

The New Arabists

A review of "Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad" by David W. Lesch

by [David Schenker \(/experts/david-schenker\)](/experts/david-schenker)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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David Schenker is the Taube Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Linda and Tony Rubin Program on Arab Politics. He is the former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.



Articles & Testimony

“In 2000, not long after Syrian dictator Hafez al-Assad died and was succeeded by his son Bashar, analogies between the Assads and the Corleone family of The Godfather started to make the rounds. While details of the popular metaphor varied, the dominant focus of the comparison was on whether Bashar represented Michael -- Don Corleone's youngest, untrained, and more conventional son -- or Fredo, his weak and incompetent eldest. Where analysts came down on this question largely mirrored their assessment of Bashar al-Assad and the future trajectory of post-Hafez Syria.

"David Lesch, a professor of Middle East studies at Trinity University, was among the most prominent American Syria watchers subscribing to the optimistic view of Bashar as Michael. To Lesch, Bashar epitomized a new-generation Middle Eastern leader dedicated to and capable of reforming the autocratic, corrupt, terrorist-supporting, anti-American regime in Damascus. So enchanted was he with the promise of the British-trained ophthalmologist who abandoned his medical career and returned to lead Syria, Lesch resolved to pen Bashar's biography. Not surprisingly, Bashar agreed to cooperate, and met with the academic several times. The resulting 2005 book, *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al Asad and Modern Syria*, set a new standard for obsequiousness..."

To read the full review, download the PDF. ❖

Commentary

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