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## **Trump administration's missile strikes against Syria break international law**

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The Trump administration's missile strikes against Syria targeted three sites reportedly fundamental to the Assad regime's chemical weapons infrastructure. The idea, we're told, is to degrade the regime's ability to use chemical weapons and deter Assad from using them on his own people in the future, and thereby enforce the international norm prohibiting chemical weapons warfare.

But the only norm we're really enforcing is the one that says the United States is exempt from the laws and norms by which our adversaries must abide.

One of the core tenets of the post-World War II "liberal world order" that America supposedly leads is that the use of force against another country is prohibited unless it is taken in self-defense or it has the support of the United Nations Security Council. By bombing the Assad regime in the absence of these prerequisites, the Trump administration is acting unlawfully.

Not only do we consistently act above the laws and norms we bomb others for violating, we also apply these standards selectively. If international humanitarian law and the laws of war really concerned the White House, for example, it would immediately halt its support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, where they have killed more than 10,000 people and have been accused of committing war crimes by bombing schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. The Saudis, with American complicity, have also imposed a severe blockade on Yemen, effectively blocking humanitarian aid for millions of Yemenis at risk of starvation and suffering from easily curable diseases.

The case for bombing Syria for the sake of humanitarian goals is weak for another reason: While chemical weapons occupy a special place in our minds as a particularly cruel form of warfare, they are actually far less lethal than the conventional military means by which most Syrians have been killed or maimed in this vicious civil war. The message we seem to be sending is that the Assad regime can't use chemical weapons again, though it can go on killing people with bombs and bullets.

Americans should also be concerned about the rule of law in our own country. The President is not vested with the power to bomb any country in the world at his own whim. His war powers are constrained by the Constitution, which grants Congress the power to authorize military action abroad. As the Constitution's lead framer, James Madison, once wrote, "In no part of the

constitution is more wisdom to be found than in the clause which confides the question of war or peace to the legislature, and not to the executive department.”

The United States is apparently so addicted to war in the Middle East, which has persisted nonstop for more than 17 years, that the rule of law and our own hypocrisy are feeble barriers to its continuance.

The truth is that these strikes were designed to be extremely limited in scope, so as to avoid changing any strategic or tactical realities on the battlefield. The Trump administration knows the chaos that would erupt if the Assad regime were to collapse. Defense Secretary James Mattis called them a “show strike.” And it is for show. These strikes won’t tangibly improve the Syrian civil war and they won’t ease humanitarian suffering. What they have done is satisfy the irrational need to “do something.” Anything, apparently.

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