Abstract: From the Numbers Game to the End Game in Syria

In “Syria Contextualized: The Numbers Game,” it was demonstrated that the popular discourse about the Syrian Civil War seems to be radically dissonant from the dynamics “on the ground” once the data deployed in these narratives are more properly contextualized—meaning any naïve intervention into such a complex system was likely to have severe iatrogenic effects.

While epistemologically important, “The Numbers Game” and its methodological successor do not offer a positive strategy for Syria. Here, we attempt to compensate for this shortcoming through a sober and detailed exploration of the reconstruction and reconciliation process which Syria must undergo in order to emerge from this crisis—considerations strangely absent (or superficial) in most discussions about the conflict. A number of critical facts emerge from such an analysis, which should guide policymakers immediately:

1. It becomes clear that the Baathist regime is going to be the only entity in Syria able to meaningfully oversee and execute this process in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, a forcible overthrow or collapse of the Syrian government would be among the worst conceivable outcomes.

2. During any transitional period, Bashar al-Asad may play an important role as a bulwark against more insidious elements of the “deep state” who have, from the beginning, believed that the government’s response to the uprising was actually too soft. That is, removing al-Asad prematurely may allow worse elements to seize power, making the process of reform much more difficult.