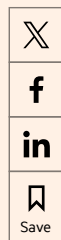


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Syria's state capture: the rising influence of Mrs Assad

Asma al-Assad, shown on last week's visit to the United Arab Emirates © FT montage: Getty Images/SANA

The first lady now has a leading role in a regime that is plundering the wealth of its people



Raya Jalabi in Beirut APRIL 2 2023



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When Bashar al-Assad visited Abu Dhabi on March 19, it was seen as the [latest sign](#) that the Syrian dictator is quietly being rehabilitated by his peers in the region.

But the trip was especially noteworthy for the fact that he was accompanied by his wife, Asma al-Assad. Dressed head to toe in white, Syria's enigmatic first lady stood out on her first known trip abroad since the outbreak of war over a decade ago.

Asma's presence underscored something little understood outside Syria: how a woman initially sidelined as an obstinate young newlywed with lofty western ideals has since risen to become one of the most powerful people in the country, at the apex of the country's ruthless ruling family.

In public, she styles herself as the Mother of the Nation, radiating maternal care as she tends to Syria's military families, cancer-stricken children and survivors of the February 6 earthquake. She sports delicate ribbons in her hair, her petite frame draped in dresses sewn by the widows of men martyred in her husband's war.

But privately, Asma has manoeuvred herself into a position of remarkable power, according to interviews with 18 people familiar with the regime's operations, including heads of business, aid workers and former government officials. She now controls some of the key levers in Syria's battered economy, both as policymaker and profiteer, helping consolidate the family's grip over a country in bloodied ruin.



Bashar al-Assad and his wife Asma visit an injured girl, who survived an earthquake in Latakia in February, at Tishreen hospital, Damascus © Yamam al Shaar/Reuters

An ex-JP Morgan banker, Asma sits at the head of the president's secretive economic council, staffed with the first couple's close acolytes and business associates. Her NGOs have helped build the Assads a vast patronage network, while controlling where international aid money flows in the country.

As early as 2020, "it had become clear that Asma was becoming a central funnel of economic power in Syria," says Joel Rayburn, who served as special envoy for Syria at the state department under President Trump.

Her fingerprints can be detected across multiple sectors of Syria's economy, including real estate, banking and telecommunications — albeit obscured by shell companies, free zones and offshore accounts owned by close associates.

That economy is teetering on the brink of collapse, hampered by years of conflict, unpaid debts to the regime's benefactors, western

sanctions, and the financial implosion in neighbouring Lebanon, long a haven for Syrian businessmen.

But much of what remains is split between Bashar, his younger brother Maher and Asma. Together, they have cannibalised Syria's traditional merchant class and created new ways to profit from the war, Syrian businessmen and analysts say.

Her name, in particular, has become shorthand for an era of financial consolidation by the presidential couple and their inner circle. As one Syrian businessman says: "All of Syria is now Asma's."

An auspicious match

Asma Akhras, 47, was born and raised in west London. People who knew her then recall a clever, charming and ambitious young woman, more comfortable speaking English than Arabic.

Her 2000 engagement to Bashar raised eyebrows, as her father was known to criticise the regime. "But Asma was clearly hungry for power," says a Syrian businessman who knew her during her time in London "Now, it's obvious to see that she thrives on [it]."

After a bumpy start in Damascus — hampered by her formidable mother-in-law who sought to restrict her role to motherhood — Asma dedicated herself to politically uncontroversial initiatives in tourism, culture and education.

In 2007, she set up the Syria Trust for Development, an NGO that would raise her profile and become an essential tool for the regime during the war. In early 2011, just as the Arab Spring arrived in Syria, Vogue published a now-infamous profile describing her as the "rose of the desert," the culmination of a decade-long charm offensive to ingratiate the couple in the western press.



Asma al-Assad makes a speech during the opening of the First International Development Conference of Syria, held by the Syria Trust for Development, in Damascus in 2010 © Khaled al-Hariri/Reuters

Before the civil war, the Damascene elite and western diplomats thought of Asma as someone who could "talk sense to [Bashar],

who made no sense”, says Andrew Tabler, a former US government official and a senior fellow on Arab policy at the Washington Institute think-tank. Many thought she would wield that influence to temper her husband’s reaction to the protests.

That assumption seems to have been misplaced. During the worst of the conflict, Asma retreated from public view, as her husband’s regime tortured and killed hundreds of thousands of people, and drove millions from their homes.

By 2016, with Assad’s forces back in control of much of Syria, she was out in full force. The timing was not a coincidence: her mother-in-law had died that year. Asma drummed up public adoration in the Alawite heartland through her charity work. A very public battle with breast cancer in 2018 helped bring the Assads closer together and soon after, Bashar entrusted his wife with parts of the state’s economics portfolio.

While Asma recovered, the country was facing increasingly dire straits. The economy was in freefall. Widespread shortages of essential goods became the norm, as the government haemorrhaged cash to fund military spending, public sector payroll, and subsidised goods. The regime was also deeply in debt to Russia and Iran. Then came the financial meltdown in Lebanon, which wiped out many Syrians’ savings. By December 2019, the currency had lost more than 95 per cent of its prewar value against the dollar, impoverishing swaths of the population.

These complex demands forced the regime to take drastic measures that cemented Bashar and Asma’s near-total grip on the economy, according to Syrian experts, businessmen and people with insight into the regime’s operations. Efforts to reach the government for comment were unsuccessful.

The presidential palace had already set about promoting close associates to act as fronts for the first family to help them accumulate more personal wealth. Many of these individuals had profited from the war; dabbling in real estate on expropriated land, operating checkpoints, or trading oil with Islamic State militants or the Kurdish militia that governs north-east Syria.

They did not have connections to the Syrian merchant elite loyal to Assad’s father Hafez. “These were names none of us had ever even heard of,” says the Syrian businessman, “mostly thugs, people who weren’t from well-known families.” Most would eventually be sanctioned by the US for [being](#) “complicit in destroying Syria’s economy”.

Their lack of connection to establishment circles meant they were almost entirely reliant on their ties to the regime, says Syrian economic expert Jihad Yazigi, as well as the security forces — chief among them Bashar’s younger brother Maher who runs the Syrian army’s notoriously brutal fourth division.

Experts say this nexus created new illicit revenue streams for the regime, largely controlled by Maher, that helped keep it afloat: weapons, oil smuggling, alcohol and sales of [the illegal amphetamine Captagon](#).

But it wasn't enough. So, in 2019, the Assad regime implemented what Syrian businessmen and experts have called a "mafia-like" campaign to shake down the business elite — including those who supported the Assads throughout the war — which continues to this day.

The shakedown began in September 2019 when dozens of businessmen were summoned to the Sheraton Hotel in Damascus, and asked to deposit US dollars into the central bank to help stabilise the Syrian lira or they wouldn't be released. According to some accounts, the total value of the deposits were in the "high hundreds of millions".



Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak welcomes Asma and her delegation to the Al Bahr Palace in Abu Dhabi earlier this month © Presidency of the Syrian Arab Republic

The seizures have become commonplace. For some, a legal pretext is used to send regime accountants into a business seemingly at random to find violations that can be leveraged for hefty fines. This can include overlooked back taxes, customs or currency violations on imported goods, or fresh tax rules applied retroactively, according to five businessmen and three analysts.

In many instances, the company's executive is detained and their assets frozen until their families can pay the fine — typically in the mid six figures.

One prominent Syrian businessman describes how he was stopped on the streets of Damascus in summer last year by members of the security forces who politely asked him to accompany them back to a nearby office. He was then quietly put into solitary confinement for 14 days and thereafter given a choice: settle a large bill based on his estimated wealth, or stay in jail indefinitely.

Money collected this way normally bypasses tax collection accounts and is instead sent to charity funds or bank accounts directly controlled by the presidential palace, which people with insight into the regime's thinking say are largely used for the Assads' patronage and personal enrichment.

Asma's circle

These systematic asset seizures are said to have been thought up during meetings of the presidential palace's secretive economic council that Asma chairs, Syrian experts and sources with insights into the regime's thinking say.

Unlike the government's formal economic committee, this one is little-known outside the palace gates and implements the regime's more clandestine asset seizures.

It is unclear how involved Bashar is with the council, despite being known as a micromanager. Some people think the first couple act in tandem on the economy, his carefully calibrated distance giving him cover. But others say it is Asma's pet project, given her background in finance. "She's very influential [on him]" says a veteran Syrian businessman who knows the Akhras family.

The highest-profile victim of the shakedowns so far is Bashar's maternal cousin [Rami Makhoul](#). Once known as the pariah regime's banker, he was thought to control more than half of Syria's economy before the war, worth billions. In 2019, authorities ransacked his sprawling empire and forced him to hand over his major assets inside the country.

This included Syria's largest company, Cham Holding, and Makhoul's crown jewel, SyriaTel, the country's largest mobile network. In doing so, the Assads brought one of their main economic rivals under their control. Asma now controls Makhoul's charity and its vast Alawite patronage network, expanding her control over the aid sector.



Queen Elizabeth receives Asma and Bashar at Buckingham Palace in December 2002 © Kirsty Wigglesworth/Pool/AFP/Getty Images

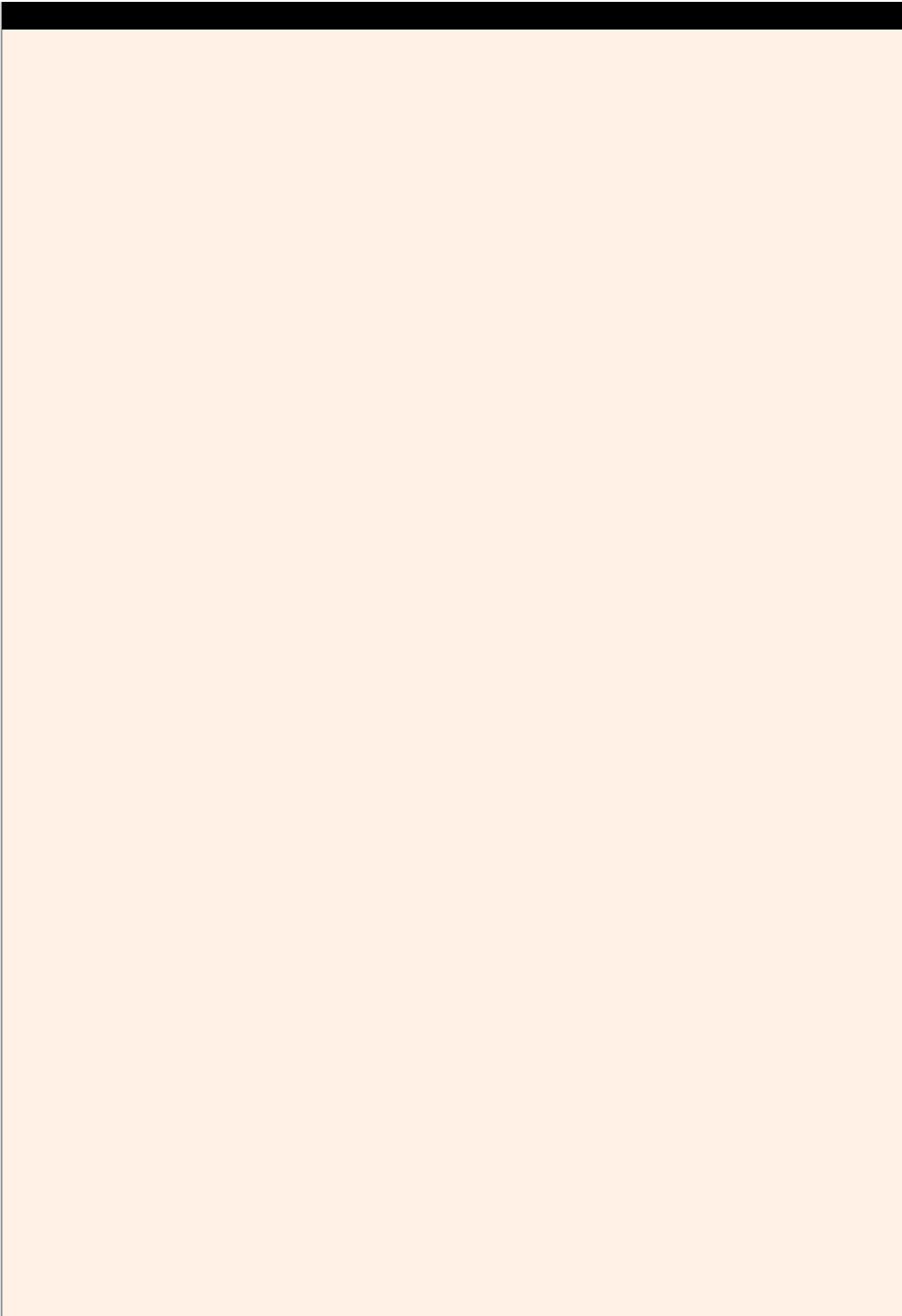
Syrian experts and businessmen say his ouster was a clear directive from Asma. It has not sat well among members of the Alawite elite. “We didn’t go through all of this, to land Syria in the hands of a Sunni woman,” says one embittered relative.

Makhlouf has since been living under house arrest, six well-placed sources tell the FT, kept around by the Assads, who are still eyeing his overseas assets. Once thought untouchable because of his family connections, his public humiliation showed Syrians that no one was beyond the regime’s reach.

Close affiliates of the Assads are everywhere, including Asma’s cousins and at least one of her brothers, who run several businesses closely associated with her. Her cousin Mohannad Dabbagh owns a 30 per cent stake in [Syria’s smart card system](#), a government scheme for subsidised food. “For any new business to get done today, Asma [and her people] take a cut,” says the relative.

The presidential couple’s names, however, are not on any documents. “You have to remember that you’re not talking about a normal capitalist system where you have quarterly reports and transparency,” says Eyad Hamid, a researcher at the Syrian Legal Development Programme. “The opacity of the system is intentional.”















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Latest on Syrian crisis



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All Comments 286

Newest

— **michaelbandera** 6 MONTHS AGO

Plundering the wealth of people? Why do you not mention about USA stealing 1/3rd of Syria's oil? She is defending her country against Western backed Wahabis, ISIS terrorists, and she wins. Shame on you whoever wrote this garbage

Recommend 9 Reply Share

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— **Majd A** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **michaelbandera**

I'm sorry what are you even talking about? Why should they be shamed for reporting the truth? Which part of the article is incorrect?

She clearly continues to exploit the country and people for selfish personal gain. Following in the footsteps of the Assad family and their corrupt regime. Name one part of this article that's incorrect?

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— **Vegan rider** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Majd A**

Where are the articles reporting about the US occupying Syria and stealing their oil? Literally stealing it? That's what michaelbandera is saying. Your argument is risible.

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— **H_ZC** 6 MONTHS AGO

She is a heroine 🙏.

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— **Adam** 6 MONTHS AGO

Let me get this right: Asma is complicit in killing thousands of Syrians, yet the UK did not strip her of her citizenship for human rights violations. Meanwhile, Ms. Begum, who left the UK as a teenager to join the Islamic State group in Syria, was stripped of her citizenship at 23 years old. Makes no sense!

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— **michaelbandera** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Adam**

No you got it 100% wrong. Western backed wahabis invaded a sovereign country and you believe in MSM propaganda.

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— **Mark H** 6 MONTHS AGO

Asma's orbit

Six of the closest associates of the first lady. Red lines indicate membership in the clandestine economic council chaired by Asma. Yellow lines indicate current or former employees of her office.

Fares Kallas

Formerly a senior aide to Asma, he is one of the first lady's closest associates. He is the secretary-general of the Syria Trust, her NGO and prime source of patronage.

Lina Kinayeh

A senior adviser to Mansour Azzam, the minister for presidential affairs, she also serves as one of the palace's private sector liaisons. She previously headed the office of the first lady. In 2020, the US Treasury noted she has "conducted a range of business and personal activities on behalf of [Asma]".

Dana Bakhour

A relative newcomer, Bakhour is the current head of the first lady's office. She was seen

In reply to [michaelbandera](#)

If you believe this paper is 'MSM propaganda', why do you read it?

Are you paid to do it?

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— **Philip II** 6 MONTHS AGO

This is good investigative journalism. Thank you. But no surprises here. The “First Lady” is simply more sophisticated in her approach to optimising state capture and international PR.

For those commenters who are clearly not very familiar with the Assad dynasty's skill at, inter alia, self preservation and self enrichment:

- it has been instrumental in allowing Iran to spread its theocratic ideology and influence across Iraq, Syria and Lebanon over the last 40 years, even though the minority Alawite sect, to which it belongs, is itself semi-secular
- the dynasty's intelligence apparatus has served the interests of various international powers quite well, including the US, Russia and Israel over many years (for example intervening in the Lebanese civil war to rescue the Phalange Christians against the Palestinians, participating in the first US war against Saddam Hussein following his invasion of Kuwait and Bashar Al Assad apparently passing Gaddafi's cell phone number indirectly to the CIA, so he could be located and captured after his escape)
- the incompetent Al Assad senior practically handed the Golan Heights over to the Israelis and his descendants have never once fought back seriously to win it back. According to Western intelligence sources, the country's annual military budget has mostly been funding the dynasty's own numerous militias and intelligence networks since the Yom Kippur war in 1973 rather than the regular army, which is made up of poor and ill-trained conscripts
- the dynasty allowed the Russians to build a naval in Tartous decades ago and airbases more recently as a quid pro quo for regime protection
- it practically ruled over Lebanon and destroyed its economy and state institutions over almost three decades and directed Hizbollah to assassinate Lebanese President Rafiq Al Hariri, who had refused to take orders from the then juvenile Bashar Al Assad.
- The Dynasty's cronies have been allowed to fully control key economic sectors and engage in smuggling and drug trafficking to supplement the regime's income for decades
- it allowed ISIS to make some early territorial gains in Northern and Eastern Syria so as to deflect Western criticisms of its savage response to the popular uprising against it and overlook the use of chemical weapons (Obama's infamous red line)

And the list goes on.

In a nutshell, the Syrian regime is quite unique in the world of despots. It has always made itself useful and available for hire. Having killed more than 500,000 of its own citizens and displaced one-half of the country's population, it is now very vulnerable and struggling to fund its own militias and repay debts to both Iran and Russia. The First Lady is just the latest CFO with a penchant for high fashion. No one knows how much longer the regime can survive. The exiled Syrian opposition movement seems to be divided and ineffectual and the regime has invariably managed to stay several steps ahead. It is now hoping to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, no doubt hedging its bets against Putin losing his shirt in Ukraine!

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— **Simone** 6 MONTHS AGO

Such a patriarchal article! "she's ambitious and wanted power". Now, really, what about all the men in power?
"Syrian businessmen" who profited from the war, now have to share their revenues with the state. How appalling!
"they say" and "they accuse". It might be true. But not even once does the article say "in papers seen by the FT journalist"..
Let's find a Marie-Antoinette !

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— **Fred** 6 MONTHS AGO

The questions, who is lesser of two evils, this or the western supported rebels who turned out to be ISIS and committing genocide. West should be careful of what they wish.

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— **HomeGazer** 6 MONTHS AGO

She gets to keep her British passport and citizenship but the young ISIS bride lost hers? A class war, obviously.

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— **Worse to come.** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to HomeGazer](#)

I mean this is a good point. Why didn't she loose it (assuming this is true).

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— **A Khalil** 6 MONTHS AGO

By an large it is a klepocracy in a Mafia state. The Arabs seem eager to make amends with Bashar a man who killed ,tortured and imprisoned countless people.

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— **kimchihummus** 6 MONTHS AGO

An important article, shedding light on the new internal dynamics of a mafia regime, especially in light of burgeoning attempts to reintegrate Syria back into AL and then the wider community. Good reporting as always. Important to highlight Mrs. Al Assad British connections, which run very deep.

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— **Thegoodthebadandtheugly** 6 MONTHS AGO

A similar career to Isabella dos Santos. If you have the right father or husband you can own the country's resources and control its assets. Probably also neighbours in Knightsbridge.

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— **pol roger** 6 MONTHS AGO

Wow, what a sociopath. Rather like Ruja Ignatova of OneCoin fame. Funny how you never see them both in the same toom at the same time

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— **Keep Cool** 6 MONTHS AGO

So a British national is doing all of this ? Why is that British national not being made subject to British Anti bribery laws, Human Rights laws etc. There is clear jurisdiction

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— **JulianRugby** 6 MONTHS AGO

Is she still holding an UK passport? Any debate about it? I am just wondering why does this woman still travelling with an UK passport?

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— **Without fear and without favour** 6 MONTHS AGO

I bet Elizabeth II had to scrub her hands with bleach and wire wool after having to shake hands with people like this.

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— **Taras** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Without fear and without favour**
not necessarily

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— **The Missing Chord** 6 MONTHS AGO

And she still has a British passport.

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— **sewa** 6 MONTHS AGO

'Humanitarian' work has become a fasade for mafia thugs, it would seem. It is not the first case of crime happening through 'charity networks'.

[Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Tom7891** 6 MONTHS AGO

"... a regime that is plundering the wealth of its people" wow
That could be applied to the US which burnt trillions into endless wars with million killed while its own people are growing power by the same time. All this reads like the straw in your neighbour's eye, indeed

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— **Stainless_steel** 6 MONTHS AGO

she took the playbook from Azerbaijan's Aliyev family. Where the wife of the president has the charity for decades where most of taxes flow into. most of the country's wealth is under her name or her children. Pashayevs (family of the wife) cracked down on long time backers of Ilham's and consolidated all their assets under their names. As i was reading this article i thought i was exactly reading about Pashayevs.

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— **YetAnotherReader** 6 MONTHS AGO

She sports delicate ribbons in her hair, her petite frame draped in dresses sewn by the widows of men martyred in her husband's war.

No sympathy for Assad, but would have been ok to keep it factual. Unless you really suggest that she traces down the wives of martyred men and enslaves them in some dress workshop.

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— DavidSF2012 | 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to YetAnotherReader

Also, the usage of "martyred" seems inappropriate here.

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— the First Time | 6 MONTHS AGO

He needs to establish a special international tribunal to try the regime in cases of premeditated murder, against humanity and war crimes, and the date of execution of the penalty is on the Day of Al-Alawwin, like the tyrannical Saddam Hussein

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— Development Economics44 | 6 MONTHS AGO

"Asma Akhras, 47, was born and raised in west London"

Why can't the author say Asma was born and raised in Ealing! This is the borough that raised John 'quincy' Adams - author of the Monroe Doctrine, and where Lady Byron established the first school for the working class - now the University of West London. James Cleverly, the UK's current Foreign Secretary, is a graduate of this enlightened institution.

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— RonaldoMcDonaldo | 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to Development Economics44

I thought it was Acton.

↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— Development Economics44 | 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to RonaldoMcDonaldo

Yes. Acton is in the borough of Ealing.

↩ Reply 🔄 Share

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— RonaldoMcDonaldo | 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to Development Economics44

Acton doesn't sound quite as posh as Ealing, though. Correct?

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— Philip II | 6 MONTHS AGO

"Efforts to reach the government for comment were unsuccessful".

Good. The article would never have been published otherwise!

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🚩 Report

— sammy | 6 MONTHS AGO

We should realise that middle east is a difficult place to govern and only folks like Assad Sr, Saddam, Mubarak, Gaddafi, and even Shah of Iran kept the region under control while trying to educate the population especially women! Yes, they were brutal in some respects. But that is the price to pay for development and women's rights etc., Democracy is not suitable for all. It requires well educated population. Time to realise that and let each country do their thing and allow natural evolution into democracy.

👍 Recommend 3 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— DavidSF2012 | 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to sammy

"Time to realise that and let each country do their thing and allow natural evolution into democracy."

Where is the evidence of any such societal evolution? It seems to work the other way, towards autocracy.

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— **RonaldoMcDonald** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **DavidSF2012**

Are they buying and selling oil using US dollars? If not, then they are evil autocratic regimes. If they are, then they are cuddly pro-western regimes like Saudi Arabia.

It's very simple!

Reply Share Report

— **Leadership always Leadership.** 6 MONTHS AGO

They - Assad's Mafia - are pure evil and they will pay for that with silver bullets. 2023 is end game for them....

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— **Oliver** 6 MONTHS AGO

"We didn't go through all of this, to land Syria in the hands of a Sunni woman," says one embittered relative.

Asma is pure evil but for an influential segment of Syrian society that doesn't really seem to matter. They now reap what they have sewn, backing the butcher

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— **RonaldoMcDonald** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Oliver**

Maybe you should stick to your sewing.

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— **JC** 6 MONTHS AGO

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/15/assad-emails-father-in-law-crackdown?intcmp=239>

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— **Liszt** 6 MONTHS AGO

The "ethics" of an investment banker...

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— **Eclair** 6 MONTHS AGO

The wife of a butcher trying to rehabilitate the family's name synonym of butcher. Hard to imagine that there is anything else than this in such a dammed couple.

Recommend 4 Reply Share Report

— **Lone Regulator** 6 MONTHS AGO

Do any other FT subscribers wish this publication spent more time on financially important topics?

Recommend 4 Reply Share Report

— **Blissfully Aware** 6 MONTHS AGO

Best wife ever!

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— **DontpanicMrMainwaring** 6 MONTHS AGO

What I don't understand is what economic activity is generating the wealth for these people to steal

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[Report](#)

— **Omaral** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to DontpanicMrMainwaring](#)

Drugs

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— **JC** 6 MONTHS AGO

I wonder what her parents make of it all. The article mentions they still live in London

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— **Liszt** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to JC](#)

And she's still a UK citizen.

[Recommend 1](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

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— **QE X** 6 MONTHS AGO

by the widows of men martyred in her husband's war.

Come on. Let us be adults and scrap the propaganda. Assad is a brutal tyrant, no more than his father whose brutality was tolerated by the west in exchange for a stable Syria.

It is Obama's war to part with US policy, presumably his ego wanted to be on the "right side of history," but instead he gave birth to ISIS.

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— **CheckerOfFacts** 6 MONTHS AGO

One prominent Syrian businessman describes how he was stopped on the streets of Damascus in summer last year by members of the security forces who politely asked him to accompany them back to a nearby office. He was then quietly put into solitary confinement for 14 days and thereafter given a choice: settle a large bill based on his estimated wealth, or stay in jail indefinitely.

In the US we call these transactions campaign contributions. They keep the Washington D.C. economy humming along nicely. Of course we are too civilized here to use solitary confinement cells. There are so many 5 star restaurants in Georgetown to settle such accounts over a three martini lunch.

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[Report](#)

— **Theo** 6 MONTHS AGO

Someday maybe an FT Lunch with Asthma...?

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[Report](#)

— **Uticensis** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Theo**

That would be a jolly wheeze.

Recommend 6 Reply Share

Report

— **Without fear and without favour** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Theo**

One salad niciose.

One Martyr sole/soul (without the white phosphorus jus)

One pint of orphans blood.

Price: One million Krugerrands

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Report

— **LibrarianCap** 6 MONTHS AGO

Asma Akhras, 47, was born and raised in west London. People who knew her then recall a clever, charming and ambitious young woman

There are bad people in each society, but the superiority of the Western World is that here these people become eye surgeons and bankers, instead of getting the chance to become murderous tyrants.

Recommend 10 Reply Share

Report

— **worriedinlondon** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **LibrarianCap**

bad people of the Western World

.... become eye surgeons? What?!

Reply Share

Report

— **LibrarianCap** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **worriedinlondon**

Bashar al-Assad was training at the Western Eye Hospital before his older brother died and he was recalled to Syria as the replacement heir.

<https://www.bmj.com/bmj/section-pdf/743078?path=/bmj/347/7924/Observations.full.pdf>

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— **chernevik** 6 MONTHS AGO

Looks like foreign aid to Syria has moved well into the "enabling" category.

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Report

— **Hello beautiful day** 6 MONTHS AGO

Let's hope she suffers at some point

Reply Share

Report

— **Liszt** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Hello beautiful day**

Survived breast cancer in 2018.

Reply Share

Report

— **Reader X** 6 MONTHS AGO

How does a country like Syria\Russia\N Korea (and the many others) develop the

institutions to move beyond aggravated kleptocracy.

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— **MissMarple** 6 MONTHS AGO

So Axma Assad can keep her British passport.

But not Shamima Begum.

Who is more hateful? Who is more dangerous? Who has definitely blood kn her hands?

[Recommend 18](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

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— **Reader X** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to MissMarple](#)

I think you forget about the dog whistle value.

[Recommend 6](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— **The_Thinking_Goblin** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to MissMarple](#)

Yeah. The hipocrisy is stunning. It really is.

[Recommend 6](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— **JC** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to MissMarple](#)

Both of them should lose their British passports in my view

[Recommend 8](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— **Kitty Cat** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to MissMarple](#)

They should both lose their passport Shamima Begum joined ISIS for Christ sake. Asma Assad is married to and assists her mass murderer husband.

[Recommend 1](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— **RonaldoMcDonaldo** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[In reply to Kitty Cat](#)

British laws are less about revenge/punishment and more about deterrence/protecting the public.

Personally, as someone who lives in east London, I'd rather not have people connected with ISIS wandering about here. That is a good enough reason on its own to keep them out of our country.

But I agree that both of these sorry characters should not have a British passport.

[Recommend 2](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— **MissMarple** 5 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Kitty Cat](#)

Shamima Begum was 14. She was groomed online & dreamt of exciting good looking ISIS fighters (the promotional videos are really slick). A 14 year's old girl in a strict family dreaming of adventure. Further did you listen to her? She is really dumb. The danger she presents is nil & anyway she can be monitored etc. Obviously you do not have teenage daughters or have no idea what they are up to. I hope if you did you would be more compassionate.

Assad isn't a child. She wasn't groomed. She had a prosperous happy middle class existence. There is no excuse.

[Recommend 2](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— **Riverwalk** 6 MONTHS AGO

For I am a pirate queen
Haha
For I am a pirate queen
And it is, it is a glorious thin'
To be a pirate queen!

Recommend 6 Reply Share

Report

— **IRONY** 6 MONTHS AGO

Lenin would be loving this. No doubt, in Asma's way of thinking, she's behaving morally promoting women's rights and social change in Syria.

Recommend 2 Reply Share

Report

— **FakeCharmer** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

I wonder who has committed a more heinous crime - Britain who is ready to act on an impoverished 15 yr old in Syria or a billionaire who pedals in blackmail and death who continues to hold a British passport. Shame on us.

Recommend 11 Reply Share

Report

— **Leopold Bloom** 6 MONTHS AGO

It beats me how such people reconcile their consciences at night. Wouldn't you be devastated if they were your children?

Recommend 3 Reply Share

Report

— **G2D** 6 MONTHS AGO

As Saddam Hussein example showed us in Irak , having a secular dictator in charge instead of any Muslim ruler of any kind of Muslim variance is a much better outcome period .

Recommend 2 Reply Share

Report

— **QuestionAnswer** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **G2D**

Saddam killed more than a million Iraqis, Kurds, Iranians, Kuwaitis and others.

He also consciously laid the foundations of the sectarian tensions on which ISIS built another empire of blood.

On Google you will be able to find many Muslim rulers that haven't even done a fraction of the evil Saddam did.

So out of respect for the children Saddam killed, the women he raped, the Kurds he gassed, the political dissidents he executed, please refrain from complimentary comments about a mass murderer.

Recommend 3 Reply Share

Report

— **Gary_C** 6 MONTHS AGO

On the topic of looting the Syrian people, don't forget this chap:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkKPGnM1LAQ>

This is the self-styled 'play boy' - Ali Makhlof, son of Rami Makhlof who is cousin to Bashar Al-Assad. He can play, when it is with other people's money. Stolen from the Syrian people.

Recommend 4 Reply Share

Report

Riverwalk 6 MONTHS AGO

How many countries are in effect run by mafia families who throttle any wealth creation and leave their own people to beg in the streets, or to flee abroad. What do these rulers think their legacy will be? You can't take it with you.

Recommend 20 Reply Share

Report

Ben 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Riverwalk

Swiss Banks , wonder how many trillions stashed there unclaimed

Recommend 10 Reply Share

Report

Leopold Bloom 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Riverwalk

Their legacy will be eternity in Hell.

Recommend 4 Reply Share

Report

Kenneth Kohlrahi 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Leopold Bloom

There is no such thing as hell. There will be no negative consequences for these people. Just immense wealth and luxury and power.

Recommend 1 Reply Share

Report

Platox1 6 MONTHS AGO

Which overseas banks are holding this money? The UK stripped citizenship from a teenage who went to Syria yet they they won't strip Asma's?

Recommend 40 Reply Share

Report

Liszt 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Platox1

Money talks...a lot.

Recommend 6 Reply Share

Report

Beere JJ 6 MONTHS AGO

Vile.

Recommend 12 Reply Share

Report

Travelaround59 6 MONTHS AGO

How do they say:

"Behind a successful man (read dictator) there is a strong intelligent woman"

Recommend 1 Reply Share

Report

Beere JJ 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Travelaround59

Behind every great man is a very surprised woman.

Recommend 8 Reply Share

Report

Dwightoc 6 MONTHS AGO

Didn't the Americans/IMF recently donate 15bn to Ukraine? I wonder how much of that will "leak" into the pockets of many favoured individuals.....

Recommend 3 Reply Share

Report

GroEL 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Dwightoc**

A prime example of the dumbest kind of ,whataboutery'

Recommend 8 Reply Share

Report

— **Markdoc** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **GroEL**

Eh. It's what Russian trolls are paid to do.

Recommend 6 Reply Share

Report

— **Craigsams** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Dwightoc**

\$178 billion

Recommend 1 Reply Share

Report

— **whoopsadaisy** 6 MONTHS AGO

It was for *these* human cockroaches that children

were nerve-gassed !!?

Recommend 9 Reply Share

Report

— **Wu-Tang Clan** 6 MONTHS AGO

For what its worth I used to be friends with Asma before she married Assad and I don't buy the picture that is being painted in this article.

However, it is the sheer hypocrisy of the West to call out one corrupt kleptocracy - while supporting another - which causes these propaganda-driven articles to lose their impact....

And I know it is off-topic, but lets not forget to mention that the US military continues to ILLEGALLY occupy parts of Northern Syria - under the ridiculous pretext of "fighting ISIS"...

Recommend 11 Reply Share

Report

— **Kitty Cat** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Wu-Tang Clan**

She's basically running a protection racket all whilst using that money that is supposedly for Syrian people to basically strut around in Valentino suits. That and there is the evidence of this with all the bank shell companies and phony charities she is linked to.

That and I'm guessing you're referring to Ukraine which granted has it's issues but at the the same time was trying to reform and move towards the West when it's violent thuggish oppressive neighbour invaded. That and unlike Syria Ukraine doesn't barrel bomb and gas it's civilians.

Then you go on a desperate whataboutery about the US.

Recommend 28 Reply Share

Report

— **zincpink** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Wu-Tang Clan**

You must give some worth to your friendship with this criminal, since you brag about it.

I also knew a German who bragged about his parent 's friends: Magda Goebbels, Margarete Himmler and Emmy Göring. Try to match that if you can.

Recommend 4 Reply Share

Report

— Nabuko 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Wu-Tang Clan

So the US is occupying illegally but Bashar's thugs are occupying legally?

Recommend 3 Reply Share Report

— modiloroo 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Nabuko

well Syria is but one location occupied illegally by the US..... should we have an Oped piece on their so called democracy

Reply Share Report

— A new name 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Wu-Tang Clan

I always think it is rather intersting how the passage of time changes us in ways we never expect.

Recommend 2 Reply Share Report

— Liszt 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Wu-Tang Clan

Remind me not to ever hang out with you..

Recommend 2 Reply Share Report

— Will! 6 MONTHS AGO

A fascinating article, thank you FT.

It also requires UN bodies and aid groups to partner with government-affiliated agencies the Syrian Arab Red Crescent

The Red Cross & Red Crescent movement defends its independence and neutrality strongly. I'd be interested to learn how the movement is dealing with reports of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent affiliating with the Syrian government.

Recommend 3 Reply Share Report

— Nostramo 6 MONTHS AGO

Super article. We're seeing so little coverage in the mainstream press these days. Keep it up.

Recommend 28 Reply Share Report

— Old Brimstonian 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Nostramo

You know, I have a funny feeling that they will.

Recommend 2 Reply Share Report

— Tamerlane 6 MONTHS AGO

Valentino dresses.

Recommend 1 Reply Share Report

— G2D 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Tamerlane

Better than burkha

Recommend 1 Reply Share Report

— **L6** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Tamerlane**

Might be gold label Tk maxx

👍 Recommend 1 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share

🚩 Report

— **Richard** 6 MONTHS AGO

If you really cared about the Syrian people you'd lift the sanctions and tell the Americans to get out of Syria.

👍 Recommend 8 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share

🚩 Report

— **StoneArthur** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

...and I thought she was with him for his looks.

As full of the milk of human kindness as MacB's good lady.

👍 Recommend 8 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share

🚩 Report

— **whoopsadaisy** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

↳ In reply to **StoneArthur**

A nice Ceaușescu ending for them both hopefully..

👍 Recommend 13 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share

🚩 Report

— **Austrian Farmer** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

Not surprised to find the UN collaborating with the regime and spreading taxpayers' money around in Syria...they are always centre stage when it come to tyrannical regimes...

👍 Recommend 3 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share

🚩 Report

— **World traveller** 6 MONTHS AGO

A kleptocracy. But if he Bashar was allowed to suppress the original uprising and if he killed 20,000 like his Dad it would, imho, have been better than what followed. Half hearted western support for an opposition that was then dumped has led to the disintegration of a country and a vastly higher death toll.

👍 Recommend 2 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share

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— **Richard** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **World traveller**

We don't want Isis ruling Syria.

👍 Recommend 5 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share

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— **Si Falous** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Richard**

ISIS (DAESH) emerged years later, and in Iraq.

I believe his point is that the path chosen - half-way policy - ended up being worse all-around for Syria than either (a) not supporting opposition and letting it get crushed relatively quickly (like earlier revolt evoked) at less cost of life and destruction or (b), going 'all-in' and backing full overthrow.

While certainly debatable, the early opposition was certainly not dominated by al-Qaeda type salafist jihadis, and perhaps an early fall of the Assad regime might not have led to the cycle of radicalisation that actually occurred under the half-measures response model followed as something one can argue rather credibly was the worst of both worlds.

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— **Rational_Investor** 6 MONTHS AGO

You either have Assad or Al Qaeda . There is no in between.

[Recommend 5](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Si Falous** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Rational_Investor](#)

An assertion that is refuted by Libya which has neither result (although hardly is a happy result as such).

[Recommend 8](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Maxwell Wild** 6 MONTHS AGO

Not stripped of her UK passport?

This seems to be the exact opposite of the treatment of Ms Begum.

I wonder why?

[Recommend 12](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Scotstoun** 6 MONTHS AGO

Finest productions of middle England

Aung San Suu Kyi & Asma

Did hitler ever come to England for aspirations?

[Recommend 1](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **StoneArthur** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[In reply to Scotstoun](#)

Your knowledge of history suggests you missed out on a decent quality Scottish university-education.

[Recommend 2](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Lugalzagesi** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Scotstoun](#)

Aung San Su Kyi has not enriched herself and for all her flaws she has been democratically elected. She still enjoys large support from the people. In Myanmar the wealth has mostly been carved up by the junta for the military cartels. For more than 60 years.

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— **Scotstoun** 6 MONTHS AGO

Prime example of what English upbringing can produce. War criminals as well

[Recommend 6](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **StoneArthur** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Scotstoun](#)

Now, now wee laddie.

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— **Eric Cartman** 6 MONTHS AGO

I don't believe in stripping people of citizenship under any circumstances other than fraud getting the citizenship in the first place. But in her case I'm really wavering.

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— Scotstoun 6 MONTHS AGO

Why strip her of her English passport, she might be an ally against war on terror to west or even get her job back at JP.

[↩ Reply](#)

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[🚩 Report](#)

— Angus::Mitchell 6 MONTHS AGO

Pariah's outside their broken nation.

[👍 Recommend 1](#)

[↩ Reply](#)

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— Felix of Arabia 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

The main photo is not Assma Al Assad !!!!
She does lot of charity work benefiting unfortunates poor in Syria. So what , she wears expensive clothes. No coverage of Mrs Zelenskyy who went on shopping spree in her latest trip to Paris spending over \$40k just before going to Washington with her superhero husband !
Western journalism lost the plot . By the way god forbid criticising Ukrainians lately western politicians and journalists realised Ukrainian are angels descended from heaven!
Maybe just maybe if 5% of media exposure and political effort to stop total destruction of Yemen and deliberate starvation of poorest Yemenis war could have been stopped. No one can explain to me why urgent medical equipments cannot be shipped directly from western countries into Sanaa !!!
Invasion of Ukraine is unjustified but it totally exposed western politics are journalists being hypocrites. Please spare me repeating “ oh Russians had to be stopped otherwise they would have captured all Eastern Europe!!!! “

[👍 Recommend 6](#)

[↩ Reply](#)

[🔗 Share](#)

[🚩 Report](#)

— whoopsadaisy 6 MONTHS AGO

[↩ In reply to Felix of Arabia](#)

Shouldn't Muslims be solving Muslim problems ??

I seem to remember that there was a lot of ire on the side of the religious the last time we got involved...

[👍 Recommend 4](#)

[↩ Reply](#)

[🔗 Share](#)

[🚩 Report](#)

— Felix of Arabia 6 MONTHS AGO

[↩ In reply to whoopsadaisy](#)

Are you claiming the west supporting Ukraine because Ukraine is a Christian domain ? I believe at least 40-50% Russian orthodox and rest catholics. What about Russians ? Are Eastern Orthodoxy not a Christian sect?
You justify west supporting Ukraine in face of Russian aggression while in Yemen case the west decided to sell as much as possible of weapons to Saudi Arabia & UAE to systematically destroying Yemen with non stop aerial bombardments after convincing Sanaa regime to totally destroy anti aircraft missiles to deny access to AQAP !!!!!

[👍 Recommend 2](#)

[↩ Reply](#)

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— Larchmont 6 MONTHS AGO

[↩ In reply to Felix of Arabia](#)

Pretty crude stuff, Kremlin and not very convincing

[👍 Recommend 3](#)

[↩ Reply](#)

[🔗 Share](#)

[🚩 Report](#)

— Liszt 6 MONTHS AGO

[↩ In reply to Larchmont](#)

Hit the nail on the head

[Reply](#)

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— **Tickytl** 6 MONTHS AGO

No mention of the drought that made resources scarce 14 years ago. No mention of the vast number of Iraqi refugees that increased the population by over 10% in 18 months 20 yrs ago. Context is important..... The Iraq war turned him into a tyrant because he had no other option.

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— **Kitty Cat** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Tickytl](#)

“The Iraq war turned him into a tyrant because he had no other option.”

You what?

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— **Diddlydum** 6 MONTHS AGO

If anyone wonders why Muscovy, Syria and China are so pally -- follow the money to private back accounts.

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— **CuriousGeorge** 6 MONTHS AGO

Most of this story is based on rumour and hearsay. I'm pretty sure that the negative press about the Assad regime is based on propaganda, most likely driven by Israel and its western lackeys. Israel continues to bomb Syrian targets with impunity. Remember: everybody went along with the Saddam WOMD story (also driven by Israel and AIPAC) until it turned out to be an utterly false accusation...but only after Iraq had been turned into a wasteland. The Zionist agenda is to foment war and civil strife throughout the surrounding region in order for Israel to be perceived as the 'only liberal democracy in the Middle East.' Also remember that the Assad gov't fought Islamic State to protect secularism and freedom for women in Syria.

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— **Diddlydum** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to CuriousGeorge](#)

Your talk sheet may work in, say, the ME, but your ideological rhetoric is soooooo dated. But you do have a point: even this deeply corrupt and genocidal regime is actually preferable to much of the alternatives. The alternative to the Assad gang is not a well-ordered liberal and secular democracy but most likely something even more barbarous. Such are the choices in the ME. There are virtually no good guys.

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[Report](#)

— **John5599** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Diddlydum](#)

I have no agenda here, but after travelling the Middle East I found Syria an eye opener. It was so western with women wearing jeans and felt very secular. People were lovely and most liked Assad

[Recommend 5](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— **AGP81** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to John5599](#)

After 30 years in the region, please don't confuse the people with their governments.

Most Syrians I know despise Assad, and some of them had family that died at the hands of the regime. There are definitely exceptions that support him: but they're connected Alawites.

[Recommend 5](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Craigsams** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to AGP81](#)

Not just 'connected Alawites' - also Orthodox Christians, Ismailis (Aga Khan's followers), Armenian Christians, Druze, Kurds and other minorities who ISIS would have beheaded by now if the Syrians hadn't stopped them

[Recommend 4](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **AGP81** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[In reply to Craigsams](#)

Touche.

I was thinking mainly of those who supported his rule, as opposed to experiencing some tangential benefit after many years.

[Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **AntiRaci** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to CuriousGeorge](#)

Curious George the anti-Semite climbs out of his hole. So Syria's problems are Israel's cause?? The Zionist entity planning to rule the world??LMAO.

[Recommend 11](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Larchmont** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to CuriousGeorge](#)

Assad's fought DAESH for its own self preservation. They want to protect that family business and as Awali, who are not really muslim, they were very worried about a Sunni jihad against them.

[Recommend 1](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **doc martin** 6 MONTHS AGO

"They certainly don't need all the money they've collected for just themselves

that could be said about many many folks in the usa this isn't to condone the assads, but what they are doing is in no ways shame or form unique

[Recommend 3](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **doc martin** 6 MONTHS AGO

Asma has seemed unfazed. Last October, she was photographed wearing a 2021 Valentino dress worth \$4,500 — at least 200 times what the average Syrian salary is worth today.

UN also pays millions of dollars — \$12.3mn in 2021, according to Shaar's analysis of its latest data — for staff to stay at the Damascus Four Seasons Hotel.

Both seem criminal if you ask me

[Recommend 5](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Zicopele** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **doc martin**

Not criminal but distasteful.

👍 Recommend 5 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

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— **Balanced_Perspective** 6 MONTHS AGO

Asma Assad is simply helping to preserve the Syrian state, as imperfect as it is, the alternative (civil war and jihadi terror) is worse. Let each country be to itself rather than seeking to effect change or funding Islamists to do so.

👍 Recommend 10 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— **Diddlydum** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Balanced_Perspective**

A point with some validity. But, of course, the Assad regime is not standing on its own. It would have been swept away but for Muscovite support. Not that the alternative would have been any better, but just to make the point that no great power -- obviously not Muscovy or China! -- have any intention of letting every country be itself. Muscovy doesn't even want a number of its neighbours to even be countries.

👍 Recommend 4 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— **Kitty Cat** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

↳ In reply to **Balanced_Perspective**

Helping to preserve it by basically running a protection racket that funnels money into her accounts. That's some real great preservation going on there as usual you anything but balanced.

👍 Recommend 3 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— **Charles__** 6 MONTHS AGO

NGOs shouldn't be paying the regime to be allowed to help people out. It's sad parts of the world are run by such tyrants. And I feel for the people.

👍 Recommend 2 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— **Western Double Standards** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Charles__**

Alot of lives in so-called tyrannical countries had better lives until the west bombed them, destabilize their society and rob them of their oil.

👍 Recommend 2 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— **Diddlydum** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Western Double Standards**

Good then for the Syrians that they've been bombed by Muscovy and their own government. Few peoples are so lucky.

👍 Recommend 5 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— **Western Double Standards** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Diddlydum**

It's called civil war. Wherever you are from, your history of civil wars were won by throwing pebbles? You need to get your head checked. And I doubt you had any concerns when Ukraine was bombing the regions in the east.

👍 Recommend 1 ↩ Reply 🔄 Share

🚩 Report

— **Kitty Cat** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Western Double Standards**

Not like the Syrian government and Russians gassed and barrel bombed their own people but that doesn't fit your stupid narrative does it.

👍 Recommend 1 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share 📄 Report

— **Western Double Standards** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Kitty Cat**

Speaking from someone who probably supported use of chemical weapons and depleted uranium, sanctions which kill civilians etc., but that doesn't fit your narrative too does it? So what's your point? That only the west are allowed to kill?

👍 Recommend 2 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share 📄 Report

— **Kitty Cat** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Western Double Standards**

Sanctions don't kill civilians the horrible regimes that get themselves sanctioned by their actions do. As for depleted Uranium ahhh you have fallen like the half wit you are for Putin's lies and we don't use chemical weapons. Nice try though troll.

👍 Recommend 1 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share 📄 Report

— **RuedelaLoi** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Kitty Cat**

Actually the US did use depleted uranium in Iraq.

👍 Recommend 1 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share 📄 Report

— **Liszt** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **RuedelaLoi**

Educate yourself on depleted uranium...

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depleted_uranium

👍 Recommend 1 ↳ Reply 🗨️ Share 📄 Report

— **Western Double Standards** 6 MONTHS AGO

↳ In reply to **Kitty Cat**

It is the type of severe ignorance of people like you that really disgust me. It really makes me question God whether there is any morality left in this world, or that the devil himself is already in so many people like you who would still call yourself a human being and lecture others on how to behave. Sanctions don't kill? Once day when the tables are turned, and the west get sanctioned instead, I'm pretty sure your dim-wits will be crying genocide.

Ah yes. No chemical weapons. Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. No rapes and murders by US soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq and other countries. I heard those before. Why don't you take a walk alone through those countries you guys invaded, and see if you end the trip still with your head? Ah yes, they hate American freedom. Really, grow up.

[↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **Archer Maymulakhin-Markiv** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

Asma: apt pupil of 'The Godfather II.'

Classic mother-in-law problem.

So much material for a soap opera. "The Devil's Double" & "Tyrant" had a go at it, but, BBC, where are you when we need you?

[👍 Recommend 2](#) [↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **Archer Maymulakhin-Markiv** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[↩ In reply to Archer Maymulakhin-Markiv](#)

Suggested title: "Princess Azma of Az, the Bloodstone City."

[👍 Recommend 2](#) [↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **Archer Maymulakhin-Markiv** 6 MONTHS AGO

[↩ In reply to Archer Maymulakhin-Markiv](#)

Strike a blow for women's empowerment.

[↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **1000cheers** 6 MONTHS AGO

Great article! Why does she still have her British passport, I wonder? So bottom line is that any money that goes to Syria charities will help Asma get her next Valentino dress or diamond ring...

[👍 Recommend 8](#) [↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **Tempus Fugit** 6 MONTHS AGO

Pure Evil.

[👍 Recommend 7](#) [↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **Archer Maymulakhin-Markiv** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[↩ In reply to Tempus Fugit](#)

Evil, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, is never pure and rarely simple.

But Asma does deserve her own circle of hell.

[👍 Recommend 3](#) [↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **Diddlydum** 6 MONTHS AGO

[↩ In reply to Archer Maymulakhin-Markiv](#)

She'd have company with pretty much any ruler in the ME, Moscow and China.

[↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **Orient Expresso** 6 MONTHS AGO

Who would envy Asma and Assads? This is where all Russias and Chinas will eventually end.

[👍 Recommend 2](#) [↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— **havetravelledandlivedoutsidemymhomecountry** 6 MONTHS AGO

The smiling face of evil. Chilling.

[👍 Recommend 5](#) [↩ Reply](#) [🔗 Share](#) [🚩 Report](#)

— Diddlydum 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to [havetravelledandlivedoutsidemymyhomecountry](#)

This particular evil at least looks better than the alternative evils.

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— L6 6 MONTHS AGO

Wonder what age they consider succession planning for their kids.

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— Hatshepsut 6 MONTHS AGO

"a systematically corrupt humanitarian assistance system in [Syria]". "The regime routinely restricts access to areas in need". If this report is reliable, the conclusion is that the Syrian regime is thoroughly disreputable and disgusting.

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— Macrohedge 6 MONTHS AGO

When they spin a geno cider into a feminist empowerment story. Nice to watch

[Recommend 6](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— Archer Maymulakhin-Markiv 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to [Macrohedge](#)

Waiting for Asma to be featured in the FT's fashion pages: Dress for Excess.

[Recommend 5](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— sam 6 MONTHS AGO

The Sopranos with chemical weapons, as Foreign Policy called this clan in 2013.

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[Report](#)

— FT reader 6 MONTHS AGO

Excellent investigative article. An unrelated question but since it is mentioned that these people were able to keep their British passports and the core issue is human rights, what is the update on Julian Assange? When is he going to be able to live as a free man again?

[Recommend 7](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

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— Ben 6 MONTHS AGO

Assad is a blood soaked murderer of his own people . I don't believe West have any less blood on their hands. Problems in Arab states always lead back to West. It was all about Arab Spring and liberation of Arab citizens at the beginning , how quickly West changed direction when their chosen leaders were not getting elected. In Egypt the very first free elections they had elected the Muslim brotherhood . What did West do ? Quickly organised a Coup putting General Sisi in charge who now gets red carpet treatment in Paris and Washington. Assad and Russia have won the Syrian war at the expense of first destroying Syria . We have to accept that in bring Syria slowly back into political dialogue.

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[Report](#)

— Andrzej Rossa 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to [Ben](#)

This Machiavelli for absolute beginners course a bit too much for me. And equating Bashar's regime with the West a bridge too far...

[Recommend 4](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— Ben 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Andrzej Rossa**

How many of his own citizens did Bashar murder and how many people did West kill in Iraq under false pretence that Iraqis were going to bomb London with WMD.

Recommend 2 Reply Share Report

— CorpRaider 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Ben**

Actually the West did not kill that many people in Iraq as well, but Iraqis killed a whole lot of Iraqi people in a civil war, supported by International Islamic extremists. I wonder where that BS comes from...

Recommend 1 Reply Share Report

— BigAde 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Ben**

Boo hoo. The West made me do it.

Recommend 2 Reply Share Report

— Dan O 6 MONTHS AGO

Shamima Begum - groomed by terrorists, poor, taken to hell, UK passport removed.

Asma al-Assad - grooming by Valentino, rich, part owner of hell, UK passport retained.

Recommend 161 Reply Share Report

— Eric Cartman 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Dan O**

it's much worse than that. Shamima was a minor when she fled UK. She also has no other home or citizenship (the Bangladeshis say she isn't a citizen). Asma is "queen" of Syria

The double standards are vile.

Recommend 42 Reply Share Report

— Dan O 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Eric Cartman**

15 years old.

Would have been very different if she were white and technically dual Canadian nationality.

You can imagine the pearl clutching headlines that would have followed.

Recommend 11 Reply Share Report

— Kplk 6 MONTHS AGO

If the opposition had won in Syria we would now be having articles on how a humane modern democracy was sharing the nation's wealth with all and how education and healthcare for everyone was being dispensed with fairness and efficiency.

Recommend 5 Reply Share Report

— Andrzej Rossa 6 MONTHS AGO

Simply outrageous! Cynical and cunning female monster soaked in innocent civilians' blood. What is the Foreign Office waiting for? Her British passport a disgrace for the UK...

Great reporting btw...

[Recommend 64](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#)

[Report](#)

— **Kenneth Kohlrabi** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[In reply to Andrzej Rossa](#)

Why must you call her a "female" monster? She's a woman. If the article was about her husband would you call him a male monster?? Are you shocked to learn men and women are equal? Equally smart. Equally cunning. Equally cynical. Equally vicious. Equally able.
And you Brit's give passports to vile people all the time. Cue the Russian criminals living in your country.

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[Report](#)

— **KO25** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[In reply to Kenneth Kohlrabi](#)

Perhaps they use the word female to remind us that women too can be evil, in the same way as men because some people are surprised to learn that women can be equally evil? Or maybe it's because they wasn't to draw the distinction because they think women are less often as evil as men?
It is possible that their comment isn't meant to malign women.
Bottom line, we don't know and it's not a big deal.

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— **John Koeman** 6 MONTHS AGO

"Secret cables and reports by the U.S., Saudi and Israeli intelligence agencies indicate that the moment Assad rejected the Qatari pipeline, military and intelligence planners quickly arrived at the consensus that fomenting a Sunni uprising in Syria to overthrow the uncooperative Bashar Assad was a feasible path to achieving the shared objective of completing the Qatar/Turkey gas link....the CIA began funding opposition groups in Syria. It is important to note that this was well before the Arab Spring- engendered uprising against Assad."

(Kennedy, Robert F., Jr., 'Why the Arabs Don't Want Us in Syria,' Politico, February 22, 2016.)

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— **John Koeman** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

"When James Jeffrey, U.S. special envoy for Syria, said that his job was to make Syria 'a quagmire for the Russians,' the remark went largely unnoticed.
Jeffrey's words were not merely, it turns out, intended to convey a general sense of opposition to Russian designs in Syria. They headlined a series of measures intended to prevent the return of normality to regime-controlled Syria, to foment renewed crisis, and thus to turn Syria from an asset to a burden for both Moscow and Tehran. The main method for achieving these goals has been the strangling of the Syrian economy."

(Spyer, Jonathan, 'Trump's Syria Policy Is Working,' Foreign Policy, July 1, 2020)

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[Report](#)

— **Tempus Fugit** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to John Koeman](#)

Is that you Mr Blair?

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[Report](#)

— **makemineatea** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

There's a mighty song & dance in UK newspapers of the tabloid variety over revoking the British citizenship of a hapless, thoughtless teenager who was arguably cyber-groomed and definitely sex-trafficked to ISIS, Shamima Begum - but nary a mention of the poisonously corrupt, smirking Asma Bashad. Having read this one has to ask why she hasn't also been denied the fail safe of a British passport. I'm quite sure that should the roof eventually fall in on this noxious regime their friends in the Gulf States will shelter them and their loot.

[Recommend 91](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Passing through** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to makemineatea](#)

My thoughts exactly. If Begum has to be punished for her poor decisions, then so should Asma, whose actions have far greater consequences for Syria.

[Recommend 42](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **KO25** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Passing through](#)

She should be punished and so should others. If we can't punish the others, it doesn't mean Begum should go free though.

[Recommend 1](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **GreaterFoolStrikesAgain** 6 MONTHS AGO

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Obama's goals in supporting the rebellion in Syria may have been laudable, but look at the result. The fact is, when judged by results alone, Asma and her husband look better than Obama and the broader West. We would do well to remind ourselves of Hobbes' Leviathan. When a social contract is broken, no matter how bad it was, if there is no viable plan to bring about a better alternative, something immeasurably worse will emerge.

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— **DuvetMan** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to GreaterFoolStrikesAgain](#)

This overlooks the role of Assad in escalating the conflict at every turn in order to retain his total grip on power:

1. Mass arrest of protestors.
2. Widespread torture.
3. Releasing Islamists from prison.
4. Focussing the war effort on the FSA and generally ignoring ISIS
5. Using chemical weapons to murder his own citizens in the most vile manner - eyes burning, losing control of their spawning muscles and drowning in their own body fluid, all while completely and terrifyingly cognisant and aware of what is happening.

To say the Assad's look better than Obama is just ludicrous. Mr and Mrs Assad have inflicted enormous suffering on their own people.

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— **Man fred** 6 MONTHS AGO

Queenie getting jiggy with the butcher and his bint, figures

[Recommend 5](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Passing through** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Man fred](#)

That picture was taken in 2002 so no doubt the government of the time

That picture was taken in 2002 so no doubt the government of the time were hoping to see some democratisation and find someone they could work with.

Like they thought about Putin. Hmm...

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— **Postman** 6 MONTHS AGO

That assumption seems to have been misplaced. During the worst of the conflict, Asma retreated from public view, as her husband's regime tortured and killed hundreds of thousands of people, and drove millions from their homes.

Her only achievement is to become a leader within a criminal organisation.

Charity work might soothe her conscience, while she satisfies expensive tastes through theft.

How does this corrupt accomplice to a brutal regime still have a British passport?

Revoke it. She needs sanctions not citizenship.

[Recommend 22](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **The real greybeard** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Postman](#)

Nobody close to Assad has a conscience.

[Recommend 13](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **John Koeman** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Postman](#)

Because we instigated the uprising in Syria:

"I was in England two years before the violence in Syria on other business....I met with top British officials, who confessed to me that they were preparing something in Syria. This was in Britain, not in America. Britain was preparing gunmen to invade."

French Foreign Minister Ronald Dumas.
(The Guardian, August 30, 2013)

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— **Kenneth Kohlrabi** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Postman](#)

Seriously. As if having or not having a UK passport would be a big deal for a multi gazillionaire. What would it give her that she can't get elsewhere?

[Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **beetle100** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

does she really say he looks good but otherwise a little dull and not really care in fair. She was in no frame of mind to judge. How boring were the presentations

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— **Daniel** 6 MONTHS AGO

Looking forward to The Hague...

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— **Latinaview** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Daniel

How are pleading, guilty or not guilty?

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Report

La Comtesse aux pieds nus 6 MONTHS AGO

Strip this woman of her British nationality. Poor Syrian people. So many lives lost in the Syrian revolution and they failed to dislodge these vampires...

Recommend 14 Reply Share

Report

KaLung 6 MONTHS AGO

No governments are boyscouts but the al-Assad regime is pretty much as close to evil as one can get

Recommend 2 Reply Share

Report

M Fretwell 6 MONTHS AGO

Our politicians profiteer at our expense. Taxes went up because of the covid overspending on business loans which went to their friends and they had shares in those companies, lest we not forget.

Recommend 4 Reply Share

Report

parasol 6 MONTHS AGO

What a vile individual.

Recommend 90 Reply Share

Report

Humanity 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to parasol

You mean the head of ISIS? I agree.

Recommend 7 Reply Share

Report

My_angst 6 MONTHS AGO

The evil touch of the Russian mafiosi permeate the corridors of power like a stench that you can't lose, beholden to putrid to sustain him, Bashir and his family are trapped.

Recommend 48 Reply Share

Report

JS 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to My_angst

The Arab elite doesn't need Russian support to steal the national wealth.

Recommend 27 Reply Share

Report

Woody Hedgehog 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

In reply to My_angst

But the west did nothing to stop this. We are almost as guilty. Millions dead, displaced or suffering because the west refused to act when it could have easily tipped the balance. Now our stomachs turn and anger boils at this elite supported by Russia, an ecosphere of tyrants. We must take responsibility for turning our heads the other way whilst the murder was so well documented daily on the news, we refused to risk our comfortable lives to defend the innocent against these murders. We are complicit in their success and carnage.

Recommend 6 Reply Share

Report

Inchofer 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to Woody Hedgehog

In reply to Woody Hedgehog

Obama drew a red line.

[Recommend 6](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Laura P** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Inchofer**

Yes but he allowed the regime to cross it, he might as well not have bothered.

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— **The real greybeard** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Woody Hedgehog**

And what exactly should the West have done?

[Recommend 13](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Chucky** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **The real greybeard**

The usual useless war in order to retreat behind an even larger disaster which would be commented by the same reader as the fault of the west.

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— **Woody Hedgehog** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **The real greybeard**

Nothing, we wouldn't want to disrupt your comfy life for the sake of few million lives, best hide in a corner and order your deliveroo

[Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **The real greybeard** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Woody Hedgehog**

So you don't have a clue either ...

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— **PJ** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Woody Hedgehog**

Tip the balance in favour of whom? This is not good vs evil. None of the factions are pure, and none have full support. Someone will always say they are oppressed and whoever you support there will be more fighting.

[Recommend 4](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Kenneth Kohlraabi** 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to **Woody Hedgehog**

The folks trying to topple Assad were the worst kind of religious nutters. Ready to behead us all.

The west hardly was going to support them.

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— **Kelso** 6 MONTHS AGO

Typical ad hominem slanders. Assad wouldn't be in power if people didn't support him

Assad's main problem is Israel wants to steal his land and increase apartheid footprint.

Stop the bombing.

[Reply](#)

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— **Mangalorian** 6 MONTHS AGO

Shallow reporting. The cash being extracted from Syrian businessmen in favour of charities - have you questioned if these "businessmen" paid all taxes legally due? Looking at everything from a cosy European worldview would miss the ground realities and the need to pursue nuanced policies in a chaotic environment.

[Recommend 15](#)

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— **mc6** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Mangalorian](#)

If there are taxes to be paid, collect them into the Finance Ministry's account, not "charities" controlled by the President for life and his Lady Macbeth. What the devil is "cozy" and "western" about that? "Nuanced policies" indeed... 🙄👎

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— **China created covid and lied** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Mangalorian](#)

She sure looks "cozy" in her European Valentino dress, my propagandist friend.

[Recommend 32](#)

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— **Kenneth Kohlrabi** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to China created covid and lied](#)

Why do people insist on focusing on irrelevancies like what women are wearing? Does anyone mention that Bashars suits are Valentino and cost £5,000 each? Who cares?

[Recommend 2](#)

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— **Kitty Cat** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[In reply to Mangalorian](#)

Ok so the Syrian government has brought in these new laws on taxes/businesses which ok they can do. However, to go back and fine these businesses retroactively for activities that took place before these laws even existed is absurd and completely unfair. That's like me putting an extra £100 on a bill for fixing your kitchen sink a week later because I didn't like the cup of tea you made me.

That and how is "Looking at everything from a cosy European worldview" when everyone with a working brain can see how ridiculous these fines are. Money that is taken from these businesses ends up either in Asma/Bashar/Maher's bank accounts/shell companies or charities. So it's not even going to help the average Syrian because they could put the fine in their tax office account but no it goes straight to one these shady bank accounts or charities. You could spot how shady and absurd this is from the International Space Station

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— **Humanity** 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

[In reply to Kitty Cat](#)

Lo!!! Perhaps the Russians and Chinese can do a better job from the Space Stations as US doesn't have the capability anymore. No wonder they get it right on this story.

[Recommend 1](#)

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— takasa 6 MONTHS AGO

Most would eventually be sanctioned by the US for being "complicit in destroying Syria's economy".

Surely this sentence has another meaning?

This article is informative, but without the context of geopolitics it comes across as character assassination.

👍 Recommend 4 🗨 Reply 🌐 Share

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— retiro 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

Asma is a repulsive individual and the perfect example of greed at all costs. She sold her family, her upbringing, and the costly education her parents gave her for a life of luxury in an tyrannical regime.

She deserves as much punishment as the blood-thirsty family she married into. For those readers who may not be aware, I recommend reading not just on Bashar, but also on Rifaat (uncle of Bashar) and Maher (brother) to get a glimpse of how morally broken the al-Assad family is.

👍 Recommend 170 🗨 Reply 🌐 Share

🚩 Report

— Postman 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

🗨 In reply to retiro

It is estimated the Syrian Civil War has resulted in half a million dead and 13 million people being displaced.

The suffering is hard to imagine.

The duplicity of her charity work repulsive.

👍 Recommend 93 🗨 Reply 🌐 Share

🚩 Report

— Humanity 6 MONTHS AGO

🗨 In reply to Postman

She didn't start the war. If anything the Syrian government defeated the terrorist organizations. Is this not a fact? Am I imagining? Is ISIS a figment of my imagination?

👍 Recommend 34 🗨 Reply 🌐 Share

🚩 Report

— Hugh Manatee 6 MONTHS AGO

🗨 In reply to Humanity

So you're just going to skip over the drought and conditions from ~ 2006, how this led to the protests in ~ 2011 and how Assad responded (as any small-minded individual does - with violence), and focus on Assad fighting ISIS? Are you also going to skip over the use of chemical weapons as well?

<<https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War>>

👍 Recommend 67 🗨 Reply 🌐 Share

🚩 Report

— Humanity 6 MONTHS AGO (Edited)

🗨 In reply to Hugh Manatee

The only thing the world remembers from Syria is the catastrophe unleashed by ISIS and how anti-government protestors rapidly turned into the worst terrorists humankind has known.

See the picture above from the UAE visit. She doesn't look anything like ISIS. Does she?

Why don't you just ask people to vote for her vs Baghdadi in your lame western democracies (wherever you're from) and see who they vote for. Or make it more interesting her vs Netanyahu in Israel today and see who wins. She is not a terrorist. We all know that. And the Syrian people refused to have ISIS rule over them - something it appears you would have preferred and liked. So sorry!!!

👍 Recommend 20 ↩ Reply ➦ Share 🚩 Report

— **Hugh Manatee** 6 MONTHS AGO

↩ In reply to **Humanity**

I'll take your response as "yes, I am - perhaps unsurprisingly - going to take completely skirt over any inhumane behaviour by anti-Western parties, whilst professing to be unbiased"

👍 Recommend 33 ↩ Reply ➦ Share 🚩 Report

— **Tickytl** 6 MONTHS AGO

↩ In reply to **Hugh Manatee**

Chemical weapons?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7bNclYHJ74>

The Gray Zone has covered the false flag operation. You can still find references to Iraqis pulling babies out of incubators in Kuwait. How theses falsehoods penetrate history

👍 Recommend 8 ↩ Reply ➦ Share 🚩 Report

— **Hugh Manatee** 6 MONTHS AGO

↩ In reply to **Tickytl**

Would that be Max "anything the US does is imperialism but when Russia does it it's fine" Blumenthal? Oh yeah, bound to be a neutral and credible source 😊

Here's a link to Al Jazeera coverage of the UN and OPCW report on the Assad regime having used chemical weapons on its own people, just so you don't have to have a melt down about "western media":

<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2021/6/4/opcw-suspects-17-instances-of-chemical-weapons-use-in-syria>

👍 Recommend 11 ↩ Reply ➦ Share 🚩 Report

— **Larchmont** 6 MONTHS AGO

↩ In reply to **Tickytl**

Gray Zone is Russian state ops

👍 Recommend 5 ↩ Reply ➦ Share 🚩 Report

— **City Living** 6 MONTHS AGO

↩ In reply to **Tickytl**

Having visited Syria, it was the best country in the Middle East. Culturally liberal and vibrant.

Not been there for ten years but I find Max Blumenthals account credible.

[Recommend 2](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **35_39S** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Humanity](#)

Asma?? Is that YOU????? Thanks for leaving a comment to your own article !!!

[Recommend 4](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **doc martin** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to retiro](#)

could b MBS, putin, Xi, Zuma etc

they are no aberration

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— **Bobster** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to retiro](#)

It sounds like they are the Ceaucescu's of Syria?

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— **User_2021** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to retiro](#)

You seem to have issues dealing with successful women...

[Recommend 1](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Randoob** 6 MONTHS AGO

Excellent article, thank you.

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— **Grumpz** 6 MONTHS AGO

Clearly not a very nice individual...

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— **RonaldoMcDonaldo** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Grumpz](#)

Hey... she does a lot for charity!

[Recommend 10](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Celi** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to RonaldoMcDonaldo](#)

So did Jimmy Saville...

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— **ComeAgain** 6 MONTHS AGO

The Assad family will reap what they have sown one day, with double compound interest.

[Recommend 28](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **Kenneth Kohlrabi** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to ComeAgain](#)

That's very unlikely. There's no such thing as karma. Or heaven. Mostly, very vile people in banana republics (and elsewhere, too) get away with being very vile.

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— **Tony, Islington** 6 MONTHS AGO

An exec JP Morgan banker, why isn't that a massive surprise?

These are the king of individuals banking attracts.

[Recommend 25](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **KaLung** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Tony, Islington](#)

Hope the good people in investment banking reflect on that.

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— **Larchmont** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to Tony, Islington](#)

thank you for trivializing the evil off this woman

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— **GWR** 6 MONTHS AGO

Great article FT, an interesting read!

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— **RonaldoMcDonaldo** 6 MONTHS AGO

You'd think this Damascene elite would be willing to change their minds about all this stuff.

[Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **deMontaigne** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to RonaldoMcDonaldo](#)

A story as old as time. You can sell your soul only once. After that, only double-down.

[Recommend 1](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **RonaldoMcDonaldo** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to deMontaigne](#)

So, what about St Paul then?

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— **CanuckAnalystV2** 6 MONTHS AGO

So interesting, hardly any comments. Anything about Israel has dozens of people writing, practised foaming at the mouth, but it seems like Syria and it's under the radar rehabilitation doesn't get people overly upset.

[Recommend 2](#) [Reply](#) [Share](#) [Report](#)

— **WendellMurray** 6 MONTHS AGO

[In reply to CanuckAnalystV2](#)

CanuckAnalyst? Version 2? When was he Version 1?

In any case, excellent reporting here. No clue how these Arab Middle Eastern countries function. Those who control governments do so solely for their

own personal benefit. Why does the population acquiesce to this? Yes, the countries are internally inundated with government spies and so-called "security" personnel, but still.

Recommend 2 Reply Share Report

Hornedrabbitt 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to WendellMurray

Have you missed what's been going on over the last 12 years? The population has very clearly not acquiesced. They tried to get rid of the Assads, resulting in thousands dead and tortured in government prisons, a civil war and a global diaspora of millions of Syrians.

Recommend 8 Reply Share Report

Mancmanandseagull 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to CanuckAnalystV2

We don't need to currently, we know how bad Syria is. this excellent article just connects dots for us. A beautiful country with beautiful people led by vicious snakes.

Israel, well you create an apartheid state and eventually it engulfs everything. Your mate Bibi is seeing to that and the rest of the nation now erupts. The nation was meant to hold themselves to a higher standard but it is showing that Bibi is just another middle East dictator. Power at any cost. You brought Israel into this, now this is the reposit.

Recommend 9 Reply Share Report

accompanying Asma on the Assads' March trip to Abu Dhabi.

stonebird 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to CanuckAnalystV2

How many times in the past year have you seen an article about Israel where the comments are enabled. ? Almost never. Try talking about the three missile and bomb attacks in the last four days on Syria, and you will see that there is a lot of discussion in the FT:

Luna al-Shibl
A former Al Jazeera news anchor, Shibl has helped craft the Assad regime's public image as the most senior government press official. Shibl is also a senior adviser to the president and a prominent member of the Assads' inner circle. Along with her husband, she was sanctioned by the US in 2020. She was seen accompanying Asma on the Assads' March trip to Abu Dhabi.

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stonebird 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to CanuckAnalystV2

I think the missiles are in fact mainly targeted at Iranian supported installations or equipment in Syria that threaten Israel.

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stonebird 6 MONTHS AGO

In reply to KaLung

The last one targeted four separate airfields. The first hit Aleppo airfield (actually for the second or third time) and the second hit a residential area in Damascus.

claim that a new radar system was the target on seen accompanying the airfields. Probably.

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hedgehog 6 MONTHS AGO

Great article

Recommend 45 Reply Share Report

Khodr Ali Taher
The owner of Syria's biggest retail phone and

IT operator, EmmaTel. Many believe he operates the company launched in 2019 on her behalf; Emma was Asma's anglicised childhood nickname in London.

Yassar Ibrahim

Economics adviser to the president. He is connected to dozens of businesses, a sprawling empire that spans telecommunications to construction to oil firms and has taken on many of the companies that Syrian business owners have been compelled to sell.

However, US officials began to see clear patterns and realised it could sanction those near the heart of the regime. "It wasn't difficult to build up — their front actors are so prominent, it was easy to hit them," Rayburn, the former US official, says.

Chief among them is Yassar Ibrahim. Largely unheard of outside Damascus before the [US sanctioned him](#) in 2020, his name is now the only one that matters, according to 12 businessmen, analysts and people with insight into the Assads' inner circle.

He is officially economics adviser to the president, but also sits on the clandestine economic council that Asma chairs. Unofficially, he takes on many of the companies that business owners have been compelled to sell, according to four businessmen in the region, and two sources with insight into regime operations.

His name appears on dozens of company documents, some registered in Syria and Lebanon and others in the Cayman Islands. They include telecommunications companies, tourism, construction, real estate, private security and oil firms among others, according to Karam Shaar, a senior fellow at the New Lines Institute who has tracked Ibrahim's activities.

Several of these key associates had early starts in the first lady's office, including Lina Kinayeh, who previously headed Asma's office

but is now a ministerial adviser. She is one of the palace's private sector liaisons, three well-placed sources say. When sanctioning her in 2020, the US Treasury noted she "has conducted a range of business and personal activities on behalf of [Asma]".

Another of Asma's close affiliates is Khodr Ali Taher, owner of Syria's biggest retail phone and IT operator, EmmaTel, and a member of the palace's economic council. Many believe he operates the company launched in 2019 on her behalf; Emma was Asma's anglicised childhood nickname in London.

Misplaced trust

A key power base for Asma, and a prime source of patronage, is the Syria Trust. It is run by her close associate Fares Kallas, formerly her senior aide who now sits on the palace's economic council.

Analysts and aid experts say her experience managing the NGO before the war allowed her to craft a systematically corrupt humanitarian assistance system in the country, with her network at its core.

From the start of the war, "NGOs couldn't operate without having contact with her," says the veteran businessman. Syrian sources and aid workers have said the relationship was so blatant that Asma would host meetings in her office at the presidential palace to negotiate international NGO contracts.

Aid groups over the years have [routinely conceded](#) to the Assad regime's demands, fearful of losing access and under pressure to keep humanitarian help flowing.

Recommended



Syrian crisis

The rising influence of Mrs Assad

The regime routinely restricts access to areas in need, diverts aid towards its preferred communities and insists on the hiring of officials' relatives. It has also targeted rival groups to help Asma consolidate control over an industry with a guaranteed influx of cash. Last year, a children's NGO was forced to close down after authorities raided their offices and threw several of their staff in jail, according to two people with

knowledge of the raids.

It also requires UN bodies and aid groups to partner with government-affiliated agencies the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Syria Trust. These were the key partners distributing post-quake international aid.

The Syria Trust network includes 14 affiliated subsidiaries and programmes, including a university, a microfinance initiative and cultural heritage arm. But its work in the humanitarian space has repeatedly raised alarm bells. The Syria Trust provides legal aid and psychosocial support and runs [UN-linked community centres](#) for those displaced by the war. It did not respond to a written request for comment.

Analysts say that leaves people who were terrorised and displaced by the regime at the mercy of a regime-affiliated organisation that may seek retribution. “Most reasonably-minded people would agree it is unfathomable for Asma’s charity to provide protection and legal support to people her husband has victimised,” says Emma Beals, non-resident fellow at the Middle East Institute.

The Syria Trust’s website says it has generated “unanticipated income” via its construction company [Deyari](#). The firm has won several tenders for UN [projects](#) in recent years, and works on an Agha Khan Foundation [project](#) in old Aleppo.

A UNHCR 2018 [audit report](#) is critical of an unnamed UN partner that contracted a company it “fully owned” to rehabilitate shelters for approximately \$400,000. The partner was the Syria Trust and the company was Deyari, according to two sources.



Asma waves with disabled children in 2018 during a graduation ceremony for professors from Damascus University, who will work at the Syrian Organisation for Persons with Disabilities © Omar Sanadiki/Reuters

In response to questions from the FT, the UN said its partnerships with the Syria Trust have become “much more limited” and are often necessary because of their “institutional role”. In all cases, their performance is regularly monitored: “Partnering does not imply giving carte blanche,” says Francesco Galtieri, who until March was a senior UN official in Damascus.

But the UN also pays millions of dollars — \$12.3mn in 2021, according to Shaar’s analysis of its latest data — for staff to stay at the Damascus Four Seasons Hotel. On paper, the hotel is majority [owned](#) by a businessman named Samer Foz who was [sanctioned](#) by the US over his financial ties to the regime. But four Syrian

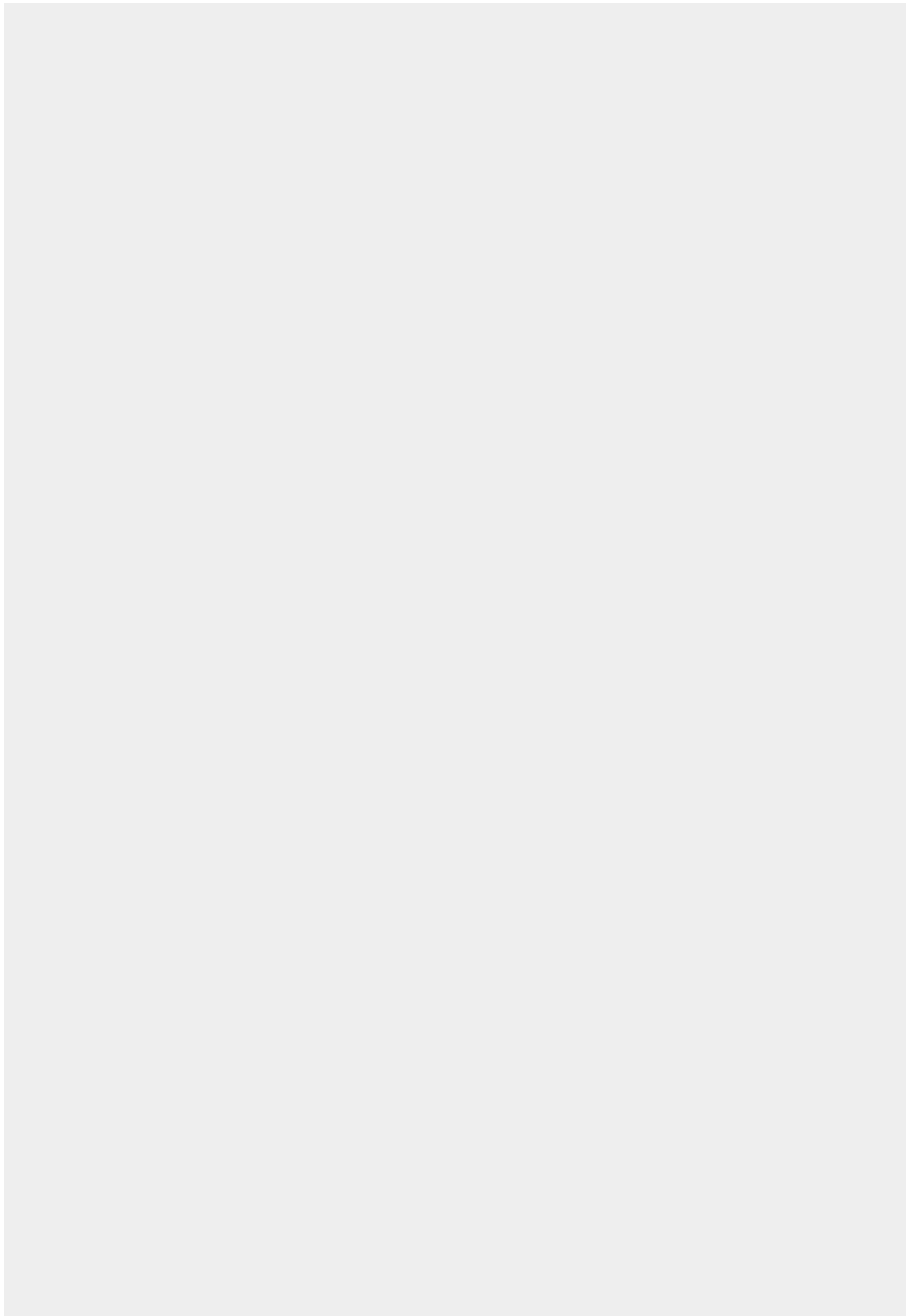
businessmen, two experts and a relative of Foz's suggest that a

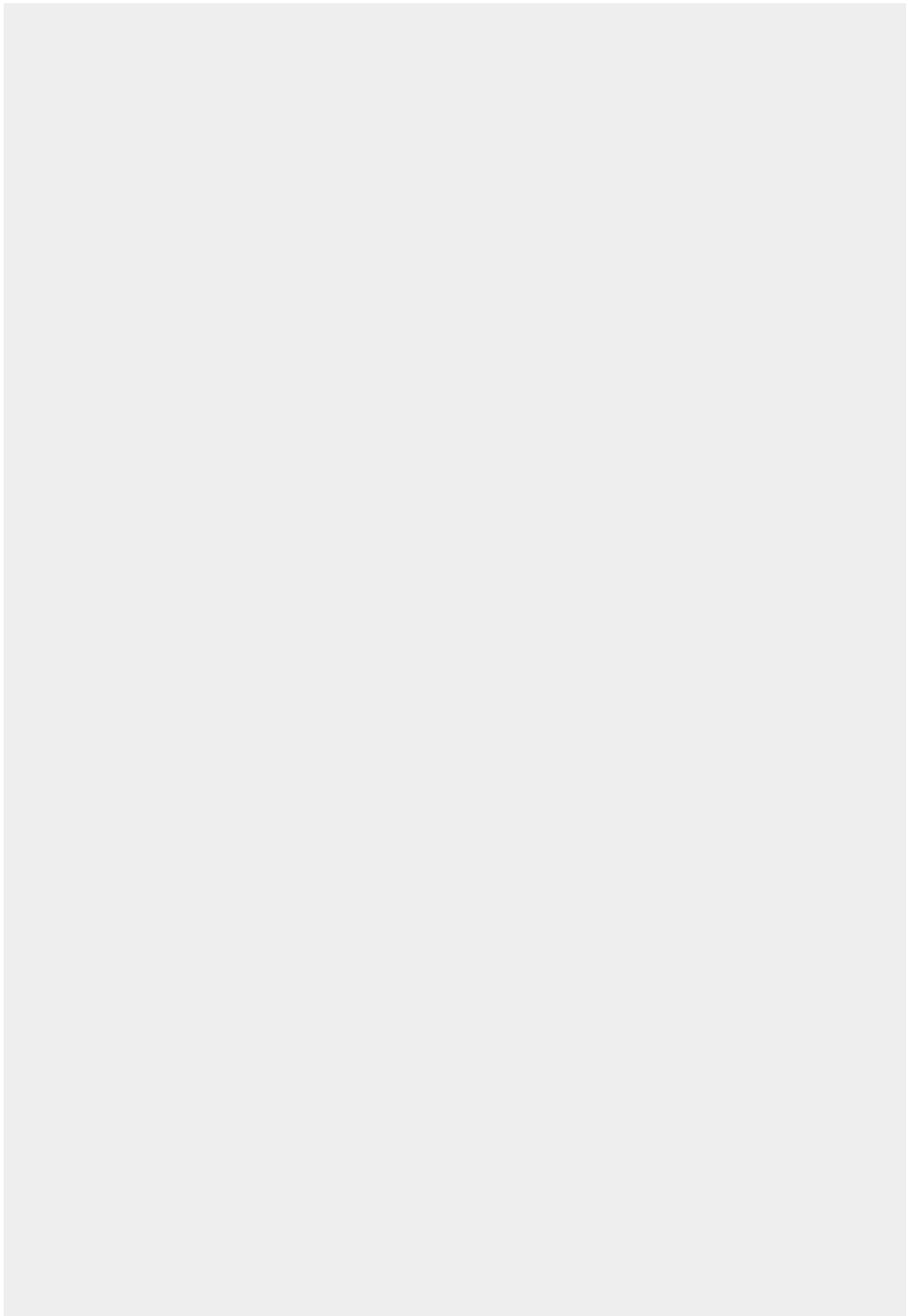
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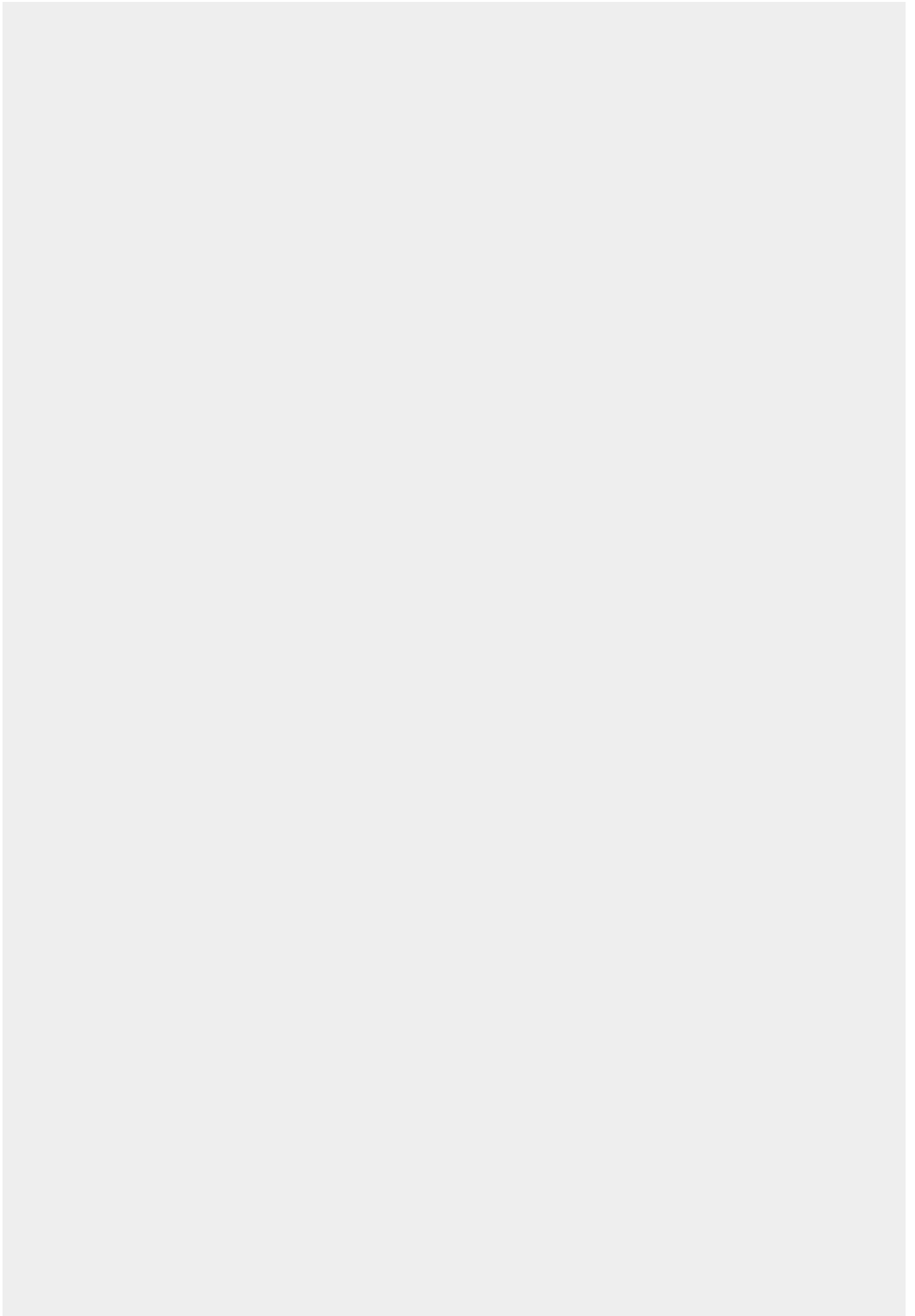
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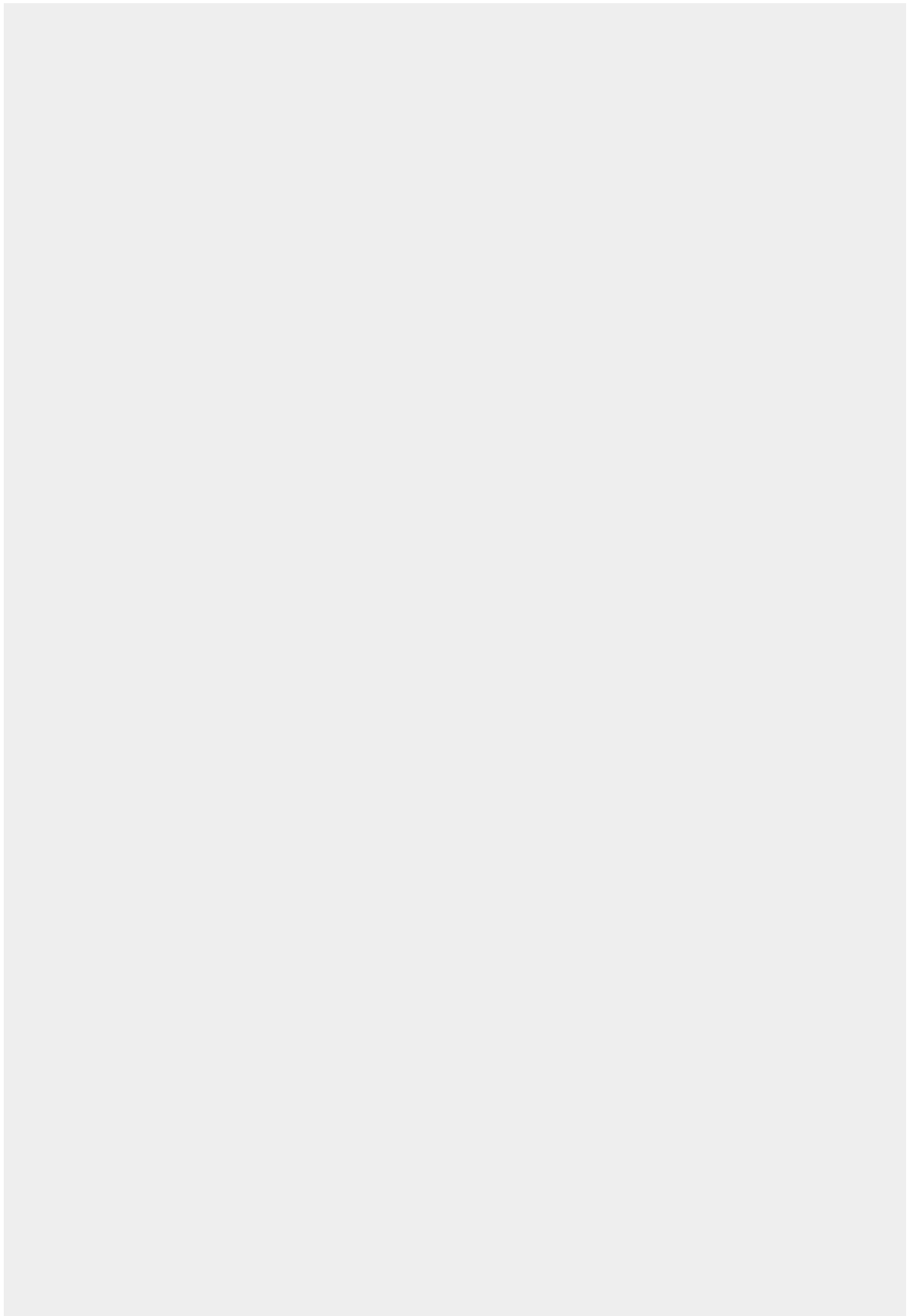
just buying up property and landmarks for prestige and dominance, to make sure everyone knows who's in charge."

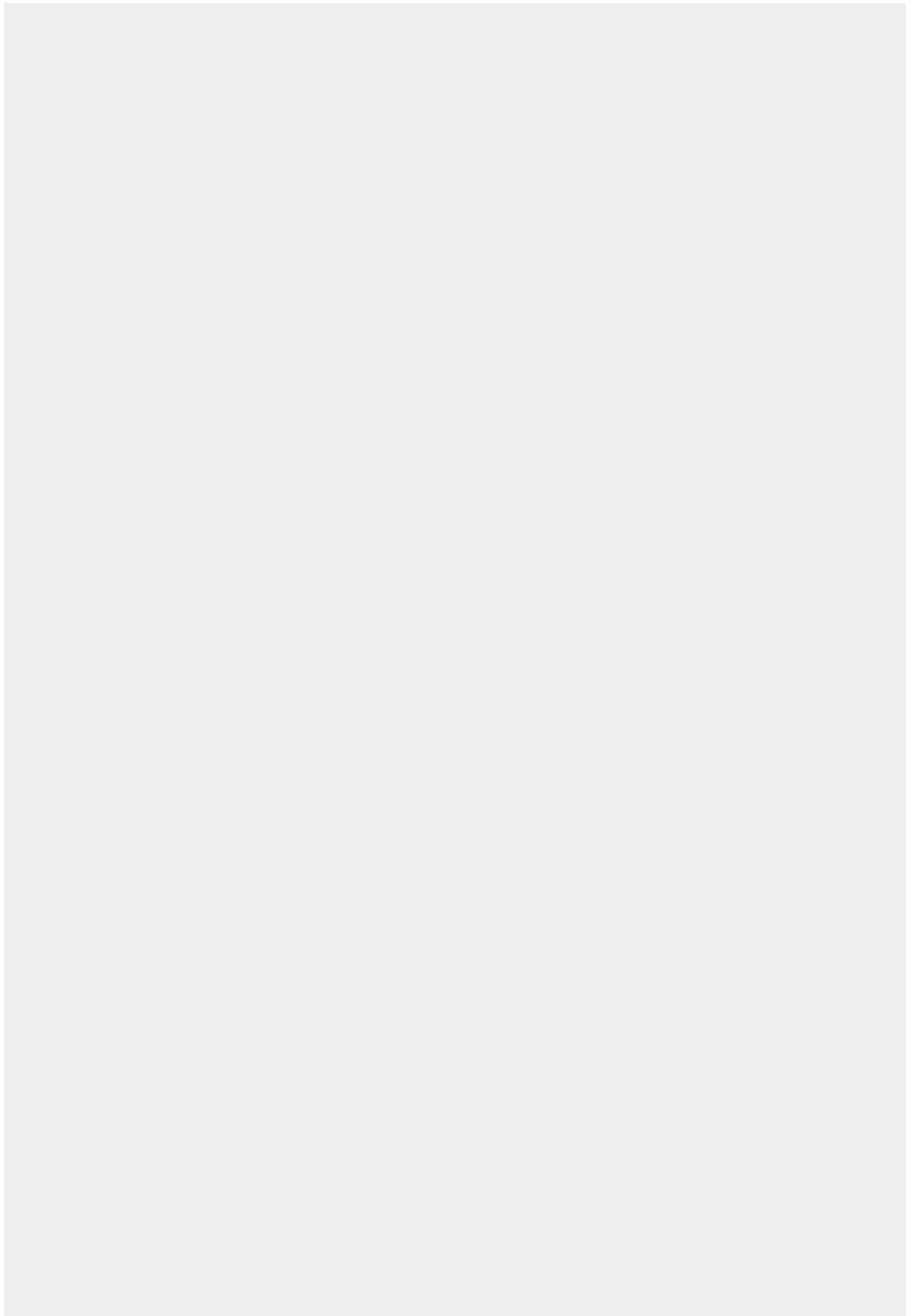
A Nikkei Company

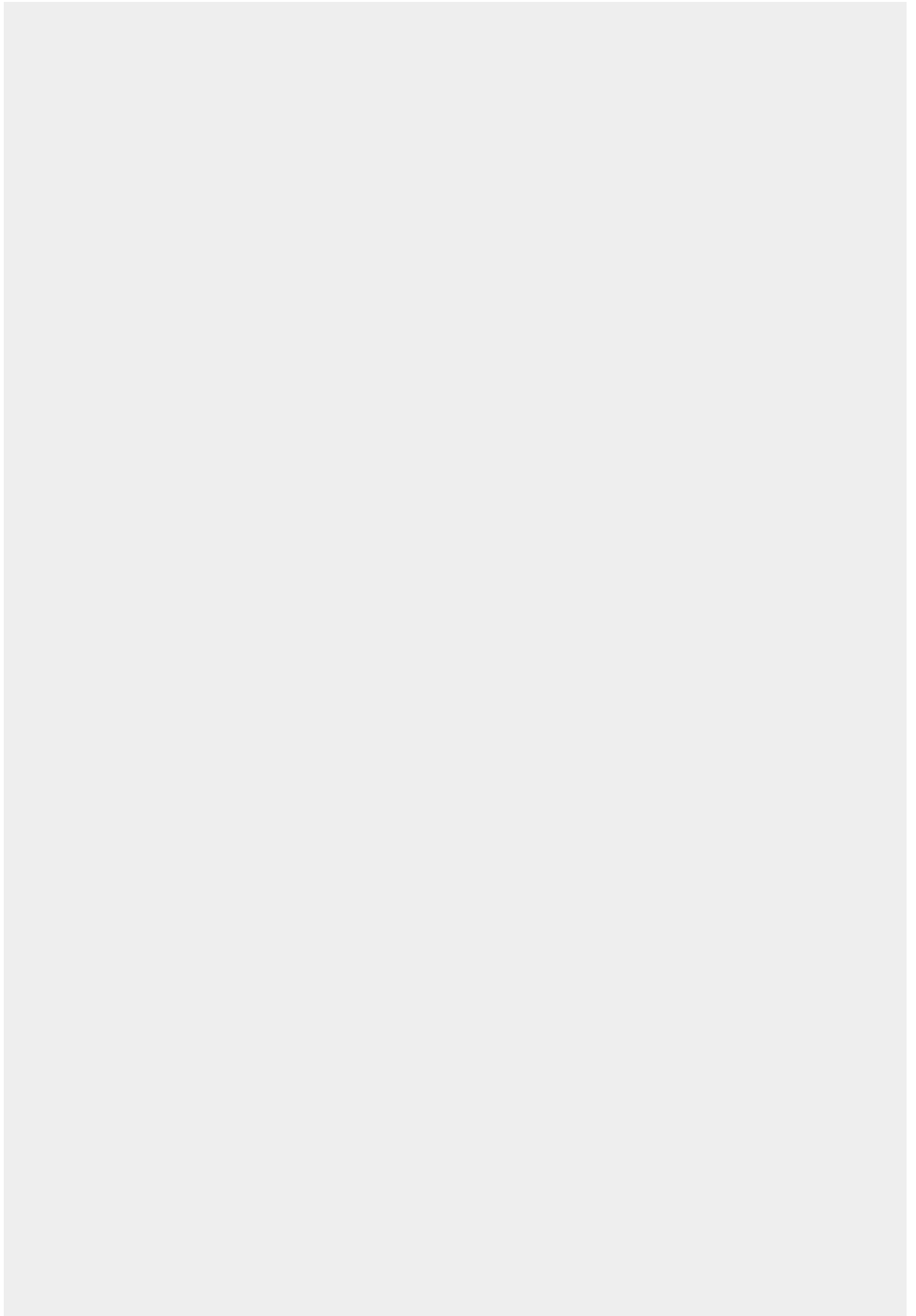


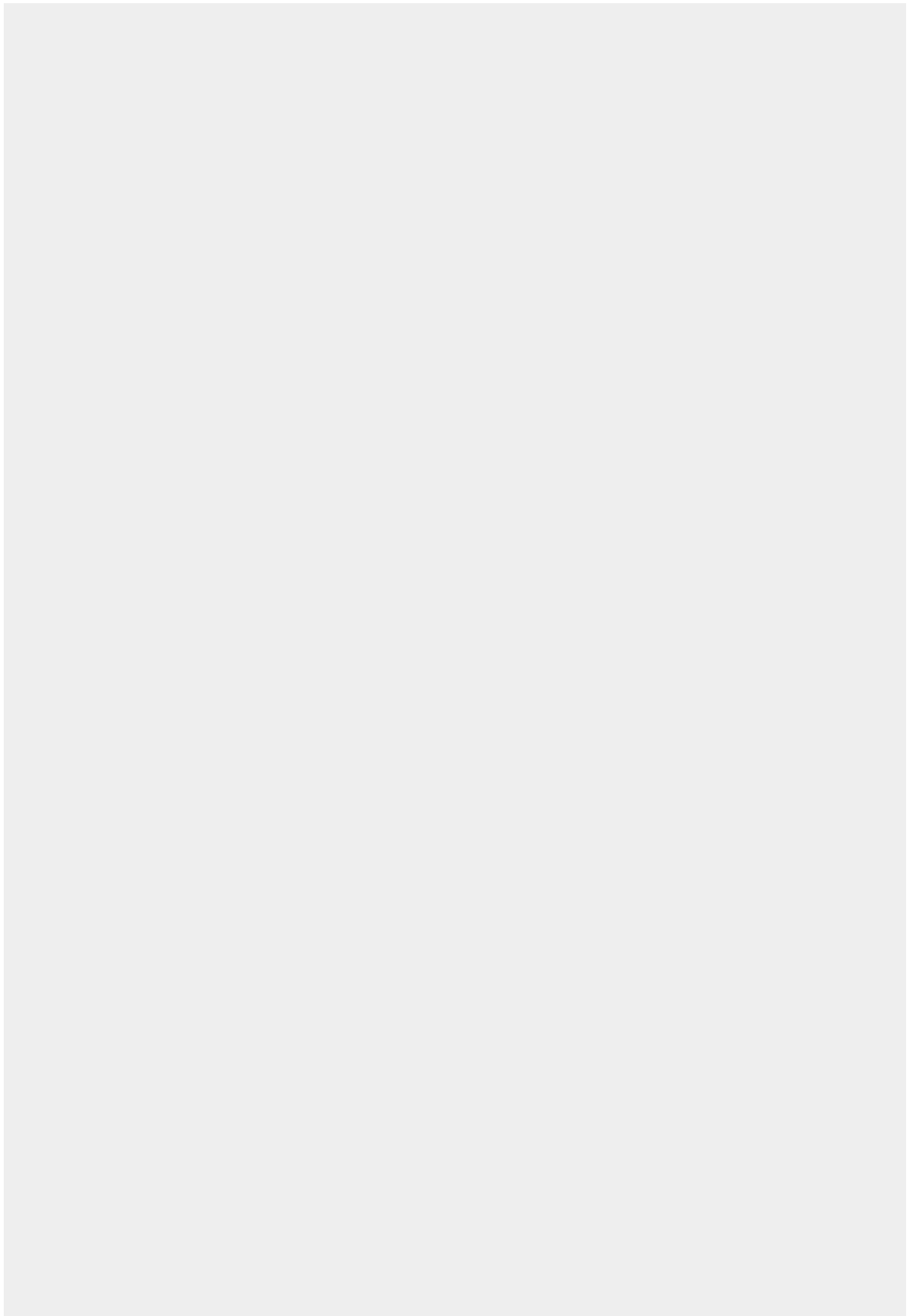


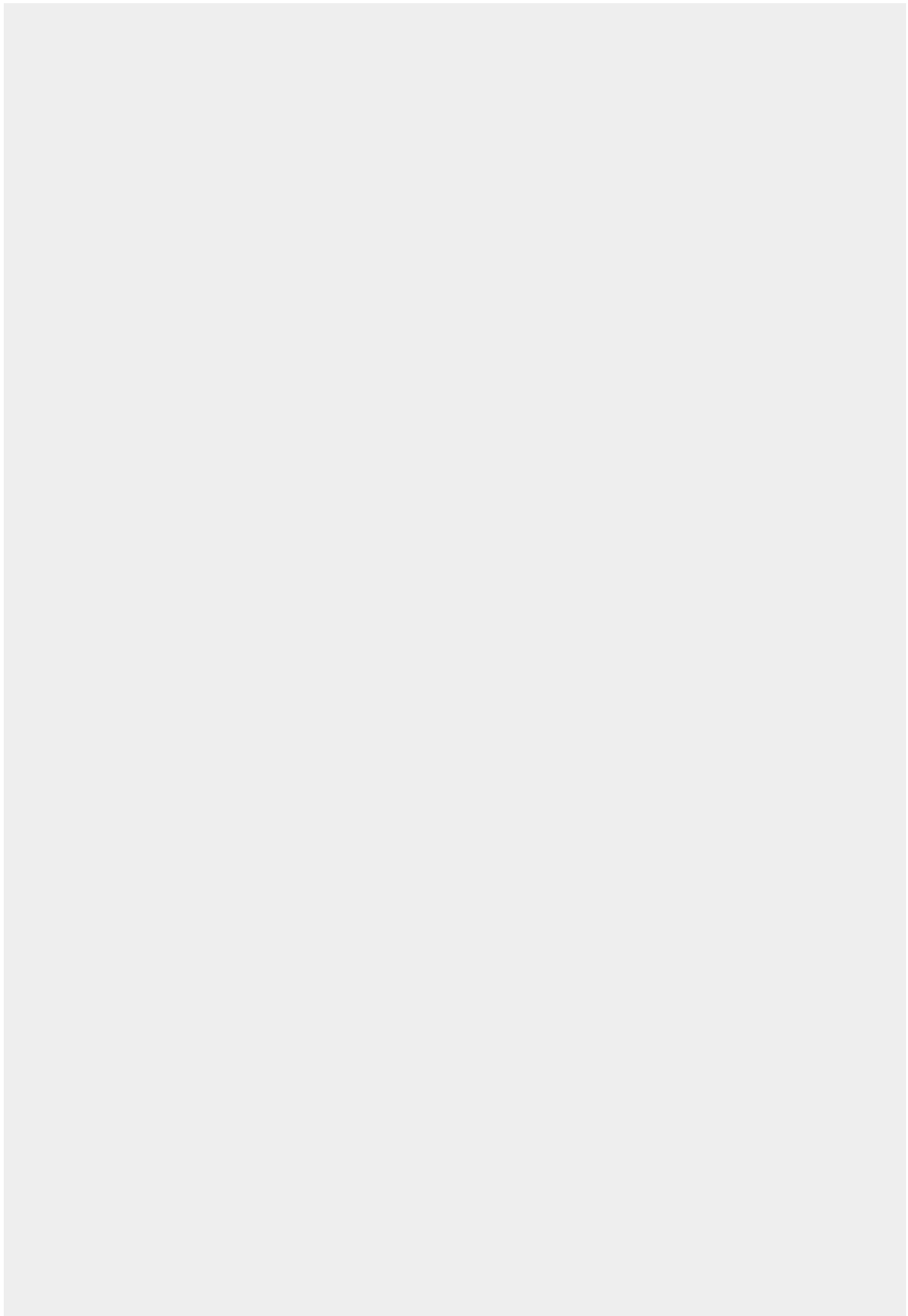












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