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A landmark decision  
Short Paper 3

Obama's decision not to intervene was justified enough to not call him wrong. Both bombings and more substantial support had unpredictable outcomes and even in the best case the US would have seen little benefit from victory. Regarding terrorism and stability in the region, intervention could have stopped ISIS, but it would have resulted in tension between the US and Iran - the largest threat to regional security -. Disregarding all the national interests, the US had a moral obligation to intervene, if it had a reasonable chance to stop the mass atrocities, which was not the case.

Bombing the Assad regime would have had limited results. Its traditional allies, Iran and Russia, had big stakes in the survival of the regime and therefore would have provided support to Assad to get up from the ground after the attacks. Such action, would create a conflict where each side receives just enough support to continue the killings and the devastation of the country. A protracted civil war with continuous stalemate and "multiple external backers with conflicting objectives" would have never let the US achieve its two goals (Lynch). First, the creation of a legitimate government in a war is impossible. Second, the chaos of war might have given rise to more radicalism, and bombing Assad would have helped the rebels and ISIS at the same time. In conclusion, the mild reaction worsens the situation, so the US's remaining options were to aggressively attack or restrain from intervening.

While substantial intervention had the possibility to tip the balance in favor of the rebels, it would have meant another expensive, protracted war for the US with uncertain outcomes. In case of success, the US would have had a chance to show off its unquestionable superpower status and military might, that many countries, such as Russia, Iran and China start to challenge. A quick end to the war would have prevented a military response from Iran or Russia, and solved the chaos that created ISIS. There is a good reason to believe that with support the civil war would have succeeded, since Libya provides a good example of how a rebellion can overthrow a regime (Hamid). Although Assad possesses a stronger, more loyal army than Gaddafi, with more military support the Syrian rebels had a good chance of winning. What follows the invasion remains, however, a big question. We are yet to see an example where a war with foreign intervention creates a legitimate government. It has been a struggle in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. These countries remained in chaos for years, even though the price tag for the two invasions reached about 1 trillion dollars. Is it really worth it, when the long-term outcomes are unclear?

Standing to the side seems to be the least bad of the options. Involvement in the conflict implicitly means taking responsibility for any bad results, for which the US can easily be called incompetent. It's hard to see how entering as a fifth party in this war doesn't create more chaos for instance with the chance of Russians "accidentally" bombing US troops. Rebel forces are made up of farmers, engineers and average citizens, who would have a hard time catching up with Assad's professional army. In addition, at the beginning of the conflict there was no clear leading rebel group to work with. The opposition was divided into fractions with different ideologies and goals. Finding the one to support seemed impossible at that time. Not to mention that the public opinion in the US was against sending troops to

Syrian land. It would have been suicidal for Obama to nevertheless get involved in the conflict considering he had three more years in office. He used to be a great president, but not the one who could have pulled this off.

Restraint serves the US national interest best. Iran's and later Russia's involvement in the war can be a welcome scenario for Washington. This way they can pass on the responsibility to solve the conflict. Restraint avoids getting into conflict with Iran, and the possible breakup of the nuclear deal. Iran is a central power in the region and the main source of the Shia vs Sunni conflict, therefore remaining in peace with Iran is crucial to avoid a far more devastating war. The involvement is further bleeding the already financially deprived Iran and Russia, that might necessitate the reforms that the US secretly wishes for. Since ISIS is waging a war against the whole world, including Iran and Assad, eventually they have to deal with this problem as well. The question remains, however, is it moral not to stop the mass atrocities that have been happening in Syria?

I believe every country has a moral obligation to minimize the number of tragedies in the world to its ability, as we live on the same interconnected Earth. However, tragedies do not include only wars. The events in Syria with over 500 000 deaths over 6 years are definitely tragic, and have to be stopped. However, people unintentionally focus on the tragedies that fill the media and forget about what else is happening in the world. As of 2012, every year 1 500 000 people die from HIV and about 500 000 from malaria according to the WHO. Investing a portion of that 1 trillion dollars, the US would spend on an invasion, in R&D for a cure would result in a much larger scale positive effect. If morality is rational, Obama's priority should be to cure diseases than to solve wars with uncertain outcomes.

Thinking further into the future, the US still has plenty of chances to support Arab nations to solve their problems. Attacking Syria and creating a stable government is a short-term solution to the long lasting Sunni - Shia conflict and the radicalization of Islam. The next generation of presidents should think rather about the US's position in the world of Islam and how to support a peaceful reformation of the religion.

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