

OBAMA'S RED LINE ALREADY CROSSED IN SYRIA

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's decision to strike the Syrian regime in retaliation for a chemical attack comes four years after his predecessor Barack Obama faced a similar challenge from Damascus and chose to back down. There was no doubt among the international community on August 21, 2013: Obama's "red line" had just been crossed in Syria with a chemical

weapons attack outside Damascus that was almost certainly the work of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Two years earlier, Obama had vowed that the use of such weapons would "change my calculus" to justify military intervention in Syria. Britain and France agreed, embracing the president's rhetoric. So when the massacre took place in Ghouta, an eastern suburb of the Syrian capi-

tal where US intelligence said some 1,400 were killed by a sarin gas attack, all eyes turned toward Washington. Two days later, Obama said he was ready to strike.

But to surprise in the United States and around the world, he said he would put any decision over military action in Syria to a vote in Congress, essentially ruling out any immediate

attack. Then his ally British Prime Minister David Cameron—who had also submitted a decision over military action to his country's lawmakers-backed out after parliament voted against taking part. In the end, Obama's White House would never directly intervene militarily against the Assad regime, anxious to maintain the region's crumbling geopolitical and military balance. —AFP









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