

The Way to Democratic Resilience - Foreign Powers vrs Syria's Democratic Mirage Noemi Bessa Vilela and Anthony Murphy

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Abstract

This paper explores the democratization of the Syrian Arab Republic amid the complex landscape of internal division and external influences. The transformative events that begun in December 2024, with the fall of President Bashar al-Assad and the establishment of a transitional government, have introduced both opportunities and challenges for building democratic resilience. Internally, Syria faces difficulties stemming from its authoritarian legacy, sectarian divisions, and the involvement of various domestic and international actors with divergent interests. The legitimacy of the transitional government is contested by groups such as the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which have expressed concerns over exclusion. Moreover, the government has faced criticism for human rights abuse, including arbitrary detentions. Externally, regional powers such as Türkiye, Iran, and Israel maintain significant influence. Israel's recent military actions, including airstrikes in Palmyra, resulting in significant casualties among Iranian-backed militias, underscore the ongoing geopolitical complexities. The Syrian path toward democracy remains precarious, shaped by the interplay of internal dynamics and external pressures. While the recent establishment of a transitional government marks a pivotal step, the journey ahead requires sustained commitment to reconciliation, institutional reform, and adherence to democratic principles. Building upon state-of-the-art developments in both legal and crisis management literature, the authors argue that relative limits, or institutional resilience, are preferable to absolute rules or rigid safeguards. In theory, systemic resilience assumes diversity, redundancy and polycentric governance. However, practice tells a different story: democratic resilience requires specific solutions, tailor-made to any given country. In the Syrian case, constitutional design would have to enshrine an inclusive governance model, addressing long-engrained sectarian grievances, integrating diverse political factions, and navigating the diverging interests of multiple international stakeholders. Keywords: democratization, democratic resilience, institutional diversity, polycentric governance, Syrian Arab Republic, systemic resilience, transitional government.