

No military option in Syria Foreign Policy Marc Lynch 17 January 2012 It is time to think seriously about intervening militarily in Syria, argues Steven Cook today. He joins a small but growing chorus pushing for such a move. Some parts of the Syrian opposition have moved toward requesting an intervention, albeit with serious reservations and furious internal disagreements, as has the Emir of Qatar and some other Arab officials. And then of course, there are those who have been pushing for hawkish policies toward Syria for years who have seized the moment to push for action, and others who generally support military solutions. This is the kind of temporary coalition which can drive real policy shifts.

It is easy to understand the urgency behind such a call. The brutality of the Syrian regime has produced unspeakable atrocities which challenge the conscience of the world. The daily death toll, and the horrific videos and images which circulate freely, can easily make the passions overwhelm the interests and push us to set prudence aside. I supported the intervention in Libya, and believe strongly in the importance of advancing regional and global norms against regime violence.

But the U.S. should
not

be contemplating military intervention in Syria. Risky, costly foreign policy decisions can not simply be taken to express moral outrage. They need to have a serious chance of success. None of the military options currently under discussion have a reasonable chance of improving the situation at an acceptable cost, and their failure would likely pave the way to something far worse.

(...) Military intervention in Syria has little prospect of success, a high risk of disastrous failure, and a near-certainty of escalation which should make the experience of Iraq weigh extremely heavily on anyone contemplating such an intervention. (...)

If Syria really did resemble Libya, then the argument for a similar intervention under the mantle of the

Responsibility to Protect

would be stronger. But it doesn't. The Syrian opposition is far weaker, more divided, and does not control any territory. There are no front lines dividing the forces which can be separated by air power, no tanks and personnel carriers conveniently driving along empty desert roads to be targeted from the sky. The killing in Syria is being done in densely populated urban environments. There is no UN Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force. The geography and sectarian landscape are different, as is the regional environment and the risk of spillover into nervous neighbors such as Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. (...)

Military intervention in Syria to stop the killing appeals to the soul but does not make sense. That doesn't mean ignoring the slaughter. The United States and its allies must indeed do more

to support the Syrian opposition forces. It should work to achieve a UN Security Council mandate for comprehensive international sanctions against Damascus, and continue to work with its regional allies to build bilateral and regional pressure. Now that Michael McFaul has finally been confirmed as ambassador to Russia, and the Arab League mission has largely failed, the U.S. can hopefully make more progress in shaping a strong Security Council resolution. The U.S. and its allies should push International Criminal Court indictments and hold the regime accountable for its crimes. (...)

I have my doubts about whether the Syrian regime is truly crumbling, as so many claim, but I do believe that the Syrian regime is destroying itself through its repression, losing political support and control over much of the country. The U.S. needs to hasten those processes, not insert itself in the middle with military action which can not hope to succeed.

Read full
[article](#)

.