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OPINION | OTHER THOUGHTS

Syria: Obama Correct To Turn To Congress

THE CLARION-LEDGER (Aug. 31): Regardless of motives, President Barack Obama made the right decision in seeking congressional support for a military response to Syria's (alleged) use of

weaponized gas on rebels. While history and precedent provide a clear enough path for the president to make the decision himself, this particular incident at this particular time holds tremendous importance for the future of the Middle East and for the direction of our country.

Syria is but a minor player among Arab nations, but its allies are strong. Furthermore, we have seen all too well how American intervention without well-planned strategies for post-success actions can make matters far worse than before. Look to Iraq. Look to Egypt.

Compound this with the increasing reports of a strengthening al-Qaida presence in Syria, and we must be more vigilant than ever in vetting any military response that leaves Syrian power in place - which is the extent of any military reaction that most even would consider supporting.

At home, the divide among our national leaders is clear, and it worsened by the divide among our people. If the backlash against former President George W. Bush was bad after his decision to invade Iraq, the backlash against Obama for launching a military action against Syria could be devastating to our domestic agenda.

With Great Britain unlikely to join us in a military response and with the United Nations deciding against any retaliatory action, Obama would be unwise to move forward alone. Congress must be his ally in this action, or this action must not take place.

Congress, however, now has a bigger job to do. ... There is no good decision, no right and no wrong. And while the president could have made it himself, he was right to heed the calls of congressional leaders and many Americans who said he

should seek the approval of Congress. This will now be an American decision, one made by all we have elected to represent us, lead us and protect us.

THE VIEWS PAGE

■ The PRESS & DAKOTAN Views page provides a forum for open discussion of issues and interests affecting our readers. Initialed editorials represent the opinion of the writer, but not necessarily that of the PRESS **& DAKOTAN.** Bylined columns represent the view of the author. We welcome letters to the editor on current topics. Questions regarding the Views page should be directed to Kelly Hertz at views@yankton.net.

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press Today is Thursday, Sept. 5, the 248th day of 2013. There are 117 days

Today's Highlight in History: On Sept. 5, 1972, terror struck the Munich Olympics as the Palestinian group Black September attacked the Israeli Olympic delegation; 11 Israelis, five guerrillas and a police officer were killed in the resulting siege.

On this date: In 1774, the first

Continental Congress assembled in

Philadelphia. In 1793, the Reign of Terror began during the French Revolution as the measures to repress counter-revolutionary activities.

1836, Sam Houston was elected president of the Republic of

In 1913, fire devastated Hot Springs, Ark., destroying some 60 blocks.

In 1914, the First Battle of the Marne, resulting in a French-British victory over Germany, began during

In 1939, four days after war had broken out in Europe, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a proclamation declaring U.S. neutrality in the

In 1945, Japanese-American Iva Toguri D'Aquino, suspected of being wartime broadcaster "Tokyo Rose," was arrested in Yokohama. (D'Aquino was later convicted of treason and served six years in prison; she was ardoned in 1977 by President Gerald

In 1957, the novel "On the Road," by Jack Kerouac, was first published

by Viking Press. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy signed legislation making aircraft hijackings a federal crime.

In 1975, President Gerald R. Ford escaped an attempt on his life by Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, a disciple of Charles Manson, in Sacramento,

In 1986, four hijackers who had seized a Pan Am jumbo jet on the ground in Karachi, Pakistan, opened fire when the lights inside the plane failed; a total of 22 people were killed

in the hijacking. In 1997, Britain's Queen Elizabeth Il broke the royal reticence over Princess Diana's death, delivering a televised address in which she called her former daughter-in-law "a remarkable person." Mother Teresa died in Calcutta, India, at age 87; conductor Sir Georg Solti died in France at age

Ten years ago: Israeli commandos killed a Hamas bombmaker in a firefight and pulverized the West Bank apartment building in which he had been hiding. Hurricane Fabian slammed into Bermuda, killing four MacKenzie died in Burbank, Calif., at

age 76.

Five years ago: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice became the highest-ranking American official in half a century to visit Libya, where she met Moammar Gadhafi. Europe's Steins asteroid 250 million miles from Earth. Publishing giant Robert Giroux. who'd guided and supported dozens of great writers from T.S. Eliot and Jack Kerouac to Bernard Malamud and Susan Sontag, died in Tinton Falls, N.J., at age 94.

One year ago: In an impassioned speech that rocked the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte. N.C., former President Bill Clinton proclaimed, "I know we're coming back' from the worst economic mess in generations, and he appealed to hardpressed Americans to stick with Barack Obama for a second term in

Today's Birthdays: Former Federal Reserve Board chairman Paul A. Volcker is 86. Comedian-actor Bob Newhart is 84. Actress-singer Carol Lawrence is 81. Actor William Devane is 74. Actor George Lazenby is 74. Actress Raquel Welch is 73. Movie director Werner Herzog is 71. Singer Al Stewart is 68. Actor-director Dennis Dugan is 67. College Football Hall of Famer Jerry LeVias is 67. Singer Loudon Wainwright III is 67. "Cathy" cartoonist Cathy Guisewite is 63. Actor Michael Keaton is 62. Country musician Jamie Oldaker (The Tractors) is 62. Actress Debbie Turner-Larson (Film: Marta in "The Sound of Music") is 57. Actress Kristian Alfonso is 50. Rhythm-and-blues singer Terry Ellis is 50. Rock musician Brad Wilk is 45. TV personality Dweezil Zappa is 44. Actress Rose McGowan is 40. Actor Andrew Ducote is 27. Actress Kat Graham is 27. Olympic gold medal figure skater Kim Yu-na is 23.

Actor Skandar Keynes is 22. **Thought for Today:** "History may be divided into three movements: what moves rapidly, what moves slowly and what appears not to move at all." — Fernand Braudel, French historian (1902-1985).

FROM THE BIBLE

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:8. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

YOUR LETTERS

Pinhead Perspectives Charles Snyder, Apple Valley,

Clearly Bill O'Reilly has an affinity for the word pinheads; he uses it so prolifically that, at least in my case, whenever that word comes up, Bill spontaneously comes to mind. In a recent column (Press & Dakotan, Aug. 18), he made mention of the pinheads in Washington — meaning of course, our elected representatives.

Various sources similarly define pinhead as; one who lacks

the intelligence of the "normal" sector of the human population; a very dull or stupid person; a fool: a nitwit. It seems evident that our elected representatives do not fall into that category. After all, they were able to get elected and the vast majority of them once elected are pretty much able to camp out in Washington, if not by reelection, then as lobbyists.

So, while I think Bill is wrong, might I be wrong? Might it be that old idiom, "It takes one to know one" is literally true?



"NR.CASTRO, YOU'RE EARLY! WHAT AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE FOR ME , AND THE TAXPAYERS!"

American Credibility

Kathleen

PARKER

BY KATHLEEN PARKER

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WASHINGTON — Undoubtedly you've heard that American credibility is on the line, thanks to President Obama's vacillation on what to do about

To bomb or not to bomb, that is always the question.

Obama, indeed, seems to be stricken with indecision. Two years ago, he said that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must go. Last year, he drew the now-infamous red line on chemical weapons use.

Finally, after chemical weapons were used on civilians, most likely by the Assad regime, Obama called for military action. Then, after deploying Secretary of State John Kerry to make the case, he suddenly decided to pass the decision to Congress. (Note to Kerry: Google Obama and "under the bus.")

Now we're stuck with a near-certain military strike that could have disastrous repercussions — all on account of a few presidential words carelessly uttered. It's all about our credibility, they

What does this mean, exactly? Merriam-Webster defines credibility as "the quality or power of inspiring belief." Applied here, it means that when you draw a line in the sand, you have to be willing to fight when that line is crossed.

Apparently, the defining atrocity for the Obama administration is the use of chemical weapons. Pentagon spokesman George Little says using chemical weapons "violates basic standards of human dig-

Unlike, say, shooting protesters in the public square. Or chopping off limbs with machetes, systematic rape, enslavement, sex trafficking and down the list of atrocities we've witnessed without feeling compelled to respond. We may have turned a blind eye, but at least our credibility remained intact.

Why? Primarily, one supposes, because our president didn't draw a line. If your mind has wandered to the playground, where little boys get in fights over taunts and fragile pride, welcome to the sandbox. What say we all brush off our britches and think this one through?

Arguments favoring an attack include that Assad's willingness to use chemical weapons poses a threat to our allies and that other radical actors might become emboldened if the U.S. fails to act. Finally, terrorists might get their hands on Syria's chemical weapons and use them against us. All true, though the terrorist threat seems more

plausible if Assad is ousted. Otherwise, except for the method of killing, not much has changed in the two years since the Arab Spring became a bloody winter in Syria and elsewhere. Recall, too, that we didn't intervene in 1988 when Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons to slaughter 3,000 to 5,000

Kurds. Do we really wish we had? Where does one draw the line on interventions to save innocents at the hands of their own countrymen? Whose civil war is off-

Would that Obama's foreign policy were clear enough to provide answers. More to the heart of the current debate is whether a limited missile strike would make any difference. The nearunanimous opinion is not really. From the porches and stoops of America's heartland to the marbled floors of the U.S. Capitol, the consensus is that a limited strike would merely aggravate matters and potentially lead to a catastrophic clash with global ramifications. How would that work for our credibility?

A strike of greater proportions reminds us of Colin Powell's better moment: You break it, you

That Barack Obama hesitates seems the least of our concerns. He has created problems to be sure, speaking loudly and carrying a twig (as a reader wrote me, to give credit where due). His "foreign policy" seems to be more afterthought (or political cynicism) than strategy.

Even so, lawmakers, including John Boehner, Eric Cantor and Nancy Pelosi, are lining up to support the president's plan for missile strikes. Let's hope that whatever the outcome, our best efforts have been directed by an abundance of caution rather than a prideful attachment to credibility. This is not to say that credibility isn't important, but the measure of one's credibility isn't only whether a nation is willing to stand its ground. It is also whether a nation is willing to be wise.

The U.S. still carries the biggest stick. We are still the bravest, most compassionate, generous nation in the history of mankind. When our allies need us, our credibility is beyond reproach. We always act decisively when the stakes are clear. The world knows this. It is our exceptional history, not a single, transitory man, that inspires belief.

And sometimes, it is helpful to note, a coiled snake is more effective than one that reflexively strikes.

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Remaking The Basic Bargain

Robert

REICH

BY ROBERT B. REICH

Tribune Content Agency

Congress will reconvene shortly. That means more battles over taxes and spending, regulations and safety nets, and how to get the economy out of first gear. Which means more gridlock and continual showdowns over budget resolutions and the debt ceiling.

But before the hostilities start again and we all get lost in political strategies and petty tactics, it's useful to consider what's really at stake for our economy

and democracy. For much of the past century, the basic bargain at the heart of America was that employers paid their workers enough to buy what American employers were selling. Government's role was to encourage and enforce this bargain. We thereby created a virtuous cycle of higher living standards, more jobs and hetter wages

But the bargain has been broken. And until it's remade, the economy can't mend and our democ-

racy won't be responsive to the majority First, a bit of history. Back in 1914, Henry Ford announced he was paying workers on his Model T assembly line \$5 a day — three times what the typical factory employee earned at the time. The Wall Street Journal termed his action "an economic crime."

But Ford knew it was a cunning business move. The higher wage turned Ford's auto workers into customers who could afford to buy Model T's. In two years, Ford's profits more than doubled.

Yet in the years leading up to the Great Crash of 1929, employers forgot Henry Ford's example. The wages of most American workers stagnated even as the economy surged. Gains went mainly into corporate profits and into the pockets of the very rich. American families maintained their standard of living by going deeper into debt, and the rich gambled with their gigantic winnings. In 1929, the debt bubble popped.

Sound familiar? It should. The same thing happened in the years leading up to the crash of 2008. The lesson should be obvious. When the economy becomes too lopsided — disproportionately benefiting corporate owners and top executives rather than average workers — it tips over. It's still lopsided. We're slowly emerging from

the depths of the worst downturn since the Great Depression, but nothing fundamentally has changed. Corporate profits are up largely because payrolls are down. Even Ford Motor Company is now paying its new hires half what it paid new employees a few years ago. All over the American economy, employee pay

is now down to the smallest share of the economy since the government began collecting wage and salary data 60 years ago. And corporate profits con-

stitute the largest share of the economy since then. This is a losing game for corporations over the long term. Without enough American consumers,

their profitable days are numbered. Europeans are in no mood to buy. India and China are slowing dramatically. Developing nations are in trouble.

Republicans claim rich people and big corporations are job creators, so their taxes must not be raised. This is blatantly untrue. In order to create jobs, businesses need customers. But the

rich spend only a small fraction of what they earn. They park most of it wherever around the world they can get the highest The real job creators are the vast mid-

dle class, whose spending drives the economy and creates jobs. But as the middle class's share of total income continues to drop, it can't spend as much as before. Nor can most Americans borrow as they did before the crash of 2008 borrowing that temporarily masked their declining purchasing power.

As a result, businesses are still reluctant to hire and pay decent wages. Which is why the recovery continues

to be so anemic. As wealth and income rise to the top, moreover, so does political power. Corporations and the rich are able to entrench themselves by keeping low tax rates and special tax breaks (such as the "carried interest" loophole allowing private equity and hedge fund managers to treat their incomes as capital gains), and ensuring a steady flow of corporate welfare to their businesses (special breaks for oil and gas, big agriculture, big insurance, Big Pharma, and, of course, Wall Street).

All of this continues to squeeze public budgets, corrupt government, and undermine our democracy. The issue is not and has never been the size of our government; it's who the government is for. Government has become less responsive to the needs of most citizens and more responsive to the demands of the monied interests.

The Republican response is to further reduce taxes on the rich, defund programs for the poor, fight unions, allow the median wage to continue to drop, and oppose any limits on campaign contributions or spending. It does not take a great deal of brainpower to understand this strategy will lead to an even more lopsided economy, more entrenched wealth, and a more corrupt democracy.

So as Congress reconvenes and the battles resume, be clear about what's at stake. The only way back to a buoyant economy is through a productive system whose gains are more widely shared. The only way back to a responsive democracy is through a political system whose monied interests are more effectively constrained.

We must remake the basic bargain at the heart

Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of "Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future." He blogs at www.robertreich.org.