

US and Russia clash over Trump's strike on Syria

By Demetri Sevastopulo and Courtney Weaver in Washington, Kathrin Hille in Moscow and Erika Solomon in Beirut

AP PHOTO



Russia and the US clashed on Friday as an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council debated President Donald Trump's military strikes against Syria in response to the chemical weapons attack that killed more than 70 people.

In his first major military action, Mr Trump authorised the launch of 59 Tomahawk missiles at a Syrian airfield after a gas attack that the US and its allies blamed on Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev on Friday said that the strikes had "completely ruined relations" between the US and Russia and that the two countries were now "on the verge of a military clash".

The strikes mark a stark shift of US strategy over Syria, where the civil war has killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. During his campaign, Mr Trump had signalled that he would be less willing than some of his predecessors to intervene on humanitarian grounds, but on Friday Sean Spicer, his spokesman, said the president had been "very moved" by the images of slaughtered children.

Speaking at the UN, Vladimir Safronov, Russia's envoy, said the strikes could spark "extreme-

ly serious" consequences for regional and international stability, and warned that the "aggression by the US has only facilitated the strengthening of terrorism".

Nikki Haley, US ambassador to the UN, hit back with a blistering speech, in which she said Russia bore "considerable responsibility" for the gas attack.

"Assad...thought he could get away with it because he knew Russia would have his back. That

changed last night," said Mrs Haley, adding that Moscow was either "knowingly" allowing chemical weapons to remain in Syria, "incompetent" or being made "a fool" of by Mr Assad.

"The US took a very measured step last night. We are prepared to do more. But we hope that will not be necessary," Mrs Haley added.

Later on Friday, Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary, told reporters that the US was preparing to

impose more sanctions on Syria, without providing details.

Mr Spicer said the US president had ordered his national security team to develop options to respond to Syria as soon he was briefed on the gas attack on Tuesday, and signed off on a decision to launch missile strikes at 4pm on Thursday. Mr Trump informed Xi Jinping, the Chinese president, as they finished their first dinner together at his Mar-a-Lago resort.

The strikes were applauded by many western nations which said Mr Assad had crossed a line with the gas attack. Matthew Rycroft, UK ambassador to the UN, said it was an "appropriate response" to a "heinous" war crime by the Syrian regime.

But Russia, the main backer along with Iran of the Syrian regime, said it would have serious consequences. Major General Igor Konashenkov, spokesman for the Russian defence ministry, said the Russian military would take steps to strengthen Syrian air defences to help "protect the most sensitive Syrian infrastructure facilities".

Moscow had called for the emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, and said it would suspend its channel for communicating military action in Syria with Washington, which has been used to prevent accidental conflict.

The strikes, which were the first direct intervention by the US against Syrian government forces, marked a break with US policy under the Obama administration.

"It is in the vital national security interest of the US to prevent and deter the spread or use of deadly chemical weapons," Mr Trump said on Thursday after the strikes, which were welcomed by Republicans and many Democrats.

"These strikes show that President Trump is willing to take forceful, timely and decisive action," John Barrasso, a Republican senator from Wyoming, told the Financial Times. "This proportional response is designed to deter Assad from committing future atrocities against his own people. It marks a reversal of eight years of America in retreat by the Obama administration."

Some lawmakers urged Mr Trump to spell out a broader strategy for dealing with Syria's long-running civil war. One former administration official said that while the strike would probably have a deterrent effect, it would involve the US more in the war.

"The [Trump] administration may consider this strike a one-off, but others - including Assad - may force a different outcome," the former official said.

European governments also backed the strike, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande issuing a joint statement that blamed Mr Assad for the chemical weapons attack and the subsequent US response.

Michael Fallon, the UK defence secretary, called for parties in Syr-

TRUMP TURNS GLOBAL POLICEMAN

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In a reversal of his non-interventionist rhetoric, Donald Trump dons a global policeman's uniform in response to the alleged use of chemical weapons by President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. The US launched a cruise missile attack on Shayrat air base, which the Pentagon says was the base for the chemical attack on civilians in Idlib. Russia condemned the strike as an act of aggression.

US and Russia clash over Trump's strike on Syria (continued)

ia to “redouble” efforts to reach a political settlement. But he warned of further US strikes if Mr Assad used chemical weapons again. “That is the message we take from last night,” he told the BBC.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a longstanding critic of Mr Assad, hailed the strike as a positive development, but said it was not enough on its own and that “serious steps” were needed to protect the Syrian people.

The Pentagon said initial indications showed the strike had “severely damaged or destroyed Syrian aircraft and support infrastructure and equipment at Shayrat airfield, reducing the Syrian government’s ability to deliver chemical weapons”.

But the Russian defence ministry on Friday questioned that assessment and said only 23 of the missiles had reached their target, destroying six ageing jets that were under repair. The runway

was also undamaged, Maj Gen Konashenkov said.

Local pro-government journalists in Syria said at least 14 Syrian jets had been destroyed. The Syrian army said the attack killed six people and caused extensive damage, adding that it would respond by continuing its campaign to “crush terrorism” and restore peace and security to all of Syria.

On Friday, Syrian activists reported a series of air strikes on the town of Khan Sheikhoun, the site of this week’s gas attack. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was not clear whether the attacks were carried out by Syrian or Russian forces.

Activist Othman al-Khani, who lives in the town, said locals were concerned they may be targeted for revenge.

“People have been fleeing the town since the chemical attack and they will keep fleeing now. Everyone here is worried that actually

maybe we will be targeted even worse,” he said.

The US said it had given Russia notice ahead of the strikes “to minimise risk to Russian or Syrian personnel located at the airfield”.

Although the damage assessment remains disputed, one analyst said the warning given to the Russians was likely to have been passed on to the Syrians and could explain why so few aircraft were destroyed and why some US missiles could have been destroyed on their way to the target.

“I think that a key piece of the puzzle is that the US had to provide the Russians with sufficient warning to evacuate any aircraft and personnel before the strikes, which will have been immediately passed to the Syrian Air Force allowing any operational jets and key equipment to be evacuated too. Furthermore, it will have given the defences prior warning to be ready,” said Justin Bronk, an analyst at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

Mr Bronk added that footage he had seen after the attack showed most of the hardened shelters used to protect aircraft on the ground were destroyed in the strike but were empty.

A Syrian defector who had been an officer based at Shayrat said that while any impact from the strike was likely to be limited, any attack



on the base could damage regime air operations in the country.

Its central location in Syria made it the “nerve centre” of attacks, and because other airbases in northern Syria are currently out of commission, it was the main staging post for strikes against the rebel-held north. Regime forces would now have to take a much longer flight from Damascus, he said.

“Will it help the rebels win the war? No. But it might give civilians some much needed relief.”

The office of the Syrian president struck a defiant note, calling the strike “reckless” and “irresponsible”.

Shayrat is one of Syria’s largest airbases, 45km east of Homs city.

Talal al-Barazi, governor of Homs, told Reuters it was “essential” for Syrian forces in their operations against Isis in the eastern desert areas around the city of Palmyra as well as gasfields in the area.

The tabular content relating to this article is not available to view. Apologies in advance for the inconvenience caused.

Additional reporting by Mehul Srivastava in Istanbul, John Reed in Jerusalem and Mark Odell and Henry Mance in London

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Medvedev said that the strikes had 'completely ruined relations' between the US and Russia and that the two countries were now 'on the verge of a military clash'

Sweden faces new reality of heightened security and vigilance

By Guy Chazan in Stockholm

For Mustafa, an Iraqi-born market trader, Friday’s horrific terror attack in downtown Stockholm was a point of no return. “You can feel the mistrust now, and it’s growing,” he says.

He was at the scene minutes after a 39-year-old Uzbek man hijacked a truck and ploughed it through a crowded street in the Swedish capital, killing four people and injuring 15 before crashing into the front of a department store.

Mustafa, who declined to give his surname, ran to the scene, saw the carnage in the truck’s wake, and helped to cover up the strewn body parts of victims using plastic bin bags.

But he also saw first-hand how the event has changed Sweden. Later on Friday, as he prepared to drive home, armed policemen on the hunt for the assailant surrounded his car and ordered him out with his hands up. They searched him and his vehicle and took his driving licence. “I’ve lived here for 33 years and never witnessed anything like that,” he says.

Stockholm has now joined the growing ranks of European capitals - London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin - that have been blighted by terrorism. Once laid-back and easy-going it is

now jittery and on edge.

And some Swedes are wondering whether the free, open society they are so proud of will survive the new reality of terror, enhanced security and heightened vigilance.

Laying flowers near the Ahlens department store where the terrorist’s trail of destruction ended, prime minister Stefan Löfven vowed on Saturday that nothing would change. “We want...to live a normal life,” he said. “We are an open, democratic society, and that is what we will remain.”

But Sweden was changing, even before Friday. In the wake of the refugee crisis of 2015, it had already adopted a much more restrictive immigration policy which slowed the flow of asylum-seekers to a trickle - from 163,000 in 2015 to fewer than 30,000 last year. And in the last few weeks Mr Löfven, a Social Democrat, has been pushing a tough new law-and-order agenda, promising a crackdown on violent crime and more spending on defence.

«It’s very good timing for Löfven,” says Stefan Fölster, head of the Reform Institute, a Stockholm-based think-tank. “This attack will give him carte blanche to implement his proposals.”

Sweden is at a crossroads. It basks in its reputation as a “humanitarian superpower” and a

bastion of liberal values. It is proud of its generous welfare system, its openness to foreigners, and the fact it has never taken part in a war in 200 years.

Yet recent events show it is not immune from the global turbulence that brought Donald Trump to power in the US and delivered last June’s vote on Brexit.

Sweden, which has taken in more refugees per capita than almost any other European country, is experiencing profound racial tensions, rising income inequality and a surge in support for the populist, anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats, now the country’s second-largest political party.

That has coincided with a bout of national hand-wringing about the Sweden’s far from stellar record on integrating immigrants. “I don’t actually think the Swedish model is so open and generous,” says Erik Belfrage, a former senior vice-president at SEB bank and now chairman of consultancy Consilio International. “The darker the skin, the harder it is to get a job.”

Politicians admit there have been failures. “We need to work on integration so everyone can find their way into Swedish society, no matter where they’re from,” says Anna Kinberg Batra, leader of the opposition Moderate Party,

in an interview. “There is still a lot of work to do.”

Yet she insists that Friday’s terror attack should have no bearing on the debate about refugees. The perpetrator’s ethnic identity was irrelevant: “This is not about immigration - it’s about violence. And we must be determined not to let violence win,” she says. No one, she adds, should try to “exploit this for political ends.”

Yet the Sweden Democrats are already seizing on the incident to bolster their anti-immigration argument. “Sweden used to be a harmonious society, but if these [security issues] continue, our values, our open society, will be destroyed,” says Richard Jomshof, the Sweden Democrats’ party secretary, in an interview. “The police are clearly struggling to cope with the problems that politicians have created.”

The politicians are trying hard to come up with solutions. Ahead of a Social Democrat congress in Gothenburg this week, Mr Löfven, a former welder and metal workers’ union leader, has been cultivating a tough guy image, promising a crackdown on crime, an extension of border controls and, in the face of a resurgent Russia, increased spending on the military. The promises come amid rising public concern about violent, gang-related



crime: there have been 12 fatal shootings this year alone.

They are also part of a bid by Mr Löfven’s Social Democrats to avert defeat in elections, due next year. The party, which has been in power for three years, is staring defeat in the face: for years it polled at more than 40 per cent: now it is at 29 per cent. Meanwhile the Sweden Democrats are at 17 per cent, up from about 13 per cent in the 2014 election. Mr Jomshof predicts it will win a fifth of the vote next year and end up with 70 seats in Sweden’s 349-seat parliament, up from 49 now.

Yet Friday’s attack could mobilise support for Mr Löfven and his calls for greater investment in security. “Government and opposition will come to-

gether to increase the budget for the police and armed forces, which was needed anyway,” says Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson, president of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation.

Meanwhile, people are clinging to the hope that Sweden’s values will survive the advent of terrorism. Mr Thorwaldsson was heartened by the public response to Friday’s attack. “People showed another side of themselves, helping others, buying food for those who were stranded, opening their homes to them,” he says. “We have always been an open society and we will remain one. More hate will not solve anything.”

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TRUMP AND TAXES

Back to drawing board, seeks GOP consensus

Josh Boak & Stephen Ohlemacher,
Washington

PRESIDENT Donald Trump has scrapped the tax plan he campaigned on and is going back to the drawing board in a search for Republican consensus behind legislation to overhaul the U.S. tax system.

The administration's first attempt to write legislation is in its early stages and the White House has kept much of it under wraps. But it has already sprouted the consideration of a series of unorthodox proposals including a drastic cut to the payroll tax, aimed at appealing to Democrats.

Some view the search for new options as a result of Trump's refusal to set clear parameters for his plan and his exceedingly challenging endgame: reducing tax rates enough to spur faster growth without blowing up the budget deficit.

Administration officials say it's now unlikely that a tax

overhaul will meet the August deadline set by Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin. But the ambitious pace to figure out a plan reflects Trump's haste to move quickly past a bruising failure to broker a compromise within his own party on how to replace the health insurance law enacted under President Barack Obama.

The White House is trying to learn the lessons from health care. Rather than accepting a bill written by the lawmakers, White House officials are taking a more active role. Administration officials have signaled that they want to pass tax legislation with only Republican votes, yet they've also held listening sessions with House Democrats.

White House aides say the goal is to cut tax rates sharply enough to improve the economic picture in depressed rural and industrial pockets of the country where many Trump voters live. But the administration so far has swatted down

alternative ways for raising revenues, such as a carbon tax, to offset lower rates.

Trump, who brands himself as a deal-maker, has not said which trade-offs he might accept and he has remained non-committal on the leading blueprint, from Rep. Kevin Brady, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee.

Brady, R-Texas, has proposed a border adjustment system, which would eliminate corporate deductions on imports, to raise USD1 trillion over 10 years that could fund lower corporate tax rates.

But that possibility has rankled retailers who say it would lead to higher prices and threaten millions of jobs, while some lawmakers have worried that the system would violate World Trade Organization rules.

Brady has said he intends to amend the blueprint but has not spelled out how he would do so.

Other options are being sho-

pped on Capitol Hill.

One circulating this past week would change the House Republican plan to eliminate much of the payroll tax and cut corporate tax rates. This would require a new dedicated funding source for Social Security.

The change, proposed by a GOP lobbyist with close ties to the Trump administration, would transform Brady's plan on imports into something closer to a value-added tax by also eliminating the deduction of labor expenses. This would bring it in line with WTO rules and generate an additional \$1.2 trillion over 10 years, according to budget estimates. Those additional revenues could then enable the end of the 12.4 percent payroll tax, split evenly between employers and employees, that funds Social Security, while keeping the health insurance payroll tax in place.

This approach would give a worker earning \$60,000 a year an additional \$3,720 in take-home pay, a possible win that lawmakers could highlight back in their districts even though it would involve changing the funding mechanism for Social Security, according to the lobbyist, who asked for anonymity to discuss the proposal without disrupting early

negotiations.

Although some billed this as a bipartisan solution, and President Barack Obama did temporarily cut the payroll tax after the Great Recession, others note it probably would run into firm opposition from Democrats who loathe to be seen as undermining Social Security.

The White House would not comment on the plan, but said a value-added tax based on consumption is not under consideration "as of now," according to a White House statement.

The lack of detail about how to significantly rewrite tax laws for the first time in 30 years may provide Trump some time to build consensus among Republicans. But without Trump laying down his hand, lawmakers appear reluctant to back a plan that will likely stir controversy.

"Because there are trade-offs, congressmen need cover from the president to withstand the lobbyists and constituents who are going to complain," said Bill Gale, an economist at the Brookings Institution who worked at the White House Council of Economic Advisers during President George H.W. Bush's administration.

The Trump administration appears to have shut out the economists who helped assemble one of his campaign's tax overhaul plans, which independent analyses show would have increased the budget deficit.

"It's a little frustrating that they feel they have to write a new tax plan when they have a tax plan," said Steven Moore, an economist at the conservative Heritage Foundation who helped formulate tax policy for the Trump campaign.

Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, a member of the Senate Finance Committee, said that all of the trial balloons surfacing in public don't represent the work that's being done behind the scenes.

"It's not really what's going on," Portman said. "What's going on is they're working with on various ideas."

Investors are beginning to show some doubts that Trump can deliver. Stocks rallied after his election on the promise of lower taxes and fewer regulations, but the Dow Jones Industrial Average has dipped 1.2 percent over the past month as the path for health care and tax revisions has become muddled.

"The White House is going to need its own clear direction, or it's going to need to defer to Congress, but saying that your plan is forthcoming and then not producing a plan kind of puts everything in stasis," said Alan Cole, an economist at the conservative Tax Foundation. **AP**

'BioBlitz' scientists to survey California desert valley



Christopher Weber, Los Angeles

SCIENTISTS will fan out across a California desert valley this weekend to take an inventory of everything there that flies, hops, runs, swims or grows in the dirt.

It's been 45 years since researchers last scoured Amar-

gosa Valley near the northern edge of the Mojave Desert. That accounting of species led to federal protections within the remote region and new scientific understanding of its biodiversity.

Over three days, experts in a variety of fields will once again tally birds, bats, toads,

crickets, coyotes, lichen and native plants, said Sophie Parker, a senior scientist with the Nature Conservancy.

"We're revisiting this area to determine how it has changed over the past several decades," said Parker, who's organizing the "Bio-Blitz"

with officials from the federal Bureau of Land Management.

Researchers have kept a regular count of hundreds of bird species, two species of desert fish and a tiny endangered rodent called the Amargosa vole, she said.

But the status of many other living things in the valley remains a mystery that some three dozen scientists hope to shed light on starting Friday.

Entomologists will tote nets while on the lookout for certain flies, beetles, crickets and grasshoppers.

Botanists will search for two rare plants that may have emerged from dormancy following heavy winter rains that prompted rare desert blooms elsewhere in California.

And mammologists will track footprints and scat in the hopes of spotting bobcats, mountain lions, coyotes, rabbits and kit foxes.

The valley stretches into Nevada but the Bio-Blitz will focus on a 26-mile section along the Amargosa River on the California side, east of Death Valley.

Parker said she looks forward to hearing her colleagues' shouts of excitement echo over the landsca-

pe as they make discoveries.

"Since we don't have a full and complete understanding of the area, it can be really gratifying when we're able to do this kind of detailed work," she said.

Since the 1972 survey, the Nature Conservancy has worked with the land management bureau to protect the biodiversity within the Amargosa River Watershed — employing scientific study and land acquisition and restoration.

The weekend's base camp will be at a date farm that sits along a creek that feeds into the river, where herpetologists are hopeful they'll find the endangered Amargosa toad hopping around.

Bats have been seen near the farm and researchers will use echolocation to determine where they forage and roost.

"The river has cliffs and canyons and caves along it where there may be bats," Parker said last week. "This would definitely be adding knowledge, to get an understanding of exactly where they are."

Parker, a soil ecologist, plans to spend most of her time on hands and knees, digging for what she calls a "living crust" of lichens, mosses and bacteria common along certain riverbanks.

"It's a very small-scale ecosystem, and that's what gets me individually excited," she said. "But it's the collective effort that this whole thing is all about." **AP**

ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



AN INTRODUCTION TO DOG HEARING

EXTERNAL EAR

There are two part to your dog's external ear. The pinna and the external ear canal. The pinna, or the ear flap, gives each breed of dog its distinctive look. The ear flap is made up of cartilage which gives the ear strength. The coned shape structure of the ear delivers sound to the external ear canal. The external ear canal also called the auditory canal picks up the sound and sends it down the canal to the ear drum. This canal runs down the side of the head diagonally and then horizontally into the head.

MIDDLE EAR

The middle ear includes the tympanic membrane, or eardrum, and the tympanic cavity. The ear drum is a thin tissue that separates the external ear from the middle and inner ear. Once the sound reaches the ear drum it vibrates through air vibration and sends it to the tympanic cavity. The

tympanic cavity contains auditory ossicles which are three small bones that vibrate with noise. These bones are the malleus, the stapes and the incus. These bones are connected and are located just behind the ear drum to the window of the inner ear. Unless the ear drum is ruptured, the middle and inner ear is not visible. To keep the ear pressure normal, the middle ear is connected to the pharynx by the eustachian tube. This allows air to pass in and out from the pharynx to the middle ear.

INNER EAR

The inner ear is located by the petrous temporal bones of the skull. It contains cilia, which are tiny hair-like strands that are responsible for changing sound impulses into electronic impulses. The inner ear houses a bony labyrinth or osseous that contains fluid filled membranes. There are three structures that are in

the inner ear: the cochlea, vestibule and three semicircular canals. The cochlea contains nerves that pass on the sound impulses that are responsible for hearing. The vestibule and the semicircular canals are tissues that are responsible for equilibrium and balance maintenance. The cochlea, the vestibule and the semicircular canals are full of cranial nerves which transmit sound and balance to the brain.

Deafness

When puppies are born they are not able to hear. Their eardrums are closed until they are 10 days old. They can start to hear sound in about 14 days. At four weeks their inner ears are fully developed and a veterinarian can then check for deafness. Deafness results in the damage to the ear drum, the middle and inner structures or the nerves. Disease, trauma or certain drugs can cause deafness



in your dog. Deafness can also be hereditary and can affect certain breeds such as Dalmatians, Boston Terriers, Rottweilers and Border Collies.

Hope this is interesting
Till next week
Dr Ruan

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