

# How to Advance Transition to a Post-Assad Future

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Michael Herzog \(/experts/michael-herzog\)](/experts/michael-herzog)

Michael Herzog was appointed Israel's ambassador to the United States in 2021. Previously, he was an international fellow at The Washington Institute.

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## Articles & Testimony

In this paper, the former chief of staff to Israel's minister of defense argues that, in addition to the moral imperative to help the Syrian people, there are also strong strategic reasons for the West and various regional states to be more proactive in bringing about the end of the Assad regime. Speeding up the process of the regime's collapse would avert the destabilising consequences of a lengthy civil war, as well as dealing a blow to the radical, Iran-led alliance in the region. Although direct military intervention is not currently on the cards, there are other ways the West could intervene to help advance Assad's fall. International involvement certainly comes with risks, Herzog argues, but the costs of inaction will be far higher.

## Key Points

- The Syrian government is battling a growing insurgency, with the situation developing into a civil war. Neither side is currently capable of overwhelming the other.
- Whilst external powers interested in keeping Assad in power are actively protecting their interests, Western powers calling for Assad to go are relatively passive in supporting the Syrian opposition.
- Continued relative Western passivity could result in a very long conflict within Syria, possibly lasting years, developing along sectarian lines and leading to the deaths of many more thousands with no clear outcome.
- With Assad unwilling to negotiate his own departure and the bulk of the opposition unwilling to negotiate any solution with him, the Annan Plan has little prospect for success and a plan B is required.
- The Assad regime's departure would deal a serious blow to Iran and to the Iranian-led axis and encourage those in the region standing up to repression.
- To maximise the chances of Assad's departure, while minimising risks, European powers along with the US should adopt a more proactive policy through:
  - significantly increased, though carefully calibrated support for the opposition;
  - further isolation of the regime;
  - continuing to seek Russia's cooperation, whilst realising that the more inevitable the fall of the regime looks, the more likely Russia is to engage in a process to replace it;

- support for Syria's neighbours in managing the fallout from the conflict;
- preparation of contingency plans to secure Syrian strategic weapons and prevent humanitarian catastrophes;
- taking an opportunity to mend fences between Israel and Turkey.

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