

# Syria 2013 Isn't Iraq 2003, and Obama Isn't Bush

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By [Brian Frydenborg](#) August 31, 2013

17 upvotes



Photo Credit: AP

Attempts at making historical analogies are more often than not tedious, tiresome, and incorrect. The latest in this petulant trend involves accusing the Obama administration of [creating another "phony" war in Syria](#) along the lines of Bush and Iraq. This analogy is obviously wrong on so many levels.

The first reason why involves the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). In Iraq, the U.S. was acting in response to phantom WMD and

programs that no longer existed. In Syria, the impending U.S. intervention is in response to chemical weapons [that were used](#) to kill over [1,400 people, including over 400 children](#), making it [the worst chemical attack](#) in over two decades. There was nothing hypothetical about this.

Furthermore, the intervention in Syria would not be a full-scale war where we invade and occupy another country. It would be more like a police action similar to NATO's recent Libya campaign or Clinton's NATO air campaign in the Balkans. Obama has no stomach to put American troops on the ground in Syria, whereas the U.S. was prepared to invade and occupy Iraq in 2003.

In Iraq, there were there was no serious Al-Qaeda or Islamist presence or link. However, in Syria today, [Al-Qaeda and similar extremist Islamist militias](#) are quite present and are striking the biggest blows against the Assad regime. It has been a dream of Al-Qaeda to get its hands on WMD, including chemical weapons, but it has failed in its [long history of attempts](#) to make [or acquire](#) its own. We know Syria has these weapons, and we know these groups are in Syria and would certainly not pass up a chance to acquire them. Not allowing extremists or terrorists to come out on top of both the Assad regime and the moderate rebels is a crucial U.S. national interest, as the West would certainly be a target with WMD in terrorists' hands. As bad as the August 21 attack was, attacks with nerve agents like the one used [could be far deadlier](#) and larger, so this is a concern for the whole world.

Finally, Barack Obama is not George W. Bush. Bush was eager for the chance to fight what he considered a just war, and did not use American troops as a last resort. The Gitmo, NSA, and drone issues of today all pale in comparison to launching two major ground wars, one of which Obama has ended, and the other of which he is close to ending. Obama has been very reluctant to use large numbers of American forces abroad

(with the exception of Afghanistan, and only temporarily) and even let allies like France take the lead in Libya. Additionally, Obama's support of the rebels has been reluctant. [For some time, he overruled](#) his closest advisors' recommendation that the U.S. arm the rebels. Only when Assad clearly and grossly violated Obama's one "red line" did he move towards direct action.

Obama has the specter of Iraq looming large in his mind as he decides how to handle Syria. Yet, there are also the ghosts of Darfur, Rwanda, Srebrenica, the Armenians, and the Holocaust. Inaction by the U.S. has only seen escalation of all kinds in Syria and the region: in deaths, in sectarianism, in terrorism, in air attacks on civilians, in the destruction of whole neighborhoods (even cities), in the millions of refugees and displaced, in the destabilization of the region, and in the use of chemical weapons. If strikes from a distance can make Assad think twice, or even prevent him from engaging in large-scale chemical attacks at minimal costs and risk to the U.S., why not try?

The damage Assad could suffer from U.S. strikes might be too high to continue the use of such weapons. Even with inevitable collateral damage, this would save lives and prevent battlefield deployments of these weapons, which would only increase their chances of exposure to terrorists eager to grab them. Even if Assad he does not relent in their use, his capabilities will be weakened. If anything, Obama's approach to Syria shows that he clearly has learned at least some lessons from Iraq.