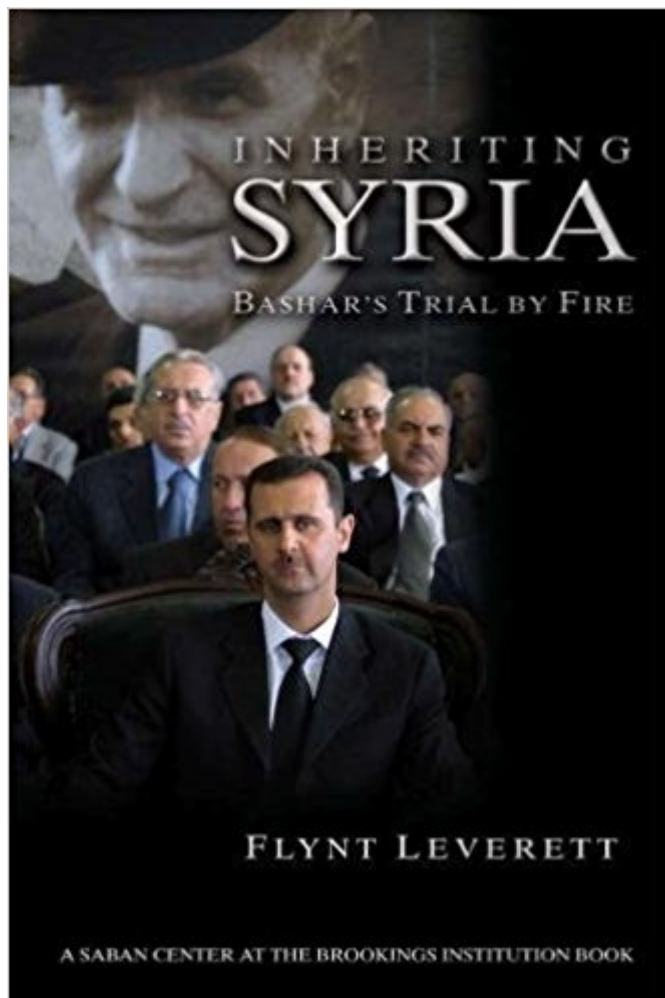


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Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial By Fire



Synopsis

Syria has long presented a difficult problem for American policymakers. Actively supportive of groups such as Hezbollah, it has occupied Lebanon for more than 20 years. Damascus remains intransigent on Israel's complete withdrawal from the disputed Golan Heights as the sine qua non for peace with that state. It is often mentioned in the same breath as members of the infamous "axis of evil." Syria occupies an important strategic position in the Middle East—one made even more significant as America considers long-term involvement in the reconstruction of Iraq. As the policy challenges posed by Syria's problematic behavior have grown more pressing in the recent security environment, the United States has had difficulty formulating a coherent and effective policy toward Damascus. The death of long-time dictator Hafiz al Assad has forced renewed debate on its place in the region. The transition from Assad to his son Bashar has thrown Western consensus on how to deal with the Syrian leadership further into doubt. In heriting Syria fills this void with a detailed analytic portrait of the Syrian regime under Bashar's leadership. It draws implications for U.S. policy, offering a bold new strategy for achieving American objectives, largely via a strategy of "coordinated engagement" employing both sticks and carrots. This strategy would be independent of the Arab-Israeli peace process, thus a historical departure for the United States. The author's long service in the foreign policy establishment has uniquely positioned him to provide valuable insights into this mysterious yet important country. This book will be of high interest to those concerned about the Middle East, the war on terror, and the future of American foreign policy. Written for a general audience as well as the policymaking and academic communities, heriting Syria is an important resource for all who seek deeper understanding of this enigmatic nation and its leadership.

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Customer Reviews

"Leverett offers an incisive analysis of how Hafez Assad operated and what motives underlay his endless maneuvering and calculation." —Thomas W. Lippman, The Washington Post, Book World, 6/12/2005" This book is valuable for its account of Syria under Bashar al-Asad, but especially for its insights into the US policy process and the divisions within the US foreign policy establishment....Leverett's measured analysis (along with inside accounts of other moderates) gives hope that the voices of reason may yet prevail in the corridors of Washington power."

—Raymond Hinnebusch, The Middle East Journal" Inheriting Syria is recommended for public and academic libraries and to those interested in Middle Eastern affairs." — Curled Up, 11/16/2005" At a time in Washington when policy interests chase down facts, near facts or fiction, what suffers is honest analysis, common sense and nuance. Fortunately, that is what Leverett offers in the discussions of Bashar's performance thus far in managing Syria's domestic- and foreign-policy." —Martha Neff Kessler, Middle East Policy" an exhaustive study of the country's policies and ambitions under the young president." —Tim Boxer, 15 Minutes" Flynt Leverett's book is one of the few that make sense. It is a sympathetic and well-researched account of Syria since the death of its long-time leader President Hafez al-Asad five years ago." —Amir Taheri, Asharq Alawsat, 10/24/2005" This book, with no doubt, is destined to serve as an important source for studying contemporary Syria....In sum, Leverett's book is an important, interesting, and informative one. It will serve as a vital source of information for anyone interested in learning more about Syria and Bashshar al-Asad. It also offers important insights into Washington's mode of conduct vis-a-vis Syria in recent years." —Eyal Zisser, Middle Eastern Studies" Leverett parts the veil to show us the complex workings of this state sponsor of terror, possessor of WMD, and important player in determining the future of the Middle East. From peace for Israel to the security of U.S. forces in Iraq, Syria has a veto. Leverett shows how the unlikely leader in Damascus is struggling with the strange regime his father built." —Richard A. Clarke, former U.S. national coordinator for counterterrorism and author of AGAINST ALL ENEMIES" Flynt Leverett is a 'country specialist' in the best sense of the term. He is thoroughly familiar with Syria's politics and policies as well as the ins and outs of the U.S.-Syrian relationship. This is a well-balanced assessment of Bashar and his regime, offering a thoughtful analysis and critique of U.S. policy as well as

alternative options." —Itamar Rabinovich, President, Tel Aviv University"When I served as Director of Central Intelligence, Flynt Leverett was one of my 'go-to' analysts on the Middle East, particularly Syria. In 1996, his forthright analysis helped U.S. policymakers walk Israel and Syria back from the brink of armed conflict. He now brings that same analytic acumen and historical perspective to the difficult choices facing the United States. No matter what your point of view, this is a well-written and solidly argued book that could not be more timely." —George J. Tenet, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and former Director of Central Intelligence"Bashar al-Asad's Syria has remained a mystery to most observers. Flynt Leverett's book begins to unravel the mystery. He offers an insightful picture of who the younger Asad is; how he seeks to follow the 'script' he inherited from his father; which political, familial, psychological, sectarian, and bureaucratic factors constrain him; and what approaches by the United States might most effectively alter Bashar's behavior and the balance of forces in Syria. For anyone interested in understanding Syria today and considering the options for dealing with it, this book is essential reading." —Dennis B. Ross, Washington Institute for Near East Policy and former special Middle East coordinator

Flynt Leverett is a senior fellow and director of the Global Energy Initiative in the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation. Most recently, Leverett was a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy. He has served as senior director for Middle East affairs at the U.S. National Security Council, on the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, and as a senior Middle East analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mr Leverett gave the best analysis for the state of Syria past and present that I have read in one book. This is definitely the book to read for a balanced account of Syrian history and the future of Syria based on the history. I study Syria extensively and this book is the best and most unbiased single book to read on the subject plain and simple. Great job

This is an excellent book if you are interested in the middle east.

Great! Good book.

I will give this book five stars because it is perhaps the only book available in English that offers this kind of information on Syria, even though such information is widely available in Arabic texts.

Leverett provides a highly accurate description of the power circle in Syria despite the few minor mistakes. The author then cites a number of Bashar's statements and encounters to support the book's main point: that Bashar Assad has genuine intentions for change and positive overture toward the United States except that the US is not currently willing to reciprocate this kind of behavior. Leverett then examines the possibilities facing America when dealing with rogue states like Syria. According to Leverett, there are four options: sanctions, military campaigns or alternatively, Leverett suggests that the United States employs what he terms as "conditional engagement." The author dismisses sanctions saying that they proved to be inadequate if applied unilaterally without Europe's involvement. He argues that military campaigns exposed America's limited human and financial resources as the United States maintains considerable missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and other regions of the world. Therefore, Leverett suggests that the US start building trust with Syria and provide Bashar and his young team leverage over the old guard in his presumed bid to change and modernize Syria. American-Syrian trust building can start from the successful exchange of intelligence information on Al-Qaeda and be expanded to include exchange of other favors. According to Leverett, these incentives would be the carrots as opposed to the many sticks with which America will threaten Syria in case the latter fails to comply. Consequently, and over the medium and long terms, such a policy will benefit both nations even though the author does not suggest that it will lead to the democratization of Syria. He stated, however, that trying to unseat Bashar would only bring instability and Muslim fundamentalists to power and that Bashar remains America's best bid in Syria. The hypothesis of the book is interesting, even though it has nothing new to it. This kind of containment-of-dictators policy has dominated America's foreign policy prior to 9/11 and has not proven any particular success. Furthermore, a main prophecy in the book failed the test of time since according to Leverett, a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon would lead to a Lebanese civil war. By the time this review was written, Syrian troops had been outside of Lebanon for over a month and nothing like civil strife yet appears to be coming in the Lebanese horizons. As for Israel, Leverett makes it known that Bashar's attitude to the US is independent of the procession of any Syrian-Israeli peace. Leverett quoted Bashar as saying that he was ready to "bracket" the peace process for the time being while he improves Damascus's bilateral relations with Washington. This can only be a proof that Arab dictators like Bashar are never as genuinely concerned about re-gaining any disputed land inasmuch as they are interested in keeping the Arab-Israeli conflict going so that they can use it as a pretext to justify their leadership and divert their people's hate against foreign enemies and away from their tyranny and corruption.

This book promises much, particularly in dealing with this little-known (in the U.S., at least), but ultimately very important lynchpin in the Middle East. There is interesting material on the Assad family as well as the Syrian political environment and dynamic, BUT too many of the annotated sources are highly questionable, e.g., Leverett quotes frequently from publications by the Washington Center on Near East Policy, an American Likudnik organization closely tied to AIPAC, the principal Israeli lobby in this country. Additionally, he quotes from Daniel Pipes, the highly controversial creator of the McCarthyite CAMPUS WATCH, to 'monitor and censure' College Professors not teaching Middle Eastern Affairs from an Israeli-centric view. Pipes, widely regarded as an Arabophobe and Islamophobe throughout academic circles, is a highly biased source. Although this book is valuable since there are so few others on the subject available in English, it should be used and studied with great caution. Too bad, an excellent opportunity by the author has been missed.

Despite somewhat dry writing and rapidly evolving events on the ground, this is a compelling book for anyone interested in the Middle East. Former U.S. State Department and C.I.A. Syria-expert Flynt Leverett covers the history, personalities and strategies of the late dictator, Hafiz Al-Asad, and his son, Bashar, Syria's current ruler. The author explains U.S. diplomatic options and traces the evolution of Syria, an impoverished rogue dictatorship long under U.S. sanctions as a state that supports terrorism. He devotes about 30% of his well-researched book to a chronology, appendix and footnotes. He provides extensive support materials to demonstrate why a country with so many internal needs has become such a devoted patron of terrorism, imbued with the purpose of destabilizing Western Democracies' policies and spoiling any regional peace efforts. Leverett also addresses the U.S. State Department's near tolerance of much of Syria's international troublemaking. While he presents clear descriptions, he offers no clear-cut answers - as if there are any - but offers possible scenarios, mostly stalemates, in this drawn-out international chess game. We recommend this book as important reading on U.S. foreign policy.

This is a well written, up to date interesting book. However it is written from an American analysts view. The analysis is good, but in my opinion it has too many references to US policies. Everett presents three different perspectives of Bashar; as a reformer, as a status-quo president and as a lame-duck president and measures these views with his actual recent policy. It clearly demonstrates that Syrian policymaking is quite complex. Furthermore, it is as an authoritative account on Syrian contemporary politics. The concluding thoughts are however, in my opinion, perhaps a bit optimistic. Recommended reading for everyone interested in Levant- and authoritarian politics!

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