

Twelve years later Community Comment: September 12, 2013 Mike Goldsby

Yesterday was the 12th anniversary of the violence of Nine Eleven. So many things have changed since then and I would like to hope that we have learned valuable lessons from that experience.

We have learned not to underestimate the destructive potential of a misguided leader like Osama Bin Laden. And hopefully we have learned not to rush to war with incomplete information.

But now we face Syrian President Assad, another leader with destructive potential, and we face another decision about rushing into combat in another Middle Eastern conflict. I for one am sick of war; The cost in lives of our troops, dead and wounded, and the damage to their families. The cost to our strained national budget and deficit. The damage to the people and cultures in the war zones. These are all global wounds that will not soon heal.

So none of us, conservative, liberal or apolitical, want to rush into conflict. But how do we deal with human suffering inflicted by chemical weapons in the Syrian Civil War? Do we address it or ignore it? President Obama made his case to the American public and saw his approval ratings drop. Hopefully, a diplomatic solution is on the horizon. But that solution is more likely if Syria thinks the US will make a military strike. What a mess.

Is chemical warfare any different from other warfare? I mean, isn't suffering and death the same regardless of whether it is a gun or a bomb or a gas canister? Well, yes and no.

Chemical weapons are weapons of mass destruction but in a separate category from biological weapons and nuclear weapons. Chemical weapons can be dispersed over a wide area and can afflict many people in addition to the intended target.

The first international laws against chemical weapons date back to 1899. But despite those bans, chemical weapons were used in the trenches of World War One. There have been multiple agreements banning the use of chemical weapons since then. Many countries have signed on not to use the weapons but still maintain stockpiles. This includes the United States and Russia. These stockpiles exist as a deterrent to attack, supposedly. The United States reserves the right to use chemical weapons to retaliate against chemical weapon attacks from aggressors.

Two nations have stockpiles but have not signed the agreement. Syria is one. The other is North Korea. Isn't that reassuring?

According to NBC News, experts estimate the arsenal in Syria at more than 1,000 tons, including sarin gas, the nerve agent tabun, and blistering agents such as mustard and hydrogen cyanide.

The weapons are stored in five major locations in Syria although they have been moved around frequently. NBC News says Syria has the ability to launch chemical warheads about 300 miles.

We have irrefutable proof that chemical weapons were used in Syria against the Syrian people, both rebels and civilians. They admitted it. The footage of the suffering of the victims in Syria is pretty awful. But video footage of war is always awful.

The United States can't swoop in to every country where there is injustice. We are already stretched too thin. But how can we sit back while innocent people suffer?

Problems like these are best addressed by a global community rather than a single country. Obviously big countries shoulder more of the responsibility but it still should come from multiple countries, standing together against use of chemical weapons.

Chemical weapons are awful but pale in comparison to biological weapons. If you want to get frightened, read Richard Preston's books, like ***The Hot Zone*** or ***Demon in the Freezer***. The world needs to exert some control over chemical and biological weapons. We clearly have enough ways to harm each other already.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment