

The Collapse Of The Assad Regime: The Role Of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (Hts) And The Challenges In Post-War Syria - An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT

Syria's transformation following the fall of the Assad regime marks a pivotal moment in its modern history. This paper explores the historical trajectory of the Assad dynasty, the domestic and international forces leading to its downfall, and the current efforts to rebuild Syria under new governance. The study examines the roles of key stakeholders, including international actors such as the U.S., Russia, Iran, Turkey, Israel, and Gulf states, in shaping Syria's post-conflict landscape. It highlights the complex challenges facing Syria's reconstruction, encompassing political legitimacy, economic revival, social cohesion, and foreign diplomacy. The rise of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) as a governing entity raises critical concerns regarding its ideological past and future governance aspirations. Additionally, the study evaluates the international community's response and the prospects of sustainable peace in Syria. By analyzing historical events, policy shifts, and emerging geopolitical realities, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of Syria's transition and the multifaceted challenges it faces in achieving stability and national reconstruction.

Keywords: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Syria, Bashar al-Assad, collapse of the Assad regime.

1. GLIMPSE OF MODERN-DAY SYRIA

Contemporary Syria is a nation steeped in history and diversity—a land whose modern identity is shaped by centuries of cultural evolution, colonial influence, and internal resilience. Located on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean, Syria's geography spans fertile river valleys, rugged mountain ranges, and expansive desert plateaus. Its natural features, from the Anti-Lebanon Mountains along the western border to the Euphrates River that traverses the heartland, have long influenced its economic, social, and political life.

The modern Syrian state emerged following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent French mandate. After years of nationalist agitation, Syria achieved de facto independence on 17 April 1946 and was later recognized as a sovereign republic, marking a new chapter in its turbulent formative years.^[1] Over the following decades, the country experienced a series of coups and political upheavals that eventually gave rise to the long-lasting Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party regime—a period marked by rapid modernization efforts juxtaposed with political repression. Today, despite enduring conflicts and

economic challenges, Syria continues to rebuild its national institutions while seeking to honor its rich, multifaceted past.

At the heart of Syrian society are its people, a mosaic of ethnicities and cultures. Arabs constitute the vast majority, yet significant communities of Kurds, Armenians, Turkmen, and Circassians enrich the social fabric. This ethnic diversity is mirrored in the nation's religious landscape. According to recent demographic estimates, approximately 87% of Syrians adhere to Islam, of which about 74% are Sunni Muslims while the remaining 13% belong to various Shia sects—including Alawites, Ismailis, and Twelvers^[2]. Christians, who once formed around 10% of the population, as well as Druze (approximately 3%), also contribute to the nation's cultural plurality, even though the ongoing conflict has led many from these communities to seek refuge abroad.

Syria's religious landscape is a vibrant mosaic shaped over centuries by the contributions of diverse faith communities, including Sunni and Shia Muslims, Christians, and Druze. These groups have historically enriched the nation's cultural fabric with their distinct traditions and practices. However, the legacy of past conflicts and external influences has sometimes strained these relationships, as seen in episodes like the 1982 Hama massacre—where a brutal crackdown on predominantly Sunni opposition highlighted deep-seated sectarian divides—and more recent assaults on Christian neighborhoods in Aleppo during the civil war.^[3] Such incidents underscore the challenges that arise when political strife intertwines with religious identity. As Syria embarks on the challenging process of national reconstruction, ensuring equal rights and robust protections for every religious community remains a critical priority for building a truly inclusive future.

[1] *An Independent Nation – Heritage for Peace*. (n.d.).

[2] *Syria - the World Factbook*. (n.d.).

In addition to its rich human tapestry, Syria's strategic location has made it a focal point for regional and international interests. With borders touching Turkey to the north, Iraq and Iran to the east, Jordan to the south, and Israel and Lebanon to the west, the country has long been at the crossroads of trade, culture, and political influence. This unique geographic position continues to shape Syria's internal policies and external relations as the nation navigates complex regional dynamics.

Despite the hardships of decades of conflict and political instability, Syria's enduring spirit is evident in its ongoing efforts to forge a unified national identity that embraces both its ancient heritage and modern aspirations. Contemporary Syria remains a land of contrasts—rich in history and cultural diversity yet facing formidable challenges as it rebuilds and strives toward a future defined by unity, tolerance, and sustainable development.

[3] Monde, L. (2024, September 17). Syria's Christians, a disappearing community. *Le Monde.fr*.

2. POLITICAL PAST OF SYRIA

(The Assad Dynasty)

The Assad family has been synonymous with modern Syrian politics, having maintained power for over five decades. Emerging from modest beginnings, the Assads established a dynastic regime that combined military strength, political maneuvering, and ideological shifts to govern Syria. Central to this legacy is Hafez al-Assad, whose ascent and long rule laid the groundwork for the authoritarian system later inherited by his son, Bashar al-Assad.

2.1. Hafez al-Assad

Early Life and Rise to Power

Hafez al-Assad emerged from humble beginnings in a modest Alawite family in rural Syria. His early military career, marked by hard work and discipline, laid the foundation for his later ascent. By the 1960s, discontent with political instability and weak governance in post-independence Syria provided Assad an opportunity. In 1970, he staged the Corrective Movement^[4]—a bloodless coup that ousted the de facto leader, Salah Jadid—and swiftly consolidated power, eventually assuming the presidency. This decisive action marked the beginning of a long and autocratic regime that would span nearly three decades.

Consolidation of Power and Domestic Policies

Once in power, Hafez al-Assad restructured the Syrian state through a combination of ruthless repression and strategic patronage. He capitalized on the inherent sectarian divisions within Syria by elevating members of his own Alawite minority into key positions in the military and security apparatus. Assad's government not only redefined Alawite identity around his own cult of personality but also sought to co-opt influential Sunni elites by appointing them to senior government roles and integrating them into his expansive network of patronage. Despite these efforts to present an image of inclusivity, his policies often resulted in widespread disenfranchisement of the Sunni majority. Notably, the brutal response to the 1982 Hama uprising—where government forces deployed artillery and chemical weapons against predominantly Sunni rebels—remains one of the darkest episodes of his rule, with estimates of civilian casualties ranging from 10,000 to 25,000^[5].

[4] History, S. S. / M. B. (2024, December 17). The history that Syria's new leaders will need to overcome. *TIME*.

[5] Paris, G. (2025, February 7). Hafez al-Assad's Syria: Forging a dynasty, at any price. *Le Monde.fr*.

International Relations and Regional Influence

Hafez al-Assad also excelled in using foreign policy as a tool to bolster his regime. Recognizing Syria's strategic position at the crossroads of the Middle East, he skillfully aligned with the Soviet Union to secure critical military and economic aid, which in turn enabled him to maintain a robust security apparatus at home. Simultaneously, he sought to balance relations with Western powers; in 1974, he hosted U.S. President Richard Nixon—the first American leader to visit Syria—to project an image of diplomatic openness following the 1973 Arab Israeli War. Assad's participation in the 1973 war, in which Syria and Egypt coordinated an attack on Israel, further bolstered his standing among many Syrians by positioning him as a defender of Arab interests, despite the military setbacks that followed^[6].

Legacy and Impact

Under Hafez al-Assad, Syria transformed into a tightly controlled state where dissent was met with harsh repression, and state security operated with impunity. His regime's reliance on violence, sectarian favoritism, and elite patronage created a legacy of deep-rooted mistrust and division—a legacy that continues to influence Syrian politics today. Despite the outward stability he achieved, the conditions under his rule often left the populace impoverished and politically marginalized, setting the stage for future conflicts and uprisings.

2.2. Bashar al-Assad

Following the death of his father, Hafez al-Assad, in 2000, Bashar al-Assad—then a relatively unknown ophthalmologist—was swiftly elevated to power through a carefully orchestrated succession plan. Groomed by Hafez from an early age, Bashar was unexpectedly thrust into a role for which he had little formal military training. However, his rapid transformation from a medical professional to the leader of

Syria was facilitated by his embrace of the Ba'ath Party's ideology and the consolidation of loyalist networks within the security apparatus. His accession marked the beginning of a new chapter in Syrian politics, where he projected an image of modernity and reform. Yet, despite early promises of liberalization, Bashar's presidency soon became synonymous with continuity of authoritarian rule. This transformation was underpinned by the systematic suppression of dissent, the co-option of influential figures from both the Alawite minority and select Sunni elites, and the maintenance of an extensive surveillance and repressive security system^[7]. His rise was not simply a transfer of power—it was a deliberate effort to stabilize a nation long wracked by internal divisions, albeit by methods that would later fuel further unrest.

[6] *The more things change – a look back at Syria's Hafez al-Assad.* (n.d.).

[7] McCarthy, S. (2024, December 9). *Who is Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian leader whose family ruled with an iron fist for more than 50 years?* CNN.

Domestic Conditions Under Bashar's Regime and the Syrian Civil War

Under Bashar al-Assad, domestic conditions in Syria deteriorated significantly over time. Although his initial appearance as a reformist leader generated cautious optimism, the reality on the ground soon revealed a regime that relied heavily on repression. Economic mismanagement, pervasive corruption, and the stifling of political freedoms created widespread public discontent. As the regime concentrated power through a militarized and omnipresent security apparatus, dissent was met with brutal crackdowns. Reports of arbitrary arrests, torture, and the use of excessive force became common, fostering an atmosphere of fear and mistrust.

The tipping point came in 2011, when a series of peaceful protests—sparked by the Arab Spring—began in the southern city of Deraa. Initially, demonstrators demanded political reforms and the release of political prisoners. However, the regime's violent response, which included the use of live ammunition, barrel bombs, and alleged chemical attacks, transformed these protests into a full-scale civil war. The conflict rapidly escalated, drawing in various opposition groups and militant factions. The brutality of the regime's tactics, including the mass killing of civilians (approx. 350,209 civilians)^[8] and the destruction of infrastructure, further polarized the population along sectarian and ethnic lines. Over time, the war devastated the country's economy and led to widespread displacement; millions of Syrians were forced to flee their homes, both internally and as refugees abroad. Social services collapsed, and chronic shortages of food, medicine, and necessities became the norm in many regions. The deep scars left by decades of repressive governance not only laid the groundwork for the uprising but also perpetuated a cycle of violence that made reconciliation and recovery exceedingly difficult.

Bashar's Foreign Policies and Allegiances

Bashar al-Assad's foreign policy was characterized by a pragmatic, if controversial, balancing act aimed at preserving his regime's survival amid regional turbulence. Early in his tenure, Bashar sought to project an image of openness and modernity by engaging diplomatically with Western nations. However, as internal dissent escalated and the civil war deepened, Assad increasingly relied on longstanding alliances with Russia and Iran. These relationships proved crucial in securing military and economic support that bolstered his repressive apparatus. Russian backing—manifested through arms supplies, air support, and strategic deployments such as the naval base in Tartus—provided a lifeline that allowed his forces to regain ground against various insurgent groups.

[8] United Nations. (2023, December 14). *Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights A/HRC/50/68.*

At the same time, Assad's regime maintained a complex, sometimes contradictory, approach toward regi-

onal players. While publicly attempting to position Syria as a central mediator in Middle Eastern affairs, the regime also cultivated ties with neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Iraq, although these relationships were frequently marked by mistrust and strategic rivalry. Furthermore, his government's support for anti-Israel rhetoric and participation in occasional military confrontations with Israel—especially over the Golan Heights—underscored his regime's reliance on a narrative of resistance against Western and Israeli influence. This delicate balancing act was intended to signal both strength and regional relevance while deflecting international criticism over human rights abuses. Nevertheless, as the Syrian civil war dragged on, Assad's foreign policy increasingly came under scrutiny for its implications in prolonging the conflict and for entrenching a system of patronage that prioritized regime survival over democratic reform.

3. THE 2024 DECEMBER UPRISING

3.1. What led to the fall?

The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024 was the culmination of longstanding domestic grievances compounded by shifting international dynamics. Internally, decades of authoritarian rule had sown deep discontent among the Syrian population. Under Assad, shallow reforms failed to address systemic issues such as rampant corruption, chronic unemployment, and deteriorating public services. The regime's repressive tactics—rooted in a history of brutal crackdowns like the 1982 Hama massacre—fostered widespread resentment among ordinary Syrians, particularly among the youth and urban middle class who had grown increasingly aware of the regime's shortcomings.

Economic mismanagement further eroded the regime's legitimacy. The state's inability to stimulate growth or alleviate poverty, alongside heavy reliance on patronage networks that favored a small elite while marginalizing the majority, left the populace disillusioned^[9]. This internal decay was dramatically exposed during the civil war that began in 2011, as protest movements evolved into an armed rebellion. Over the past 13 years, Syria's gross domestic product has collapsed by 87%, plunging from \$68 billion in 2011 to just \$9 billion in 2023.^[10]

[9] Staff, A. J. (2024, December 8). Syria's Bashar al-Assad: The president who lost his homeland. *Al Jazeera*

[10] *What lies ahead for Syria after Assad's exit?* (n.d.).

Western sanctions have further restricted an economy that was already in decline, compounding the severe downturn. Moreover, the Assad regime's soldiers, who were inadequately compensated, showed little incentive to uphold and protect a failing economic system. Over time, the prolonged conflict drained state resources, weakened the security apparatus, and fragmented the national fabric, thereby undermining any semblance of stability.

On the international front, Assad's regime increasingly depended on its alliances with Russia and Iran to maintain military support. While these alliances initially propped up the regime through arms supplies and economic aid, they ultimately contributed to Syria's isolation from the broader global community. As Western nations shifted their strategic priorities and imposed stringent sanctions, the regime's economic foundation eroded further. This diminishing external support was critical; when Russia and Iran began recalibrating their regional policies, the long-standing security umbrella that Assad had relied upon weakened considerably^[11].

Moreover, regional geopolitical shifts and the intensification of the civil war provided insurgent groups with the momentum they needed to seize key urban centers. Rebel forces, galvanized by both decades of

domestic repression and the collapse of international backing, were able to capture strategic cities and cut off the regime's access to critical resources. The combination of an embattled economy, widespread popular uprising, and the loss of key foreign support ultimately rendered the regime unsustainable, leading to its collapse in December 2024.

3.2. Who led the fall? (The Overthrowers!)

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formed in 2017 from the remnants of the al-Nusra Front, played a decisive role in the collapse of the Assad regime. Initially governing Idlib with strict Islamist policies, HTS gradually adopted a more inclusive approach, allowing cultural activities to flourish. It sustained itself through local taxation, control of border crossings, and external donations. By late 2024, HTS expanded beyond Idlib, capturing significant territories in Aleppo, Hama, and ultimately Damascus, cementing its role as a primary force in the regime's downfall. While rooted in Salafi-jihadist ideology, it increasingly framed itself as a nationalist force fighting for Syria's liberation, promising security, stability, and an Islamic system tailored to local needs.

[11] *Why Al-Assad fell*. (n.d.). The Washington Institute.

The **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**, a coalition of Kurdish and Arab militias, was instrumental in Assad's fall. As the United States' key ally against ISIS, the SDF secured control over northeastern Syria and focused on consolidating autonomous governance. During the final offensive, it coordinated with other rebel factions to secure strategic victories. However, tensions with **Turkey**, which views the Kurdish-led **People's Protection Units (YPG)** as a security threat, have complicated the SDF's long-term role in Syria's post-Assad future.

The **Syrian National Army (SNA)**, a Turkish-backed coalition of opposition fighters, defectors, and warlords, significantly contributed to Assad's downfall. Armed and funded by Turkey, the SNA participated in key offensives in northern Syria, weakening government forces. Despite its fragmented structure and lack of ideological unity, it provided essential manpower and logistical support. However, in the post-Assad era, its future remains uncertain as Turkey seeks to reshape Syria's political landscape while navigating tensions with Kurdish forces and other factions.

The **Druse militia**, operating under the **Southern Operations Room**, played a crucial role by launching an offensive from **Sweida** in southwest Syria. Traditionally neutral, the Druse had resisted conscription into Assad's army, and economic hardships fueled their opposition. Their military involvement further isolated Assad and contributed to the broader collapse of regime control, marking a significant shift in Syria's rebel dynamics.

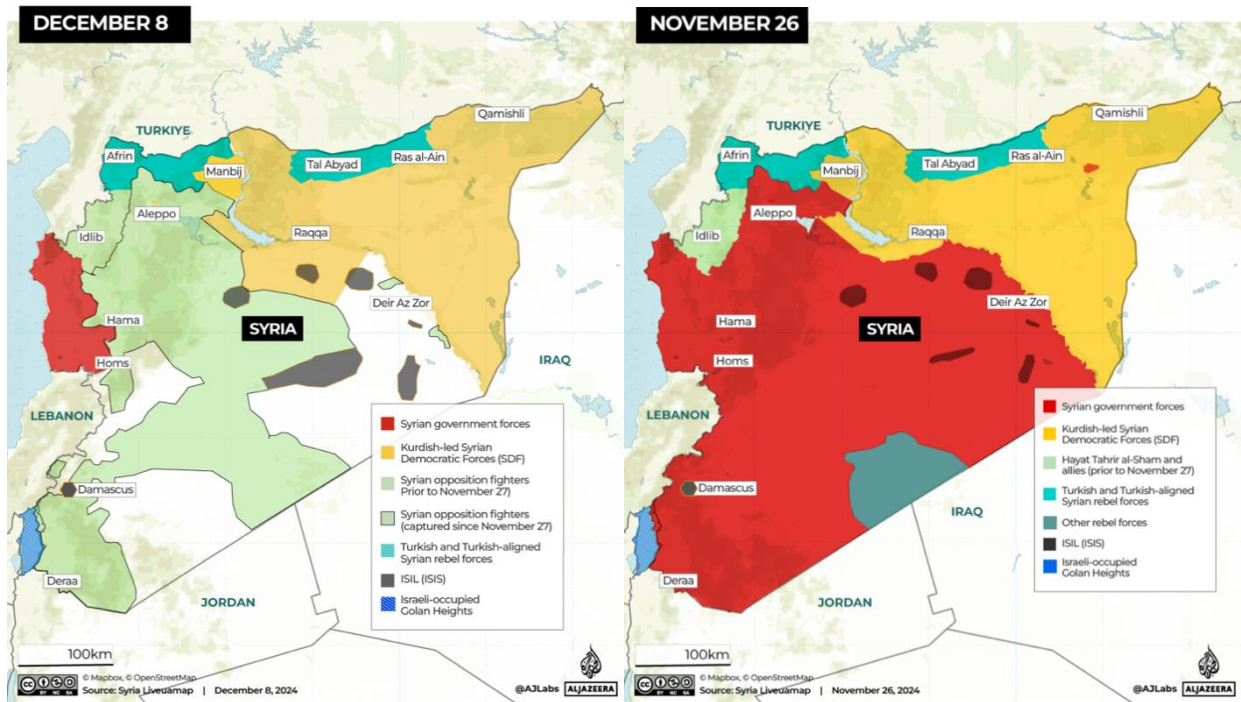
3.3. How did the fall take place?

The final chapter of the Assad regime began with a lightning-fast offensive launched by opposition forces on November 27, 2024. After years of stalemate in the Syrian civil war, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), backed by Turkey, seized the moment to strike. Exploiting the government's waning control and fragile defenses, the rebels swiftly captured significant portions of Aleppo and Idlib governorates. The Syrian military, stretched thin and struggling with internal divisions, failed to mount an effective response. By November 29, opposition fighters stormed into Aleppo, Syria's largest city and a symbolic stronghold of the Assad government. The rapid fall of Aleppo, a city the opposition had not controlled since 2016, underscored the crumbling authority of the regime. Within a day, rebels raised their flag over the historic Aleppo Citadel and occupied key strategic locations, including the international airport. The speed of the rebel advance revealed the extent of the regime's weaknesses, as Assad's forces, demoralized and poorly

supplied, retreated in disarray.

Determined to regain lost territory, the Assad regime launched a counteroffensive on December 1, deploying airstrikes and ground forces against rebel-held positions in Aleppo and Idlib. While Russia provided limited air support, the Syrian military lacked the resources and manpower to turn the tide. Iran, a long-time ally, offered diplomatic backing but stopped short of deploying additional military aid. Meanwhile, Hezbollah, another key supporter, was preoccupied with its own escalating conflict with Israel, leaving Assad with dwindling reinforcements. Between December 2 and December 4, the rebels capitalized on the government’s vulnerabilities, pushing their offensive southward. By December 5, Hama had fallen, a moment of deep significance as it was the site of a historic anti-government uprising in 2011. As rebel forces celebrated in Assi Square, it became clear that the collapse of the Assad regime was accelerating. [12]

With momentum firmly on their side, opposition fighters advanced toward Homs, Syria’s third-largest city and a key transit hub linking Damascus to the Alawite strongholds along the coast. By December 6, the city was encircled, and by the next day, government forces surrendered. The loss of Homs effectively severed Assad’s remaining strongholds from the capital, signaling the final unraveling of his rule. On December 7, reports emerged that Bashar al-Assad had fled Syria, a clear admission of defeat. [13] The next day, December 8, Damascus fell. Rebels stormed government buildings and declared victory from the Umayyad Mosque, marking the end of more than five decades of Assad family rule.



Pre Coup [14]

Post Coup

[12]. The Hindu Bureau. (2024, December 9). *Collapse of Assad regime: How it happened*. The Hindu.

[13] Desk, E. (2024, December 10). 14 days that changed Syria: A timeline of how Assad’s government fell. *The Indian Express*.

[14] AJLabs. (2024, December 8). Taking Syria: The opposition’s battles shown in 11 maps for 11 days. *Al Jazeera*.

4. INTERNATIONAL CONSEQUENCES

4.1.U.S. Strategic Involvement and Policy Shifts in Syria

The war against ISIS has been the key factor of United States' involvement in Syrian politics and foreign affairs. The United States have constantly supported the Syrian democratic forces which formed the rebel group that contributed to the fall of the regime. The SDF is constantly provided military aid through the US, which has allowed them to take control in northeast Syria which is the hub for oil & gas infrastructure in Syria. Along with this under the Biden administration approximately 900 US military personnel ^[15] were deployed in the northeast region of Syria. The US Senate as part of the 2025 defense budget approved \$147 million in their fight against the ISIS and aid to the SDF in Syria ^[16].

At the policy end, The Caesar Act of 2019 established by the US Congress implemented sanctions and financial restrictions on institutions and individuals related to conflicts in Syria working for the Assad regime. The famous operation inherent resolve, which was USA's targeted operations to defeat ISS led to 11,235 strikes in Syria till 2017 ^[18] and a total of 93 million USD ^[17] funding for stabilization activities in the region in 2024.

However, with the change in presidency, the new Donald Trump government has made it very clear that they do not wish to be involved in the problems of Syria. They have been working to retract the military personnel deployed in Syria. Diplomatic talks to align the new governance in Syria with Western interests is the contemporary focus area.

4.2.Russia's Military Influence and Changing role Post-Assad

Russia has been a part of Syrian politics since 2015 when it formally entered the Civil War by stopping the rebel forces who were backed by the West. The major reason behind Russia's intervention was to not lose a regional ally in the form of Assad. Since then, the involvement of the Russian government in Syria has been immense. Russia has used Syria as an opportunity to test Russian weapons. It is approximated that close to 600 latest weaponries were tested during operations in Syria. The Russians also gained the right over the port of Tartous which attracted a \$500 million ^[19] investment from them.

[15] Jazeera, A. (2025, February 5). American ally SDF: Not yet notified of US plan for Syria withdrawal. *Al Jazeera*.

[16] Semav, & Semav. (2024, December 19). *U.S. Senate Allocates \$527 Million for Counter-ISIS Operations in Syria and Iraq*. North Press Agency.

[17] Operation inherent resolve quarterly report to Congress. LEAD IG REPORT TO THE U.S. CONGRESS. (2024, October 3).

[18] U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE. (n.d.). *Special Report: Operation Inherent Resolve*. U.S. Department of Defense.

[19] Petkova, M. (2020, October 1). What has Russia gained from five years of fighting in Syria? *Al Jazeera*.

During the December uprising Russia's primary focus shifted from protecting its friend in the Middle East to fighting with its age-old enemy, Ukraine. A lack of active support from Moscow eventually led to the end of Assad's regime, however, to display their support, Asad and his family were welcomed in Moscow in such times of horror.

Diplomatic tensions exist now because Russia have lost their leverage against Syria, and there are also speculated reports of the new government ending the port leave granted by Asad. The locals have celebrated the reduction of Russian influence and demanded the return of Asad from Russian protection.

4.3.Iran's Investments, Hezbollah's Role, and the Impact of Assad's Fall

Iran's involvement in Syria has been extensive, marked by significant investments and military support aimed at bolstering the Assad regime and extending Tehran's regional influence. Financially, Iran has invested approximately \$50 billion in Syria, along with \$11 billion of oil imports from Iran. ^[20]

Militarily, Iran deployed units of the elite Quds Force and mobilized allied militias, such as Hezbollah, to

fight alongside Syrian government forces. Hezbollah's involvement was particularly notable, with thousands of its fighters operating in Syria to support Assad and secure supply lines critical for its operations against Israel.

The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 has profoundly impacted Iran's strategy. The new Sunni Islamist-led government in Syria has expressed opposition to Iranian influence, leading to the withdrawal of most Iranian forces and allied militias from the country. This retreat signifies a major setback for Tehran, disrupting its land corridor to Hezbollah in Lebanon and diminishing its capacity to project power in the region.

Politically, Iran faces increased isolation as its principal Arab ally has been overthrown. The loss of Syria as a conduit for supporting Hezbollah weakens Iran's deterrence posture against Israel and alters the balance of power in the Middle East. Iran's economic conditions were pre-existing, not very good and now with the loss of an ally, the recovery of the debt and investments made in Syria seem futile. The forces in Syria blame Iran for the atrocities towards the people during the Civil War and an anger amongst the local people dismiss immediate hopes of friendly relations.

[20] Campbell, M. (2024, December 14). Iran has lost Assad — and with him \$50bn. *The Sunday Times*.

4.4. Israel's Security Concerns and Military Strategy in Post-Assad Syria

Following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime, Israel has significantly intensified its military operations in Syria. Israeli forces have conducted over 480 airstrikes^[21] targeting military installations and weapon depots across the country, aiming to dismantle Syria's military capabilities and prevent advanced weaponry from reaching hostile entities like Hezbollah.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declared that Israel will not permit forces of the new Syrian army or insurgent groups such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) to operate south of Damascus. This policy includes maintaining Israeli military positions in the U.N.-monitored demilitarized zone near the Golan Heights to ensure regional security.

The intensified Israeli military actions have drawn criticism from the United Nations and the new Syrian authorities, who accuse Israel of violating international agreements and Syrian sovereignty. Despite these objections, Israel maintains that its operations are essential to safeguard its national security interests in the evolving regional landscape.

4.5. Gulf States' Diplomatic and Economic Engagement with new Syria

Following Assad's fall on December 8, 2024, Gulf nations quickly re-established diplomatic ties with Syria's new leadership. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman resumed activities in Damascus, with ambassadors meeting Syrian officials by December 12. Bahrain, as head of the Arab League, formally expressed support for Syria's transition, while the **Arab Ministerial Contact Committee on Syria** reinforced regional backing.^[22]

Saudi Arabia pledged strong support for Syria's stability and minority protections, with reports suggesting it may begin supplying oil to Damascus. On December 22, a Saudi delegation met with Syria's new leader, signaling deeper cooperation. The UAE, initially hesitant, engaged diplomatically on December 23 but remains cautious due to concerns over Islamist influences. Meanwhile, Qatar has already provided humanitarian aid. These developments indicate that Gulf states, which had once normalized ties with Assad, are now pragmatically aligning with Syria's new government, focusing on economic and political stability.

[21] Krever, M. (2024, December 11). *Israel strikes Syria 480 times and seizes territory as Netanyahu pledges to change face of the Middle East*. CNN.

[22] Dhojnacki. (2024, December 24). *What role will the Gulf states play in shaping the new Syria?* - Atlantic Council. Atlantic Council.

4.6. Turkey's Expanding Influence and Challenges in Northern Syria

Turkey has been a pivotal player in Syria's civil war, driven by strategic objectives such as countering Kurdish autonomy, establishing a Sunni Islamist-aligned governance, and repatriating Syrian refugees. To achieve these aims, Turkey has conducted multiple military operations in northern Syria, notably "Operation Euphrates Shield" in 2016 and "Operation Peace Spring" in 2019, targeting Kurdish forces and ISIS elements. These interventions have resulted in Turkey controlling significant territories in northern Syria, including areas like Afrin and parts of Idlib province. This control has been solidified through the support of Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups like SNA and the establishment of local administrative structures aligned with Ankara's interests. Following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime, Turkey's influence in Syria has expanded, positioning it as a dominant force in the region. This shift has led to increased tensions with Kurdish factions and diplomatic engagement in the future rest on how Syria balances between Turkey and the Kurdish.

4.7. The United Nations Role in Syria's Transition and Peacekeeping Efforts

The UN played a critical role in humanitarian relief during the Syrian war but struggled to broker lasting peace. With Assad's regime gone, the UN has expressed cautious optimism about Syria's future. The organization is working closely with international stakeholders to establish a framework for democratic governance and human rights protections. Latest updates show UN-backed efforts to mediate peace between competing factions and ensure that foreign influence does not destabilize the new government.

5. NATIONAL GOVERNANCE RECONSTRUCTION

5.1. Appointment of the New Political Leadership

In the aftermath of Assad's fall, Ahmed al-Sharaa has been appointed as Syria's interim president. Al-Sharaa, formerly a leading figure in Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), now leads the transitional government. This administration has pledged to uphold the rights of all religious and ethnic communities, signaling a commitment to inclusivity. Notably, the new government has extended invitations to exiled communities, including Syrian Jews, to return and participate in national reconstruction efforts. This gesture underscores a broader initiative to rebuild Syria's diverse social fabric.

Ideology and Historical Contradictions

HTS, originally an Islamist militant group with roots in al-Qaeda, has undergone a significant ideological evolution. Historically, HTS advocated for a strict Salafi-jihadist agenda, often employing authoritarian measures in territories under its control. However, the transition from insurgency to governance has necessitated a shift towards more moderate rhetoric. The current leadership emphasizes national unity and the protection of minority rights, a stance that contrasts sharply with their previous hardline positions. This ideological transformation raises questions about the group's genuine commitment to democratic principles and inclusivity.

Plans and Future Vision

The interim government has articulated a comprehensive vision for Syria's reconstruction and political renewal. Central to this vision is the organization of inclusive elections, projected to take up to four years to ensure thorough preparation and broad participation. In the interim, the administration is focusing on rebuilding critical infrastructure, revitalizing the economy, and restoring public services disrupted by years of conflict. Additionally, there is a concerted effort to reintegrate various armed factions into a unified national military framework, aiming to stabilize the security landscape. The government's outreach to

international and regional partners, including engagement with the Arab League, reflects a strategic approach to garner support for Syria's transition.

5.2.Challenges to Peace

The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime has ushered in a pivotal era for Syria, marked by significant challenges in governance reconstruction. The new administration faces multifaceted obstacles across economic, political, social, and human rights domains, all of which are critical to the nation's recovery and stability.

Economic Challenges

The Syrian economy has contracted by approximately 84% during the nearly 14 years of conflict, with nearly 90% of the population now living below the poverty line ^[23]. The national currency has experienced a significant devaluation, with the official exchange rate of the Syrian pound falling 270-fold against the U.S. dollar between 2011 and 2023. ^[24] This depreciation has fueled hyperinflation, with consumer price inflation surging by 115% in 2023. Despite some easing of international sanctions, deep structural economic problems persist, affecting businesses and citizens alike. Rebuilding efforts are estimated to require between \$250 billion to \$400 billion ^[25], a monumental sum necessitating substantial international investment and aid. While some international sanctions have been lifted, the economy remains hindered by deep structural issues, necessitating comprehensive policy reforms, foreign investment, and sustained political stability for meaningful recovery.

Political and Governance Obstacles

The transition from Assad's autocratic rule to a new governance structure is fraught with political complexities. The provisional government, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), must establish legitimacy and foster inclusivity among Syria's diverse populace. HTS's history as a Salafi-jihadist organization raises concerns about its commitment to democratic principles and human rights. The group has pledged to respect the country's diversity and rebuild its institutions; however, skepticism persists regarding its ability to demobilize militias and integrate various factions into a cohesive national framework. The potential for internal power struggles and regional disputes poses a significant threat to the nation's political stability.

[23] United Nations Development Programme. (2024). The impact of the conflict in Syria. In *UNDP Impact Assessment Report*.

[24] *Explainer: The economic challenges stifling Syria's reconstruction efforts*. Xinhua. (2025, February 13).

[25] Wires, N. (2025, February 13). *Macron urges Syria's interim government to join US-led anti-extremist coalition*. France 24.

Social and Human Rights Issues

The prolonged conflict has inflicted deep social scars, with millions of Syrians displaced internally and internationally. Repatriating refugees and providing adequate housing, healthcare, and education are monumental tasks. The new government must also address sectarian tensions and ensure the protection of minority rights to prevent further societal fragmentation. HTS's previous governance in regions like Idlib has been marked by authoritarian practices, raising doubts about its commitment to upholding civil liberties and fostering an inclusive society. Building trust among the populace and the international community is essential for social cohesion and long-term peace.

International Relations and Reconstruction Aid

Securing international support is vital for Syria's reconstruction efforts. The new leadership must navigate complex diplomatic landscapes to attract foreign aid and investment. Western nations have expressed conditional support, emphasizing the need for democratic reforms and human rights protections as prerequisites for assistance. The lifting of certain sanctions offers a glimmer of hope; however, substantial economic recovery hinges on comprehensive policy overhauls and the establishment of a stable,

transparent governance system. Engaging with regional powers and international organizations will be crucial in mobilizing resources and expertise for rebuilding the nation's infrastructure and institutions.

6. CONCLUSION

The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 represents a defining moment in Syria's history, ending over five decades of authoritarian rule. While significant challenges lie ahead, this transition presents a unique opportunity to rebuild Syria into a stable, inclusive, and prosperous nation. The success of the new administration will depend on fostering national unity, security, and democratic governance. By prioritizing dialogue and collaboration, Syria can move toward a government that represents the aspirations of all its people.

Economically, Syria's recovery is challenging but achievable. With strategic investments, international partnerships, and structural reforms, the country can rebuild its infrastructure and restore economic stability. Gulf states, China, and Western donors have shown interest in assisting reconstruction efforts, and their support, coupled with internal economic reforms, can lay the foundation for long-term prosperity. Socially, efforts to reintegrate displaced Syrians and foster national reconciliation must be at the forefront. Transparent governance, inclusive policies, and protections for minority communities will help rebuild trust and ensure lasting peace. The new administration has pledged to uphold these principles, and with sustained efforts, Syria can emerge as a resilient and harmonious society.

On the international stage, Syria has the chance to redefine its diplomatic relations. By engaging in constructive partnerships and ensuring regional cooperation, Syria can gain the trust and support of the global community. Peacebuilding initiatives, conflict resolution mechanisms, and counterterrorism efforts will play a crucial role in shaping Syria's future standing.

Ultimately, Syria stands at a crossroads where positive change is within reach. By embracing inclusive governance, fostering economic growth, and prioritizing human rights, the country can transition from decades of turmoil to a brighter future. While challenges remain, the determination of the Syrian people, combined with international collaboration, can pave the way for a peaceful and prosperous nation. The road ahead requires patience and perseverance, but with hope and commitment, Syria can build a future that honors the resilience and aspirations of its citizens.

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