

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement by Secretary James N. Mattis on Syria

Press Operations

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Good evening. As the world knows, the Syrian people have suffered terribly under the prolonged brutality of the Assad regime.

On April 7th, the regime decided to again defy the norms of civilized people, showing callous disregard for international law by using chemical weapons to murder women, children and other innocents. We and our allies find these atrocities inexcusable.

As our commander in chief, the president has the authority under Article II of the Constitution to use military force overseas to defend important U.S. national interests. The United States has an important national interest in averting a worsening catastrophe in Syria, and specifically deterring the use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

Last year, in response to a chemical weapons attack against civilians and to signal the regime to cease chemical weapons use, we targeted the military base from which the weapons were delivered.

Earlier today, President Trump directed the U.S. military to conduct operations, in consonance with our allies, to destroy the Syrian regime's chemical weapons research, development and production capabilities.

Tonight, France, the United Kingdom and the United States took decisive action to strike the Syrian chemical weapons infrastructure.

Clearly, the Assad regime did not get the message last year. This time, our allies and we have struck harder. Together, we have sent a clear message to Assad, and his murderous lieutenants, that they should not perpetrate another chemical weapons attack for which they will be held accountable.

The 70 nations in the defeat ISIS coalition remain committed to defeating ISIS in Syria. The strike tonight separately demonstrates international resolve to prevent chemical weapons from being used on anyone, under any circumstance, in contravention of international law.

I want to emphasize that these strikes are directed at the Syrian regime. In conducting these strikes, we have gone to great lengths to avoid civilian and foreign casualties.

But it is time for all civilized nations to urgently unite in ending the Syrian civil war by supporting the United Nations backed Geneva peace process.

In accordance with the chemical weapons convention prohibiting the use of such weapons, we urge responsible nations to condemn the Assad regime and join us in our firm resolve to prevent chemical weapons from being used again.

General Dunford will provide a military update.

Based on recent experience, we fully expect a significant disinformation campaign over the coming days by those who have aligned themselves with the Assad regime. In an effort to maintain transparency and accuracy, my assistant for public affairs, Dana White, and Lt. Gen. McKenzie, director of the Joint Staff, will provide a brief of known details tomorrow at 9:00 a.m.