

THE DAILY STAR

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Voices of Syria

Two years after the outbreak of the uprising in Syria, The Daily Star spoke to Syrians from different walks of life about how their opinions had changed over the course of the conflict and what their hopes were for the future.

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Many Western politicians and observers expected the conflict to be over within a short time. This was a clear case of wishful thinking, completely overlooking the power and strength of the regime. More than a year and a half ago I indicated that I would not be surprised if the regime would be able to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Baath Party coming to power on March 8, 1963, which now is already behind us.

I was surprised by the level of violence and atrocities, as well as by the lack of vision of the regime that everything could be solved by violent suppression and intimidation of Syria's citizens.

The best way out seems to be a peaceful dialogue. Not to even try would be a missed chance, and the alternative is just further bloodshed and loss of life. Only after dialogue has really failed, should alternative options be considered.

President Assad will fight for his life and that of his regime. He will not sign his own death warrant, but he might step down in a constitutional way as a result of elections. I am afraid that Syria will still suffer from violence, destruction and sectarian polarization and confrontation, unless dialogue is started. The extremist Islamist opposition groups are bound to continue their violent opposition.

Nikolaos Van Dam

Former ambassador of the Netherlands and author of "The Struggle for Power in Syria"

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Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Mar-14/209999-voices-of-syria.ashx#ixzz2Nhs432Jc>

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