

Now or Never: A Negotiated Transition for Syria International Crisis Group - Middle East Briefing
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Overview One year into the Syrian uprising, the level of death and destruction is reaching new heights. Yet, outside actors – whether regime allies or opponents – remain wedded to behaviour that risks making an appalling situation worse. Growing international polarisation simultaneously gives the regime political space to maintain an approach – a mix of limited reforms and escalating repression – that in the longer run is doomed to fail; guarantees the opposition’s full militarisation, which could trigger all-out civil war; and heightens odds of a regional proxy war that might well precipitate a dangerous conflagration.

Kofi Annan’s appointment as joint UN/Arab League Special Envoy arguably offers a chance to rescue fading prospects for a negotiated transition. (...)

(...) Annan’s best hope lies in enlisting international and notably Russian support for a plan that:

- comprises an early transfer of power that preserves the integrity of key state institutions;
- ensures a gradual yet thorough overhaul of security services; and
- puts in place a process of transitional justice and national reconciliation that reassures

Syrian constituencies alarmed by the dual prospect of tumultuous change and violent score-settling. Such a proposal almost certainly would be criticised by regime and opposition alike. But it would be welcomed by the many Syrians – officials included – who long for an alternative to the only two options currently on offer: either preserving the ruling family at all costs or toppling the regime no matter the consequences.

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