

# SYRIA DEEPLY

## The Week in Syria, Deeply

### Dear Deeply Readers,

This week [the U.S. said it shut down the Syrian embassy](#) in Washington and consulates in Michigan and Washington, calling them “an insult,” given President Bashar al-Assad’s assault on his people. Just days later, U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford, the U.S.’s former envoy to Damascus, conceded that Assad would likely remain in power – at least through the “medium term.”

Those two points reflect a stymied state of the U.S.’s Syria policy. It’s clear Assad isn’t going anywhere – he has enough momentum to feel comfortable, as evidenced by [the regime’s strategic win in the Lebanese border town of Yabroud](#). Assad is at ease enough to campaign for re-election this year, poised to win another seven-year term as Syria’s president. One U.S. official called that prospect “[offensive and disgusting](#).” But in the same week, major policy moves were largely symbolic – [appointing a Syrian special envoy](#) and kicking out Syrian diplomats won’t have a real impact on the balance of Syria’s war.

With the U.S. and its allies either unwilling or unable to make moves of greater consequence in Syria, they have little power to determine the outcomes. Instead, what happens next will determine the chaotic flow events on the ground, shaped somewhat by Iran’s strategic and material support for the Assad regime. In a show of Iran’s importance, U.N. Syria Envoy Lakhdar [Brahimi travelled to Tehran this week](#), urging Iranian leaders to urge Syrian leaders to resume peace talks. Recall that Iran wasn’t even invited to [those peace talks](#), which were held in Geneva in January and stalled shortly after. But as Assad’s primary backer, Iran is arguably the player with the greatest leverage in bringing about any political transition in Damascus.

That leverage has played out through patronage networks that shape facts on the ground. Since the start of Syria’s war, aid to the rebels has been weak and fragmented, while aid to the Assad regime, especially from Iran and Hezbollah, has been steadfast and substantial. That continues to give Assad a significant advantage in the field.

“The regime is exploiting a rising sense of conflict fatigue, increasing popular disenchantment with opposition, and rebel group willingness to ignore exiled opposition

leaders,” wrote Ayham Kamel of the Eurasia Group.

Kamel predicts that Assad will run and win a re-election, reinforcing his legitimacy among his base. For Assad’s critics and for centrist Syrians at large, it’s led to a desperate fatalism, a realization that no change is coming – a despondent acceptance that no part of the catastrophe is set to end.

Meanwhile the regional consequences of Syria’s war continue to escalate. This week saw [an exchange of fire between Syria and Israel](#), the conflict’s most serious spillover to date into the Golan Heights. Just north on the Syrian frontier with Lebanon, tensions between Sunnis and Shiites [sparked wider protests](#), while the Lebanese town of [Arsal was hit by Syrian air strikes](#) – as a stronghold for Syrian rebels, it’s often been a target for regime fire. As part of a [U.S.-backed initiative to head up the southern front](#) against Assad, [Saudi Arabia is boosting its support to Syrian rebels](#), sending weapons and money through Jordan. That complicates matters for the Jordanian kingdom, as it becomes a more obvious staging ground for rebel operations and a potential target itself.

And so the region suffers along with Syria, as its conflict drags down the fate of the whole neighborhood. It’s become a wicked problem to solve; those tasked with doing so are looking for ways around the gridlock. Last week the U.N. said it had enough [evidence to indict suspected war criminals from both sides](#) of the conflict; on Monday, it will review compliance with [a Security Council resolution on humanitarian aid](#) (supply convoys have been [held up by “administrative hurdles” from the Syrian government](#)). Meanwhile Syrians themselves are living through the breakdown of the social fabric, from [a rising number of divorces](#) to [trouble putting food on the table](#). On Thursday, [95% of Syria was cut off from the internet](#) – a brief pause in the country’s ability to share its grief with the world.

### **Highlights from Syria Deeply:**

[How Food Price Hikes Are Impacting Syrian Families](#)  
[Q&A: Inside the Aid Efforts of Syria’s Food Distribution Program](#)  
[What Victory in Yabroud Means for the Government](#)  
[Amid Conflict, More Syrian Families Battle Through Divorce](#)  
[Will This Week’s Attacks Draw Israel into the Syrian Conflict?](#)  
[The Significance of a Syrian Election](#)  
[Why Did 95 Percent of Syria Lose Internet This Week?](#)

### **Headlines from the Week:**

New York Times: [Three Years of Strife and Cruelty Puts Syria in Free Fall](#)  
National Public Radio: [A Syrian Refugee Camp with Girl Scouts and a Safeway Store](#)  
Los Angeles Times: [U.S. Shifts Strategy to 'Southern Front'](#)

Associated Press: [Syrian Government Recaptures Crac des Chevaliers](#)

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Sincerely,

The News Deeply Team

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