RtoP – Why Intervention has taken place in Libya but not in Syria

By Julie Lenarz

The tidal wave of protests that swept across the Middle East and North Africa erupted in Tunisia on December 17th, 2010. Ever since, governments in four countries have been forced to step down and the struggle continues in many parts of the region, expressing itself in different levels of intensity. While revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and the Yemen ended relatively quickly, protests in Libya and Syria turned out to be extremely bloody and persisting.

In Libya, inspired by the ousting of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, violence broke out in February 2011. Only weeks later, a similar situation occurred in Syria. When people went onto the streets to protest for greater freedoms and against government corruption, nepotism and oppression, their demands were met with maximum brutality by the Gaddafi and Assad regimes. Security forces randomly fired into crowds and the army deployed heavy weaponry, including tanks and helicopters, to crush down the rebellion.

In both cases, the international community and regional actors strongly condemned the assaults and spoke of crimes against humanity. They repeatedly reminded the governments in Tripoli and Damascus of their responsibility to protect their own citizens from severe harm. The pleas to curb violence, however, fell on deaf ears.

The international community ultimately took matters into their own hands when NATO enforced a no-fly zone over Libya and supported rebels in their struggle against the army. Given the explicit reference to the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) in the respective United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR), Libya was perceived by many as the protocol's finest hour. Despite a similar normative dialogue encompassing the rapidly deteriorating situation in Syria, the international community has so far failed to effectively intervene.

The puzzle that arises is why RtoP was invoked in Libya but not in Syria, despite the striking similarities of systematic human rights violations. Crimes against humanity are committed on a large-scale basis, sanctions have failed, international and regional players have condemned the violence and expelled both countries from their circles and the opposition has asked openly for intervention in form of a no-fly zone and safe havens.

If we are really witnessing the emergence of a global agenda committed to prevent and stop mass-slaughter by challenging the absolute nature of state sovereignty and framing sovereignty as a responsibility of the state to safeguard the well-being of its citizens, why has action been taken in one but not the other case?

The different outcome in Libya and Syria cannot be explained with RtoP and that the protocol does not coincide with the practice of foreign policy. RtoP makes intervention sound apolitical, yet it is a fundamentally political act. It requires a state or coalition of states to identify the victims and perpetrators of a crime. It calls on the international community to protect one group of people from another and by that it touches upon vital interests of major powers. Only if it does not undermine

national interests, in particular those of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), RtoP works relatively smoothly.

If we accept that line of reasoning, we can account for the deviation. While in Libya, the political, strategic and economic considerations pointed in favour of intervention, in the case of Syria, vital national interests of major powers would be compromised by the fall of the Assad regime. This is especially true for Russia.

One could of course argue that RtoP is indeed the reason why action has only been taken in Libya. Some scholars have claimed that by overstepping its mandate, NATO has caused long-term damage to the agenda. This explanation, however, does not tell the whole story. This is related to the question of sanctioned legal authority. For example, Russia and China have repeatedly vetoed any resolutions in the UNSC that would have paved the way towards military intervention. It, however, does not falsify but reinforces my point. A lack of legitimacy from the UNSC might pose a dilemma but it is not an ultimate obstacle to act. In the past, states have acted in favour of military intervention, despite a disputed mandate, as for instance in the case of Iraq, and even in the absence of one, when they took action against Milosevic in the Balkans. Countries tend to find a way around the UNSC, if required.

To return to the central argument, it can be demonstrated that although RtoP is an integral part of the decision-making process, it is not the single factor which determines foreign policy in favour of intervention or inaction. The importance of vital political, strategic and economic interests by major powers explains the discrepancy between the Libyan and Syrian crisis, despite the otherwise striking analogies between the two scenarios.

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

RtoP was written in the early years of the new millennium, by the United Nations' International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) under the leadership of Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, and formally integrated into the UN's framework in 2005 through the passing of UNSCR 1674.

The protocol has deep roots in reality, as it was a reaction to the bloody, conflict-stricken 1990s where severe breaches of human rights and genocide occurred. What immediately comes to mind is the failed intervention in Somalia with disastrous, long-term consequences for humanitarian policy; or the fastest killing-spree of modern times, the Rwandan genocide, which produced almost 1 million dead in less than four months; or Milosevic's merciless rape and ethnic cleansing of the Balkans for much of the 1990s; let alone other atrocities that took place across the globe from Iraq to East Timor and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The single most important dimension of the responsibility to protect is therefore prevention. It is not only supposed to stop and react to genocide and crimes against humanity, but ideally avert them before they occur. RtoP is not a military protocol but one that works first and foremost with diplomatic instruments. Humanitarian interventionism is, however, acceptable under extraordinary circumstances. To be warranted, citizens of a sovereign country must be subject to severe bodily and mental harm on a large-scale basis or be in danger

of annihilation. The use of force is regulated by

four precautionary principles: right intention, last resort, proportional means and reasonable prospect in combination with just cause and right authority.

While the primary responsibility rests with the state concerned, the international community has the obligation to step in, if the state in whose territory the assault takes place fails to act accordingly, either because it is incapable of or unwilling to do so. Under these circumstances, the UN's principles of non-intervention and absolute state sovereignty yield to RtoP.

The idea of an apolitical humanitarianism may be a noble endeavour but is incompatible with the reality of international politics. There exists no purely altruistic interventionism, as national interests are always an integral part of the balance of power, blurring the lines between humanitarian motives and realpolitik. In fact, the heart of the protocol is inherently political, as it requires the international community to take sides. By protecting Libyan civilians, it automatically condemned the methods of the Gaddafi regime. And by helping the Syrian rebels to succeed in the quest for freedom, it would inevitably contribute to the downfall of Assad.

The protocol was also meant to impose strict rules, making it more difficult for regimes to oppose humanitarian acts under the UN banner. Those were particularly aimed at countries defined by Michael Ignatieff as the 'chief strategic threat to the moral and political commitments of liberal democracies'. Russia and China present a profound challenge to the ideology of freedom and democracy, which are at the very core of our liberal societies. Regimes which are internally oppressive cannot be

expected to act as the guardians of human rights on the outside. Their understanding of sovereignty is absolute, much alike to the UN's pillar principles of non-intervention and absolute sovereignty; their resentment against intervention in another state's affairs runs deep and they fiercely protect those principles through their veto powers in the UNSC.

Given that RtoP operates within that particular framework, it has become a victim of political and moral corruption by the permanent members of the UNSC. The different kind of voting behaviour in regard to Libya and Syria is a case in point and brutally exposes the selectiveness and profound weaknesses that are deeply entrenched in the structure of RtoP.

PROTECTING THE INNOCENT

RtoP requires the main purpose of any military intervention to be the protection of civilians from their government, which are unwilling or unable to secure the safety of their subjects. Unlike the Genocide Convention, the threshold for intervention under RtoP is much less rigorous. While genocide has not taken place in either Libya or Syria, crimes against humanity have undoubtedly been committed on a systematic and large-scale basis.

When violence broke out in Libya in February 2011, the regime in Tripoli used maximum force to suppress the rebellion. In a television broadcast, Gaddafi declared a policy of no mercy towards the rebels, characterised by murderous and genocidal rhetoric, threatening to 'cleanse Libya house by house'. In Syria, the situation

escalated shortly afterwards in mid-March. As in the case of Libya, the Assad administration initiated a brutal campaign against the protests. Unlike his counterpart in Tripoli, Assad employed a different argument. He tried to portray them as enemies of the state and

terrorists to be defeated, as it would be the duty of any sovereign concerned for the safety of the state.

However, when more and more reports about massacres against civilians surfaced, it quickly became apparent that the regime in Damascus was involved in a one-sided mass-slaughter. One of the largest-scale atrocities took place near Homs, where the head of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) confirmed that at least 90 people had been killed by Assad's forces, including 32 children. Recently, the numbers of reports of atrocities committed by opposition factions have increased. They must be a cause for concern and be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Nevertheless, they are not so common as to represent Syria as a conflict between two equal forces.

The uprisings in both countries are deeply disturbing and the human cost is terrible. Any military intervention would easily satisfy the criteria of right intention and just cause. In June 2011, an official of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) estimated that between 10,000-15,000 Syrians had already lost their lives. According to the interim Libyan health minister, the number was twice as high at the end of the conflict and 50,000 have been wounded. The casualty number in Syria has reached comparable levels and there appears to be no end to the bloodshed. So far 21,536 Syrians have lost their lives and another 276,000 have fled to neighbouring countries. Even if there is no certainty of the accuracy of the statistics, the total death toll

and the number of wounded and displaced is undoubtedly horrendous.

EXHAUSTING THE REPERTOIRE OF PEACE

RtoP dictates that military, economic, political and diplomatic sanctions must have failed before the use of force is permissible, since it is to be regarded as an extraordinary measure and imperfect instrument for righting humanitarian wrongs. International and regional players have therefore tried at great length to explore and exploit all peaceful options.

On February 22nd, 2011 the Arab League suspended Libya's membership and on the same day, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) expressed 'strong condemnation of the excessive use of force against civilians'. Less than a month later, on March 8th, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) called for the enforcement of a no-fly zone over the country.

By the end of February, the UNSC had authorised UNSCR 1970. This was unanimously accepted, explicitly referred to RtoP and strongly condemned the severe human rights violations. As a consequence, an arms embargo, travel ban and asset seizure were imposed. Matters were referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which in June issued arrest warrants against key members of the Gaddafi family and regime. In accordance with regional and supranational institutions, the UN General Assembly suspended Libya's membership and the European Union (EU) followed suit, announcing an arms embargo and other coercive measures.

While regional players initially embraced a rather passive policy towards Syrian, they eventually concluded, after months of bloodshed, that a tough line against Damascus was in order. Consequently, the Arab League expelled Syria from its circle on November 12th and announced unprecedented political and economic sanctions. After Assad's non-compliance with observes,

dispatched by the Arab League, they formally entered a dialogue with the Syrian opposition. The GCC and OIC embraced the same policy and suspended Syria's membership from their organisations, in February and August of 2012 respectively.

The EU announced similar sanctions against the regime in May 2011. Those became more inclusive throughout the conflict. In August 2011, the EU announced an arms embargo, asset seizure and travel bans, followed by an oil embargo in September. Since the beginning of the crisis, 17 restrictive measures have been introduced.

Reacting appropriately to the violence in Syria tuned out to be a challenging task for the UN, as a result of the deep division in the UNSC. Western powers tried to push through tough sanctions against the government in Damascus but China and, in particular, Russia vehemently vetoed any such attempts. The only common ground was UNSCR 2043, proposed by Russia and unanimously accepted, which established a UN observer mission known as UNSMIS. 300 unarmed monitor were dispatched to Syria to assess the situation and supervise the implementation of the UN Special Envoy's six-point proposal. But the mission turned out to be a colossal failure, with Kofi Annan resigning in deep frustration and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon concluding there was 'little evidence' the

Assad regime was interested in the peace initiative.

It can be summarised that both Libya and Syria were subjects to substantial military, economic, political and military sanctions. The international community, as well as regional actors, have taken all necessary steps to satisfy the precautionary principle of last resort. In the case of Libya, consensus existed that the peaceful repertoire of the protocol had been exhausted and military intervention was the only way to secure the protection of civilians. In Syria, however, the killing has been going on for almost a year and the opposition, in line with Western and Arab governments, have repeatedly argued that now is the time to impose a no-fly zone.

RUSSIA AND CHINA VS THE WORLD

Libya appears to be a clear cut case for right authority under RtoP. UNSCR 1973 authorised NATO 'to take all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack'. Although five countries abstained – Russia, China, Brazil, India and Germany – the resolution was generally perceived as a great success for RtoP and precedence for future interventions.

The honeymoon, however, did not last long. Almost instantly, Russia and China criticised the West for misinterpreting the mandate and taking the mission further than authorised by the UN. They lamented that NATO was actively contributing to the fall of the regime, rather than protecting civilians only, as explicitly stated in the resolution. This narrative is now readily

deployed by non-interventionist countries to justify their opposition to a firm resolution on Syria.

But this explanation must be regarded as a political smoke screen for justifying inaction. First, it appears to be straightforward that it would have been impossible to effectively ensure the safety of Libyan civilians without toppling Gaddafi, given his pledge to fight until the bitter end. This controversy at the heart of RtoP proves yet again how intimately related humanitarian and political goals can be. In reality, it becomes literally impossible to separate one from the other. Second, even if NATO had not overstepped the mark, Russian and China would have vetoed any intervention in Syria regardless to protect vital interests at stake.

Negotiations over a UNSCR against Syria turned out to be much more complex and ended in a political deadlock. This was due to the repeating boycott of Russia and China. Both made use of their veto power in the UNSC not once or twice but thrice. The first UNSCR of October 2011 was strong in language but proposed little concrete measures. It condemned the systematic violations of human rights but was hijacked by a double veto. The same happened again in February 2012, despite the council dropping references to economic sanctions and an arms embargo, let alone anything close to a no-fly zone. When the two permanent members excised their veto for a third time in July 2012, a group of countries, unwilling to accept Russia's and China's arbitrary behaviour, pushed for a gathering of the UN General Assembly to obtain, at least symbolically, a broad consensus against the brutality of the regime. Consequently, in August 2012, it overwhelmingly voted in favour of an Arab-drafted, anti-Syria resolution,

condemning the UNSC's inadequate response.

At first sight it would thus appear that while Libya satisfies RtoP's criterion of right authority, Syria fails to fulfil this requirement. This conclusion is however over-simplistic and will be further explored.

THE TRIUMPH OF INTERESTS OVER THE RIGHT TO BE PROTECTED

The question remains why RtoP has been invoked in one case but not the other. Whilst theoretically, intervention in Syria should have already taken place, it does not reflect the reality on the ground. Because RtoP is not as apolitical as it pretends, the politics, which are an integral part of the balance of power, obstruct its realisation.

It is fair to argue that Gaddafi was relatively isolated with no real allies in the Arab and Western sphere, bordered by states such as Egypt and Tunisia, which were undergoing revolutions of their own. While as a consequence of the war in Iraq, the regime had attempted to re-integrate itself into the international community, Gaddafi was still perceived as the 'mad dog' (a name once given to him by former US Resident Ronald Reagan). Since states are more likely to intervene in the internal affairs of another country, if the state in question is perceived to be weak, so that the potential costs are calculable and containable, Gaddafi was an easy target.

If anything was on the mind of Russia and China, it was their general anti-Western foreign policy agenda and their tendency to stay out of other countries' affairs. But

given that large parts of the region were in turmoil and future trouble likely to occur, they concluded that now was not the right time to oppose the NATO-led coalition. A compromise on Libya could help to justify future opposition to operations in countries more vital to their national interests. Therefore, when UNSCR 1973 was passed, Russian and China abstained, alongside India, Brazil and Germany.

In the case of Syria, the situation is more complex. Especially Russia has a strong interest in the survival of the Assad regime, since essential economic and strategic considerations are at stake. The partnership between the two countries dates back to the 1950s and reached its peak in the 1980s and 1990s, when Russia supplied Syria with military equipment worth $26 billion, including missile systems, about 5,000 tanks, 1,200 aircraft, 4,200 artillery pieces and mortars 70 warships. As a result, 90% of Syrian military capabilities are from the Soviet era. Seven years ago, Russia agreed to cancel Syria's debt of $9.8 billion from the Soviet era in exchange for a range of multi-million contracts, from trade and energy to arms and Russian investment in Syria is now worth almost $19.4 billion.

Furthermore, Russia's only extra-territorial naval base is on Syrian soil and would be lost, after the fall of Assad and this would constitute a significant blow to Russian plans to strengthen its sea power in the Mediterranean.

However, Russian support cannot exclusively be explained by rational choices. It also has deep roots in the country's pathological opposition to American policy. The consequences of Moscow's irrational behaviour are profound and, eventually, Russia will find itself on the wrong side of the Arab Spring. The Syrian opposition has already made clear its opinion of Russia's counter-productive policy and the Gulf States, in particular Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have also voiced their resentment.

Russia, however, is not the only problem that makes potential intervention in Syria risky. Assad is also one of the few remaining allies of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In the past, Iran and Syria have cooperated closely in Lebanon where both had a firm grip on their proxy group, Hezbollah, and been united in their determination to exterminate arch-enemy Israel. Indeed, both Iran and Syria have repeatedly threatened to unleash Hezbollah on Israel, in the event of intervention. Iran, the only Shia state in the world, is further interested in keeping the Alawites, a sub-group of Shi'ism, in power, instead of having to deal with yet another Sunni dominated country.

The second key factor is the military capabilities of the respective countries. The Libyan army was considered to be weak and unorganised, unable to resist a NATO-led operation for long. The regime in Tripoli had run the same risks as the Shah of Iran once done. It had deliberately neglected the 50,000-member army and the military had no appropriate plans for responding to rebellions, since such plans were never allowed to be made, as the fear of an internal coup was too great. The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) reported that Russia supplied Gaddafi's forces with the only weapons system which could have 'pose[ed] a threat' to NATO's air campaign.

Assad's army is stronger than that of Libya under Gaddafi, despite the Syrian opposition claiming that already 50,000 soldiers have defected, including high ranked officials. The average standard of military efficiency in the Middle East, however, is relatively low, especially in countries where most weaponry consists of outdated Soviet-era purchases. There is credible evidence, which suggests that Assad's capabilities should not be overestimated, with estimated ground troops not higher than 100,000, a lack of regular maintenance in the air force, a navy limited in scope without aircraft carriers, destroyers or submarines and Assad's failure to get hold of 60% of his ill-trained reserves.

The third point, namely the rebels' unity or rather disunity, is a persisting source of concern. In Libya, the dissidents were already in control of a significant portion of the territory when NATO intervened. At the time, Gaddafi forces were still occupying the west of the country but the rebels had liberated large parts of the east, with Benghazi as their self-declared capital.

As a result, they were perceived to be in a position to provide Libya with some basic security and leadership during the transition period, until a proper election could take place. This was important, as that the aftermath of the revolution was a major concern for the international community, since many believed that extremists might exploit the power vacuum.

The opposition in Syria is much more heterogeneous. Many different ethnic groups live in Syria. In the early days of the rebellion, opposition was organised in 'brigades', delineated by religion or ethnicity. However, opposition leaders have identified lack of unity as a concern amongst Western powers and have tried to

remedy this. Two of the main opposition camps, the Syrian National Council

(SNC) and National Coordinating Committee for Democratic Change (NCC), have merged. The NCC originally favoured political talks with the Assad regime, but abandoned its strategy after Assad's methods of oppression became increasingly violent.

This development was not without results, as the Arab League had formally entered talks with the Transition Council and President Hollande has declared France to be ready to acknowledge the interim government once properly established. Opposition forces also made territorial gains and have a relatively firm grip over the northern parts of Syria.

This line of analysis has now become difficult to sustain. Although Syria is not without allies, the regime has become increasingly isolated over the past few months and the general consensus reflects Assad's fall. In addition, while Syrian armed forces are more efficient than those of Libya, the assumption that NATO – the most powerful military alliance in the world – could not defeat an ordinary Middle Eastern army remains unconvincing. Though enforcing a no-fly zone would be more complex than it was in Libya, a lack of political will not military capacity has prevented intervention so far. The on-going struggle of the Syrian rebels for unity is a source of genuine concern to those who espouse RtoP. Nevertheless, there is credible evidence of slow but significant political progress. Two of the main opposition groups have merged and the

Free Syrian Army (FSA) has agreed to sign a code of conduct, in an attempt to demonstrate their readiness to lead the country during the transition period in an orderly manner. These developments should be encouraged rather than disparaged.

LEGITIMATE BUT ILLEGAL?

There are two other critical considerations: the issues of legality and fear of chemical and biological weaponry. Is intervention in Syria delayed by an absence of sanctioned legal authority? This assumption is over-simplistic. RtoP itself contains a passage which addresses the problem:

The Security Council should take into account in all its deliberations that, if it fails to discharge its responsibility to protect in conscience-shocking situations crying out for action, concerned states may not rule out other means to meet the gravity and urgency of that situation – and that the stature and credibility of the United Nations may suffer thereby.

This freedom of action was endorsed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who recently lamented that inaction in Syria reminded him of the UN's failure to protect civilians in Srebrenica.

Another option under RtoP is to refer the matter to the General Assembly in an Emergency Special Session. Action over Syria would not even create a UN precedent, since it is more than sixty years since the "Uniting for Peace" UNGA resolution was passed protecting Korea.

Moreover, if the UNSC were to be hijacked by the interests of a permanent member state, then the next best source of international legitimacy would be regional powers and organisations. As outlined before, regional, supranational institutions as well as sovereign states, in particular

Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have openly lobbied for a no-fly zone and the establishment of safe havens for refugees.

States in the past have acted contrary to the rulings of the UNSC, as in Kosovo, which would determine the intervention to be illegal but morally justified. The invasion of Iraq occurred against the background of profound controversy over the legality of that action. What Iraq demonstrates is that a mixture of national interests together with humanitarian concerns can lead to states to circumvent the UNSC and evidence will be explored in great detail in the fourth chapter.

RED LINES: CHEMICAL WEAPONS

In 2003, Gaddafi had abandoned his repertoire of chemical and biological weapons, as part of a diplomatic realignment following the invasion of Iraq. During the 2011 Libyan revolution, this weakened the regime's national and international position, given the deterrent effect of these weapons, and thereby encouraged intervention.

In Syria, regional and international players remain deeply concerned about the danger of Assad using chemical and biological weapons against the opposition and civilians, despite his claim that he would only deploy these in the event of foreign intervention. Another concern is that Assad could lose control over the weapon stockpiles, which could result in non-state actors, such as of Hezbollah or Islamic extremists group such as al Qaeda, acquiring these weapons. Given that the

post-Assad period is likely to be extremely chaotic, this is a realistic scenario.

Indeed, the question of chemical and biological weapons is of such concern that it has recently become a potential catalyst, which could move Western powers to begin intervention. President Obama has declared the use of such weaponry as his 'red line', and President Hollande of France has similarly stated that it would be a legitimate justification for direct intervention.

This is a significant observation. In the eyes of the West, the incentive to intervene is currently not strong enough, despite the death toll being equivalent to Libya. But if the Syrian regime began using chemical or biological weapons as part of its campaign of repression, intervention would be politically justified.

The threshold for intervention in Libya appears to have been lower than it is now in the case of Syria. The explanation for that is as follows: because due to the precedent set by Saddam's Iraq in the 1980s, it is clear that the use of these weapons by Syria may represent a wider threat to the region as well as the international community and as such goes beyond the essentials of RtoP to embrace the concerns of national interests. Priority is not given to people's right to be protected. If that were the case, intervention would already have taken place. Humanitarian motives might be an integral part of the decision-making process but they compete with the logic of realpolitik.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The puzzle circled around the question of why RtoP was invoked in Libya but not in Syria, despite RtoP's precautionary principles for military intervention have been fulfilled.

In both countries, systematic human rights violations have been committed on a large-scale basis, sanctions have failed, international and regional players have condemned the mass-slaughter and expelled Libya and Syria from their circles and the opposition has lobbied for the enforcement of a no-fly zone and the establishment of safe havens. In theory, action in Syria should already have taken place. So why has it not?

As demonstrated, this is the wrong question to ask. RtoP proposes an apolitical, idealised version of humanitarian interventionism and tries to remove international politics from a subject, which is itself highly political. What follows is that the answer lies not with the protocol per se but the political climate in which it exists. In the case of Libya, the costs for intervention were relatively low in comparison to potential risks, due to the unique factors relating to the Gaddafi regime and its role in the region and on the international stage. The national interest of intervening powers, in combination with the moral force of RtoP, ultimately triumphed over the principles of non-intervention.

In Syria, however, the incentive to intervene, despite the fulfilment of the respective criteria, is not enough to outweigh a complex matrix of domestic, regional and global considerations. Humanitarian concerns must give way to realpolitik. Russia's economic and geopolitical interests in the region cross with concerns over the US presidential election, the European currency crisis and several other constraints, which make

intervention in Syria less viable or attractive for major powers.

When the conflict escalates further and threatens to violate the US' 'red line' policy, intervention in Syria becomes both more feasible and more likely. At present, however, it is extremely doubtful that a form of intervention will happen anytime soon, given the stated intention of President Obama that he has no ambition to get further involved in Syria, until the elections in November are over.

What could change the current policy of inaction would be an atrocity that would shake the consciousness of the world, such as a Srebrenica style massacre, or the use of chemical and biological weapons as experienced in Iraq. Another possibility is that if the civil war in Syria crosses into neighbouring countries, this could trigger a regional intervention. Syria has already clashed with Turkey and Jordan, while the Kurds of Syria and Iraq are united against Assad.

Russia and China are unlikely to change their position, as this does not accord with their interests internationally and in the region. Intervention in the future could realistically only take the same form as the Iraq crisis, as national interests are perceived to outweigh the necessity to preserve international peace or respect the authority of the UN. Thus, intervention becomes a question of political will and national interests as opposed to a sense of a capacity for military action or a perception of the necessity to protect human rights.

For now, the bloodshed in Syria continues. Once more, the international community is in the process of learning the lesson it pretends to have learned many times in the past.

About the author:

Julie Lenarz is the Executive Director of the Humanitarian Intervention Centre, a Fellow at the Institute for Middle Eastern Democracy and an adviser on foreign and security policy. She tweets @MsIntervention

Cite this paper as:

Lenarz, J. (2012) *"RtoP – Why Intervention Has Taken Place in Libya but not in Syria"*. Humanitarian Intervention Centre

References

[1] ‘President Bush’s Address to the Nation’ New York Times http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/08/international/08PTEX.html?pagewanted=3&pagewanted=all 8 September 2003

[2] ‘Remarks by the President at the National Defense University’ The White House http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university 23 May 2013

[3]Ibid.

[4] Blair, T ‘A Global Alliance for Global Values’ The Foreign Policy Centre http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/798.pdf September 2006

[5] ‘News Conference by President Obama’ The White House http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/news-conference-president-obama-4042009 4 April 2009

[6] See e.g. Milne, S ‘Britain’s wars fuel terror. Denying it only feeds Islamophobia’ The Guardian http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/may/29/britain-wars-terror-islamophobia 29 May 2013

[7] Tenety, E ‘Sarah Palin at Faith and Freedom conference: ‘Let Allah sort it out’ in Syria, Middle East’ Washington Post http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/wp/2013/06/16/sarah-palin-at-faith-and-freedom-conference-let-allah-sort-it-out-in-syria-middle-east/ 16 June 2013

[8] Welch, M ‘Rand Paul Mainstreams Non-Interventionism’ Reason http://reason.com/archives/2013/02/05/rand-paul-mainstreams-non-interventionis 5 February 2013

[9] Brannen, K ‘Republicans Raise Questions About Defense Spending’ Defense News http://www.defensenews.com/article/20110708/DEFSECT05/107080308/Republicans-Raise-Questions-About-Defense-Spending 8 July 2011

[10] Johnson, B ‘Don’t arm the Syria maniacs’ Daily Telegraph http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10124089/Boris-Johnson-Dont-arm-the-Syria-maniacs.html 16 June 2013

[11] Watt, N ‘Cameron says UK prejudiced for believing Muslims cannot manage democracy’ The Guardian http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/feb/22/david-cameron-uk-muslims-democracy 22 February 2011

[12] ‘Syria death toll tops 100,000’ Daily Telegraph http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10142892/Syria-death-toll-tops-100000.html 26 June 2013

[13] International Edition with Levy & Counsell, ‘Episode 11: Julie Lenarz’ Ricochet http://ricochet.com/main-feed/Julie-Lenarz 2 April 2013