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January Roundtable: Responding to the Syrian Crisis, Introduction

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January Roundtable: Responding to the Syrian Crisis, Introduction

Abstract

An annotation of:

“The World Next Genocide” by Simon Adams. New York Times, November 2012.

and

“Syria is Central to Holding Together the Mideast” by Condoleezza Rice. Washington Post, November 2012.

Keywords

Human rights, Syria, Bashar al-Assad, Military intervention, Responsibility to protect, International Criminal Court

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Responding to the Syrian Crisis

Articles under review:

- [“The World Next Genocide” by Simon Adams.](#) *New York Times*, [November 2012](#).
- [“Syria is Central to Holding Together the Mideast” by Condoleezza Rice.](#) *Washington Post*, [November 2012](#).

Syrian popular uprisings began the very same week that the UN Security Council approved the intervention in Libya, and the reprisal from President Bashar al-Assad was immediate and brutal. The international reaction from the outset of the Syrian crisis, however, contrasts sharply with the intervention in Libya. After twenty months of continuous violence in Syria, responses from the international community remain considerably weak in view of the extent of the humanitarian crisis. According to international reports,^[1] the death toll has risen to more than 60,000 while more than four million people inside Syria are in need of medical assistance. The number of internally displaced people has reached 2.5 million, and Syrian refugees in neighboring countries exceed 400,000. Humanitarian assistance to Syria is clearly insufficient, and regime violence severely limits the delivery of available supplies to civilians still inside the country.

This month's Roundtable focuses on two pieces centered on possible responses to the Syrian crisis. Condoleezza Rice's op-ed directly calls for a US-led military intervention in the Arab country. Dismissing the idea that the crisis is humanitarian in nature, the former Secretary of State focuses instead on the geopolitical dangers of letting Iran spread its influence among Shiites across the Middle East, arguing that Syria is central to holding the region together. Rice acknowledges that the risks of intervening in Syria are high, but she contends that the "breakdown of the Middle East state system is a graver risk. Iran will win, our allies will lose, and for decades the region's misery and violence will make today's chaos look tame."

The second piece by Simon Adams, director of the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, focuses on responses that are short of the use of military force. He calls on governments to intensify their efforts to hold all perpetrators of mass atrocities accountable at the International Criminal Court and to simultaneously support United Nations human rights monitors on the Syrian border in order to collect evidence and testimony for future prosecutions. In Adams' view, the real choices in Syria today are "between action enabling further crimes against humanity to take place and action dedicated to ending impunity for such crimes once and for all."

The policy options promoted by Rice and Adams, and their potential for managing the Syrian conflict and/or preventing the escalation of mass atrocities are at the heart of this month's Roundtable. The four panelists respond critically to each of these proposals while simultaneously opening up a wider range of possible responses to the Syrian crisis.

[1] U.S. Embassy in Syria.

<http://iipdigital.U.S.embassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/01/20130110140816.html#axzz2Hfyf3AD5>

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