

# Syria Attack: Is America a Superpower Again?

*Just a few short months after Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, he was faced with having to deal with former President Obama's infamous "red line in the sand" failure in Syria. This came about because President Assad of Syria used chemical weapons against his population once again, ignoring international conventions and treaties on their use.*

President Trump's response to that attack was to send 59 missiles into Syria, attacking the air force base where the chemical attacks originated. It was a measured response to the Assad government's misuse of these weapons and fully in line with enforcing the Chemical Weapons Convention.

One can easily lay **at least part of the blame for this attack at Obama's feet** and his failures in regard to teaching Assad a lesson. Obama had threatened Assad with crossing the red line in the sand and using chemical weapons on his own population. But when Assad crossed that line, Obama did nothing. This hurt United States credibility abroad, showing other countries two dangerous things:

- 1. The word of the American President, in regard to maintaining world peace, was meaningless.*
- 2. America was abdicating her role as the world's police.*

Rather than punish the Assad regime for their actions, Obama and his Secretary of State, John Kerry, negotiated an agreement with Syria and their sponsor, Russia. In that agreement, Syria remove or destroy 600 metric tons of chemical weapons, assenting to the Chemical Weapons Convention, even though they were one of the few countries who never became a signer of it.

Obama and Kerry declared this a diplomatic win, even though there was no proof that Syria didn't have any chemical weapons left.

**There are many reasons for Obama's lack of action** in this case, not the least of which was his poor understanding of the proper use of military force.

But apparently the biggest reason was because Iran (which supports Syria) threatened to back out of the nuclear deal they were negotiating with the United States and other countries. As this "deal" was to be part of Obama's legacy, he had to protect it.

This then became part of what Donald Trump inherited when he was sworn in as president. **US credibility on the world stage was at an all-time low.** The question was, would Trump follow in Obama's footsteps or would he act more like former President Reagan.

One can see that first chemical weapons attack as a test on the new American President, amongst other things. This was Trump's first real test in such circumstances, and there were many people around the world waiting with bated breath to see how he would react.

While I am sure there were some who were disappointed (rogue governments and despotic dictators), those who believed in the rule of law were probably breathed a huge collective sigh of relief.

The Syrian government paid a price for that test; one which many would think should have been high enough that they wouldn't be quick to repeat it. But alas, rulers such as Assad rarely learn from their mistakes. When they are backed up in their actions by imperialistic powers like Russia, who has often been a bad actor on the world stage, it gets even worse.

So, Assad's military attacked his civilian population once again, this time killing at least 42 people. This required a response and **Trump made it clear that there would be one.**

The response came in the form of coordinated air strikes by the US, Britain and France, targeting three specific targets in Syria; a chemical research center, storage facility and an equipment facility and command post. All three of these locations were selected because they are key elements in Assad's chemical warfare machine.

Before the bombing, Russia publicly declared their support for Assad, saying that they would defend the Syrian President and retaliate against any attack by the United States.

However, they also pulled their naval assets out of Syria, either as a precaution to protect those assets or to signal that they wouldn't really take any action and that their declaration was for nothing more than show. Now, four days later, we are still waiting to see if there will be any response out of Moscow.

## **How Could This Have Happened?**

We must understand that Syria has a deadly history with chemical weapons. Since 1972, there have been 73 chemical weapons attacks. To believe that a piece of paper would keep them from continuing in this vein might be just a bit naïve.

Like any other such agreement, the Chemical Weapons Convention is an imperfect document, created by imperfect people. While I am sure that it was crafted with the best of intentions and the greatest of care, the reality is that any such document is only good for show.

Signing it makes the participating countries look like good world citizens. But people who are willing to break such an agreement will do so, just like mass shooters will bring

firearms into a gun free zone.

However, it is possible to work your way around many such agreements as well. The Convention identifies **three categories of “controlled substances” for control:**

- *The first includes chemicals which have little to no use outside of being chemical weapons.*
- *The second includes chemicals which have small-scale industrial applications.*
- *Finally, the third includes chemicals which have large-scale applications, other than being chemical weapons.*

There are a several chemicals which are highly deadly yet fall into this third category due to their industrial uses. All the Convention requires for the creation of such chemicals or their precursors is that the chemical plants which produce them report to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), telling them that they are producing those chemicals and in what quantity.

Since there are deadly chemicals in the Schedule 3 list which have major industrial uses in pharmaceuticals, pesticides and even toiletries and detergents. Syria, like many other countries, can produce as much of them as they like. Identifying legitimate production for these uses and stockpiling these chemicals as weapons is almost impossible to identify, let alone control.

Chlorine gas, which has been used by Syria in their more recent attacks, is extremely common. This is the same substance which is used for purifying water, keeping swimming pools clean and whitening clothes. Since chlorine is a naturally-occurring element, it would be virtually impossible to prevent any country from manufacturing or using it.

Even so, the Chemical Weapons Convention still outlaws the use of such chemicals against people or animals. Of courses, Syria can claim that they never signed the Convention, which would

be true, even though they have agreed to abide by the provisions of it.

It is the fact that they broke this provision in the Convention which forced President Trump's hand. If such international agreements, accepted by the community of nations as being law, are not upheld by the member nations, to include punishment of those who break them, they don't mean a thing.

Law is only law when it is enforced. This is true of a municipal prohibition on public spitting and it is true of international treaties and accords. Someone must enforce the law, or it may as well not exist. On the international stage, that someone is the United States of America; preferably working together with allies, but even if we must act on our own, taking it upon ourselves to be the world's police.

## **The United States as the World's Police**

There is some disagreement as to when the United States became the world's police. Perhaps that's because it wasn't so much an event, as a process. We can see the roots of this process starting in the 1800s. But it wasn't until the rise of communism that it became a major issue.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States was called on to intervene in two World Wars, protecting Europe from aggression in both. In the process, we protected much of Africa in World War I and much of Asia in World War II. But another important thing happened in World War II, with the British Empire largely broken up by the war, domination of the free world changed from British hands to American ones.

This truly came to fruit during the early days of the Cold War, as the United States found itself having to protect the world from expansionist Soviet Union. President Truman

declared to the world that the United States would support any country which stood against the spread of communism.

Had he not done this and had the United States not stood against the Soviet Union, the world would probably be communist today.

This alone was enough to make the United States the world's police, even though we weren't really looked at that way. Rather, we were the prime country standing against Soviet aggression and their intent to annex the third-world countries. In many cases, it was US support and at times involvement (this was the prime mission for Special Forces), which kept those countries from being overrun by communist forces.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disbanding of the Soviet Union there was no longer a "red menace" for American military and political might to stand against. For a time, we were the world's one true superpower; a grave responsibility, which the United States rose to.

Granted, **the United States has not always used its power perfectly**. There have been times when we have used our military prowess and political clout with less than perfect motives. In many other occasions, our political leadership picked the wrong foreign leaders to support. Time after time, groups which presented themselves as democratic turned out to be something quite different, when they got into power.

But the United States stands alone in the world for going to the aid of and protecting countries which were faced with aggressive takeovers, genocide, and despotic rulers. While we have not done so perfectly, what we have done is aid these countries even when it was not in our best interest to do so. In this, we defended the people of those countries, even when we did not stand to gain.

With that kind of history for our nation, President Trump had

to act to punish the Assad regime and protect the people of Syria. As the world's most powerful country, it is our responsibility to protect the weak, even when we don't stand to gain. Just as we they done countless times in the past, our military rushed to the defense of the Syrians people, against an unjust government.

Sadly, Obama didn't understand this grave responsibility that our country holds. Perhaps if he did, this attack would not have been necessary. The problem could have been solved several years ago, rather than having to be solved today.

But apparently Obama didn't understand the unique place that the United States holds in the world; not as the world's masters, not as the world's slaves; but **as the world's police**.

While this might not be the most enviable position to have to fulfill, there is no other country which is as well prepared by both temperament and strength to do so. Thank God that we are; for the other options (Russia and China) do not appear to be such good choices.



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