



## [On Syria, most thoughtful people are torn](#)

Foreign military intervention would prolong the war and increase the carnage still further. But this does not mean that the US in conjunction with others, including Syrian civil society, cannot do anything to help the situation. Reply to [Nader Hashemi](#).

I am glad that Nader Hashemi [still respects me](#) despite our differences on the question of foreign military intervention in Syria and the efficacy of armed struggle in that fragmented society. The feeling is mutual.

Indeed, with the exception of some neo-conservatives and other hawks who apparently have never seen an opportunity for western intervention they didn't like and some on the far left who assume that any regime hostile to western imperialism must be progressive, I've generally been impressed with the maturity of the debate around Syria. Most thoughtful people are torn on these questions, myself included.

Once again, however, Hashemi misrepresents me. I do not "blame" the Syrian people for taking up arms. Indeed, I have never passed moral judgment on any oppressed people who feel the necessity to use violence in their struggle for liberation. As much as Hashemi or anyone else, I want the Assad regime overthrown and a peaceful democratic Syria to emerge as soon as possible, so if I believed that armed struggle and foreign military intervention would increase that possibility and shorten the Syrians' suffering, I would have no trouble saying so.

However, for reasons I [spelled out in my previous article](#), I do not believe this to be the case. Indeed, the horrific rate of civilian casualties, about which Hashemi tries [to make his case](#) for continued armed resistance and foreign military intervention, actually increased tenfold when the almost exclusively nonviolent uprising of the first several months was later eclipsed by the armed resistance. And, based on my knowledge of Syria and empirical studies regarding previous foreign intervention in civil wars I cited in my [previous article](#), I believe foreign military intervention would prolong the war and increase the carnage still further.

Indeed, while I appreciate that Hashemi validates what he calls my "strong ethical orientation" in addressing these issues, I would once again emphasize that my approach is utilitarian, not pacifist.

More importantly, he misquotes me by saying that I had written there was "not much" the international community could do; I was actually speaking only in terms of the US government, primarily in regard to calls for US military intervention. And, despite his [claims to the contrary](#), I never ever implied that the international community should abandon the Syrian people in the face of such horrific repression or expect them to "genuflect in front of the House of Assad and re-enter that collective prison known as the Syrian Arab Republic."

My contention that the United States cannot do much to alleviate the bloodshed (again, for reasons I spelled out in my previous article) does not mean that the US - in conjunction with other governments, the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations, international NGOs, and Syrian civil society - cannot do anything to help the situation. These could include coordinating material and political support for what remains of the nonviolent movement and for civil society overall; I certainly hope and expect the Syrian people would continue their resistance until the regime is overthrown, but use more effective strategies and tactics.

Additional actions by the international community could include dramatically increasing humanitarian assistance; working towards an arms moratorium on all sides; holding an international peace conference which includes both relevant state and non-state actors; accelerating diplomatic efforts to overcome Russian obstruction at the United Nations; and, pushing the International Criminal Court to indict Assad and others responsible for atrocities.

Though it may be tempting to dismiss any one of these as unrealistic or inadequate to end the killing or bring down the Assad regime, they are certainly not any more unrealistic than [Hashemi's insistence](#) that armed resistance is the key to victory - which, after more than two years of fighting, has not brought the Syrian people any closer to that goal - or that foreign military intervention would accelerate the regime's demise.

Finally, despite the obvious difficulty in surveying public opinion, Hashemi [insists](#) he knows that the vast majority of Syrians support foreign military intervention. I suspect just the opposite. At least we both agree that the Syrians themselves must take the lead. He should also realize, however, that it does them no service to attack and misrepresent other concerned scholars who, like him, have for years been working in solidarity with the Syrian people in their struggle for freedom.