US missile strike on Syria

Why in news?

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US launched a missile strike against Syria under the pretext of suspected chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhun by President Bashar Al-Assad's regime.

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What happened in Khan Sheikhoun?

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- Khan Sheikhoun is a town in north-western Syria.
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- It is under the control of rebel fighters and al-Qaeda-linked jihadists.
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- Syrian government allegedly launched an air strike on the area.
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- More than 80 people have been killed in a suspected chemical attack.
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- Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said that the victims experienced symptoms including redness of the eyes, foaming from the mouth, constricted pupils, blue facial skin and lips, severe shortness of breath and asphyxiation
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- These symptoms are consistent with reaction to nerve agents.
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- Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will not be able to confirm anything until samples are tested at an accredited laboratory, but many believes that Sarin Gas was used.
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- The Syrian military denied using any chemical agents, while its ally Russia said an air strike hit a rebel depot full of chemical munitions.
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What is Sarin gas?

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- Sarin is highly toxic nerve agent, considered 20 times as deadly as cyanide.
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- It inhibits the action of the acetylcholinesterase enzyme, which deactivates signals that cause human nerve cells to fire.
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- Sufficient exposure can lead to death via asphyxiation within minutes.
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- Sarin is almost impossible to detect because it is a clear, colourless and tasteless liquid that has no odour in its purest form.
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- It can also evaporate and spread through the air.
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How did the world respond to the US strike?

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- US missile strike was launched from guided-missile destroyer warships in the eastern Mediterranean targeting the airfield in Shayrut.
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- It was used by Syrian and Russian forces to launch the chemical weapons.
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- The limited attack was used as a warning.
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- UK and Israel backed it as a “just” response
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- Germany and France issued a joint statement blaming Assad for the US action.
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- Australia, Italy, European Union and Saudi Arabia also backed US.
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- China also condemned the deadly chemical weapons attack in Syria.
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What is the opposition?

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- Russia and Iran strongly condemned the US’ unilateral move.
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- Russia is one of the closest allies of the regime of Assad.
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- It considers the US strike as “aggression against a sovereign state”.
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- They are of the view that the Syrian army does not have any chemical weapon stockpiles and the destruction of all chemical weapon stockpiles of the Syrian armed forces was recorded and confirmed by the OPCW
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- Russia also called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to discuss the strike.
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- This will further harm US-Russia ties.
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