

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Anne-Marie Slaughter <[REDACTED]>
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To: H
Cc: Abedin, Huma; Jacob J Sullivan (SullivanJJ@state.gov); Cheryl Mills
Subject: analysis by Emirati defense analyst of military action in Syria, published in Emirati newspaper The National

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I know this is not on the table, but I thought you should see it. AM

As war engulfs Syria, foreign forces could turn the tide

Ahmad Al Attar and William J Moloney

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As the Syrian city of Homs tipped towards open war yesterday, international resolve was still mired in confusion. The ability of a UN Security Council resolution to stem the bloodshed is in doubt, while with few exceptions foreign observers are waffling on military intervention.

The strongest statements have come from Qatar's Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who recently told the US television channel CBS that "troops should go to stop the killing". The proposal, however, was short on details, and it remains to be seen who would be involved.

Turkey is still trying to hold on to the last vestiges of its "no problems with neighbours" foreign policy. The Arab League is caught between states that are dealing with their own revolutions, states that are wary of what comes after the Assad regime and states that are apathetic.

There is a general lack of political resolve, but if the violence continues as we have seen in Homs, intervention is the only option left on the table. But even if there was the will to intervene, could it be accomplished?

First and foremost, the goals of intervention must be highlighted. The mandate behind such a mission would be explicitly to bring an end to the Assad regime. As was witnessed in Libya last year and in Iraq in 2003, the only way to bring an end to a despotic and highly centralised regime is to decapitate it by seizing the capital. Diehard units may continue to hold out after the political centre has been captured, but for all intents and purposes, the dictatorship would have lost the ability to use the state apparatus to wield control.

The forceful removal of the Assads by military means faces several key challenges. The Free Syrian Army does not have the manpower, materiel, or necessary organisation and support capabilities to defeat the much larger Syrian Army and Republican Guard (not to mention Damascus's extensive naval and air assets). Unlike Libya, intervention in Syria would require the deployment of foreign ground forces.

The staging of a ground intervention would be critical. While Syria borders five countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Iraq) not all of them would be suitable candidates to support an invasion. A militia that is invested in the survival of the Syrian regime controls Lebanon; Israel is unlikely to support the removal of the "devil they know"; and Iraq is too unstable to support another deployment of foreign troops on its territory. Only Turkey and Jordan would be capable, and potentially willing, to host a ground offensive.

To defuse Damascus's claims of "imperialism", the ground component would best be conducted by a Turkish-Jordanian-GCC force, fighting the regime on both northern and southern fronts, with US and Nato air and intelligence ground support.

The Syrian ground forces seem formidable on paper, with 1,600 T-72 tanks, 2,200 BMP armoured vehicles, plentiful anti-tank weapons (including advanced AT-14 Kornet missiles) and substantial artillery and air-defence systems. While the Syrian air force has about 60

relatively modern planes, the remaining 524 combat aircraft are ageing models from the 1960s and 1970s. The navy is the smallest and most poorly equipped of the branches, and would be almost irrelevant anyway in an intervention staged from Turkey or Jordan.

The first phase would be the aerial campaign preparing the way for close air support of a ground advance. Surface-to-air missile sites (SAMs) and air force planes and installations would have to be completely destroyed, which would take significantly longer than the initial salvo against air defences in Libya.

There is a precedent in the 1999 Nato intervention in Kosovo, which stretched out over three and a half months, involving over 1,000 combat aircraft and 38,000 combat sorties. It involved almost all Nato members, and heavily relied on the US air force's diverse capabilities.

The 2011 intervention in Libya relied even more heavily on US air force support. While US and Nato forces should not have boots on the ground, their expertise in winning air superiority would drastically limit casualties.

The best-case scenario would be a two-front war. On the northern front, the Turkish army would push south to take Aleppo and sever Damascus's links to the Syrian Mediterranean region (which contains a large Alawite population). This would reduce the likelihood of a repeat of the battle of Sirte, where Qaddafi loyalists held out for several weeks after the fall of Tripoli.

On the southern front, a combined Jordanian-GCC force would take Al Harisa and Shahba, before pushing on to Damascus. The rationale is based on low population density. The Syrian military may have units that are better trained in defensive asymmetric warfare, which would fortify themselves in urban environments, having learnt from the experience of Hizbollah in Lebanon. The southern approaches to Damascus are relatively flat, supported by a road network and have a lower population density, allowing a mobile offensive that avoided urban areas and minimised civilian casualties.

Middle East militaries' ever-present problems with practical combined forces and manoeuvre warfare would slow the southern advance, but a conventional ground offensive backed by close air support could avoid a long, drawn-out war, as was seen in Libya. Estimates of Libyan civilian casualties are uncertain, but certainly aggravated by urban warfare and the poor training of Libyan militias.

If the political or humanitarian situation in Syria changes to a degree where intervention is the only option, it could be successful. But it must be focused and decisive to shorten the conflict and minimise casualties. As the Homs massacre continues, this could be the only solution to the crisis.

Ahmed Al Attar is an Emirati security affairs commentator. William J Moloney is a defence analyst

Anne-Marie Slaughter
Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University Professor of Politics and International Affairs
Princeton University
440 Robertson Hall
Princeton, NJ 08544

Assistant: Terry Murphy

Website: www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr

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