
**SYRIA: MINIMIZING CIVILIAN HARM DURING
MILITARY INTERVENTION**

ROUNDTABLE OUTCOME DOCUMENT, FEBRUARY 2013

Background

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, the international community has debated the need for and potential efficacy of military intervention to stop the Assad regime’s brutal suppression of the political opposition and to prevent atrocities against the civilian population. Until recently, this discussion has mainly focused on the transfer and provision of weapons and humanitarian assistance to the armed opposition. However, as allegations of indiscriminate use of force and attacks on civilians by regime forces increase, including by the use of airpower and surface-to-air missiles, calls for more robust action are growing louder.

Civilian harm is a risk in any military intervention. Sound policy and international law require any nation or coalition contemplating such action to assess not only the goals and potential efficacy of particular military options, but also the risks those options pose to civilians in the conflict—including casualties, displacement, increasing cycles of violence, environmental degradation, and more. Such risks should be assessed before and during combat; to consider them after an intervention option has been chosen is too late.

To this end, Center for Civilians in Conflict with support from the American Society of International Law (ASIL) convened a roundtable of knowledgeable policymakers, military planners, humanitarian and protection experts, and legal academics to consider five military options for foreign involvement in Syria specifically through a civilian harm mitigation lens. The five options included: training and equipping the armed opposition; conducting limited airstrikes; deploying patriot batteries around Syria; creating no-fly and no-drive zones; and deploying an international security force post-conflict. The discussion was conducted under the Chatham House Rule and participants spoke in their personal capacity informed by their respective professional skills. The aim of this document is to provide decision makers with informed perspectives on the civilian implications of possible interventions. All options considered by the participants were based on the premise that appropriate international legal authorization had been obtained.

Participants were asked to consider the following overarching questions with regard to each option:

- What are the primary and secondary protection concerns for civilians in each course of action?
- What precautions can be taken in each course of action to ensure civilians are informed of impending operations so they may stay away from likely targets, if possible?
- What specific type of harm to civilians is likely in each course of action, including death, injury, property, livelihood, and/or civilian infrastructure damage, decreased access to health care, environmental impact, displacement, limitations on freedom of movement, etc.?

- What can be done specifically in each scenario to minimize harm to civilians?
- In each scenario, how could the intervener consistently assess the civilian harm it is causing to ensure it isn't doing more harm than good?
- What can policymakers consider now about how to handle civilian harm during an intervention and post-conflict?

To be clear, the roundtable issue at hand was not the proactive protection of civilians, in which a military intervention would place some manner of buffer between armed actors and Syrian civilians. This topic has, and continues to be, widely discussed in the international community. Rather, the roundtable discussed “civilian harm mitigation,” meaning to avoid causing civilian harm and properly responding to it during and after a military intervention. There is a complicated calculus to be done in comparing the threat the fighting poses to civilians and the potential harm that could be created through a military intervention, as well as not intervening at all. Roundtable participants engaged in back-of-the-napkin costs and benefits, but it was not the main thrust of this discussion.

This paper does not advocate for one particular form of intervention. Rather, it highlights the risks to civilians of several often-discussed possibilities for military intervention in Syria. Additionally, the paper does not represent the full range of considerations that military planners and civilian policymakers must think through with regard to civilian harm before settling on particular course action. It is meant as a starting point. We note that each intervention is assumed to have a political mandate, and that international humanitarian and customary international law are in full force. Lastly, participants made points about one or another intervention option during the discussion that could be relevant to other intervention options. To avoid repetitiveness, we did not duplicate a consideration everywhere it is relevant. We hope readers will take this into consideration. They will also notice a hint of tension, and at times contradiction, among points made under each option. This is natural and to be expected with an exercise like this. Most importantly, it reflects the inherent complexity of this issue.

Discussion Summary

Any mandate for military intervention in Syria must take into account the root causes of the conflict so any action does not exacerbate tensions or violence, the possible short and long-term consequences of the intervention, and post-conflict reconstruction, governance and stability concerns.

Each military intervention option requires, during the planning stage, evaluating the potential negative impact on the civilian population, as well as monitoring operations as they are conducted. Mechanisms like civilian casualty tracking cells with investigatory capabilities should be created during the planning stages of the intervention. The post-conflict end-state should also be considered prior to any military intervention. Post-conflict imperatives include security sector reform, accountability mechanisms such as a commission of inquiry, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, the securing of weapons stockpiles, and protections for minorities against retaliatory attacks.

The following summarizes the key observations and considerations highlighted by the participants in respect of each option for military intervention.

Arming the opposition (intervention option #1) was considered the worst military intervention option for minimizing harm to civilians, mainly due to misuse and unintended proliferation. End users are difficult to vet, while the weapons themselves are nearly impossible to track. Providing weapons also increases the risk of post-conflict proliferation to facilitate armed conflicts elsewhere, and could facilitate post-conflict

violence among rivals within Syria itself. If arms are provided, so too should be training requirements, with prioritization of international law and civilian protection as much as weapons use.

Conducting limited airstrikes (intervention option #2) would be the best military intervention option for limiting unintended harm to civilians, as it is a relatively controlled application of force. This assumes proper intelligence, planning and conduct of operations informed by advanced civilian harm mitigation priorities, rules of engagement, and procedures—all of which should be carefully considered before engaging. Limited airstrikes could reduce the regime’s ability to target civilians by air, and thus may positively impact civilians and the ability of humanitarians to assist them. This intervention could be carried out quickly, though would carry a heavy material and economic cost.

Deploying Patriot batteries (intervention option #3) carries a very low risk of causing civilian harm, as the primary benefit of the Patriot is deterrence. At the same time, the batteries provide little protection for civilians except those in very close proximity to the Turkish border and have capability challenges when used offensively (e.g., targets must be in the line of sight). Without significantly restructuring NATO’s mandate, and upgrading the communications systems attached to the current deployment of Patriot batteries, this option will provide little actual benefit to civilian populations in Syria. The use of Patriots may also invite mission creep into Syria.

Creating a no-fly zone (intervention option #4) must begin with an understanding of the mandate, whether to prevent Assad from using air capabilities against the population or used as an offensive operation to attack regime forces. A no-fly zone could stop Assad’s aerial bombardment of civilians and further allow humanitarians to access populations. There are limitations to this, however, if the regime retaliates against humanitarians and civilians with ground forces. Continuous, good intelligence will be necessary to identify valid military targets and to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants in a dynamic combat environment like Syria.

Deploying an international security force (intervention option #5) would be a difficult endeavor at best. The currently proposed 5,000-strong force would not contain enough capacity to accomplish civilian protection and stabilization in Damascus, let alone the entire Syrian territory. Any outside force going into Syria should have a protection of civilians mandate, meaning that it should be authorized and equipped to proactively protect civilians against threats. Foreign forces will face a complex and perhaps perilous political and security landscape, and could become involved directly in a new conflict. Such an intervention would have no chance of success without the international community planning now for a secure state post-conflict in parallel.

Discussion Outcomes

OPTION 1: Train and Equip the Armed Opposition

This course of action focuses on arming and training the rebel forces in Syria.

Participants considered: which weapons pose less risk of indiscriminate harm to civilians; which weapons require training in order to minimize civilian harm as a result of deploying them; are the armed opposition in a position to responsibly use weapons under IHL; recent political changes in the Syrian opposition structure; post-conflict, what risk will the weapons have on civilian security (abandoned, proliferated, or used with mal-intent), and how such risks can be minimized.

General Observations

- This option presents the greatest risk of civilian harm.
- The armed opposition is fragmented and lacks a unified command structure. These facts pose serious concerns about the opposition's willingness and/or ability to comply with international humanitarian law.
- The uncontrolled provision of arms carries risks of causing considerable harm to civilians, including post-conflict. Specific risks include misuse and unintended proliferation. End users are difficult to vet, while the weapons themselves are nearly impossible to track.
- Both sides in Syria are heavily armed already. Multiple states have already undertaken this option in limited form. Thus, providing additional arms to the rebel forces may not make an appreciable difference in ending the conflict.

Misusing Weapons

- Small arms and light weapons may be turned against unarmed civilian populations, both during the current conflict and post-conflict periods of stabilization and reconstruction.
- More sophisticated weapons systems may increase the ability of the armed opposition to resist Assad, but may also increase the risk posed to civilian populations. For example, man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), would allow the opposition to engage Syrian warplanes at much a higher altitude, but could endanger civilian aircraft. Sophisticated weapons systems could also be dismantled and used during insurgencies to build more deadly IEDs that, even if targeted against military objectives, invariably kill civilians, as demonstrated in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Depending on the mission mandate, providing sophisticated weapons systems may lessen the impact on post-conflict civilian populations. For example, in Afghanistan, MANPADS such as Stingers caused minimal casualties due to their inability to be used effectively against ground-based civilian targets and their limited battery life.

Unintended Proliferation

- Providing weapons to the Syrian opposition increases the risk of post-conflict proliferation to facilitate armed conflicts elsewhere. Weapons from conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Libya are now being used in Syria, Gaza, and Mali.
- Even sophisticated weapons systems could help facilitate conflict elsewhere. As one example, Jordan's government and civilian population would be at greater risk if opposition groups there obtained sophisticated weapons systems from the Syrian conflict.
- Arming the opposition could embolden fragmentation in post-conflict Syria. The post-Soviet Afghanistan is a case in point. Foreign weapons transfers to the mujahedeen in the 1980s for use against Soviet forces fueled massive, violent battles between rival factions, as well as sectarian and ethnic conflict, killing thousands of civilians. In the absence of a common enemy in a post-Assad Syria, weapons could be used among rival factions with civilians caught in the crossfire or worse, targeted for their political and confessional affiliations.
- Intervening states must plan for post-conflict processes of disarmament, collection, and securing stockpiles, including cooperative efforts where multiple states have provided arms. If there is no feasible plan for disarming groups or if the opposition is not stable enough to maintain security during the post-conflict phase, arming rebels is unlikely to end well.

Vetting, Training and Accountability

- Where arms are provided, so too should be training.
- Training should prioritize international law and civilian protection as much as weapons usage, since elements of the armed opposition appear genuine in their desire not to harm civilians but lack the tactical skills to do so.

- Training armed groups comes with challenges, including: i) secure location for training to occur in a conflict setting; ii) language and cultural requirements for the trainers; and iii) relationship between trainers and armed opposition group leadership (e.g.: are they advisors, observers, commanders, etc.).
- Armed support must be conditioned on the rebels to accept training and procedures on the use of those weapons in such a manner as to minimize the impact on civilian populations. Nations already arming rebels should be pressured to initiate similar procedures.
- It will be difficult to get the armed opposition to sign up for training without something being brought to the table for them in return. Although the rebels hope outside forces bring more guns, providing them logistical support and additional humanitarian assistance instead might be an alternative way to encourage more training opportunities.
- Vetting procedures employed by some countries during previous conflicts were inadequate. Vetting process must be enhanced to identify groups or individuals likely to use weapons against civilians.
- Responsibly arming the rebels requires more coherent opposition groups with strong command and control, and internal accountability procedures to minimize unlawful or irresponsible use of weapons. These structures and conditions do not exist in Syria, greatly complicating any decision to arm opposition forces.
- The international community should send a strong, unequivocal message to all parties to the conflict to conduct investigations and hold violators accountable under domestic and international law.

Political and Legal Implications

- Potentially negative responses from Iran and Russia, and retaliatory escalation from the regime itself that could intensify the conflict, could increase the risk to civilian populations.
- The legal ramifications of training and arming opposition forces may include internationalization of what currently has the characteristics of a non-international armed conflict (NIAC). For example, the *Tadic* decision of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) provides a standard for evaluating when an intervention causes a NIAC to escalate to an international armed conflict. The “overall control” test uses factors like provision of arms and training to determine when a state has become so involved as to internationalize the conflict.

OPTION 2: Conduct Limited Airstrikes

This course of action proposes that interveners target military objectives, in particular Syrian aircraft on the ground and the Syrian regime’s runways. This option is unlikely to halt helicopter use (though Assad’s supply is dwindling) responsible for significant civilian casualties.

Participants considered: what weapons are required to do this and what civilian impact do they have; what weapons would be left behind; what civilian infrastructure would be damaged, with what impact on the local population (aid deliveries, etc.), and how quickly could it/when would it be rebuilt?

General Observations

- It’s clear that Syrian government air assets are intentionally targeting civilians and aid distribution points. Limited airstrikes could reduce the regime’s ability to target civilians in this way, and thus may positively impact civilians and the ability of humanitarians to assist them.
- The sole use of airpower will not be effective in proactively stopping civilians from being killed, injured and threatened. However, striking Syrian capabilities could reduce the threat to civilians from the Assad regime.
- Limited airstrikes would be the best military intervention option for limiting unintended harm to civilians, as it is a relatively controlled use of force. This is assuming proper intelligence, planning, and

conduct of operations informed by advanced civilian harm mitigation priorities, rules of engagement, and procedures—all of which should be carefully considered before engaging.

Logistical challenges

- Targets and target sets could be specifically chosen to minimize civilian casualties. In some cases, major Syrian airfields and surface-to-surface missile facilities are relatively isolated, thus minimizing the risk of civilian harm. Targets at dual use air facilities could also be chosen with specific attack times to minimize the risk to civilians.
- Standoff strikes with Tactical Land Attack Missiles (TLAMs) and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Munitions (JASSMs) could be conducted within a matter of hours (depending on force postures and deployment) without prior military campaigns to counter Syrian air defense networks and capabilities. These strikes would require extensive and timely intelligence, and would likely have only moderate success rates (perhaps 50 percent or lower) against mobile targets.
- Military commanders may be reluctant to conduct limited airstrikes absent a broader political and military strategy for the region. For instance, while seemingly straightforward, this option would be an immensely complicated undertaking. Force positioning, intelligence, timing, and post-strike analysis would all be exceptionally difficult tasks. Standoff TLAM and JASSM strikes will not provide the video confirmation that manned aircraft with targeting pods do. Furthermore, incremental interventions like standoff airstrikes give the target an opportunity to adapt. If a broader intervention was anticipated, a series of strikes followed by inactivity would likely make any subsequent intervention more difficult. Finally, as mentioned above, significant reduction of standoff weapon stockpiles must be weighed against other potential threats on the horizon.

Political and Legal Implications

- This option could be the easiest from a political point of view, given that it is a limited intervention. In this context a “limited” intervention refers to a constrained target set (air and missile capabilities) rather than a certain level of effort.
- Some UN Security Council member states are unlikely to back this option in light of the controversy surrounding the recent Libya mandate and subsequent NATO operations. Acting in self-defense outside a UNSC mandate is a possibility. The risk of the Assad regime deploying chemical weapons may cause a reevaluation of this option.
- Limited strikes carry a heavy material and economic cost. An effective series of strikes against a likely list of targets in Syria would probably require 1,000 or more standoff weapons, each of which has a significant price tag. Using a significant amount of them must be weighed against potential future military requirements.

Second and Third Order Consequences

- The Assad regime could turn to other military options in retaliation (e.g. chemical weapons, unconventional warfare) either against intervening forces or the domestic opposition, causing even more harm to civilians.
- The impact of limited airstrikes on Syria’s future political landscape must be considered. By making the regime more desperate as it sees its military capability degraded, will airstrikes merely move the conflict into another, potentially more brutal, phase rather than solving it? Will it lead to responses or retaliation from other states or groups or destabilize other states? For example, a significant reduction of Syrian air and missile capabilities might force the Assad regime to conduct a “scorched earth” approach using ground combat forces, substantially increasing the risk to civilian populations.
- Policymakers must consider what fills the governance void if airstrikes are successful and lead to collapse of the Assad regime, including warlordism, factionalism, or another phase of violent sectarian

and/or civil conflict. Airstrikes should be carried out in conjunction with a plan in place for post-conflict governance and mitigation of potential further harm to civilians in the aftermath of regime collapse.

- Humanitarian concerns associated with this option include new internally displaced persons and increased refugee flows. In Kosovo, the exclusive use of airstrikes meant that civilians on the ground remained vulnerable, forcing nearly 800,000 out of the country. Conversely, in Darfur, some humanitarian organizations opposed airstrikes against military targets because they could have made civilians and the humanitarian community “soft targets” for retaliation. This option could carry similar risks in Syria.
- It is difficult to assess the consequences of limited airstrikes ahead of time. The limited airstrikes in Operation Deliberate Force precipitated the collapse of the Serbian forces in the west fighting Croatia, and leading to the Dayton Accords. In contrast, the limited strikes to target Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003 led to a substantial disruption of the planned joint campaign and may have directly contributed to the subsequent insurgency.

Accounting for Casualties

- Any military intervention in Syria must include mechanisms to assess the impact of the intervention. A worthwhile tool would be a civilian casualty tracking and response mechanism, which can collect data being fed in from the ground and analyze for timely (hours, not days) assessments of the intervention. It can also proactively identify any civilian harm actually caused by the intervention, properly investigate incidents of suspected civilian casualties, counter any attempts by the Assad regime to distribute false claims of civilian harm, and recommend ways to dignify losses caused.
- NATO operations in Afghanistan and Libya provide two distinct but useful lessons in this regard. In Afghanistan, international forces created such a cell to track, analyze, and respond to civilian harm, often using the data to push back against false allegations of civilian casualties and locate war victims to provide assistance. In Libya, NATO did not create such a cell and found itself on the back foot in trying to dispute accusations of large numbers of civilian casualties.
- Battle damage assessments and investigations after operations must be conducted as a credible means to assess the operational success of civilian protection measures, as well as to establish responsibility and accountability for potential misconduct. There are practical obstacles to these measures, including limited on the ground information gathering and investigation capabilities. Nevertheless, they must be considered before launching any air campaign.

OPTION 3: Deploy Patriot Batteries

This course of action has Patriot anti-missile systems deployed in Turkey and Jordan, close to the Syrian border, to potentially engage Syrian aircraft. This option can only stop Syrian airstrikes in limited, albeit important, areas spanning 25–50 miles from their emplacements. Patriot batteries are typically used for the protection of military forces, but in some conflicts they have been used to defend civilian population centers. Given the range of the missile system, its ability to impose a No-Fly-Zone (NFZ) or defend an area over a territory not controlled by partnered ground forces is limited. NATO Patriot batteries are currently 16 miles off the Syrian border in Turkey and are now operational. Under the current rules of engagement, Syrian forces must cross into Turkish airspace for their use to be authorized. Their current purpose is defensive only, providing no relief to Syrian civilians inside Syria.

Participants considered: how targeted are these strikes and what is the risk to civilians if they miss; is the blast itself a threat to civilians; would location of the batteries risk civilians (i.e., retaliatory fire), the risk of shifting Syrian government responses to non-patrolled areas, or avenues used to flee Syria?

General Observations

- The primary benefit of Patriot batteries lies in their deterrent effect, which may limit Assad's willingness to pursue actions against civilian populations within their range.
- This option is unlikely to extensively, negatively impact civilians, but also provides little protection for civilians against Assad's forces, except those in very close proximity to the Turkish border. Without significantly restructuring NATO's mandate, and upgrading the communications systems attached to the current deployment of Patriot batteries, this option will provide little actual benefit to civilian populations in Syria.

Logistical and mandate concerns

- Utilizing Patriot batteries to protect Syrian civilians in Syria creates the risk of mission creep beyond the limits originally proposed in this option. For example, if Patriot batteries are protecting Syrian civilians up to 50 miles inside of Syria, and Assad were to start targeting civilians just outside of the protected zone, there would be increased pressure to engage Syrian forces beyond the range of what the Patriot batteries could accomplish.
- Given the Syrian government's practice of aerial targeting of bakeries and fuel queues, some participants raised the possibility that Patriot systems could enable a kind of "NFZ light" along certain areas of the border. If certain strategic areas within Syria could be protected from airstrikes, it could enable humanitarian groups greater confidence in transportation and storage of humanitarian supplies. This could also enable a measure of safety for the civilian population in those same areas, protecting them from aerial bombardments which to date continue throughout the North.
- This was seen as a "feel-good option," with low risk to involved states.

OPTION 4: Standoff No-Fly Zone or Full NFZ and No-Drive Zone

In the standoff no-fly zone (NFZ) option, planes enforce a no-fly zone without crossing into Syrian airspace. The planes would shoot down aircraft within their effective range, namely the northern and southern third of the country, and coastal areas. The option of creating a full no-fly and no-drive zone most closely represents what was done in Libya, and requires first dismantling all Syria's air defenses and then creating a no-fly and no-drive zone policed by international partners within Syrian airspace.

Participants considered: if Syrian planes continue to fly, what risk does shooting them down pose to civilians; what risk or increased risk is there to civilians not under the NFZ; what unforeseen negative ramifications could there be to civilians under the NFZ; what risk is there to civilians when dismantling Assad's air defenses; what other risks would remain to civilians from Assad; would civilians still be able to flee, get aid, healthcare, etc. (i.e., if armed groups with unknown origins intermingle with the population); what are any unforeseen ramifications?

General Observations

- First and foremost, the purpose of the no-fly zone (NFZ) must be defined. Will it be solely to minimize the ability of the Assad regime to use air capabilities against civilian populations? Or, will it be part and parcel of an effort to destroy the Assad regime's full array of military forces and capabilities? Coordination between political and military sectors is a necessity.
- A proper NFZ requires specific attention to the political mandate, given that NFZs can take multiple forms and the term is widely misunderstood. The principal purpose of NFZs in Iraq was to prevent the Iraqi regime's ability to use air capabilities against the Kurdish population in Northern Iraq and subsequently against Iraqi Shiite populations in the south. The Libyan intervention, while often described as

a NFZ, but was more akin to an offensive operation conducted against Libyan ground combat forces. Qaddafi's air, surface-to-surface missiles, and air defense capabilities were certainly attacked, but the vast majority of strikes were against Libyan ground force capabilities.

- The deployment of a full NFZ—which includes the ability to attack Syrian ground forces and other military capabilities at-will—would entail a substantial escalation of the conflict, such as the deployment of special operations forces into Syria to assist in the identification and targeting of regime forces. This may, in turn, lead to a full military intervention.
- In Damascus and other government-held areas, the government is already cracking down on civilians, so it is not evident that a NFZ would or could risk more harm to those populations.

Practical Concerns

- NFZs only work if there is willingness to shoot down the Syrian planes or if the Syrian planes stay on the ground.
- Effective NFZs require continuous intelligence, particularly to identify valid military targets and to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants in a dynamic combat environment like Syria.
- Constant surveillance of targets is resource intensive, requiring a huge amount of aircraft. A US-implemented NFZ for the entire Syrian territory would require nearly every F-22 in the US inventory, most of its aerial refueling tankers and AWACS platforms, and significant support capacity. Without all these resources to fully patrol the area and immediately respond to violations, the intervention will fail.
- A full NFZ could also be prohibitively expensive to enforce. For example, it generally requires an entire 24 aircraft fighter squadron to maintain a single two aircraft combat air patrol for 24 hours. Maintaining multiple combat air patrols, sustained necessary airborne intelligence, airborne command and control, and aerial refueling in sufficient numbers so as to prevent the Assad regime from flying would require hundreds of sorties a day. The substantial commitment of a sufficient number of aircraft from this fleet would likely be financially unsustainable for an extended period of time.

Humanitarian Considerations

- If a NFZ put an end to the regime's aerial bombardments, this could potentially facilitate humanitarian aid to civilians.
- A NFZ might expose humanitarians and civilians to retaliation from the government, even if the NFZ were successful. This is a particular possibility in Damascus, where the UN and some NGOs continue to operate and through which they route aid.
- In other settings, particularly Darfur, humanitarian actors did not see a NFZ as a viable option because the ground remained under the control of the government. In Syria, much of the territory that would be covered by a NFZ is controlled by opposition groups, generally open to outside assistance—meaning ground-level threats to humanitarians would be limited.

Lessons from Libya

- Libya was a more straightforward battlefield, with one road that everyone used. This made it easier to monitor a no-drive zone. Syria's densely populated terrain heightens concerns about civilian casualties. There could be problems with identification of legitimate military targets. Concerns about kidnappings arise in a no-drive zone particularly with the intent to use hostages as 'shields' to mask military activity.
- The discrepancy between the mandate, its understanding, and the execution of the mission in Libya has resulted in a reticence by the UN Security Council to provide authorization for this option. The possibility of the Assad regime deploying chemical weapons may cause a reevaluation of this option.

OPTION 5: Deployment of International Security Force Post-Conflict

This course of action is currently being considered by the United Nations and potential troop-contributing nations in preparation for the assumed state of lawlessness if the Assad government collapses. The temporary force is expected to be in the region of 5,000 personnel and will take time to deploy, potentially requiring a “bridge” force prior to implementation.

Participants considered: should such a force have a civilian protection mandate and how would that work tactically; if so, what security tasks can they undertake and which ones should be off the table in support of the local population; what negative ramifications can come from this deployment (i.e. abuses, increased targeting of policed zones, etc.).

It is worth stating here that this option could be a full roundtable discussion in itself; the considerations below are meant to be a starting point.

General Observations

- This intervention option is really about planning for, implementing and maintaining post-conflict security. Attempting to think through these issues after the fighting is over will be far more difficult and expensive than participating in the planning for Syria’s post-conflict needs now.
- An international peacekeeping force would be an incredibly difficult endeavor at best and may fail entirely if the international community doesn’t plan for state stability in parallel.
- The proposed 5,000-strong force would not contain enough capacity to accomplish civilian protection and stabilization in Damascus, let alone the entire Syrian territory. Such a small force would have difficulty enabling the new Syrian state to effectively protect its own civilian populations.

Mandate considerations

- The difference between a Chapter VI or Chapter VII mandate will impact the extent to which the international force may engage directly in civilian protection. A proper mandate, bolstered by the requisite quality and quantity of forces, can help guard against mission paralysis should violence break out. Participants acknowledged, however, that such a mandate by itself would not ensure success.
- Any outside force going into Syria should have a POC mandate, meaning that it should be authorized and equipped to proactively protect civilians against threats.

Practical concerns

- The police and/or peacekeeping forces will face a complex and perhaps perilous political and security landscape where different groups are likely to be vying for power and territory. This could lead to conflict between the UN mandate force and the new regime or other armed groups.
- To effectively protect civilian populations, international forces will need to work with groups that have popular support within a post-Assad Syria. One example is the al Nusra Front, which has strong social support programs and is seen as less corrupt than other political factions, and would likely oppose any international security force. This may be politically untenable for intervening states.

Post-conflict considerations

- Post-conflict imperatives include security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. However, a rule of law intervention will be helpful no matter a military option (or which one) to protect civilians. Syria already has courts and laws, and transitional courts are already in place. Bolstering these structures is preferable to imposing new ones. There are lessons from the Kosovo rule of law mission that may be helpful here.

- A Commission of Inquiry should be set up quickly, including with international support and based on lessons learned from Libya. Evidence should be gathered for accountability and transitional justice, though this cannot wait until after Assad falls. Efforts to document abuses must be ongoing, including with regard to any military intervention undertaken by the international community. A DPKO/policing mission could help with this if given the right resources, political will, and international authorization.
- All civilians harmed in the conflict should receive equal recognition and assistance for their suffering, regardless of which party harmed them and irrespective of perceived or known political affiliation. Data, including casualty records compiled by civil society groups, will make identifying and assisting civilians suffering injuries, property loss or the death of their loved ones much easier than in other conflicts. Efforts to collect this kind of data, as well as others to document and reissue vital pieces of identification, such as birth and death certificates, should be supported by international donors for the long term.
- Wartime ordnance in the form of abandoned stockpiles, loose small arms, landmines, and unexploded bombs, will continue to pose a deadly threat to civilians even after the shells stop falling. It is imperative that Syrian and international efforts focused on post-war planning begin drafting a strategy to deal with the problem of abandoned ordnance. Any strategy should be based on input from affected individuals and communities, and its scope should be broad enough to cover the full spectrum of activities related to minimizing the dangers of weapons left after an armed conflict, primary among them: stockpile management, clearance, risk education, and victim assistance.

About Center for Civilians in Conflict

Center for Civilians in Conflict works to make warring parties more responsible to civilians before, during, and after armed conflict. We are advocates who believe no civilian caught in conflict should be ignored, and advisors who provide practical solutions to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

The organization was founded as Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC) in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a courageous humanitarian killed by a suicide bomber in 2005 while advocating for Iraqi families.

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