

Unlocking the Alawite Conundrum in Syria

Images and videos emerging out of Syria since 2012, becoming increasingly violent and sectarian along the way, showcased extremist groups and even children chanting things like, “Assad we will bring you down, and then we will come next for the [Alawites]!”¹ Since 1971, the Alawite community (roughly 12 percent of Syria’s 22 million people)² has sheltered Hafez al-Assad, and subsequently his son, Bashar al-Assad, by providing the family with both loyal foot soldiers who have aided the Assad regime throughout the many domestic, political uprisings it has faced (in 1964, 1980, 1982, and now 2011) and with a bureaucracy that has legitimized their theft of public funds.³ The number of Alawite casualties increased over the course of the crisis, either fighting to protect Assad or because they are accused of aiding his regime, while a growing number have faced the grim realization that the Assad family is motivated by self-interest alone.⁴ While researchers cannot pinpoint exactly how many Alewives have died, many have documented the number of Syrian soldiers instead to obtain an approximation, and have indicated that between 11,000 Alawites and 41,000 Syrian soldiers have been killed.⁵

Yet for some reason, the Alawites have not yet abandoned the Assad regime in large numbers. Even as the international community increasingly isolates him, the longer-term issue of the nature of a post-Assad Syria remains unclear. Alawites must surely recognize that their long-term interests do not lie with the current regime. Unfortunately, the precedent set by de-Baathification in Iraq frightens the Alawites in Syria, as a minority community that may be completely isolated and stigmatized by a majority Sunni population in a post-Assad Syria. Thus, for reasons of self-preservation, the Alawites should discontinue their support of the Assad regime and join the ranks of the opposition. A difficult yet not impossible option, the Alawite community can be

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incentivized to do so if the opposition can unite under the umbrella of credible and capable leaders, like the United States, and provide protection as well as the promise of inclusion and integration for the Alawites who wish to disavow Assad and his actions under the laws of a new, democratic Syria.

This paper will reflect on the relevant history of Syria that has led to the alienation of the Alawites, producing a military community that to date has

supported Assad's rule; second, it will examine the predicament Alawites face in today's crisis-stricken Syria; and finally, it will propose a series of recommendations for how U.S. policymakers as well as the international community can support the moderate factions of the Syrian opposition to help construct a post-Assad Syrian state that ensures equal rights to all citizens, regardless of religion, sect, or ethnicity.

How the Alawites Got Here

The Alawite community can be incentivized to discontinue their support of the Assad regime.

Until the early 20th century, Alawites remained in four main tribes in relative isolation in the mountains along the coast of the Mediterranean in the present-day cities of Latakia, Homs, and Hama, while Sunnis dominated the urban enclaves of Aleppo and Damascus, among others. This geographic separation and the subsequent economic disparity between the two communities, which began as early as the Ottoman period (1492–1918), ultimately led to the subjugation and marginalization of the Alawites. This marginalization continued into the period of French rule, beginning in 1919 after the fall of the Sunni–Ottoman Empire.⁶ In

that year, a failed revolt against the French occupation of Syria, led by prominent Alawite leader Saleh al-Ali, prompted France to reevaluate its approach to rule in Syria.⁷

During the French Mandate years (1921–1945), France gave the Alawite minority autonomy over regions they inhabited, and encouraged Alawite men to join the military. The Alawite enfranchisement ran counter to the motivations of Sunnis, who strongly opposed French rule and were committed to the Arab nationalistic cause for an independent “Greater Syria.” This ultimately created a distinct and separate Alawite identity, cultivating the seeds of discord between them and the Sunni majority.⁸ Eventually, the Syrian Arab nationalist movement won out, and the Sunni leader Hashim Al-attasi established the Syrian Arab Republic in 1946.

From 1954, coup d'etat after coup d'etat followed, effectively destabilizing Syria for a decade until March 8, 1963, when General Salah Jadid and Commander Hafez al-Assad, both Alawites and Ba'ath Party members, effectively launched a coup to seize control of the country. With a majority peasant population, the Alawites were attracted to the elements of socialism, a cornerstone of Ba'athist ideology. This encouraged them

to register for party membership in large numbers early on. It was only a short time before Jadid and Assad purged Sunni officers from their senior army and internal security posts, quickly filling the positions with Alawite, Ba'ath Party members. Between 1966 and 1970, over 65 percent of the entire military command became comprised of Alawites from the rural areas of Latakia, Hawran, and Der Elzor.⁹ Even in today's defense structure, Sunni soldiers outnumber Alawites in the rank and file of the military, but high-ranking Alawite commanders unquestionably hold the key positions. Moreover, while Alawite factions have positioned themselves to hold real military power in Damascus, Sunni officers have been relegated to less important and more remote governates to prohibit any real challenge to the Alawite-dominated military power structure.

Yet, the Assad family did not completely isolate themselves from the Sunni community, and in fact became socially entrenched with Sunni elites whose financial interests aligned with its own. The Sunni elites, made up of entrepreneurs and the wealthier established families of Syria, generally maintained good relations with Syria's power brokers to preserve their profits and esteemed social status. Thus, Assad and Sunni elites acted in unison on matters that often disadvantaged the general Syrian population in order to remain in their respective privileged positions. Among Hafez's most trusted advisers were individuals like Farouk al-Shara and Waleed al-Mualem, both wealthy Sunnis who remain steadfastly loyal to the Assad family. (It was not until recently that such individuals, including al-Shara, were ousted by the Assad regime when it was rumored that they would be potential candidates to replace Bashar in a transitional government.)¹⁰ The Assad family also encouraged intermarriage between the Sunni elite and Alawites in order to solidify support of the Sunni upper class. The marriages of Alawites such as Bashar, to wealthy Sunni Asma al-Akhras, and his brother, Maher al-Assad, to Sunni Manal al-Jadaan, are examples of such unions.

Today's Alawite Predicament

Without a doubt, forces antithetical to Assad's troops are desperate to convince Alawites to join their ranks. But it is difficult to convince Alawites that post-Assad Syria would prove much better for them. Alawites cannot easily resolve the predicament they find themselves in, particularly their guilt by association with the Assad family. One cannot blame them for fearing such a fate. The Sunnis of Iraq who made up parts of Saddam's bureaucracy, even simple civil servants, ten years later still suffer from guilt by association with the Ba'athist party. With Iraq still suffering from exclusion of a former ruling minority, it is understandable why fighting to protect Assad has become synonymous with fighting for political, financial, and social power for potentially decades to come.

After the rise of Syria's Ba'athist party in 1963, the growing number of educated, capable, and militarily-trained Alawites cultivated by Hafez posed a major threat to the traditional sheikh leadership in each of the four main tribes that had historically served as the Alawite power structure. The Assad family slowly indoctrinated its regime-friendly Alawite subset into believing that it was the only true leader of the Alawites, and that without their leadership, the larger community was helpless and destitute. This

false hope stands in stark contrast to the events that have subsequently transpired since March 2011.¹¹

Since the start of the crisis in 2011, Bashar has been keen to tie the destiny of the Alawites to his own. In Hama, Homs, and elsewhere, Alawites have watched the fate of their Sunni neighbors tragically unfold, but have said nothing out of fear of reprisal. Siba al-Khaddour, an Alawite originally from Homs, has organized protests in the United States and Egypt against the Assad regime since February 2011. She has stated, however, that her extended family remains silent and loyal to Bashar in Syria because they are terrified to revolt.¹² Supporting Assad, or even refusing to join those who oppose his rule, surely does not always spell consent. However, many Alawites shudder to think of the revenge that awaits them for Assad's crimes—crimes which they have not committed, but which will nonetheless be wrongly attributed to them. "We know that if we leave him, if we turn our back on Bashar, we will be paying for all of this," Siba says. The Bashar regime has spent much time speaking of "sectarian violence," perpetuating the divide and conquer technique. Siba is convinced that Assad "has successfully started a second crisis—the sectarian crisis—in order to distract us from our number one crisis: getting rid of him and building a free Syria."¹³

Syria's neighbor, Iraq, has wounded the Syrian psyche for the past ten years. Syrians—whether Alawites, Sunnis, Druze, or Shi'ites—have watched as sectarianism has wreaked havoc across Iraq since 2003. Initially, the United States' invasion of Iraq, and the Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1 that was enforced in May of 2003, intended to erase the Ba'athist party influence in Iraq by ordering the prohibition of all Ba'ath party civil servants from employment in the public sector.¹⁴ Although the Order was technically abolished one year later, the practice of de-Ba'athification continued even under the Iraqi Interim Government and continues on today. Iraqi society itself propagates the trend even through informal means, ultimately stigmatizing and alienating Ba'ath party members, especially those who are Sunni.

The experience of de-Ba'athification in Iraq has not yet been neutralized. Even recently, protests against the Maliki government have included members of the minority Sunni community that suffers from high rates of unemployment, live under permanent threat of arrest, and are marginalized in a society that has relegated them to second-class citizens.¹⁵ What has compounded matters is that former Shi'ite colleagues, also civil servants during the Saddam era, have managed to "regain their previous positions or army ranks and resum[e] a normal life."¹⁶ As recently as January 2012, the Iraqi Ministry for National Reconciliation announced the decision to stop recruitment of the Sons of Iraq—a Sunni movement that assisted U.S. forces to defeat al-Qaeda and restore Iraqi security. Such measures isolate Sunnis, making them vulnerable to recruitment by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) that prey on neglected, side-lined communities.¹⁷

Thus, the Alawites of Syria are well aware of the plight of minority groups that held on to power too tightly during their reign. And while transitional justice advocates preach of punishment only for the deserving, and not for entire religious or ethnic communities, they fear that de-Ba'athification in Syria will mean that all Alawites will lose the right to serve as public servants, members of the military, and be accepted into the new social fabric in a post-Assad Syria. Although Alawites are not likely to fall prey to ISI as the disenfranchised Iraqi Ba'athists have, extremist groups are known to exploit

those that feel *outside of the system*, with no outlet to express their desires and grievances in a Syria that is meant to be inclusive of its many ethnic and religious communities.

Meanwhile, Assad loyalists, especially those from the Alawite community, are doing everything in their power to maintain a unified Alawite front while demonizing the growing opposition. Sunnis, along with other minorities, have deserted the Assad regime since the start of the 2011 crisis. While some Alawites have deserted and even defected from the regime, others have persecuted their own to deter other community members from following suit, or to prevent them from sympathizing with their neighboring targeted communities. In one example, a deserter who called his cousin, seeking help to escape Syria, was found dead the next morning, presumably because his own cousin had reported him.¹⁸

In another instance, unity of the Alawite community and fear of the opposition led to a tragic event in Aqreb on December, 11, 2012. As the *New York Times* reports, elements from the pro-regime *shabiha* (paramilitary groups that include both Sunni and Alawite members, but are predominantly Alawite) gathered their own Alawite village men and women, and brutally slaughtered them, claiming that this was the only way to defend them from the abuse of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Survivors from the incident relayed that the Alawite *shabiha* said it would be better for the Alawite villagers to kill themselves than have the Sunni Free Syrian Army capture them. But when the FSA arrived, they rescued any Alawites that had escaped the *shabiha*. The FSA rejected the idea that it wanted to slaughter Alawites. Indeed, Youtube videos (although not verifiable since they are not recorded directly by news sources) showcased Free Syrian Army fighters stating that “Bashar doesn’t represent the Alawite sect” and that the “Syrian people are one,” as they offered medical help to injured Alawites.¹⁹ An older Alawite woman survivor cried in one of the videos, admitting she had never doubted the trustworthiness and protection of her Sunni neighbors with whom she had lived side by side for decades, and that she had been forced to follow Alawite leaders to the slaughtering site.²⁰

Alawite Concerns after Assad

Alawites face four major issues that both the opposition and the international community must acknowledge before Alawites can release themselves from Assad’s grip. First, Alawites have a real fear of retribution from various Syrian sects who have watched Assad’s regime wreak havoc. The majority of Alawites have not committed any atrocities, but they worry, perhaps rightly so, about being thrown into the same camp as those who have terrorized the Syrian people in an effort to protect Bashar. Sunnis, Druze, Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Shi’a alike have lost family and property during the current uprising; danger could come to Alawites from any one of these communities.

Second, Alawites worry about the rise of sectarianism and fundamentalism in Syria. Minority groups that have not yet revolted in large numbers share this worry as well. Indeed, more minority religious sects have stood with Assad than have stood

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against him. This is not necessarily because of any particular loyalty or affection for Assad; rather, these groups fear a government with extreme Salafi and fundamentalist tendencies rising from what they have always known to be a secular Syria.²¹ While there are extremist elements in Syria who wish to establish a fundamentalist regime in the country (for instance the al-Nusra Front and its affiliates), the overwhelming majority of Syria's 22 million people are moderates who wish to live in a country that neither is against the practice of religion (as Hafez al-Assad regulated in the 1980s) nor coerces people to practice religion.

Third, Alawites fear that, after the fall of Assad, they will be relegated back to second-class citizens, as they were often treated prior to the Assad regime's rise. Historians recount that, before Assad came into power, the portion of Alawite society not enlisted in the military were often hired as servants to Sunnis.²² It is highly improbable for post-Assad Syria that recent Alawite dominance, whether in political or military life, will exist in any form; Alawites will have to accept this reality going forward. What the future should hopefully be willing to offer, however, is equality and justice for all.

Fourth, even if Alawites join the institutionalized opposition, no trusted entity currently exists to guarantee protection in a new Syria. Alawites fear that if they desert Bashar, they will be subject to abuse in one of the three ways listed above (as victims of retribution, sectarianism, or relegated to second-class citizenship). Alawites desire reassurance that the next Syrian government—supported politically and financially by the international community—will uphold human rights standards and treat the Alawites as equal citizens of Syria. They are not oblivious to the fact, however, that the world has done nothing as over 100,000 Syrians have died since March 2011. So, understandably, they have little hope that the international community would intervene on their behalf if they were the ones under attack. It is for that very reason that the international community and the Syrian opposition in particular need to ensure secure and inclusive methods to incorporate and protect the Alawaite community in a post-Assad Syria.

Policy Recommendations

Four critical mechanisms could reassure Syrians, particularly Alawites, to abandon Assad.

Considering the Alawites' predicament, how can the international community, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC), and the moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA) convince Alawites it is in their best interest to join arms and turn their backs on the only protector they have ever known? The risks are incredibly high, with the number of total dead having exceeded 100,000 already, and the number of refugees estimated to be at three million by the end of 2013.²³ What is necessary to motivate a critical mass of Alawites to desert Assad?

Given the many challenges Syrians are facing internally and externally, there appear to be four critical mechanisms that, if pursued and highlighted publicly, could

reassure Syrians inside the country to jump from Assad's sinking ship, particularly the Alawites. First, the Syrian opposition is in dire need of a leader who can help organize the fractured, battered groups who stand against Bashar. The more time that passes, the clearer it becomes that the United States, with the support of France (under Francois Hollande's direction) and Turkey (under Ahmet Davutoglu's leadership), can provide the military capability and democracy-building experience to take the lead. Syria needs the "guiding hand"²⁴ of the United States and other democracies, because after two years it is clear that a disorganized opposition will achieve little in the face of Assad's well-armed military.

Although some might argue that the Gulf countries could provide such leadership instead, the reality is that they do not have the capability or experience to assist others in their efforts to establish democratic governments. Qatar, a steadfast ally of the Syrian revolution, has provided financial support but little else to keep the Syrian opposition together. Other Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, are not in a position to lead, especially after their financial support of the military takeover in Egypt on July 3, 2013, unseating that country's first democratically-elected president.²⁵ The Gulf countries have pursued their own personal interests, whether it be minimizing Iran's capabilities in the region or nurturing the spread of Salafi Islam to counter the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's influence. Since 2011, unfolding events in Syria and in the region should remind everyone that monarchies and sheikhdoms are simply weary of elections, undetermined outcomes, and threats to their own personal interests.²⁶

The United States, and the influence it has on the international community, has the ability to push for true change on the ground in Syria. An example of this was the mere threat of U.S. force after the chemical weapons attack on August 21, 2013. This threat ultimately led to the defection of many Syrian soldiers who had previously stood by Assad.²⁷ For the first time, defectors were admitting that U.S. involvement truly could alter the balance of power on the ground, and encouraging those teetering between both sides to abandon Assad.

It is for this very reason that Secretary of State John Kerry and UN Ambassador Samantha Power are capable of uniting and streamlining donors, most of whom are U.S. and EU allies, for the opposition. While the power to unite Syrians has not come from Syrians themselves, under the banner of the Syrian opposition time has revealed that, after two-and-a-half years of warfare, the United States can help the opposition prepare a realistic and practical framework from which the opposition can plot its next political and military steps. This is something the opposition has failed to do, due to the lack of experience and aggressive implementing force that strong leadership, like the United States, can offer.

Geneva II, scheduled to be held in November 2013 (but could possibly be postponed), should set up an appropriate stage for the international community to discuss the ultimate goals for Syria. It can also direct donor funds to appropriate channels that will prevent exploitation of the growing vulnerable communities in Syria, which pledge allegiance to anyone who can feed their families and provide protection. Funding from private individuals from various countries and religious sects has left cities like Aleppo broken and divided, with each neighborhood or area under the control of a different rebel group, each funded by a different source.²⁸

On one hand, the Syrian revolution has spurred the creation of active, involved civil society groups that never had an opportunity to flourish under the Assad regime. On the other hand, coordination is severely lacking between and among these civil society groups, precluding a united military or political strategy against the Assad regime. Thus, the unity of entities promoted by the SOC in the hopes of establishing a stable security apparatus, such as the unified Supreme Military Forces, will only prove successful if the finances to this force are channeled through a political civilian leadership that is closely connected with both the donors and the internal opposition movement. Ultimately, this will also provide civilian forces with control over the military, and not the other way around, to avoid creating a post-Bashar police or militia state.

Second, streamlining military and civilian assistance can incentivize democratic and inclusive behavior by offering each—military and private citizens—a place at the negotiating table. It also gives other groups the confidence to ask for inclusion. Trust has been lost among the many groups inside of Syria, Alawites included. Streamlining funds and assistance can be done, but it must guarantee that this assistance will not later be used against any one community. Admittedly, there are indeed strong sentiments of sectarianism, especially in cities like Homs and Aleppo that have been ravaged by war. Wajdy Moustafa, long-time Alawite opposition member, clarified that the opposition severely lacks a “constitution that protects all. Having elections is not enough. Plausible assurances need to be made for the protection of human rights for all through a forceful set of laws, such as a bill of rights.”²⁹

While sectarianism is a serious concern, much of the sectarian rhetoric has been spurred by both Assad and fundamentalist fighters to garnish the support of desperate civilians, ultimately playing in Assad’s favor. This type of propaganda has successfully escalated tensions between the various Syrian sects, and is a direct result of the disconnect between the Syrian opposition leadership and the Syrian street. Under the direction of a united opposition, moderate rebels will be more readily able to disavow sectarianism and discriminatory violence if they are promised material support, a seat at the negotiating table, and equal protection and security for the many varied communities, neighborhoods, and villages they represent.

Third, if the above steps are taken—and credible leadership with an organized team guides the way to defeat Bashar’s forces—it will undoubtedly create a need for international peacekeeping forces to prevent attacks on vulnerable communities, including the Alawites. Michael Doran and Michael O’Hanlon argue in *USA Today* that, similar to the Bosnian war, such forces are necessary to ensure the protection of civilians, especially in the immediate aftermath of Bashar’s fall.³⁰ Without providing security, revenge-seekers may very well make their way to the hills of Latakia and Tartous to either attack or intimidate Alawite communities such that they leave Syria indefinitely. While revenge killings and attacks have been isolated thus far, no one can accurately predict what those with weapons can and will do without neutral peacekeeping forces on the ground to maintain order, as advised by proper Syrian civilian, political, and international community leadership.³¹

Fourth, under a unified opposition, an applicable post-civil war judicial and legal system must develop to incentivize those who have not committed crimes to remain peaceful. Such a system will propose a hierarchy for crimes and their appropriate punishments. Social media has fostered the perception that the majority of Syrians have

blood on their hands, yet in a country of 22 million, the overwhelming majority of Syrians have not taken up arms nor committed any crimes against humanity. The SOC knows that it cannot prosecute every single criminal act since March 2011. Thus, it proposes that the list of wrongdoers be divided into two groups: the “limited black list” and the “big white list.”³² The goal of this black list is to prosecute and punish those directly responsible for orchestrating and perpetrating crimes against humanity. It includes key members of the Assad regime including Bashar, Maher, Jameel Hasan (the head of Syrian Military Naval Security, known specifically for targeting peaceful protestors), and the like. This number is most probably in the low hundreds and will require a platform akin to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The big white list will include officers who committed crimes but were not in a position of power, or those who did not direct Assad’s forces.

Beyond the obvious wrongdoers, two additional groups will pose a unique challenge to the post-Assad Syria legal system: the pro-Bashar *shabiha* and the anti-Bashar radicals. Only a limited number of *shabiha* enjoy the support of their Alawite communities because they only protect their own villages and neighborhoods, not the larger Alawite population as a whole. The Assad regime uses the majority of them to terrorize the population, loot homes, and carry out large massacres all over the country, without leaving a Syrian army footprint. This group will be especially challenging to deal with because they are not formally affiliated with the government, and proving any “chain of command” will be difficult, even if the command originally came from a government officer. As private citizens, they pose a conundrum for a transitional justice that will largely target government officials responsible for massacres.

The issue of anti-Bashar radicals who have fought alongside anti-Bashar moderates also presents a complex scenario. Ridding Syria of extremist elements cannot be achieved by killing them off—as Lebanon, Yemen, and Afghanistan have taught us; those elements will likely insist on a seat at the negotiating table. Before taking any such action, truth and reconciliation commissions should be set up to address issues of “criminal liability, forgiveness and immunity.”³³ In the past, similar tribunals were set up in Eastern Europe because the “potential class was too large and could have prevented peaceful transition.”³⁴ There is no way the judicial and prison system could absorb everyone who has committed a crime or is unwanted in post-Assad Syria. Moreover, prosecuting each and every person will require precious time in the months immediately following the fall of Assad. Distinctions between those who deserve harsh punishment and those who can be streamlined into the political system need to be developed by a unified opposition as early as possible in order to deter future crimes and positively impact future behavior.

All eyes are keen to monitor developments in northern Syria to assess a post-Assad reality.

It is also crucial that the unified opposition be permitted to operate and apply the post-Assad framework they desire *right now* in the newly liberated areas (i.e. Aleppo and Idlib), because this is an indication of what future Syria will look like. All eyes, especially Alawite ones, are keen to monitor developments in northern Syria to assess a post-Assad reality. Mixed results have ensued in liberated areas. In late March 2013,

Father Spiridonas Tanous (head of the Greek Orthodox Community in Syria), Michel Kilo (a Syrian Christian leader), and Abu Abed al-Rahman al-Suri (official spokesperson for the Syrian Islamic Front) came together to establish a legal system that would punish wrongdoers but not resort to unconscionable penalties for criminals during this time of instability and in areas where the government had lost complete control.³⁵ In this instance, even the Salafis—feared by most to be uncompromising hardliners—were able to make compromises when brought to the negotiating table to solve a problem that plagued all communities. For example, all parties, including the Salafis, agreed that the *hadd* punishment of death would not be applied except for those that had killed without any mitigating circumstance, and in cases where absolutely no psychological or justification of self-defense could be made. The fear of *hadd* punishment, Salafis argued, would deter individuals from committing murder during a time when killing is rampant. Violators would have to think many times over before resorting to such actions. In this way, all groups were able to make concessions and unite the local interim justice initiatives on the ground, improving an effort to protect the interests of the entire community.³⁶

Improving post-Assad Alawite Prospects

The United States can best provide the guidance and legitimacy for the opposition.

The road to salvaging what is left of Syria is not a simple one. Ending the bloodshed and preparing the ground for the next Syrian government should be the international community's number one priority for the country's future. Any solution must be practical and inclusive. To this end, the United States can best provide the guidance and legitimacy for the opposition such that it becomes a true force challenging Bashar's rule. Only a streamlined, civilian political leadership can ensure the stability of Syria. This will require

genuine protection of the Alawite communities through both constitutional mechanisms and an international peacekeeping force.

The state Hafez al-Assad built, which benefits only the military and social elite, has neglected the needs of an overwhelming portion of the Syrian people, whether they are Alawites, Sunnis, Ismailis, or Christians. Unfortunately, Assad's regime has preserved its claim to power by exploiting the diversity of the Syrian fabric and pitting the differences of one sect against another. Reconciliation is possible, but it will require hard work and sincerity from all sides. Having the United States mobilize and ensure that Syrians, as well as other elements of the international community, can help address the concerns of Alawites and other minorities is a crucial step to smoothing that road to a post-Assad Syria.

Notes

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