

He Was Against Military Action in Syria Until He Was For It

Even many of President Donald Trump's most vocal critics are supporting his limited military response to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's barbaric poison gas attack on his own people. But then it would be difficult not to support Mr. Trump given the images that he and all the world saw on television: children, even babies, gasping for air, foaming at the mouth, a grief-stricken father cradling the lifeless bodies of his two young children.

But President Donald Trump did have one prominent critic of his decision to use force against Syria. And that critic was Citizen Donald Trump.

Here are some tweets he sent out in August and September of 2013 after the Syrian government's last major poison gas attack on its own citizens:

"Stay out of Syria, we don't have the leadership to win wars or even strategize."

"The President must get Congressional approval before attacking Syria-big mistake if he does not!"

"President Obama's weakness and indecision may have saved us from doing a horrible and very costly (in more ways than money) attack on Syria!"

"What I am saying is stay out of Syria."

"Don't attack Syria – an attack that will bring nothing but trouble for the U.S. Focus on making our country strong and great again!"

“President Obama, do not attack Syria. There is no upside and tremendous downside. Save your ‘powder’ for another (and more important) day!”

“Obama must now start focusing on OUR COUNTRY, jobs, healthcare and all of our many problems. Forget Syria and make America great again!”

Yes, Donald Trump was against attacking Syria until he was for it.

There is no law – or any sound reason – that says Mr. Trump can’t change his mind. Being a candidate, after all, is not the same as being president.

So what accounts for President Trump’s inconsistency?

“I will tell you,” he told reporters in the White House Rose Garden, “that attack on children yesterday had a big impact on me – big impact. That was a horrible, horrible thing. And I’ve been watching it and seeing it, and it doesn’t get any worse than that.”

Donald Trump is a man of impulses. He saw something he didn’t like and he took action.

But his observation that “it doesn’t get any worse than that,” is questionable since Assad had used chemical weapons against his enemies inside Syria before.

Citizen Trump was against military action then.

And who knows how many other children have died terrible deaths, not by gas, but by constant bombing of their homes by the Syrian dictator’s regime?

Nor was it the first time a despot in the region had launched a chemical attack on his people. Saddam Hussein slaughtered his Kurdish enemies with poison gas – and those images were also shown on television.

Despite that, Citizen Trump told us over and over that he was against going to war in Iraq (even though that's not completely true).

But seeing those images on television, now that he was president, was something he chose not to ignore. That was a good thing. But when you're the president of the most important and powerful country in the world, acting on TV images and impulses is not always a good thing.

What happens now? What if – unlikely as it is – Bashar al-Assad uses poison gas on children again? Will President Trump send more cruise missiles into Syria? How about troops?

What if one of Bashar al-Assad's barrel bombs wipes out a neighborhood and cameras record the bodies of dead children in the street? What then?

As the New York Times reported, when he was a candidate, Donald Trump "criticized Mr. Obama and Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state who was Mr. Trump's opponent in the election, as plunging heedlessly into foreign entanglements, drawn by misplaced idealism and the substitution of other nations' interests for America's."

Was his decision to take military action against Syria a first step in the direction of his own foreign entanglement based on his own idealism?

Whatever the long-term answers, President Trump's short-term response to Assad's war crime makes sense. On top of the damage our cruise missiles did to that air base, the president also sent a message to North Korea and its benefactor, China: My tweets can be backed up with force. I am not Barack Obama. Proceed with caution.

And to Russia: My affection for your leader has its limits.

It's too soon to know what impact those messages will have.

But there's something we already know: Impulsive actions – as satisfying as they may be – are no substitute for well thought out policy. And we're still not sure what foreign policy this president will adhere to when the next crisis comes. And it will.