

The Washington Times

Calls mounting for Trump to target Assad in missile strike against Syria

Dave Boyer

April 11, 2018

A member of the Senate Armed Services Committee urged President Trump Wednesday to launch a “regime-threatening” military attack against Syria, as the president warned on social media that a missile strike is imminent.

Sen. Mike Rounds said the U.S. should target President Bashar Assad’s “command and control system” in retaliation for a chemical-weapons attack on civilians last weekend in a rebel-held suburb of Damascus.

“This one’s got to be a very serious, a very regime-threatening attack,” the South Dakota Republican said on the Hugh Hewitt radio show. “Remember, this guy’s already been warned once. This is one that that should be noticed not just by the Assad regime, but by Iran and by Russia as well, very clearly.”

Russia and Iran are providing the Assad government with military support in Syria’s seven-year-old civil war.

Michael Rubin, a former Pentagon official and Middle East specialist at the American Enterprise Institute, said there are legitimate reasons for the U.S. to target Mr. Assad personally. He said killing Mr. Assad would be “the ultimate deterrent to dictators” who use chemical weapons or sponsor terrorism.

“There is nothing absolute about the prohibition on targeting world leaders,” Mr. Rubin wrote this week in *The Washington Examiner*. “Want to use cruise missiles? As Assad leads Syria to ruin, there is no reason why his shiny and ostentatious palace should remain standing on a mountaintop above Damascus. And while Russia warns the United States not to retaliate in Syria, permanently removing Assad from the battle field would leave Moscow no choice but to begin serious negotiations on who comes next.”

But John Glaser, director of foreign policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, said Mr. Trump should “back down” from his threats of an attack against Syria. He said any military strike would be illegal because it hasn’t been authorized by Congress.

“No U.S. military action short of all-out regime change is going to deter the Assad government from committing future atrocities,” Mr. Glaser said. “It strains common sense to take an illegal military action with virtually no chance of success and with high risks of escalation because roughly 40 people were killed by chlorine in a civil war that has killed 500,000 people by bullets and bombs.”

Mr. Trump referred to Mr. Assad on Twitter Wednesday morning as a “Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!” He scoffed at Russia’s claim that it will shoot down any U.S. missiles launched at Syria.

“Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and ‘smart!’” Mr. Trump tweeted.

In response, Russia’s Foreign Ministry said in a Facebook post that “smart missiles should fly towards terrorists, not towards the lawful government.”

An international chemical-weapons watchdog said Tuesday it was preparing to deploy a team of investigators to Syria to determine whether banned chemical agents were used in the attack, which killed dozens.

In Damascus, the foreign ministry accused the U.S., which has supported some rebel groups in the Syrian civil war, of using “fabrications and lies” as an excuse to hit its territory.

“We are not surprised by such a thoughtless escalation by a regime like the United States regime, which sponsored terrorism in Syria and still does,” the state news agency SANA cited an official source in the ministry as saying.

After the attack in Douma, the insurgent group entrenched there — Jaish al-Islam — finally agreed to withdraw. That sealed a major victory for Mr. Assad in the war, crushing a protracted rebellion in the eastern Ghouta region near the capital Damascus.