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Few See U.S. Military Action Discouraging
Chemical Weapons Use

Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes

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Few See U.S. Military Action Discouraging Chemical Weapons Use

Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes

President Obama faces an uphill battle in making the case for U.S. military action in Syria. By a 48% to 29% margin, more Americans oppose than support conducting military airstrikes against Syria in response to reports that the Syrian government used chemical weapons.

The new national survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted Aug. 29-Sept. 1 among 1,000 adults, finds that Obama has significant ground to make up in his own party. Just 29% of Democrats favor conducting airstrikes against Syria while 48% are opposed. Opinion among independents is similar (29% favor, 50% oppose). Republicans are more divided, with 35% favoring airstrikes and 40% opposed.

The public has long been skeptical of U.S. involvement in Syria, but an April survey found more support than opposition to the idea of a U.S.-led military response if the use of chemical weapons was confirmed. The new survey finds both broad concern over the possible consequences of military action in Syria and little optimism it will be effective.

Three-quarters (74%) believe that U.S. airstrikes in Syria are likely to create a backlash against the United States and its allies in the region and 61% think it would be likely to lead to a long-term U.S. military commitment there. Meanwhile, just 33% believe airstrikes are likely to be effective in discouraging the use of chemical weapons; roughly half (51%) think they are not likely to achieve this goal.

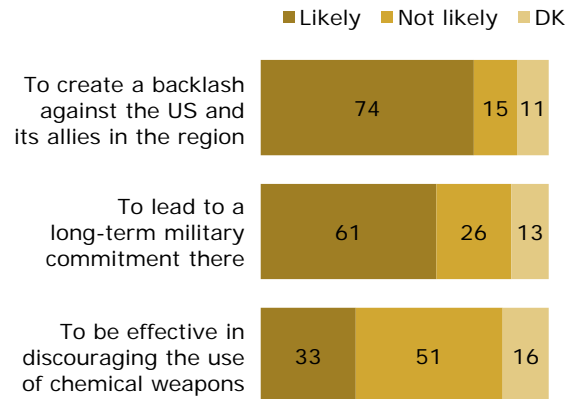
Democrats Dubious, Republicans Divided over Syrian Airstrikes

<i>U.S. airstrikes against Syria</i>	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%	%
Favor	29	35	29	29
Oppose	48	40	48	50
Don't know	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>20</u>
	100	100	100	100
N	1000	226	301	352

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Aug. 29-Sept. 1, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Most See U.S. Airstrikes Leading to Backlash, Long Commitment

Do you think U.S. airstrikes in Syria are likely to...?



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Aug. 29-Sept. 1, 2013.

However, most believe Assad is guilty of using chemical weapons; 53% say there is clear evidence that the Syrian government used them against civilians there while just 23% say there is no clear evidence of a chemical attack. While those who think the evidence is clear offer modestly more support for airstrikes, even here as many oppose as support U.S. military involvement (41% each).

A Third Say Obama Has Made Case for Airstrikes

Overall, just 32% of Americans say Obama has explained clearly why the U.S. should launch military airstrikes against Syria while 48% say he has not explained the reasons clearly enough.

Although Democrats tend to oppose airstrikes against Syria, they give higher marks than Republicans to Obama for making the case for military action.

About half of Democrats (52%) say Obama has clearly explained reasons for conducting airstrikes in Syria, while 33% say he has not. Majorities of Republicans (60%) and independents (54%) say he has not explained the rationale for airstrikes clearly enough.

Partisan Views of Syria, Potential Consequences of U.S. Military Action

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
<i>Has Obama explained clearly why the U.S. should launch airstrikes?</i>	%	%	%	%
Explained clearly	32	19	52	25
Not clearly enough	48	60	33	54
Don't know	<u>20</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>21</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Is there clear evidence that the Syrian government used chemical weapons against civilians?</i>				
Yes, clear evidence	53	56	62	47
No, not clear	23	23	20	27
Don't know	24	21	19	26
<i>Do you think U.S. airstrikes in Syria are likely to ...</i>				
<i>Create a backlash against the U.S. and its allies in the region</i>				
Yes	74	77	71	77
No	15	15	21	13
DK	11	7	8	10
<i>Lead to a long term U.S. military commitment there</i>				
Yes	61	64	57	66
No	26	24	34	24
DK	13	12	10	10
<i>Be effective in discouraging the use of chemical weapons</i>				
Yes	33	35	46	26
No	51	54	40	58
DK	16	11	14	16
<i>Should the U.S. first get a United Nations resolution to use force before taking military action against Syria?</i>				
Yes, should get UN resolution	59	54	66	58
No, does not need to do this	28	34	24	31
Should not use force (Vol.)	2	3	1	2
Don't know	11	9	9	8
<i>Following news...</i>				
Very closely	39	44	42	39
Fairly closely	29	28	31	26
Not too closely	15	13	15	16
Not at all closely	16	15	12	19
N	1,000	226	301	352

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Aug. 29-Sept. 1, 2013.

Most independents (58%) and Republicans (54%) also say that U.S. airstrikes in Syria are not likely to be effective in discouraging the use of chemical weapons. Democrats are more closely divided – nearly as many say they will not be effective (40%) in achieving this goal as say they will (46%).

There is less disagreement over other possible consequences of military action: Majorities of Republicans (77%), independents (77%) and Democrats (71%) say U.S. airstrikes are likely to create an anti-U.S. backlash in the region, while smaller majorities in all three groups also say they are likely to lead to a long U.S. commitment in Syria.

Gender Gap over Syrian Airstrikes

Men are twice as likely as women to favor U.S. military airstrikes against Syria. Among men, nearly as many favor (39%) as oppose (46%) the proposed military action. Among women, just 19% support airstrikes, while 49% are opposed. Women are more uncertain about what to do at this point – 31% offer no opinion compared with just 15% of men.

There are few other major demographic differences of opinion: for example, young and old, college graduates and those with no college offer similar levels of support and opposition.

Support for military airstrikes runs somewhat higher among those who have followed the story the most closely: 37% of those who say they have tracked news about the possibility of airstrikes “very closely” favor airstrikes compared with just 21% of those who say they have followed “not too” or “not at all” closely. Yet opposition to the idea is prevalent regardless of people’s level of interest – nearly half oppose airstrikes among the most and least attentive segments of the public.

Those who see clear evidence of chemical weapons use by Syria – and those who say Obama has clearly explained reasons for using military force – are divided over whether the U.S. should conduct airstrikes. Among the 53% of Americans who say there is clear evidence the Syrian

Those Who Say Obama Has Clear Rationale Are Split over Airstrikes

The U.S. conducting military airstrikes against Syria in response to reports that the Syrian government used chemical weapons ...

	Favor %	Oppose %	DK %	N
Total	29	48	23=100	1,000
<i>Following news about possible U.S. airstrikes in Syria ...</i>				
Very closely	37	48	15=100	452
Fairly closely	27	51	22=100	294
Not closely	21	45	35=100	253
<i>Clear evidence Syria used chem. weapons?</i>				
Yes	41	41	19=100	572
No	18	68	14=100	210
<i>Obama has explained clearly?</i>				
Yes	42	38	20=100	348
No	25	60	15=100	484

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Aug. 29-Sept. 1, 2013. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

government used chemical weapons against civilians, opinion is split evenly as to whether the U.S. should (41%) or should not (41%) conduct airstrikes. Among the 32% who say Obama has explained clearly why the U.S. should launch airstrikes, 42% favor doing so, while 38% remain opposed.

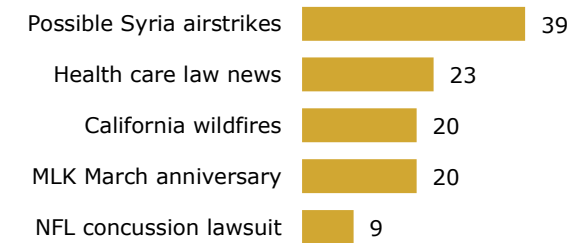
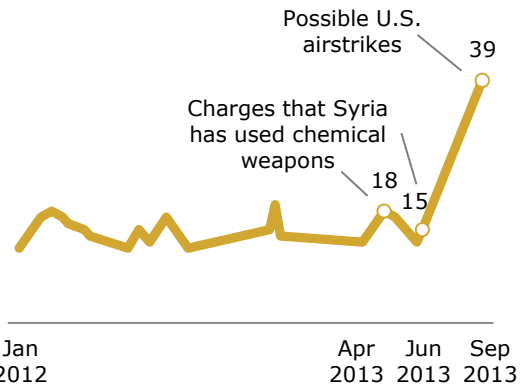
The Week's News

Roughly four-in-ten (39%) followed news about potential U.S. airstrikes in Syria “very closely.” The percentage following news about Syria very closely has approximately doubled from recent weeks, when no more than about 20% tracked Syrian developments very closely, including earlier charges this year that the government used chemical weapons.

Americans paid more attention to the Syrian developments than other stories this week, including news about the health care laws (23% very closely), wildfires in California (20%) and the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington (20%). About one-in-ten (9%) very closely followed the news about the NFL’s agreement with former players about concussion-related lawsuits.

Interest in Syria News

% following news “very closely”



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Aug. 29-Sept. 1, 2013.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted August 29-September 1, 2013, among a national sample of 1,000 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (500 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 500 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 263 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at MKTG under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status, based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,000	3.7 percentage points
Republicans	226	7.8 percentage points
Democrats	301	6.8 percentage points
Independents	352	6.3 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER
August 29-September 1, 2013 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1,000

ASK ALL:

PEW.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY "Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?"]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
a. Possible U.S. airstrikes in Syria in response to reports that the Syrian government used chemical weapons					
August 29-September 1, 2013	39	29	15	16	*
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
June 14-16, 2013: <i>Charges that Syria has used chemical weapons against anti-government groups</i>	15	30	20	33	2
June 6-9, 2013: <i>Political violence in Syria</i>	13	23	22	42	*
May 9-12, 2013	17	24	25	33	1
April 25-28, 2013: <i>Charges that Syria has used chemical weapons against anti-government groups</i>	18	25	24	33	1
March 28-31, 2013: <i>Political violence in Syria</i>	13	22	25	40	1
December 13-16, 2012	14	26	26	33	1
December 6-9, 2012	19	28	23	29	1
November 29-December 2, 2012	15	23	23	39	1
August 16-19, 2012	12	24	26	37	2
July 19-22, 2012	17	24	23	36	1
June 28-July 1, 2012	13	19	26	42	*
June 14-17, 2012	15	24	21	40	1
May 31-June 3, 2012	12	25	25	37	1
April 12-15, 2012: <i>International efforts to stop political violence in Syria</i>	14	23	25	37	1
April 5-8, 2012	15	21	27	37	1
March 15-18, 2012: <i>Political violence in Syria</i>	16	26	27	30	1
March 8-11, 2012	17	23	23	37	1
February 23-26, 2012	18	24	21	35	1
February 9-12, 2012	17	23	23	36	*
January 12-15, 2012	12	17	26	45	1
August 4-7, 2011: <i>Political violence following uprisings in Syria</i>	10	19	26	44	1
June 2-5, 2011: <i>Anti-government protests and violence in some Middle Eastern countries</i>	18	25	25	32	*
May 5-8, 2011: <i>Political violence following uprisings in Syria</i>	14	27	30	28	1
April 28-May 1, 2011: <i>Anti-government protests and violence in some Middle Eastern countries</i>	18	29	25	27	1
February 3-6, 2011: <i>Anti-government protests in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries</i>	32	35	16	18	*
January 27-30, 2011	17	26	21	35	*
b. Wildfires in California					
August 29-September 1, 2013	20	33	23	24	*

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
June 28-July 1, 2012: <i>Large wildfires in Colorado</i>	27	28	21	23	1
June 14-17, 2012: <i>Wildfires in Colorado and other Western states</i>	17	28	24	32	*
September 8-11, 2011: <i>Wildfires in Texas</i>	20	27	25	27	1
June 23-26, 2011: <i>Wildfires in the West and South</i>	21	24	26	28	1
June 9-12, 2011: <i>Wildfires in Arizona</i>	18	27	24	30	*
September 3-6, 2009: <i>Southern California wildfires</i>	22	32	29	16	0
April 24-27, 2009: <i>Wildfires in South Carolina</i>	12	21	29	38	*
November 14-17, 2008: <i>California wildfires</i>	21	28	29	22	*
October 17-20, 2008	15	28	33	24	*
July 11-14, 2008	22	34	28	16	*
October 26-29, 2007	40	41	13	6	*
January 12-15, 2007: <i>Fires in Malibu, California</i>	10	20	31	38	1
November, 2003: <i>California wildfires</i>	38	35	17	9	1
June, 2002: <i>Wildfires in Colorado and other western states</i>	30	36	25	9	*
September, 2001: <i>Wild fires in the west</i>	28	37	24	11	*
December, 1993: <i>Southern California fires</i>	44	39	13	4	*
July, 1990	29	35	24	12	0
c. News about parts of the health care law that are about to take effect					
August 29-September 1, 2013	23	25	21	30	*
July 18-21, 2013	25	25	19	30	*
June 28-July 1, 2012: <i>The Supreme Court decision on the 2010 health care law</i>	45	21	14	19	*
March 29-April 1, 2012: <i>Supreme Court hearings about the 2010 health care reform law</i>	29	27	17	27	*
November 17-20, 2011: <i>The U.S. Supreme Court agreeing to hear legal challenges to last year's health care reform law</i>	18	24	24	33	1
February 3-6, 2011: <i>A federal judge ruling that part of the new health care law is unconstitutional</i>	25	28	19	28	1
January 20-23, 2011: <i>News about Republican efforts to repeal last year's health care law</i>	29	29	20	21	1
December 16-19, 2010: <i>A federal judge ruling that parts of the new health care law are unconstitutional</i>	28	24	17	30	1
September 23-26, 2010: <i>News about portions of this year's health care reform law beginning to take effect</i>	37	31	17	14	1
April 16-19, 2010: <i>News about the new health care reform law</i>	40	30	16	14	*
April 9-12, 2010	46	27	15	12	*
April 1-5, 2010	42	27	14	16	*
March 26-29, 2010: <i>Debate over health care reform</i>	49	29	12	10	*
March 19-22, 2010	51	24	11	14	*
March 12-15, 2010	40	31	16	13	*
March 5-8, 2010	42	27	17	15	*
February 26-March 1, 2010	29	29	19	22	*

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	Very closely	Fairly closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	(VOL.) DK/Ref
February 19-22, 2010	33	28	19	19	*
January 29-February 1, 2010	39	27	16	17	*
January 22-25, 2010	41	32	15	11	*
January 15-18, 2010	37	27	19	18	*
January 8-11, 2010	39	26	20	15	*
December 18-21, 2009	42	27	16	14	*
December 11-14, 2009	42	30	15	14	*
December 4-7, 2009	42	28	15	14	1
November 20-23, 2009	42	29	14	15	*
November 13-16, 2009	38	26	17	17	1
November 6-9, 2009	35	28	15	22	1
October 30-November 2, 2009	32	26	19	23	*
October 23-26, 2009	40	27	16	17	1
October 16-19, 2009	36	28	15	21	*
October 9-12, 2009	37	29	14	19	1
October 2-5, 2009	39	29	16	16	*
September 25-28, 2009	45	31	12	12	0
September 18-21, 2009	44	26	19	11	*
September 11-14, 2009	44	27	14	15	*
September 3-6, 2009	40	26	16	17	0
August 28-31, 2009	40	28	17	14	1
August 21-24, 2009	49	24	12	15	1
August 14-17, 2009	39	31	15	15	1
August 7-10, 2009: <i>Debate in Washington over health care reform</i>	40	27	17	15	1
July 31-August 3, 2009	47	26	14	13	1
July 24-27, 2009	44	28	15	13	*
July 17-20, 2009	33	31	13	21	2
July 10-13, 2009	24	29	20	27	*
June 26-29, 2009	29	26	20	25	1
June 19-22, 2009	28	28	20	23	*
June 12-15, 2009	29	26	18	26	*
May 15-18, 2009: <i>Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans</i>	25	30	20	24	*
March 6-9, 2009: <i>Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling health care</i>	41	32	13	14	*
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON:					
September, 1994: <i>The Clinton administration's health care reform proposals</i>	32	41	18	9	*
June, 1994	34	40	19	7	*
May, 1994	37	37	16	9	1
January, 1994	38	38	15	9	*
Early January, 1994	40	40	14	6	*
December, 1993	45	35	12	7	1
October, 1993	44	32	17	6	1
September, 1993	49	34	11	6	*
August, 1993: <i>Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton</i>	27	32	25	15	1
June, 1993	28	38	19	15	*
May, 1993	30	30	25	14	1
d. The 50 th anniversary of the March on Washington, when Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech August 29-September 1, 2013	20	30	23	28	*

PEW.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
e. The NFL's proposed agreement with former players over concussion-related lawsuits August 29-September 1, 2013	9	18	21	51	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON: May 3-6, 2012: <i>The death of former NFL linebacker Junior Seau in an apparent suicide</i>	16	19	25	37	1

ASK ALL:

PEW.2 Would you favor or oppose the U.S. conducting military airstrikes against Syria in response to reports that the Syrian government used chemical weapons?

Aug 29-Sep 1

2013

29	Favor
48	Oppose
23	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

NO QUESTION PEW.3**ASK ALL:**

PEW.4 Do you think Barack Obama has explained clearly why the U.S. should launch military airstrikes against Syrian military targets or has he not explained the reasons clearly enough?

	<u>Explained clearly</u>	<u>Not clearly enough</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
August 29-September 1, 2013	32	48	20
TRENDS FOR COMPARISON: March, 2003: <i>Do you think George W. Bush has explained clearly what's at stake as to why the U.S. might use military force to end the rule of Saddam Hussein, or do you think he has not explained the reasons clearly enough?</i>	49	47	4
February, 2003	53	40	7
January, 2003	42	53	5
December, 2002	48	45	7
Late October, 2002	48	45	7
Mid-September, 2002	52	37	11
Late August, 2002	37	52	11
New York Times August, 1990: <i>Do you think George Bush has explained clearly what's at stake and why the U.S. is sending troops to Saudi Arabia, or do you think he has not explained the reasons clearly enough?</i>	50	41	9

ASK ALL:

PEW.5 Do you think U.S. airstrikes in Syria **[INSERT, RANDOMIZE]** or not?

	<u>Yes, likely</u>	<u>No, not likely</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a. Are likely to lead to a long-term U.S. military commitment there August 29-September 1, 2013	61	26	13
b. Are likely to create a backlash against the U.S. and its allies in the region August 29-September 1, 2013	74	15	11
c. Are likely to be effective in discouraging the use of chemical weapons August 29-September 1, 2013	33	51	16

ASK ALL:

PEW.6 Should the U.S. first get a United Nations resolution to use force before taking military action against Syria or don't you think the U.S. needs to do this?

	Should first get <u>a UN resolution</u>	Does not need <u>to do this</u>	(VOL.) Should not use <u>force in Syria</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
August 29-September 1, 2013	59	28	2	11
TREND FOR COMPARISON:				
March, 2003: <i>Military action against Iraq</i>	54	35	1	10
February, 2003	57	33	*	10

ASK ALL:

PEW.7 From what you've read and heard, do you think there is clear evidence that the Syrian government used chemical weapons against civilians, or not?

Aug 29-Sep 1

<u>2013</u>	
53	Yes, there is clear evidence
23	No, there is not clear evidence
24	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)