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The Day After

Post-Uprising Realities & Challenges

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Preface

Omar Imady

We are presently entering what might be termed the ‘Day After’ phase (or phases) of the Syrian Uprising; a period when the uprising and all the wars it unleashed gradually give way to the harsh realities of demarcation lines, the challenges of reconstruction, and the astronomical bill of the war effort. The fact that this phase involves a regime ‘victory’ that could not have been achieved without the overwhelming support of Russia and Iran, means that the regime is unable to enforce its own conditions and must constantly negotiate with the Russians, and at times the Iranians, regarding the optimal way to exercise its authority. The US military presence which, at least presently, appears to be long term, adds additional pressure on the regime and restricts its capacity to expand its territory. In this issue of *Syria Studies*, we are pleased to share three studies that shed light on some of these complex layers of post-uprising Syria.

In *Syria’s Reconciliation Agreements*, Raymond Hinnebusch and Omar Imady explore how the regime and the opposition interacted with the evolving idea of *musalahat* or ‘reconciliations’. At first, when neither side could unseat the other, these reconciliations were in essence, truces which reflected the war of attrition. As the regime grew stronger, largely after the Russian intervention, the *musalahat* evolved into several more advanced types, all designed to break the rebels, yet significantly different in the extent to which the regime was willing to agree to a more balanced arrangement. Hinnebusch and Imady proceed to examine the more recent, and internationally sanctioned, ‘deconfliction zones’ and show how they are similar, and different, from previous arrangements. The critical trademark of all of this, from a governance perspective, is the fact that all these arrangements entail, in various degrees, the decentralisation of government authority. The paper ends with the ironic conclusion that the Syria that may emerge from all this extensive decentralisation may resemble in certain ways the very Syria the protesters back in 2011 were advocating.

In *Syria’s Reconstruction Scramble* – Muriel Asseburg & Khaled Yacoub Oweis, focus on whether or not Europe should put aside its current reservations and become involved in the reconstruction effort. Asseburg and Oweis show that the realities of the post-uprising phase are in sharp contradiction with any meaningful at-

tempt at reconstruction. Any involvement at this stage would amount to reducing reconstruction to the mere rebuilding of physical infrastructure even as actual fighting continues and without any prospects to a political settlement. The authors further conclude that Europe should instead "... play the long game and develop leverage to make future contributions serve state and peace-building purposes."

In *What the West Owes Syrians*, Diana Bashur explores another significant post-uprising reality, Syrian refugees and the costs involved in hosting them by Western countries. Here Bashur is seeking to draw our attention to an important, yet largely ignored, correlation between the profit incurred through arms sales by Western countries to countries that have provided support to the armed opposition and the costs involved in hosting Syrian refugees in the West. Bashur eloquently contrasts the extent to which the West was enthusiastic about the Arab Spring with the significant increase in arms sales to the region by EU and the US, 23% and 300% respectively. Bashur leaves us with the sobering probability that some European politicians "... may have opted for a tradeoff: making their taxpayers shoulder the short-term cost of hosting refugees in exchange for profits to the arms industry."