

# SYRIA: U.S. military officials informed Russian counterparts of the impending attack

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Bashar Assad was responsible for the chemical attack, which he said employed banned gases and killed dozens.

“Assad choked out the lives of innocent men, women and children,” Trumped declared.

The U.S. strikes hit the government-controlled Shayrat air base in central Syria, where U.S. officials say the Syrian military planes that dropped the chemicals had taken off. The U.S. missiles hit at 8:45 p.m. in Washington, 3:45 a.m. Friday morning in Syria. The missiles targeted the base’s airstrips, hangars, control tower and ammunition areas, officials said.

Syrian state TV reported a U.S. missile attack on a number of military targets and called the attack an “aggression.”

The surprise U.S. assault marked a striking reversal for Trump, who warned as a candidate against the U.S. getting pulled into the Syrian civil war, now in its seventh year. But the president earlier in the week appeared moved by the photos

of children killed in the chemical attack, calling it a “disgrace to humanity” that crossed “a lot of lines.”

About 60 U.S. Tomahawk missiles, fired from warships in the Mediterranean Sea, targeted an air base in retaliation for a chemical weapons attack that American officials believe Syrian government aircraft launched with a nerve agent, possibly sarin.

The president did not announce the attacks in advance, though he and other national security officials ratcheted up their warnings to the Syrian government throughout the day Thursday.

“I think what happened in Syria is one of the truly egregious crimes and shouldn’t have happened and it shouldn’t be allowed to happen,” Trump told reporters traveling on Air Force One to Florida, where he was holding a two-day summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The strike came as Trump was hosting Xi in meetings focused in part on another pressing U.S. security dilemma: North Korea’s nuclear program. Trump’s actions in Syria

could signal to China that the new president isn’t afraid of unilateral military steps. even if key nations like China are standing in the way.

Trump has advocated greater counterterrorism cooperation with Russia, Assad’s most powerful military backer. Just last week, the Trump administration signaled the U.S. was no longer interested in trying to push Assad from power over his direction of a conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and led to the worst refugee crisis since World War II.

U.S. military officials sought to portray the strikes as an appropriate, measured response. But the assault still risks plunging America into the middle of Syria’s conflict, complicating the safety of the hundreds of U.S. forces fighting a separate campaign against the Islamic State group in the north of the country. If Assad’s military persists in further gas attacks, the Trump administration might logically pursue increased retaliation.

Russia and Iran, Assad’s allies, pose other problems. Russian military personnel and aircraft are

embedded with Syria’s, and Iranian troops and paramilitary forces are also on the ground helping Assad fight the array of opposition groups hoping to topple him.

Before the strikes, U.S. military officials said they informed their Russian counterparts of the impending attack. The goal was to avoid any accident involving Russian forces.

Nevertheless, Russia’s Deputy U.N. ambassador Vladimir Safronkov warned that any negative consequences from the strikes would be on the “shoulders of those who initiated such a doubtful and tragic enterprise.”

The U.S. also notified its partner countries in the region prior to launching the strikes.

Trump’s decision to attack Syria came three-and-a-half years after President Barack Obama threatened Assad with military action after an earlier chemical weapons attack killed hundreds outside of Damascus. Obama had declared the use of such weapons a “red line.” At the time, several American ships in the Mediterranean were poised

to launch missiles, only for Obama to abruptly pull back after key U.S. ally Britain and the U.S. Congress balked at his plan.

He opted instead for a Russian-backed plan that was supposed to remove and eliminate Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles.

Thursday night’s strikes were launched from the USS Ross and USS Porter and landed in the early morning Friday in Syria.

The world learned of the chemical attack earlier in the week in footage that showed people dying in the streets and bodies of children stacked in piles. The international outcry fueled an emotional response from Trump, who appeared to abandon his much-touted “America First” vision for a stance of humanitarian intervention, akin to that of previous American leaders. “I think what happened in Syria is a disgrace to humanity,” he said Thursday.

Trump seemed to rapidly reconsider his feelings about Assad, saying: “He’s there and I guess he’s running things, so something should happen.”



Jessica A. Stewart/The St. Joseph News-Press via AP

**United State Marine Corp Staff Sgt. Kevin Harmon, left, and Pfc. David Aguirre raise the flag at Mount Mora Cemetery Thursday in St. Joseph, Mo. They also laid a wreath at the World War I memorial in honor of the 100th anniversary of the United States entering the first world war.**

## Thousands pause for global WWI centennial observance

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Awed by an eight-plane flyover that left the sky streaked with plumes of red, white and blue contrails, thousands paused Thursday in the shadow of the nation’s official World War I monument in remembrance of the day a century ago that the U.S. entered the fight.

Melding equal measures of homage to American sacrifice with patriotism, the commemoration — “In Sacrifice for Liberty and Peace” — amounted to a multimedia time warp to April 6, 1917, when America begrudgingly joined the global conflict that President Woodrow Wilson had sought to avoid through neutrality.

With winds fluttering flags amid temperatures in the upper 40s, a few thousand ticketholders and dozens of foreign ambassadors watched a color guard clad as WWI-era “Doughboys” present the colors.

Short films — one narrated by Kevin Costner, another by Gary Sinise — displayed on twin screens 25 feet tall offered documentary-style flashbacks. Ragtime music, military pomp and recitations of writings of the period filled voids between speeches, many of them by politicians.

Many who publicly spoke offered a nod to American sacrifice: By the time U.S. troops helped vanquish Germany and the conflict ended in 1918, more than 9 million people were lost to combat, some 116,000 of them Americans killed in what turned out to be a transformational war. A conflict initially fought by horseback in dank, muddy trenches gave way to carnage by armored vehicles, air combat and German use of mustard gas.

“America entered the war to bring liberty, democracy and peace to the world after almost three years of unprecedented hardship, strife and horror,” retired Army Col. Robert Dalessandro, chairman of the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission, which hosted the event, told the crowd. “We still live in the long shadow of World War I in every aspect of our lives.”

Kansas City’s selection

“America entered the war to bring liberty, democracy and peace to the world.”

— Robert Dalessandro, Retired U.S. Army Colonel

as host of Thursday’s hours-long affair was no accident, given the hilltop setting’s 217-foot tall Liberty Memorial tower and the sprawling WWI museum below it.

The monument was built after a burst of postwar patriotism that over 10 days in 1919 raised \$2.5 million, the equivalent to more than \$30 million today.

So noteworthy was the achievement that Allied commanders from Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, France and the U.S. gathered in 1921 to dedicate the site, across the street from the Kansas City train station that more than half of U.S. troops passed through before being shipped overseas.

When the monument was completed five years later, more than 150,000 turned out to hear President Calvin Coolidge dedicate it. Cast on Thursday by Mayor Sly James — a former Marine — as one of Kansas City’s “crown jewels,” the site last year drew 200,000 visitors spanning more than 70 countries.

“For the past 91 years, people from across the globe have come to learn and remember,” said the museum’s CEO, Matt Naylor, who displays in his office the shaving kit his British grandfather used as a WWI infantryman in France.

Across the Atlantic on Thursday, France staged its own centennial observance.

French defense minister Jean-Yves Le Drian urged diplomats and veterans at Paris’ U.S. embassy to remember “the courage of America and the millions of soldiers that came to fight at our side.”

Le Drian added that French soldiers who attended the Kansas City event demonstrated that “our countries are coming together around a common history.”



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