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**From:** Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>  
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**To:** H  
**Subject:** From Gelb

On Syria. I thought you'd appreciate:

### SYRIA

Faced with evil, Americans always want to be on the side of the angels. So American interventionists, hawks and human-righters, are banding together, as they did in Libya, to stop President Bashar al-Assad from killing his people. But when interventionists become avenging angels, they blind themselves and the nation, and run dangerously amok. They plunge in with no plans, half-baked plans, with demands to supply arms to rebels they know nothing about, with ideas for no-fly zones, and bombing. Their good intentions could pave the road to hell for Syrians, preserving lives today, sacrificing more later.

Characteristically, the interventionists aren't holding themselves to higher account; they're blaming President Obama. To them, it's all about his failure to act. But the president is moving sensibly and with due dispatch to restrain Assad's killings. He's squeezing the dictator economically and isolating him diplomatically. And while it doesn't look like much, it is suppressing Assad's freedom to slaughter. He has the military power to kill far more of his people. Meantime, Mr. Obama is trying to fashion a coalition for more direct action – and it isn't easy.

The natural choice to blunt Assad's savagery, the Arab League, is practically useless. The League's "observer missions" have failed (what a surprise!). Now, the League seeks a joint observer mission with the U.N. Mind you, if the League really wanted to act decisively, it could as it did against Col. Gaddafi in Libya, under NATO cover.

Forget about the U.N. Security Council, too. That august body couldn't even pass a mild resolution calling a halt to violence on both sides—one that didn't even demand Assad's removal. Not wanting to encourage interventionary precedents, China and Russia vetoed it. Not to worry, the Security Council resolved to "remain actively seized of the matter."

It is no wonder, then, that U.S. hawks chime in with their tried and true panaceas – secret arms aid, open arms aid, air protection for starters, bombing, whatever. In typical form, Senators John McCain, Lindsey Graham, and Joe Lieberman went further and said: "The bloodshed must be stopped, and we should rule out no option that could help to save lives."

Yet the hawks do not make clear who would supply the arms, nor exactly who would receive them. Those most affected, the Arabs and the Turks, are providing few or no arms. Ask them and they'll tell you that with more arms, they foresee an all-out civil war, perhaps spilling into their countries. Assad would be deposed, but the price would be very high. Muddying the water further, there are lots of Syrian factions with widely divergent and conflicting views. Some want foreign arms and more; others don't. Most haven't given a clear thought to governing post-Assad.

The post-Assad landscape probably would be more volatile than post-Hosni Mubarak Egypt. The Syrian political map is quite explosive: a potential rulership of Islamic extremists; Christians who greatly fear the extremists for what they did to Christians in Iraq and Egypt; and good, solid Sunni businessmen who might not have the stomach for a battle. Nor can outsiders expect to control this ménage.

One idea advanced by interventionists deserves more attention: safe havens. The idea is to set up zones to which Syrians can flee for protection, say in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The catch here is that advocates also call

for "no-fly zones" patrolled probably by U.S. fighters in case Assad attacks the zones. MORE PROBLEMATIC STILL IS THAT SYRIAN AIR DEFENSE SYSTEMS ARE FIRST RATE AND WOULD ENDANGER U.S. FIGHTERS.

Americans can't believe there aren't great solutions, and it's not for a lack of creativity. Salvation for the Syrians, however, may not rest in solving the problem with bold and rudderless fixes, but in ensuring Washington doesn't make matters worse -- for ourselves and others.