



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

August 28, 2013

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I deeply respect your role as our country's commander-in-chief, and I am mindful that Syria is one of the few places where the immediate national security interests of the United States so visibly converge with broader U.S. security interests and objectives. Our nation's response to the deterioration and atrocities in Syria has implications not just in Syria, but also for America's credibility across the globe, especially in places like Iran.

Even as the United States grapples with the alarming scale of the human suffering, we are immediately confronted with contemplating the potential scenarios our response might trigger or accelerate. These considerations include the Assad regime potentially losing command and control of its stock of chemical weapons or terrorist organizations – especially those tied to al Qaeda – gaining greater control of and maintaining territory. How the United States responds also has a significant impact on the security and stability of U.S. allies in the region, which are struggling with the large exodus of Syrian refugees and the growing spillover of violence feeding off of ethnic and religious tensions. The House of Representatives takes these interests and potential consequences seriously in weighing any potential U.S. and international response in Syria.

Since March of 2011, your policy has been to call for a stop to the violence in Syria and to advocate for a political transition to a more democratic form of government. On August 18, 2012, you called for President Assad's resignation, adding his removal as part of the official policy of the United States. In addition, it has been the objective of the United States to prevent the use or transfer of chemical weapons. I support these policies and publicly agreed with you when you established your red line regarding the use or transfer of chemical weapons last August.

Now, having again determined your red line has been crossed, should a decisive response involve the use of the United States military, it is essential that you provide a clear, unambiguous explanation of how military action – which is a means, not a policy – will secure U.S. objectives

and how it fits into your overall policy. I respectfully request that you, as our country's commander-in-chief, personally make the case to the American people and Congress for how potential military action will secure American national security interests, preserve America's credibility, deter the future use of chemical weapons, and, critically, be a part of our broader policy and strategy. In addition, it is essential you address on what basis any use of force would be legally justified and how the justification comports with the exclusive authority of Congressional authorization under Article I of the Constitution.

Specifically:

- What standard did the Administration use to determine that this scope of chemical weapons use warrants potential military action?
- Does the Administration consider such a response to be precedent-setting, should further humanitarian atrocities occur?
- What result is the Administration seeking from its response?
- What is the intended effect of the potential military strikes?
- If potential strikes do not have the intended effect, will further strikes be conducted?
- Would the sole purpose of a potential strike be to send a warning to the Assad regime about the use of chemical weapons? Or would a potential strike be intended to help shift the security momentum away from the regime and toward the opposition?
- If it remains unclear whether the strikes compel the Assad regime to renounce and stop the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people, or if President Assad escalates their usage, will the Administration contemplate escalatory military action?
- Will your Administration conduct strikes if chemical weapons are utilized on a smaller scale?
- Would you consider using the United States military to respond to situations or scenarios that do not directly involve the use or transfer of chemical weapons?
- Assuming the targets of potential military strikes are restricted to the Assad inner circle and military leadership, does the Administration have contingency plans in case the strikes disrupt or throw into confusion the command and control of the regime's weapons stocks?
- Does the Administration have contingency plans if the momentum does shift away from the regime but toward terrorist organizations fighting to gain and maintain control of territory?

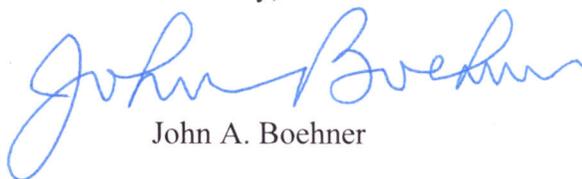
- Does the Administration have contingency plans to deter or respond should Assad retaliate against U.S. interests or allies in the region?
- Does the Administration have contingency plans should the strikes implicate foreign power interests, such as Iran or Russia?
- Does the Administration intend to submit a supplemental appropriations request to Congress, should the scope and duration of the potential military strikes exceed the initial planning?

I have conferred with the chairmen of the national security committees who have received initial outreach from senior Administration officials, and while the outreach has been appreciated, it is apparent from the questions above that the outreach has, to date, not reached the level of substantive consultation.

It will take Presidential leadership and a clear explanation of our policy, our interests, and our objectives to gain public and Congressional support for any military action against Syria. After spending the last 12 years fighting those who seek to harm our fellow citizens, our interests, and our allies, we all have a greater appreciation of what it means for our country to enter into conflict. It will take that public support and congressional will to sustain the Administration's efforts, and our military, as well as their families, deserve to have the confidence that we collectively have their backs – and a thorough strategy in place.

I urge you to fully address the questions raised above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John A. Boehner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being particularly prominent.

John A. Boehner