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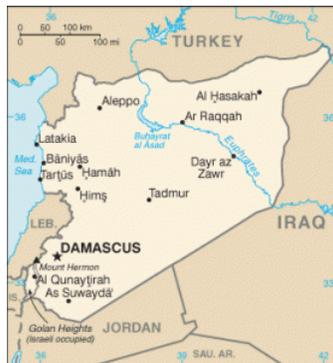
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Assad Said to Have Fled Damascus amid ‘Information Blackout’

By John Glaser

July 19, 2012

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has reportedly fled the capital of Damascus after three top security officials were killed on Wednesday, as an “information blackout” has gone into effect about his whereabouts.



Reports from Arab media, opposition figures, and western officials say that Assad fled by plane to his hometown near the seaport of Latakia. Other reports say he fled to the village of Kardaha in the Alawite Mountains. Wherever he is, he is said to be directing a harsh military response to a set of bold attacks in Damascus by Syrian rebel militias.

The London based Arab-language newspaper al-Quds al-Arabi claimed there are reports that Assad survived an assassination attempt on Tuesday evening and may be suffering from injuries to his legs and abdomen. These reports have not been confirmed.

The website of the Syrian state news agency SANA was down for much of Thursday and the television channel was reportedly on a loop of Assad's last public appearance.

The regime has given Damascus residents in areas captured by rebels [a 48-hour deadline to leave](#) before heavy bombardments of rebel areas begin.

The sudden increase in capacity, effectiveness, and sophistication on the part of rebel militias in their attacks on the regime were unexpected. The likely source of such rapid improvements are likely to be due to outside assistance, possibly from the US and its allies.

As Western leaders hail the impending doom of the Assad regime, others caution such moralizing celebration. "Even if [Assad] goes there's a lot of post-Assad issues for which nobody is really prepared — the price of the fragmented opposition and power of armed groups," [says Marc Lynch](#), an Obama administration consultant and Middle East expert at George Washington University.