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Potomac war hawks target Middle East, again

By Bob Barr
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The war hawks are circling the Potomac. The drum-beating and saber-rattling is growing louder. Calls for the United States to intervene militarily in yet another Middle Eastern country are being repeated with increasing frequency.

This scenario is becoming distressingly familiar. Over the past several years, our country's armed forces have intervened in this troubled region time and again as part of a noble effort to rid the area of pesky dictators and instill "democracies" in their stead. Iran and Syria are the latest countries on our list of potential military targets. While support for intervening in Iran appears to be dying down — at least for the moment — support for intervening in Syria appears to be increasing.

The situation on the ground in Syria is indeed troubling, as protests against the government of Bashar Assad are being met with brutal military action. An estimated 6,000 men, women and children have been killed in demonstrations over the past year, and some 32,000 injured — and these estimates may be conservative.

Never one to shy away from calls to commit our military to faraway lands, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) explained in a recent editorial that the United States can no longer stand by and watch these atrocities; we simply *must* get involved. This intervention, opined McCain, would not just be humanitarian, but also part of our "national security policy" since Iran is Assad's "main ally."

There is, of course, no denying that the measures being employed by Assad against protesters in his own country are brutal and tragic, and they should be condemned and opposed. There is also solid intelligence linking the regimes in Damascus and Tehran.

The real question, however, is whether these factors alone provide a legitimate “national security” basis on which to justify an American military intervention in Syria. The American people are not so sure. The public is weary from the more than a decade of confused and costly fighting in Afghanistan (to say nothing of the multi-year and multi-trillion-dollar escapade in Iraq). A recent Pew Research poll shows that nearly 64% of Americans believe we have *no* responsibility to become involved in Syria. That’s sensible, especially since the results of our support for regime change in Egypt and Libya remain uncertain.

Presidential elections often have the effect of bringing out the hawkish side of candidates from both major parties. Hopefully this will not be the case this summer and fall, despite McCain’s certain efforts to do so. The costs — both direct and indirect — are far too high.