

## Between Not-In and All-In: U.S. Military Options in Syria

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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**In light of the inability of diplomacy and sanctions to staunch the Syrian bloodletting, the Obama administration is reviewing its policy alternatives in Syria. This paper, and the associated briefing, provides an overview of U.S. military options, evaluating the pros and cons of each.**

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The Syrian war has left more than 150,000 dead and more than 9 million displaced. With diplomacy and [\(/uploads/Documents/pubs/PN18\\_Syria\\_Atwood2.pdf\)](/uploads/Documents/pubs/PN18_Syria_Atwood2.pdf) sanctions having failed to achieve their objectives, the Obama administration is reportedly considering a more proactive role in the conflict. The impulse to refrain from military intervention remains understandable, but the costs of nonintervention may be even steeper: an al-Qaeda foothold and expanded Iranian influence in the Levant, a new generation of jihadists poised to migrate to other conflicts, social tensions and political instability in neighboring states, and growing doubts about U.S. credibility. Nor does military intervention necessarily imply boots on the ground. Many options entail lower levels of force, including strengthened sanctions and cyberoperations, force build-ups, or an enhanced effort to equip and train the moderate opposition. The window may have closed for seeking a positive outcome in Syria, but by acting wisely yet assertively, the United States may yet secure its interests.



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In Policy Note 18, Washington Institute military fellows **Chandler Atwood**, **Josh Burgess**, **Michael Eisenstadt**, and **Joseph Wawro** address specific military steps that can help prevent worst-case scenarios from materializing. An accompanying PowerPoint briefing elaborates on options described in the text.

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