The US, Britain and France on Friday night launched more than 100 missiles against Syrian targets in a strike against the Assad regime’s chemical weapons capabilities, but stopped short of attacking Russian or Iranian targets in order to avoid triggering a broader conflict. The western allies had “marshalled their righteous power against barbarism and brutality,” Donald Trump said in a national television address. The strikes were in response to a suspected poison gas attack in the Syrian town of Douma last weekend that killed at least 70 people. “They have lost a lot of equipment and material. It will have a significant effect,” he said. “The words cripple and degrade are accurate.” The attack followed days of sabre-rattling by Mr Trump as he sought ways of deterring further chemical attacks while minimising the risk of becoming embroiled in a deeper conflict involving Russia. Moscow deployed troops and war planes to Syria three years ago to back President Bashar al-Assad in his country’s seven-year civil war. Mr Trump tweeted that it was “mission accomplished,” on Saturday. “So proud of our great Military which will soon be, after the spending of billions of fully approved dollars, the finest that our Country has ever had. There won’t be anything, or anyone, even close!” he said, praising France and the UK for their “wisdom” and “fine military”. Russian president Vladimir Putin condemned the attack “in the most serious terms”, saying it had violated the principles of international law and constituted “an act of aggression against a sovereign state that is at the forefront of the fight against terrorism”. However, in contrast to threats made by a senior Russian military official last month and several Russian officials over the past week, the Russian president made no mention of the possibility that Russian forces could strike back at the US military. Vasily Nebenzia, Russia’s ambassador to the UN, described the strikes as an “illegal military venture” that violated international law and made a catastrophic humanitarian situation in Syria “even worse”, accusing the allied action of being tempted by neo-colonialism and acting without evidence. Nikki Haley, US ambassador to the UN, said the allies acted “after careful evaluation” of the evidence and that Mr Trump had told her earlier on Saturday he was ready to take further military action if the Assad regime used chemical weapons again. Western leaders stressed the attacks were focused on chemical weapons rather than on broader strategic goals.

“This is not about intervening in a civil war. It is not about regime change,” said Theresa May, the UK prime minister. “It is about a limited and targeted strike that does not further escalate tension in the region and that does everything possible to prevent civilian casualties.” French president Emmanuel Macron said the action was launched against the Syrian government’s “clandestine chemical arsenal”. He said there was “no doubt” that the Assad regime was responsible for the chemical attack in Douma. Damascus and Moscow have denied that any gas attack took place, accusing the Syrian opposition of fabricating the incident.