



**Should the US take action against the
Syrian government for its use of
chemical weapons?**

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Should the US take action against the Syrian government for its use of chemical weapons? This is a very complex question involving several issues and concerning many countries, if not the whole world. That is why, before affirming or denying whether the US should intervene in Syria's scenario some research and analysis must be done.

Since France¹ started using gas weapons at the beginning of the First World War (1914-1918), this kind of arms have been considered a big threat. In fact, this was the first time that chemical weapons like chlorine, mustard gas, or phosgene were used on a large scale, claiming the lives of about 91,200 people (Duffy, 2009).

Nevertheless, this topic had already proved to be a concern at the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907² where the *Declaration concerning the Prohibition of the Use of Projectiles with the Sole Object to Spread Asphyxiating Poisonous Gases* was created (Scott, 1909).

Unfortunately, the use of chemical warfare is still present, despite all the treaties and declarations creating the prohibitions of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. Examples of such treaties are the Geneva Protocol (1925), the Biological Weapons Convention (1972), and the Chemical Weapons Convention (1992)³, all of which have been broken at some point.

The Chemical Weapons Convention covers 24 articles regarding the prohibition to develop, produce, purchase, store, hold, transfer and use chemical weapons. This initiative includes 189 states which decided to join given the danger and threat that these weapons pose to the society. It states that the utilization of chemical weapons entails a crime; therefore, it must be penalized. However, in spite of these attempts to keep away all weapons of mass destruction, many countries still manufacture and possess their own gas armaments.

The most recent event, in which chemical weapons have been used, occurred in Syria last August 21, causing the deaths of thousands of innocents. This incident is currently

¹ It is incorrectly believed that Germany was the first country using chemical gas weapons. The reality is that France was the first country employing these weapons on August, 1914 by using tear gas (Heller, 1984).

² The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 were conferences aiming for peace by the negotiation of weapon disarmament, laws of wars and crimes.

³ The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was approved in 1992 and it opened for signature in 1993 but it didn't become effective until 1997.

generating great media coverage due to the uncertainty of Middle Eastern future and because of the involvement of other countries in search of a solution. It is the case of the United States, where the current president, Barack Obama, has proposed an aerial attack (not too severe) in order to punish the use of chemical weapons.

Syria's civil war began around two and a half years ago, following the big wave of revolutions and protests conceived by the "Spring Arab"⁴. This revolutionary battle was commenced by protesters (also called rebels) who wanted and still desire the renunciation of the dictatorship imposed by Bashar Al-Assad and his family (this political regime has been in force since the political party Ba'ath was founded in 1966).

So far the war has been very bloody, but there has been little intervention from other countries. Some sources, such as *CNN* broadcast and newspapers, reported how in August of last year the Obama administration authorized clandestine support materialized in arms and advice for the Free Syrian Army⁵. Millions of dollars of humanitarian assistance for the Syrian people was also included in this support package. Other than that, not much attention had been addressed to this conflict until recently, when the use of chemical weapons crossed Barack Obama's "red line"⁶.

This situation has brought along a serious dilemma: whether Obama should defend his word and take action against Syria's government or not. The president of the United States together with the Secretary of State (John Kerry), are convinced that this chemical attack cannot be forgiven and therefore, they have claimed that their country should attack and punish Syria's government.

At this point and after all the wars in which the United States has been involved, people are starting to get suspicious about US government interests. The previous administration under the governance of George W. Bush (2001-2009) has cast doubts on the credibility of Barack Obama's intentions because similar reports happened when George Bush decided to go in war with Iraq⁷ without the United Nations' approval⁸.

⁴ The Spring Arab is been the term used to comprise the revolutions carried out in the Arab countries against the different political regimes and leaders. It began in Tunisia in 2010 (Game III, 2011).

⁵ The Free Syrian Army is an army constituted by the rebels willing to fight for the resignation of Bashar Al-Assad.

⁶ Obama's red line stands for a declaration made by the president who claimed an intervention by his country if chemical weapons were used by Syria's government.

⁷ Iraq war (2003-2011) was started due the incorrect presumption stating that Iraq was in possession of threatening weapons of mass destruction. This assumption was made by the US government.

⁸ The former national secretary of the United Nations, Kofi Annan declared to the BBC that Iraq war was illegal.

This war led to an enormous expenditure in the defense budget and it cost the lives of thousands of people, not just from United States and Iraq, but from several allied countries as well. This is the main reason why the population in United States have “voted no” to a new war. However, these consequences are not the only arguments making me feel skeptical about the beginning of a new international conflict in Syria.

I don't believe that the United States government wants to act in Syria's best interests, but for their own benefits. I suspect there is some hidden agenda covered under the excuse claiming that the use of chemical weapons must be punished and the deaths of innocent people should not be allowed. Otherwise, the United States would wait to get the approval of the UN, the verification of who used the chemical weapons (the government or the rebels)⁹, and backup from other countries. However, they are already determined to attack and help the rebels who on the other hand are involved with terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda.

The fact the United States is rushing too much into this and that recently, according to *Los Angeles Times*, they have modified their initial plan of attack into a more intense one, makes the causes for striking even more suspicious. Behind every war there are economic interests and in this case there are several reasons why the United States could benefit for imposing their power, among them: Syria's geographical location.

Syria is situated in the Middle East, bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon. It is between the Middle East and Europe, which represents a place of vital importance taking into account that in the basin of the Eastern Mediterranean is where the largest reserves of gas are located. This power source is now more valued than ever and it could generate a very successful business. In the US's ambitious plan, Syria would be a bridge to transport gas to Europe, but this is something Russia is not willing to give up.

Another reason why the United States could be interested in attacking Syria is because of debt pressure. If the strike is approved, the Senate would raise the debt ceiling and the United States government would have a little more time and money to keep financing civil servants and pensions.

All these reasons are quite selfish when looked from the outside since they only benefit the United States. Perhaps, the fact that I am from Spain (Europe) makes my point of view more subjective. In any case, I don't think United States should take the justice by their own hands. The decision they are about to make could imply to risk lives of innocents from all over the

⁹ It is hard to know what party used the chemical weapons since they blame each other. The media doesn't help either: newspapers from Syria's allied countries as Russia declare the rebel side as guilty, whereas other countries like the United States claim the culprit was Bashar Al-Assad and his army.

world (as it happened in Iraq). The majority of people I asked in Spain confessed to be developing a bad perception about the US government for starting this kind of conflicts without the approval of other countries, especially in this case, in which there is a necessity for more research since there are still open questions. What we know for sure is that the chemical agent used which it has been responsible for the death of thousands of innocents was Sarin gas¹⁰, as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (David Cameron) reported a few days ago to *The Guardian*.

In conclusion, I believe the United States, as well as other countries, should take action against the use of chemical weapons since this practice has been declared a crime and it is taking many lives. However, I don't think they should strike now because they have already revealed the strategy and Syria could be ready for an effective counterattack. Even if Syria's government was not successful in its counterattack, the victory by the United States could lead Al Qaeda to the power of the country of Syria, something dangerous considering that this group promotes violence and hatred towards the United States.

Another important reason not to attack Syria now is given by the fact that many countries will see themselves involved. The relationship between the USA and the Middle East has always been on the tightrope, and Israel as well as Turkey may be put in danger due to this conflict. In the event of a war, Russia and China are also most likely to intervene as the most powerful allies of Syria and if countries start joining sides, then a small attack can become the Third World War, a war that humanity may not be able to survive

This is why the United States should wait, even if the government interests are genuine. Waiting for the involvement of the U.N., NATO support, or diplomatic solution would be a much wiser solution. Otherwise, the only thing that will emerge from this crisis is a tarnished reputation for the United States.

¹⁰ Sarin Gas is a liquid chemical that can be used as a chemical weapon when it is presented in its gaseous state. It is known to be one of the most potent and painful nerve agents. It acts as an insecticide affecting the nervous system directly: nerve impulses are continually transmitted and altered, causing the muscles and organs to relax in excess. People exposed to it usually die from suffocation because the muscles involved in the action of breathing do not respond. This gas was lethal gas was also used during a few terrorist attacks on Japan (Castro, 2013).

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