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Obama Logic: Dictators Don't Kill People, Chemical Weapons Do

By Douglas J. Feith

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According to today's *Washington Post* headline: "Syria has destroyed chemical weapons facilities, international inspectors say." Should this be cause for celebration?

The Syrian civil war is a strategic, humanitarian, and arms-control problem for the United States. The Obama administration has chosen to focus only on the arms-control aspect of the problem.

The Assad regime is Iran's best friend in the world. Iran has invested heavily in protecting Assad and if he retains power, the influence of Iran's Khamenei regime will grow. Russian president Vladimir Putin also has exerted himself for Assad and will benefit if Assad defeats the Syrian rebels.

The death toll in Syria is over 100,000. Estimates put the displaced persons within Syria at over 4 million and the refugees who have fled the country at over 2 million. The latter are straining resources in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon and could create political disruptions there. In the last few days, the news media have been reporting that polio is beginning to spread among Syrian children.

Finally, the Assad regime appears to have violated the 1925 Geneva Protocol by using poison gas against its own people.

The Obama administration has effectively rewarded Assad for violating the Geneva Protocol. Having declared long ago that Assad “must go,” President Obama dropped that demand as soon as he accused Assad of using poison gas. Instead, he effectively consented not to challenge Assad’s retention of power so long as Assad agrees to give up the Syrian chemical-weapons arsenal. This is a small price for Assad to pay for an enormously important change in U.S. policy.

Assad looks brilliant. The Syrian rebels feel abandoned. Khamenei and Putin are reaping dividends. Dictators around the world are seeing the benefits of Assad’s use of chemical weapons. And presumably President Obama is happy that Syria’s current participation in chemical-weapons disarmament gives him an excuse to take no other action, not even to provide aid to some of the rebels.

One commentator said that what President Obama has done is like telling a man who has committed murder with a knife that you’ll let him go free if he hands in the knife.

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