

Statement for the Record

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security

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Mr Chairman, members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to address you on the subject "Crisis in Syria: Implications for Homeland Security."

An American missile strike against Syria might well adversely affect American security. We have seen in the past that half measures, ineffective strikes, and "shots across the bow" against diabolical enemies have often resulted in tragic counter strikes against Americans interests at home and abroad. President Reagan ordered an air strike against Libya in 1986. In time the Libyans retaliated with a terrorist bombing that killed hundreds of Americans aboard Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie Scotland. President Clinton ordered retaliation strikes against terrorists who bombed American embassies in Africa. The terrorists, unaffected by these missile strikes, were emboldened by attack the USS Cole in 2000 and later the World Trade Center in 2001 that killed thousands of innocent Americans.

A missile strike that does not result in regime change in Syria or the defeat of the Syrian Army can only have a similar impact. Failure to defeat Assad might well embolden the Syrians to retaliate against our homeland as well as Americans abroad. In fact Assad has already telegraphed his intention to retaliate, possibly with chemical weapons. There is an old military adage that certainly conveys in these circumstances: "If you want to kill the snake cut off the head not the tail. Limited strikes over a limited time against limited strategic objectives in Syria will only cut the tail and embolden the snake to strike back.

While a revenge strike against Syria might endanger the homeland such an action will have virtually no impact on the Syrian regime or the course of this bloody sectarian civil war. Assad will likely survive. He and his murderous regime will only continue to butcher his people. The proposed firepower strike violates every principle of war to include surprise, mass and a clearly defined and obtainable strategic objective. As the nation "takes a knee" the Syrian Army will continue to hide, disperse, camouflage and secret his strategic systems among the population. What might have degraded Assad's forces two weeks ago will certainly not have the intended effects as we delay and continue to telegraph our military intent.

Sadly the principal motive for risking American lives in Syria is our "responsibility to protect" the world's innocents. This is not about threats to American security. In fact members of this Administration take pride in the fact that their motives are driven by guilt over slaughters in Rwanda, The Sudan and Kosovo and not by any systemic threat to our own country. Are we really willing as a nation to put the lives of our soldiers at risk to serve a purpose unrelated to

our vital national interests? The American people have answered this question. The polls indicate that the American people do not believe that the risks are worth the rewards.

We should not put American lives at risk to make up for a slip of the tongue about red lines. This is an act of war done purely for retribution and to restore the reputation of a President. This administration states that such a strike is necessary to maintain American credibility in the face of threats from enemies such as Iran. Killing more Syrians won't deter Iranian resolve to confront us. The Iranians have already gotten the message and have internalized our amateur approach and lack of resolve. But by no means should such esoteric excuses for war such as "credibility" or the restoration of national honor ever be a justification for committing an act of war against a country that has never threatened us in the least.

In the past we have used a firepower-only strategy against the Serbs and Libyans. But Syria is not Libya or Serbia. Perhaps we have become too used to fighting third rate armies. As the Israelis learned in 1973 these guys are tough and mean spirited killers with nothing to lose. It's important to remind ourselves that strikes against Syrian will involve the Nation in a sectarian civil war. Such conflicts are by their nature the most intractable, ruthless, long lasting and bloody of any form of warfare. If the past is prolog third party involvement in civil wars never ends well for any of the participants.

As in the past we will fire our missiles and likely kill innocent Syrians for no justifiable strategic purpose. We know how this war will begin but no one in the Administration can postulate how it will end.

For a great power often an effective strategy is to maintain the potential for war rather than going to war. Our most respected Soldier-President, Dwight Eisenhower, possessed the gravitas and courage to say no to war eight times during his presidency. He ended the Korean War and refused to aid the French in Indochina; he said no to his former war time friends when they demanded American participation in the capture of the Suez Canal. And he resisted liberal democrats who wanted to aid the newly formed nation of South Vietnam. We all know how that ended after his successor ignored Eisenhower's advice. My generation got to go to war.

Perhaps after more than half a century we might take a page from the Eisenhower era and accept the premise that saying no is the best of a very bad set of strategic alternatives.

These strikes can only end badly for our country. We have no legitimate strategic end state in mind. A strike delivered for the purpose of "sending a message" will only inflame a region that does not think well of American motives after ten years of war in the Middle East. Other nations might wish us well in this endeavor but none other than France thinks well enough of our strategy to risk the lives of their soldiers. We may wish to end this with a shot across the bow. But history shows time and again that war is the most unpredictable of all human endeavors. Once the dogs of war are unleashed, even for the most noble of motives, the consequences can only be unpredictable and likely end tragically for the nation.