

CURRENT HISTORY

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“The Assad government watched how uprisings unfolded in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, took stock of international reactions to these events, and, in response, developed strategies to maximize its probabilities of survival.”

How the Syrian Regime Outsmarted Its Enemies

REINOU LEENDERS

Hammered for more than two years by mass protests and a vicious insurgency, the Syrian regime is still there: shaken, damaged, but alive and kicking. The latest boost to its survival came from its maneuverings, with the help of its staunch ally Russia, to avert US strikes following the government's use of chemical weapons against its civilian population in the suburbs of Damascus in August 2013. The regime's dramatic acknowledgment of its chemical weapons stock and its promise to hand it over are likely to preoccupy its enemies abroad in what is sure to become a protracted process of seeking and destroying chemical facilities in the midst of war. Contrary to Western insistence on regime change since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in March 2011, the chemical-weapons initiative lets President Bashar al-Assad off the hook, at least for now. But in other ways, too, his regime has managed to stack the cards in its favor.

Assad's narrative of Al Qaeda jihadists dominating the insurgency, combined with his portrayal of the uprising as driven by raw sectarian hatred, has now gained wide currency, rallying non-Sunni minorities and allies at home and in the region firmly behind the regime and paralyzing meaningful Western intervention or support for the opposition. The Assad government has effectively thwarted suggestions to impose a no-fly zone or support the rebels with air power, doing everything it could to prevent a “Libya scenario.”

Prospects for a negotiated settlement or transition are equally dim.

With diplomatic efforts going nowhere, Assad's regime has incrementally stepped up its use of lethal weaponry, carefully testing what the world would tolerate or ignore, and then embarking on indiscriminate use. Through its aggressive use of force, the government has managed to thwart the rebels' advances and is now engaging in a war of attrition to retake territory.

All these fairly successful regime tactics stand in stark contrast with assessments that, in his response to the uprising and insurgency, Assad has been detached from reality or too unsophisticated to channel the mounting demands of citizens into less-threatening avenues. The idea that he will soon fall may now be discredited, but the image of a disconnected and clumsy regime still enjoys wide acceptance even after government forces have put a halt to rebel advances.

For an accurate reading of the Syrian crisis, and for anyone contemplating any sort of intervention, this assessment needs to be seriously reconsidered. It simply fails to capture what Syrian protesters and rebels, and their backers abroad, are up against. Indeed, a closer look at how the regime has fared since the Arab Spring reached the country in March 2011 suggests that it has been highly calculating, even rational. It is learning and adapting, by trial and error—still besieged, but dangerously close to coming out on top.

REPRESSION AND MOBILIZATION

The assessment that the regime was out of touch with the dramatic changes sweeping through the region appeared to be underscored on the eve of the Syrian uprising, when Assad gave an interview to the *Wall Street Journal*. He confidently declared

REINOU LEENDERS is a reader in international politics and Middle East studies at King's College London. He is the author of *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon* (Cornell University Press, 2012) and co-editor of *Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran* (Stanford University Press, 2013).

that Syria would be immune to the wave of protests in the Arab world due to its “exceptionalism,” based on his government’s adaptability and the popularity of its defiant foreign policies.

Of course, he was wrong. But so were most pundits and widely accepted theories on popular mobilization and revolutions. The latter stress that people mobilize when they see “structural opportunities” such as factionalism, coups, defeat in war, or any other development revealing sudden cracks within the ruling elite. Before the uprising, the Syrian regime did not experience any of this, and hence it felt assured that it could weather the storm raging next door. Assad and the regime were not the only ones to fail to see that the cause of mobilization would not be sudden regime weaknesses, but widely shared perceptions among discontented citizens that the protest movement was strong enough to take to the streets and pose a real challenge, making it worth joining.

When the government opened fire on Syria’s early risers in Dara’a, a backwater in the Hauran region in the southwest of the country, repression ignited and radicalized further protests. The people of Dara’a saw regime violence as adding insult to the injury inflicted by the arrest of two women and fifteen schoolchildren, which caused them to discount fears of repression and demand their right to dignity.

Mobilization in heavily repressive environments like Syria’s is rare, primarily because activists have few clues about the preferences of others and little information about the level of shared willingness to take significant risks by going into the streets. Yet, when mobilization somehow does occur under these conditions, it sends important signals to others that inform their decisions whether to join the movement.

Assad only had to turn on his television set to watch reports on Tunisia and Egypt and see what popular uprisings could lead to. From this perspective, moral considerations aside, it made perfect sense to ruthlessly clamp down on the early protests. That this policy of repression did not have the desired result of stopping the protests from gaining critical mass has more to do with the remarkable and networked resources, capabilities, and determination of the protesters than with a presumed miscalculation of the regime.

COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

The Assad regime appeared to have no coherent response to the rapidly spreading protests

aside from indiscriminate repression. But until the siege of Dara’a in April 2011, Syria’s fragmented landscape of prevailing local, regional, and transnational identities made it seem likely that events in Dara’a would remain an ultimately local affair of limited national significance. Even activists in Damascus initially doubted whether Dara’a could be a sufficient trigger for nationwide mobilization. The regime thought likewise. It portrayed the protests as expressing merely local grievances, allowed members of parliament from the area to highlight protesters’ Hawrani identity, and initiated a “national dialogue,” culminating in proposed reforms of local governance and December 2011 local elections.

Meanwhile, the regime erected checkpoints throughout the country, as if to physically underline the nation’s fragmentation and cripple mobilization. Obviously, the government’s attempt to contain the protests locally failed, but not because it was unresponsive. It failed because protesters managed to turn anger about and solidarity with the plight of their counterparts elsewhere in the nation into a major tool of mobilization. This effectively lifted Dara’a out of its perceived marginality to the country as a whole.

From the regime’s perspective, it could be argued that brute force against spreading mass demonstrations throughout the country ultimately paid off. Force failed to crush the diffusion of protests, but it certainly contributed to the militarization of anti-regime mobilization, markedly so at the end of 2011. Assad may have reasoned that this would transform the confrontation into a game that the regime, given its superior military capabilities, would stand a much better chance to of winning or surviving. Indeed, the military standoff that ensued seems to contain much less prospect for regime change than the peaceful protests in the first few months of the uprising.

The government’s tactics in this respect were understood by some Syrian activists. Their peaceful defiance seemed like small fry compared with the threat of machine-gun-toting insurgents. Yet they were systematically targeted for arrest, beating, torture, and assassination by a regime that knew that it was more likely to be overrun by the masses such activists mobilized than by armed insurgents whose numbers pale in comparison. Whatever its exact calculation, the government proved right to have gambled on its comparative advantage in military force. To date, no significant

foreign support has materialized that could tip the balance in the rebels' favor.

The more militarized the Syrian uprising became, the more jihadist fighters rose to prominence, if only because they were fully motivated and better equipped and experienced to engage the regime militarily. Of course, this was exactly the kind of opposition that the regime had claimed to be countering in its justifications for stamping out overwhelmingly peaceful mobilization in the first place.

NETWORK VULNERABILITIES

From the beginning, Assad realized that protesters were so elusive and persistent largely because they drew on diffuse, clan-based, or tribal solidarity networks. In many ways this posed a serious obstacle for security forces and the regime's intelligence agencies, the *mukhabarat*, in quelling the protests, if only because they failed to fully penetrate such clan-based networks. In the early days of the uprising, security forces arrested en masse members of the Abu Zeid clan in Dara'a instead of taking out its key mobilizers. The regime then changed course by courting leaders and heads of clans and tribes throughout the country. This approach ultimately paid off only in Dara'a, where regime control was more or less restored, but it suggests that the regime was reading the uprising correctly.

Similarly, the government understood that the networks enabling and fueling mobilization to an important degree centered on cross-border movements and crime, which provided the opposition with key resources and social capital to withstand the regime's onslaught. The government thus launched a campaign branding protesters as "a bunch of smugglers," sent its own unsavory characters to compete with these networks (including former inmates who were conditionally released), and shut the borders for weeks on end.

These efforts did not put an end to the protests or the insurgency, but Assad's tactics prevented the emergence of a clear and strong opposition leadership, which could have put irresistible pressure on the regime to accept a transition of power. Lacking coherent leadership, the uprising soon began to lose focus. None of the more savvy dissidents, who understood the government's comparative advantage in violence, could stop increasingly

infuriated protesters from calling for jihad, celebrating anti-Alawite firebrand clerics, and embracing armed resistance. The predominance of loose and leaderless networks that at first enabled mobilization became a liability.

It also prompted a lasting rift between, on the one hand, local protesters and activists and, on the other, expatriate Syrians who scrambled to claim ownership of the "revolution." Established in October 2011, the Syrian National Council (SNC) was soon criticized for being out of touch with events and actors on the ground, as foreign powers looked in vain for an effective and genuine revolutionary leadership. The broader and more inclusive Syrian National Coalition, established in December 2012, met a similar fate, prompting Assad to dismiss it as a gathering of disjointed exiles spending their time abroad in luxury hotels. In September 2013, 13 large rebel groups, including some associated with the Free Syrian Army, concluded in a joint statement that exile groups did not represent them.

THE IDENTITY CARD

At first, both the regime and the protesters stressed their all-inclusive credentials when it came to Syria's multi-sectarian landscape. For decades the government had carefully built an image

of itself as a guarantor of the country's sectarian peace, notwithstanding the fact that most of its key decision makers, its security services, and its officer corps are recruited from within the Alawite community, which constitutes a mere 11 percent of the population. Still, such claims were more than hollow rhetoric: The regime made real efforts to incorporate and co-opt Sunni Arabs, first by way of civil service appointments and, more recently, when regime strongmen intermarried with the families of Sunni Arab entrepreneurs. For their part, protesters underscored their nonsectarian intentions, even when they overwhelmingly drew on the Sunni Arab community, which makes up some 60 percent of the population.

The regime invented, encouraged, and manipulated sectarian divisions that dramatically altered—and undermined—the uprising's dynamics. Pro-government militias, together with the armed forces, engaged in sectarian killings. The massacres of Hula and al-Qubair in May and June 2012, inflicted by regime forces, were a turn-

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ing point, setting a pattern for many more. One reason for this sectarian strategy appears to lie in the government's initial difficulty with identifying and targeting its opponents' leadership. After it had swept up all members of the Abu Zeid clan in Dara'a, the regime applied the same logic throughout the country, taking Sunni Arab identity markers as a proxy for anti-regime sentiments and subversive activities. Government forces combed mixed areas for suspected opposition supporters by targeting those with Sunni Arab names, or simply flattened entire villages and urban neighborhoods populated by Sunni Arabs.

By exaggerating and encouraging sectarian divisions, Assad and his coterie effectively cast doubt on the opposition's plans for the country's Alawite, Christian, and Shiite minorities, should the regime fall. That, in turn, facilitated the creation of pro-regime vigilante groups such as the Alawite *Shabiha* and "popular committees" that recruit primarily among these minorities. In other ways, too, mounting sectarianism served the regime well. It bolstered the jihadist-Salafist camp in the opposition, which cast its struggle as one against a heretical Alawite regime and its Shiite agents (described as *rawafidh*, "rejectionists" of the true faith). From a regional perspective, this placed the country and its conflict firmly on the growing Sunni-versus-Shiite fault line that had emerged since the US invasion of Iraq. Iran, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government soon came to Assad's rescue.

The regime also played on the country's ethnic splits. In April 2011 it made concessions to the Kurds (10 to 15 percent of the population), first by granting citizenship to stateless Kurds, and then by allowing the Democratic Union Party, aligned with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, to effectively control parts of Kurdish-majority areas in northeast Syria. This enabled the government to divert scarce troops from the Kurdish-controlled areas, and also drove a wedge between the Kurds and the Sunni Arab-dominated Syrian opposition, which resented the Kurds for failing to play a significant role in the insurgency.

Kurdish leaders began to distrust the opposition for its insistence on Syria's Arab identity, in disregard of Kurdish rights and autonomy claims. After more than two years of bickering, the SNC

in September 2013 finally agreed to drop the word "Arab" from its envisaged post-Assad "Syrian Republic." Yet this belated concession lost its significance as Kurdish militias engaged in repeated clashes with jihadist fighters from nearby Raqqa, effectively making the Kurds an auxiliary force against the regime's fiercest enemies. Last but not least, de facto autonomy for the Kurds saddled Turkey, perhaps the most vocal enthusiast of Syrian regime change, with an armed, unpredictable entity waving PKK flags at its very doorstep.

By playing its identity card the regime certainly ran the risk of blowback, since its sectarianism could alienate the mainly Sunni Arab rank and file of its armed forces. Yet defections, after peaking in the first year of the uprising, have remained limited and have not seriously affected military performance. This has largely resulted from the regime's reliance on its key "praetorian" units—the elite 4th Armored Division, the Republican Guards, and the Special Forces regiments—that are staffed mainly by Alawites and are better equipped and trained. To maximize their utility, these units were rotated

and paired with regular units to counter defections and to ensure that "shoot to kill" orders were strictly obeyed. With their growing complicity in the regime's atrocities, the appetite for defection among regular

forces has waned, just as a shared sense of threat increased with the rise of their jihadist enemies.

WAR ECONOMY

Most Syria watchers and commentators blame the uprising largely on the government's abandoning its populist "social contract," essentially a patrimonial arrangement extending material favors beyond the regime's immediate circles in exchange for acquiescence in its rule. One-time beneficiaries felt increasingly marginalized by selective economic reforms and the rampant cronyism that accompanied them, especially since Bashar al-Assad took office in 2000. With increasing poverty and socioeconomic inequality, "something had to give," as the scholar Bassam Haddad put it.

An impressive array of government measures in response to the uprising suggests that its own analysis matches the consensus view. Since the beginning of the uprising it has taken the following steps: raising salaries of public servants; granting fixed contracts to irregular staff at public

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institutions; providing public employment for a large number of young people; reversing fuel subsidy cuts; lowering consumer taxes; forgiving farmers' and manufacturers' debts; setting higher prices for cotton growers; and reducing the fee for avoiding military service. In addition, the government has used monetary policy vigorously to contain inflation and prevent a collapse of the Syrian pound. Cuts in taxes and fees, in addition to a temporary ban on sheep exports, further contributed to keeping inflation from reaching the levels that struck Iraq under international sanctions in the 1990s. The regime ensured that, at least within its enclaves, government institutions continued to function and civil servants got paid.

Private entrepreneurs, dependent on the government, were encouraged, and some say forced, to spend considerable sums on humanitarian aid to the displaced and suffering civilians in regime-controlled areas. International aid providers, primarily operating under the umbrella of the United Nations refugee agency, were forced to work with the regime if they hoped to stay in the country. To increasingly war-weary citizens the message was clear: If you value a modicum of normalcy, the regime is your best bet for survival. The lawlessness, looting, and largely bungled attempts to provide basic services in besieged rebel-held areas underscored the regime's argument.

THE PROPAGANDA BATTLE

The Assad government's media policies have been commonly written off as a dismal failure and yet more evidence of its inertia and lack of ingenuity. Certainly, the regime's media outlets, whether state-owned or "private" mouthpieces such as *ad-Dunya* television, were no match for protesters' increasingly sophisticated use of social media. At times the official media reporting bordered on the ridiculous and can be safely assumed to have undermined the government's cause. Yet its efforts to counter or dilute the reach and impact of protesters' media campaigns have had some success.

Stirring doubts about the authenticity and reliability of its opponents' reports has been key to the regime's media response. Thus, it was quick to launch a weekly television series, "Lies of the Opposition," to claim in often excruciating detail that opposition activists, in collaboration with international and Arab media outlets, doctored YouTube footage to conceal their secret agendas and violent methods. Government forces and loyalists uploaded their own footage, parading their tro-

phies, showing "evidence" of activists' arms caches, or warning opponents what could happen to them. The regime was also the source of clearly doctored footage uploaded in order to stir doubts about the authenticity of the opposition's digital media campaign. Syrian army soldiers allegedly staged their own (faked) atrocities, footage of which they sold to Arab satellite television stations.

All these practices, along with the regime's refusal to allow international journalists to report freely from the country, undermined the ability of the opposition to effectively transmit its messages to foreign audiences, as doubts set in about the credibility of social media material coming from Syria. In short, Assad made important progress in creating a virtual version of the proverbial fog of war.

When jihadists, including foreign fighters, entered the battlefield in early 2012, Syrian state media reporting on the "Islamist terrorist conspiracy" no longer appeared absurd. Footage of rebel atrocities, whether pushed by the regime or not, increasingly reached and helped to shape perceptions of both domestic and Western audiences. Acutely aware of the need to win the propaganda battle, the government mobilized English-speaking businessmen at home and hired public relations firms abroad to project the image of a necessary, all-out war against Islamist extremism.

It is true that the two main extremist and Al Qaeda-affiliated rebel movements, Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, currently control Raqqa, the northern parts of Idlib, and Aleppo, in addition to a narrow strip on the border with Iraq, near Deir al-Zour. This is significant, but much of the reporting by Western media leaves unmentioned the fact that large swaths of Syria are under the control of other rebel forces aligned with the Free Syrian Army. Indeed, it is the latter who are currently doing most of the fighting against the regime.

LESSONS FROM ABROAD

The Assad government watched how uprisings unfolded in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, took stock of international reactions to these events, and, in response, developed strategies to maximize its probabilities of survival. Developments abroad received close attention from state media, suggesting a keen interest in lessons for Syria.

For instance, the regime took measures, with partial success, to prevent a "Benghazi scenario" in Syria, whereby an enclave near international borders serves as a launching pad and logisti-

cal hub for the opposition. Its measures in this respect were complementary to its efforts to cut off rebel supplies, as illustrated by its disproportionately large concentration of troops in Dara'a, bordering Jordan, and the siege and capture of Qusayr, near the Lebanese border, in June 2013.

Even more important was Assad's resort to a remarkable, gradual dosing of lethal violence and repression, as if to gauge outsiders' tolerance levels—which, if overstepped, might have given momentum to those pressing for international intervention, as happened in Libya in March 2011. Thus, the regime began to use heavy artillery in the siege of Homs in February 2012. When that did not trigger an international response, the regime started to rely on its air force to relieve its strained troops, starting with limited helicopter attacks and escalating to the use of fighter jets to pound rebel-held territory. With still no international response, Scud missiles and rockets were employed, first in December 2012 against military targets and then against residential areas. Barrel bombs, napalm, and cluster bombs followed.

Then the regime turned to its chemical weapons, first at a scale sufficiently limited to allow for deniability, and then far more significantly in eastern Ghouta on August 21, 2013. The regime may have misjudged the risk that using chemical weapons would bring the United States and some of its allies dangerously close to carrying out military strikes. However, from the regime's perspective it simply may have been worth taking the risk, since rebels in the suburbs of Damascus had closed in on a large military complex on Mount Qasioun, which forms a critical line of defense for downtown Damascus and the presidential palace on Mount Mezzeh.

In any case, the regime quickly turned the tables by allowing UN inspectors to dismantle its chemical weapons stocks. From Assad's perspective, the deal has numerous expected payoffs. Most immediately, it removes the threat of US strikes that, even if limited in scale, would likely have targeted the same military installations on Mount Qasioun. It turns Syria's status as an international pariah into that of a necessary partner in a virtually unprecedented experiment in countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction under the Chemical Weapons Convention. The deal will

also likely complicate Western and Arab support for arming the rebels. The threat of renewed Israeli strikes prompted by concerns over arms shipments to Hezbollah has somewhat lessened, since they might risk derailing the process. An alleged Israeli airstrike on October 31 appears to have been delayed until the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons that same day reported significant progress in dismantling Syria's capability to produce chemical weapons. Finally, the West's focus on the use of chemical weapons seems to imply that there are no internationally imposed limits on the regime's use of conventional weapons, however destructive and lethal.

Meanwhile, Assad has not given an inch with regard to suggestions for a negotiated exit. He embraced the idea of an international conference, called Geneva II, to discuss a "transition" in Syria only when circumstances had become least conducive for it to produce any real results. Assad counted on the opposition's refusal to attend the conference, waited for Russian-US disagreement on what the envisaged

transition would entail, and trusted that Washington would refuse to give Iran a seat at the conference table. The United States and Russia are still talking about Geneva II, and now the opposition—not Assad—stands accused

of obstinacy. In addition, the regime's refusal to engage in any real dialogue helped prevent defections of high officials and senior officers from reaching critical levels. Assad's stance allowed him to convey a powerful message that he would not abandon his agents of repression.

Regime "learning" also drew on advice and assistance from allies, primarily Iran and Hezbollah, on how to deal with the insurgency. Qassem Suleimani, the head of Iran's al-Quds Force, reportedly has revamped Syria's competing security forces and intelligence agencies, coordinates Iranian and Syrian troops, trains pro-regime militias, and helps run an elaborate system to monitor rebel movements. Hezbollah is widely believed to have planned and led the capture of Qusayr, and likely assists regime efforts to regain territory elsewhere. The head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, Mohammad Ali Jafari, acknowledged that his force has been "giving intellectual and advisory help and exchanging experiences" with the Syrian government. Besides offering expertise with the

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military hardware it supplies, Iran may have introduced improvised and highly lethal weaponry to the Syrian regime, including the notorious barrel bomb, thrown indiscriminately onto residential areas from helicopters and first used in August 2012, and so-called improvised rocket-assisted munitions, or “lob bombs.”

Syrian government documents published by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* suggest that visiting Iranian officials gave the regime advice on how to circumvent international sanctions. One may also speculate that the Iranian regime’s suppression of the Green Movement was the main “experience” that Jafari shared with his Syrian counterparts. There are some striking echoes in Syrian regime tactics of some of the methods used against Iranian protesters in 2009. The Assad government’s use of militias in infiltrating and obstructing demonstrations is similar to the tactics used by the Iranian Basij militia. Syria’s “Electronic Army” is likely to have been modeled on Iran’s “Web Crime Unit,” set up in 2009 to counter internet activists. Likewise, the Syrian regime’s courting of Christian community leaders and its implicit deal-making with Kurdish groups resemble the Iranian government’s exploitation of a disconnect between the Green Movement and minority groups in the provinces, including the Kurds.

It can be equally profitable to learn from less friendly sources, or even from one’s enemies. Regime agents reportedly flooded the country’s black markets with cheap but sabotaged ammunition that explodes in a gunman’s hands when fired—a tactic used by US forces in counterinsurgency operations in Iraq.

REGIONAL WILD CARD

Despite the ruthlessness otherwise displayed by Assad’s regime, it is noteworthy that thus far it has refrained from actively and aggressively playing its “regional card” by facilitating a spillover of the conflict to neighboring countries as the ultimate price for its downfall. There have been ample reminders that a regional spillover is conceivable: Lebanese critics of the Syrian regime have been assassinated; pro-regime combatants have clashed with anti-regime forces in Lebanon, primarily in Tripoli; and regime agents reportedly have infiltrated Syrian refugees arriving in Jordan. More generally, the regime’s sectarian tactics coincide with and deepen perceived regional fault lines between Sunnis and Shiites. Assad has warned that Western action against his govern-

ment would “cause an earthquake” and “burn the whole region.”

Yet the much-feared regional war over his regime’s fate has yet to commence outside Syria, despite its potential to bring violence and instability right to the heart of its neighbors’ capitals. It is as if the regime realized that if the specter of regional fallout materializes, it will lose its deterrent effect on those considering support for the rebels or other interventions. Meanwhile, Syrian refugees in neighboring countries—now exceeding two million and still growing in numbers and in the burden they place on local economies and host countries’ stability—are a reminder of the regional stakes of the regime’s endgame, should the conflict ever reach that stage.

TRIAL AND ERROR

The Assad regime has suffered major setbacks and losses, some of which could have been prevented or lessened had it responded differently. Yet from the government’s perspective, and in terms of Assad’s professed inclination to put all his policies at the service of its survival, the damage has been worth it. This is not to say that the regime’s counterrevolutionary tactics are part of a master plan carefully drawn up and then purposefully implemented. Trial and error better describe the regime’s strategy. Many of the government’s responses and policies appear to have originated in varied and often contradictory impulses and actions of multiple regime figures. However, this suggests a degree of collectively generated, ad hoc adaptability that is less susceptible to the risks of tunnel vision and fatal miscalculations typically associated with autocratic discretion.

Much of the ongoing discussion regarding what the outside world can or should do to stop or contain the bloodshed in Syria has failed to acknowledge, let alone address, this reality. Denouncing the regime for its atrocities may be intended to muster support for intervention among reluctant Western audiences. Alternatively, as many Syrians suffering from the regime’s onslaught suspect, crude portrayals of Assad’s misrule may be designed to compensate for doing nothing or very little on the ground. Yet this should not stand in the way of a clear-eyed analysis of the regime’s responsiveness, adaptability, and resilience, which any outside intervention will have to reckon with, whether it takes the form of sanctions, diplomacy, arming the opposition, or direct military action. ■