

Editorial: Assad Chemical Attack Perfectly Timed to Extract Further Concessions from the West [Free article]

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Today's chemical attack by the Syrian regime is perfectly timed to highlight the impotence and weakness of the West and place further pressure on it to restore ties with Damascus.

Early this morning, warplanes carried out airstrikes on the town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province using sarin nerve gas. Later, they fired rockets at local clinics treating the wounded, killing many more. At the time of writing, at least 58 Syrians are believed to have died.

The attack occurred the day the European Union hosts in Brussels a large international funding conference for Syria - which was initially supposed to focus on reconstruction but was scaled down - and as the U.S. administration is sending mixed signals with regards to its policy toward Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

In other words, while the regime is sensing a gradual shift toward a restoration of ties, it knows the West is not there yet.

Thus, rather than making concessions or political gestures, the regime is further raising the stakes and the political cost for the West of not cooperating.

Assad knows that he has nothing to lose from carrying out the strikes. The EU is not yet ready to resume its ties anyway, while the United States is still hesitant. As to the outcry over the attack, at most it will last a few weeks, as it has been the case since 2011.

By committing large-scale massacres, the regime shows to the world the West's impotence and weakness, delegitimizing all the political values it claims to be standing for. "You do not want to restore ties? I will kill more civilians and show the world how impotent and cowardly you are."

The more the attack is publicized the more the West is humiliated - hence the timing of the attack during the Brussels conference.

As soon as the outcry fades, pro-regime analysts, bureaucrats and politicians in the EU and U.S. will complete the regime's job and push for restoring ties and accepting the regime's blackmail "for the sake of protecting Syrian civilians and improving their livelihood."

Obviously, any restoration of ties and funding will not have much to do with the wellbeing of Syrians, but rather with the political credibility of the West.

Since former U.S. President Barack Obama's green light in September 2013, Assad knows that a large-scale attack against its civilians is a short-term public relations liability but a long-term political asset.

In the next few months, as long as the West is not ready to acquiesce to the regime's demands, expect further spectacular massacres.

The Syria Report

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