



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Toxic Leadership Under Bashar al-Assad: A Case Study

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Sep 10, 2024	<p>By analyzing Assad's leadership style and its impact on Syria, we can deduce the Lessons The following results: The Syrian crisis clearly demonstrates how toxic leadership can have dire consequences far beyond a state's borders. Assad's policies have led to a devastating civil war, a global refugee crisis, economic collapse, and the disintegration of Syria's social fabric, and This underscores the importance of early detection of toxic leadership and addressing it before its effects become severe. The importance of democratic institutions: The example of Syria shows the importance of strong and effective democratic institutions. The absence of real checks and balances has allowed Assad to concentrate power in his own hands and suppress dissent. The role of the international community: The Syrian crisis raises difficult questions about the role of the international community in dealing with high-profile leaders. It has demonstrated the limits of traditional diplomatic and economic tools in confronting a regime determined to stay in power at any cost. In conclusion, the case of Bashar al-Assad offers valuable lessons about the dangers of toxic leadership and the challenges of confronting it. It invites us to think seriously about how to build more resilient societies and political systems that are more capable of resisting tyranny. It also reminds us that preserving democracy and human rights is an ongoing responsibility that requires vigilance and tireless work from all members of society. The challenge facing us today is how to apply these lessons to prevent the emergence of toxic leaders in the future, and how to build a more just and democratic world that respects the rights of all people and protects their dignity.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The world today has witnessed many changes resulting from cognitive developments and technological transformations; which resulted in major changes in the methods of producing knowledge and types of professions, and the emergence of specializations that did not exist before according to the requirements of the labor market; which requires making changes in administrative methods in schools.

Leadership plays an important and influential role in the success of organizations in achieving their goals, as leadership affects on Performance involves complex relationships at different organizational levels. (Aravena, 2019), An effective leader is one who has a great influence within the organization, and this influence does not necessarily have to be always positive. He may exploit his influence in a way that contradicts the authority granted to him, which results in the collapse of the organization. (Al-Al-Romeedy & Ozbek, 2022).

This is why researchers have recently become more interested in studying the dark side of leadership. There is no doubt that negative leadership practices and abuse of power in some organizations have revived researchers' interest in the dark side of leadership. There is also a group

of dark or destructive leadership styles, including destructive leadership, toxic leadership, abusive leadership, authoritarian leadership, and toxic leadership. Despite the differences in these concepts, they have been used to describe the same phenomenon, which is the hostile leadership effects of those in a position of authority, which negatively affect employees and the organization (Radwan, 2019).

Understanding toxic leadership is not only useful for advancing leadership theories, but can be an essential element in developing leaders and providing them with best organizational practices. At the same time, it is harmful to subordinates and costly to the organization. (Sparks et al., 2015).

Toxic leadership is a critical issue in organizational and political contexts, often resulting in detrimental effects on followers, institutions, and entire nations. This case study therefore examines the leadership style of Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria since 2000, as an example of toxic leadership in action, exploring the characteristics of Assad's leadership, its impact on Syria and its people, and the broader implications for understanding toxic leadership in political contexts.

Research problem:

The toxic leadership of Bashar al-Assad in Syria provides a critical case study of how destructive rule can destroy a nation and create far-reaching regional and global consequences. Since taking power in 2000, Assad has displayed classic characteristics of toxic leadership, including authoritarian decision-making, disregard for human rights, manipulation of information, and the creation of a climate of fear. These leadership practices have led to a multifaceted crisis with profound societal, political, economic, regional, and international security implications.

Research Questions

This case study raises critical questions about the nature of toxic leadership in political contexts, the mechanisms by which it takes hold, and the challenges of effectively addressing it, especially when it is deeply embedded in state power structures. It also highlights the need to better understand how to prevent the rise of toxic leaders and mitigate their effects once they are in power.

The research sought to answer the following questions:

- How does a Leo's leadership style match the characteristics of toxic leadership?
- What factors have contributed to Assad's ability to maintain power despite widespread opposition and international condemnation?
 - How can the international community more effectively address cases of toxic leadership in sovereign states?
- What lessons can be drawn from the Assad case to prevent the rise of toxic leaders in other contexts?
- How does the concept of toxic leadership in political contexts differ from or relate to toxic leadership in institutional or organizational settings?

Study hypothesis:

It is likely that Bashar al-Assad's approach to governance shows a toxic and immoral leadership style, which relies on tyranny, oppression, and disregard for human rights, which negatively affects the cohesion of Syrian society, enhances the spread of corruption and violence, and weakens state institutions in the long run.

Research objectives:

The aim of the research is to:

Defining toxic leadership and identifying its main characteristics. –1

-Analysis of Bashar al-Assad's leadership style within the framework of toxic leadership.

-Assessing the Impact of Assad's Leadership on Syria and Its Citizens.

-Discussing the broader implications of toxic leadership in political contexts.

-A critical assessment of the challenges of addressing toxic leadership in established political systems.

Importance of research:

Advancing understanding of toxic leadership in political contexts: This study makes a significant contribution to the field of leadership studies by applying the concept of toxic leadership to a complex political context. While toxic leadership has been widely studied in organizational settings, its manifestations and effects in national governance are less explored.

Informing International Politics and Diplomacy: By analyzing the international community's responses to the Assad regime, this research can inform future diplomatic strategies and policy decisions regarding similar situations. It also highlights the challenges and limitations of current international mechanisms in addressing toxic leadership within sovereign states, which may guide reforms in international law and diplomacy.

Enhancing conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies: The insights provided by the study into the entrenchment and persistence of toxic leadership in conflict situations could contribute significantly to conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. Understanding the dynamics of Assad's rule could help develop more effective strategies for negotiation, mediation, and post-conflict reconstruction in Syria and similar contexts.

Strengthening human rights protection mechanisms: The study's examination of human rights violations under Assad's rule can be useful in improving international human rights protection mechanisms. It highlights the need for more effective tools to prevent and respond to systematic human rights violations by state leaders.

Civil Society Media and Democracy-Building Efforts: By analyzing how the Assad leadership has suppressed civil society and democratic institutions, this research can inform strategies to strengthen these elements in Syria and other authoritarian contexts. The study highlights the critical role of strong civil society and democratic institutions in preventing and mitigating toxic leadership.

Contribution to Middle East regional studies: The study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership and conflict in the Middle East, contributing to a deeper understanding of regional politics and the interplay between domestic and international factors in shaping political outcomes.

This research therefore holds great value for academics, policymakers, diplomats, human rights advocates, and the wider public. It not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of toxic leadership and authoritarian regimes, but also has practical implications for addressing similar challenges in other contexts. The insights gained from this study can inform more effective strategies for strengthening democratic governance, protecting human rights, and promoting international peace and security.

Theoretical framework:

Toxic leadership:

Leadership plays an important and influential role in the success of organizations in achieving their goals, as leadership affects performance and involves complex relationships at various organizational, emotional, professional, and personal levels.(Arevana, 2019).

Researchers have recently become increasingly interested in studying the dark side of leadership, as there are many dark and negative leadership styles. Ohls pointed out that (Olls, 2014) pointed out that toxic leadership, as one of the dark images in leadership behavior, is widely present, and he pointed out that its harmful effects do not only affect employees, but also affect organizations and society as a whole..

There are many names used to describe toxic leadership, including poor supervision, autocratic leadership, aggression, authoritarian leadership, Machiavellian or narcissistic leadership, defective leadership, deviant leadership, and toxic leadership (Dahesh, 2017).

The concept of toxic leadership:

Researchers have used the terms toxic leadership and toxic leader, but they differed in their definitions. The following is a summary of the terms:

Presenting the most important definitions of toxic leadership and the toxic leader:

I knew if others (Lu et al, 2012) defines a toxic leader as a leader who abuses his authority, violates the legitimate interest of the organization, and engages in unethical or even illegal behavior.

And Ols knew it (Olls, 2014) as a type of counterproductive business behavior aimed at harming the legitimate interests of the organization.

Sparks and Zurich knew it (Sparks & Zurick, 2015) as involving the interdependence between the leader and followers in an environment where deviation is common in order to achieve self-interests at the expense of the interests of the organization.

Mohammed pointed out (2023) Toxic leadership is a voluntary or intentional behavior on the part of a leader that aims to harm subordinates and the organization by encouraging subordinates to achieve goals that conflict with the legitimate interests of the organization and using harmful methods to influence subordinates in order to achieve the leader's goals..

The researcher defines toxic leadership as deliberate behaviors issued by the leader that harm the organization in which he works or harm his subordinates or both together in order to achieve his personal goals.

Traits of toxic leadership:

There are many traits that a leader must have in order for us to judge him as having toxic leadership traits.

Sparks and Zurich both confirmed that (Sparks & Zurick, 2015) that high-profile leaders are characterized by charismatic behaviors and characteristics that include providing vision, self-skills, and a high degree of energy, especially since they have a need and obsession with power, not for the purpose of achieving organizational goals, but rather for the purpose of enhancing and increasing self-promotion.

While Einarsen et al. (Einarsen et al, 2007) stated that the toxic leader is characterized by three features that can be explained as follows:

-1 The behavior of a toxic leader is regular and repetitive: This means that toxic leadership behavior excludes irregular or occasional behaviors such as those that occur during a fit of anger, or when rushing, or others. Rather, it is regular behavior characterized by continuity, such as persistently making bad decisions that lead to harming the organization's interests, or dealing with employees in a systematically aggressive manner.

-2 There is no relationship between intention and toxic behavior of the leader: Some researchers believe that the intention to harm the organization is included when making decisions, while many

researchers exclude the issue of the presence of intention and the behavior issued by the leader is sufficient without considering the presence of intention to harm.

-3 Violation of the legitimate interests of the organization: Toxic leadership behaviors violate the legitimate interests of the organization, and therefore legitimate interests accordingly are those that are within the limits of the law and what justifies them, and therefore the behaviors of toxic leaders are behaviors that violate the law or customs and that harm the organization.

As Gardner et al. point out, Gardner, 2016) suggests that a toxic leader is authoritarian, ineffective, unethical, and incompetent.

Omar et al. also pointed out that: Omar, 2015) that the toxic leader always reduces cohesion and encourages frustration, tension and despair among followers by limiting and controlling initiative, which results in a stressful work environment that helps corruption grow.

As Leonard explained, Leonard, 2014) that there are some characteristics of toxic leadership as follows: it involves coercion and manipulation rather than commitment and persuasion, and it is characterized by selfishness, as it essentially focuses on the goals and objectives of the leader rather than the goals of the organization and the well-being of its members.

Causes of Toxic Leadership:

When studying the variable of toxic leadership, it is very useful to study the reasons for the emergence of this style of leadership, because half of the treatment of the problem is identifying its causes..

Al-Abidi (2018) confirmed that a purposeful work culture often appears through its values and beliefs within the standards of positive behavior, but an individual or group of individuals may appear and their goal becomes destruction and sabotage in the workplace, and these behaviors may range from disrespect to verbal assault or concealing their faults and mistakes at the expense of others, and there are several reasons that require the emergence of such behaviors that can be explained as follows:

- 1-When an individual has low self-esteem and needs to prove himself by exploiting others or controlling a weaker person.
- 2-Achieving personal goals through the power and position he enjoys at the expense of the goals of subordinates.
- 3-An individual's love for spreading lies and rumors in order to complete his personality at the expense of others, and this behavior may lead to distorting the reputation of subordinates.
- 4-Using threat as a weapon to achieve personal goals.
- 5-Lack of social competencies including emotion and emotional intelligence.

As Sheard emphasizes, Sheard, 2013) stated that toxic leadership behaviors can appear in organizations due to several factors, including:

- 1-Direct and indirect reinforcement of organizational and social environments; as in many environments there are factors that may encourage the emergence of narcissistic leaders, in addition to the praise and commendation that falls under what is known as social and false hypocrisy by a group of working individuals close to these leaders, as these environments are described as unstable and low in culture, knowledge and organization.
- 2-Weak personalities and wills of individuals working with leaders who follow destructive and subversive behaviors of their feelings, goals and desires, and they do not move a muscle and are obedient despite being exploited. (Muhammad, 2020).

Bashar al-Assad: Background and Rise to Power

Bashar al-Assad was born in 1965 in Damascus, Syria. He is the son of Hafez al-Assad, who ruled Syria from 1971 to 2000. Initially, Bashar was not groomed for leadership, as his older brother, Bassel, was expected to succeed their father. However, after Bassel's death in 1994, Bashar was quickly groomed for succession (Zisser, 2007).

Assad took over the presidency in 2000 after the death of his father. Initially, there were hopes for reform and modernization under his leadership. But these hopes were quickly dashed as Assad consolidated his power and continued many of his father's authoritarian practices.

Leo Leadership Style: Signs of Toxicity

The Leo leadership style closely aligns with the characteristics of toxic leadership in several key ways:

autocratic decision making Assad has a highly centralized and authoritarian approach to governance. He maintains tight control over all aspects of Syrian politics and society, making unilateral decisions without meaningful consultation or consideration of diverse viewpoints. (Lesch, 2011). This is consistent with the toxic leadership trait of concentrating power and excluding others from the decision-making process.

Disregard for ethical standards and human rights Under Assad's leadership, Syria has been accused of numerous human rights violations, including torture, arbitrary detention, and the use of chemical weapons against civilians. (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This blatant disregard for ethical standards and human rights is the hallmark of toxic leadership, prioritizing the retention of power over ethical considerations.

Narcissism and self-interest: Assad has consistently prioritized maintaining his power over the well-being of Syrian citizens. His refusal to step down or negotiate during the Syrian civil war, despite the immense suffering it has caused, demonstrates a focus on personal interests rather than national well-being (Phillips, 2016). This is consistent with the toxic leadership trait of extreme selfishness and disregard for the needs of followers.

Create a climate of fear Through the use of secret police, arbitrary arrests, and violent suppression of dissent, Assad has created an environment of fear and intimidation in Syria. (Pearlman, 2017). This is consistent with the toxic leadership trait of using fear as a control mechanism.

Manipulating information The Assad regime tightly controls the media and the flow of information inside Syria, manipulating narratives to maintain power and discredit the opposition. (Yassin-Kassab, & Al-Shami, 2016). This is consistent with the toxic leadership trait of distorting reality and controlling information to serve the leader's interests.

Lack of accountability Assad has consistently refused to take responsibility for the atrocities committed under his rule, often blaming external factors or "terrorists" for the country's problems. (Abboud, 2016). This is consistent with the toxic leadership trait of avoiding accountability and deflecting blame.

Divisive tactics Assad has exploited and exacerbated sectarian divisions within Syria to maintain power, using a "divide and rule" strategy to divide the opposition and maintain support from certain groups (Hinnebusch, 2012). This is consistent with the toxic leadership trait of creating divisions to maintain control.

Coercion and intimidation The Assad regime has used extreme violence, including alleged chemical weapons attacks, to suppress dissent and maintain control. (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This use of coercion and intimidation is a classic hallmark of toxic leadership.

Exploiting the needs of followers Assad has played on the fears and insecurities of certain segments of the Syrian population, especially religious minorities, by positioning himself as their protector against extremism. (Zisser, 2007). This exploitation of followers' needs for security is consistent with toxic leadership tactics.

Resistance to change and criticism: Despite international condemnation and calls for reform, Assad has remained largely intransigent, refusing to implement meaningful changes or accept criticism of his leadership. This resistance to change and criticism is a common trait among high-level leaders.

The researcher sees ABashar al-Assad's leadership style closely aligns with the characteristics of toxic leadership across multiple dimensions. His authoritarian rule, disregard for human rights, manipulation of information and sectarian divisions, creation of a climate of fear, and prioritization of personal power over national well-being all embody the destructive nature of toxic leadership in a political context.

Factors that contributed to Assad's ability to maintain power:

Key factors that have contributed to Assad's ability to maintain power despite widespread opposition and international condemnation It was represented in the following:

- External support: Military and political support from Russia and Iran has been crucial to the survival of the Assad regime. (Phillips, 2016). Russia provided air cover and advanced weapons, while Iran provided ground forces and financial support. This external support strengthened the regime's military capabilities and protected it from direct international intervention. (Hinnebusch, 2012).
- The opposition is fragmented: The inability of the Syrian opposition to unite its ranks and present a coherent alternative contributed to the prolongation of Assad's rule. (Lister, 2015).
- Exploiting the fear of extremism: Assad has successfully portrayed himself as a protector of minorities and a bulwark against Islamic extremism, earning him support from some segments of Syrian society and the international community., it has He exploited the rise of extremist organizations such as ISIS to justify his repression and gain international sympathy. (Lesch, 2011).
- Control of government institutions: Barefoot ٱطThe lion is in control of M ٱWisdom over key government institutions, especially the military and security services, and This control enabled him to effectively suppress dissent and maintain the loyalty of the ruling elites. (Heidemann, 2013).
- Control of media and information: The regime has imposed strict censorship on the media and the internet, allowing it to control the dominant narrative inside Syria., and He used propaganda effectively to discredit the opposition and enhance his own legitimacy. (Yassin-Kassab & Al-Shami, 2016).
- Exploiting international divisions: Assad has taken advantage of divisions in the UN Security Council, particularly between the West and Russia/China, which have prevented decisive international action against him. (Hinnebusch, 2012).
- "Long War" Strategy ٱAssad adopted a strategy of steadfastness and attrition, relying on the fact that time would work in his favor as the opposition and the international community became tired (Abboud, 2016).
- Benefit from customer networks: Hafez al-Assad maintained a complex network of clientelist relationships that linked the interests of economic and military elites to his continued hold on power. (Daher, 2019).
- brutal suppression of dissent: The regime used excessive force and brutal methods to suppress dissent, creating a climate of fear and discouraging opponents. (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

- **Exploitation of sectarian identities:** Assad has deepened sectarian divisions in Syrian society, which has strengthened support for him among some groups fearing alternatives.(Pearlman, 2017).

SoIt can be argued that a complex mix of internal and external factors, coupled with Assad's cunning strategies, have contributed to his ability to remain in power despite the enormous challenges. This highlights the complexity of dealing with toxic leadership in political contexts, especially when it is supported by external forces and powerful internal networks..

The impact of Assad's toxic leadership

The consequences of Assad's leadership style have been devastating for Syria and its people:

1-Syrian Civil War: Assad's refusal to address legitimate grievances and his violent response to protests in 2011 led to a devastating civil war that lasted for more than a decade (Abboud, 2016).

2-Humanitarian crisis: The conflict has led to one of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century, with millions of Syrians internally and externally displaced (UNHCR, UNHCR, 2021).

3-economic collapse: The Syrian economy has been shattered by ongoing conflict, sanctions and mismanagement, resulting in widespread poverty and suffering for Syrian citizens. Daher, 2019).

4-International isolation: Assad's actions have isolated Syria on the international stage, with sanctions and diplomatic pressure imposed on it by many countries (Hinnebusch, 2012).

5-Institutional erosion: The concentration of power in Assad's hands has weakened Syrian institutions and civil society, making real reform increasingly difficult. Heidemann, 2013).

The effectiveness of the international community's response to cases of toxic leadership in sovereign states:

The international community faces significant challenges in dealing with toxic leadership in sovereign states, given the principles of non-interference and respect for national sovereignty. However, there are several strategies that the international community can follow to deal more effectively with these situations.:

- **Strengthening early warning mechanisms:** Develop more effective monitoring and analysis systems to identify indicators of toxic leadership in their early stages.(Byman & Lind, 2010).
- **Strengthening international institutions:** Reforming the UN Security Council to limit the use of the veto in cases of gross human rights violations, andStrengthening the role of the International Criminal Court in holding accountable leaders involved in crimes against humanity(Weiss, 2015).
- **Smart Sanctions Application:** Targeting senior leaders and their support networks with targeted financial and travel sanctions, rather than blanket sanctions that affect the general population.(Drezner, 2011).
- **Supporting civil society and independent media:** Providing financial and technical support to NGOs and independent journalists within the countries concerned, andStrengthening the capacity of these entities to document violations and disseminate accurate information(Keck & Sikkink, 1998).
- **Strengthening multi-track diplomacy:** Engaging a wide range of actors, including diplomats, NGOs, and the private sector, in conflict resolution efforts(Lederach, 1997).
- **Building regional and international alliances:** Formation of broad alliances of countries and regional organizationsthroughCoordinate diplomatic and economic efforts to increase their effectiveness in pressuring senior leaders.(Keohane, 1984).
- **Support for institutional reform:** Providing technical and financial assistance to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law in countries at risk(Carothers, 1999).

- Support education and awareness programmes on good governance and human rights.
- Use positive incentives: Providing economic and diplomatic incentives to countries that demonstrate progress on good governance and human rights.(Levitsky & Way, 2005).
- Improving cooperation in combating corruption: Strengthening international cooperation in tracing stolen assets and recovering stolen funds(Sharman, 2017).
- Developing communication and information strategies: Countering propaganda and misinformation spread by toxic regimes with effective information campaigns, and supporting alternative media platforms and censorship circumvention technologies(Nye, 2004).

The researcher believes that this effectively addressing toxic leadership in sovereign states requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. So that the international community must balance respect for national sovereignty with the need to protect human rights and good governance. Strong international coordination and the intelligent use of diplomatic, economic and legal tools are essential to achieve effective results in confronting toxic leadership..

Lessons learned from Assad's leadership to prevent the rise of high-ranking leaders in other contexts:

Several important lessons can be drawn from the Assad case to prevent the rise of toxic leaders in other contexts. These lessons include::

- The importance of strong democratic institutions: Strengthening the separation of powers and checks and balances mechanisms to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of one individual through ensuring the independence of the judiciary and the strength of parliament as guarantees against tyranny(Linz & Stepan, 1996).
- Maintaining an active civil society: Support and protect NGOs, unions, and independent media as counter-actors to absolute power. (Diamond, 1994).
- Tackling corruption in its early stages: Implement strict policies to combat corruption and prevent the exploitation of public resources. (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).
- Limiting family or one-party control: constitutional limits on terms of office and the transfer of power and preventing the inheritance or monopolization of power by a specific group (Schedler, 2002).
- Promoting political pluralism: Ensuring a fair and transparent electoral system that allows for real competition (Levitsky & Way, 2010).
- Paying attention to the early signs of toxic leadership: Developing mechanisms to monitor and analyze the behavior of political leaders (Kellerman, 2004).
- Promoting education and political awareness: Including civic education and human rights in school curricula (Galston, 2001).
- Maintaining the independence of the armed forces: Preventing the politicization of the army and ensuring its loyalty to the constitution and not to a specific person or party (Huntington, 1957).
- Strengthening international and regional ties: Promote integration into international and regional organizations that support democracy and human rights. (Pevehouse, 2005).
- Addressing social and economic grievances: Addressing poverty and inequality that can fuel discontent and facilitate the rise of populist leaders (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).
- Promoting freedom of media and information: Ensuring freedom of the press and protecting journalists from persecution (Freedom House, 2021).
- Building a democratic political culture: Promoting the values of tolerance, dialogue and pluralism in society (Almond & Verba, 1963).
- Developing accountability mechanisms: Establishing independent and effective oversight bodies to monitor government performance (O'Donnell, 1998).

- Concern for transitional justice: Establish mechanisms to deal with the legacy of past violations to prevent their recurrence (Teitel, 2000).
- Strengthening international cooperation in combating toxic leadership: Developing more effective international mechanisms to address gross human rights violations (Sikkink, 2011).

From the above, these lessons underscore the importance of building strong, resilient political systems that can resist the rise of toxic leaders. This requires sustained efforts at the local, national, and international levels, with a focus on promoting democracy, human rights, and good governance. By applying these lessons, societies can become more resilient to the emergence and influence of toxic leadership.

CONCLUSION:

The case study of Bashar al-Assad as an example of toxic leadership provides a disturbing insight into the devastating effects that such leadership can have on states and societies. By analyzing Assad's leadership style and its impact on Syria, we can deduce the following results:

1. The Syrian crisis clearly demonstrates how toxic leadership can have dire consequences far beyond a state's borders. Assad's policies have led to a devastating civil war, a global refugee crisis, economic collapse, and the disintegration of Syria's social fabric., and This underscores the importance of early detection of toxic leadership and addressing it before its effects become severe..
2. The importance of democratic institutions: The example of Syria shows the importance of strong and effective democratic institutions. The absence of real checks and balances has allowed Assad to concentrate power in his own hands and suppress dissent.
3. The role of the international community: The Syrian crisis raises difficult questions about the role of the international community in dealing with high-profile leaders. It has demonstrated the limits of traditional diplomatic and economic tools in confronting a regime determined to stay in power at any cost..
4. The importance of awareness and education: The continued rule of Assad despite all that has happened highlights the importance of promoting political awareness and critical thinking among citizens. Education and political literacy can help inoculate societies against the propaganda and disinformation practiced by toxic regimes.
5. The need for a comprehensive approach: The Syrian case confirms that addressing toxic leadership requires a comprehensive approach that includes political, economic and social reforms. The conditions that allow toxic leaders to emerge and persist are often complex and intertwined..
6. The importance of transitional justice: As the conflict in Syria continues, it is important to think about how to deal with the legacy of abuses and crimes in the future. Transitional justice and reconciliation will be crucial to building a post-Assad Syria..
7. The role of media and civil society: The Syrian crisis has demonstrated the importance of a free media and an active civil society as lines of defense against a toxic leadership. Suppressing these institutions was one of Assad's first steps to consolidate his power..

In conclusion, the case of Bashar al-Assad offers valuable lessons about the dangers of toxic leadership and the challenges of confronting it. It invites us to think seriously about how to build more resilient societies and political systems that are more capable of resisting tyranny. It also reminds us that preserving democracy and human rights is an ongoing responsibility that requires vigilance and tireless work from all members of society.

The challenge facing us today is how to apply these lessons to prevent the emergence of toxic leaders in the future, and how to build a more just and democratic world that respects the rights of all people and protects their dignity.

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