

## Syria's Neighbours Say Enough Is Enough, Stop The Killing

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### Western powers and their regional allies are increasingly understanding that just talking to Syrian president Bashar al-Asad about his brutality will not be enough to stop it.

**T**he brutal crackdown on the besieged city of Hama during the first week of the Muslim Holy month of Ramadan, combined with similar moves into the eastern city of Deir al-Zor, have clearly demonstrated Bashar al-Assad's regime is determined to shoot its way out of the current crisis.

For five months, Turkey, France, the United States and some Arab countries have urged Assad to launch comprehensive political reforms as a way to start a political process that would end the bloodshed and lead a transition to democratic rule. As it is very clear now that whatever the regime announces is rendered meaningless by its brute repression, Saudi Arabia has followed Qatar's recent decision to denounce the regime's brutality and withdraw its ambassador.

Assad's launching of its bloody assault on the eve of Ramadan last week showed the regime was somehow not concerned the crackdown would run into Ramadan -- a bizarre calculation for a minority Alawite-dominated regime that carried out a massacre in the same city in 1982, killing between 20-30,000 people. The regime's use of cannon fire during the assault, which created a black cloud of soot hovering above the city that was captured on internet videos, showed the scale of the attack.

Saudi King Abdullah bin Abulaziz very clearly felt that it could no longer stand by and say nothing in response to what he aptly described as a "killing machine." The King -- leader of a regional Sunni heavyweight country -- will also have been aware of reports that Shiite Iran is supplying technology and know-how to the Assad regime to kill predominately Sunni protesters, which has detrimental implications for how Riyadh sees Assad's domestic and regional calculations.

The Saudi statement and those of others signals that Arab countries are now fed up with Assad's slaughter and an effort to close Arab ranks and join international efforts to pressure the regime is now in the making.

After assessing the damage, Turkey, perhaps Syria's chief regional ally besides Iran, will send its Foreign Minister Ahmet Davatologu to Damascus tomorrow. His announcement that his message in Damascus "will be decisively delivered" was quickly rebuked by Assad's political adviser Bouthaina Shaaban, saying he will "hear even more decisive words in relation to Turkey's position" of not accepting the Assad regime's story of blaming the protests on "armed terrorist groups."

Given that these words come from Shaaban -- who has thus far been held out as a "moderate reformer" -- demonstrates the massive chasm between the Assad regime on the one hand and the Syrian people and the international community on the other.

Reticence by regional allies such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey to US and European diplomatic efforts to condemn the Assad regime at the United Nations has thus far been a major impediment to a more forceful stance on the crackdown. The real question now is how this shift will affect Russian and Chinese opposition to a UN Security Council Resolution condemning the attack.

Both countries -- which have oil interests in Syria -- agreed to a presidential statement last week, but this announcement has been overtaken by the scale of destruction in Hama. With Syrian energy sanctions legislation introduced in the US Senate last week, and the Obama Administration working with its European allies to find ways to target Syria energy (France, Germany, Holland and Italy consume the lion's share of Syrian oil exports, and Royal Dutch Shell is the country's largest foreign investor), Western powers and their regional allies are increasingly understanding that just talking to Assad about his brutality will not be enough to stop it.

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*(<http://www.chicagoreviewpress.com/catalog/showBook.cfm?ISBN=1569768439>).* ❖

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