

# Crossing The Red Line

The use of chemical weapons is a grave breach of a long standing international law. Now, however, chemical weapons have been used in the brutal civil war in Syria. This breach of international law raises difficult political and moral issues: What do we do? if anything?

The decision is affected by the Security Council of the UN which is immobilized by the Russian veto power. Russia has recently made an offer to be discussed later. At this moment in history, the massive refugee problem is all the UN can help with. Otherwise the UN is impotent. More importantly, a non response to the use of chemical weapons is, tantamount to turning a blind eye to growing human rights atrocities and as well jeopardizing international conventions and treaties. The major problem is that military intervention, contemplated by the President of the US, has very little support due to very real issues of uncertain consequences. On the other hand, doing nothing also has possible serious consequences.

We are conflicted. After Iraq and Afghanistan we, among many others, are fed up with war. Based on information of weapons of mass destruction that did not materialize in Iraq, we are highly skeptical of the authenticity and accuracy of intelligence reports regarding Assad's role in the use of chemical weapons. There are unanswered questions regarding the use of chemical weapons by the so-called rebels.

For these reasons and others to be mentioned, the authors of this article are not in agreement and we have decided to lay out some of the reasons for Intervention and non-Intervention.

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## **REASONS FOR NOT INTERVENING:**

Military interventions have been shown historically to result in unintended consequences, for example killing civilians. Thus, the civil war could worsen and increase the already terrible refugee problem. The US government is thinking of a limited strike. What is that? Why should that act as a deterrent? The Syrian government may respond with further chemical attacks. What do we do then? It may strike other countries in the region widening the war.

The US may then be on a slippery slope of getting deeply involved in a civil war. The US government has not spelled out the end game. Because of Iraq, there is still skepticism about who is responsible for the chemical attack.

## **REASONS FOR INTERVENING:**

There are certainly risks in intervening. The risks in not intervening could embolden Iran in its nuclear ambitions and encourage the Syrian regime to let loose more lethal chemical attacks. Civilian casualties would be accelerated and there would be even more refugees seeking safe haven. There would be extreme regional instability.

We ask, Should the world stand by if governments brutalize its own people? An excellent answer to this question lies in hindsight!. Why didn't the European powers intervene when the Nazis, before the second world war, brutalized and slaughtered the Jews and many others?. In fact, in the Nuremberg trials of the Nazis at the end of the war the Nazi defenders were tried for atrocities they committed DURING but not BEFORE the war.

The world did nothing in the Armenian genocide. A more recent example, is the failure to intervene in the Rwandan genocide in

FROM THE UN

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1994. A subsequent UN inquiry concluded that as few as 2500 troops could have prevented the massacre of 800,000 Tutsis.

**View of SE:** There are risks in intervening as well as risks in not intervening. In this case, it's a difficult call. Ultimately, the moral case is that we must stand up when countries violate basic international laws and brutalize their people. In each case, one must consider the human cost. Because we can't intervene everywhere does not mean we should intervene nowhere.

**View of RMG** There is no such thing as a limited strike. What are the limits? The best laid plans etc etc. It is clear that the citizens of the US, as represented by members of Congress, are leery and unwilling to get involved in yet another intervention at any level. The number of refugees is mounting, the medical system is working against unbelievable odds, lack of medications and medical help.

Recently, Russia has proposed that Syria's chemical weapons be put under international control. Syria has agreed. Unfortunately, it required a threat of a military strike. There is great skepticism of the offer. Is it a delaying tactic? Can some of the weapons be hidden? In any case, it will be explored. Most experts think it will be very difficult especially during a brutal civil war. If this comes to pass it will be a great victory for upholding international law. It will revitalize the UN Security Council where much of the negotiations will go on.

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