PERSUASIVE SPEECH

FOR

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Hello everyone. The eminent lawyer, Clarence Darrow once said, “The world is made up for the most part of morons and natural tyrants, sure of themselves, strong in their own opinions, never doubting anything.” And although this may be true for most people, reality tells us otherwise. Life is not so cut and dried. Opinion-particularly political opinions are strong and impassioned and there are always at least two sides to every story. Many people believe that “might makes right” while others believe that legacy, tradition, natural order and succession are the laws of the universe, while others stand for the principles that give power to the people. For as long as there have been at least two men on earth, there has been divisiveness as one covets the other’s possessions and position in the world. Some may even believe that condition exists in our DNA and that conflict is unavoidable. And for almost as long as history has been recorded, the conflict in the Middle East has garnered headlines, casualties, and impassioned public, political and diplomatic attention and debate. Who **IS** right? What is the answer? Will there ever be peace? Will the world’s citizens ever agree to get along?

The great military man and self-proclaimed Emperor of France, Napoleon I said, “I am sometimes a fox and sometimes a lion. The whole secret of government lies in knowing when to be one or the other.” Today we will discuss the points and counterpoints of the benefits and downsides for the United States for the Assad regime to either stay or be thrown over in Syria. Remember-for every person there is a potential opinion, and for every person who maintains the courage of his or her convictions and beliefs, there is a counterpoint. The one thing we all really need to agree on, however, is that choices cannot be made without having received information. Informed choice is essential to maintaining a position of integrity and justice.

In brief, Bashar al-Assad became President of Syria in 2000, succeeding his father Hafiz al-Assad, who was President of that country from 1971. Bashar studied medicine in Damascus and continued his education in London, and although he served in the Syrian military as an army doctor, he was not his father’s principle choice for succession-that was his brother Basil who was killed in a car accident. Even though he lacked political and military experience, Bashar was then groomed to take over for his father when the time arrived. Some may think, “Was he amply prepared to lead the country?” Others may counter; he is an educated man with a more sophisticated worldview having studied abroad and may be more prepared to deal with issues of foreign policy and diplomacy. Once again-remember-there are at least two sides and many angles and facets to every story.

So what are the pros and cons from the point of view of the United States for keeping or ousting the Assad regime? These points are not easy to distinguish, so let’s explore them.

What are some reasons for the US to accept or at least tolerate the Assad regime? The first and probably the most obvious reason is based on a simple theory, and that is, “The devil you know is better than the devil you don’t know.” I am not calling Assad the devil, I am merely pointing out that there is a familiarity with Assad’s position and philosophy with regard to the leadership of Syria. Let’s remember that the same family has led Syria for over forty years at this point. Some may think the continuity and tradition creates a degree of stability in the region-one that can be dealt with; one whose movements and actions are more predictable than not. In an article in “The New Republic,” the author, David Schenker said, “Years ago when I was working in the Bush administration, I was tasked to write an options paper on Syria. Prior to putting pen to paper, I sought the sage counsel of the late Peter Rodman, who, in typical fashion quipped, “Kissinger tasked me to write the same paper in the early 1970s.” Today, 40 years and seven presidents later, the United States is still seeking an effective policy to contend with the Assad regime.” The US may not agree with the position of the Syrian government as it stands and has stood, but in its own way, there is some sort of stability.

Another reason for the US to not upset the apple cart at this time is that there are several countries that are strong allies with Syria, and jeopardizing the relationships the US has with some of these countries could make matters worse for Americans. It is no secret that China is a tremendous partner to the US in the world of manufacturing and finance, and China has expressed its opinion with regard to the United States’ stance on using force in Syria. In September of 2013, Reuters ran a piece entitled, “China Welcomes Russia-US accord on Syria Chemical Weapons.” The article goes on to inform us, "We believe that this framework agreement has ameliorated the present explosive and tense situation in Syria and has opened a new perspective on using peaceful methods to resolve the Syrian chemical weapons issue," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his visiting French counterpart, Laurent Fabius.

"[China](http://www.reuters.com/places/china?lc=int_mb_1001) upholds the finding of an appropriate resolution to the Syrian issue, including that of the chemical weapons, under the framework of the [United Nations](http://www.reuters.com/subjects/united-nations?lc=int_mb_1001)," Wang added.

"The U.N. Security Council should play an important role in this ... Military methods cannot resolve the [Syria](http://www.reuters.com/places/syria?lc=int_mb_1001) issue." In other words, the US needs to think of the bigger picture when determining the most diplomatic route in dealing with Syria.

A third reason the US might support the existence of the Assad regime is to not add to the conflict and death toll. In June of 2013, the New York Times reported over one hundred thousand deaths had occurred since the civil war began in 2011. In January of 2014, that number increased by 50% to one hundred and fifty thousand casualties including women, children, babies, civilians, and of course, members of both military factions. Of other civil wars it has been said, “Something is wanting, and must be done, or we shall be involved in all the horror of failure, and civil war without prospect of its termination.” Is there a point to killing off the people you serve? And maybe outside forces should let Syria find their own solutions and not add to the carnage.

What are some reasons for the US to be involved in terminating the Assad regime? Since life is about being able to view both-really ALL sides to a situation, let us say that the last reason stated above might also be the first reason for Assad to step down as Syria’s President. As the head of state, one who is at the nexus of the strife and unrest in his country, the blood of over one hundred and fifty thousand Syrian citizens from all walks of life is on his hands. One cannot simply think of this magnitude of casualties as “collateral damage” expected from conflict. One has to consider the sanctity of human life and someone needs to lead a movement to see that the killing needs to stop.

The US would also want to see the power of Assad diminished with regard to the use of chemical weapons, in several capacities-so they can’t be used to brutalize and destroy the Syrian populace or the citizens in neighboring countries. The Washington Post ran an article about this topic last August, 2013, in which it stated, “Any U.S. military action, Carney said, would be a response to "the prohibited use of chemical weapons against civilians." [US Secretary of State] Kerry emphasized that "there must be accountability for those who use the world’s most heinous weapons against the world’s most vulnerable people." What he did not say at any point was that the United States would be entering the war to decisively end it or that the time had come for the world to remove Assad from power.” Although direct threats to the Presidency were not clearly stated, the message was there.

Another reason for the United States to denounce Assad’s leadership and to support his removal from power is that even with efforts at diplomacy, it seems Syria is not honoring protocol. At the end of February 2014, UPI shared information in an article whose title was, “US Slams Syrian Regime for Punitive Actions Against Geneva II Opposition Delegates.” In the piece, we learn, “Following reports that the Assad regime has arrested delegates' family members, designated delegates as terrorists, and seized delegates' assets, the State Department issued a [statement](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/02/222610.htm) Wednesday calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the unfairly arrested, including delegate Mohammed Sabra's brother, Mahmoud Sabra.” Alleged actions such as these beg the question, “How does one enter into any kind of diplomatic understanding if the participants are not respecting the rules?

In the end, the voices that shout loudest for freedom and justice for ALL citizens will be the voices that will be heard. It has long been said, that there are “three sides to every story;” yours, mine and the truth,” and while each side truly believes they stand for the truth, it is up to each one of us, as citizens of the world, to do the research, discover the core issues on both sides-or ALL sides of the conflict, and then determine what the truth is for YOU. It is my intention to have enlightened each one of you regarding this very serious crisis. It is up to the United States to choose the course of resolution deemed the most effective and humanitarian for all sides.

Thank you all.