

## **U.S. Missiles Light Up Damascus**

### **What is the issue?**

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- U.S. has recently launched missiles against select locations in the Syrian capital Damascus - which risks escalating the conflict.

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- Significantly, this was in response to the alleged chemical attack by the Syrian government forces against its own citizens in rebel held territories.

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### **What was the attack about?**

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- U.S. president Donald Trump had threatened the Syrian government with the threat of military action if chemical weapons were used.

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- In mid 2017, when there was a suspected chemical attack in Idlib province, the U.S. had fired 59 cruise missiles at a government airbase.

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- Despite this, the government forces allegedly carried out another chemical attack recently on rebel control “Douma region” near Damascus.

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- Consequently, the US in alliance with UK and France decided to launch an attack against selected targets to punish the Assad regime.

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- Over 100 missiles were fired at three regime facilities to completely destroy Syria’s chemical weapons program.

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- After the attack, the US has stated that its mission was a success and that it doesn’t intend to follow up with further attacks.

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### **Was the protocol followed?**

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- While the use of chemical agents against civilians deserves harsh punishment, the manner in which the U.S. and its allies have acted raises serious questions.

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- Significantly, Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) hasn't even begun its investigation on the alleged chemical attack on Douma.

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- The proper procedure would've been to wait for OPCW (inter-governmental watchdog) to probe the veracity of the alleged chemical attack.

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- The US and its allies should've then approached the UN Security Council with requisite evidence and sought an approval for an assault.

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- But contrarily, the US alliance seems to have acted merely on the basis of inputs from their intelligence agencies (which is a breach international law).

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### **What are the risks?**

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- While Mr. Trump has already trumpeted that the US mission was a success, the statement seems to lack solid grounds.

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- Notably, the previous US attack was also intended to dissuade Syria from using chemical weapons - which clearly has failed.

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- Hence, if the Syrian regime was to resort to another chemical misadventure, the US would be forced to intervene again with more might.

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- Such actions might drive the US more into the viscous Syrian entanglement and increase the risk of a direct conflict with Russian troops there.

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- In fact, Russia has been strongly and consistently positioning itself behind Assad and the Syrian regime, which is a major worry.

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### **What is the way ahead?**

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- The war is already 7 years old and more than 4 lakh people have died.
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- There is no dispute that Mr. Assad is presiding over a monstrous military machine that has used brute force against his own people.
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- But the Syrian maze is so complex that a sudden collapse of the regime would push the country into further chaos and make things worse.
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- Significantly, more bombs and missiles would put the millions who currently live in the relatively stable regime held territories under risk.
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- It is high-time that the West shifts from unilateral and coercive military action to aggressive multilateral diplomacy to end the unfolding misery.
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- The only way out is for Russia and US to get to the negotiating tables for immediately stopping the violence and negotiating a long-lasting peace.
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**Source: The Hindu**

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