



[What's Next in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime?](#)

Earlier this week on Sunday, Syrian opposition forces took control of the capital city of Damascus and ousted the regime of despot Bashar al-Assad, forcing him to flee the country. The rapid and stunning military offensive that toppled the Assad government swept through major cities across Syria including Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and, eventually Damascus, in a mere 11 days. Opposition forces were clearly able to capitalize on the Assad regime's major backers of Iran and Russia being distracted elsewhere, yet the swiftness in which the campaign was carried out still came as a surprise to most observers. One thing that experts have been quick to point out is that the fall of the Assad regime is partly of his own making, as the former dictator's repeated refusal to engage in political dialogue with the Syrian opposition undoubtedly contributed to the overthrowing of his government. The deposing of the brutal Assad regime has elicited joy and relief amongst the Syrian population, and now in the aftermath of it, a mix of hope and uncertainty exists regarding the nation's political future.

For many analysts, the fall of the Assad regime serves as a considerable setback to Russia and Iran's influence in Syria while conversely, Turkey has gained significant leverage on the diplomatic front. Ankara's support of the Syrian opposition has left them with sizable sway over the post-Assad political rebuilding process and as a major diplomatic player in the determining of what comes next. With Assad gone, Turkey may also see an opportunity to reshape the power dynamics in its border region with northern Syria and curb Kurdish autonomy. Furthermore, the post-Assad reconstruction efforts in Syria could provide Turkish companies and businesses with lucrative financial opportunities too. In the end, there appears to be a broad consensus among issue experts and commentators that Turkey will strive to fill the regional void that has been left by the fall of the Assad regime at the expense of the ruling governments in Russia and Iran – both of whom are seen as the notable strategic losers stemming from what has transpired in Syria.

Following the sudden toppling of the Assad regime, much of the attention and focus has now understandably turned towards the nature of the political transition that has gotten underway. While it is still unclear precisely how Syria's domestic politics will unfold in the coming weeks and months, the manner in which external actors attempt to exert their influence is likely to have a major effect on the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East. One of the critical factors that remains to be seen is whether or not Syrian opposition forces will be able to stabilize the country, or if instead, it becomes a power vacuum paving the way for harmful interference from various external entities. To this end, earlier this week, Mohammed al-Bashir was tasked with forming and leading a transitional government after meeting with Syrian opposition leader Abu Mohammad al-Julani and outgoing Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali. Effectively stabilizing the country and creating a sociopolitical environment of good governance would also open the door for millions of Syrian refugees who fled the oppressive Assad regime to return home. Another key aspect that will be worth keeping an eye on – but more related to the potential impact of the developments in Syria on the future of the region as a whole – is the possibility of the Assad regime's fall reviving popular dissent against other autocratic governments in the Middle East as well. These regimes have been able to fend off threats to their rule since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, and some observers have wondered if the successful ousting of Assad could reignite domestic uprisings elsewhere across the region.

While a great degree of uncertainty surrounds Syria's political future, its citizens have rightfully rejoiced at the collapse of the ruthless Assad regime. Bashar al-Assad ruled the country as a totalitarian police state, presiding over decades of brutal suppression and heinous abuses against the Syrian population and clinging to power through domestic oppression, torture, and mass arbitrary detainment. In just the past 13 years since the onset of the 2011 uprising, human rights groups estimate that more than half a million have been killed, including at least 200,000 civilians, with a whopping further 14 million forcibly displaced. As such, the reaction to the ousting of Assad has been one of jubilation, as citizens draped themselves in the flag of the Syrian opposition and toppled statues of the former despot. In the aftermath of Syrian opposition forces' capture of Damascus, videos on social media and news networks showed celebratory scenes of people who were long held captive being released from the regime's prisons, now at last able to return home to their families. The full extent of the Assad regime's sheer brutality is still being brought to light with the liberation of hundreds of prisons and detention facilities where rights groups have documented that people were routinely tortured and executed under Assad.

The fall of the Assad regime comes with a host of both opportunities and challenges for Syria. It provides a chance to create an inclusive government and allow various stakeholders to have a say in the shaping of the country's future. At the same time, a failure to effectively fill the void left by the removal of Assad could pave the way for instability and risk Syria turning into a setting for regional competition over influence. Ensuring a stable post-Assad Syria requires healthy diplomatic engagement and dialogue, and it is ultimately the Syrian people who should determine their future governance.