

The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

[Assad's Visit to China Fails to Achieve his Main Goal](#)

By Loretta Wolchko

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad recently visited China to attend at the annual Asian Games. His visit in late September was his first to China in almost two decades, with the last visit occurring in 2004. It is widely speculated that this visit by al-Assad is a diplomatic attempt at securing friendships and funds for his regime from Xi Jinping. This endeavor takes place amid the civil war that has torn apart Syria and claimed half a million lives over the last decade. This visit comes only a few months after Syria was fully reinstated as a member of the Arab League after its suspension twelve years ago - right when the war began.

Assad and his wife landed at Hangzhou International Airport greeted by cheering children handing them bouquets as they walked a red carpet. He would later attend the opening games in Hangzhou with Xi to discuss long-term cooperation economically, politically, etc. Other political leaders in the region were also in attendance, but Assad had the most to gain and lose from his attendance and correspondence with Xi.

It was anticipated that Assad would emphasize the need for financial support during this time. The Syrian president's visit comes amid an extensive period of Western sanctions on the country. Both the U.S. and some European states have refused to provide any reconstruction funds until a settlement is adopted via a U.N. resolution. This has left Assad with few resources to turn to.

In addition to Assad's finances, it was announced by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the two leaders would discuss strengthening bilateral relations. Subsequent to the unique trip, China declared that it would continue pursuing a "strategic partnership" with Syria. In addition, Chinese state media stated that the presidents share a mutual detest for foreign intervention, a clear swing at the U.S. and the West's general influence.

Because of the atrocities committed against the Syrian people following the Arab Spring, many countries that were once allied or neutral with Syria have isolated Assad. China is one of the few who have not completely shut him out thus far after twelve years of conflict. The two have had amicable relations since the founding of the PRC, with Syria being one of the first Middle Eastern countries to recognize it as a sovereign nation. During Assad's last visit, then-President Hu Jintao expressed concerns over disputes in the region. Despite his concerns, he remained firm in his stance that Syria was a nation of integrity and importance to the international community. This sentiment is not widely shared, however.

In recent months, demonstrations against Assad have become more frequent. Groups such as the Druze, who have historically been neutral in the conflict, have been holding protests for over a month at this point. The protests from the Druze have inclined communities in government strongholds to begin their own demonstrations against the tyrant. Developments such as these within the conflict are reported to be of growing cause for concern for Assad and his regime. Experts on the conflict, as well as Syrians themselves, have theorized that the growing

unrest has driven al-Assad into a corner.

The war has decimated Syria to a point where Assad is now networking with Xi for funds and overall support for his regime. During his term, Xi has remained in Assad's corner. The former has used veto power on the U.N. Security Council to prevent resolutions from being passed that would hold Assad accountable for his crimes. Both Xi and Assad are pariahs in the international community, isolated by the West and neighboring countries. Last year, Syria joined China's Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to develop infrastructure internationally. From this partnership, both parties seek to gain: China wants to secure a larger presence in the Middle East beyond trade and Assad needs assistance rebuilding his war-torn country.

This cooperation between China and Syria has withstood decades of global tensions and political unrest. The commonalities upon which this relationship is built are ones of dishonesty, greed, and absolute power. It is widely known that China is looking to combat U.S. hegemony and to knock the latter out of its place on the world stage, so to speak. It is unlikely that Xi will simply hand Assad several billion dollars to help bring Syria out of its turmoil. However, this does not mean that the partnership does not call for any concern from the West. It cannot be predicted what will come as a result of the partnership, or even just Assad's sojourn to the Middle Kingdom. What can be said, however, is that these developments should not be taken lightly. China and Syria are not and have not been friends of the U.S. for quite some time now. Their values towards democracy and human rights are in full contradiction with the U.S.'s own. The U.S. must continue to monitor both Assad and Xi more closely than ever.