

**Buffer Zones and Local Freezes: What Hope for Ending Syria's Civil War?** It is a stain on the collective conscience of the international community that after nearly four years of fighting, 200,000 killed and 10 million [displaced](#), there is still little hope for an imminent end to Syria's civil war. Regional and international efforts to end the conflict, documented in great detail in our 'Crisis in Syria' [page](#), have had limited impact.

The rare consensus that allowed the Security Council to pass resolutions [2165](#) permitting cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid, and [2118](#) calling for the destruction of the Assad regime's chemical arsenal, were welcome developments. However, in practice, it has done little to relieve the suffering of civilians still caught in the slaughter.

Instead, the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, ISIS or IS) has regionalized the war, bringing wanton destruction and the threat of genocide to neighbouring Iraq, while Turkey's borders are currently threatened by the ISIS [siege](#) of Kobane.

Already, the conflict has consumed two astute international negotiators – Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi – both sent to Syria as joint UN/Arab League Special Envoys, and both unable to stem the bloodshed. The [third](#) to try his hand is Steffan De Mistura, a veteran diplomat who has served as the head of the UN missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The siege of Kobane and the appointment of De Mistura have both brought with them new proposals for a gradual ease in the fighting aimed at creating space for a political solution. The Turkish proposal to create a 'buffer zone' along the Syria-Turkey border, and De Mistura's local 'freeze' represent the latest attempts to change the conflict's trajectory.

While similar in their aims, they differ in operational terms. Both, however, have invited criticism and praise that underscore the complexity of the conflict and any solution to it. The potential for these plans to bring immediate relief to civilians and a long-term settlement is measured through the vocal response of civil society and other influential voices below.

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