

Opening with audio from ABC News about the chemical attack

And that was ABC news. Now that some of the dust of the last few weeks' events in Syria has begun to settle, I thought that it might be a good time to take account of what really happened before and after the suspected chemical attacks in the town of Douma on April 7th. This report will be split into two sections: this week, I'll be focusing on the events that led up to and immediately followed the US, UK and French strikes in Syria on the 13th; next week, I'll speak more on the aftermath both in Syria and abroad. You are listening to Cameron Lallana with KDVS news. Thank you.

Douma is located in the Eastern Ghouta region, which is a suburb that's about 15 kilometers east of Damascus. The area as a whole is one of the last remaining strongholds held by Syrian rebel groups, although it has been steadily losing ground to Syrian government forces following a renewed push into the territory that began last February. Douma itself has already been long under siege, facing almost constant shelling and airstrikes as well as a shortage of food and supplies. The United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees' Syrian representative, Sajjad Malik, visited Douma with an aid convoy at the beginning of March; after returning, he reported that the area was quote "on the verge of major disaster," and that, furthermore, "(go to quote from video)." Then, on April 7th, came the gas attacks.

Although the overall toll of this is still being determined, the general consensus among the local and international aid organizations is that at least 40 people have died as the result of chemical weapons use.

In the following days, among rumors that the US was considering a retaliatory strike against the Assad regime, the Russian Ambassador to Lebanon, Alexander Zasytkin, said this on a Lebanese news broadcast: "if there is a US missile attack, we ... will shoot down U.S. rockets and even the sources that launched the missiles."

Minutes after a Fox and Friends news segment reported on Zasytkin's comments, Trump tweeted, quote "Russia vows to shoot down any and all missiles fired at Syria. Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and "smart!" You shouldn't be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!"

Following this, according to reporting by the New York Times and New York Magazine, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis implored President Trump to not attack the Assad regime until it could be independently confirmed that they had, in fact, been responsible for the chemical weapons use, and, in addition, to have congress authorize a strike against a limited range of Syrian government targets. President Trump—supported by new national security advisor John Bolton—on the other hand, favored a broader retaliation that would also hit Assad's patron's, Russia and Iran, according to the Wall Street Journal. In the end, they reached a compromise that favored Mattis' position, agreeing to limit the strikes to three targets: a research center that was used to develop weapons, and two chemical weapons facilities.

Go to Trump announcing strikes, then missile launch audio

On April 13th, the US, UK, and France launched a total of 105 missiles against these targets, from not only ships, but planes and a submarine as well. Although there were concerns about immediate counter-attack, no such event ended up materializing.

Following the strikes, the Russian military claimed that the anti-missile defenses that they had provided to the Syrian government had shot down 71 of these missiles. However, no

evidence to support these claims has surfaced. Furthermore, the Pentagon has disputed this claim, saying that although Syrian air defenses fired 40 interceptor missiles, they appeared to lack guidance systems. Pentagon analysts were careful to hedge the extent of lessons learned from this, though: they noted that Syria actually does possess an advanced missile defense system, and it is likely lack of training and other human errors that mainly limits their effectiveness. In addition, Russia actually does have more sophisticated systems in Syria, but seems to have chosen not to engage the barrage.

At the end of all of this, the question still remains: what effect, if any, have these strikes had? And what might they presage for the future? We'll dig into that more fully next week; for now, I'll leave you with Amanda Sloat—a Robert Bosch senior fellow in the Center on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution—speaking on the podcast Bombshell:

Audio clip from starting at 18:23