



Nothing but blood in Syrian intervention for U.S.

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The American people, chastened by the long Iraq entanglement, oppose another intervention, but the lesson has been lost of the leadership class

A "red line" has been crossed, deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes told the media last week: U.S. intelligence has determined with "high certainty" that the Bashar al-Assad regime used sarin gas against Syrian rebel forces.

Assad denies the charge, but we're told that blood samples from multiple Syrians test positive for the nerve agent, and that perhaps 150 people have died from the attacks in a civil war that's claimed some 90,000 victims thus far.

"The president has said that the use of chemical weapons would change his calculus, and it has," Rhodes declared. So the Central Intelligence Agency will begin funneling military aid, starting with small arms and ammunition, to elements of the Syrian Opposition Coalition we think we can trust.

I may be one of those "cynics" President Obama has warned our impressionable young people about, but when I hear the White House telling us we should get embroiled in yet another Middle Eastern conflagration based on "high certainty" about WMD, I start backing slowly toward the door.

"He gassed his own people" sounds all too familiar. (Also, is it really a "Weapon of Mass Destruction" if you have to wait for the bloodwork to figure out whether it was used?)

The polls show overwhelming opposition toward intervening in the Syrian Civil War. The American people seem to have learned something from our fruitless, decade-plus Iraq entanglement, but the leadership class, apparently, has not. So it's once more into the breach -- gingerly, this time. Trust us.

Sorry -- no. What in the world are we trying to achieve here?

The rebels insist that light weapons won't turn the tide: "They should help us with real weapons, anti-tank and anti-aircraft, and with armored vehicles, training, and a no-fly zone," says a spokesman for the Free Syrian Army. Senators John McCain, R-AZ, and Lindsey Graham, R-SC, the Bobbsey Twins of knee-jerk interventionism, favor the latter.

The Pentagon brass is much less gung-ho: "I don't think at this point I can see a military option that would create an understandable outcome" Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in March.

We're asked to believe that our intelligence is good enough to allow us to distinguish "good" rebels from bad. But as Milton Bearden, who ran the CIA's covert aid to the Afghan mujahideen in the late '80s, explained to Foreign Policy magazine, "once you begin arming any rebellion that involves fractious parties in the same rebellion against a common enemy, you've got to understand that the materials you give to the group of your choice will be sold, traded, bartered to most of the other players."

The Congressional Research Service reports that "Sunni extremist groups seem increasingly active in Syria, including groups sympathetic to or affiliated with Al Qaeda," and, as General Dempsey notes, we have, at best, a "very opaque understanding of the opposition."

A gruesome video that went viral last month gives some sense of the nature of the conflict the Obama administration aims to join. It features a Syrian rebel announcing "I swear to God we will eat your hearts out, you soldiers of Bashar. You dogs. God is greater!"--as he cuts out the heart of a dead enemy and takes a bite.

No doubt we'll have a rigorous review process to ensure that, while we're winning hearts and minds, we won't give weapons to rebels who eat hearts. But, as Bearden puts it, "once we start providing anything to the rebels, we better understand that if they win, we own it"--so perhaps we'd do better to sit this one out.