

# Intervention in Syria: A Defense of our Core Values

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This essay is original and was written specifically for the contest. I am a student at Mamaroneck High School. Mrs. Katz is a teacher who can verify this work is my own. I give the Kemper Human Rights Education Foundation permission to publish it.

I believe that President Bashar al-Assad of Syria is systematically exterminating his own people. He has violated nearly every single right that is guaranteed to everyone on Earth. His soldiers have shot at peaceful protesters demanding freedom, they have gang raped young boys contrary to the anti homosexual laws in Syria, and they have even used children as young as eight years old as human shields. The Syrian Civil War has lasted over 2 years and there is currently no end in sight. The UN estimates that over 70,000 people have been killed and that approximately a million refugees have fled to other countries. I believe that the Syrian Civil War has gone on for long enough and that the United States of America cannot stand for the execution of an entire people by their own government. America has to continue to stand up for the rights of citizens to be heard by their government. Our nation's leaders need to implement the values that we hold closest to our hearts, in Syria. These values include the right to a transparent government constructed through a democratic process, and the rights guaranteed to us in our first amendment that allow a government to flourish. We do not stand for dictators in any way, shape or form. We did not support a Führer in Germany or a military dictatorship in Japan, and we will certainly not support the Ba'ath party in Syria.

In April 2011, protests erupted across Syria. These protests were part of a wider movement called The Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy protests in several Middle Eastern nations that resulted in tremendous changes in government. When protests started in Syria, soldiers from the Syrian army were forced to shoot at protesters. In a report from the UN that was released in November 2011, a defector from the Syrian army described how he was ordered to fire at peaceful protestors carrying olive branches. His group indiscriminately mowed down the people in the crowd including children. Other defectors saw their fellow soldiers get executed. They had been ordered to fire directly into crowds of civilians but instead, they fired into the air to disperse them. Security forces in the row behind them executed the non-compliant soldiers in the first row for not following orders. The actions ordered by Syria's military leadership are in direct violation of Article 21 of The

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 21 states that “The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized.” Syria ratified that treaty which makes it obligated to abide by it. Even the Syrian constitution allows for peaceful assembly. However, Syria had been in a state of Emergency for over forty years which led to a suspension of most rights guaranteed by the Syrian constitution.

In the United States we are used to our constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. Our first amendment allows for the American people to speak their minds and to be heard by their government. In Syria, things are a lot different. According to the UN report, “Decades of tight control of freedom of expression, as well as surveillance and persecution of opponents, have severely limited political life and the constitution of an autonomous civil society.” There was heavy infrastructure in place to deny the Syrian people their freedom of speech which included secret police networks. People have been arbitrarily detained, tortured, beaten and killed for exercising their god given rights. This is wrong and it is in violation of international law. Without the ability to speak out, it is impossible to form a fair government. The Syrian people cannot hold their leaders accountable for their actions because they are unable to vote them out. If they try to install new leadership or even show interest in reform, they disappear. This suppression of freedom of expression is exactly why The US must intervene in the Syrian Civil War. The United States of America is a strong defender of the freedom of expression which almost always leads to democracy.

Congress and the Obama Administration need to offer lethal assistance to the Syrian rebels. The country is locked in a bloody stalemate which foreign intervention could easily break. Currently, the government has only sent over food and medicine. However, President Obama recently approved a new aid package that included military equipment such as body armor and night-vision goggles. That is not nearly enough aid for the Syrian rebels. The Syrian rebels need weapons. Congress needs to approve an aid package for Syria that includes lethal aid. While it would be extremely imprudent to put boots on the

ground in Syria, limited military involvement would definitely help the Free Syrian Army get rid of Assad. America should not become involved with another prolonged ground war in the Middle East so this assistance should take the form of air support and possibly even bombardments from naval assets in the region. Fighter jets could strike locations that are strategically important for Assad's forces and provide reconnaissance for the rebels. This is the strategy that worked well in Libya 2 years ago. The agreement of America's allies will be vital in Syria. The US also has to get NATO support in declaring a no fly zone over Syria.

I believe that Assad has to go. He is one step short of committing genocide. Amazingly, for years the Ba'ath party has been tolerated by America, but that has to stop. Assad and his Orwellian security forces have violated the most sacred rights that people have. They have laughed at important human rights treaties and openly defied them. The sounds of the pleas of their own people were drowned out in the crack of sniper rifles and the whistling of rockets tipped with chemical warheads. They have angered the rest of the world by limiting freedom of speech and freedom of assembly to deny the Syrian people the right to choose their own leaders. The Assad regime has put a lot of thought into its inhumane treatment of the Syrian people, but what it has not thought of is America's response to such a gross violation of human rights. We stand by our most important principles even if that means taking military action to defend them. We hold the freedom of expression as our most sacred principle and also as a responsibility. It is our responsibility to ensure that that right is available everywhere on earth because we know that where it is available there is democracy. Where there is democracy there is unabridged political freedom that guarantees a high quality of life. Therefore, since freedom of expression ensures democracy, it is our most important principle to defend. It is a principle that we will defend all around the world until we do not have the power to defend it anymore. That is what Bashar al-Assad does not understand and that is why he has to relinquish control of Syria. We just have to make sure that happens.

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