

Between Not-In and All-In **U.S. MILITARY OPTIONS IN SYRIA**

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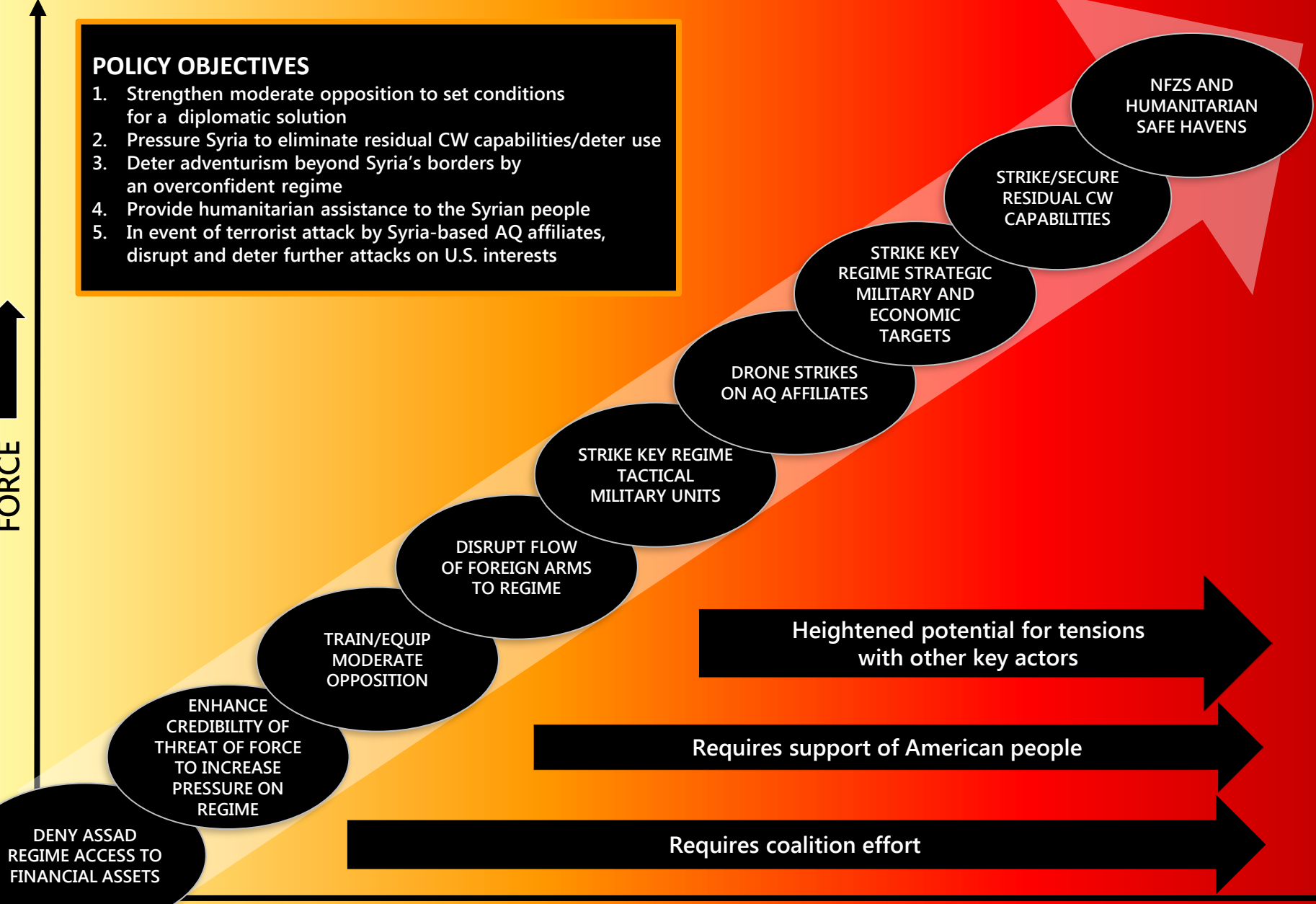
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Syria : U.S. Military Options

POLICY OBJECTIVES

1. Strengthen moderate opposition to set conditions for a diplomatic solution
2. Pressure Syria to eliminate residual CW capabilities/deter use
3. Deter adventurism beyond Syria's borders by an overconfident regime
4. Provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people
5. In event of terrorist attack by Syria-based AQ affiliates, disrupt and deter further attacks on U.S. interests

FORCE ↑



RISK →



Deny Assad Regime Access to Financial Assets

CONCEPT

1. Conduct cyberattacks on financial assets belonging to Assad and regime insiders
2. Broaden and tighten sanctions on key regime figures
3. Develop info ops to drive wedge between regime and supporters

PROS

- Could exacerbate tensions within regime, and between regime and domestic supporters
- Could undermine regime's patronage network
- Would not cross tacit public or congressional redlines regarding use of force

CONS

- Assets of senior officials probably not vulnerable to cyberattack/sanctions
- Effective sanctions might require UNSCR, but politics might make this unattainable
- Losses could be made good through state-enabled theft and pillage
- Requires long timeline
- Contrary to administration's policy of cyber-restraint
- Could prompt cyber-retaliation against U.S. financial system
- Unlikely to achieve decisive results as stand-alone COA

COMMENTS: Low-risk, low-payoff course of action (COA), best used together with other options; sectarian solidarity and survival instincts are likely to preclude self-destructive economic competition among Alawite regime insiders



Enhance Credibility of Threat of Force to Increase Pressure on Regime

CONCEPT

1. Increase diplomatic pressure and build coalition
2. Deploy coalition ISR/strike assets to signal resolve, gain actionable intelligence, and set conditions for kinetic action
3. Info ops to bolster perception of U.S. resolve and undermine regime confidence

PROS

- Relies on threat, not use of force (i.e., no boots on ground)
- Could create uncertainty about future U.S. intentions, causing regime to act with greater caution or restraint
- Enhanced situational awareness regarding regime operations could create opportunities
- Would not cross tacit public or congressional redlines regarding use of force

CONS

- Unlikely to achieve decisive results as stand-alone COA
- Without serious preparations for kinetic action, perception that U.S. unwilling to incur significant risk might prompt Assad to intensify operations
- Could entail long-term commitment of high-demand, low-density ISR assets, affecting readiness elsewhere

COMMENTS: Low-risk, moderate-payoff COA that is unlikely to achieve U.S. objectives on its own



Train/Equip Moderate Opposition

CONCEPT

1. Intensify effort to train/equip moderate opposition to enable more complex operations by providing (a) more ATGMs, light anti-aircraft weapons (but not MANPADs); (b) actionable intel from intensified ISR and coalition HUMINT; (c) and enabling more sophisticated small-unit tactics (e.g., artillery raids on airfields/anti-aircraft artillery ambushes)
2. Enhance opposition's ability to: (a) counter key regime units & capabilities (helicopters & SCUDs); (b) interdict regime resupply operations; (c) ambush key regime personnel
3. Info ops to bolster moderate opposition profile, magnify military achievements, and undermine regime morale

PROS

- Could affect war's outcome by altering military balance and psychological dynamic
- Scalable: efforts can be expanded, goals revised, if moderate opposition proves capable.
- Could enhance moderate opposition's ability to recruit new members and members from other groups
- Could enable U.S. to better shape coalition support to opposition
- Might create a credible diplomatic option
- Could help nuclear negotiations with Iran by demonstrating U.S. resolve
- Would not cross tacit public or congressional redlines regarding use of force

CONS

- Could exacerbate opposition infighting over resources
- Could prompt Iran and Russia to increase support for regime
- Reputational/operational risk if U.S.-supplied arms used in war crimes or transferred to violent extremists
- Risks to U.S. trainers in neighboring countries

COMMENTS: Moderate-risk, moderate-to-high-payoff COA; could succeed as stand-alone option, but requires cooperation of Syria's neighbors (Jordan and Turkey)



Disrupt Flow of Foreign Arms to Regime

CONCEPT

1. Destroy key air assets and disrupt key airfields involved in resupply ops from Iran and Russia with standoff strikes:
 - Strike Syria's 5x IL-76 transports involved in resupply ops, as well as supporting infrastructure (POL, hangers)
 - Strike internal resupply hubs (airfields, helos, POL, hangers)
2. Use ISR assets to monitor alternate resupply lines (ground LOCs) and provide intel to support opposition interdiction efforts
3. Increase U.S./coalition naval presence off Syrian coast
4. Info ops to highlight complicity of Iran/Russia in regime crimes against humanity, increase political costs of support

PROS

- Could constrain regime's ability to conduct/sustain military operations
- Forces regime to use ground lines of communication that are vulnerable to interdiction by opposition
- Could alter war's psychological dynamic
- Proof of U.S. resolve and willingness to incur risks

CONS

- Unlikely to alter war's outcome on its own
- Risk of U.S. casualties/POWs (mitigated by reliance on stand-off strikes)
- Regime and allies might respond with terrorism, direct action
- Potential for heightened tensions with Iran and Russia, creating policy complications elsewhere (e.g. nuclear negotiations with Iran), especially if Iranian personnel are killed
- Could entail open-ended military commitment lacking public and congressional support
- Could cause regime to cease cooperation with CW elimination efforts
- Legal authority to act? UNSCRs? Responsibility to protect?

COMMENTS: Moderate-risk, moderate-payoff COA, best used together with train/equip option



Strike Key Regime *Tactical* Military Units

CONCEPT

1. Strike 4th Armored and Republican Guard Divisions, SCUD units: field formations, command posts, HQs, barracks, POL, weapons depots, maintenance facilities
2. Strike key regime aviation units: rotary and fixed-wing aviation assets, POL, weapons depots
3. Info ops to highlight targeted-unit involvement in crimes against humanity

PROS

- Could greatly degrade regime's military capability and alter psychological dynamic by opening new front against Assad
- Could lead to pause in regime attacks and reduction in civilian/opposition casualties
- Would force regime to focus on defense
- Could buy opposition time and space to train, equip, and organize
- Might help spawn credible diplomatic process

COMMENTS: Moderate-risk, moderate-payoff COA, best used with train/equip option

CONS

- Unlikely to alter war's outcome on its own
- Risk of U.S. casualties/POWs (mitigated by reliance on stand-off strikes)
- Regime and allies might respond with terrorism, direct action
- Potential for heightened tensions with Iran and Russia, creating policy complications elsewhere (e.g. nuclear negotiations with Iran), especially if Iranian personnel are killed
- Could entail open-ended military commitment lacking public and congressional support
- Could cause regime to cease cooperation with CW elimination efforts
- Legal authority to act? UNSCRs? Responsibility to protect?



Drone Strikes on AQ Affiliates*

CONCEPT

* Only in response to AQ attacks on U.S. interests originating from Syria

1. Drones used in permissive air defense environments only
2. Suppress air defenses if necessary to enhance freedom of action
3. Acquire near real time actionable intelligence on AQ affiliates to facilitate strike ops

PROS

- Proven tactic that could disrupt AQ operational planning and operations
- Could alter balance of forces between mod-erate opposition groups and AQ affiliates
- Might convince AQ associates that attacking U.S. not worth risks/costs

CONS

- Drones limited to permissive air defense environments
- Air defense suppression operations required to enable drone activity in nonpermissive environments
- Might inadvertently reduce military pressure on Assad regime
- Reputational/political risk if drone strikes result in inadvertent civilian casualties that are publicized by Syrian social media

COMMENTS: Moderate-risk, moderate-payoff COA, best used together with train/equip option



Strike Key Regime *Strategic* Military and Economic Targets

CONCEPT

1. Coalition air campaign to seriously damage
 - POL stocks, intelligence facilities, regime command, control and communications
 - Dual-use industrial facilities owned by close associates of Assad
 - Assad's ability to communicate with people (TV, AM/FM radio...)
2. Info ops to separate regime from supporters, engender perception that end of regime is near

PROS

- Could significantly degrade regime's military capability and freedom of action, and alter psychological dynamic of conflict by opening new front against Assad
- Could force regime to focus on defense
- Could buy opposition time and space to train, equip, and organize

CONS

- Unlikely to alter war's outcome on its own
- Risk of U.S. casualties/POWs (mitigated by reliance on stand-off strikes)
- Regime and allies might retaliate with terror attacks, direct action against Coalition states
- Risk of heightened tensions and escalation by Iran and Russia (i.e., intensified resupply efforts, such as S-300s, SCUDs) and policy complications elsewhere (e.g. nuclear negotiations with Iran), especially if Iranian personnel are killed
- Could entail open-ended military commitment lacking public and congressional support
- Could cause regime to cease cooperation with CW elimination efforts
- Could further complicate postwar reconstruction, reestablishment of government services
- Legal authority to act? UNSCRs? Responsibility to protect?

COMMENTS: High-risk, high-payoff COA, best used together with train/equip option



Strike/Secure Residual CW Capabilities

CONCEPT

1. Coalition air campaign to destroy inaccessible CW sites (B-2s with bunker-busting weaponry and supporting packages)
2. Secure remaining CW sites via Coalition trained/equipped proxies, as feasible
3. Info ops to justify strikes

PROS

- Could neutralize/functionally destroy regime's residual CW capabilities
- Demonstration of resolve could alter psychological environment
- Could enhance leverage in nuclear negotiations with Iran by demonstrating willingness to undertake counterproliferation strikes in event of noncompliance

COMMENTS: High-risk, low-to-moderate-payoff COA; not viable while Syria in compliance with mandate to destroy its CW program, though credible reports of undeclared stocks or CW use by regime could be game-changing

CONS

- Some stockpiles/capabilities could survive aerial bombing and be diverted by terrorists (though few, if any, have ability to operate in a contaminated environment)
- Securing residual capabilities during shooting war would entail significant risk
- Potential for harm to nearby civilians if strikes result in release of agent
- Risks of U.S. casualties/POWs (mitigated by reliance on stand-off strikes)
- Regime might retaliate by terror attacks, direct action against coalition states
- Could inadvertently telegraph limited nature of U.S. goals in Syria, signaling to regime that it is free to act elsewhere
- Could entail open-ended military commitment lacking public and congressional support
- UNSCR 2118 does not authorize use of force



No-Fly Zones and Humanitarian Safe Havens

CONCEPT

Option 1: Narrow NFZ

- Patriot missiles w/AWACs, Rivet Joint & JSTARS (ISR “eyes and ears”) along Turkish and Jordanian borders
- Patriot arc w/ ISR assets could cover Aleppo, parts of Idlib province, and Deraa in south

Option 2: Broad NFZ

- Coalition air campaign to establish & sustain NFZs and refugee safe havens along Turkish and Jordanian borders
- Degrade/destroy Integrated Air Defense System adjacent to safe havens

Both require “boots on ground” to secure safe havens and undertake humanitarian assistance ops

Info ops to justify NFZs/safe havens

PROS

- Would provide relief for some at-risk populations
- Permit reestablishment of rudimentary services and governance in areas protected by NFZs/humanitarian safe havens
- Scalable: from narrow NFZs created by Patriot SAMs along borders with Turkey and Jordan, to broad NFZs covering much larger areas

CONS

- Resource intensive, requires staging areas in neighboring states, large amounts food/medicine, large numbers “boots on ground” to protect supply lines and at-risk populations
- Could require limited air-defense suppression campaign at outset to set conditions for success
- Risk of U.S. casualties/PoWs
- Expensive
- Could entail open-ended military commitment lacking public and congressional support
- Could cause regime to cease cooperation with CW elimination efforts
- Regime and allies might respond with terrorism, direct action against safe havens or coalition members
- Legal authority to act? UNSCRs? Responsibility to protect?

COMMENTS: High-risk COA that could achieve limited but desirable humanitarian goals and build legitimacy for other COAs



Conclusions

- U.S. may eventually use the military to achieve narrowly defined goals relating to CW disarmament/deterrence or counterterrorism.
- No single course of action likely to reverse regime's battlefield momentum and set conditions for a negotiated settlement.
 - Hybrid options that create synergies among multiple courses of action are more likely to succeed.
- Broader policy success will require moderate opposition to enhance military effectiveness, marginalize extremists, act with unity of purpose, and put political house in order.
- Between nonintervention and a ground invasion, there are a number of military options to alter the course or outcome of the civil war, mitigate its effects, or achieve a number of more narrow goals.



Appendix A: Planning Assumptions

- U.S. public and administration would not support options entailing significant casualties or “boots on ground”
 - This could change if AQ affiliates in Syria were to conduct successful attack on U.S. or against U.S. interests overseas.
- Administration will not support options that could undermine agreement to eliminate Syria’s CW or ongoing nuclear diplomacy with Iran
- Administration will eschew options that entail a significant potential for mission-creep or that require major budgetary outlays
- U.S. will press Israel to avoid military activities in Syria that could complicate any U.S. military intervention
 - Creates potential for US-Israel tensions if latter continues to enforce its redlines against:
(1) violation of Golan ceasefire; (2) nascent Hizballah or AQ enclaves; 3) transfer of game-changing arms or CW to Hizballah or other terrorist groups
- Jordanian and/or Turkish support critical to nearly any kind of U.S. military role
- Iraq will not provide significant support to any U.S. effort
- Gulf Arab allies generally supportive, but degree to which interests align with U.S. unclear
- Israel ambivalent about U.S. military intervention, will act unilaterally to protect interests



Appendix B: Planning Constraints

- Administration's desire to avoid another war in Middle East
- Opposition by U.S. public and Congress to direct military intervention in Syria
- Ambivalence of key allies regarding increased U.S. military role (e.g., Turkey?)
- Legal authorities to act (UNSCRs, international law, UNSCR 2118)
- Ability to obtain necessary access, basing, overflight rights
- USG and key ally concerns regarding transfer of sensitive arms to Syrian opposition, e.g., MANPADs
- Covert action limited by U.S. government tendency to leak
- U.S. and coalition intelligence gaps and shortfalls regarding the regime and opposition