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AMERICA'S ROLE IN SYRIA AFTER THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS ATTACK AND IMMIGRATION REFORM

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After hearing about the horrific killing of civilians in Syria in a chemical weapon attack, President Obama stated: "We have concluded that the Syrian government in fact carried these out. And if that's so, then there need to be international consequences." The United States may resort to this military action alone, even though Britain has backed out, although France too believes that there must be a serious deterrent to discourage the use of chemical weapons again. The potential use of force against another country brings up the specter of Iraq, when we went to went to war on false information that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. This time it is different. There is conclusive proof of a chemical weapons attack, and it is sad to see images of rows of bodies of innocent children, which was most likely perpetrated by the Assad regime in Syria.

Still, people are legitimately questioning America's role and whether it is legal for America to use force without a Security Council resolution. It is a foregone conclusion that Russia, which is a steadfast ally of the Assad regime, will veto any proposal in the Security Council to militarily intervene through a UN force to protect the Syrian people from future chemical weapon attacks. The United States, along with France, is attempting to assert and develop a new legal doctrine to bypass the Security Council, which is that a country can use force to protect the citizens of another country that have been killed, such as in the Syrian chemical weapon attack. They use the recent example of NATO's use of force during the Kosovo crisis in 1999 and bypassing the Security Council in the face of a Russia veto, that prevented Milosevic from further slaughtering the Albanians, and which resulted in his downfall. Today, Serbia is a member of the

European Union and Kosovo is an independent country. Kosovo is a successful example of countries intervening through force to stop a humanitarian disaster. On the other hand, the world stood by when there was genocide of unimaginable proportions in Rwanda.

No matter what people think, but America still remains the superpower and is expected to lead the rest of the world during such a crises. America will never win universal admiration as a superpower and it will make terrible mistakes, like the Iraq invasion, whose specter still haunts us and inhibits countries today from intervening in the affairs of another sovereign state even in the face of an actual chemical weapon attack that has resulted in the slaughter of thousands of innocents (including 400 children) like insects killed by pesticide.

If America, as a superpower, continues to play the role of a cop in world affairs by virtue of its superpower status, it will have more moral legitimacy to do so if it embraces people from the world through a humane and compassionate immigration system. It is a system that allows immigrants to quickly integrate and become part of America regardless of their nationality, religion or ethnicity. Even though our immigration system is presently broken and does not permit all deserving people to become legal, American has not en mass deported its 10 million undocumented immigrants. The world would much rather prefer America as a superpower that embraces immigration than a rising superpower such as China, which may not in the same way as America. In the same vein, if America is trying to develop a new international legal norm, which is the right to protect people and bypass the moribund Security Council, even if one does not agree whether use of force is the only way to protect, America will have more legitimacy to do that if it is still looked upon as the beacon for hope through its immigration system.

At the dawn of the American Republic, Thomas Paine in Common Sense rightly and most proudly proclaimed that "the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind." In this fateful hour of decision, with history and our conscience the only sure guide, surely the reverse must be true. From the time that Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence attacked King George III for interfering with immigration, since the first Congress enacted the Naturalization Act of 1790, our immigration system has been a symbol of what kind of a people we are and what manner of nation we seek to become. The many ideological grounds of exclusion in the 1952 Immigration Act eloquently reflected the anxieties and prejudices of the Cold War. The abolition of the

national origins quota in 1965, passed the same year as the Voting Rights Act, testified to the nation's belief in the promise of equality for all. The Refugee Act of 1980 was the embodiment of our continued commitment to the preservation and promise of America as a refuge for the persecuted and the oppressed. The Immigration Act of 1990 by tripling the number of employment-based visas and creating the national interest waiver reflected a growing national realization that participation in a global economy required an enhanced readiness to accept and admit the best and the brightest from all nations regardless of nationality. An American that readily embraces immigrants from around the world will be more likely to better understand the world.

Therefore, while the Obama Administration and Congress are involved with Syria, they must not lose focus on Comprehensive Immigration Reform. The Senate Bill, S. 744, which has already passed the Senate, will expand pathways for people to come to the US, and will also legalize more than 10 million people. If the House passes a similar version of S. 744, a reformed immigration system will continue to burnish America's role in the world. Perhaps, no other country would have legalized 10 million of its undocumented population ever, regardless of where they have come from, and put them on the path towards becoming Americans. The significance and impact of such an immigration measure would give America more moral legitimacy to speak on behalf of the world and to seek to establish new international legal norms that would protect vulnerable populations from future humanitarian disasters such as the chemical weapons attack we witnessed in Syria. Now, it is our turn to decide if our policy abroad and our actions at home will honor Dr. King's teaching that "the arc of history is long but it bends towards justice."

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