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How to End Syria's Horror

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No issue in the world today is of greater immediate importance than the need to end the civil war in Syria. The past 2 1/2 years have been a disaster for peace, stability and our sense of common humanity. Gut-wrenching images of unspeakable, indiscriminate violence against civilians have shocked the world. According to the latest United Nations estimates, more than 100,000 Syrians, including many children, have lost their lives as a result of the criminal behavior of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime.

There are now more than two million Syrian refugees in bordering countries and more than four million displaced persons inside Syria. With the murder of peaceful protesters, the shelling of residential quarters, the execution of soldiers who refuse to fire on their countrymen and the use of chemical weapons, a picture has emerged of a regime that is systematically defying the most basic international moral and legal standards.

Unless the world is content to watch the carnage continue, the Syrian regime and its instruments of oppression must be removed. The international community's shameful acceptance of impunity for Assad and his henchmen is a blot on the conscience of the world.

Western leaders' dithering and the cynical support of Russia and China for Assad is a stigma that they will bear forever. Iran's support for the regime is nothing less than a war crime.

The current charade of international control over Assad's chemical arsenal would be amusing if it were not so blatantly perfidious. While it has allowed U.S. President Barack Obama to back down from his threat of military intervention in response to the regime's use of chemical weapons, it has also allowed Assad to continue to butcher his people. It is ludicrous to believe that U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's "offhand" comment about destroying Syria's chemical weapons stockpile was anything but a well-choreographed opening for Russia to make its diplomatic play, thereby letting the U.S. off the hook.

If the world — and especially the American people — believe that removing Assad's chemical weapons will end his government's slaughter of innocent men, women and children, then all semblance of rational thought, humanitarian care and regard for national interest has been thrown to the wind.

Preventing Assad from using his killing machine by any means, including targeted strikes on his air force and command-and-control centers, is the only way to end the bloodshed in Syria. Despite public promises by Kerry to supply the Syrian opposition with weapons — and even after Obama declared that Assad must go — Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced that the Pentagon had no such plans. Why make such a statement when it can bring only chagrin and despair to the victims, while bringing comfort and solace to a criminal regime? How one can reconcile such contradictions is beyond me.

If we continue to delay military action, we will have to intervene with greater force when the carnage spreads to Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. Indeed, Lebanon, following the collapse of former Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government, is already on the brink of civil war as direct intervention in Syria by Hezbollah, Iran's Lebanese proxy, to prevent Assad's overthrow has exacerbated the country's own longstanding sectarian tensions. Witness the recent car-bomb attacks in a Hezbollah-controlled neighborhood of Beirut and in the northern city of Tripoli. If law and order are to prevail, Hezbollah must be neutralized, and the Syrian-dispatched assassins of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri must be brought to justice.

Saudi Arabia is doing what it can to help. It is providing financial aid to Lebanon in an effort to rebuild a stronger, more stable country and to roll back the influence of Iran. We have long pushed for the disarming of Hezbollah, and we have assisted the government with nearly $1 billion in financial support and credit to purchase weapons for the Lebanese Army, and we will continue to do so in the coming decade. But unless the international community — particularly the permanent members of the UN Security Council — begins to fulfill its obligations in Syria, money will not be enough to prevent further chaos and destruction.

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