

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I write with urgency regarding the alleged use of chlorine gas by the Assad regime in an attack against Syrian civilians in northwest Syria. It is imperative that the international community respond swiftly to this outrageous attack which violates international standards and norms against chemical weapons use. As the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Samantha Power stated on March 6, 2015, "Despite having acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Assad regime has again demonstrated its brutality by turning to chlorine as another barbaric weapon in its arsenal against the Syrian people...Let's ask ourselves who has helicopters in Syria? Certainly not the opposition. Only the Assad regime does and we have seen them use their helicopters in countless other attacks on innocent Syrians using barrel bombs."

Bashar al-Assad and those forces backing his regime, including the government of Iran and its proxy force, Hezbollah, are once again challenging the world and testing the boundaries of the will of the international community to respond. As the Syrian civil war enters its fifth year, I urge you to reenergize the broad international coalition that is committed to a Syria without Assad. This includes exposing and targeting the tools of Russian and Iranian support for Assad's bloody regime, and working with like-minded partners to increase pressure on him and his allies.

The first step is a fact-finding mission by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to investigate the attack. This mission must be sent to the field immediately. However, the OPCW will not attribute culpability for the chlorine gas attack. Therefore, I urge you to work with the United Nations, or another appropriate neutral body, to swiftly make an attribution assessment. Once an attribution has been made, the United Nations Security Council should consider the full range of potential responses, including a Chapter VII response pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2118.

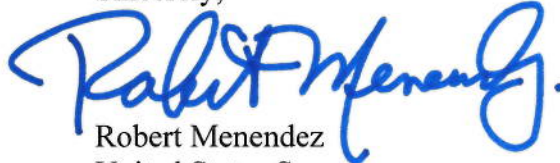
Only a month ago, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2209 by a vote of 14-1 with the agreement of all permanent members including Russia. The resolution states that the use of chlorine gas is a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and any future use would result in the imposition of Chapter VII measures. UN Chapter VII punishments could include additional sanctions and the use of force to prevent future attacks.

In September 2013, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed an Authorization for the Use of Military Force Against the Government of Syria to Respond to Use of Chemical

Weapons. Assad eventually agreed to a process negotiated by the United States with Russia to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons program under international supervision, as well as becoming a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Unfortunately, it is clear that this effort has not prevented the use of chemical weapons against Syrian civilians, nor has international pressure changed Assad's calculus with respect to murdering his own people. Worse, Assad's supporters, including the Iranian regime, the Russian government, and Hezbollah have actually increased their support for the regime as these attacks have continued and increased in nature and scope.

All options for response must be explored. We send a clear signal to Assad and his backers that the international community will not tolerate further such attacks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a long, sweeping tail.

Robert Menendez
United States Senator