

A Violation of International Law Deserves an International Response

Dear Colleague:

We are all shocked and horrified by the chemical weapons attack that occurred in Syria on August 21, 2013. This was a violation of international law and more importantly a violation of human decency. In recent days, the Obama administration has presented to the American public, Congress, and the world community, evidence that indicates with a high degree of confidence that the Syrian government, led by Bashar al-Assad, is responsible for this heinous act. In addition, the United Nations has sent in inspectors to confirm that a chemical weapons attack occurred and will issue a report in the coming week, but will not identify the perpetrator of the act. Nearly every nation on the planet has signed agreements that prohibit the use of chemical weapons. Clearly, we cannot allow this violation to go without a response.

The President made the appropriate decision to request authorization from Congress to use military force prior to engaging our forces. Congress must now determine the appropriate course of action, and I believe this means ensuring that the United States is acting in concert with international partners to respond to this breach in international law. This means bringing our case to the United Nations Security Council and seeking a decision on an international course of action.

However, over the course of the last few days one of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council – Russia – has rejected the assessment put forward by the U.S. government attributing responsibility to the Syrian government for this attack and putting blame on the rebel forces. This is in spite of a clear and convincing case presented by our government showing that the Assad regime is responsible and without providing any evidence to the contrary.

I urge you to cosponsor the attached resolution calling on the international community to act collaboratively to respond to the chemical weapons attack, urge the United Nations Security Council to immediately meet to examine evidence put forward by the United States in regards to the Assad regime's responsibility for these actions, and to determine a recommended course of action. If Russia has evidence to contradict our government's assessment, they should bring that forward to the international community at that time. However, simply blocking any attempt to move forward with a resolution on the Security Council should not be acceptable. This is not the time for obstructionism. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has urged the Security Council to "unite and develop an appropriate response" following the report back from the UN inspectors, stating that "this is a larger issue than the conflict in Syria. This is about our collective responsibility to mankind."

As Secretary Kerry stated before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the world is watching our actions, and it is up to us to lead by working with the international community to enforce international laws.