

Nov 04, 2016 by *Najla Al Awadhi*

# **A Multilateral Intervention in Syria: A Moral Necessity** <sup>[1]</sup>

I am often told that Syria is not Libya and that any intervention would lead to a disproportionate death of civilians, making such an intervention unacceptable and unjustifiable. I would argue that the morality justifying the need for intervention in Syria is indisputable. First and foremost, innocent life is in danger and in need of protection. The Syrian Government has initiated an operation of large scale and systematic violation of human rights, with the UN stating that what the Syrian Government is doing amounts to crimes against humanity. It has made dignified human life virtually impossible for its civilian population. The Syrian Government's actions against its own people erodes its legitimacy as the central state authority and hence weakens its status as a sovereign government in a sovereign state.

Clearly, intervention should be sought as a last resort after other means; specifically, after negotiations and dialogue have been exhausted. It is safe to say that the Arab League spearheaded such negotiations and sent observers on the ground to ensure the blood shed would be stopped. This proved to be ineffective at putting an end to the killing of civilians by the Syrian Government. It could be argued that the Syrian Government is buying time and using this time to brutally crush both acts and even sentiments of opposition.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the idea of intervention here has not been initiated or led by Western nations. In fact, the Arab League, especially the GCC, as well as Turkey, have made very strong arguments for the need to condemn the actions of the Syrian Government by appealing to the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution that would open the door for several options of intervention. These countries have also called for humanitarian intervention. There is a diverse consensus for the need to act on the question of Syria, with the notable exceptions of China and Russia, as both have vetoed a resolution that sought to condemn the acts of Syria's Government. In light of this, if intervention were to take place its foundation would be from a credible authority i.e. the UN and it would therefore have the necessary coalition to sustain it.

Intervention in the case of Syria will have to be multi-pronged covering areas of humanitarian intervention, arming the resistance, and aiding the resistance with military strategy. In addition, it will require supporting the opposition to create a credible and legitimate alternative to the Assad regime. Finally, it must increase the intensity of strategic sanctions to force the Assad regime to make concessions. For this multi-pronged strategy to be successful it must be led by regional players, key GCC countries, and Turkey. The recent failure of the Friends of Syria Conference was perhaps a testament to that fact that the international community is still trying to develop a plan of action with regards to Syria, but the next conference scheduled to take place in Turkey may be more promising.

The intentions of the parties involved in the question of Syria are a complex by-product of

geopolitical realities. On one hand, there is the right intention based on the moral obligation and desire to protect human life. However, given the historical evidence as to the negative pattern of behavior of the Assad regime, there is no doubt that Western countries in addition to key Arab countries would welcome a shift from the current Syrian Government to a more moderate regime.

Opposing arguments have been made by Russia that intervention would lead to civil war. I do not find such arguments to hold much weight, as such an argument could have also been argued for a case of zero intervention in Yemen and Libya. Russia and China, which both have their own circumstances of domestic opposition (for example Chechnya, Taiwan, Tibet) are naturally uneasy with the prospect of intervention in Syria. In addition, it is possible that they are suspicious that any change in regime may not be aligned with safeguarding their interests in the Arab region.

Countries like Iran, organizations like Hezbollah, and also Israel (to a lesser extent) have a stake in the continuation of the Assad regime, as it is a familiar regime, which they have an understanding with. It is also a regime that does not wield substantial regional power, as the Assad regime today primarily poses a threat to its own people. Therefore, the notion of an opposition movement taking hold in Syria will be resisted primarily by Iran and Hezbollah who have a strong ties and influence with the Assad regime, and would initiate a major counter intervention.

Ultimately the question is will more evil be caused by intervention or non-intervention? The Assad regime has a historic record proving a pattern of non-restraint towards how it will treat its own people, and by extension other nations; civilians are fair game as far as it is concerned. The possibility to support a more moderate and progressive government in Syria, especially in light of the momentum of the Arab Spring, makes it a historic opportunity. To stop and contemplate on the consequences of non-intervention makes it all too clear that intervention is not only wise, but also in the long run inevitable.

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