

“Boots on the Ground”? 75,000 Troops “Required to Secure Chemical Weapons if Damascus Falls”

By [RT](#)

Global Research, September 05, 2013

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The potential of strategic US strikes in Syria has sparked fears Damascus' chemical weapons could fall into the wrong hands if the government is toppled. A recent congressional report says 75,000 troops would be needed to safeguard the WMD caches.

The Congressional Research Center (CRS) [report](#), issued just one day before the alleged August 21 chemical weapons attack in a Damascus suburb, was compiled with the aim of “responding to possible scenarios involving the use, change of hands, or loss of control of Syrian chemical weapons.”

It states that Syria's chemical weapon stockpiles, which a French intelligence report recently estimated at over 1,000 tons, have been secured by Syrian Special Forces.

“Due to the urgency of preventing access to these weapons by unauthorized groups, including terrorists, the United States government has been preparing for scenarios to secure the weapons in the event of the Assad regime's loss of control,” the document reads. Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 7, 2012, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta warned the ouster of Assad would present a scenario “100 times worse than what we dealt with in Libya.”

In order to secure the 50 chemical weapon and production sites spread across Syria, in addition to storage and research facilities, “The Pentagon has estimated that it would take over 75,000 troops to neutralize the chemical weapons,” the document continues, citing a February 2012 CNN report.

Meanwhile, a resolution backing the use of force against President Bashar Assad's government cleared the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on a 10-7 vote on Wednesday, although section 3 of the draft ostensibly ruled out US combat operations on the ground.

The wording of the text, however, could potentially allow for troops on the ground for the sake of non-offensive operations, including securing chemical weapons stockpiles and production facilities.

While the Senate committee initially opted to limit US military involvement in the country to 90 days with no potential of ground operations, Republican Senator John McCain joined forces with Democratic Senator Chris Coons to add a provision calling for “decisive changes to the present military balance of power on the ground in Syria.”

The Obama administration's vacillations on Syria were perhaps best exemplified by Secretary of State John Kerry. Speaking before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Tuesday, Kerry suggested it would be preferable to give the White House the power to send in ground forces in the event that Syria “imploded” or if chemical weapons were at risk of being obtained by extremists.

“I don't want to take off the table an option that might or might not be available to a president of the United States to secure our country,” he told the committee in the run up to the vote.

After being told by Senator Bob Corker – the top Republican on the committee – his sentiments regarding boots on the ground were not “a very appropriate response,” Kerry quickly backtracked.

“Let’s shut the door now,” Kerry said. “The answer is, whatever prohibition clarifies it to Congress or the American people, there will not be American boots on the ground with respect to the civil war.”

Having cleared committee, the measure authorizing force in Syria is expected to reach the Senate floor next week. Senator Rand Paul, a republican with strong ties to the Tea Party movement, has threatened a filibuster.

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