

Syria's Chemical Weapons Crisis Demands Action

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Save



Opposition fighters celebrate as they burn down a military court in Damascus, Syria, on Dec. 8, 2024. (The Canadian Press/AP-Hussein Malla)

OPINION

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Commentary

Damascus's fall creates an immediate security crisis for American interests. While Washington debates appropriate responses, Assad's chemical weapons stockpiles and military infrastructure sit vulnerable to exploitation, transfer, or misuse.

Intelligence reports from the past 24 hours demand attention. Industrial facilities near Sheikh Najjar contain precursor chemicals and delivery systems. Military bases around Damascus house

sophisticated weapons threatening American forces and allies. Recent reports indicated attempts by regime loyalists to access these stockpiles during the government's collapse.

America faces three urgent imperatives.

The first requires securing and neutralizing chemical weapons before they disappear into the region's shadowy weapons markets. Every day, these arsenals remain unsecured, increasing proliferation risks to terrorist cells and hostile states.

The second imperative demands establishing robust containment. The current U.S. deployment of 900 troops lacks resources to monitor critical facilities across eastern Syria. American forces must expand their presence around key infrastructure while coordinating with regional partners to prevent weapons transfers.

Third, creating internationally protected zones is essential to stabilizing civilian areas and preventing mass displacement. Refugee flows threaten Jordan and Lebanon's stability. Only decisive American leadership prevents another humanitarian catastrophe.

Turkey's role demands particular scrutiny. President Erdoğan's intelligence services operate freely across northern Syria, coordinating with various groups through meeting points near Antakya. This presence near sensitive military installations creates unacceptable proliferation risks. Regional dynamics favor immediate action. Russia focuses on Ukraine, limiting its ability to secure Syrian military assets. Iran lost its primary conduit for weapons transfers.



These circumstances create opportunities for American-led security initiatives.

Critics advocating patience misread strategic imperatives. When ISIS seized territory in 2014, hesitation proved catastrophic. Today's situation poses graver risks—sophisticated weapons systems combined with uncertain custody chains threaten regional security architecture. Gulf allies recognize these dangers. Saudi Arabia and the UAE understand that proliferation threats demand robust American engagement. Their financial and diplomatic support would sustain security operations while demonstrating international legitimacy.

Israel's position proves instructive. An unsecured chemical weapons stockpile along its northern border poses unacceptable risks. Israeli forces mobilizing in the Golan Heights demonstrate that regional security demands immediate attention.

America's response requires three specific steps:

1. Specialized units must deploy to identify and secure WMD facilities. These teams must establish perimeter control around known storage sites while gathering intelligence on possible undeclared locations.
1. Implementation of strict monitoring protocols is required. Surveillance assets must track movement near sensitive installations while coordinating with regional partners to prevent weapons transfers.
1. Clear security boundaries demand establishment. American forces should maintain defensive positions around critical infrastructure while coordinating with allies to prevent unauthorized access.

Past experiences provide clear lessons. Iraq's post-2003 weapons proliferation created regional instability. Libya's collapsed arsenals armed extremists across North Africa. Syria's stockpiles pose similar risks requiring preventive action.

Washington must act before opportunities disappear. Each day without a robust security presence increases proliferation risks while weakening America's strategic position—history judges hesitation harshly when vital interests demand action. The choice facing policymakers is clear: establish comprehensive security frameworks or watch sophisticated weapons disperse across an unstable region. Leadership requires decisive action to protect American interests and regional stability.

Allies watch while adversaries probe defenses. America's next moves will determine Middle East security architecture for decades. The time for decisive action has arrived.

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