

# Syria's Military Opposition: How Effective, United, or Extremist?

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Jeffrey White was an adjunct defense fellow at The Washington Institute, specializing in the military and security affairs of the Levant and Iran.

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Aaron Y. Zelin is the Gloria and Ken Levy Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where his research focuses on Sunni Arab jihadi groups in North Africa and Syria as well as the trend of foreign fighting and online jihadism.

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**M**any options for direct military action in Syria have been on the table, ranging from token strikes with small numbers of weapons to much broader operations such as attacks on leadership targets or the imposition of no-fly and no-drive zones. In addition, the United States could respond indirectly by providing truly significant military assistance to the rebels. The recent chemical warfare attack, however, has rendered urgency to a considered U.S. response. Despite the Obama administration's aversion to using military power in Syria and the difficulty of forging allied consensus on goals and methods, the Assad regime must be held accountable.

Nevertheless, the risk-benefit calculus for any decision depends, at the very least, on a thorough understanding of the disparate ideologies that drive the Syrian opposition, their military inadequacies, and their ability to create a unified political structure. To clarify these issues, Jeffrey White, Andrew J. Tabler, and Aaron Y. Zelin, all respected experts on Syria, present their findings in this Washington Institute Policy Focus, which has been updated to accommodate the most recent developments in this ongoing humanitarian crisis.

## THE AUTHORS

**Jeffrey White** is a Defense Fellow at The Washington Institute and a former senior defense intelligence officer.

**Andrew J. Tabler** is a senior fellow in the Institute's Program on Arab Politics and author of *[In the Lion's Den: An Eyewitness Account of Washington's Battle with Syria](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/in-the-lions-den-an-eyewitness-account-of-washingtons-battle-with-syria)* (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/in-the-lions-den-an-eyewitness-account-of-washingtons-battle-with-syria>).

**Aaron Y. Zelin**, the Institute's Richard Borow Fellow, maintains the website Jihadology.net. ♦

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