

**By Gloria Oh**

With NATO, inaction speaks louder than words. Post-Chicago summit, one message has been made glaringly clear for the Atlantic alliance: military intervention in Syria will not occur in the near future. "A NATO ally has to come forward and request that type of planning," said Ivo Daalder, the US Ambassador to NATO. Yet during the two days world leaders met in the Chicago, there was no mention of a Syria action plan. "NATO has no intention to intervene in Syria," said NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. His sole reference during the summit to the 15-month-long conflict not only underscored the alliance's 'we-won't go-there' posture, but also displayed an irritation with the question's being at the top of reporters' minds. Apart from diplomatic remarks expressing concern, Rasmussen gave no other indication that further steps would be taken. "We strongly condemn the behavior of the Syrian security forces and their crackdowns on the Syrian population," he said.

"It's clear when it comes to Syria, they're willing to say the right things, but they're not willing to back up their words with concrete actions," said Robert Zarate, policy director of the Washington-D.C.-based Foreign Policy Initiative, of the alliance. Zarate said he strongly doubts there will be any significant action from the US before the US presidential election in November because of "political calculations." European member countries are preoccupied with their own concerns as well, with austerity affecting capacity building for new missions. "They have the Eurozone crisis to deal with and in recent memory, they haven't been investing in their military," he said of NATO's European allies.

NATO's involvement with Libya last year, which ultimately led to Gaddafi's ouster from power, has been viewed as a precedent for taking action in Syria. But foreign-policy experts say there are many factors that make a Syrian intervention more difficult. Caution may stem from a lack of confidence in coming out of an intervention successfully. "We're not sure we can win. And if you can't be sure on that, you can make the situation worse," said Richard Longworth, a senior fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, a leading U.S. think tank. "It's one thing to have a lot of military power, but it's another thing to control and change society, which we haven't been able to do." Incentives also separate the two countries. "Syria doesn't have much oil. Libya did," Longworth said. "Second, Syria is an ally with Russia. NATO's relations with Russia are tense right now. That's a matter of reluctance."

Russia's and China's veto on U.N. Security Council's resolutions over the prolonged violence in Syria have been obstacles for collective action by the international community, thwarting what many view as a mandate for foreign intervention by military force. But the continuing violence, which in late May claimed the lives of 49 children and 34 women, according to the United Nations, during a massacre in the village of Houla, led the Security Council to unanimously condemn "in the strongest possible terms" the "outrageous use of force against civilian population." While Russia backed this statement, their Syrian ally was reluctant to place all of the blame on government forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad. Despite diplomatic efforts such as the six-point peace plan brokered by Kofi Annan, the joint United Nations and Arab League special envoy to Syria, the killings have not stopped, with neither side abiding by the UN's call for a ceasefire.

There is no doubt the end of Assad's regime would mark a momentous moment in Arab Spring. Syrian-American activists involved in opposition efforts say they are "waiting for their day" but are also growing more jaded about the situation abroad. "I think we were disillusioned by what happened in Tunisia, a revolution in one day," said Sana Khatib, an activist working with the Syrian American Council and founder of Text for Syria, which donates aid funds to those

afflicted by the violence and destruction. The resignation of Egypt's former president came within a matter of months and then Libya followed with "the intervention of the world and the death of Gaddafi basically publicised to the world on YouTube."

"I used to wake up every morning and check my text messages to see if he (Assad) had resigned yet," she said. "It was very naïve of me. I didn't realize that Syria was a completely different story." NATO's future role in democracy building and peacekeeping could be renewed with more proactive involvement with Syria. A successful mission there could revitalise multilateral cooperation and provide more legitimate grounds for negotiations, but the alliance has currently chosen to stand on the sidelines, watching on, as the death toll climbs.

***The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the EUISS.***