

IS THE RED LINE ONLY RHETORIC?: WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION
(WMDS), SYRIA'S CIVIL WAR, THE UNITED STATES FAILED FOREIGN
POLICY AND ITS UNINTENDED RAMIFICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

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The thesis evaluates Middle Eastern foreign policy of the George W. Bush and Obama administrations in the Syrian civil war and the utilization of chemical weapons in August 2013. The United States' response to the chemical attack on Damascus highlights an inability to deal with Middle East instability due to the Arab Spring's secular and religious conflict and long-term violent conflict further damages the American presence in this region.

The thesis utilizes a historical analysis of the U.S. relationship with Syria, to highlight problematic foreign policy constructions under the Bush and Obama administrations, as well as analysis of its political ramifications. The evidence reveals erosion of the U.S. as moral arbiter of geopolitical conflicts due to "red line" rhetoric, wherein foreign policy is unable to respond to the Assad regime and Russian chemical weapons dealmaking isolates the U.S. from its role as negotiator in international conflicts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. CHEMICAL WEAPONS: SCOPE, DEFINITIONS, AND CONCERNS.....	10
III. SYRIA-U.S. RELATIONS.....	30
IV. THE RHETORIC OF THE “RED LINE,” PROBLEMS WITH AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA, AND PROBLEMS FOR THE FUTURE.....	42
V. CONCLUSION.....	65
ENDNOTES.....	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY	73

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since September 11, 2001 the United States has been focused on the “War on Terror,” which has dominated foreign policy focus, especially in terms of the construction of international relations with individual countries within the Middle East and the political and military approach to non-state actors and Islamic jihadists in the region encompassing the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The problematic state-building techniques undertaken by President George W. Bush, economic troubles on the domestic front, has left the United States deficient in the construction of realistic and properly focused foreign relations attitudes. The lack of focus on instruments of foreign policy, outside of military force, has lead to the erosion of the nation’s perceived moral authority as a neutral arbiter of geopolitical conflicts, which has been vital in America’s emergence as a superpower in the twentieth century.

Since the end of World War II, the realm of international relations has been marked by a policy response of global cooperation with past presidential administrations, but as the geopolitical reality shifted and created a “unipolar balance of world power . . . [that has] become an entrenched fact[,]” which many analysts believed was a force for “global stability . . . because of the wide lead of the United States in so many categories of national power, rational second-tier states would ‘bandwagon’ with Washington rather than challenge it, either alone or by creating rival blocs.”¹ However, since the George

H.W. Bush Administration, many presidents have turned away from this policy of cooperation and arbitration based on international law and appropriate response and foreign nations, as a whole, began its own recalibration of the status of the United States in the global arena. For example, the United States, particularly in the 1990s, refused to pay obeisance to the United Nations, a global governing body that the nation was a founding member of since the end of World War II, and promptly decided to reverse its vote on inclusion into the International Criminal Court. Under the Obama Administration, some strides have been taken to thaw the decision of noninvolvement with the International Criminal Court, namely with the introduction of monetary sums to aid in the reward for capturing fugitives from justice, but there has been no movement to join the system itself.² The United States is facing a problem with legitimacy, especially in terms of its commitment to neutral global affairs when comparing its prior record to its current one: the “War on Terror,” finalization of the Iraq War, the current conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly in terms of combating Islamic terrorism in the form of Al Qaeda and other splinter cells in the region, a legacy of coercive interrogations at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, the abuses of detainees at Abu Gharib Prison, and domestic spying, in the name of homeland and global security.

Foreign policy aims are important to global and national security, not only in terms of the United States, but also our allies. Traditionally, the United States’ ideas of national identity have had a life of their own and cannot be reduced to material interests or institutional structures.³ The American political culture and conception of national self has been deeply rooted in the parameters of the founding of this country and the vast

distance between America, Europe and Asia have contributed to the sense of exceptionalism that has pervaded United States history⁴ and potential attitudes towards foreign policy, especially with the historical significance of European alliances and the potentiality for conflict in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

America's approach to foreign policy traditionally has been to detach from global diplomacy and remake the world in America's image⁵ and policy aims. The term detachment, for the definition of this paper, "refers to a pervasive sense that the United States should be actively engaged in global commerce but have 'as little political connections as possible' with other countries" which harkens back to the tenets espoused by George Washington and "in recent years, such detachment has assumed several forms[,] such as the aforementioned rejection of the International Criminal Court and "the Bush administration's penchant for unilateral action and selective regard for international law."⁶ A quick delineation between the term detachment and isolation is needed because detachment is not used, in the context of this paper, to replace isolationism. Isolationism is defined as a "disengagement from the outside world and is frequently (and erroneously) used to define early American foreign policy."⁷ While President Clinton and others have defined America's foreign policy as the enlargement of democracy, the conception causes problems, predominantly with knowing the limitations of the United States as measured in the values that guide the nation. Samuel P. Huntington has observed "America's Creed," which is defined as "liberty, equality, individualism, democracy, and the rule of law" is "difficult to reconcile in a complex modern state, let alone one that has attained global primacy."⁸

President Obama's administration has pursued foreign policy as soft power, the "ability to get what you want by attraction rather than coercion or payments, the nation would live up to its democratic principles and by its own example, seek to inspire political reforms overseas." Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton further called for a "multipartner" world, like-minded governments to carry the burden of a peaceful, stable, and democratic world order. Traditionally the United States has failed to remember that democracy means different things to different cultures. This is evident in the fact that China, Russia and other emerging governments do not see themselves as partners with the United States. To further this President Obama declared that diplomacy would be restored as an instrument of foreign policy, yet leading by example has meant prolonged responses to the security of our allies in dealing with the Middle East, specifically Syria.

The history of the United States' relationship with the Middle East is marked by continual conflict of Middle Eastern nations mediated by the United States, as well as direct conflict between the United States and Middle Eastern nations. International relations between the United States and individual Middle Eastern countries continues to be a problematic area of foreign policy, especially in terms of the relations with Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya. The proverbial red line seems to be a perennial metaphor espoused by the United States towards nations who violate international agreements, international laws, and human rights. The United States has had a long history of attempting to interact both peacefully and neutrally with various Middle Eastern nations, but in certain instances the will of the foreign government conflicts with the global community, creating an arena of American foreign policy that must balance national

interests with the well-being of the geopolitical landscape. These types of conflicts are fraught with unintended consequences and historical significance of the region itself, a history that is populated by the resentment of colonizing European forces and decades of a lost self-determination, creating a political and military morass that informs subsequent conflicts and alliance construction.

Another pressing problem informing the conflict within the Middle East and the United States' response to the region is the historical period of the Cold War and because of the rise of militant Islam. The history of this sect of Islamic belief:

had for years expressed ill will toward the West on several counts. For one thing, they resented the role of earlier Western leaders in redrawing the map of the Middle East after the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and after the two world wars of the twentieth century. Similarly, they strongly opposed the UN's creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the support given by Western leaders, especially those in Washington.”⁹

Another problem found within the resentment of the Western world is the belief that continued monitoring and incursion into the Middle East stemmed from ulterior motives on the part of Western powers, especially the United States, in terms of desiring the oil wealth of the region.¹⁰ During the Cold War, the resentment and simmering conflict in the Middle East was secondary to the larger threat of the Soviet Union and its incursion and expansion in other parts of the global landscape. For the most part, the only attention that the United States paid to the Middle East, outside of the Tehran hostage crisis, was the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan that lasted from December 1979 to February 1989.

The increasing tensions with the Middle East is furthered complicated by the rise of the Arab Spring movement and its expansion out of Egypt into the Arabian Peninsula,

particularly in terms of the governmental response to the threat of overthrow or restructuring of the political and structural apparatus of a given nation. The Arab Spring movement has caused severe destabilization in the political, social, and religious landscape in the Middle East, particularly in the nations of Egypt, Libya, and Syria, creating a potentially fractious and violent recapitulation of established repressive regimes found within the region. The region, Syria in particular, already has a long history of following in Egypt's footsteps because during the 1960s and 1970s, "the new regimes in Syria and Iraq resembled that of Egypt" in that "they were strongly authoritarian military regimes with organized bureaucratic and one-party political support, and they also depended upon patronage relationships between the leaders and favored clientele."¹¹ Syria's current political and social system is not only shaped by influences from Egypt and other geographically close Middle Eastern nations, but it is also influenced by Bashar al-Assad and the political and social influences of the family dynasty and the one party system.

In light of the violence occurring in the Syrian civil war and Bashar al-Assad's treatment of the Syrian people, the global community, specifically the United States, needs to closely monitor the regime's actions, within the treatment of the Syrian populace and other neighboring states. Syria is known to possess Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and the threat of Assad's deployment of chemical weapons against the Syrian people is an increasing concern to the global political landscape. The United States government needs to closely monitor Bashar al-Assad's movements of the Syrian stockpile of chemical weapons and to take a hard-line proactive role to prevent the

utilization of such weapons against the Syrian people or other populations within striking distance of Assad's regime, particularly in light of evidence that his administration has utilized these stockpiles, possibly on multiple occasions, and the fact that the destabilized region of Syria has become a host to member of non-state and Islamic terrorist groups actively pursuing outside agendas within the political and social tumult.

While President Bush drew a hardline stance over allies of the United States, in the war in Iraq, the attitude insulted President Bashar al-Assad. Ever increasing meddling by Syria into Lebanese affairs has angered the United States and further strained relations with Syria to the point that Syria now forms alliances with terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. Syria has a long history of sponsoring Hezbollah because in the mid-1980s both "Iran and Syria share credit for sponsoring these young revolutionaries" and:

from Syria's standpoint, the militant Shi'i party was a fortuitous instrument for preserving Syrian interests: supporting Hezbollah allowed Syria to maintain its alliance with Iran, gain the means for striking indirectly at both Israel and the United States, and keep its Lebanese allies, including the Amal movement, in line ("U.S.-Syrian Relations).

While Hezbollah and the Taliban have continually worked within the Syrian borders and with the Syrian government, the alliances have grown stronger over the ongoing "War on Terrorism" that the United States has been promoting. The result is an increasingly problematic area of foreign relations due to an influx of undetermined variables in which the government of the United States must balance the threat of global terrorism with the instability found within the Bashar al-Assad regime and the appropriate foreign policy response to the reports of chemical weapons usage, human rights violations, and the

future of the state of Syria itself. One of the problems found with the Obama administration's response to the Syrian civil war and chemical weapons usage in 2013 is the inability to measure a strong foreign policy response that balances the competing aims of the United States within the geopolitical landscape, including the response to chemical weapon usage, the veracity of Syrian reporting and destruction of chemical weapons, instability found within the regime itself, and allegations of human rights violations in conjunction to the continuing American mission of promoting antiterrorism missions within the region and ensuring global security from non-state actors.

The scope of this paper is the study of the failed foreign policy of the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama in state-building which correlates with an erosion of the perceived moral authority of the United States as a neutral arbiter of geopolitical conflicts, particularly in the construction of "red-line" rhetoric. An insufficient response of the United States foreign policy towards the Middle East exists, in terms of the U.S.'s response of a "red line" ultimatum to the threat of Assad regime's use of chemical weapons in Syria. In light of the violence occurring the Syrian civil war and Bashar al-Assad's treatment of the Syrian people, the global community, specifically the United States, needs to closely monitor the regime's actions. Syria is known to possess Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and the threat of Assad's deployment of chemical weapons against the Syrian people is an increasing concern to the global political landscape. The United States government needs to closely monitor Bashar al-Assad's movements of the Syrian stockpile of chemical weapons and to take a hard line proactive role to prevent the utilization of such weapons against the Syrian people or

other populations within striking distance of Assad's regime. While coalition-building in the Middle East is beneficial to the safety of the U.S. and their alliances, it has also strained relations in parts of the Middle East. Syria's close ties to terrorists groups, such as Hezbollah highlights the problematic nature of the Syrian civil war because the loss of Bashar al-Assad's regime will create a power vacuum in which terror networks can flourish and the cache of chemical weapons cannot fall into the hands of these individuals.

CHAPTER II

CHEMICAL WEAPONS: SCOPE, DEFINITIONS, AND CONCERNS

For the scope of this paper, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's definition of chemical weapons will be utilized, which delineates chemical weapons as "a chemical substance, which is intended for use in military operations to kill, seriously injure or incapacitate people because of its physiological effects."¹² The discovery of the current arsenal of chemical weapons is reliant on a variety of sources, particularly in terms of the search for new chemical compounds in scientific research that yielded toxic results that would be weaponized in order to create cheaper offensive and defensive weapons. Furthermore, the classification of these agents falls within a spectrum that contains both chemical and biological weapons, with some agents, such as botulinum toxin and ricin, being considered "chemicals of biological origin."¹³ The specific delineation of the source classification of chemical weapons is important due to the issue of the variety of agents stockpiled by most modern nations and the differential affects of these agents on both military and civilian populations. The classification systems devised by the global scientific community influences the detection and treatment abilities of various global investigative and monitoring agencies to accurately and quickly identify instances of chemical weapons attacks and the agents used in these events. The final mode of general

classification is the identification of agents “according to their mode of action or by the time of they remain active in the environment (persistence) and lethality.”¹⁴

An introduction into chemical weapons also necessitates a general history of the twentieth century, in which the high points of the discovery of these chemical compounds and known chemical weapons attacks is necessary to the delineation of the spread of proliferation. The resulting effects of the rapid proliferation of chemical weapons is obtainment of chemical weapons by several countries in the Middle East at the end of the twentieth century, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The creation of these agents occurred through a disparate variety of sources, including the accidental effects of research and deployment in Germany during World War I and World II and also by active research throughout the twentieth century, although all of these discoveries are used in warfare against enemies, whether real or perceived threats. The beginnings of the proliferation of chemical weapons begins in the early twentieth century in Western Europe, particularly during the conflict of World War I. During World War I, the period of 1914 to 1918, approximately 1,300,000 people, both military personnel and civilians, suffer from chemical gas injuries and around 90,000 people die from the various attacks.¹⁵ During the conflict of World War II, the paranoia surrounding the utilization of chemical weapons, particularly poisonous gas, highlights a Allied drive to develop countermeasures and their own offensive and defensive weapons of the same caliber. Benito Mussolini’s Italian campaign to conquer Ethiopia employed the use of chemical weapons, particularly mustard gas, by aerial spraying.¹⁶ Japan invades Manchuria and, in 1936, causes the capitulation of the region through a massive chemical weapons

campaign, wherein evidence of “mustard gas, phosgene, and hydrogen cyanide” on Chinese populations is noted by Allied intelligence.¹⁷ During the same period German chemical laboratories produced the first nerve agent, Tabun.¹⁸ By the 1960s, certain Middle Eastern countries have expanded their weapons repertoire to include chemical weapons and in the period from 1963 to 1967, the Yemeni civil war, Egypt utilized phosgene and mustard bombardment against Yemeni forces in support of the South Yemeni forces.¹⁹ One of the most famous incidents of chemical weapons attacks in the region of the Middle East is Saddam Hussein’s utilization of the Iraqi chemical stockpile during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) in which he ordered the use of mustard and nerve agents against Iran and Iraqi Kurds.²⁰

In terms of the global response to chemical weapons, criticism and prohibition of these asymmetrical weapons began early on in the twentieth century, particularly after the devastation of World War I. European powers derided the use of chemical weapons on military and civilian populations and worked to prevent both another world war and the continuance of chemical weapons production for use in armed conflict. One of the original documents dealing with the usage of chemical weapons is the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which “outlawed the initiatory use of both chemical and biological weapons.”²¹ The another governing document dealing with the usage of chemical weapons is the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and Their Destruction (1972), which states global “prohibition of the development, production, and stockpiling of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and their elimination, through

effective measures, will facilitate the achievement of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”²² One of the problems with this convention is the fact that many of nations, outside of the United States, European countries, and Russia have not signed onto the agreement. Further governing agreements include the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) which outlaws the production, stockpiling and use of these weapons, but there are countries that still have access to these WMDs and certain countries in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya have not destroyed their holdings of chemical weapons.²³ The chemicals that have been weaponized are broken down into schedules, and this classification system is used to denote whether the agent has any practical application within mainstream society.

Furthermore, a complicating matter in the issue of chemical weapons usage in the current geopolitical landscape is the fact that some Middle Eastern countries, such as Syria, Iraq, Kurdistan, have used these weapons against their own people. The instances of attacks within the borders of a single nation brings in another dimension to the problematic nature of warfare and civil unrest, namely the violation of human rights and the possibility of genocide. Genocide, or “the systematic mass killing of a particular group of unarmed people,”²⁴ and the term was adopted in 1943 by “Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin”²⁵ with the intelligence coming out of Germany surrounding Adolf Hitler’s systematic genocide of the Jews and other groups. By 1948, the global community had denounced genocide and at this point “genocide [becomes] a legal term with a lengthy legal definition contained in the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (or the Genocide Convention).”²⁶ The

convention explicitly lists the parameters of events that are considered genocide and expand upon the Lemkin definition. By the governing United Nations document, genocide is considered as acts:

committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) killing members of the group;
- (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.²⁷

The generation of the guiding regulations surrounding the prohibition of genocide highlights an emerging arena of global conflict that has punctuated the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One of the problems with the United Nations' definition of genocide is that, while effectively addressing the type of genocide characterized by the Holocaust and other incidents of ethnic, religious, racial, and nationalistic cleansing that was endemic during the twentieth century, the definition does not include genocide based on the targeting of social and political groups. In terms of some of the recent conflicts involving genocide, such as the utilization of chemical weapons as massacring agents, exemplified in the Iran-Iraq War and Syria. Chemical weapons were addressed after World War II, yet the use of these weapons can fall under the category of genocide along with the classification of prohibited weapon technology utilized during war. The current tension and unrest in the Middle East, especially with the movement and expansion of the Arab Spring, a focus on the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), specifically

chemical weapons, and the utilization of genocide as a repressive state action has to be undertaken in the analysis of nation-confined and regional civil wars.

The signing of the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention bans the manufacture, stockpiling or transfer of chemical weapons, making the destruction of all chemical weapons problematic due to the intricacies of proper disposal. While it is far easier to list those who have not signed this agreement, for the purpose of this paper it is relevant to state that the Syrian Arab Republic has not signed. The Russian Federation signed on 13 January 1993, Libya to this date has not signed, Iraq has not signed, and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed on 13 January 1993.²⁸ One of the problematic areas with the issue of Syria's non-signatory status on the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention is the fact that the nation did sign the 1925 Geneva Protocol, highlighting an area in which the country's use of chemical weapons against its civilian population would violate the preceding binding document. While the safe destruction of these weapons for those who have signed and are complying with the agreement is of the utmost concern in the United States and elsewhere since any leakage could contaminate the drinking water, airborne contamination with the incineration of these chemicals is also a problem, for vegetation along with animal or human contact.

In order to highlight the problematic nature of the Bashar al-Assad regime's usage of chemical weapons on the Syrian people, an understanding of the nature of these weapons is needed. Although the incidence of chemical agents has already been proven, the danger inherent in the stockpiles of such weapons in the region of the Middle East is fraught with continued questions to the legitimacy of the foreign policy attitudes of the

Obama administration towards actual Syrian disarmament. A multitude of variables regarding the Syrian chemical weapons program still exists, even with the deal brokered by the Russian Federation, including questions of the breadth of the cache of chemical weapons, whether all of the weapons and agents are being yielded to the international community, if there is the existence of other Syrian weapons in the hands of non-state terrorist groups, and the viability of American foreign policy concerning the utilization of a “red-line” rhetoric that impedes rapid response to allegations of genocide through the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war. An explication of the classification system of chemical agents and the relative symptoms of agents of known possession in Syria is crucial to substantiating the American response and further blowback that could occur due to United States action in the region.

Overall, chemical weapons are divided into four categories: blister agents that destroy exposed skin tissue (e.g., mustard gas and lewisite); blood agents that, when inhaled, block oxygen circulation within the body (e.g., hydrogen cyanide and cyanogen chloride); choking agents that inflame the bronchial tubes and lungs, possibly causing asphyxiation (e.g. phosgene and chlorine); and nerve agents that short circuit the nervous system, resulting in respiratory failure and death within minutes (e.g. tabun, sarin, soman, and VX).²⁹

In grading these types of agents, the most lethal subtype of chemical weapons are nerve agents, due to the relative low amount of agent needed to incapacitate and kill a large population. Furthermore, the Chemical Weapons Convention also stipulates the use of multi use agents depending on the event in which they are utilized. For example, most riot and police grade teargas “are considered chemical weapons if [they are] used during war.”³⁰ In terms of creating such agents, it is incredibly easy to obtain the chemicals needed to manufacture chemical weapons, as some of the most popular poison gases

utilize chemicals found in the pesticide, fertilizer, and pharmaceutical industries through a variety of means, both legally and illegally. Mustard agents have ingredients with dual use purposes as lubricant additives, pen ink, pesticides, dyes, insecticides, synthetic resin, and other applications.³¹ Chemicals used to manufacture sarin have alternative purposes in flame retardants, gasoline additives, paint solvents, and ceramics, to name a few other manufacturing sources.³² Tabun's chemical makeup includes chemical utilized in gasoline additives, detergents, hydraulic fluids, pesticides, and insecticides.³³ Soman can be, at least partially, manufactured from chemicals found in lubricant additives and cleaning and disinfectants for food processing equipment.³⁴ Finally, VX, one of the most insidious chemical weapons, involves utilizing chemicals also used for organic synthesis, lubricant oils, insecticides, and pyrotechnics.³⁵ On top of this worrisome availability of chemicals to create chemical weapons from scratch, is the ease with which these agents can be manufactured with commercially available equipment. According to most governmental reports, "to set up a poison gas production line, . . . [a country] would need reactors and agitators; chemical storage tanks, containers, and receivers; heat exchangers or condensers for temperature control; distillation or absorption columns to separate the chemical compounds; valves, multi walled piping, and pumps to move chemicals between reactors and other containers."³⁶ All in all, the chemical weapons facility structure would be identical to a pesticide plant or other manufacturing hub, hence the problematic nature of the United States-Libyan relationship in which American forces and intelligence attempting to find the Libyan chemical weapons hub during the 1980s.

One of the problems with the delineation of chemical weapons is the preponderance of agents that can be classified as weaponized toxins that fall under the Chemical Weapons Convention. In order to facilitate a focused discussion of chemical weapons in the context of Syria, the paper will focus on the known chemical caches under the Bashar al-Assad regime, with a particular focus on the chemical agents postulated in the chemical weapons attack that preempted any smaller-scale American foreign relations response to the Syrian civil war. Syria was able to stockpile weapons through a variety of sources, including trade relations with the Soviet Union and Russian Federation, specifically after the collapse of the government in 1991. According to open United States intelligence documents, Syria is known to possess large stockpiles of nerve agents, particularly sarin and VX, as well as mustard gas, but no official full report of the chemical weapons stockpile is open for the public. According to most reports, Syria does not have the full capability to create its own chemical weapons from raw materials and instead relies on other countries to supply the starters for these chemical agents. Most intelligence highlights three major sources for the Syrian chemical weapon stockpile and “Syria ‘probably’ first began stockpiling in 1972 or 1973, when Egypt gave the country a small number of chemicals and delivery systems”³⁷ before the Yom Kippur War. Further sources of chemicals have come from the Soviet Union and in 1994 Boris Yeltsin dismisses Anatoly Kuntsevich, the military head of the committee on biological and chemical weapons, for “helping to arrange an illegal delivery of about seventeen hundred pounds of nerve gas precursor agents to Syria and for planning a much bigger shipment.”³⁸ Meanwhile, previously the Soviet Union had sent shipments of chemical

agents to Syria, along with equipment and training, creating an unstable Middle Eastern country with the means to continue its stockpile of chemical weapons.³⁹ Furthermore western companies are also known to have shipped chemical weapons starter agents to Syria, further populating the cache, especially in terms of the amount of nerve agents that the country possessed in various locations.⁴⁰ By 2013, Syria was deemed to have one of the largest chemical weapons stockpiles in the world and according to a French intelligence report during the same year, intelligence notes that Syria possesses “more than 1,000 metric tons of chemical warfare agents and precursor chemicals” with the stockpile including “several metric tons of sarin, which represents the bulk of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile. Syria also has several hundred metric tons of mustard agent in ready-to-use form and several tens of metric tons of VX.”⁴¹ The sarin and VX are stored in binary form for readiness to load into munitions and, as of 2013, was actively researching a new nitrogen-based mustard blister agent and a nerve agent more deadly than sarin.⁴² Syria had created a sophisticated dissemination system for its chemical weapons, including the capability to strike multiple targets at once and “Syria possesses ‘several hundred’ Scud B, Scud C, Scud D, and SS-21 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), all of which are mobile.”⁴³ Furthermore, the Syrian government also possesses warheads with the capability of attaching these chemical weapons to the missiles, allowing the Bashar al-Assad to strike multiple targets in the Damascus area within a short period of time. Furthermore, the government has also obtained BM-21 multiple rocket launchers, creating an ability to “deliver sarin, mustard agent, and VX” up to fifty kilometers from its firing location and “rocket launchers. when massed, can be

used to rapidly achieve lethal doses of non-persistent agents in a concentrated area.”⁴⁴

The ability to quickly transport these missile systems, combined with the expansive nature of the chemical weapons depots, highlights the ability of Assad regime to effectively utilize chemical weapons against civilian populations based on the movements of the Syrian rebel groups throughout the areas surrounding Damascus, Homs, and Aleppo.

In order to highlight the issue of Syria’s chemical weapons, a discussion on the chemical makeup and effects of the known agents is necessary, especially with a delineation of these agents according to two types of classification systems: schedule classification and the aforementioned type classification. In the schedule classification, the purpose is to highlight the the actual usage of the chemicals and chemical precursors to organize them into categories based on actual usage and if any usage outside of the generation of chemical weapons exists. A schedule I classification denotes that there is no legitimate use for the chemical agent and this schedule includes Ricin, Lewisite (an organoarsenic compound and blister agent), sulfur mustards, and nitrogen mustards.⁴⁵ Lewisite was specifically made for warfare during World War I, although the production is difficult and lengthy and there is no other usage for this chemical outside of production for weapons technology and deployment during active conflicts to incapacitate a deemed hostile population. Due to the length it takes to make Lewisite and the difficulty involved and the lack of documentation of Syria having this compound it will not be discussed in this paper, but it highlights how the schedule I list of chemicals are deemed solely for military usage as chemical weapons.⁴⁶ However, within schedule I, the sulfur and

nitrogen mustards have been cited within the Syrian chemical stockpile with increasing accuracy, especially since 2013, and intelligence agencies, including the United States, Israel, Great Britain, Russia, and France, have noted the massive amount of chemical agents of this type and the active research into expanding the known types of mustard agents within Syria. Furthermore, all nerve agents are considered to a part of the schedule I classification, as all of these nerve agents were originally created in laboratory settings for national defense and military weaponry.⁴⁷

Schedule II chemicals and chemical precursors are separate from Schedule I agents due to the fact that there is limited outside commercial production of these chemicals.⁴⁸ As noted earlier in this chapter, some of the most prevalent chemical weapons have some chemical precursors that are easily obtainable in a commercial format. While many of the chemical weapons have these types of chemical ingredients, the final chemical structure must be predominantly found within one of the three schedules. In other words, although chemical found in Schedule I may have some minor ingredients that have genuine commercial value, the final chemical structure cannot be utilized in the commercial world, hence precluding it from schedule II or III. Within schedule II, are chemical agents including 3-Quinuclidinyl benzoate, better known as BZ.⁴⁹ The final classification level, schedule III, contains some of the more well known poison gases, such as phosgene, cyanogen chloride, and hydrogen cyanide.⁵⁰ The schedule classification of the Chemical Weapons Convention also monitors the production of organophosphates, which are utilized in the production of several types of chemical weapons, most notably nerve agents. The schedule classification also sets the

guidelines for the amount of these types of chemicals allowed and the amount at which these stockpiles must be reported to the necessary reporting organizations within the Chemical Weapons Convention and prohibits the manufacture of such chemicals beyond the amount stipulated in the Convention agreement.⁵¹

The second type of categorization of chemical weapons, previously alluded to in this chapter, is the categorization of agents based on the symptoms and injuries associated with their deployment. The Chemical Weapons Convention has nine different categories: choking agents, blister agents, blood agents, nerve agents, riot control agents, mustard agents, psychotomimetic agents, toxins, and a final category. possible CW agents, that encompasses emerging chemical weapons that blend biological and chemical weapons or created through biotechnology.⁵² The classification system based on symptomatic effects is an aid in the identification process in the aftermath of a chemical weapons attack, but in the case of Syria, the identification is extremely difficult due atypical symptoms found within the documented chemical attacks in 2013. Furthermore, unsubstantiated reports of earlier chemical weapons usage, notably in December 2012, highlight the relative problematic usage of chemical weapons by the al-Assad regime. Overall, most analysts note that the atypical symptoms are “the result of Assad’s military using an atypical mix of chemical arms, so-called ‘riot control agents,’ and conventional munitions on the battlefield” and a defected Syrian chemist stated “that this blending of weapons was done, in part, to create a confusing blend of symptoms — and mask their source.”⁵³

One of the most important chemical agents found in the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile is the high amount of nerve agents noted by various reporting countries.

Organophosphate (OP) nerve agents are specifically designed and utilized in military use to cause incapacitation or death and they are extremely acute in their toxicity. One of the potential reasons for the Syrian choice to rapidly acquire a large stockpile of organophosphate nerve agents is the lethality of these weapons. According to the Chemical Weapons Convention, nerve agents are designed in such a way that they “are stable and easily dispersed, highly toxic and have rapid effects both when absorbed through the skin and via respiration.”⁵⁴ Underneath the heading of organophosphate nerve agents is a swath of chemicals that all create extremely debilitating symptoms and potential mortality are: Tabun (GA), Sarin (GB), Soman (GD), GF, and VX.⁵⁵ The relative volatility of these nerve agents serves as one of the catalysts of a schedule I determination because of their ability to work on both the respiratory tract and absorption through the skin, depending on the thickness of the agent. For example, VX is typically seen as “an involatile oil and is therefore classified as belonging to the group of persistent CW agents” because it works through prolonged skin absorption, while Sarin is “at the opposite extreme, being an easily volatile liquid . . . and mainly taken up through the respiratory organs.”⁵⁶ The rest of the organophosphate nerve agents can be used in either format and the addition of a thickener can cause soman, tabun, and GF to be considered a persistent chemical agent.⁵⁷ While all of these are nerve agents, the toxicity level in these aging agents still causes concern in the dissemination of said chemical weapons due to the fact that even accidental dissemination can cause contamination of the surrounding “ground for several weeks because of their greater stability with respect to water and their much lower volatility.”⁵⁸ In other words, the use of nerve agents within the Syrian

landscape makes the potentiality of recurring symptomatic victims higher due to the inability to cleanse the area of the nerve agent and therefore these agents have long-lasting effects.

As far as the symptoms of nerve agents, the toxic actions inhibit acetylcholinesterase, which breaks down acetylcholine. These transmitters in the brain control the smooth muscle, cardiac muscle, and exocrine function.⁵⁹ The problem with poisoning by nerve agent is dependent on the transmission source, whether by inhalation or skin absorption. Overall, the threat of these nerve agents is the relative inhalation and the concentration in which a nerve agent is deployed.⁶⁰ In small concentrations, nerve agents cause “increased production of saliva, a running nose, and the feeling of pressure on the chest” along with miosis of the pupil that effects short-range vision and causes pain with any attempt to focus vision, headaches, and general symptoms of tiredness, slurred speech, nausea, and hallucinations.⁶¹ The symptoms of moderate poisoning by nerve agents can also include: bronchoconstriction, overproduction of mucous secretions (which causes shortness of breath and coughing), vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramping, involuntary urination, sweating and severe drooling.⁶² Severe poisoning results in the symptoms of moderate poisoning combined with muscular weakness, local tremors, convulsions, loss of consciousness and cardiac arrhythmia.⁶³ One of the problems with a population of exposed civilians is that the concentration of the chemical weapon may be so severe that they die before the individuals are symptomatic, making the identification of the chemical weapon extremely difficult. The cause of death is respiratory failure due to the nerve agents' usage as an acetylcholinesterase inhibitor.⁶⁴

One of the utilized chemical agents in the Syrian stockpile was sarin, a worrisome issue with the civil unrest in the country due to the fact that it was the chemical weapon used in the chemical attacks in “the Damascus suburb of al-Ghouta on August 21, in Khan al-Assal near Aleppo in March 2013 and in Saraqeb near the northern town of Idlib last April.”⁶⁵ Sarin is classed is one of the worst chemical weapons in existence and denotes the al-Assad regime’s intent to cause mass deaths and casualties in order to repress the civil unrest and maintain the legitimacy of the regime. Isopropyl methyl phosphonofluoridate or Sarin is readily soluble in organic solvents and can be disseminated by ton containers (TC), rockets (R), bombs (B), cartridges (C) and projectiles (P) and its adaptability is one reason why it is the most commonly used chemical weapon. Sarin and Tabun are more toxic, volatile, and more resistant to hydrolysis and Sarin is more volatile than Tabun.⁶⁶ Sarin is the most studied of the three nerve agents due to its high volatility and rapid dispersion, along with the fact that it is an inhalation hazard instead of an ingestion or skin absorption hazard. The introduction into the human body is less perceived than other agents and can be absorbed through the conjunctiva of the eye and upper gastrointestinal tract along with inhalation.⁶⁷ Upon contact sarin causes constriction of the pupils, pain and dim vision, bronchoconstriction, wheezing, increase in mucus production and labored breathing, these are all dependent on exposure and can vary in severity.⁶⁸ The time of onset can vary in the route of exposure to within minutes after inhalation or up to forty-five minutes after ingestion to two to eighteen hours after application to the skin. Acute exposure can last from one to six days

and during recovery symptoms may intermittently recur. Severe exposure causes death, the ultimate outcome for the intended use.⁶⁹

Another source of Syria's chemical weapons is the preponderance of mustard agents, in both sulfur and nitrogen based formats. Originally, mustard agents were known as blistering agents due to the effects of the chemical compounds on the skin.⁷⁰ Further reevaluation of these agents has led to a reclassification as blistering and tissue-injuring agents due to the added effects of "severe damage to the eyes, respiratory system and internal organs."⁷¹ Mustard agents are the most well known chemical weapons because of the utilization of these early agents during World War I and production and stockpiling of these agents spread out after World War II to include the Middle East.⁷² From 1979 to 1988, mustard agents were extensively used during the Iran-Iraq war and highlights the favoritism of these agents by state apparatuses because these chemical weapons result in a "medical system [being] overloaded with numerous victims who require long and demanding care."⁷³ In a pure state, mustard agents are odorless, possesses a low volatility, and very stable during storage and "can cause injury to the respiratory system in concentrations which are so low that the human sense of smell cannot distinguish them."⁷⁴ According to most sources:

In the form of gas or liquid, mustard agent attacks the skin, eyes, lungs and gastro-intestinal tract. Internal organs may also be injured, mainly blood-generating organs, as a result of mustard agent being taken up through the skin or lungs and transported into the body. The delayed effect is a characteristic of mustard agent. Mustard agent gives no immediate symptoms upon contact and consequently a delay of between two and twenty-four hours may occur before pain is felt and the victim becomes aware of what has happened. By then cell damage has already been caused.⁷⁵

One of the relative positive aspects of mustard agents is the fact it has a high concentration threshold for causing fatality and on the average about fifty times more mustard agent concentration is needed to cause death when compared to nerve agents.⁷⁶ The large Syrian stockpiles of mustard agents and research into producing new types of these agents highlights the resistance of the al-Assad regime to both outside interference and a willingness to use long-lasting chemical weapons to devastate any political and social resistance.

Another chemical weapon present in the Syrian cache is VX and is one of the most dangerous agents in the classification of toxic agents. Before VX is prepared for dispersal, “it has the viscosity of motor oil and at one stage in the manufacture the appearance of frozen milk” but once released “the slowly evaporating VX turns the target area into a virtual no-man’s-land for days and probably longer; the gas can be absorbed by vegetation and remain lethal.”⁷⁷ The reason that VX is a more dangerous chemical weapon is the length of toxicity and lethality because “militarily, VX is defined as a persistent agent: GB, which evaporates at about the same speed as water, is listed as a non-persistent agent [and] both are believed to be equally toxic.”⁷⁸ One of the problems with VX being a part of the Syria chemical weapons stockpile is the fact that it is about ten times more lethal than sarin and its viscosity makes it an ideal persistent chemical agent in which civilian populations would be consistently sickened by its use.⁷⁹

3-Quinuclidinyl benzilate, better known as BZ, developed by the U.S. Military for use in warfare, although all stockpiles of it were supposedly destroyed in 1989. Agent 15 was developed by Iraq for the same use and is either identical to BZ or closely related to

it. Both BZ and Agent 15 are glycolate anticholinergic compounds related to atropine and other deliriant. One of the problems with treatment for BZ and Agent 15 poisoning is the fact that the agent mimics some of the same symptoms of nerve agent poisoning and the regular treatment protocol for nerve agents include the injection of atropine can exacerbate the symptoms and hasten death.⁸⁰ These are psychoactive incapacitating agents and BZ is stable in most solvents, with a half life of three to four weeks in moist air, even heat producing munitions can disperse it, it is persistent in water, soil and most surfaces.⁸¹ Recreational use is nonexistent due to the unpleasant effects. BZ is odorless and nonirritating with onset of symptoms several hours after contact, it appears Agent 15 has the same properties, as the CDC and reliable Syrian sources believed it was used in Syria in December 2012.⁸² BZ and Agent 15 are best used as inhalants and do not have a successful skin absorption rate. Death occurs at high exposure levels and since its relatively long dispersal rate of the agent in the soil and stable weather conditions has a long duration, continual exposure occurs with resulting organs failure due to a failure of organ system response to normal bodily chemical production.⁸³

The chemical versatility of these warfare agents causes many nations to over mix these chemicals, creating lethal doses that are preferred by countries and non-state actors as retaliatory devices. One of the ongoing problems with the production and stockpiling of chemical weapons is the desire to create more lethal agents or to mask the identity of the chemical weapons utilized. To these ends, many state actors, such as Syria, deploy multiple types of chemical weapons or mask these weapons with the use of white phosphorus and riot control agents in order to maximize the casualties and create a

smokescreen that will obscure the violation of the Geneva Protocol so that reporting agencies and major superpowers, such as the United States and the Russian Federation, as well as European nations cannot easily identify and corroborate reports on the ground in Syria. The choice of chemical weapons deployment stems from the fact that these asymmetrical weapons are cheaper to procure and utilize than more traditional weapons systems. The chemical attacks of 2013 highlight an increasingly unstable Syrian regime attempting to maintain control of its agency and justification for leadership of the country.

CHAPTER III

SYRIA - U.S. RELATIONS

The issue of Syria-United States relations is fraught with a history of colonization and backlash against Western interference into the region of the Middle East, particularly during the twentieth century. Early on in the twentieth century, the United States is preoccupied with the Cold War and the domino theory, causing the Middle East to become one of the battlegrounds upon which an ideological, political, social, and economic conflict is fought and foreign policy is punctuated with the tensions of these countries becoming satellite nations of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of militant Islam and other competing interests in the region, including oil and the problematic reality of the Iraqi Hussein regime, leads the United States to pull back from a neutral foreign policy in the Middle East. Resentments in the Syrian-United States relationship, particularly on the Syrian side, abound and the international relations of these two countries are not seen as equal on either side. The reality of these relations highlights the continuing problems within the explication of the “red-line” rhetoric employed by the Obama administration and the ways in which this type of foreign policy possesses an inability to produce any real and lasting effects on the issue of the current Syrian civil war, the legitimacy of the al-Assad regime, and the United States’ response to the use of chemical weapons against civilian communities surrounding Damascus. Furthermore, the blowback of the Cold War continues to inform the Syria-United States

relationship with the Russian Federation's brokering of the chemical weapons deal that led to the ongoing Syrian chemical weapon disarmament.

Official United States relations with Syria began in 1835 while Syria was considered a territory of the Ottoman Empire and Syria declared independence in 1946 breaking from the Ottoman Empire, long before then the United States had consuls in Aleppo.⁸⁴ After Syria's independence was recognized by the U.S. a consulate was established on September 7, 1946 and George Wadsworth was appointed for this mission.⁸⁵ After Syria's independence, the spread of secularism occurs in which "the new intelligentsia was the product of European and modernized late Ottoman education" and "the formation of dependent colony states in 1920 [prior to Syria's independence] provoked the coalescence of an opposition intelligentsia which included Ottoman and Western-educated soldiers and officials, landowners, religious notables, and sometimes tribal chiefs and merchants."⁸⁶ Under this type of intellectual proliferation and moderations is ushered the outside global conflict of the Cold War and the Middle East being used as a central battleground between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union further complicates the militarization of the Syrian government during the Cold War with the introduction of arms, specifically chemical weapons, as evidenced in Chapter II.

In 1957, the CIA failed in an attempt to topple then President Adib Shishakli and as a result then Ambassador Faris Al-Din was asked to leave Damascus.⁸⁷ Again in 1967 relations were strained when Israel occupied the Golan Height and tensions continued with the United States using diplomatic efforts to achieve a tenuous disengagement

agreement and relations with Damascus thawed even more when President Nixon visited on an official trip in 1974.⁸⁸ The thawing of the United States-Syrian relations is punctuated by strife caused in 1973 with the Yom Kippur War. In the Yom Kippur War “Soviet-equipped armies of Egypt and Syria suddenly exploded into a new crisis between the superpowers” and heightened Cold War attitudes since the “Soviet Union insisted on a cease-fire and suggested that U.S. and Soviet troops be deployed to enforce it. Kissinger was determined to keep Soviet forces out of the region.”⁸⁹ Problems continue with the Cold War relations of the Soviet Union and Syria because “US interests appeared to be coming under threat...with Soviet arms sales to Iraq and Syria.”⁹⁰ United States-Syrian relations continued to thaw in the twentieth century, specifically during the Gulf War, then Syrian President Hafez al-Assad attended a Middle East conference supporting the United States and further showed good will toward the U.S. when President al-Assad became a key player in securing the release of the hostages in Lebanon.⁹¹

One of the problems with the alliance between the United States and Syria is the fact that in 1988 biological agents were sent to Iraq and “the Commerce Department banned sales of anthrax and dozens of other pathogens not only to Iraq but Iran, Libya, and Syria, which were also suspected of trying to develop germ weapons.”⁹² The reports of Syria attempting to start a biological weapons program can be connected with their possession of chemical weapons to highlight the need for increased scrutiny by the United States. Overall, most reports cite a lack of evidence that Syria was ever able to create a biological weapons program, but questions remain to the actual resting place of

the Iraqi biological weapons stockpile. The lack of knowledge about these types of weapons programs, both biological and chemical, highlights the nature of the repressive regimes that dot the landscape of the Middle East and the probability of these types of weapons falling into the capability of terrorist networks.

Relations with Syria became estranged after the 9/11 attacks when Syria started limiting cooperation with the United States, although Syria has fought against Al Qaeda and informed the United States of a potential plot similar to the U.S.S. Cole attack, tensions between the two nations continue. When the Iraq war began, President Bashar al-Assad became terse with President G.W. Bush and this contention was further enflamed when the United States found out that Syria was attempting to control fighters coming across and retreating to the Syrian border to gain access to Iraq. On top of these problems, Syria began serious negotiations with Saddam Hussein in the ever-increasing threat of weapons of mass destruction and alliances formed with Iran.

While President Bush drew a hard line stance over allies of the United States in the war with Iraq, this attitude insulted President al-Assad. Ever increasing meddling by Syria into Lebanese affairs has angered the United States and further strained relations with Syria to the point now that Syria now forms alliances with terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. Syria has a long history of sponsoring Hezbollah because in the 1980's both "Iran and Syria share credit for sponsoring these young revolutionaries" and:

from Syria's standpoint, the militant Shi'i party was a fortuitous instrument for preserving Syrian interests: supporting Hezbollah allowed Syria to maintain its alliance with Iran, gain the means for striking indirectly at both Israel and the United States, and keep its Lebanese allies, including the Amal movement, in line.⁹³

While Hezbollah and the Taliban have continually worked within the Syrian borders and with the Syrian government the alliances have grown stronger over the ongoing “War on Terrorism” that the United States has been promoting. While this action is beneficial to the safety of the U.S. and their allies, it has also strained relations in parts of the Middle East. Syria’s close ties with terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah and Hamas highlights the problematic nature of the Syrian civil war since the loss of Bashir al-Assad’s regime will create a power vacuum in which terror networks can flourish and the cache of chemical weapons cannot fall into the hands of these individuals.

Further complicating the Syrian-United States relations is the fact that Syria possesses a secular governmental body and is known for a poor human rights record. As of 2011, Syria continues to be listed as a human rights violator with many international organizations and watchdog groups. According to the report of the Syrian Human Rights Committee:

every year, new tools of oppression are added by the Syrian authorities to their oppressive regime, especially with regard to the practise thereof that is most harsh and oppressive such as imprisonment, murder, expulsion, prevention from travelling, torture, corruption, suppression of speech, despotism, combating one’s belief, monopolizing the media and preventing the civil society from practicing its role, etc.⁹⁴

The human rights violations of the al-Assad regime highlight the problematic nature of the Syrian civil war and the global community because al-Assad is decimating his people in order to quell the rebellion stemming from the Arab Spring movement. The Human Rights Watch organization has noted the implementation of incendiary weapons against civilians in since mid-November 2012 and the organization is calling for the

“Syrian military [to] cease its use of incendiary weapons immediately” and “a total of 106 nations have prohibited the use of air-delivered incendiary weapons, which cause serious burns, in populated areas, but Syria has not banned the weapons.”⁹⁵ The utilization of these weapons highlights the Syrian regime’s ability to violate not only human rights, but also international agreements. The incendiary weapons “can contain any number of flammable substances, including napalm, thermite, or white phosphorus and are designed to set fire to objects or to cause burn injuries”⁹⁶ and news reports have already noted the presence of weapons utilizing napalm-like materials. Human Rights Watch has identified several confirmed areas that have been targeted by aerial bombing “Daraya in Damascus, Maarat al-Numan in Idlib, Babila in Damascus, and Quseir in Homs.”⁹⁷ Hard evidence has been shown that the incendiary bombs came from the Assad regime because:

markings on the remnants identify them as ZAB-series incendiary aircraft bombs (Zazhigatel'naya Aviatsionnaya Bomba) made by the Soviet Union. The first type is a ZAB-100/105, a 100 kilogram (220 pound) bomb. The second type is an RBK-250 ZAB-2.5 bomb that releases 48 incendiary ZAB 2.5 submunitions over an area the size of a football field. The specific type of substance contained in these submunitions is believed to be the flammable substance thermite, according to a technical analysis provided by the independent arms expert Nic Jenzen-Jones. Thermite is used only for its incendiary effect and not for marking, obscuring, illumination or other purposes.⁹⁸

Both videos and witnesses document that the bombs were dropped from MiG warplanes, the same type of airplane used by the Syrian military. The argument can be made that if Bashar al-Assad is willing to use incendiary bombs to attack civilian and rebel populations alike, then the utilization of chemical weapons is not out of the realm of possibility. Reports of the Syrian military also denote the use of Scud missiles against

the rebel opposition movement and, while Syria denies the claims of using long-range missiles on what they characterize as “terrorist gangs,” United States officials state “Syria had fired half a dozen Scud missiles at targets in rebel-held areas of northern Syria. Western officials called the action a sign of the government’s desperation as rebels make territorial gains and degrade the fighting ability of security forces.”⁹⁹ As Bashar al-Assad and his regime become increasingly desperate to hold onto the reins of the Syrian government and to quell the civil war, the option of releasing chemical weapons remains a dire reality.

By the early part of 2013, the tensions in Syria, and by extension the tensions in the Syria-United States relationship, were quickly boiling over as the Syria’s violence erupted at new heights and the United States began to weigh its options of intervention. Beginning in February 2013, the violence between the Syrian rebels, and allied groups, and the al-Assad regime increased. Much of the violence during this period stemmed from lagging promises of talks between the two groups and “Syrian insurgents attacked military checkpoints and other targets in parts of central Damascus . . . shattering a lull in the fighting.”¹⁰⁰ The rebel group begins to assert dominance over key areas in Syria, especially Damascus and Aleppo, and reports began surfacing of violent attacks on military personnel, with the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights noting “booby-trapped cars explod[ing] near the military intelligence and state security branches, killing at least 12 members of the security forces and wounding more than 20” with security forces being deployed to Palmyra after the attack and “engaging in gun battles with insurgents that left at least civilians wounded in the cross-fire.”¹⁰¹

By the end of February 2013, the fighting is continuing at a fervent pace, with the utilization of car bombs in Damascus, with mounting military, rebel, and civilian casualties. The rebels, as termed as insurgents by the Syrian government and state-run media, escalate the violence and target more governmental buildings in an attempt to force the Syrian military out of key districts and regions. The civilian population is caught between two fractious groups and “many Damascus residents have remained undecided in the civil war and fear that their ancient city will be ravaged like Aleppo and other urban centers to the north” by the rebels and at the same time “the government has decimated pro-rebel suburbs with airstrikes and artillery, leaving vast areas depopulated and traumatized.”¹⁰² Conflicting reports are being sent out of Syria to the global community watching the proceedings and “antigovernment activists in Syria said the military fired Scud missiles into at least three rebel-held districts of Aleppo . . . flattening dozens of houses, killing at least 12 civilians and burying perhaps dozens of others under piles of rubble.”¹⁰³ By the end of February, most third-party reports found that fighters associated with the Free Syrian Army had control of military facilities in Deir al-Zour, one of which being a military missile facility. By this time in the Syrian civil war, rebels were deriding the legitimacy of Bashar al-Assad, calling for his and “the security and military leadership responsible for the state of Syria . . . [to] step down and be considered outside this political process” because “they cannot be part of any political solution for Syria and must be held accountable for their crimes.”¹⁰⁴

While the violent conflict in Syria is escalating, the Obama administration and various foreign powers are wrestling with the appropriate response to the growing need

for intervention, whether politically or militarily. In the early part of February 2013, at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, a Pentagon plan, supported by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin E. Dempsey, was revealed “to arm carefully vetted Syrian rebels.”¹⁰⁵ The plan to arm the rebels was vetoed by President Obama, even though it had support from Central Intelligence Agency director David H. Petraeus and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The plan was in the works for a better part of a year due to increasing calls from Syrian rebels for materiel support and reveals “the debate over arming the rebels is complex and turns on assessments on the military advantages they might gain, the political calculations on who might come to power in Syria, and the dangers that the arms might fall into the wrong hands.”¹⁰⁶ The conflict within the Obama administration, including Congress, highlights how the rhetoric of the “red line” begins before the use of the term and explication of the weaknesses found with the Obama administration’s foreign policy to the Syrian government. Certain congressional leaders, such as John McCain, highlights the problematic issue of a divided presidential administration because President “Obama had ‘overruled the senior leaders of his own national security team, who were in unanimous agreement that America needs to take greater action to change the military balance of power in Syria.”¹⁰⁷ The divided attitudes in the Obama administration is further complicated with the Clinton resignation from the Secretary of Defense post and the appointment of John Kerry as successor. John Kerry begins to take a harder line with the Syrian government and at the end of February 2013, the Obama administration’s official response to the conflict had shifted. According to official remarks from Secretary

Kerry, “the Obama administration ha[d] been considering new steps to increase support for the Syrian opposition and hasten the departure of President Bashar al-Assad and that some of them would be decided at an international conference in Rome.”¹⁰⁸ The Obama administration’s tactic at this point in the conflict is to “build up its leverage in the hope that Mr. Assad will agree to yield power and a political transition can be negotiated to end the nearly two-year-old conflict.”¹⁰⁹ At the same time, other nations are beginning to weigh in on the conflict, and the crucial attitudes are the official positions of neighboring Middle Eastern countries. By 2013, most of the Middle Eastern nations, with a notable exception of Iran, are moving towards intervention into Syria to remove Bashar al-Assad. In February 2013, Saudi Arabia “financed a large purchase of infantry weapons from Croatia and quietly funneled them to antigovernment fighters in Syria in a drive to break the bloody stalemate that has allowed President Bashar al-Assad to cling to power.”¹¹⁰ According to many accounts, the Syrian rebels were acquiring “their arms through a variety of means, including smuggling from neighboring states, battlefield capture, purchases from corrupt Syrian officers and officials, sponsorship from Arab governments and businessmen, and local manufacture of crude rockets and bombs.”¹¹¹ The increasing interest in the Middle East to arm the rebels highlights popular support of the opposition and a desire for an end to the Assad regime, highlighting a lack of legitimacy that is an impetus for the chemical weapons attack in August 2013.

Further allegations of the use of chemical weapons occurred in March 2013 at Khan al-Assal and both sides of the conflict blame the other. Online reports and YouTube videos of the attack surface, with images of gagging, unresponsive victims

laying on gurneys and floors, with harried rebel fighters and beleaguered medical personnel attempting to treat the victims. Symptoms noted in the videos of this attack include shortness of breath, an overproduction of saliva and mucous, burns and powder marks, twitching and convulsions. Through the use of social media, the Western world is able to experience daily life in Syria for the civilians caught in the civil war and monitoring agencies, especially the United Nations, are sent environmental and bodily fluid samples in order to test for a variety of chemical weapons. By August 2013, an official report is released in which “independent tests of environmental samples by both Russian and American spy services indicate that the deadly nerve agent sarin was used during [the] March 19 battle at Khan al-Assal” but there is little agreement with “the Russians blaming the Syrian rebels for launching that unconventional strike on the Aleppo suburb, while the Americans say it was a case of chemical friendly fire.”¹¹² The disparate reports by the two superpowers highlights an inability of the Obama administration to act at this time, even with hard evidence that chemical weapons were used at Aleppo, due to the fact that no Assad military personnel were witnessed in carrying out the attack. Through the play of events that happens in August 2013, it is safe to say that the chemical weapons attack in March was the result of an order by the Assad regime due to the known chemical weapon stockpile possessed by the leader at this point in time.

By August 2013, conflict in Syria had escalated between the al-Assad regime and the Syrian rebels and reports of possible chemical weapons attacks had intensified. According to United States intelligence reports:

three days before rockets fell outside Damascus, a team of Syrian specialists gathered in the northern suburb of Adra for a task that U.S. officials say had become routine in the third year of the country's civil conflict: filling warheads with deadly chemicals to kill Syrian rebels. The preparations . . . continued from Aug[ust] 18 until just after midnight on Aug[ust] 21, when the projectiles were loaded into rocket launchers behind the government's defensive lines. Then at 2:30am, a half-dozen densely populated neighbors were jolted awake by a series of explosions, followed by an oozing blanket of suffocating gas.¹¹³

The Obama administration had undeniable proof of the chemical attack, although the precise chemical agent used would not be identified until a month later. Although the Syrian government, as well as the Russian Federation, would attribute these attacks to the Syrian rebels, as earlier reports were minimized in the same manner. Soon after the attack, President Obama announced in a televised program that the administration did not “believe that, given the delivery systems, using rockets, that the opposition could have carried out these attacks. [The administration] ha[s] concluded, that the Syrian government, in fact, carried these out.”¹¹⁴

The events of 2013 highlights the problematic area of a civil war in the Middle East and the relative inability of the global community to quickly address the use of chemical weapons upon civilian populations in Syria. One of the concerning aspects of these chemical attacks is the lack of accountability of the United States and other Western nations in upholding the Geneva Protocol, under which Syria is a signatory, in forcing the compliance of the Assad regime to give up its weapons and a wholesale lack of rapid response to the political genocide occurring within Syria.

CHAPTER IV

THE RHETORIC OF THE “RED LINE,” PROBLEMS WITH AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS SYRIA, AND PROBLEMS FOR THE FUTURE

While President Obama tried in 2013 to rally support from Congress to attempt a military intervention in Syria, President Putin parlayed and had negotiations with President Bashar al-Assad to “give up” the chemical weapons. Weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) have indeed been turned over for destruction, yet these have been proven to be older weapons that are somewhat impure and there is still conflict with the speed with which Syria hands over its chemical weapon stockpile. There has been movement of stockpiles and rocket launchers back to Russia with what is to be believed as chemical agent starters and chemical precursors. Russia has explained that the rocket launchers are old and non-working and are being used for scrap, yet reports from UN inspectors say that these launchers were used recently and have only been returned to the Russians for safe keeping. While President Putin has taken the world stage by intervening with an outcome that is favorable to himself and Syria, not to mention others in the Middle East, further questions of allegiance and reasons for brokering the Syrian chemical weapons deal stem from the decisions to expand territory of the Russian Federation with regards to Crimea and the Ukraine.

The Russian Federation’s interest is due to the fact that Syria is a source of geostrategic power. The Tartus port in Syria is the second largest port in the region and

houses a Russian naval base, which is the only Mediterranean fueling spot for Russia and outlet for naval maneuvers in the southern Mediterranean area. The port allows Russia to avoid the Dardanelles in Turkey who is a NATO ally and the international relationship is not considered to be amicable. The geopolitical strategy of keeping al-Assad in power benefits Russia so that under the 1971 agreement with Damascus, Russia has a dominating force in the Mediterranean. The Russian regional supremacy, as far as a superpower having a port in Syria, also serves as a positive strategic position for the Assad regime because it serves as a dropping off point for arms shipments, starters for weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), a pick up point for repairs that need to be done, such as the Russian attack helicopters that Syria retains for its military personnel.

The problem of Syria and the thrust of American foreign policy to the ends of securing a nonviolent end to the Assad regime is not solely from the decisions made during President Obama's two terms. As we have seen in other major policy decisions and events throughout American history, most of the problems that occur in a president's administration have some sort of influence from previous presidents' decisions and shaping of foreign and domestic policy. The problem of Syria and the "red line" rhetoric can be traced back to Middle Eastern foreign policy under the Bush administration and the focus of this administration of terrorism and the beginning of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Obama, early on in his first term, had to make crucial decisions regarding the American policy towards the Middle East, the trajectory of the "War on Terrorism," and the viability of various foreign relation ties in the region, balancing all of these variables with the promise to end the conflicts in the aforementioned nations.

During President G.W. Bush's term, he neglected relations with Syria in attempting to pursue Al Qaeda into Pakistan and Afghanistan that resulted in the only negotiations going on with Syria being sanctions against the government for human rights violations and other unwanted behavior. The economic sanctions placed on Syria turned President al-Assad toward another set of allies, Russia and Iran, which had been allies for years with the Middle Eastern nation, even under Bashar's father. Due to possessing a port in Syria, Russia was very favorable to President al-Assad's wishes and Russia would turn the other way in the human rights violations that were taking place, especially in light of the allegations of human rights violations occurring in Russia at the same time. Syria has been a traditional ally of Russia, even during the period of the Cold War, and "the Soviet Union provided a great deal of aid to Damascus; the Syrian Ministry of the Economy concluded that the USSR was 'responsible for 90 industrial facilities and pieces of infrastructure, one-third of Syria's electrical power capability, one-third of its oil-producing facilities and a threefold expansion of land under irrigation — aided in part by assistance with building the massive Euphrates dam.'"¹¹⁷ The Soviet Union also provided the training with new MiG fighter jets to provide Syria with a fully functional air force and after Anwar Sadat moved towards the United States alliance, "Syria became Moscow's most important Arab ally."¹¹⁸ A deterioration of the Syrian-Russian relations occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union, due to the inability of Syria to pay back its debts to the now economically fragile nation and Boris Yeltsin further fractures this alliance with an opening of relations between Russia and Israel.¹¹⁹ Beginning in 2003, under the Putin presidency, the Syrian-Russian alliance is mended due to the openness of

Putin's foreign relations and "the U.S. invasion of Iraq . . . led the Syrians to reevaluate the importance of upgrading ties with a resurgent Russia, particularly as Syria itself felt threatened by the U.S. presence in Iraq."¹²⁰ One of the contentious points in the normalization of relations between Syria and Russia is the Tartus port and "after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, concerns that Russia might lose some of the ports used by the Black Sea Fleet raised the importance of retaining the Tartus base, a concern reinforced by the 2008 clash with Georgia and the fear of 'NATO encirclement' in the Black Sea."¹²¹ Syria assents to the Russian upgrade of Tartus and expresses a renewed interest in Russian arms, rekindling a lucrative Russian-Syrian political and economic alliance. The existence of this arms and political alliance within the Middle East highlights a relative unwillingness of President Putin to jeopardize these normalized relations and possible subterfuge in creating a Russian led Syrian entrance into the Chemical Weapons Convention, particularly in terms of Russia's own history of noncompliance with these types of binding agreements of disarmament. According to most analysts, Russia has its own red line within the Middle East and because:

the Russian military and the defense industry are major supporters of the Syrian vector - and after Russia compromised with the United States to permit stronger sanctions on Iran in 2010 and abstained on the Libyan intervention in 2011, they signaled that losing Syria as well was a clear red line. [To this end,] in January 2012, the Admiral Kuznetsov carrier battle group made a visit to Syria, docking in Tartus, in what was seen as a sign of continued Russian support for the Assad government.¹²²

Further recalcitrance by the Russian government in any real action against Syria is likely due to the high cost that the loss of the port of Tartus would wreak on Russian economic, military, and political ties to the global community. Further erosion of international

relations between the United States and the Russian Federation continues with its actions within the Ukraine and its overall end goal within the region.

Economic sanctions work in many ways, but these types of international relations tactics cannot be the only foreign policy that the United States has towards countries it deems rogue nations. The United States has utilized the economic sanctions route with other Middle Eastern nations, specifically Iran and Iraq, with little historical success and the events of 2013 highlight that economic sanctions were not working in the conflict in Syria and that Bashar al-Assad is unwilling, without actual military intervention, to change his tactics toward the Free Syrian Army and other rebel groups and he is equally unwilling to seed any control of the nation without armed displacement, either by the Syrian rebels or an outside nation. Diplomacy, as stated by Henry Kissinger is a fine art, and that art was lost in Syria's case during the George W. Bush administration and has yet to be rekindled under the Obama administration.

While rhetoric and economic sanctions are a start in negotiations with a foreign nation, adaptability of mission is extremely important in the ability to actually receive results in the geopolitical landscape. The problem with Syria is the fact that President Obama has to balance two competing international relations' fronts, namely the Middle East and Russia. The introduction of Russia as the arbiter of the Syrian removal of chemical weapons highlights a lost opportunity for the United States because prior to the announcement of Russian-Syrian negotiations, President Obama was advocating a limited military intervention in Syria to secure the chemical weapons. The global attitude towards the news of President Obama asking for congressional approval towards this end

highlights a double-bind morass that President Obama resides in. Early in his first term he advocates a withdrawal from military intervention in the Middle East, with a withdrawal from Iraq and projected withdrawal from Afghanistan in the future. Immediately after the failed congressional vote for military intervention, the global press instigated a program of comparing President Obama to President George W. Bush over his eagerness to militarily intervene in Syria. Conjecture about the success of the proposed intervention aside, the inability to create a level foreign policy platform towards Syria, compounded with global criticism and Russian intervention, highlights the failure of the “red line” rhetoric. The Syrian civil war continues with no actual movement towards stability or the ejection of Bashar al-Assad as head of government, highlighting an area in which the United States can be further criticized for its failure to adequately intervene.

Another major concern for global security and the success of American international relations, particularly in the Middle East, is the Syrian regime’s disregard for human life in terms of stabilizing the dictatorship and the willingness of Assad to utilize chemical weapons. The continued loss of civilian life, perpetrated by the military maneuvers of the Assad regime highlights a human rights violation that can be seen as a burgeoning political genocide if the civil war continues. One of the problems with addressing the human rights violations and the possibility of genocide is the fact that the United Nations, and the United States in particular, has a long history of inadequacy in rapidly responding to this type of crisis. As the history with Armenia, Rwanda, Darfur, and the South Sudan highlights, the United States is historically unwilling to deem

violent conflicts, usually stemming from civil or ethnic wars, as genocide. Another layer complicating matters is the lack of category for political or social genocide, as noted earlier in this paper, which diminishes the death toll occurring in Syria. Global human rights organizations cannot ameliorate the problems occurring in Syria and instead must turn to the global community, specifically member states of the United Nations Security Council, as the impetus for any real intervention. Since the Russian-Syrian agreement, the media focus on the Syrian civil war has waned, resulting in a relative lack of focus on human rights violations. These violations would be an outlet for the prosecution of Bashar al-Assad at the International Criminal Court, especially in terms of the use of chemical weapons, but most of the Western world is ignoring an avenue that would oust the Assad regime and put an end to the civil war.

Furthermore, Syria's alliances with Russia and Iran are most concerning, since these alliances threaten the totality of peace and security in Israel and United States military installations in the region. Biological and chemical weapons have proliferated since 2000 and these concerns are met with sanctions from the United Nations, which in many occasions Russia has voted against as a veto member of the Security Council. The rise of Islamic extremism further complicates matters due to the fact that these asymmetrical weapons would be an ideal advancement in the tactics used for terroristic acts against the Western world, both in the region of the Middle East and in the homelands of the United States and other nations targeted by the various non-state actors. The collapse of the Soviet Union created a unique environment in which the proliferation of chemical weapons programs in the Middle East because of the lack of intelligence in

the former Soviet satellite states over the scientific installations left behind after the retreat of the new Russian government and military in 1992-1993. One prime example of the lack of intelligence and the infrastructure needed to curtail the theft or sale of chemical weapons in Eastern Europe is that “the government of Kazakhstan . . . learned only recently of an abandoned Soviet CW production facility at the Pavlodar Chemical Plant.”¹¹⁵ During the 1990s, the exportation of chemical weapons and chemical precursors became a major concern in the United States because of “the high profits obtainable from black-market sales of restricted items” that became a lucrative business, especially in terms of the failing economies of these newly independent states, and chemical weapons production facilities, such as Khimprom plant in Volgograd, “are known to retain business links to countries of CW proliferation concern[, such as] Iran and Iraq.”¹¹⁶ One of the problems with the issue of the Russian Federation is the relative lack of emphasis on the chemical weapons repositories and the focus remaining on the destruction of nuclear materials. The focus on nuclear weapons of mass destruction overshadows the relative dangers of the chemical weapons proliferation because it a “40,000-metric-ton . . . arsenal [and] Russian CW stocks include thousands of air- and artillery-delivered munitions, 80 percent of which are filled with high-quality nerve agents.”¹¹⁷ On top of this, “these weapons are in excellent condition, and some chemical artillery shells weigh as little as 20 to 40 pounds” and the portability of these weapons would make them an ideal choice for terrorism for the relative ease with which the weapons could be smuggled across country borders and ability to disseminate the chemical agents within these shells.¹¹⁸

The Arab-Spring uprising challenges the authority of al-Assad and his response is to continually move the cache of weapons. Another persistent problem in the Syrian civil war is the fact that the rebels are not the only people of Syria but also independent terror networks, such as Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula, as well as other smaller non-state actors, who hope to benefit from the political vacuum. These groups have spurred and inflamed the fighting in Syria and made official United States recognition of the Syrian rebel groups incredibly difficult and led to the stagnation in any deal to provide arms to these rebel groups in order to secure the final destabilization of the Assad regime that would mark the construction of a new Syrian government and an end to the civil war.

Global terrorism is a threat to not only the United States' national security but also to our allies globally. The threat is real as the United States has experienced firsthand and the utilization of a chemical terroristic threat is real, as evidenced in Japan with the Aum Shinrikyo train station attack by releasing Sarin in the crowd. While the biggest threat to the global community is from nonstate actors, the threat for retaliation from governmental authorities is a growing possibility, particularly in terms of rogue nations, such as Iran. The Department of State has released many warnings, memos, and detailed accounts of the susceptibility of areas and persons, not only from chemical attacks, but also from biological attacks, with the biggest threat being from anthrax. While there have been numerous scares since 9/11 of anthrax ridden letters, many of them false alarms; the availability of chemical weapons, and biological weapons, make this a very real

possibility in an unstable future landscape of competing and conflicting attitudes and religious beliefs.

The United States government has taken some precautions to guard against these types of attacks, yet one of the biggest threats to the possibility of is a strong line of foreign policy. After September 11, 2001, the common policy of the White House was to strike first, ask questions later, leading countries in the Middle East to take sides as to whom they would ally with and cause a capitulation in the pursuit of alternate forms of weapons. The unequal response to the Middle East, particularly seen in the history of the United States' alliances during the Cold War, highlights one of the continuing problems for any foreign policy in this area of the world. The countries of the Middle East are increasingly looking towards other countries, particularly Russia, in the continuance of alliances for economic and political purposes, causing an environment in which the United States will be displaced as the superpower guiding the region. If Middle Eastern countries move away from a strong alliance with the United States, the threat of terrorism will be elevated due to the lack of intelligence gathering for this region, creating a landscape in which organizations, such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda can proliferate and strengthen in massive numbers of members.

The issue of weapons of mass destruction is not a new concept in the geopolitical and global security landscape. As various analysts have pointed out, "the perception that the proliferation of "WMD" in the Third World critically endangered the United States was not invented by the George W. Bush administration" because this threat assessment was utilized by "the Clinton administration in the 1990s and its origins are traceable to

the days of the George H.W. Bush presidency.”¹¹⁹ The issue of weapons of mass destruction, particularly chemical weapons, was of the foremost concern with the increasing instability within the region of the Middle East and an interesting conflation of chemical weapons as analogous to nuclear weapons begins in the early 1990s. The argument can be made that the increasing use of the term weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) is utilized in order to conflate the threat level of third world countries, such as Iraq and Syria, possessing these weapons capabilities. One of the interesting delineations is the fact that when analyzing the rhetorical stances of the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, the focus on the threat of weapons of mass destruction is limited and the rhetorical phrase for threats in the global landscape utilizes the theory of the red line, an abstract ideal in which the United States will take steps to ameliorate the illegal actions of foreign nations, usually in terms of military deployment, if these nations move beyond an acceptable line of behavior. The problem with the abstract “red line” is the continual movement of the aforementioned “red line” and the reality of foreign policy decisions under the Obama administration. Analysts argue that the repetition of the term weapons of mass destruction during the George W. Bush administration “and the ricocheting of the phrase through the echo chamber of the mass media, emptied it of any specific meaning.”¹²⁰ The increasing use of the rhetoric of the red line and the lack of actual United States’ response to national security concerns in the global landscape is working in the same way, namely that the Obama administration is losing force and focus in the geopolitical landscape because of a lack of realtime response to perceived threats, particularly in the Middle East.

While President Obama subscribes to a policy that he believes will instill foreign leaders with favorable attitudes and cause Middle Eastern leaders to view him as a moderate American leader with no claims to oil, territory, or other demands. One of the problems with this type of foreign policy personality construction is the fact that it places President Obama into a double-bind situation with the rest of the global community. The results of his stance on Syria and chemical weapons, which will translate to other crucial events regarding extremism and human rights violations in the Middle East, is the overall global attitude towards the results of his lack of response. According to critics, the “red line” rhetoric is seen as:

a piece of Mr. Obama’s lawyerly approach to the whole issue. He says that he is against arming the rebels, but meets criticism that he must do more by increasing ‘non-lethal’ aid of such things as night-vision googles and communications equipment that will help the rebels to fight. He will not supply them with American weapons, but his intelligence services are helping with shipments of arms from Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Such fine distinctions may reassure Americans that they are not being sucked into the mayhem. But the person most likely to take comfort from Mr. Obama’s obvious reluctance to get involved is Mr. Assad.¹²³

All of the critics point to the fact that the lack of real support for the rebels will result in the radicalization of these groups looking for global jihad, particularly against the nations that did not provide support in their fight for legitimacy and independence. The “red line” rhetoric, without the stabilization of real action after the line has been crossed, leads to a destabilization in the legitimacy of United States foreign policy.

Furthermore, the presentation of the United States has shifted to the respect of sovereignty in order facilitate governmental change within the region, instead of the program of instilling democratic ideals and governmental structures through military

intervention into troubled nations. One of the problems the foreign policy aims in these image constructions is the fact that benign foreign policy does not change Middle Eastern attitudes or trajectories, and Middle Eastern countries have alternate constructions of cultural identities and religious beliefs that play a heavier role in the reasons and ways in which a country views the global community outside of the Middle East and informs the choice to stockpile weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Each of the countries that engage in the creation of a chemical weapons program, namely Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, have a long history of negative attitudes towards the overall geopolitical landscape, viewing neighboring countries, such as Israel, and the Western world as threats to the continued sovereignty of traditional cultural, historical, political, and religious standards of the nation.

Syria continues to be a safe haven for terrorist groups, especially militant Islamic groups, and to support some terrorist groups, a continuance of the historical trajectory of many Middle Eastern countries in the region. The civil war in Syria is the impetus for the presence of Hezbollah and Hamas, who are playing against both the Assad government and the rebels, while Al Qaeda has taken up arms in support of the rebels. All of these non-state actors are interfering into the Syrian civil war in the hope of attaining legitimacy with the group that finally wrests control of the government. The desire of these groups is to have another source of legitimacy within the Middle East and to find a safe haven in which to operate their religious and political aims, particularly in terms of coordinating terroristic attacks on the Western world.

On 12 November 2011, the Arab League suspended Syria's membership and imposed sanctions on the Assad regime, giving the rebels even more instinct to fight for control of the Syrian government, in the process these actions galvanized sectarian tension within the nation.¹²¹ According to James Clapper, the core of Al Qaeda has collapsed, the splinter groups of Al Qaeda have become stronger and more extreme in their fight for political power.¹²² The status of these terrorist organizations leaves Syria's civil war a place for growth and possible political legitimacy if President al-Assad is overthrown, highlighting the intrusion of insurgents foreign fighters into the ranks of the Syrian rebels. President Obama's reluctance to support the Syrian rebel groups, even just one of the many found scattered throughout the political landscape of the civil war, highlights the instability inherent in the Middle East and the reality of the international relations problems within a new global landscape fraught with transnational terrorist groups. The lack of support for the rebels may protect the United States in its short-term goals of refusing to accidentally fund or arm hidden Islamic insurgents, but at the same time resentment after the culmination of the Syrian civil war may be the impetus for these same nationalistic rebels joining Islamic fundamentalism and causing further destabilization of the region and the foreign relations of the United States.

Reports in August 2013 have noted that U.S. sources and the United Nations have confirmed that al-Assad has mixed and used Sarin and what is believed to be Agent 15. These have been confirmed after soil samples were smuggled out of Syria and tested. The presence of these attacks is of greatest concern, not only for neighboring nation states, but also for the United States. When President al-Assad mixed and used these

chemical he again stepped over the “red line” set down by President Obama in terms of unacceptable behavior. The result was tighter sanctions on the part of the United Nations, yet Russia has tried to block these sanctions. The time elapsed between the reports of mixing the chemicals and the response from the United States has become too lengthy, the longer it takes for responses, the more damage is done to national security. Silence toward the al-Assad dynasty gives the impression that only sanctions and discussion will be done, these sanctions have no effect since Russia, Iraq and other alliances Syria has will not enforce sanctions set by other nations. The United States has called for Bashar al-Assad to step down, yet no other diplomacy actions have been taken and reports of continued chemical attacks are not being discussed.

As of March 2014, reports are still incoming of chemical attacks and potential chemical attacks in the future, raising questions of the legitimacy of the negotiated deal and where the rest of the cache resides. According to Israeli news outlets, further alleged chemical attacks have taken place in March 2014, in Damascus’ eastern Harasta neighborhood, with the chemical agent used being described as a neutralizing agent, designed to incapacitate.¹²³ The reports coming out of Syria are conflicted, pointing at both the Assad regime and the rebels as the possessors of these chemical weapons in a continuance of the conflict before the October 2013 Syrian capitulation to the Chemical Weapons Convention. If the rebels are in possession of these arms, a further delineation of the membership of these various groups are crucial due to the possibility of non-state Islamic terrorists being a portion of the fighters within the landscape of Syria.

The United States has long held the practice of inserting leaders that would be willing to work with us in the past, this option has not been discussed nor considered by President Obama, as it would have been by President G.W. Bush. In keeping with the historical record on the efficacy of this option and its blowback on the United States foreign policy, President Obama was correct in not considering this type of forced regime change. One of the successes of President Obama is the ability to learn from historical mistakes, but the legacy of his personal presidential decisions are not yet ready for an analysis of the full breadth of the results of the decisions to allow Russia supremacy within the Syrian negotiations.

One of the immediate problems within the foreign policy landscape in regards to the question of the Syrian civil war is the fact that the full utility of the American presidency was not utilized before, President Vladimir Putin stepped in to negotiate the seizure of the Syrian chemical weapons cache. The one true diplomatic option was never used, namely neutral negotiations between President Obama and President al-Assad. While the Obama administration worked to attempt the end of the Syrian civil war through the support of the rebel groups, true negotiations with Bashar al-Assad to bring an end to the utilization of chemical weapons was overlooked.

Global terrorism is a threat to not only the United States' national security but also to our allies globally. The threat is real, as the United States has experienced firsthand and the utilization a chemical terroristic threat is real, as evidenced in Japan with the Aum Shinirkyo train station attack by releasing Sarin in the crowd. While the biggest threat to the global community is from nonstate actors, the threat for retaliation

from governmental authorities is a growing possibility, particularly in terms of rogue nations, such as Iran. The Department of State has released many warnings, memos, and detailed accounts of the susceptibility of areas and persons, not only from chemical attacks, but also from biological attacks, with the biggest threat being from anthrax. While there have been numerous scares since 9/11 of anthrax ridden letters, many of them false alarms; the availability of chemical weapons, and biological weapons, make this a very real possibility in an unstable future landscape of competing and conflicting attitudes and religious beliefs.

The United States government has taken some precautions to guard against these types of attacks, yet one of the biggest threats to the possibility of is a strong line of foreign policy. After 9/11 the common policy of the White House was to strike first ask questions later, this lead the Middle East to take sides as to whom they would ally with. While President Obama subscribes to a policy that he believes will instill foreign leaders to look to him for calm reserve and wish to have a democracy like ours, the fact remains that given cultural identities and religious beliefs play a heavier role in how and why a country stockpiles WMDs. The instability inherent in the Syrian civil war allows a gateway to Islamic terrorism within Syria, both targeting the Assad regime and the rebel groups, but at the same time the levels of terroristic threats towards the United States, at home and abroad, is elevated with increased instability within the region of the Middle East. The inability to achieve any sort of change at the current time in Syria makes the likelihood of a complete destabilization

The longer instability in the Middle East continues, the stronger and more organized terrorist groups become and with this rapid reinvigoration that can prove detrimental to the global community. While a focus on the threat to human life is important to the discussion of terrorism in the shadow of the Syrian civil war, through the utilization of seized chemical weapons and events similar to September 11, 2001, an analysis of this threat must also consider the threat of terrorism to the global economy, energy and water supply. The threat of the Syrian civil war moves beyond the human factor due to the interconnectedness of the region with other global communities and this increasing global interdependence makes it impossible for any country to remain unaffected by movements, such as the Arab Spring, or civil wars.

The civil war in Syria was spurred by the Arab Spring taking place elsewhere in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt and Libya, which has led to volatility in the financial and commodity markets and increasing unemployment has left the Euro and American dollar struggling to recover. Any instability in the Middle East, particularly in terms of the spillover of tensions and violence into bordering countries affects not only the economic markets, but also a major source of oil for the global community. Oil prices continue to rise, due to the machinations of speculators, which in turn causes Middle Eastern nations, such as Libya and Saudi Arabia, to slow down production and supply of oil to the global markets. The old Cold War domino theory would be an apt application to the political landscape of the Middle East due to the fact that tensions and civil war in Syria is spilling over into other Middle Eastern nations and the resurgence of the sentiments espoused in the Arab Spring are still a threat to security in the region.

An added area of concern is the relative instability of religion within the Middle East, in particular Syria, due to the historical treatment of foreign relations under the religious paradigm of Islam. The Syrian civil war may be politically and socially motivated under the banner of the Arab Spring, but the religious affiliations of the major players within this conflict does translate into a contentious arena that the United States is unprepared to deal with effectively. The introduction of Hezbollah into the forces fighting the Syrian rebels serves as evidence that “the conflict . . . [is] a sectarian war from the outset”¹²⁴ and the issue of religious affiliation further complicates foreign policy aims in the Middle East. The Alawite sect in Syria, which the al-Assad dynasty and its top-ranking military and security forces are aligned with, “is ‘quasi Shiite,’ a fact which accounts for the government’s alliances to Iran and Hezbollah; while Syrian rebel forces are overwhelmingly dominated by the country’s aggrieved Sunni majority, now backed by the Sunni governments of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, along with various foreign Sunni jihadis.”¹²⁵ One of the problems with the strict delineation of many analysts, and a fact that further complicates matters, is that the Alawite sect is seen as a heretic group by most Shiites and the al-Assad regime is a Baathist organization. One of the problems found within the Syrian landscape that transforms the conflict from its secular Arab Spring origins into a religious war between the two dominant sects of Islam is the existence of Sayyida Zainab, a crucial Shia shrine within a suburb of Damascus. The shrine is incredibly important to the legitimacy of the al-Assad regime due to its historic importance in the construction of the repressive regime under Bashar al-Assad’s father, Hafez al-Assad. Although “Sunni scholars had issued fatwas recognizing the Alawites as

Muslims, many senior Shia and Sunni clerics refused to do so[,]” creating an intrinsic problem with the al-Assad dynasty in terms of political legitimacy due to the constitutional stipulation that the president be a Muslim. Since the Sunni majority, and to a certain extent the Shia minority, did not completely recognize the Alawite sect as being true Muslims, the creation of the al-Assad regime can be seen as in violation of the Syrian constitution, a problem that highlights the intrinsic problem of the political legitimacy of Bashar al-Assad and his need to retain complete control of the country, including through the use of chemical weapons. Hafez al-Assad was able to secure control in Syria through the patronage of two major Shia leaders, Musa al-Sadr and Hasan al-Shirazi, creating an unstable political legitimacy based on the tenuous religious linkages founded during the 1970s.

The religious site of Sayyida Zeinab becomes the crux of the legitimacy of the al-Assad regime due to the patronage of important religious leaders, not including the two founding members of the political and religious alliance in the 1970s. By the time that Hafez al-Assad exerted control in Syria, “other senior Shia clerics, such as Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Muhammad Hussayn Fadlallah, the late Lebanese Grand Ayatollah, and Iraqi Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi established schools and offices in Sayyida Zeinab” and moreover the shrine in Damascus became the center for Shia religious life for those not able to travel to the Iraqi Najaf and Kerbala shrines or those who did not want to travel into the Iranian center for theological schooling, Qum.¹²⁶ The existence of the Syrian shrine itself is a contention for the religious strife found within the Syrian civil war due to the fact that many Sunnis believe that it “was proof that

the Assad regime was teaming up with Iran and the region's Shia to convert the Syrian population.”¹²⁷ The violent incursions of Syrian rebels into Damascus has targeted the Shia shrine locations across the suburbs and the decision of the al-Assad regime to destabilize the rebel hold on key locations of Damascus, specifically through the use of chemical weapons, highlights the continuing religious strife that is destabilizing an originally political and secular conflict. One of the problems with the creation of a separate and contiguous religious civil war in Syria is the importation of foreign fighters to Syria on both sides. In terms of the al-Assad regime, the introduction of Hezbollah fighters join the ranks of various Iraqi groups, including “the Sadrists[,] . . . a Shia militia, named the Abu Fadl al-Abbas Brigade, was also formed to defend the shrine, and allegedly includes Syrian, Lebanese, and Iraqi members, as well as Iranian special forces.”¹²⁸

Further religious complications are highlighted when an analysis of the Chemical Weapons Convention based upon the inclusion of Islamic viewpoints to the agreement and its ramifications. According to analysts, there are three main objections to Middle Eastern nations and their willingness to join the Chemical Weapons Convention: morality, reciprocity, and military necessity.¹²⁹ An understanding of all three areas must exist in order to deconstruct the relative unwillingness of the al-Assad regime to sign on to any type of treaty or convention that would constrain the ability of the Bashar al-Assad to utilize chemical weapons within his own country as a repressive tactic.

On the first point, morality, many Islamic leaders do not perceive an utility in differentiating the types of weapons or abilities to neutralize enemy forces, unlike the

United States and other Western nations. According to most analysts, the argument that ““an old rifle, hand-to-hand fighting, nuclear bombs, and mustard gas are all equal””¹³⁰ is of major consequence in the region of the Middle East and has been a key component in most Middle Eastern nations not joining the Convention because “if there is no real moral difference between chemical weapons and other armaments, there is no moral impetus to sign the treaty at all.”¹³¹ The extension of this argument to the al-Assad regime’s utilization of chemical weapons highlights that the Islamic construction of morality towards chemical weapons is not the same as the Western world’s construction of the pervasive dangers of these weapons of mass destruction. Instead, the moral argument would lead to Bashar al-Assad postulating that the use of chemical weapons is a efficient weapon to use against the Syrian rebels due to the lack of destruction for the surrounding landscape, especially the Shia shrines in the vicinity of the conflict, and these weapons would be especially efficient as a repressive tactic in order to constrain fighting in other parts of Syria.

The second point of the unique Islamic view of chemical weapons, reciprocity, highlights a problematic argument made by leaders of many Middle Eastern countries that condemn the use of chemical weapons abroad, but at the same time this denunciation “does not by itself entail eschewing a chemical (or nuclear) weapons program” within the country itself.¹³² Overall, Islamic theology holds that “if an enemy commits a wrongful act, especially in war, one is permitted to respond in kind[,]” therefore the chemical weapons program in a Middle Eastern country is designed as a way to ensure the defense of the Islamic community.¹³³ The utilization of chemical weapons by the al-Assad

regime would fall under the defense of Islam within this paradigm due to the inherent religious constituency of the regime and rebel factions. The regime would see the utilization of chemical weapons as a defense of Shia Islam because of the presence of violent Sunni rebels. Furthermore, the Convention is seen as affront to Islamic self-determination in a globally nuclear landscape and Hafez al-Assad originally rejected the Convention ““because it provides for banning chemical weapons, while completely ignoring nuclear weapons, and this is a great injustice.””¹³⁴

The final categorization, military necessity, is one of the most crucial arguments for the original Syrian rejection of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The use of chemical weapons is supported by the argument that “the duty to defend the community has a special moral weight in the Islamic tradition” and the “duty is so urgent that in the Islamic tradition military necessity may sometimes justify otherwise unacceptable acts.”¹³⁵ The Syrian government’s use of chemical weapons on civilian populations would be supported with this argument because of the presence of rebel factions within these neighborhoods in the crucial defensive site of Damascus. The al-Assad regime sees their role in defending both the community and Islam from the Syrian rebels, so the use of chemical weapons would be viewed through the image of Islamic tradition and not through the lens of Western constructions of the use of unacceptable weapons technology.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The al-Assad's consent to the Chemical Weapons Convention, through the lens of Islamic constructions of acceptable war tactics, does not transcend the situation into a deeper acceptance of the Western ban on weapons of mass destruction. Instead, the brokering of the weapons deal by the Russian Federation has impelled Bashar al-Assad to cede control over some of the chemical weapons due to economic and political reasons. The Islamic construction of appropriate response does not fall in line with the Western construction of war and civil war protocols, most notably in relation to the United States' attitude towards the status of the Middle East. Instead, the voluntary secession of chemical weapons highlights an ongoing conflict within Syria that transcends international relations and other secular concerns, illuminating the Syrian civil war as a conflict that is fraught with religious, political, and social meanings. The rhetoric of the "red-line" perpetuated by the United States under the George W. Bush and Obama administrations creates a situation in the Middle East that cannot be easily remedied and highlights a lack of real continuity and force in American foreign policy.

The issue of chemical weapons highlights a continuing concern in American foreign policy, particularly in terms of the inclusion of extremist groups within the confines of the Syrian civil war and the disparate United States' response to the use of these weapons against civilian populations as a repressive tactic highlights the ongoing

erosion of the American role as a moral arbiter in the geopolitical landscape, setting the scene for further conflict in American international relations throughout the world. The lack of American response will most likely engender further feelings of resentment in the Middle East, creating a prime environment for further escalations of Islamic militancy against the West, creating an area in which United States interests, politically, economically, and socially, will be threatened. Furthermore, the effects of the Arab Spring will further destabilize the region and the Obama Administration must take into account the secular and religious impact of civilian protests against repressive regimes within the explosive landscape of the region, as seen with the short-term supremacy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the ongoing problematic political scene within Egypt and other countries swept up in the force of the Arab Spring movement.

The involvement of the Russian Federation, particularly as the new arbiter of conflict in the Middle East highlights instability in global politics that can further erode the supremacy of the United States in such matters. The role of Russia, however, is seen as a problematic issue due to its involvement with Syria in political and economic alliances historically. The chemical weapons program found in Syria can be traced back to the Soviet intervention into the scientific development of the country under the al-Assad dynasty and further questions surrounding this economic alliance cannot be interpreted without the passage of time and the release of pertinent documents. The present evidence of the Syria-Russian alliance highlights the variables involved in the Syrian capitulation to the Chemical Weapons Convention that sheds further light on the extent of Russian intervention into the strength of the Syrian regime. The lack of a strong

American response and reliance on “red line” rhetoric highlights an area of foreign policy that is lacking substance and force within the geopolitical landscape, a mistake that cannot continue if the United States desires stability in the Middle East

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