

Option 1: Use the U.S. Military in Syria

The Syrian Civil War has been raging for six years. Nearly five hundred thousand people have died, and more than one million have been injured. More than half of Syria's population of twenty-two million have fled their homes. Aside from these humanitarian concerns, there are other important strategic issues that threaten U.S. influence and power in the region. Russia is pouring in military supplies and helping Bashar al-Assad's Syrian government wage a war of brutality. The Syrian government has used chemical weapons against civilians; it is allied with the terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah, enemies of the United States and our ally Israel. Assad is also allied with Iran, a country that is hostile to the United States and seeking to strengthen its influence in the region. We cannot stand idly by and let Russia and Iran call the shots in this crucial part of the world. The terrorist group ISIS is fighting to overthrow Assad's government; we must strike them too.

Congress should authorize the president of the United States to launch military action in Syria. We must do more than launch a few cruise missiles. We must strike hard with our air and naval forces and weaken the Syrian army's fighting capability. We must hit ISIS when we can and stop them from threatening us here in the United States. We must enforce a "no-fly" zone to prevent the Assad government and its Russian allies from indiscriminately bombing civilians and using chemical weapons. We must be willing to confront Russian military forces and stop them from playing an active role in supporting the Assad government. We should increase support for Syrian rebel groups that are not affiliated with ISIS or al Qaeda by providing training and sending weapons, like anti-aircraft missiles to fight the regime's airplanes and tanks. We welcome support from any of our allies, but we will not wait for or depend on it. The United States is the most powerful country on earth; we must not hesitate or show doubt while U.S. interests are threatened.

Option 1 is based on the following beliefs

- U.S. military force can change the balance of power in Syria and result in an outcome more favorable to the United States.

- Military action to stop the civil war in Syria is crucially important to the United States. Beyond ending the fighting, it would help preserve U.S. influence and

protect U.S. allies, limit Russia's role in the region, weaken ISIS, ensure access to oil, and limit the power of Iran.

- Neutralizing Russian military influence will help force Assad from power, end the conflict, and stop the flow of Syrian refugees.

Name: _____

Arguments for

1. This war has steadily worsened for six years. Failure to act decisively will result in continued suffering and fighting.
2. Russian military involvement in Syria must be met with a clear response from the United States or else Russia will become more aggressive in other parts of the world.
3. Without decisive U.S. action, there is a danger that this war will continue indefinitely. Syria's neighbors and Europe cannot continue to absorb the flow of refugees.
4. As long as Assad remains in power, the influence of the dangerous anti-U.S. government in Iran and the terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas will increase.

Arguments against

1. Military force will not be as effective as some claim. The Iraq War taught us that the United States cannot solve the political issues of another country through the use of military force.
2. If the Assad government loses power, who will take over? The most likely groups are extremists and even groups affiliated with al Qaeda and ISIS.
3. There is a risk that military confrontation with Russia could escalate into a larger conflict between two nuclear powers.
4. The use of military force will increase the suffering of civilians in Syria and worsen the refugee crisis, not end it.
5. The United States cannot and should not take responsibility for solving the problems of Syria on its own. We must use diplomatic cooperation with the international community—including countries we often disagree with like Russia and Iran—to negotiate and resolve this conflict.
6. We have plenty of issues here at home that we should prioritize, such as crime, the economy, and our education system.

Name: _____

Option 2: Stop the Humanitarian Disaster

For over six years, the Syrian people have experienced violence, displacement, and death as a civil war has consumed their country. Nearly five hundred thousand have died. How much longer can we stand by and watch as children die and as twelve million people are forced to flee from their homes? The world's refugee population is at its highest level since World War II. Many of these refugees are from Syria. Millions have fled to neighboring countries that struggle to accommodate them in refugee camps. Others are risking their lives to travel to Europe. Instead of military intervention, the United States should help restart the diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict and open our doors to Syrian refugees.

Although there have been many recent setbacks and disagreements with Russia, we should redouble our efforts to make diplomacy effective. We share an interest in stopping ISIS in its tracks and reducing the threat from extremists. We should involve Syria's allies and trading partners, such as Iran, and its neighbors, such as Turkey, in political negotiations to reach an end to the civil war. We should support an international arms embargo to stop the flow of weapons into the hands of the Syrian government, ISIS, and rebel forces. The United States should increase humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees overseas and open our borders to admit more Syrian refugees. Twelve million men, women, and children have been displaced from their homes and need assistance. This is not acceptable, and we must act. But, we must not do so in a way that is rash and unwise.

Option 2 is based on the following beliefs

- Military force is not an effective means of dealing with international crises. It will lead to more fighting, increase harm done against civilians, and worsen the refugee crisis.

- A political agreement is the only way to stop the violence and protect civilians from further harm.

- The United States is not capable of solving the Syrian conflict on its own. The situation requires the involvement of Syria's allies, its neighbors, and the international community.

Name: _____

Arguments for

1. Military intervention will cause an escalation of the violence. The United States should not take any action that would harm the people we are trying to protect or lead to a wider war.

2. International diplomacy and cooperation are the only ways to address the refugee crisis. The use of military force will only make it worse.

3. The crisis in Syria is an international problem—violence has spilled across boundaries. The large flow of refugees is adding to political divisions in Europe that threaten the European Union. Global concerns about the threat of terrorism persist. An international crisis requires an international response.

Arguments against

1. International organizations and coalitions are slow moving. Russia is happy to talk all day long in diplomatic meetings about “solving” the Syria problem, because it gives time to Assad to achieve his military goals.

2. Diplomacy has failed over and over again to stop the fighting in Syria.

3. We should not negotiate with hostile countries like Syria, Russia, and Iran.

4. Failing to act decisively makes the United States appear weak and ineffective.

5. Anything other than a strong U.S. military response would send a message to leaders around the world that the war crimes of Assad and his Russian allies are acceptable.

6. The United States should not spend any more resources on humanitarian assistance for other parts of the world. It is time to focus on our own citizens and address domestic problems that we are actually capable of fixing.

Name: _____

Option 3: Stay Out of Syria

The United States should not intervene in Syria. Despite the terrible events in Syria, until our own safety is threatened, we must refrain from conducting foreign policy that creates more problems than it solves. U.S. meddling in Syria is the perfect recruitment tool for terrorist groups like ISIS. Our most recent experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan cost many lives and trillions of dollars and have shown us that we are not well-equipped to “fix” problems around the globe. While the Syrian Civil War is a tragedy, let us put our responsibilities to our own citizens above all others.

Under no circumstances should the United States use any military force in Syria. Even if the countries of the region are waiting for us to do something, why should we bear the responsibilities and the costs? Syria’s neighbors have the most at stake; if they think something must be done, let them risk their own people’s lives and spend their own resources to deal with this issue. The United States has considered itself the world’s policeman for too long and at great cost. In addition, we cannot admit more refugees from Syria. Although refugees are carefully screened to rule out admitting terrorists, they place a financial burden on our local communities. We must reduce our impulse to make the world safe and solve all of its problems.

Option 3 is based on the following beliefs

- The war in Syria is not going to end soon whether or not the United States intervenes. We cannot afford to become entangled in another long war.

- The events in Syria, while tragic, are not a priority for the United States. We have enough issues to deal with here at home

like the economy, crime, and our education system. The governments and people of the region need to solve their own problems.

- The war in Syria is not an immediate threat to the United States. It is not in our interest to get involved.

Name: _____

Arguments for

1. The United States should not bear the burden of solving the problems of the Middle East. The people of the region need to solve their own problems.

2. Past military involvement in the Middle East has failed to achieve its policy goals and has led to the rise of extremist groups like ISIS.

3. To pursue military intervention in Syria takes away resources that could be used to address critical domestic policy concerns like rebuilding infrastructure and providing funding for education.

Arguments against

1. As long as the United States remains on the sidelines, the Assad regime will continue to massacre Syrian civilians, including with chemical weapons. The United States has a strategic interest to show that these weapons must never be used.

2. Refugee flows are threatening political stability in Europe and leading to the rise of right wing movements that want to dissolve the European Union. This is an outcome that Russia would favor, but is contrary to the interests of the United States.

3. Those who say the civil war in Syria does not affect U.S. interests ignore what is at stake if we do not intervene: the United States will appear weak and ineffective against ambitious and hostile countries like Russia and Iran.

4. We must take a strong stand against the horrendous slaughter of civilians. We cannot turn away and pretend this humanitarian catastrophe is not happening.

5. The idea that Syria's neighbors are powerful enough to end the fighting, now that Russia is involved, or that they could agree on a course of action is completely unrealistic.

6. The war in Syria is leading to the growth of extremist Muslim terrorist groups, including ISIS, which may attack us on our own soil. It is foolish to think that we can ignore this conflict.