

The Power of Coercive Nuance



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Following the destruction of Homs, [8,000 dead](#), two double vetoes and a year of inaction, the U.N. Security Council has unanimously endorsed Special Envoy Kofi Annan's [six-point peace plan](#) for Syria. It is also cautiously prepared to "consider further steps as appropriate."

For now, [Assad has agreed to it](#).

But what does that mean? And what will the Security Council do if Bashar al-Assad continues murdering his own people?

These are not easy questions. The world cannot be changed by bold statements alone. Nor is a solution just an airstrike or "safe haven" away. The "balance of consequences" argument against military intervention in Syria is a powerful one. But there is a cost for inaction also. So far the Security Council has been a mere spectator of crimes against humanity in Syria. This has corroded its credibility and exacerbated the crisis.

There is no quick fix, but that doesn't mean the options are only invasion and inaction.

Part of the solution is for the Security Council to frame engagement with Syria in terms of its [Responsibility to Protect](#). A diplomatic surge with high-level support from Russia, the United States, Turkey and the Arab League must impress upon Assad and the opposition that the Annan plan is their only option. This is not hand-wringing utopianism. Rather it is a recognition that any solution short of civil war and thousands more corpses will require deep political commitment.

The Security Council also needs to support Annan's plan with coercive nuance. Consideration of future measures should include referring the situation to the International Criminal Court, an arms embargo and targeted sanctions. Disincentives for lending to Syria, such as labeling arms and oil contracts signed by the Syrian government as "odious debt," rendering them unenforceable, also deserve further exploration.

The cruel truth is that there is no quick fix in Syria. But that does not mean that the Security Council has to choose between invasion and inaction. Through the careful deployment of both soft and hard (nonmilitary) power, with Annan's heightened diplomacy at the fore, there is still time to arrest Syria's descent into catastrophe.