

# The United States Has No Good Options on Syria

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](/experts/dennis-ross)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](/experts/dennis-ross)

Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.



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**By rethinking its position on creating an opposition buffer zone along the Turkey-Syria border, the administration could spur Assad, Iran, and Russia to change their calculus.**

It should come as no surprise that the Obama administration continues to wrestle with its approach to Syria. There are no good options in a war that has claimed 200,000 lives and displaced nearly 10 million people. The president is right to say that there are no magic solutions, yet he also clearly understands that avoidance is not an alternative if we are to achieve his declared objective of degrading and eventually destroying the Islamic State. Leaving the terrorist group with a haven in Syria ensures it both an ability to wreak havoc in Iraq and an operational space from which to plan, recruit and, in time, carry out attacks worldwide.

Every option, however, also presents us with dilemmas. Already, our bombing of Islamic State targets in Syria has freed the Assad regime to intensify its bombardment of the non-Islamic State opposition. As these forces see our attacks against the Islamic State making them pay a price, we are alienating the very groups we hope will replace the Islamic State. But the administration avoids attacking Syrian regime targets at least in part because it fears Iran's response -- not so much in Syria but in Iraq. As one senior administration official told me, if we attack Bashar al-Assad's positions, the Iranians will unleash the Shiite militias against our presence in Iraq...

**[View the full article on the \*Washington Post\* website. \(http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-united-states-has-no-good-options-on-syria/2014/11/21/7faf8e50-70eb-11e4-893f-86bd390a3340\\_story.html\)](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-united-states-has-no-good-options-on-syria/2014/11/21/7faf8e50-70eb-11e4-893f-86bd390a3340_story.html)** ❖

*Washington Post*

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