

Did regional inaction over Syria ferment deeper regional crisis?

By [Ciarán Morrissey](#), Comment Editor (2015/16)

Tuesday 21 October 2014



AP

Despite protests, outrage and calls for intervention in the war in Syria, the West has decided to involve itself rather late. While the civil war began in early 2011 as part of the Arab Spring, Britain and America have only become directly involved with the war effort in the past few months in direct response to the threat of ISIS.

As ISIS has managed to wrought violence and destruction on a huge scale, it is natural for us to speculate if anything could have been done at an early stage to prevent the formation of such an organisation. It is, however, incorrect to assert that there has been no action or intervention within the region.

Due to the sectarian undertones of the conflict, there have been numerous instances of foreign support to both sides of the conflict. Iran, a Shia state, has had ground troops fighting alongside Assad (a Shia himself) against a coalition of predominantly Sunni rebel groups, scores of whom are receiving significant military aid from Sunni-backed Saudi Arabia. In addition, as in the cases of Afghanistan and Libya, many Muslims from across the world have travelled to the region to take part in the fighting. Some of these fighters are Syrians fighting in what they see to be a nationalist conflict, while others believe themselves to be fighting a holy war. This latter group constitutes the bulk of ISIS, which, despite being Sunni cannot be considered a typical opposition group.

The fact that so many nations and foreign individuals have played an active part since the advent of the conflict shows that it is a complete misnomer to assert that there has been regional inertia and want of partisanship. There have been disparate demonstrations of regional action particularly among the rebels whom are have travelled from foreign lands to engage in the fight for multifarious reasons.

We cannot predict what would have happened had the West been involved from the start. It is likely, as in

the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan that local Syrians would have united in an insurgency against a perceived foreign diktat. Another scenario could have been that of a combined arms offensive, which could have crushed the Assad regime and allowed the various rebel factions to gain control over the whole country.

That being said, it is extremely important to note that the rebels are far from a homogeneous group. The emergence of ISIS alone proves this; ISIS splintered off from the rebels and are now attacking every other armed and unarmed group in the vicinity.

If we were to intervene on the side of the Syrian rebels, say, two years ago, it is unrealistic to fathom that this schism would have been curtailed. It is perfectly plausible to suggest that we would have merely ousted Assad and ushered in a new era of military and political instability.

There's even historical precedent for this. As recently as last year the British Government tried to pass a bill that would allow them to arm and train Syrian rebel groups. Those groups in question then went on to form ISIS. Hence, we have no reliable way of knowing which groups may become dominant and aggressive in the short term- let alone the long term.

In closing, it is necessary to state that while we may want to get involved in the fight to bring the desired stability to the region, any military action by the British government is likely to be futile. Any actions we take in the short term may have egregious and unpredictable long-term consequences.



One comment

Justin Timberlake

22 Oct '14 at 10:26 am

This article seems like an Orwellian re-write of history, you explicitly suggest that Britain and America have only very recently got involved with Syria. Where on earth did you get that from?

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/01/us-usa-syria-obama-order-idUSBRE8701OK20120801> That is in the Summer of 2012...

It is well known that The West's funding and training of Syrian rebel groups has been going on for years now and that it has (unsurprisingly) hugely exacerbated the civil war and helped spawn some particularly nasty terrorist groups. To suggest the West has only just got involved because of ISIS is just laughable!

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