



DADDY DEAREST

INSIDE THE MIND OF BASHAR AL-ASSAD / BY NIHAD SIREES



corner. While all those accompanying him were chatting and laughing, Bashar would sit silently, absorbed in his iPad. With the arrival of fighting in Damascus, he has stopped dining out.

His sister left for Dubai with her children after her husband was killed, and then Bashar's mother followed his sister. People say Bashar has sent his wife to live somewhere safe with their kids, away from him. I can imagine him now, busy with the fighting for most of the day, for maybe as many as 18 hours. But at night, he sits in his bed with his iPad, surfing the websites he likes, while listening to the gunfire that comes closer and closer. London must seem like a lifetime away for this eye doctor, forever his father's son. **NW**

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Are the Syrian people doomed to keep dying until Bashar himself does?





Inexorably Bashar al-Assad, like his father, has leveled cities and executed opponents.

Soon after the death of his father in 2000, the young man who liked to spend his time in cafés in earnest communion with his laptop, the incongruously nerdy scion of an iron-fisted tyrant, found himself president of the country. He took the place of his deceased father, grasping all the reins of government and heading the security apparatus. He became the president and commander in chief of the Army and was immediately promoted to the rank of staff major general, head of all security agencies, and chair and theorist of the ruling Baath Party. He also became the head of the Supreme Judicial Council. According to the powers set forth in the Constitution, the president has the power to dissolve the People's Assembly and appoint the prime minister and the ministers, as well as the ability to sack them whenever he wants. In short, and overnight, he became the absolute leader of everyone and of everything in Syria.

He was an affable person and mild mannered, and the people liked him. He wanted to bring progress to Syria. He attended forums on the economy and listened attentively to debates. Everyone noted that he liked to listen, that he had a sympathetic ear. He encouraged putting forward initiatives and urged many



The two-year war in Syria is responsible for an estimated 70,000 deaths and counting.

school. The local security agencies treated the boys harshly, reportedly torturing and injuring them. When the people in the city learned what had happened, they poured out into the streets angrily, but security agents, true to Syrian ways, fired at them, and civilians were killed. The security apparatus simply dealt with the opposition in its time-honored manner: brutally and directly, according to the unwritten principles by which they were established.

Here was the defining moment for the president, the educated man and doctor who everyone attested had a nice and friendly character. What was he supposed to do at that moment, other than go and meet the angry people and calm their anger, and apologize to them for the physical abuse inflicted on their children? But President Bashar knew very well that he could not govern if he abused himself in that way. His belief in the system built by his father made it impossible for him to act in ways Hafez would have despised. So he kept sending his forces to crush the angry protesters, who were now in demonstrations not only because their brothers and relatives were imprisoned, tortured, and injured, but also because other Syrians—their fellow citizens—were being shot dead.