

The Syria Crisis: A Washington Institute Guide

Sep 10, 2013

As members of Congress consider President Obama's request to undertake military action against the forces of President Bashar al-Assad, The Washington Institute presents the following guide to help Americans better understand the crisis in Syria.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, our experts have conducted extensive research and have traveled frequently to the region to learn first-hand about the conflict's political, social, economic, and military realities. As a result, The Institute has become an important source of information for Administration officials, the Pentagon, intelligence agencies, and the media. The articles and media appearances below are culled from the Institute's most recent work. Topics covered include: [Why Assad used chemical weapons](#) ([#whydidassadusechemicalweapons](#)); [a look inside Syria's collapse](#) ([#dystopiansyria](#)); [the stakes for U.S. credibility](#) ([#uscredibilityisatstake](#)); [Iran's role](#) ([#theiranconnection](#)); [U.S. options for striking Syria](#) ([#targetsyria](#)); [the view from Israel](#) ([#israelinthecrosshairs](#)); [how Assad and his wife think](#) ([#insidethemindsofbasharandasmaalassad](#)); and [Hezbollah's game-changing role](#) ([#hezbollahthegamechanger](#)).

Why Did Assad Use Chemical Weapons? ()

Why would Bashar al-Assad flout international law and defy U.S. warnings to use chemical weapons against men, women, and children? And the incident in East Ghouta on August 21 was likely not the first.

TWI in the Media

Andrew J. Tabler: [The Situation Room](#) (<http://washin.st/12PZeIn>) (CNN) and [The Lead](#) (CNN) (<http://washin.st/1dqPH02>)

Jeffrey White: [NewsHour](#) (http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/july-dec13/syria2_08-21.html) (PBS)

[Implications of Possible Chemical Weapons Use in Syria](#) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/implications-of-possible-chemical-weapons-use-in-syria>) by [Michael Herzog](#) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/herzog-michael>), [Michael Knights](#) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/knights-michael>), [Andrew J. Tabler](#) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/tabler-andrew-j>), and [Jeffrey White](#) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/white-jeffrey>)

[Cutting Through the Fog of War in East Ghouta](#) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/cutting-through-the-fog-of-war-in-east-ghouta>) by [Andrew J. Tabler](#)

[Polarized International Reactions to Syrian Chemical Attack](#) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/polarized-international-reactions-to-syrian-chemical-attack>) by [David Pollock](#) ([/experts/view/pollock-david](#))

Dystopian Syria ()

Syria has effectively collapsed into a patchwork of spheres of influence dominated by different religious, ethnic and political groups. Who are these groups? Are they indigenous or foreign? What are their capabilities? What would be the impact of a U.S. raid?

TWI in the Media

Andrew J. Tabler: NewsHour (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2013/08/syrias-fragmented-future.html>) (PBS), The Lead (<http://thelead.blogs.cnn.com/2013/05/31/who-are-the-syrian-rebels/>) (CNN), All Things Considered (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=192277263>) (NPR)

Andrew J. Tabler, Jeffrey White, and Michael Eisenstadt (C-SPAN) (<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/EventsinSy>)

Is Syria Finished? (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/is-syria-finished>) (*The Mark News*) by Dennis Ross ([/experts/view/ross-dennis](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/ross-dennis))

The Day After Assad Wins: The Hard Truths About Post-War Syria. (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-day-after-assad-wins-the-hard-truths-about-post-war-syria>) (*Foreign Affairs*) by Andrew J. Tabler

Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United, or Extremist? (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syrias-military-opposition-how-effective-united-or-extremist>) by Jeffrey White, Andrew J. Tabler, and Aaron Y. Zelin ([/experts/view/aaron-y-zelin](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/aaron-y-zelin))

Beyond the Redline: U.S. Opportunities with Syria's Armed Opposition (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/beyond-the-redline-u.s.-opportunities-with-syrias-armed-opposition>) by Andrew J. Tabler, Jeffrey White, and Michael Eisenstadt ([http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/eisenstadt-michael](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/eisenstadt-michael))

Syria's Collapse and How Washington Can Stop It (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syrias-collapse-and-how-washington-can-stop-it>) (*Foreign Affairs*) by Andrew J. Tabler

(See also: Al-Qaeda Announces an Islamic State in Syria: (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaeda-announces-an-islamic-state-in-syria>) The Syrian Islamic Front: A New Extremist Force: (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-syrian-islamic-front-a-new-extremist-force>) How Syria's Civil War Became a Holy Crusade (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-syrias-civil-war-became-a-holy-crusade>); and International Jihad and the Syrian Conflict (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/international-jihad-and-the-syrian-conflict>))

U.S. Credibility Is at Stake ()

Would failure to punish Assad for using chemical weapons and crossing an American “red line” undermine U.S. credibility -- and power -- in the region and around the world?

TWI in the Media

Dennis Ross: Andrea Mitchell Reports (<http://video.msnbc.msn.com/andrea-mitchell/52819844#52819844>) (MSNBC)

U.S. Credibility on Iran at Stake in Syria (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/u.s.-credibility-on-iran-at-stake-in-syria>) (*Foreign Policy*) by Michael Singh ([/experts/view/singh-michael](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/singh-michael))

If Bombs Hit Damascus, Israel Looks to Tehran (<http://washin.st/19ZEm6E>) (*Tablet*) by David Makovsky ([/experts/view/makovsky-david](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/makovsky-david))

Syria's Humanitarian Crisis: A Moral and Strategic Issue. (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syrias-humanitarian-crisis-a-moral-and-strategic-issue>) by David Pollock and Andrew J. Tabler

Should the U.S. and Its Allies Intervene Militarily in Syria? (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/should-the-u.s.-and-its-allies-intervene-militarily-in-syria>) (*CQ Researcher*) by Andrew J. Tabler

The Iran Connection ()

Iran is the largest regional supporter of the Assad regime and has the most to lose if it falls. What are the implications of a U.S. strike for Tehran and for preventing an Iranian nuclear breakout?

Blocking Action on Syria Makes an Attack on Iran More Likely (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/blocking-action-on-syria-makes-an-attack-on-iran-more-likely>) (*Washington Post*) by Dennis Ross

Attacking Syria Is the Best Way to Deal with Iran (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/attacking-syria-is-the-best>)

[way-to-deal-with-iran](#) (*New York Times*) by Andrew J. Tabler

[Syria as a Spoiler in Iran's Foreign Policy \(http://washin.st/18YcyLw\)](http://washin.st/18YcyLw) by Mehdi Khalaji (</experts/view/khalaji-mehdi>)

Target: Syria ()

What can and should the United States target in a military strike against Assad's forces?

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Jeffrey White: NewsHour (http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/july-dec13/syria2_08-26.html) (PBS)

Michael Eisenstadt: All Things Considered (<http://www.npr.org/2013/09/03/218627294/what-a-cruise-missile-attack-on-syria-would-entail>) (NPR)

[Bombing Syria: What's the Goal? \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/bombing-syria-whats-the-goal\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/bombing-syria-whats-the-goal) (*Politico*) by Robert Satloff (</experts/view/satloff-robert>)

[Taking Punitive Military Action Against the Syrian Regime \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/taking-punitive-military-action-against-the-syrian-regime\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/taking-punitive-military-action-against-the-syrian-regime) by Jeffrey White

[All the Tyrant's Men: Chipping Away at the Assad Regime's Core \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/all-the-tyrants-men-chipping-away-at-the-assad-regimes-core\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/all-the-tyrants-men-chipping-away-at-the-assad-regimes-core) by Grace Abuhamad and Andrew J. Tabler

[Forget the Red Line and Engage in Syria \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/forget-the-red-line-and-engage-in-syria\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/forget-the-red-line-and-engage-in-syria) (*New York Daily News*) By David Schenker (</experts/view/schenker-david>)

[Striking Syria: Lessons from the Israeli Experience \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/striking-syria-lessons-from-the-israeli-experience\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/striking-syria-lessons-from-the-israeli-experience) by Michael Herzog

[Linking Targets to Political Objectives in Syria \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/linking-targets-to-political-objectives-in-syria\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/linking-targets-to-political-objectives-in-syria) by Chandler P. Atwood (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/chandler-p.-atwood>) and Michael Knights

(See also: [Syrian Measures to Mitigate the Effects of a U.S. Strike \(http://washin.st/15MKazb\)](http://washin.st/15MKazb) ; [Sending the Right Message in Syria: Lessons from Past Airstrikes: \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/sending-the-right-message-in-syria-lessons-from-past-airstrikes\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/sending-the-right-message-in-syria-lessons-from-past-airstrikes) [Arming the Syrian Rebels: Sliding Toward Iraq or Inching Toward Stability? \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/arming-the-syrian-rebels-sliding-toward-iraq-or-inching-toward-stability\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/arming-the-syrian-rebels-sliding-toward-iraq-or-inching-toward-stability))

Israel in the Crosshairs ()

Will the Assad regime or Hezbollah, its Lebanese proxy, strike Israel to retaliate for a U.S. attack?

TWI in the Media

David Makovsky [Morning Edition](http://www.npr.org/2013/09/04/218811161/how-much-does-israeli-security-enter-into-u-s-decision-on-syria) (<http://www.npr.org/2013/09/04/218811161/how-much-does-israeli-security-enter-into-u-s-decision-on-syria>) (NPR)

Israel's Next Front: Syria (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/israels-next-front-syria>) (*Tablet*) by David Schenker

Syria's Forgotten Front (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/syrias-forgotten-front>) (*New York Times*) by David Pollock

As Syria Crumbles, Israel Prepares for Instability (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/as-syria-crumbles-israel-prepares-for-instability>) by Michael Herzog

Inside the Minds of Bashar and Asma al-Assad ()

During his 14 years of journalism in Syria, Andrew J. Tabler gained unusual access to President Assad and his wife, Asma. He has provided western journalists with unique insight into how Syria's First Couple thinks.

TWI in the Media

Andrew J. Tabler: *The Today Show* (<http://www.today.com/news/syrias-first-lady-8C11035490>) (NBC), *The World* (<http://www.theworld.org/2013/09/assad-on-charlie-rose/>) (PRI), and *CNN* (<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/07/world/meast/syria-house-of-assad/>)

Hezbollah: The Game-Changer ()

Supported and directed by Iran, the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah has thrown its weight behind the Assad regime, shifting the military balance.

TWI in the Media

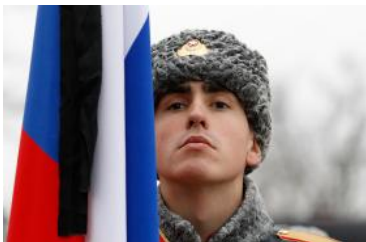
Matthew Levitt with Amb. Frederic C. Hof, *C-SPAN* (<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/314803-1>)

Hezbollah's Declaration of War in Syria: Military Implications (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollahs-declaration-of-war-in-syria-military-implications>) by Jeffrey White

The Hezbollah Connection in Syria and Iran. (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-hezbollah-connection-in-syria-and-iran>) (CFR.Org) by Matthew Levitt ([/experts/view/levitt-matthew](http://experts.view/levitt-matthew))

Hizb Allah's Gambit in Syria (<http://washin.st/15f6Wzq>) (*CTC Sentinel*) by Matthew Levitt and Aaron Y. Zelin ❖

RECOMMENDED



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[The Ukraine Crisis Isn't Over: Russia Has Lied About Troop Withdrawals Before](#)

Feb 16, 2022

♦ Anna Borshchevskaya

([/policy-analysis/ukraine-crisis-isnt-over-russia-has-lied-about-troop-withdrawals](#))



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

As China Thrives in the Post-9/11 Middle East, the US Must Counter

Feb 16, 2022

Jay Solomon

(/policy-analysis/china-thrives-post-911-middle-east-us-must-counter)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations

Feb 15, 2022

Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)

TOPICS

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Proliferation (/policy-analysis/proliferation)

U.S. Policy (/policy-analysis/us-policy)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Syria (/policy-analysis/syria)