

The Strategic Significance of the Syrian Elections

Syria's presidential elections signify the country's victory in the decade-long Hybrid War of Terror and will help it transition towards its inevitable post-war future.

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The Hybrid War of Terror on Syria isn't yet fully over, but the country's presidential elections nevertheless signify its victory. The entire purpose of that campaign was to forcefully remove President Assad from office, after which Syria would surrender its sovereignty to its neighbors, first and foremost “Israel” and Turkey.

The country's infrastructure and economy have been devastated by the humanitarian crisis that this conflict provoked, yet the Syrian people still stand strong. Although there exist some among them who despise their leader, the vast majority of the Syrian people still proudly support him, in some cases even more now after ten years of war than they did at its onset. That's because many of them eventually realized that this is about much more than him personally, but the future of their civilization-state.

As it stands, Syria is presently divided into three “spheres of influence” – the liberated majority of the country, the American-controlled eastern portion beyond the Euphrates River, and the sliver of Turkish-controlled territory along the northern border that also importantly includes Idlib. Syrians in the last two regions didn't have the chance to exercise their democratic rights since the occupying authorities naturally prevented them from doing so. In fact, they've made it all but impossible to reunify the country since the military situation is such that the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) doesn't want to risk a much larger war by attacking NATO forces there despite having the international legal right to expel the invaders. Resolving this dilemma will be among the top tasks facing President Assad during his next term seeing as how few doubt that he'll win the elections.

I proposed some solutions in the analyses that I published back in February about how [“Syria Should Talk With The US Since Its Iranian & Russian Allies Are Already Doing So”](#) and [“Balancing Regional Interests In Syria Is The Only Way To Reach A Compromise Solution”](#). In short, some form of decentralization granting broader political rights to the occupied regions might be a pragmatic means of resolving this dilemma, though of course, the devil is in the details so to speak. Iran's military presence in the country, despite being legal and premised on fighting international terrorism there, is a major problem for the US. It's unlikely that

America will agree to any compromise solution so long as Iranian forces remain in Syria, but it's also equally unlikely that Syria will ask them to leave, even through a phased but dignified withdrawal. Damascus depends on Tehran's anti-terrorist support, and the Iranian presence also prevents Syria from falling under disproportionate Russian influence.

On the topic of Russian-Syrian relations, ties remain excellent and continue to diversify into other fields beyond the military one, but there hasn't been as much progress on courting Russian businesses as Syria had hoped. The unilateral US sanctions regime acts as a powerful deterrent to reconstruction efforts, though these are unlikely to be lifted so long as Iranian military forces remain in the country. America seems to have realized that President Assad isn't going anywhere since he genuinely enjoys tremendous grassroots support among the vast majority of his people so regime change no longer remains a viable policy option. Instead, the US will predictably seek to transition towards "regime tweaking", or pressuring Syria to make certain political changes that accommodate American interests such as decentralization.

It's unclear whether such a policy will succeed, especially remembering that Iran probably won't be asked to withdraw from Syria, so observers can expect for this issue to remain unresolved for the indefinite future. That being the case, President Assad's other top priority is to more comprehensively rebuild the liberated majority of the country. This will be difficult so long as the US' unilateral sanctions regime and secondary sanctions threats remain in place, but progress could prospectively be achieved through a combination of Russian, Iranian, Chinese, and Emirati efforts. So long as their companies have the will to face possible American sanctions, which is admittedly questionable, they'll be able to help rebuild Syria. As an incentive, Damascus could offer them preferential partnerships, but this still might not be enough for some of them to take that risk.

It's indeed possible for there to be no political or economic breakthroughs in Syria anytime soon, in which case the country will continue to struggle but nevertheless continue making gradual progress in a positive direction. The only real security threats that remain come from ISIS sleeper cells, mostly outside the most populated areas judging by recent reports about their attacks. This will always be a problem and probably won't ever be fully resolved considering the nature of the threat itself. Even so, the Syrian intelligence agencies and their allies will continue to infiltrate and dismantle such groups, but some will always evade detection until it's too late. That, however, shouldn't represent any considerable obstacle to Syria's gradual reconstruction, but highly publicized attacks might dissuade all but the bravest international investors.

Another priority of President Assad's next term in office will be encouraging his compatriots who fled over the past decade to return home and help rebuild their country. Some will decide not to if they retain political grievances or committed war crimes of course, but it's expected that more Syrians will eventually move back over the coming years. The state will therefore have to continue supporting this special category of citizens, made all the more difficult by the never-ending economic crises caused by the US' unilateral sanctions regime, but it also has a lot to gain in the sphere of soft power so it'll probably do its best in this respect in order to show the world that the situation is normalizing. With time, and combined with possible investment incentives amid continually improving security, Syria might be able to turn the tide on its economic crisis.

Returning back to the lead-in topic of this analysis, the strategic significance of the Syrian

elections, it can be said that they represent a new phase of normalization there. The last ones in 2014 took place during the worsening war, but this time everything is comparatively much better. The Western Mainstream Media will continue to delegitimize the Syrians' exercise of their democratic rights, but policymakers will pragmatically realize that it's a dead-end for them to continue agitating for regime change. Syria might even eventually repair some of its political relations with certain Western countries, not right away of course, but with time. Its political and economic challenges will likely remain unresolved for a while, but even so, the world should realize that Syria emerged victorious in the decade-long Hybrid War of Terror and that better days are surely ahead.

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