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Ending the Syrian conflict: Foreign Intervention or Renewed Political Process?

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Synopsis

The massacre of more than 100 people in the west-central town of Houla last month brought condemnation of the brutal regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad by the U.N. Security Council. A NATO-led intervention is possible but a diplomatic solution based on the Annan peace plan, with the support of Russia and China, is more likely to achieve results.

Commentary

The peace plan negotiated by former U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan has failed to stop the violence and brutality carried out by the Syrian regime. The plan calls for peace, withdrawal of troops from cities and to create dialogue between the regime and opposition parties. Even with the presence of almost 300 U.N. monitors in the country to administer the truce has not stopped the violent attacks conducted by the Syrian troops in towns where opposition and rebels are strong.

The distressful sight of children's bloodied and battered bodies shown on YouTube purported to prove the fatalities of the terror attack carried out by the autocratic regime of Bashar al-Assad in the west-central town of Houla. The Syrian Government immediately rejected claims that its forces were involved in the attacks. Assad himself described the killings as an "ugly crime" that even "monsters" would not carry out and blamed "foreign meddling" for Syria's divisions and foreign groups for attacking Syria.

Syrian activists have declared that more than 1000 people have died in the violence since the cease-fire went into effect in early April this year. Political analysts have noted that the prospects of a diplomatic resolution to Syria's conflict appeared to disappear with the continued bloodshed, and where the world has witnessed Kofi Annan's peace plan being repeatedly violated by the Syrian government. The conflicts on the ground in Syria under the eyes of worldwide viewers are obvious proof that the peace plan is heading towards a dead end. These signified that Assad's regime does not recognize anything other than the language of force and brutality.

Fresh Political Dialogue and Economic Pressure

The spiralling cycle of violence and crisis in Syria have deeply troubled the world. The Syrian people want an immediate end to all violence and re-establishing of the country's usual social order. Political dialogue is unquestionably the best answer to the problem as it can reduce the damage of the conflict to ordinary Syrians.

Internationally, world powers share a belief that Syria could descend into civil war and plan to map out possible ways to avoid such a disaster for the region, according to a representative of international envoy Kofi Annan. Further violence occurring in Syria may lead towards a full-scale civil war which will have catastrophic consequences for the region and even to the world. The world powers need to engage in strategic discussions to avoid such cataclysmic crisis.

However to achieve success in political dialogue they need to have the agreement of Syria's allies Russia and China. Russia's role is crucial for the success of the peace plan and the EU nations see Russia's close ties with Syria as an antidote to end the violence. EU nations want Russian President Vladimir Putin to take a stronger line on Syria and add more pressure to the Syrian regime to withdraw its heavy artilleries from cities and comply fully with envoy Kofi Annan's peace plan. They also hope that Russia and China will come to an agreement to condemn President Assad and seek his removal from the presidency.

Besides political dialogue, sanctions also remained important to further loosen the tight knot hold of Assad's regime. Sanctions were imposed on the Syrian government since the uprising began in Syria early last year and recent treasury sanctions to the Syrian International Islamic Bank add more economic pressure to the Syrian government. The bank's assets will be frozen in the United States and companies and individuals are forbidden from dealing with the designated bank. Foreign powers are also looking at other options aimed at tightening economic pressure on Assad's regime after the mass massacre in Houla.

Foreign Intervention

Syria's revolutionaries are seeking for a game-changer. Support for foreign intervention is not universal, of course. While many of the Syrian community have appealed for military intervention, there are minority Syrians represented by the National Coordination Committee (NCC) who reject any form of military intervention in Syria. For months now, Syrian activists have debated whether any form of foreign intervention is the silver bullet that could tilt the balance of power in their favor. As the Syrian regime is continuing its oppressive behavior in killing innocent Syrians, opinion among Syrians have changed dramatically – from the early stages when the uprising broke out, the thought of foreign intervention was never a solution to the crisis. But lately, due the recent mass killings, Syrians have started to accept the fact that military intervention could indeed save the lives of the mass of the people.

Nevertheless the United States will not enter the frame and be blamed for another intervention a la Iraq and Afghanistan. It is possible to envisage a NATO Libyan - like intervention led by one of the Middle East states or Turkey. Russia and China have made it clear that they will not support the U.N. for military intervention in Syria. But if the world continues to pressure both countries and the number of killings continues to escalate in Syria, we may see them bow to the international pressure and finally agree to the removal of Bashar al-Assad, through diplomatic ways.

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