

# Was President Trump 'Suckered' Into the Syrian Missile Strikes by Obama Advisers?

The major problem that President Trump faces in foreign policy and national defense is not Russia, the Red Chinese or even ISIS and the Muslim culture of jihad—it is the many Obama-era advisers and appointees that he has kept on, and in some cases even promoted, that are leading him into the same Obama-style disasters that he campaigned against when he was running for president.

Last night President Trump order as many as 60 cruise missiles to strike a Syrian government-held airbase. According to *The Wall Street Journal* the strikes represented the first time a U.S. military operation deliberately targeted the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

Mr. Trump is being pushed and encouraged by the same Republican neo-con cabal in Congress, led by Senator John McCain, that provided aircover to Obama when he tiptoed into another Near East war of choice in Syria.

What prompted the latest push for more American involvement in Syria came earlier this week as activist groups blamed Bashar al-Assad's Syrian government for a Tuesday attack in northern Syria in which dozens of people were killed, including according to CNN, at least 10 children, and more than 200 individuals were injured, because of asphyxiation caused by exposure to an unknown gas or chemical agent.

After the attack, Senator McCain—a vocal critic of President Trump's foreign policy—ripped into the president, saying he needs to speak out against Assad and promise that Assad's

allies will pay a price for their actions against the Syrian people.

"I want to hear him [Trump] say we're going to arm the free Syrian army," he said. "We're going to dedicate ourselves to the removal of Bashar al-Assad. We're going to have the Russians pay a price for their engagement. All players here are going to have to pay a penalty and the United States of America is going to be on the side of people who fight for freedom."

Never mind that the "Free Syrian Army" is largely a figment of McCain's fevered imagination.

In July of 2015 Obama's Defense Secretary Ashton Carter admitted that only 60 so-called "moderate" Syrian rebels were then being trained by the U.S. in the \$500 million program that had been slated to put 3,000 fighters into the field against ISIS by the end of that year.

Carter told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he regretted disclosing that the number was so low but "I wanted to tell the truth. The number 60, as you all recognize, is not an impressive number. The number is much smaller than we hoped for at this point."

The \$500 million Syrian training program authorized by Congress was intended to train and equip up to 5,400 fighters annually, with about 3,000 projected to be ready by the end of 2015.

In September of 2015, the testimony of Centcom commander, General Lloyd Austin, revealed that the U.S. plan to train thousands of Syrian opposition soldiers had cost half a billion dollars and resulted in "four or five" trained people on the battlefield.

Most of the trainees McCain thinks constitute a "Free Syrian Army" were killed in their first contact with the enemy or

went over to the jihadi forces aligned with the Islamic State.

However, in response to the goading of McCain and others President Trump said the Syrian regime's apparent use of chemical weapons against its own citizens "crossed a lot of lines" for him; "These heinous actions by the Assad regime cannot be tolerated," he said, hinting that some military response was being contemplated.

In announcing the strike on the airbase "It is in the vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons," Mr. Trump said. "There can be no dispute that Syria used banned chemical weapons."

The problem is we've heard very similar words from President Obama, and after spending billions of dollars in a war of choice in Syria, nothing effective came of them, even though the Obama administration knew exactly where the Syrian chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs are located.

In August 2013 the Obama White House issued a report, "Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013" saying:

The Syrian regime maintains a stockpile of numerous chemical agents, including mustard, sarin and VX and has thousands of munitions that can be used to deliver chemical warfare agents.

Syrian President Bashar al-Asad is the ultimate decision maker for the chemical weapons program and members of the program are carefully vetted to ensure security and loyalty. The Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC)—which is subordinate to the Syrian Ministry of Defense—manages Syria's chemical weapons program.

Obama knew where the SSRC is, and never hit it. President Trump's team knows exactly where the SSRC is—why didn't they take it out?

We suggest it is because too many of the people who advised Obama are now advising President Trump.

We have long been opposed to further entanglement in Obama's war of choice in Syria, both because we saw no American national interest in the Syrian civil war and because we tend to believe what James Madison said about war.\*

However, if President Trump truly believes eliminating the Syrian chemical weapons program is in the national interest of the United States, he should take out the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center where they are made and managed. Anything short of that is merely continuing the fantasies of John McCain and the halfhearted measures and follies of Barack Obama.

\*Of all the enemies of true liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instrument for bringing the many under the domination of the few. {eoa}

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