

Why Puppet Masters Need Presidents

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President Obama did Americans a favor by bungling his recent attempt to please his powerful backers who want military action to overthrow the Assad dynasty in Syria. Now that the United States and Russia have announced a [plan](#) to seize Syria's chemical arsenal, it's time to reflect more broadly on events that almost led to a bombing attack by the United States.

Others will celebrate the success of achieving some of his goals without bloodshed. That is surely a good thing. What follows is an effort to explain also what might have been.

The president undertook six network interviews on Sept. 9, typified by his interview portrayed above with CBS reporter Scott Pelley in a White House "Photo of the Day."

But the president was not able to turn around public opinion for a bombing attack in reprisal for the gassing deaths of civilians Aug. 21 in a rebel-held suburb of Damascus.

Obama claimed President Bashar al-Assad's government inflicted the attack. The U.S. president and his team cited largely secret evidence to counter Assad's denials.

Worse, Pierre Piccinin, a Belgian teacher released after five months of captivity by the Free Syrian Army, is saying he and a fellow hostage, an Italian journalist, overheard statements by rebels showing their responsibility for the attack.

The part-time journalist said in a [TV interview](#) that he sympathized at first with the rebel group touted by U.S. leaders -- but then saw the Free Syrian Army disintegrate into kidnapping, banditry and worse.

Whatever the real facts, Obama surely knows he faces a problem of conflicting evidence -- as well the hurdle of legal standards. After all, it takes guilt beyond reasonable doubt to convict someone just for throwing a punch.

Obama has been trying to claim a violation of world norms sufficient to launch military strikes when he cannot obtain support from the United Nations, NATO, the European Union, or even the United Kingdom.

But the president has faced overwhelming pressure to kow-tow to his most powerful backers. So, he persisted in his PR campaign early this week, and his aides suggested he might launch missiles even if he lost a congressional vote.

Such an attack would have provoked an impeachment campaign by back-bench GOP House members blighting the rest of his term. On the military front, U.S. bombing could easily lead to escalation, as the public well knows from the experience of previous recent wars and their dubious rationales at the start.

The high costs that the president seemed willing to pay indicate why we should ignore much of the rhetoric and focus on those who apply pressure so effectively on him: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Israel, plus their Western business allies in the United States, United Kingdom, and France.

Most of Syria's neighbors want to oust President Bashar al-Assad, shut down its military, and exploit Syria's national assets in cooperation with Western powers.

The business alliances are cemented by close intelligence ties. Glenn Greenwald reported in the [Guardian](#) on the basis of Edward Snowden documents that the National Security Agency (NSA) delivers to Israel raw intelligence on the electronic communications of ordinary Americans under no suspicion of wrongdoing.

Arizona Sen. John McCain is the most visible face of this war lobby in the United States, along with his GOP sidekick, Sen. Lindsay Graham of South Carolina.

The key U.S. government player, however, is CIA Director John Brennan.

His career encompasses close bonding with Bush, Saudi, and Obama personnel -- as well as the key financial and operational elements of the war lobby. Brennan chaired the Intelligence and National Security Alliance, an association of intelligence professionals, after he ended the first stage of his 25-year CIA career.

As chief of counter-intelligence in the Obama White House, Brennan met daily with the president and could guide him on preferred policies.

In my new book *Presidential Puppetry*, I describe Brennan as a vital "string" between the powers and the puppets: Brennan helps the elite manipulate the action in ways difficult for the audience to see.

Brennan developed close relationships with members of the Saudi royal family during his years as CIA station chief in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s.

In arguing for a U.S. escalation of the war, Gulf royalty would hardly want to be seen traipsing through the White House visitor gates with their colorful robes flowing.

Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan, shown above in a file photo courtesy of Wikipedia, is one of the more important puppet masters. He leads Saudi intelligence after many years as its ambassador to the United States shoring up ties with the most central players.

London's *Telegraph* and alternative media have reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin this summer rejected Bandar's \$15 billion offer for business deals if Russia would abandon its longtime support for Syria. That illustrates the scope of the dealmaking that has long occurred between the Gulf monarchies and the Western powers.

As one measure of how much the government and mainstream media tilt toward war escalation, McCain and Secretary of State John Kerry each praised during a Senate hearing last week the advocacy of a young research analyst who was later [fired](#) from a pro-war, neo-con think tank after being caught lying about her educational credentials.

McCain had read into the Senate record a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed by "Dr." Elizabeth O'Bagy, age 26, a senior research analyst for the DC-based Institute for the Study of War. She has recently

appeared on Fox News and CNN, each of which has major investments from Saudi sources.

Those kinds of hidden connections are hardly unique. Al Jazeera is funded by Qatar. White House Deputy National Security Advisor Benjamin Rhodes has two siblings working as network news executives, including CBS News President David Rhodes.

More generally, the formula of an attractive young scholar or White House aide justifying war or similar controversial policies has proven effective in recent years in shaping public opinion.

The subliminal message to viewers is that military support for rebels is not just to please innate hawks, anti-Muslim fanatics, and fat-cat contractors. Instead, war can curtail chemical killing and genocide, advance democracy and other human rights -- and build a better future for all.

Most reading this would vividly recall the "WMD" hysteria before the 2003 Iraq War. Older readers remember how government leaders boot-strapped the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution into authority for a long-term, massive escalation of the Vietnam War.

Perhaps even more on-point, however, was the 1990 baby-killing hoax concocted with the help of the most important DC public relations firm of its era, the CIA-linked Hill & Knowlton.

The mission was to help its hidden client, Kuwait, drum up popular support in the United States for the first war against Iraq by claims, including in a Capitol Hill hearing, that Saddam Hussein's invading troops had killed newborns in Kuwait.

The fraud is documented in books by at least two authors, Harper's Publisher John MacArthur and Susan Trento. She has spent decades covering the CIA and related intrigues, as has her husband, Joseph.

Hill and Knowlton's chairman was Robert Keith Gray, who became prominent as a White House adviser in the 1950s and was closely linked by Trento to a number of CIA intrigues.

Gray, a recent guest on the radio show I co-host, wrote me this year to deny irregularities in the Kuwait representation more than two decades ago. He said Trento's account was erroneous in unspecified ways.

But there should have been a federal grand jury or similar probe to achieve accountability for questions of that scale, no matter where the trail led. If that had happened we could have a lot more trust in authorities when we hear now of these kinds of massacre allegations.

This time, the stakes were so high and the public relations task so hard for the White House that American Israel Political Action Committee launched a nearly unprecedented [lobbying campaign](#) in favor of the president's authority to bomb Syria.

Summing up, this column has been to address the question of why puppet masters need presidents groomed in both parties for possible election.

The answer, of course, is that the White House provides a unique soapbox to inspire and to command even when a policy might be unpopular.

Those who, like Obama, ascend to that stage have passed many tests to prove their loyalty on core issues -- and to develop powers of persuasion appealing to the public.

But sometimes a podium is not enough, thank God.

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<http://tinyurl.com/kfc3grr>

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-815.html>