

Enablers of Mass Atrocities: Enablers of the Syrian Conflict Stop the Atrocity Supply Chain March 2013 The Syrian conflict is a human rights catastrophe. Over the past two years, nearly 70,000 people have died, mostly civilians, including more than 3,700 children, and nearly one million refugees have fled the country. Although both sides of the conflict are responsible for atrocities, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad is responsible for the vast majority. The regime's security forces have used indiscriminate bombings, intentional mass killings, rape, and torture to kill and brutalize civilians. There is no end in sight.

President Obama has made stopping mass atrocities a “core national security interest” of the United States, which manifestly applies to Syria. As neighboring countries struggle to absorb the nearly one million refugees and regional powers become more involved in the conflict, the possibility of wider violence and instability looms. Yet U.S. efforts to slow or stop the crisis—diplomacy and sanctions against the regime, primarily—have had little effect. Amid calls to arm the rebels, we urge the United States to approach the conflict from the other end: to choke off the flow of arms, resources, and money to Assad. While no single strategy could resolve this crisis, this low-risk, nonviolent one could help stem the bloodshed and put pressure on Assad to stop the bloodshed.

The Syrian regime's mass atrocities—like all mass atrocities—are complex, organized crimes requiring the support of third party “enablers.” This report provides both a unique overview of Assad's enablers and a roadmap the U.S. government can follow to crack down on them. A number of countries and commercial entities are knowingly or tacitly enabling Assad's atrocities. (...)

Together, these enablers form a supply chain that passes through the legal jurisdictions of a number of countries with whom the United States has a relationship. Not only do many of the arms and other resources headed for Syria traverse the territory of U.S. allies; many ships fly the flags of countries that are allied with the United States or otherwise susceptible to American influence. Also, the supply chain includes commercial entities—such as insurance providers, oil firms, and shell businesses designed to conceal the ownership of ships—that are located in countries where the United States has leverage.

Given its relationships with these countries—as well as its political, economic, and military reach—the United States is particularly well positioned to disrupt the supply chains. U.S. officials could and should enlist these countries in a systematic effort to deny Assad the support that is enabling atrocities.

To bolster this effort, the U.S. government should take the following steps:

The State Department should publicly and privately pressure enabling countries, share information with the foreign authorities who can aid in disrupting enablers, and direct embassies to collect information on enablers.

The Treasury Department should impose sanctions that prevent U.S. entities from doing business with Assad's enablers and that limit his ability to repatriate funds from oil exports.

The Commerce Department should amend the Export Administration Regulations (EAR) to secure control over the delivery of information and communications technology to repressive regimes like Syria. The department should also work with the industry to promote its best practices, to prevent such technology from enabling atrocities. (...)

The report expands Human Rights First's work identifying and tracking the Assad regime's enablers since 2011. It is based on open source information, which is limited due to the exclusion of most foreign reporters from Syria, the secrecy cloaking intelligence and trade information, and the efforts of enablers to evade detection. The cases documented in this report are representative, not exhaustive.

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