

# Five Ways al-Assad May Fall

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## The question now in Syria is not if al-Assad will fall, but how.

The opposition has become powerful enough to liberate parts of the country from Bashar al-Assad's rule, even reaching the suburbs of Damascus. The question now is not if al-Assad will fall, but how. The fate of other dictators, from Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Jean-Claude Duvalier in Haiti, provides a political menu of five options for how al-Assad may go.

1. **Milosevic's Miranda Rights:** Al-Assad holds on to power, turning the popular uprising into a sectarian conflict between Alawites and Sunnis. Syria descends into a war of ethnic cleansing. In the long term, however, this ushers in an economic and moral collapse of his regime similar to that of Milosevic's rule in Serbia. Although the dictator of Belgrade instrumentalized Yugoslavia's break to foment ethnic war and cling to power in the early 1990s, in the end he failed. International sanctions and continued unrest brought down his regime in a decade. Milosevic ended up being arrested in 2001 and then turned over to the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague which read him his Miranda rights. In 2006, fifteen years after the uprising against him, Milosevic died of a heart attack in his prison cell.
2. **Baby Doc's Dolce Vita:** Al-Assad decides that it is time for him to go, his regime collapses, and he brokers a deal with a patron state, for instance Russia, to take him in. Just as after the end of his rule in 1986, Haitian dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, or Baby Doc, found safe haven in his guardian France, where he lived la dolce vita, al-Assad could find himself in his protector Russia, safe and comfortable, though probably not enjoying the Russian weather.
3. **Mubarak's Misery:** Al-Assad agrees to a transition, yielding power to a deputy. He is then arrested, and given a promise of a fair trial in Syria as part of a transition. Just as Egyptian dictator Mubarak agreed to leave power to his deputy in 2011, only to end up in jail and then put on a trial likely to last for years, al-Assad languishes in a

jail cell, waiting for justice that never comes.

4. Ceausescu's Chopping Block: Al-Assad holds on to power with obstinacy. His close elite, though, predicts regime collapse, deciding to sacrifice [the dictator] in a palace coup to save themselves. Just as Romania's Nicolae Ceausescu was executed by his people on live TV in 1989, a year after the uprising against him, Assad is killed by his own generals. Syria moves into a period of instability marked by continuing demonstrations and the tenuous hold of power by the old elite. In the end, the demonstrators win, inshallah!
5. Gadhafi's Cut: Al-Assad holds on to power together with his army, turning more brutal and committing large scale massacres. This brings more people to the streets, leading others to take up arms against the regime. The uprising crescendos before Syria can descend into sectarian warfare. The revolution succeeds. Just as Gadhafi's dictatorship succumbed to a massive popular uprising, al-Assad's rule simply withers away. The dictator of Damascus meets the "people's justice" and Gadhafi's abrupt fate.

Those are five potential ways for al-Assad to go. Which one do you find most likely? Or do you have another idea for how he might leave power?

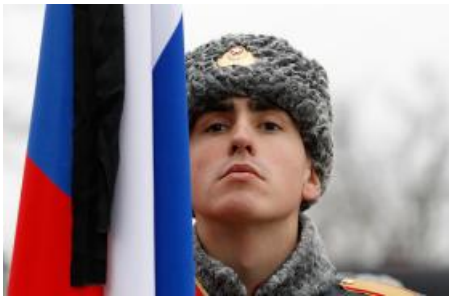
*Soner Cagaptay is director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute; he was recently invited by CNN to post regular commentary on the intersection of history and politics. ❖*

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