

Debate #1: Should the United States attack Syria?

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Strike On Syria: Meaningless Gesture Or Necessary Response?

by Mark Memmott

The arguments for and against taking military action against the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad for its alleged use of chemical weapons against civilians were laid out Monday on Morning Edition.

Making the case for a "legitimate, necessary and proportional response" was Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

"The human and national security stakes of chemical weapons use," she said, are too high to go unanswered. Unless there's a response, Power said, Assad will use chemical weapons "again and again and again and it's only a matter of time before [they] fall into the hands of nonstate actors" such as al-Qaida. Power also made the case that the U.S. can't wait for authorization from the U.N. Security Council because Russia will continue to block such a move by the U.N.

Arguing against a military strike was Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., who serves on the House Appropriations Committee's foreign operation subcommittee. The conflict in Syria, he said, is "particularly intractable and particularly nasty. It's a war on many levels. A civil war, a religious war, a proxy war between the Iranians and the Saudis." He sees "no direct security threat to the United States" or its allies, and argues that limited strikes "are not likely to work." They would be "largely a gesture," Cole said.

Also on Morning Edition, NPR Pentagon correspondent Tom Bowman spoke about some of the more robust bombing options the Pentagon is considering — which he told us about last week — and plans that the U.S. military is drawing up to boost the training of Syrian rebels. But Tom said there is "a lot of skepticism [among] active-duty military [officials] and retired military" about the Obama administration's push to take action against Assad. Many feel "that there is no strategy; there's no way ahead," Tom said.

Also Monday morning, CBS News posted more from CBS This Morning host Charlie Rose's interview with Assad. It leads its report with this:

*"President Bashar Assad warned Sunday that if President Obama decides to launch military strikes on Syria, the U.S. and its allies should 'expect every action' in retaliation."*

In London, Secretary of State John Kerry said Monday that he sympathizes with those who have doubts about the need for taking action against Syria. But he said this situation is much different than the run-up to the war with Iraq, NPR's Philip Reeves reports, because the Obama administration isn't talking about going to war. Rather, it is making the case for limited strikes on some of Assad's military assets. Referring to the use of chemical weapons, Kerry said:

*"The question for all of us is what are we going to do about it? Turn our backs? Have a moment's silence? Where a dictator can with impunity threaten the rest of the world that he's going to retaliate for his own criminal activity because he is being held accountable?"*

Kerry also said Assad could head off a strike by handing over "every single bit" of his regime's chemical weapons within a week, USA Today writes. But Kerry added that he doesn't expect Assad will do that.

The debate over whether to strike will, of course, continue to build as the week goes on. President Obama is scheduled to make his case to the nation in a televised address Tuesday at 9 p.m. ET. The Senate could vote on a resolution authorizing action as soon as Wednesday. A House vote is expected to follow in subsequent days.

-- NPR News, 2013

Debate #1: Should the United States attack Syria? (Circle 'yes' or 'no' and write one paragraph on the back of this paper to explain your vote.)

Yes

No

