

Mass Atrocities in Syria: the International Response United States Institute of Peace 25
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(...) By all indications, the Syrian government has committed heinous acts of violence against unarmed protestors—including women, children and the elderly—since the outbreak of a popular uprising this spring. Incidents of violence and repression against children have had a particularly galvanizing effect on the popular protests. (...) The threat of greater violence is real and imminent. The regime certainly has the capability to carry out further acts of mass violence and repression, and the actions of the past four months suggest that it has the will to do so. The hope is that through a mix of sanctions, concerted condemnations, and even the threat of international criminal proceedings the regime might be convinced to pull back its security forces and allow peaceful protests to continue—thus preventing further atrocities. Though this strategy carries risks as well and could lead the regime to escalate out of desperation. (...) Regional organizations, such as the Arab League, could prove influential, though key Arab players are divided and in disarray due to the wider political tumult sweeping the region. The head of the Arab League, former Egyptian foreign minister Nabil Elaraby, disappointed many when he made statements recently defending Syrian President Bashar al-Assad against criticism from Washington that Assad had lost “legitimacy.” (...)

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