**Justinian and Assad**

**Prompt: You’ve read the article Justinian and Theodora--the Nika Rebellion. And you’ve read the article The Syrian Civil War about Bashar Assad’s reaction to rebellion in Syria. Compare and contrast how Assad and Justinian responded to rebellion within their realm. What effect did each dictator’s response have?**

The way that Bashar Assad, current leader in Syria, responded to the attempted revolution in his country and the way the emperor Justinian, ruler in the Byzantine Empire, responded to the Nika rebellion nearly 1500 years ago are similar. Yet, they are not identical in that Justinian’s actions seem calmer.

When Justinian became emperor in 527, Blues and Greens, who were once sport rivals, had turned to discordant political parties, who often led riots and broke many laws. Justinian set a goal to defeat these rebels and started out in a calm manner. Justinian decreed that anyone who kept on the path of destruction and chaos would be punished. He even hung seven ring leaders to send a clear message to stop. The Nika riot began when Blues and Greens attacked prisons, released inmates and set fires destroying major buildings. Armed rebels took the place of peaceful protesters and harassed people, stole, and committed other crimes in Syria. Justinian attempted to negotiate peace, offering to let rebels go if they would remain loyal. Instead, they refused to accept him as leader and they appointed their own new leader. When they did not remain loyal, Justinian’s army marched on the rebels and killed 30,000 of them.

This is similar in some ways to the Syrian Civil War which began in 2011, during a time called the Arab Spring. Peaceful protest took place in the streets, demanding for Assad, who was considered an unjust and harsh ruler, to resign. Rival rebel groups arose, also trying to take power from Assad as they had tried to do with Justinian. Assad responded similarly to Justinian and had his security force attack and beat down protesters. Yet Assad was not calm and measured and did not try to negotiate in ways Justinian had. While Justinian was attacking serious rebels, who fought soldiers in the streets, set fire to many buildings, and broke out prisoners, Assad violently responded to peaceful protesters who were not armed.

Assad responded in even worse ways, using airstrikes, bombs, and chemical weapons. Perhaps had Justinian had these, he might have used them. However, he seemed more careful because he at least tried to negotiate and be fare, while Assad did not. Unlike Assad, Justinian first tried to make amends with this group, but when the rebels were still insubordinate and even went so far as to crown a new noble, Justinian had thousands killed within just 24 hours. Fortunately, from there on, the situation became peaceful in the Byzantine empire under Justinian’s rule. Unfortunately, the Syrian conflict is still ongoing and Assad rushes to rash decisions, regularly killing his own people. Like the Nika rebellion, many people have died. To be exact, more than 160,000 people have been killed, on top of about 6.5 million people being displaced.

Tactics that may have worked in the past, even if done in a calmer way in the past, are having none of the same settling effects today so a different approach is needed all together. Also, perhaps leaders should make a greater effort to think carefully, consider all sides and attempt to negotiate more so.