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26 August, 2013

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The Daily Beast

Obama's New Syria Options=>

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Article 2.

The Wall Street Journal

Syria's Gas Attack on Civilization

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Syria will require more than cruise missiles

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Article 1.

The Daily Beast

Obama's New Syria Options

Leslie H. Gelb <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/contributors/leslie-h-gelb.html>>

Aug 25, 2013-- After the most recent use of chemical weapons in Syria, President Obama is sheltering his next moves even from his closest advisers as the whole Obama administration inches painfully toward what they all see as the moment of truth in Syria.

Once again, he could walk away from the use of force because that option has little backing either in his administration or among Americans generally. But after an endless run of inter-agency meetings at the White House, the sense is that he is nearing three conclusions: first, the Syrian government has put his credibility on the line irrevocably and inescapably; second, he now must take direct military action to punish the government of President Bashar al-Assad, though not in a manner that commits him to further use of force; and third, he needs to combine whatever force he uses now with dramatic and diplomatic initiatives.

Officials expect White House decisions to come quickly at this point. Most officials openly lament how they are being whipsawed between a general consensus in the administration against employing U.S. military force backed by huge opposition to doing so (60 percent) among polled Americans, and a growing and potent consensus among foreign policy experts and politicians to give Assad a hard punch.

Most administration officials and most Americans just can't see any lasting benefits from any form of direct U.S. military involvement in Syria, and they fear that initial actions would lead only to more and more force. On the other hand, policy experts and politicians are arguing with increasing vigor that America's and Obama's credibility in the Middle East and in the world are on the line, that he has drawn so many red lines

<<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/05/05/obama-syrian-red-line-could-return-us-to-the-mistakes-of-iraq.html>> against Assad's use of chemicals that neither he nor the U.S. can afford further thumb-sucking. This

credibility argument is deeply reinforced by a humanitarian one. The refugee and death tolls are already sky high and leaping daily and now require more than mere rhetoric and emergency aid.

With these pressures and considerations in mind, here are the overlapping policy choices the Obama team has looked at over the last week:

1. Wait on the reports of U.N. inspectors, now apparently heading toward the site where chemical weapons were, in all probability, fired off. The expectation is the inspectors will find that such weapons were, in fact, employed. Few expect the inspectors to come to a definitive conclusion on whether the government or the rebels fired them. But the presumption is bound to be that the weapons belong to the government and that the government was responsible. As quickly as possible, take the matter to the U.N. Security Council, but anticipate a Russian and Chinese veto of military action. Making these steps is more or less a given for Obama to satisfy his impulse to bow to international law.
2. Meantime, go to friendly Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates, plus key European allies such as Britain and France and see if they will join a military coalition as they did in Libya <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/04/03/nicolas-arkozy-s-war-on-gaddafi-influenced-by-philosopher-bernard-henri-levy.html> . This wouldn't provide full international or legal cover, but it would help. U.S. officials don't expect much support from Arab states, but hope for some from Paris and London. All this is to ensure the U.S. doesn't have to act alone.
3. Provide more and better military arms to the rebels, and this time actually expedite the equipment. Most administration officials still don't like this option. They remain unconvinced that they know enough about the rebels to make sure the aid doesn't fall into the wrong hands <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/06/15/will-arming-syrian-rebels-lead-to-disaster.html> .
4. Attack Syrian government military targets with cruise missiles, drones or with the foregoing plus piloted U.S. aircraft. The number of attacks would be limited. The U.S. military still doesn't care for this option any more than it likes the idea of arming the rebels. They don't see its having much effect on either Syrian capability or morale. They worry that it will produce only demands for more bombing.
5. Go further than air attacks and establish no fly zones over part of Syria. These zones would border Turkey and Jordan, and perhaps Iraq, with the intent of protecting refugees and hitting Syrian fighters when and where possible. Some Congressional hawks love this option, but in the view of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, it would be very difficult to establish and conduct. The logistical problems are enormous and at least Turkey and Jordan would have to participate, an unlikely prospect.
6. Try to use the horror and political pressures of the latest chemical weapons attack to launch a new diplomatic negotiating initiative, perhaps focused on a cease-fire. To have any chance of success, this would require two things: first, genuine help from Russia to pressure the Assad government for compromises; and second, a U.S. willingness to make a deal with the Assad government plus some, but not all, of the rebels. No official is holding his breath on this one, but they all think it's worth marrying to any direct U.S. military force. The one concern is that diplomatic failure would serve to ramp up pressures for further military action. Besides, there's great uncertainty about how Assad will react to U.S. intervention, i.e., with more defiance or a willingness to talk.
7. Offer a significantly upgraded aid package for refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, and a new and dramatic proposal for humanitarian aid to all needy Syrians inside Syria. Of course, the latter would require agreement and participation by Damascus. It might also be a good way to lay the groundwork for future negotiation.

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