Syria: Is diplomacy enough?

As I’ve indicated before, Syria is tangential to our primary focus as an organization supporting progressive change for the benefit of all Israeli citizens, and a secure peace with all its neighbors. Last week, I was given the opportunity to publish my personal view of the Syrian situation, at the Jewish Currents “Blog-Shmog.” The following is most of the concluding half of “Saving Lives in Syria- Diplomacy Is Not Enough” (representing only myself):

... I don’t advocate the U.S. being the world’s policeman, but I do support an alliance of world powers — backed up and bucked up by the U.S. — to act collectively as the world’s policeman. This is why I’m so high on the NATO-Arab alliance that succeeded in overthrowing Qaddafi. This [kind of intervention to save civilian lives from the vengeance of a deranged dictator] was supposed to be the UN’s job, but hasn’t been, usually because of the Russian and Chinese veto power... The most flagrant examples of the UN’s failure occurred two decades ago, when UN forces were withdrawn from Rwanda just as the genocide began, and in the Balkans, when UN soldiers stood by as impotent observers in the face of the massacres of civilians in Bosnia.

I would support the establishment of safe zones within Syria to safeguard the lives of millions of Syrians who have been forced to flee their homes. This would likely require some use of air power to defend them, but I’d want an international coalition to do this, and I think the Turks, Gulf Arabs and Europeans (e.g., the French) should take the lead in such operations – much as they did in Libya.

... As for Israel, it doesn’t have one clear agenda in the conflict, except for the hope that it doesn’t spill over, and that Iran or Hezbollah don’t retaliate against it (as they’ve threatened) if the U.S. attacks. If a democratic movement overthrew Assad, this would probably be best for Israel, but even that’s not obvious. Assad kept the Golan border quiet until recently, but Syria’s also been a conduit for arms from Iran to Hezbollah. Some Israelis think (as did Edward Luttwak in a New York Times op-ed a few weeks ago), that it’s in both the Israeli and U.S. interest to
just keep the conflict going, with Assad and his Hezbollah allies killing off Jihadis (and vice versa), indefinitely. But I’m neither so cynical nor so bloody-minded.