



CATO INSTITUTE: No Strategic, Tactical, Legal, or Humanitarian Justification for US Strikes in Syria

John Glaser

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This amounts to an embrace of Russia's challenge and it risks a significant escalation of the U.S. role in Syria. It is a profoundly dangerous example of brinkmanship.

Americans are now supposed to ready themselves for a military clash with a nuclear power over a U.S. military strike against the Assad regime that has no legitimate justification.

First, any U.S. strike against Syria will be illegal unless it first receives explicit authorization from Congress. As was the case with Trump's previous missile strike against the Assad regime last April, he will be acting unlawfully if he takes this action.

Second, what does the administration expect to accomplish here? No U.S. military action short of all-out regime change is going to deter the Assad government from committing future atrocities. The strike in April 2017 had zero strategic or tactical utility. It did nothing to resolve the Syrian civil war. It did not serve U.S. national interests in any tangible way. Nor did it serve any humanitarian objective. The Assad regime has continued to use violence against its own people.

Third, it strains common sense that we would 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. Chemical weapons occupy a special place in our minds as a particularly cruel form of violence, but there is nothing special about them, except perhaps that they are less lethal than the conventional military means by which most Syrians have been killed or maimed in this war.

Reports indicate that the Trump administration is trying to find a Goldilocks military option that would be more damaging than the pin-prick punitive strike last April, but not big enough to entangle the United States in another Middle East quagmire by toppling the Assad government or clashing directly with Russian or Iranian forces in a way that triggers escalatory measures. This is a farcical exercise that ignores the utter lack of strategic, tactical, legal, or humanitarian rationale for military action.

Just days prior to news of this recent chemical weapons attack in Syria, President Trump articulated his desire to withdraw U.S. forces from the country. His instincts were correct.

John Glaser is director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.