



TALKING POINTS

Asan Plenum 2013: “New World Disorder”
www.asanplenum.org

RELEASE EMBARGO DATE: APR. 30, 2013 AT 9 AM

Panel: Syria and the International Community (Grand Ballroom III)

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 30, 2013 / 15:30-16:45

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When the Syrian civil war first began in early 2011, many analysts believed that it would not be long before President al-Assad would go the way of his fellow authoritarian leaders in Egypt and Tunisia. Two years and more than 70,000 deaths later, those early assessments have proven wildly premature. Even today, a decisive outcome remains elusive. Total state breakdown in Syria remains a serious possibility. How this conflict ultimately ends will have enormous ramifications for the region. While we do not know precisely when Assad will fall from power, given the resilience of the regime that he and his father built, it is clear that any future collapse will be sudden and abrupt. This regime is indeed fragile, and the current resilience is based on suppressed volatility.

There are two factors unique to the Syrian civil war. First, the security establishment and the urban elite have been slow to abandon the regime out of fear that the ensuing chaos will be even worse than the status quo. Second, while Iran, Russia, and China have continued to steadfastly support the regime, the anti-Assad coalition’s competing goals have led to sporadic and incoherent support for the opposition movement.

In this context, three scenarios appear to be the most plausible. First, the regime may fall due to internal elite conflict and a possible coup as the situation becomes more desperate. Second, the different rebel factions may finally coalesce under the direction of a better-equipped and better-financed Free Syrian Army and go on to win the battle for Damascus. Finally, the international anti-Assad coalition under the auspices of the Friends of Syria may agree upon a single coordinated policy governing all aspects of aid, sanctions, and thresholds for military intervention.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.