

Abstract

- **The Possibilities of US Military Strike against Syria in 2013**

On August 21, 2013, some areas in Eastern Ghouta of Damascus were attacked by poisonous gas, leaving hundreds of deaths. It was followed by Washington's announcement of its intention to launch a military strike against Syria.

The present report sets three main scenarios for a US action. **First**, the strike may be a limited one, aimed at excluding the chemical weapon completely from the military confrontation. In this case, the major regime forces will not be affected in their conflict with the armed opposition throughout the country. **Second**, the strike may take a large-scale form, not only targeting the chemical weaponry and its facilities, but the entire Syrian strategic military force. In this case, the objective will be the bringing down of President Assad's regime. **Third**, the superpower may decline from the attack, especially if the Congress rejects the action or if a Russian-Iranian initiative is launched to convince Damascus to hand over its chemical weapons.

With respect to the potential repercussions for Syria and the region, the report points out that their size is associated with the size of the strike and to its execution in the first place. Therefore, if it is a limited strike neither leading to the toppling of the regime nor the advancement of the opposition, an overall regional war is not likely to take place. Instead, regional and international understandings would be made, attempting to accomplish stability and guarantee no future use of those weapons. If the strike is an inclusive one aimed at toppling the regime, options are open for a regional warfare preceded by a strong reaction from the regime or its allies in the region. If such an attack is not carried out due to a Russian-Iranian intervention in favour of the Western – and basically Israeli – demand of destroying the chemical weapons, the status quo will most probably go on. The regime and the armed opposition alike will remain in a state of attrition, without anyone capable to achieve a military victory.

With regard to the Jordanian stance on the strike, the report comes to the conclusion that the kingdom cannot ignore the Syrian circumstances.

However, it cannot, for several considerations, influence them. Thus, it can only take a stand congruent with the Arab, regional and international context, assigning priority to national security matters, especially the borders and internal front. As for the repercussions for Jordan, further Syrian refugees are expected to flow to the country, representing an economic and humanitarian challenge to the national infrastructure. Illegal crossing of the borders may increase, including groups aiming to raise tensions in the kingdom pushed by the Syrian regime. This would create an additional security challenge.

The Chapters concludes the following recommendations to Jordanian decision-makers:

1. Committing to the above official attitude, without developing it into any direct involvement in the crisis
2. Managing the crisis in a careful way which maintains the country's security and sovereignty as well as relieves it of the repercussions
3. Attempting to provide financial aid to cope with the new Syrian refugees, taking any additional security challenges into consideration.

- Russia's Initiative to Destroy Syria's Chemical Weapons

In the aftermath of the chemical shelling of Ghouta in East Damascus on August 21, 2013, the US threatened to launch a military attack on Syria. However, Russia came up with an initiative to destroy Syria's chemical weapons, which the Syrian regime approved at once. Upon Russian-US understandings, talks took place in the UN Security Council and ended in Resolution 2118 on September 27, 2013. There was an unprecedented international consensus on the crisis since the armed conflict began in March 2011.

The resolution made general, short references to an overall political settlement – without a definite schedule – based on Geneva Convention 1, which stipulates the persistence of the regime or parts of it within a partnership with the opposition. But, more importantly, it focused on the destruction of Syrian chemical weaponry within a time framework before the end of June 2014, which almost coincides with the end of Bashar Al-Assad's term in July.

The proposal represented a great chance for all relevant parties to gain further time looking for suitable political ways out of the status quo with maximum advantages. It also had other impacts detailed by the report.

The implementation of the resolution is likely to face several obstacles. In political terms, the intentions of different parties – especially those of the regime and Washington – play a significant role in this matter. Furthermore, others in the region and in the opposition are unenthusiastic about the content of the initiative and the resolution. Other aspects have to do with the security of the international teams; the degree of cooperation on the part of Damascus and the armed groups with regard to the inspectors' efforts' requirement; availability of financial resources as well as technical and structural conditions for destruction; and the treatment of possible environmental effects of chemical substances.

There are three scenarios for the future of the Russian project and the UN resolution. First, the execution may fail, assuming that most relevant parties have given an initial approval to gain time and avoid undesirable repercussions. If they are not carried out due to the challenges or the attempts to hamper them, a military strike – or the threat to launch one – might be back. Second, they may take place by means of an international accord if all the parties find it a middle way to maintain their interests. Third, the same circumstances may continue for a while if the difficulties keep going, allowing the disputants more time to re-evaluate their stands and take other options.

On the ground, the civil war is still taking the lives of Syrians, making them homeless and destroying their country before and after the initiative. The reason is that it concentrated on the chemical weapons. However, if the US-Russian understandings depart from Geneva 1 to the political side, it is hoped that a comprehensive settlement would be reached.

In relevant, broader terms, Moscow has raised a number of regional and international questions which, according to the researchers, need specialists' deep answers leading to accurate outcomes. Some of them are on US-Russian relations, shifts in Moscow's international status and US-Iranian ties. Any developments on Tehran's nuclear issue would have certain impacts, such as increasing its regional influence and, perhaps, forming a new scene affecting all the neighbours countries, including the Arab states, Turkey and Israel.