

Trump's Syria Strike and the Washington Spring

The Syria airstrike and a stronger president

by Conrad Black



Perhaps it is a function of spring, and of the irrepressible perseverance of hope, which even motionless in the heart of darkness cannot be extinguished, that I cautiously predict the beginnings of a return to functioning government in Washington. The whole country and much of the world hopes for an end to 20 years of gridlock, chronic fiscal mismanagement, absurd wars generating gigantic humanitarian crises and large strategic gains for the enemies of the West, in particular Iran, and debased domestic politics in which each change of regime in the White House and Congress seemed to make things worse and not better.

It would have been hard to foresee that such a simple act as firing 59 cruise missiles at a Syrian air base where gas attacks on Syrian civilians, ordered by the Syrian president,

originated would have had the halcyon effect that it has had on the whole unruly Washington circus. It has been so long since a president acted effectively and decisively in the national interest by using American military strength that the confidence of the country and the world in the efficacy of the American military had declined. Apart from the execution of Osama bin Laden, American military force had not visibly been successfully deployed since the surge in Iraq ten years ago.

It was grim and depressing to see the video revenances from the Obama red-line fiasco, the claim of a great achievement in eliminating all of Syria's sarin-gas stocks without having to fire a shot. We all knew at the time it was an illusion, but the pictures of the child victims of the latest Assad atrocity were not merely horrifying in themselves, they were also a somber reminder of the terminal enfeeblement and mendacity of the Obama-Clinton-Kerry slapstick foreign-policy team.

That fiasco was of a piece with Susan Rice's righteous explanation that the murder of the American ambassador and other officials in Benghazi in 2012 was provoked by a "heinous" anti-Islamist Internet video produced by an anti-Islamist American private citizen. We all knew that that was a falsehood, too, but Susan Rice was the preferred candidate of the then-president to be secretary of state. She was disqualified by this whopper, not that the ultimate nominee (John Kerry) was remotely adequate. It was with all of them a foreign policy based on deliberate weakness and the doctrine of Mr. Obama's, as the egregious Tom Friedman of the *New York Times* fawningly called it, that if we treated enemy countries as friends they would be magically transformed into friends.

No one expects that the attack last week will reform Assad's behavior (it is only seven years since Hillary Clinton called him "a reformer"), but it has sent the message that the long night of delusional altruism and deliberate weakness in American foreign and security policy is over. It has also helped create the only circumstances in which relations

between the United States and Russia can be put back on a sound foundation after the shambles of the Obama-Biden-Clinton “reset.”

I wrote here several weeks ago of the promising [NRO](#).

– *Conrad Black is the author of [Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full](#), and*