



July 24, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. President:

The situation in Syria is, as Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said on July 18th, “spinning out of control.” Recent events make clear that the United States must play a more proactive role than it has heretofore in ensuring the end of the Assad regime and shaping a post-Assad Syria. Even prior to recent high-level assassinations and opposition gains, Assad's security forces reportedly began to move chemical weapons out of storage, raising the specter that some of the world's most dangerous weapons could be used against the Syrian people or fall into the hands of terrorists.

We believe it is clear that multilateral diplomacy and non-military pressure, by themselves, will neither compel Assad to step down nor ensure that America's national security interests in Syria and the wider region are protected. The Assad regime has repeatedly violated the ceasefire brokered by former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, just as it disregarded earlier efforts by the Arab League. Russia and China yet again used their vetoes on July 19th to prevent the Security Council from imposing more severe sanctions on Syria. Meanwhile, Iran continues to materially assist the Syrian dictatorship's crackdown on its citizens, underlining Assad's importance to Tehran.

America's national security interests are intertwined with the fate of the Syrian people and the wider region. Indeed, Syria's escalating conflict now threatens to directly affect the country's neighbors, including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Israel, and could provide an opening for terrorist groups like al Qaeda to exploit. The longer we wait to act, the more others with interests contrary to ours will fill the void, limiting America's ability to ensure a multi-sectarian pluralistic Syria. We therefore believe it is long past due for the United States to adopt a strategy that will help the Syrian people to quickly end the Assad regime and actively promote order and stability after the regime's fall.

We urge you to take immediate steps, in close and continuing consultation with the Congress, to work with regional partners to establish air-patrolled “safe zones” covering already liberated areas within Syria, using military power not only to protect these zones from further aggression by the Assad regime's military and irregular forces, but also to neutralize the threat posed by the Syrian dictatorship's chemical and biological weapons.

Such "safe zones" would serve as a destination for civilians fleeing violence. They would also provide the country's opposition groups—which have actively stood up to the Assad regime's relentless aggression, and bravely defended their cities, towns, and villages in the absence of decisive international action — a place to train, be equipped, and organize. Indeed, "safe zones" would make it easier for the United States and like-minded nations to reliably provide critical non-lethal aid, including secure communications technologies and field hospital equipment, as well as self-defense assistance, to carefully vetted recipients. "Safe zones" could also serve as a venue for U.S. and allied officials to work with Syria's future leaders to plan and prepare for a post-Assad Syria and explore options, such as an international peacekeeping force, that could limit chaos and sectarian conflict and prevent the proliferation of Assad's weapons of mass destruction.

America's continued inaction in Syria risks becoming what you called in your 2009 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, "complicity in oppression," and only serves to undermine our interests and embolden our enemies. It is clear that the United States cannot outsource its strategic and moral responsibilities to cynical great powers, regional actors who do not fully share our values, or international mediators. Only resolved U.S. leadership has the potential to halt the bloodshed and ensure the emergence of a Syria that advances America's national security interests. We urge you to exercise such leadership immediately.

Sincerely,

Ammar Abdulhamid	Abe Greenwald	Joshua Muravchik
Elliott Abrams	John P. Hannah	Meghan L. O'Sullivan
Fouad Ajami	William Inboden	Martin Peretz
Tony Badran	Bruce Pitcairn Jackson	Danielle Pletka
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Ellen Bork	Allison Johnson	Kori Schake
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Matthew R. J. Brodsky	Robert Kagan	Randy Scheunemann
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Larry Cox	Irina Krasovskaya	Lee Smith
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