

# Nigeria: To Intervene in Syria or Not

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Should the U.S. intervene in Syria with Military Action or should it not... ? That is the question. More than a year has passed since the start of the Syrian civil war and just as the violent crackdown on those who oppose the government of Bashar al-Assad has become more intense, so has the pressure on America and the West to get directly involved with military action. But while the prospect of military action is easier said than done, a look back at the metamorphic disaster that the 2003 Iraq War was for America, the strategic catastrophe that is the invasion in Afghanistan and the cataclysmic misadventure of sending troops to Lebanon in 1982 under the Reagan administration, the last thing the United States needs to do is get involved in another Middle East war. The United States has, no doubt, had its fair share in its un-judicious Middle Eastern fiascos and for the most part, American military intervention in Syria, at this time, would be most unwise.

Most would agree that some action needs to be taken in Syria. With as many as 8,000 civilians reported to have been killed since the start of the war and reports that chronicle an utmost level of brutality from both sides in the exchange, it would be unbecoming and immoral for the world to sit and just watch innocent civilians being slaughtered. Even on the scale of the most recent wars that the world has witnessed, namely during the Arab Spring, the present brutality in Syria surpasses all imagination. Every day, men, women, and children are imperiled with random bouts of artillery shelling, tanks in the streets and sniper bombardment. Now we are hearing of the use of chemical weapons. The number of people killed in Syria in this war is now five times the number of people killed in Libya in 2011 during the clampdown by the Muammar Gaddafi regime on the rebels during the Libyan revolution.

So far, the United States has had limited involvement in Syria in the form of sanctions against the Assad regime. But even if the United States had hoped on putting more effort in the war and bringing in its outside military force, it was never going to be an easy task. Unlike Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq, toppling the Assad regime is somewhat more complicated. On the one hand, America's arch nemesis, Iran is standing firm behind Syria with reported military assistance and soft landing mechanisms for some of the sanctions imposed on Syria. And on the other hand, the super significant powers of Russia and China have both exhibited their staunch disapproval of U.S efforts and their support of Syria, most recently through a rejection of a United Nations Security Council resolution on the matter. As of now, there is no international consensus for action in Syria at this time that the United States can actually act on.

So given these state of facts and given the general belief that despite the state of facts, the United States has a moral imperative to step in to stop the escalating humanitarian crisis, what options are left for the United States in this sensitive situation?

For decades, vital universal security questions have focused almost entirely on this one question; should the United States utilize its own military force to deal with similar problems that escalate throughout the world? This is a corollary of America's unsurpassed military might in the world, America's underinvestment of diplomatic and economic tools of power, and low expectations of other countries taking responsibility for their own security affairs and events in their immediate region. But even with the responsibility placed on America by virtue of its position as the world's sole super power, why America always needs to answer the question of intervention with a strategy that includes fighter jets, boots on the ground and military might rather than alternative tools at America's disposal, seems predictable to most spectators that have come to view America as a trigger happy nation with a gung-ho desire to intimidate its foes with its military might. Americans have George Bush to thank for this reputation. No matter how bad the situation is on ground, America has every reason to think twice about directly involving itself in military intervention in Syria or any other nation for that matter.

If America must impose itself in the Syrian crisis, there are other options that they should consider before the prospect of an outside military force. The United States can arm the various opposition groups in Syria and provide intelligence and logistic support for them in the war without going in them-selves. America can furthermore put more effort to reach out to these dissident and opposition groups in Syria and consider whether they will engage with them as the rightful representatives of the Syrian people, with a view towards getting international recognition; setting up a no-fly or no-tank zone of the type used in Iraq in the 1990s; and strengthening rebel forces with better resources, such as air support, intelligence, and special operations forces liaisons, which were used with great effectiveness to support anti-Taliban fighters during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. They can also encourage other concerned nations, especially those in the region, to strategically and financially support the democracy movements in Syria and to fund reconstruction in the nation should the Assad regime be eventually overthrown.

America could also make use of the social network and encourage the departure of the Assad regime with a flood of pre-emptive campaigns, using social media and other available media.

A major effort to try and come to some consensus between the Arab League, the major European governments, and the United States needs to be made in order to encourage Moscow and Beijing to step back from their current posture of supporting the Assad regime.

America would have to continue working with key countries that have strong economic links to Syria and have the strongest potential to provide assistance and safe harbour to Syrians looking to leave the conflict zone. Courting countries such as Turkey and Iraq would be strategically beneficial to the America and the West in getting support to isolate the Assad regime in Syria. Other options could include the United States working diplomatically with the members of the Arab league that want to oust the Assad regime. Already, there has been a new Arab League proposal to send a UN peacekeeping force to Syria. And although the body proposed does not appear to have the authority or firepower to respond to any breaches of the peace with force, the inclusion of the Arab league in fast forwarding the end to the assault in Syria is paramount to any peace deal or end game that will eventually take place there.

Rather than an outright military approach in Syria by the United States that is bound to end up inflaming the region's sectarian divisions and remaking the mistakes that the Bush administration made in Iraq, the United States would be best advised to not engage their military in the conflict but to continue its intervention with a focus on diplomacy aimed at getting other countries to pull their weight and exert their influence to stop the violence in Syria. In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 2009, President Obama spoke of America's new approach to foreign policy to be one that put greater emphasis on the responsibilities of other countries. In furtherance of that policy, the United States should strike a balance by offering support to Syrians seeking peaceful change and isolating the Assad government, with a strong focus on what other countries like Turkey and Iraq are willing and capable of doing on Syria.

The civil war in Syria risks drawing regional actors into a wider battle and the greater responsibility for intervention and addressing the conflict should come from key regional actors not the United States... , not the West. Of course, the United States and the West have a role to play, but their role should remain engaged and be prepared to intervene using alternative measures rather than producing a military solution right here, right now.

The revolution in Syria is part of the Arab Spring of which the foundation is for the benefit of the democracy movement. And even though the journey for the attainment of the democratic movement in Syria is cloaked in the garb of a bloody civil war and with each new civilian death a piece of our conscience is chipped away, the question of whether the U.S. should intervene in Syria with Military Action should be one that is replied with an unequivocal 'Nay'... Yes, while the United states has a moral responsibility to support the Syrian people, that moral responsibility should come in the form of the super power doing everything short of direct military intervention to show their support.