

Obama and Syria: President's Rose Garden Speech is One of His Best



By Brian Frydenborg September 1, 2013

3 upvotes



Photo Credit: MCT

President Obama's speech on Syria in the White House Rose Garden on Saturday was an invigorating reminder of why I voted twice for this man to be the leader of the free world. I will admit that throughout President Obama's presidency, I've had reservations about him and his performance, but with a little luck, [his speech yesterday in the Rose Garden](#) will go down in history as one of the finest moments of his presidency.

Along with John Kerry's [recent speech](#), Obama's address was the best case for why America needs to intervene in Syria made by an administration official. But he also made the most eloquent case I've heard in years about what America's role in the world needs to be. Obama asked, "What's the purpose of the international system that we've built" if we don't enforce it? He added, "We cannot raise our children in a world where we will not follow through on the things we say, the accords we sign, the values that define us."

That international system to which Obama refers is unbelievably precious; it took most of two millennia since the fall of Rome to overcome chaos, anarchy, and the never-ending rise and fall of empire to rebuild a system in which rule of law and international norms are enforced with any regularity. The prohibition on the use of chemical weapons is as integral to this new world order as the rights of diplomatic immunity or the freedom of navigation of the seas. Doing nothing when chemical weapons are used threatens to undermine the entire system we have today and make a mockery of humanity's ability to overcome its more violent past. While the U.S. has its history of problems with chemical weapons (like [Agent Orange in Vietnam](#) and [the just revealed Reagan Administration's shameful assistance in Saddam's chemical weapons attacks against the Iranians](#)), at least we are on the right side of this issue today.

When I heard Obama say he would ask Congress for support and authorization, I was both elated and ready to scream at the President in frustration. On the one level, this was a shining example of our separation of powers and an ability to showcase to the world the American democratic process. At the same time, I thought Obama had failed to learn anything about politics over the last few years and was opening himself up to likely be embarrassed and grievously undermined, yet

again, by the [nearly unprecedented partisanship](#) and [obstructionism](#) of House “Tea Party” Republicans.

But then I started thinking: Obama’s speech was very accommodating toward Congress. He let it be known that he can strike at a time of his choosing, and it will be even more nerve-wracking for the Syrian regime, as it doesn't know when the attack will come. The speech puts a lot of pressure on the regime while the world watches very closely what it will do while awaiting America’s action. If President Assad does anything bad or stupid (which is likely), support will only increase with the U.S. public, Congress, and abroad for Obama's plan. This is very shrewd on Obama's part, since Americans especially have only just started paying attention and are becoming more supportive in [recent polls](#) as they tune in ever more to this story; they may even pressure their members of Congress. International support will likely increase, too, especially after the UN inspectors’ [report is released](#).

So bravo, President Obama. It’s a bold plan with a big risk, but well played.