep 2013**

Lists at [CNN](#) show 25 votes for Obama's position, 179 against military strikes on Syria, and 223 undecided in the U.S. House of Representatives on 10 Sep 2013.

Lists at [CNN](#) show 25 votes for Obama's position, 32 against military strikes on Syria, and 43 undecided in the U.S. Senate on 10 Sep 2013.

Because the Senate was more favorable to Obama than the House, it was decided to introduce the resolution in the Senate first and see if the Senate approves it, before trying the more difficult House.

The Washington Post had a similar list. On 11 Sep 2013, *The Post* counted:

Position	House	Senate
for Obama	25	23
undecided	151	36
leaning NO	102	10
NO	155	31

Russia's proposal probably rescued Obama from a humiliating defeat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Alternative Authorization

On 10-11 Sep 2013 there were reports by journalists that eight U.S. Senators were discussing an alternative authorization to use military force against Syria:

A bipartisan group of senators has produced an outline for a new resolution that would reflect the Russian offer. The outline includes a call for the United Nations to pass a resolution saying Syria used chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war, and would require the U.N. to go into Syria and remove the chemical weapons by a certain date. If those requests weren't met, American military force would be authorized, according to a Senate aide with knowledge of the proposal.

There is no legislative language yet, and parameters for the timing and kind of force threatened have not yet been determined. Four Republicans (Lindsey Graham, Kelly Ayotte, John McCain and Saxby Chambliss) and four Democrats (Chuck Schumer, Bob Casey, Carl Levin and Chris Coons) are negotiating the measure.

Caitlin Huey-Burns, "McConnell Opposed to Strike on Syria," [Real Clear Politics](#), 10 Sep 2013.

The political news website Politico reported:

A powerful group of senators is quietly drafting a new proposal that could forestall military action in Syria if the country relinquishes its chemical weapon stockpile, according to sources familiar with the deliberations.

....

The broad outlines of the plan would call for the United Nations to pass a resolution asserting that Bashar Assad's regime in Syria used chemical weapons in the country's ongoing civil war. A UN team would be required to remove the chemical weapons within a specified timeframe. If the weapons were unable to be removed within that timetable, then the United States would be authorized to use military force against the country, the source said Tuesday [10 Sep]. The timeline is still being hammered out by the group.

Manu Raju, "Senators working on new Syria plan," [Politico](#), 12:42 EDT, 10 Sep 2013.

The New York Times reported on 11 Sep 2013:

On Capitol Hill, a bipartisan and growing group of senators continued their talks on Syria in light of the diplomatic efforts to secure the chemical weapons.

Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, said that the United Nations Security Council should be given days — not weeks — to approve a plan to secure the weapons. Without quick progress, efforts to authorize force would begin anew, he said.

"If they're [Russia is ?] committed to removing Bashar Assad's chemical weapons stocks, we know how to do that. We know how it's done," Mr. McCain said in an interview, adding that he "would love" to see a resolution of force "back on the floor, sooner rather than later."

"We'll know if this is serious or not. What's there to negotiate [between Russia and the USA]?" [Senator McCain] said.

For now, lawmakers in both parties were happy to set aside the Syrian crisis, mindful that a rejection of the use of force would deliver a blow to the prestige of the president and possibly the nation, but even more mindful that their constituents adamantly oppose military action.

....

Meanwhile, negotiations on an amended resolution of force continued on Wednesday [11 Sep]. The initial eight senators involved — Mr. McCain; Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina; Kelly Ayotte, Republican of New Hampshire; Saxby Chambliss, Republican of Georgia; Carl Levin, Democrat of Michigan; Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York; Chris Coons, Democrat of Delaware; and Bob Casey, Democrat of Pennsylvania — have been joined by Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Democrat of New Hampshire, and the leadership of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

After an hourlong meeting on Wednesday [11 Sep] in Mr. McCain's office, the group agreed to meet again on Thursday. Mr. McCain said the effort was aimed not at an entirely new resolution authorizing force but at an amendment to the Foreign Relations

Committee's resolution, which would allow a United Nations Security Council effort a limited amount of time to achieve its results. If the Security Council fails to act, the Senate could move forward with its original war resolution.

Michael D. Shear, "Planned as Call to Act, Obama's Speech Became Plea to Wait," *The New York Times*, 11 Sep 2013.

On 29 Sep 2013, I searched the online *Thomas* database, but found no alternative resolution on Syria introduced in the U.S. Senate and no amendment by McCain and others to the proposed Senate Joint Resolution 21, introduced by Menendez, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. My search of Google News on 29 Sep found no reports after 11 Sep on this alternative. Although some senators (e.g., McCain and Graham) probably favor giving Obama authorization to launch military strikes against Syria, nothing seems to have resulted from these discussions in the U.S. Senate. My view is that military strikes on Syria were too controversial for most Senators to want to take a vote.

this document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria3.pdf>
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