

Dear Prime Minister,

A revolution has engulfed Syria. On one side are democratic activists being shielded by rebel forces; on the other, a dynastic totalitarian dictatorship that has killed upwards of 6,000 civilians, arbitrarily detained an estimated 37,000 more, and been credibly accused by the United Nations of crimes against humanity. The province of Homs has become a latter-day Sarajevo. The kind of house-to-house raids that Muammar Gaddafi threatened to conduct in Libya are routine practice in Syria, as is the firing of heavy artillery in residential areas.

According to human rights monitors, the regime of Bashar al-Assad and its mercenary affiliates have raped young boys in front of their fathers, beat the wounded while they're in hospital, crammed people into shipping containers for transport to detention facilities, and summarily executed soldiers who refused to fire on civilians. Despite assurances from the Arab League that its fact-finding mission to Syria would spell an end to violence, there is credible evidence that the Assad regime has in fact redoubled its campaign of arbitrary arrests, torture and murder.

Recently, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe have advocated some form of intervention to protect the people of Syria. Russia and China's continued intransigence at the UN Security Council to pass even a watered down resolution condemning Assad's violence, has left the West with no alternative but military intervention.

A detailed report published by Henry Jackson Society offers a workable blueprint for intervention that would include the creation of a safe area in the northwest province of Idlib, centred in the city of Jisr al-Shughour, as well as a no-fly zone covering the western corridor of the country. The report suggests using Turkish ground troops to establish the safe area, and Western or NATO air forces to impose the no-fly zone.

Britain could provide a crucial role, as it did in Libya, in keeping the Syrian skies clear long enough to allow civilians a refuge from the regime's onslaught as well as create a viable base of operations for the political and military wings of the Syrian opposition.

We therefore encourage you to take the following actions immediately:

- Work with the United States, France, the Arab League, Turkey and NATO to assess the military requirements needed for imposing a safe area in Idlib province and a no-fly zone over the western corridor of Syria.
- Press for a clear United Nations Security Council resolution condemning the Assad regime for its continued violence against civilians and authorising the use of force to establish a safe area and no-fly zone in Syria. Also examine viability of the UN General Assembly "Uniting for Peace" resolution (377a) as an alternative legal means for authorising a multilateral intervention.

- Establish a contact group to formally liaise with the Syrian National Council, other Syrian opposition groups, the Free Syrian Army and the network of independent rebel brigades which have been responsible for most of the defensive and offensive operations being conducted in the country. These brigades have taken the fight directly to Damascus, but they are in dire need of supplies and weapons. Britain ought to provide those.

We applaud your government's efforts, in conjunction with those of the United States and European Union, to both call for the resignation of Assad and to sanction his inner circle for grave human rights abuses.

It is in Britain's moral and strategic interest to make this happen.

Sincerely,

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