OMNI SYRIA NEWSLETTER #6, September 7, 2013.
Compiled by Dick Bennett for a Culture of Peace and Justice.
(#3 Nov. 11, 2012; #4 March 5, 2013; #5 Sept. 2, 2013).

My blog: The War Department and Peace Heroes
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/
Newsletters:
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/
Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/

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[Sorry, I thought these would be active links. They are available in the web site.
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/ —Dick]

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CALL PRESIDENT OBAMA (from David D)

Now that England has chosen to NOT participate in a "punitive" cruise missile attack against the people of Syria, Pres. Obama is attempting to quell criticism of his proposal for a limited military mission in Syria.

President Obama is now offering a more modest strategy saying that a "Syrian strike would have no objective whatsoever".

Does this sound at best muddled to you?

Please tell our Pres what you think. [Several methods follow. –Dick]

We must work for a ceasefire & negotiations NOT more bloodshed.
Write or Call the White House

President Obama is committed to creating the most open and accessible administration in American history. That begins with taking comments and questions from you, the public, through our website.

Call the President

PHONE NUMBERS
Comments: 202-456-1111
Switchboard: 202-456-1414

TTY/TTD
Comments: 202-456-6213
Visitor's Office: 202-456-2121

Write a letter to the President

Here are a few simple things you can do to make sure your message gets to the White House as quickly as possible.

1. If possible, email us! This is the fastest way to get your message to President Obama.

2. If you write a letter, please consider typing it on an 8 1/2 by 11 inch sheet of paper. If you hand-write your letter, please consider using pen and writing as neatly as possible.

3. Please include your return address on your letter as well as your envelope. If you have an email address, please consider including that as well.

4. And finally, be sure to include the full address of the White House to make sure your message gets to us as quickly and directly as possible:
   The White House
   1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
   Washington, DC 20500

TWO ESSAYS BY MOHJA KAHF (see Newsletter #5)

The roar of pain from my Syria

By Mohja Kahf  FOR,  Friday, August 30, 2013, 9:54pm

http://forusa.org/blogs/mohja-kahf/roar-pain-my-syria/12373
I hear the roar of pain from my Syria, hear it loud, hear it every day, in minute detail, with names of friends and relatives attached; it not only breaks my heart but in Syria it breaks whole lives.

Let no one deny the horrific massacres of Syrian civilians by the Assad government, no matter what position one has on the imminent U.S. strikes on Syria. Yes, there is a part of me which responds to news of possible strikes with, “Smash the Butcher of Syria.” But the U.S. is not proposing strikes because it’s crying its eyes out over Syrian suffering, or out of goodwill toward the legitimate uprising for which millions of Syrians have been risking their lives and suffering agonies. A U.S. strike is not a prayer-answer to the Syrian humanitarian crisis—it means more civilian agonies, because Syria is not Kosovo, which was protected by U.N. peacekeepers in the aftermath of NATO bombing.

If the U.S. can move off its ass enough to strike Syria militarily, it can bloody well put equivalent hard work into arm-twisting the Butcher of Syria to a Yemeni-style transition, tightening the noose on Russian, Iranian, and Hezbollah provisions to the Butcher, and clearing the U.N. Security Council of vetoes for action against the regime for its use of chemical weapons. Political transition is better than military strike.

The U.S. continues to drag its feet on the Syrian revolution precisely because the revolution was begun by grassroots women and men who are not anybody’s proxies, who struggle now both against the regime and imported agendas, Islamist and Western. The U.S. has tried to develop a dog in the race, and has largely failed. General Martin Dempsey, chair of the U.S.’s Joint Chiefs of Staff, says, “the side we choose must be ready to promote their interests and ours when the balance shifts in their favor. Today, they are not.”

“There is nothing there,” says former U.S. military chief for the region General James Mattis. I know intimately that there is something there: a few million ornery, disenfranchised, utterly marginalized Syrians risking everything to create a country where they and their children can live with dignity. My axis is them. U.S. strikes are not designed to help them in that struggle.

Born in Syria, Professor Mohja Kahf teaches Middle Eastern studies and Arabic literature at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. A poet, book author, and activist, she tweets for the Syrian.
No matter what your position on the potential U.S. strikes on Syria (I’m against), all I ask is, DON’T be a hater who denies the existence of the grassroots youth who began the Syrian revolution out of hope for real freedom and out of their rising expectation for real change, hope that had nearly died in the fifty-year police state that has ruled Syria. Try to remember to have some compassion for a Syrian who might be in the vicinity, before you mouth off in the abstract on the issue; we face news every day of our friends and our relatives being killed and imprisoned. Take time to get to know about a few of them, the Syrian rev youth activists who started it all, in hundreds of towns across Syria, before you speak about Syria based on what happened in Iraq or Lebanon or Country X.

In SYRIA, this is a REVOLUTION (and yes I understand it meets the technical definition of a civil war, yes it does, AND, yet, still: This is a Revolution). In SYRIA, a Revolution
has been happening, and the will to freedom that began it will not simply be erased; it is a bell that cannot be unrung in the hearts of young Syrians. It is a consciousness change. That is why Syria is not now and will not become, despite all the [chaos] that has ensued inside the revolution, “like Iraq” (and by the way, I marched in the United States against the Iraq War, and over the years have written and published pages of poems based on the unimaginable sufferings narrated to me by Iraqis).

In SYRIA, a broad spectrum of twenty-somethings across every province were inspired by Bouazizi’s self-immolation, by 26-year-old Asma Mahfouz’ call to Tahrir, by the movement for Khaled Said, a young activist murdered by Egyptian police in 2010, NOT by some U.S. president’s call for regime change as in Iraq. By the will to “live like human beings,” as one after another has told me when I have met them and asked for their stories. ASK for their stories, please. They will TELL you what motivated them to risk their lives as they did. Syria’s revolution youth hit the streets out of grievances they have EXPERIENCED, in their own bodies, in their own lives; this revolution was not begun by some Syrian version of Iraq’s Chelebi, nor by established oppositionists, but by geographically widespread rural and small-town women and men of ALL sects, young people whom the CIA never even heard of, coming together in a new spirit. They are nobody’s proxies, no matter how much outside agendas want to make them somebody’s proxies.

And please, do not create a callous denial narrative that erases the masses of mainstream Syrians in this revolution, as if they don’t count, in favor of the Salafist extremists who are trying to take it over from its fringes as, thousands of miles away, you run screaming “Taliban! Al Qaeda!” wringing your hands but not knowing in the slightest the measure of their (nasty) influence. Do not abandon those revolution youth — whether they are still in the civil resistance or have joined the secular, mainline armed resistance — who are now themselves beset by the Salafists even while still fending off the brutal regime. For example, I just Facebook-chatted with a friend inside, one of the original protesters, who refuses to flee Syria, and incidentally he is Alawite, who has received death threats by name from the regime, and from the Nusra front on the other hand.

Above all, do not become so ethically ugly as to deny the massacres the regime has committed against civilians, or become a dictator-defender. Bashar is a Butcher;
let’s establish that as a common fact between us, no matter your other views. I have spoken out against atrocities committed by the rebel sides; they ARE heinous, AND they in no way come close to the horrors committed by the regime, which vastly outguns all the rebel sides. So the “symmetry” thing, where you say “oh, they’re all about as bad as each other” is ethically reprehensible. If you don’t have time to educate yourself, at least refrain from that moral repulsiveness, please. Do not commit the inhumanity at this time of getting on a devastated Syrian’s last nerve, by denying our bloodied dead, or our desperate need for justice.

Here are some links for further reading:

- The Syrian Revolution, Then and Now (PDF download)
- International Crisis Group’s analysis of the potential U.S. strikes [included below –D]
- The Syrian Nonviolence Movement (English and Arabic pages)
- Kamishlo House (secular, nonsectarian, democracy activism)

Please write for the release of nonviolent Syrian prisoners of conscience HELD OVER A YEAR, many over two years, by cutting and pasting the text under each picture in this album, on a Revolution page that ALSO reports prisoners held by extremist groups on the rebel side.

(Photo: Rukn Eldeen, Damascus, Syria, November 20, 2012. Rallying around the nonsectarian, secular democratic values of the Syrian Revolution.)

- Mohja Kahf’s blog

[MOHJA ALSO RECOMMENDS THIS ESSAY: Here’s an important piece, by Bill Weinberg: http://ww4report.com/node/12602

Syria: denialism delegitimizes 'anti-war' position --Dick]
Assuming the U.S. Congress authorises them, Washington (together with some allies) soon will launch military strikes against Syrian regime targets. If so, it will have taken such action for reasons largely divorced from the interests of the Syrian people. The administration has cited the need to punish, deter and prevent use of chemical weapons - a defensible goal, though Syrians have suffered from far deadlier mass atrocities during the course of the conflict without this prompting much collective action in their defence. The administration also refers to the need, given President Obama's asserted "redline" against use of chemical weapons, to protect Washington's credibility - again an understandable objective though unlikely to resonate much with Syrians. Quite apart from talk of outrage, deterrence and restoring U.S. credibility, the priority must be the welfare of the Syrian people. Whether or not military strikes are ordered, this only can be achieved through imposition of a sustained ceasefire and widely accepted political transition.

To precisely gauge in advance the impact of a U.S. military attack, regardless of its scope and of efforts to carefully calibrate it, by definition is a fool's errand. In a conflict that has settled into a deadly if familiar pattern - and in a region close to boiling point - it inevitably will introduce a powerful element of uncertainty. Consequences almost certainly will be unpredictable. Still, several observations can be made about what it might and might not do:

- A military attack will not, nor can it, be met with even minimal international consensus; in this sense, the attempt to come up with solid evidence of regime use of chemical weapons, however necessary, also is futile. Given the false pretences that informed the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and, since then, regional and international polarisation coupled with the dynamics of the Syrian conflict itself, proof put forward by the U.S. will be insufficient to sway disbelievers and scepticism will be widespread.
- It might discourage future use of chemical weapons by signalling even harsher punishment in the event of recidivism - an important achievement in and of itself. Should the regime find itself fighting for its
survival, however, that consideration might not weigh heavily. Elements within the opposition also might be tempted to use such weapons and then blame the regime, precisely in order to provoke further U.S. intervention.

- It could trigger violent escalation within Syria as the regime might exact revenge on rebels and rebel-held areas, while the opposition seeks to seize the opportunity to make its own gains.
- Major regional or international escalation (such as retaliatory actions by the regime, Iran or Hizbollah, notably against Israel) is possible but probably not likely given the risks involved, though this could depend on the scope of the strikes.
- Military action, which the U.S. has stated will not aim at provoking the regime's collapse, might not even have an enduring effect on the balance of power on the ground. Indeed, the regime could register a propaganda victory, claiming it had stood fast against the U.S. and rallying domestic and regional opinion around an anti-Western, anti-imperialist mantra.

Ultimately, the principal question regarding a possible military strike is whether diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict can be re-energised in its aftermath. Smart money says they will not: in the wake of an attack they condemn as illegal and illegitimate, the regime and its allies arguably will not be in a mood to negotiate with the U.S. Carefully calibrating the strike to hurt enough to change their calculations but not enough to prompt retaliation or impede diplomacy is appealing in theory. In practice, it almost certainly is not feasible.

Whether or not the U.S. chooses to launch a military offensive, its responsibility should be to try to optimise chances of a diplomatic breakthrough. This requires a two-fold effort lacking to date: developing a realistic compromise political offer as well as genuinely reaching out to both Russia and Iran in a manner capable of eliciting their interest - rather than investing in a prolonged conflict that has a seemingly bottomless capacity to escalate.

In this spirit, the U.S. should present - and Syria's allies should seriously and constructively consider - a proposal based on the following elements:

1. It is imperative to end this war. The escalation, regional instability and international entanglement its persistence unavoidably stimulates
serve nobody's interest.
2. The only exit is political. That requires far-reaching concessions and a lowering of demands from all parties. The sole viable outcome is a compromise that protects the interests of all Syrian constituencies and reflects rather than alters the regional strategic balance;
3. The Syrian crisis presents an important opportunity to test whether the U.S. and the Islamic Republic of Iran can work together on regional issues to restore stability;
4. A viable political outcome in Syria cannot be one in which the current leadership remains indefinitely in power but, beyond that, the U.S. can be flexible with regards to timing and specific modalities;
5. The U.S. is keen to avoid collapse of the Syrian state and the resulting political vacuum. The goal should thus be a transition that builds on existing institutions rather than replaces them. This is true notably with respect to the army;
6. Priority must be given to ensuring that no component of Syrian society is targeted for retaliation, discrimination or marginalisation in the context of a negotiated settlement.

Such a proposal should then form the basis for renewed efforts by Lakhdar Brahimi, the joint United Nations/Arab League envoy, and lead to rapid convening of a Geneva II conference.

Debate over a possible strike - its wisdom, preferred scope and legitimacy in the absence of UN Security Council approval - has obscured and distracted from what ought to be the overriding international preoccupation: how to revitalise the search for a political settlement. Discussions about its legality aside, any contemplated military action should be judged based on whether it advances that goal or further postpones it.

BILL MOYERS: ANDREW BACEVICH, AGGRESSION AFTER AGGRESSION, FOR WHAT END?

" And if we take action, where and when does it stop? Is a military response justified and if we
take action, where does it stop?

“If you think back to 1980,” Bacevich tells Donahue, “and just sort of tick off the number of military enterprises that we have been engaged in that part of the world, large and small, you know, Beirut, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia — and on and on, and ask yourself, ‘What have we got done? What have we achieved? Is the region becoming more stable? Is it becoming more Democratic? Are we enhancing America’s standing in the eyes of the people of the Islamic world?’ ‘The answers are, ‘No, no, and no.’ So why, Mr. President, do you think that initiating yet another war in this protracted enterprise is going to produce a different outcome?”


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Sent: Sunday, September 1, 2013 11:40 AM by Sonny San Juan
Subject: Fwd: Syria: Whose voice shouts the loudest

http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/08/2013830131128734704.html

Syria: Whose voice shouts the loudest

As debate rages over “intervention”, the Syrian people are the victims of a legacy of colonialism by Richard Falk.

Richard Falk is Albert G. Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University and Visiting Distinguished Professor in Global and International Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is also the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Palestinian human rights.

As the war machine of the West seems poised to attack yet another country in the Middle East, there are many conflicting viewpoints that fervently seek agreement with their advocacy pro or contra launching a new version of "shock and awe". At the same time, there is an appalling disregard of the Syrian people, whether there is a consensus on what they wish from outsiders, or just a split along the lines of the ongoing civil war.

Most pundits in the West seem to forget that whatever colour lines are used to draw national boundaries, that we are trapped for better or worse in a state-centric world that is living through geopolitical traumas of the post-colonial phase of global history.

Why is this relevant? For two fundamental reasons:

First, the ethos of self-determination, which empowered the anti-colonial movements in the period after World War II, also gave national resistance movements the will, confidence, and stamina to
endure, and eventually prevail over foreign intervention. To depart from the respect of self-determination, no matter how distasteful its expression may be, is almost always preferable to unleashing the dogs of war.

This is not a counsel of absolute adherence to the norm of non-intervention, reproduced in the UN Charter in Article 2(7) - which calls upon states, and the UN itself, to refrain unconditionally from intervening "in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of states". That is, the social contract between the UN and sovereign states incorporates the norms of self-determination and its complement, non-intervention.

Exceptions should be based on three conditions:

- A substantial spillover beyond sovereign boundaries;
- A clearly delimited authorisation by the UN Security Council, including an assumption of responsibility for operational oversight (not exercised in either the Gulf War of 1991 or Libya 2012);
- Situations where only intervention can prevent or contain a major humanitarian catastrophe, and a Security Council mandate cannot be obtained due to political opposition, where the intervention is "legitimate, although unlawful" as in Kosovo 1999: legitimate because intervention may be feasible at acceptable costs and morally compelling in order to prevent crimes against humanity, genocide or famine.

The second point of relevance to post-colonial trauma is that the capabilities of a country targeted for intervention to nullify the goals of the intervener underscore the imprudence of undertaking a military approach to conflict resolution.

In country after country, the military dominance of the intervening side has been unable to control the political outcome of the conflict.

This should have been a lesson of the great anti-colonial liberation wars, but also the real significance of the Vietnam War, as reinforced by more recent results in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even with US military dominance, something beyond superiority - the resistance of nationalist forces, relying on persistence, knowledge of the country and its culture, use of soft power modes of resistance, and selective, symbolic recourse to violence - has in due course led the intervening side to abandon its project, leaving the country to work out its own future, either by the political takeover of the country by "the enemy" (as in Vietnam) or to leave its future bedevilled by chaos and anarchic violence (as in Iraq and Libya).

Is there ever a time to intervene?

Not all interventions fail: arguably the NATO bombardment of Serbian forces in Bosnia ended the bloodshed and produced the diplomatic solution in the form of the Dayton Accords. The Kosovo intervention seems to have averted a repeat of the Srebrenica massacre.

From these perspectives, the case against an armed attack in Syria seems overwhelming, even should it be established that the Assad regime used chemical weapons in a manner that without doubt constitutes a massive crime against humanity. Why? The conditions do not exist in Syria that might justify the claim that this is one of those exceptional cases where intervention although illegal is nevertheless legitimate.

It is true that the conflict has spillover effects of a serious character for Lebanon and Turkey, and that for this reason constitutional restrictions on UN authorisation may be put to one side. Nevertheless, the political opposition by Russia, and maybe others, makes it impossible to obtain Security Council
authorisation for a military attack. Beyond these considerations, there is no likelihood that the
contemplated military attack will do more than prolong the civil war in Syria or avert a humanitarian
catastrophe. There exists neither the political will nor the tactical capabilities to produce "a just peace"
in Syria.

Examining the pro-war momentum more closely strengthens further the argument against launching a
military attack against Syria. Some allege that the real pressures for intervention derive from rogue
sources in the West: making credible the "red lines" drawn by an American president in his role as
global proconsul; enforcing the Chemical Weapons Convention - although the widely ratified treaty
contains no provision calling for enforcement; or the related argument that a decisive military response
will deter future use of chemical and other weapons of mass destruction.

These arguments, at best, relate to world order, not to Syrian sovereign rights, the ethos of self-
determination, or even bringing the war to an end. After all they have endured, such reasoning although
piously propounded, is indifferent to the likely impacts upon the Syrian people or the region.

Recall that in the Kosovo intervention there seemed to by stronger grounds for thinking that an
intervention would be effective and worthwhile: Serbia was occupying Kosovo against the united
opposition of 90 percent of the Kosovar population; there was no sustained, ongoing civil war; the
European neighbours, with the exception of Greece, supported military action by NATO; and the
timing was consistent with avoiding an imminent repetition of the Srebrenica experience.

Keeping the war going

The more cynical interpretations are usually not featured in the mainstream, but occasionally are
acknowledged, as in the publication of Edward Luttwak's outrageous prescriptions for keeping the war
going as long as possible - because victory for either side would be bad for Washington's interests, and
those of Israel.

What Luttwak, a longtime hard power think tank strategist, brazenly urges is a totally immoral policy
of helping the rebels as long as they are losing, but if they start winning then to stop the assistance until
the regime again gets the upper hand.

With such reasoning an attack now would be sensible, as recent battlefield assessments suggested that
the balance was swinging in Assad's favour. Such an orientation is pleasing both for arms dealers and
those grand strategists who believe that Western interests are best served by ensuring that the main
countries in the Middle East become preoccupied and debilitated by the entropic effects of endless civil
strife - a policy that might be associated with "the revenge of defeated imperialists". The European
colonial control system have have collapsed, but its bloody sequel would make political independence
a worse ordeal than colonial subjugation. Since the overthrow of the Morsi government in Egypt, I
have heard frequent reference to the Arab proverb: "Better a thousand years of tyranny than a single
day of chaos."

What is particularly disturbing in the framing of the Syrian debate after the chemical attack of August
21 is the failure to explore diplomatic alternatives in a manner that could produce an end to the war.

The obvious way to do this would be to involve Iran and Russia in the process, possibly widening the
scope of a diplomatic process to include the establishment of regional peace in the Middle East. To
undertake such an approach with any reasonable prospect of a breakthrough would require an
unthinkable posture of strategic detachment, putting on the negotiating table a Middle East Nuclear
Weapons Free Zone and a just solution for the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Because such an orientation accords with decency, justice, and peaceful relations for the
region, it is utopian to even mention, and so the taboos on rational discourse blinker debate in
such a way as to make the war option seem the only alternative to passive navel-gazing. Would this diplomatic approach succeed? Who knows, but that it is worth trying as opposed to sliding towards widening the Syrian conflict should be obvious to all - except those who refuse the counsel of common sense, that is, the political leaders who preside in Washington, London, and Paris.

The ordeal of the Syrian people since early 2011 should be in the foreground of the current debate, but instead it is pushed to the shadowy background. Diplomacy is the most responsible way to respond to this ordeal, but undertaken in such a way as to demonstrate the real commitment of outsiders to the realistic parameters of compromise and accommodation, especially on the part of those responsible for so cruelly colonising and exploiting the region in the past.

At the moment it is precisely certain leaders in Britain and France - which together carved up the region after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, including Syria, in the infamous secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 - that are now most loudly beating the drums of war, with the unforgiveable complicity of the hegemonic regional successor operating out of Washington, DC.

The language of Sykes-Picot should not be forgotten in this period when the colonialists are taking their long-sought revenge for being humbled since at least the aftermath of the Suez War of 1956. After proclaiming their willingness to support the emergence of Arab countries, the text turns to discussing the coloured map of the region in which it was agreed "...that in the blue area France, and in the red area Great Britain, shall be allowed to such direct and indirect administrative control as they desire".

What we are witnessing in this latest phase of this horrific Syrian struggle are the cyclical tensions between a Western militarism of decay and the abortive legacy of empire that leaves societies torn asunder.

Richard Falk is Albert G Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University and Visiting Distinguished Professor in Global and International Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is also the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Palestinian human rights.

As Strikes on Syria Loom, Is US Ignoring a Diplomatic Track That Could Prevent More Violence?

Thursday, 29 August 2013 14:08 By Amy Goodman, Democracy Now! | Video [from David D]

Britain is set to introduce a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing military action in Syria as the United States and allies gear up for expected strikes on the Assad regime. The resolution condemns the Syrian government for allegedly using chemical weapons and authorizes "necessary measures for protecting civilians." Russia and China are expected to issue a veto, raising the prospect that a U.S.-led bombing could come through NATO. The Obama administration says military action in Syria would be aimed at responding to chemical attacks, not seeking regime change, but critics say similar claims were made at the outset of the NATO intervention in Libya. "There is no military solution," says Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies. "Extra assaults from the United States are going to make the situation worse, put Syrian civilians at greater risk, and not provide protection."
This is a rush transcript. Copy may not be in its final form.

Nermeen Shaikh: Britain is set to introduce a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing military action in Syria as the U.S. and allies gear up for expected strikes on the Assad regime. The resolution condemns the Syrian government for allegedly using chemical weapons, and authorizes, quote, "necessary measures for protecting civilians."

The resolution is being introduced as the Obama administration considers launching air strikes against Syria. The United States already has four Navy warships in the Mediterranean Sea with capacity to hit Syria with cruise missiles. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said forces are "ready" to launch strikes.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CHUCK HAGEL: President Obama has asked the Defense Department to prepare options for all contingencies. We have done that. And, again, we are prepared to exercise whatever option, if he decides to employ one of those options.

Amy Goodman: Speaking to a veterans’ group in Houston, Vice President Joe Biden said there could be no doubt as to who was responsible for deploying chemical weapons.

VICE PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: There is no doubt who was responsible for this heinous use of chemical weapons in Syria—the Syrian regime—for we know that the Syrian regime are the only ones who have the weapons, have used chemical weapons multiple times in the past, have the means of delivering those weapons, have been determined to wipe out exactly the places that were attacked by chemical weapons.

Amy Goodman: The U.S. and British push for military action against Syria is facing opposition. Russia and China are expected to veto the U.N. Security Council resolution. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, quote, "attempts at a military solution will lead only to the further destabilization," unquote, in Syria and the region. The Arab League has also declined to back a retaliatory military strike against Syria.

Earlier today, the U.N. special envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, said any U.S. military action would need to be approved by the U.N. Security Council. Brahimi said, quote, "International law says that military action must be taken after a decision by the Security Council."

Nermeen Shaikh: Meanwhile, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said a U.N. team investigating the alleged chemical attack must be given time to establish the facts about what happened last week when hundreds of civilians were killed on the outskirts of Damascus. Ban said, quote, "Give peace a chance. Give diplomacy a chance. Stop acting and start talking."

On Tuesday, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem categorically denied the regime used chemical weapons.

FOREIGN MINISTER WALID MUALLEM: [translated] They said that the Syrian army used this weapon, although I have denied this to Kerry. I say there is no country in the world that will use weapons of mass destruction against its people. I dare those who accuse our army to show the evidence that we used this weapon.

Amy Goodman: To talk more about Syria, we’re joined now by Phyllis Bennis, fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. She has written a number of books, including Challenging Empire: How People, Governments, and the UN Defy US Power. Her new piece in The Nation magazine blog is entitled "Moral Obscenities in Syria."

Phyllis, welcome back to Democracy Now! What evidence has the U.S. or Britain presented showing that the Syrian government definitively used chemical weapons in the attack in Ghouta?

Phyllis Bennis: So far, no evidence has been presented as to who carried out this attack. The reports that are coming—that will come from the U.N. inspectors will not include an investigation of who carried out the attack. Their mandate is quite narrow: just to find out what was used; was it indeed a chemical weapon, as is assumed but not certainly proven yet? But they will not be bringing in evidence of who carried it out. There was a report yesterday in Yedioth Ahronoth, the Israeli mass daily, claiming that it was Israeli officials who provided the Obama administration with what is considered by Obama's people, apparently, to be definitive proof that it was the regime in Syria. We have yet to see any of that information. So far, it is simply the assertion by Vice President Biden, by—implied by Secretary Kerry and others, that there is evidence. It has not been seen.

Nermeen Shaikh: And, Phyllis Bennis, what kind of legal justification then do you think that the Obama administration might use for this? And what kinds of options are available to him?
Phyllis Bennis: Well, you know, the decision to go to the Security Council, that the British are doing today, is, as you mentioned earlier, guaranteed to get a veto, certainly by Russia, likely by China, as well, although it's conceivable China could abstain, but they're likely to veto. They may not even get nine sufficient votes.

But what's dangerous here is that the United Nations Charter, which is the fundamental component of international law governing issues of war and peace, is very, very clear on what constitutes the legal use of military force. There is no question that having used chemical weapons—whoever used it—is a huge war crime. It's a specific violation of the chemical weapons treaty. It's also a war crime or potentially even a crime against humanity. The problem is, we don't know yet who is responsible.

The U.S. is hinting that it may use the Kosovo precedent of 1999 as a way to get around the prohibition—the absolute prohibition—on using military force unless it is immediate self-defense, which no one in Washington is claiming that the use of these horrible weapons in Syria somehow threatens the United States—so that's off the table—or that the Security Council agrees, which we know is not going to happen. The Kosovo precedent basically said in 1999, "We know we can't get support from the Security Council, Russia will veto; therefore, we won't ask the Security Council, we'll ask the NATO high command." So they went to NATO, and, what a surprise, the NATO high command said, "Yes, we approve the use of military force in Kosovo."

Now, the problem is twofold. One, NATO is a military structure. It's like a hammer and a nail. If you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail. If you're NATO, everything looks like it requires a military response. The other problem is legal. There is simply no legal justification that says that the NATO high command or any other organization has the right to determine the legality of the use of force other than the U.N. Security Council. So if that is the justification, it will stand in complete violation of international law.

Amy Goodman: Speaking Tuesday, White House spokesperson Jay Carney ruled out regime change as one of the goals of possible military intervention.

PRESS SECRETARY JAY CARNEY: The options that we are considering are not about regime change. They are about responding to a clear violation of an international standard that prohibits the use of chemical weapons.

Amy Goodman: That is White House spokesperson Jay Carney, Phyllis Bennis. So what is the goal of this attack? I mean, it is clear from what they're saying that they wouldn't be attacking the chemical weapons stockpiles, but the Syrian military, but they're saying they're not trying to take out the military, and they've said that within the rebels are al-Qaeda forces, as well. So what is the goal here?

Phyllis Bennis: Well, it seems that the goal is a political goal. It's to make a statement: "Oh, my god, I used a red line. I said there was a red line, I have to do something." And the only, quote, "something" that seems to be available is a military action.

So, they say it's not the goal of regime change, but if we recall, they said the same thing about Libya. The goal wasn't regime change; the goal was to degrade the capacity to attack civilians. Well, it may, but most military analysts that we're hearing from these days say it will not prevent future attacks.

 Crucially, this kind of a military strike, which military analysts today in The New York Times admitted, from the Pentagon, that it may well hit civilians, because they don't have very good control over cruise missiles about where they hit. It may well hit civilians. They're saying that even now, days before they use those missiles. The goal is one thing; the accomplishment is something else. And I think that the danger here is that there will be enormous numbers, potentially, maybe small numbers if people are lucky, but there will be civilian casualties. This is a political reality that can spin completely out of control and lead to massive escalations.

We have to look at the what-ifs. What if there is some kind of military retaliation by the Syrian government, by the Syrian military, against U.S. targets in Afghanistan, U.S. targets elsewhere in the region, in Kuwait, in Saudi Arabia? What if there's a retaliation against Israel? Do we really think that at that point the U.S. would say, "No, we're not going any further, because we said this was not about regime change"? These military actions have a habit of spiraling out of control. It's already an extraordinarily chaotic region, where there is a great deal of instability in a number of countries. Borders have become very porous. The attacks—the U.S.-NATO attacks on Libya led to the spreading of weapons throughout the region. The growing violence in Iraq is clearly linked to the attacks in Syria.

So, the notion that we are going to somehow escalate these attacks in Syria, rather than saying this is a moment when we desperately need diplomacy—we heard today that the U.S. just announced that the scheduled meeting between the U.S. and Russia, scheduled for today, the U.S. now said, "We want to delay that. We don't want to have it. We don't think this is a good time." This is exactly the time. We need to be talking to Russia, to Iran, to all
of the U.S. allies that are supporting the other side, to force the various parties to peace talks. There is no military solution. This is what Congresswoman Barbara Lee said yesterday, and it's absolutely true. There is no military solution. Extra assaults from the United States is going to make the situation worse, is going to put Syrian civilians at greater risk, not provide protection.

Nermeen Shaikh: Well, Secretary of State John Kerry said on Monday the Syrian government took too long to grant U.N. inspectors access to areas allegedly subjected to chemical weapons attacks last Wednesday. The Syrian foreign minister claims access was requested only on Saturday. I want to play a clip from Tuesday's U.N. press briefing, where reporter Matthew Lee questions the secretary-general's spokesperson, Farhan Haq, on the precise timing of the U.N.'s request to the Syrian government.

Matthew Lee: Can you say when, formally, legally, the request to go to al-Ghouta was made?

Farhan Haq: Well, I just read you that request, which is—

Matthew Lee: Right, which is the request.

Farhan Haq: —which is a clear request that was issued on Thursday. Angela Kane was immediately dispatched, and then she arrived in Damascus on Saturday.

Matthew Lee: Right.

Farhan Haq: So she was also stepping forward with that request. But, as you see, we made that request on the 22nd of August.

Matthew Lee: But is that the request? Press statement is the request?

Farhan Haq: It's not just a press statement, when we make these things. As the statement makes very clear, "a formal request is being sent by the United Nations to the Government of Syria in this regard."

Matthew Lee: And it arrived on Saturday in the form of Angela Kane? I just wanted you to respond to that.

Farhan Haq: It's a—that's basically a question of semantics. You heard exactly what the formal request is. It went out far and wide on Thursday. Angela Kane was conveying this, and she did arrive on Saturday.

Nermeen Shaikh: Phyllis Bennis, that was Matthew Lee questioning the secretary-general's spokesperson, Farhan Haq. Could you explain why the timing of the request to the Syrian government by the U.N. is significant?

Phyllis Bennis: It's important, Nermeen, because Secretary Kerry made a very strong point that one of the big reasons for believing and for claiming that it's indisputable that the Syrian regime is responsible for these horrific attacks is that they waited so long, they waited so that the evidence would be degraded, they waited so they could attack again. His focus was they waited, they waited, they waited—they waited too long. And, indeed, the U.S. claimed the U.N. inspector should actually be withdrawn, because they had waited too long and it was no longer a viable inspection operation.

What we now know is that the formal request—and remember, we're talking about diplomacy here. When a nation is at war, the idea that it's somehow going to respond to a public call that is essentially a press release is nonsense. Secretary Kerry knows as well as anyone else, Farhan Haq knows as well as anyone else, that governments respond to formal requests, formal letters, formal phone calls. It's not about semantics. It's about diplomatic formality. We need formal diplomatic talks. We don't just need the release of a statement saying that the United Nations will request. That's fine to tell the public that. That's a good thing. But that's not the same as the formal request being handed by Angela Kane, the U.N. disarmament chief, to her counterpart in Damascus and say, "Here is the request of the United Nations." She did that on Saturday, the request was answered positively on Sunday, and the inspectors went in on Monday. That's hardly an extensive delay, as Secretary Kerry claimed. So, it's really the collapse of one of the key components of Secretary Kerry's claim of why it's so obvious that the regime is responsible for these attacks.

Amy Goodman: Phyllis Bennis, what is the peaceful alternative to respond? And is it possible that rebels used, had access to chemical weapons?

Phyllis Bennis: It's certainly possible. Anything is possible. It's certainly possible the regime used these weapons. It's also possible that part of the rebels did. We know that some of the rebel armed forces came from defectors. We have no idea whether those defectors included some defectors that might have been involved in
Now it seems that they are more concerned about the impact on Iran of the political reality that the so-called red terror, being willing to accept detainees such as the Canadian, Maher Arar, to be interrogated and tortured in government, we should note, has also been very supportive of the United States in the so-called global war on quiet, kept the border stable, kept the level of violence very much down, despite all the rhetoric. That because the government in Syria has, frankly, been very helpful to Israel. It’s kept the occupied Golan Heights opposed, or at least was standing quiet, on the idea of using military force against the government in Syria, escalation of military force against Syria. You have new pressures now coming from Israel. Israel had been people like Eliot Engel, from the Republican side, led by John McCain, Lindsey Graham—are all calling for an So, the problem we now face is there's new pressures. Certainly there's pressures coming from Congress, from people like Eliot Engel, from the Republican side, led by John McCain, Lindsey Graham—are all calling for an escalation of military force against Syria. You have new pressures now coming from Israel. Israel had been opposed, or at least was standing quiet, on the idea of using military force against the government in Syria, because the government in Syria has, frankly, been very helpful to Israel. It's kept the occupied Golan Heights quiet, kept the border stable, kept the level of violence very much down, despite all the rhetoric. That government, we should note, has also been very supportive of the United States in the so-called global war on terror, being willing to accept detainees such as the Canadian, Maher Arar, to be interrogated and tortured in Syrian prisons at the request of the Bush administration. So, there's been reluctance from Israel to call for the overthrow of that regime because of their very realistic fears of what might come next, what might replace it. Now it seems that they are more concerned about the impact on Iran of the political reality that the so-called red
line that Obama established last year does not get a military answer. And in the Israeli view, if Iran doesn't see an attack on Syria, they will believe that they have the right to disobey U.S. red lines, as well, and that's unacceptable. So, all of this comes back to the question of Iran for the Israelis. For some in the United States—

Amy Goodman: Twenty seconds.

Phyllis Bennis: For some in the United States, that's the same position: It comes back to Iran. At the end of the day, there is no military solution. There have got to be negotiations. Striking Syria now will only make the situation worse for Syrians on the ground. It's a very dangerous move.

Amy Goodman: Phyllis Bennis, we want to thank you for being with us, fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies. Among her books, Challenging Empire: How People, Governments, and the UN Defy US Power. Her latest piece, we'll link to, at The Nation magazine blog, "Moral Obscenities in Syria." Stay with us.

response to Jim Dean's Democracy for America Syria questionnaire

DAVID DRUDING, WHY AGAINST US MILITARY INTERVENTION IN SYRIAN INSURRECTION/CIVIL WAR

Based on the current situation, do you support U.S. military intervention in Syria?

No.

Please take a moment to tell us why or explain your position.

Admittedly, I do not have access to the volumes of info that our President & Secretary of State do but some facts are clear. Al Qaeda affiliate groups are active within the Syrian resistance to Syria's Pres. al Saad. It is hard to see why the al Saad regime would choose to use chemical weapons at this time. Before the UN investigative team finishes its investigation it would be viewed by countries within and outside the UN as disrespectful of the UN efforts to make a decision before their findings have even been compiled as the press is indicating has been made by the US and England.

In addition the complex alliances and resulting repercussions from an aerial bombardment of Syria by the US and UK can only be guessed at. What response will Syria's ally Iran make? How will Syria's allies in Lebanon including Hezbollah respond? Will Israel be drawn into this regional conflict?

And the civilian Syrian population has just suffered 400 deaths and countless terrible injuries from this immoral, internationally recognized illegal use of chemical weapons. How many add'l deaths and injuries will this same civilian population suffer as a result of US/UK cruise missiles reigning down upon Syria to "punish" their president's regime?

One big take away from this tragic civil war can be that in the future our leaders might refrain from ultimatums where they reference "red lines crossed" after which the US & our allies would be obliged to go to war. Yes, there are recognized "red lines" which result in UN inquiries and legal actions being taken when war crimes have been committed but further inflaming an already volatile situation by unilaterally applying more deadly force that will impact the civilian population is NOT ever a constructive course to follow.
Let's take that energy and instead direct our efforts toward developing a ceasefire and generate a diplomatic solution to this civil war and the misery that has resulted.

**Do you have any other thoughts on Syria you'd like to share?**

as another man from England suggested, "Give Peace A Chance."

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Syrian Freedom Waves Seeks Your Help

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*The Progressive, Enders: Syrian Refugees*

*The Nation: Several Articles*

Goodman, *Democracy Now,* Presents Anand Gopal

Bachevich (and McGovern, Moore): Intervention in Syria Constitutional?

Cartalucci Against Western Intervention: Assad Not Falling, SFA Terrorist.

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**END SYRIA NEWSLETTER #6**

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