



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on April 15, 2018

## Trump's Attack on Syria vs. the (Ignored) Constitution

While the U.S. attack against Syria was underway, President Donald Trump [told the nation Friday night](#): "A short time ago, I ordered the United States armed forces to launch precision strikes on targets associated with the chemical weapons capabilities of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. A combined operation with the armed forces of France and the United Kingdom is now under way. We thank them both.... Last Saturday [April 7], the Assad regime again deployed chemical weapons to slaughter innocent civilians, this time in the town of Douma near the Syrian capital of Damascus. This massacre was a significant escalation in a pattern of chemical weapons used by that very terrible regime.."



This was a far cry from the Donald Trump before he became president. Here are just three of his tweets BP (before becoming president):

- June 15, 2013: "We should stay the h— out of Syria, the "rebels" are just as bad as the current regime. What will we get for our lives and \$billions? Zero."
- August 29, 2013: "What will get for bombing Syria besides more debt and a possible long term conflict? Obama needs Congressional approval."
- September 5, 2013: "To our very foolish leader [Obama], do not attack Syria. If you do many very bad things will happen & from that fight the U.S. gets nothing!"

He attacked "Crooked Hillary" for harboring the same intentions:

- May 21, 2016: "Crooked Hillary Clinton's foreign interventions unleashed ISIS in Syria, Iraq and Libya. She is reckless and dangerous!"

Now, thanks to Assad's alleged chemical attack (thus proving his is a "very terrible regime"), that's all that is needed, apparently, to launch those missiles.

As Fox News' Tucker Carlson asked last Thursday, where is the beef?:

Tonight leaders on both sides of the aisle in Congress, in the media, in our intelligence services, and in virtually every over-funded think tank in Washington, have suddenly aligned tonight on a single point of agreement: America must go to war in Syria, immediately. Bashar al Assad cannot continue to lead that country, he must be overthrown!

But why? Why would Assad do such a thing? He paid a terrible price the last time he gassed his own people in 2017. Didn't he learn his lesson? Carlson added: "Assad's forces had been winning the war in Syria. The administration just announced its plans to pull American troops out of Syria having vanquished ISIS. That's good news for Assad. About the only thing he could do to reverse it and to hurt



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himself would be to use poison gas against children. Well, he did it anyway, they tell us. He's that evil!" Therefore, goes the war hawk narrative, something must be done! What the U.S. did in 2017 didn't work. The U.S. must up the ante, even if there is no hard evidence that Assad did this terrible deed: "The story," said Carlson, "it turns out, was propaganda, designed to manipulate Americans.... We've seen this story before and we know how it ends."

What "turns out" is the "de-classified" French government report that claimed that Assad was behind the attack. It was based, claimed the report, on "multiple media sources, the reported symptoms experienced by the victims, videos and images showing two ... bombs from the attack, and the reliable information indicating coordination between Syrian military officials before the attack."

Even if this is so, does this make any sense? Enough sense to send missiles into foreign territory to teach the miscreant a lesson? That's what Selwyn Duke in *The New American* [asked](#) on Saturday: "We have no apparent national interest in Syria. What does the risk/reward factor inform [us] here? What is the upside to risking conflict with another nuclear superpower [Russia]?" After all, wrote Duke, "Trump had announced his intention to withdraw [remaining] U.S. forces from Syria just a week earlier. Why would Assad take an action guaranteeing the last thing he wants: prolonged U.S. involvement in his nation?"

In her review of the attack, Pamela Geller, a political activist and co-founder of the American Freedom Defense Initiative (aka, Stop Islamization of America), asked the same questions: "I am not quite sure on whose behalf we are launching these strikes. ISIS? To engage Iran? There is no way Assad gassed his people. To what end? To rile up the West? It makes no sense. He won. He is in place. Why gas now?"

All of which points once again to the wisdom of the Founding Fathers, who deliberately and intentionally put in place the simplest command in the Constitution: only "The Congress shall have Power ... to declare war." *Not* the President. The Founding Fathers did not want a single man to decide when to take the nation into a war.

Under the U.S. Constitution, the powers of the president were much more limited than that of a monarch, as Alexander Hamilton explained in *The Federalist*, No. 69:

The President is to be commander-in-chief of the army and navy of the United States. In this respect his authority would be nominally the same with that of the king of Great Britain, but in substance much inferior to it. It would amount to nothing more than the supreme command and direction of the military and naval forces, as first General and admiral of the Confederacy; while that of the British king extends to the DECLARING of war and to the RAISING and REGULATING of fleets and armies, all which, by the Constitution under consideration, would appertain to the legislature.

The following century, President Abraham Lincoln provided a good explanation (though some say surprisingly, in light of his own constitutional abrogations during the Civil War) as to why the president should not be the decider as to when to go to war:

Allow the President to invade a neighboring nation, whenever he shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion, and you allow him to do so, whenever he may choose to say he deems it necessary for such purpose — and allow him to make war at pleasure....

Kings had always been involving and impoverishing their people in wars, pretending generally, if not always, that the good of the people was the object. This our Convention understood to be the



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most oppressive of all Kingly oppressions; and they resolved to so frame the Constitution that no one man should hold the power of bringing this oppression upon us.

Randolph Bourne, a progressive at the turn of the century, turned against his mentor, John Dewey, when Dewey proposed war as a tool to spread the joys of “democracy” around the world. In his 1918 essay, “War is the Health of the State,” Bourne wrote that war

automatically sets in motion throughout society those irresistible forces for uniformity, for passionate co-operation with the Government in coercing into obedience the minority groups and individuals which lack the larger herd sense. The machinery of government sets and enforces the drastic penalties, the minorities are either intimidated into silence or brought slowly around by a subtle process of persuasion which may seem to them to really converting them....

In general, the nation in war-time attains a uniformity of feeling, a hierarchy of values, culminat[ing] at the undisputed apex of the State ideal, which could not possibly be produced through any other agency than war.

Perhaps with war-hawkers such as John Bolton now whispering in his ear, the president has forgotten his previous anti-war stances and is now allowing the alleged, largely unproven gas attacks by Assad on his own people (and against his own self-interest) to provide him an excuse to get even with “that very terrible regime.”

If constitutional restraints on the president such as the congressional power to declare war are ignored long enough, they will effectively go away.

*Photo: mj0007/iStock/Getty Images Plus*

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