

The West Celebrates Assad's Fall, But What Comes Next May Be Even Worse



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12-11-2024 ~ *How can the fall of the admittedly brutal Assad regime create a "historic opportunity" for the Syrian people when the country is now under the control of jihadists?*

The toppling of Bashar al-Assad in Syria was cheered by U.S. President Joe Biden and other major Western leaders, like French President [Emmanuel Macron](#) and German Chancellor [Olaf Scholz](#), as it ended the reign of a brutal regime more than 13 years after Assad's crackdown on anti-government protests ignited Syria's civil war.

Indeed, Biden described Assad's fall as a "[historic opportunity](#)" for the Syrian people, echoing Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, the leader of the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group (HTS) that took over Syria, who [said](#), "This victory, my brothers, is historic for the region."

But wait. Isn't HTS on the list of banned terrorist groups and Jolani a jihadist militant whose journey began in Iraq with links to al Qaeda and later to the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)? So why is the West cheering for al Qaeda and its allies?

The European Union Agency for Asylum [describes](#) HTS as a coalition of Islamist Sunni armed groups that "frequently commit serious human rights abuses, including harassment, assassinations, kidnapping, and torture, as well as unlawful

detention of civilians.” It goes on to say that “civilians have also been extorted and kidnapped for ransom” and that “the group has conducted formal military campaigns, assassinations, hostage takings, and ‘lone wolf’ operations, including suicide bombings,” while “members of religious minorities have been forced to convert to Islam and adopt Sunni customs.”

So, what is going on here? How can the fall of the admittedly brutal Assad regime create a “historic opportunity” for the Syrian people when the country is now under the control of jihadists? But we’ve been witness to this comedy drama before. From 1979 to 1989, the United States (along with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan) armed and financed the Afghan Islamist fighters known as the mujahideen who were fighting the Soviet Union. The plan from the beginning was to keep the Islamist insurgency going for as long as possible, thus sucking the Soviets into a Vietnam-style quagmire.

The Islamist fight in Afghanistan against the Soviets was “the good jihad,” according to Washington. The mujahideen were fighting for peace against an enemy of the Western world and deserved U.S. support. Of course, we know how that turned out.

The Bush administration embarked on a campaign against terrorism following the 9/11 attacks, with the [first phase](#) of the campaign focusing on “capturing or killing bin Laden, destroying his al Qaeda network in Afghanistan, and deposing the Taliban-regime.”

Undoubtedly, bombing into oblivion the Islamists in Syria if the new government, headed by [Mohammed al-Bashir](#) who has been appointed as interim prime minister, fails to lead a new path is a contingency plan that Washington has probably already considered. The job, in fact, could be given to [Israel](#), for whom bombing is second nature. Since the fall of Assad, Israel has already carried out [hundreds of airstrikes](#) across Syria, targeting airports, naval bases, and military infrastructure. And the [U.S. Central Command](#) announced that it has struck more than 75 targets, including ISIS leaders, operatives, and camps.

Hypocrisy and duplicity, followed in the end by astonishing moral and political somersaults, are trademarks of the way Washington and its Western allies approach world affairs and conduct diplomacy. And these elements have been in full display since the start of Syria’s civil war. The [Obama administration](#) provided

support to the anti-Assad forces, primarily to the Free Syrian Army forces and its affiliates, but the CIA began to support other groups as early as 2013 even though they had jihadi orientations. CIA's covert operation against the Syrian regime, known as [Timber Sycamore](#), was a joint effort with Saudi Arabia that had long ties with radical Islamist groups. But regime change is what Washington was after in Syria, so everything else was of secondary concern.

The fall of the Assad regime has staggering implications for security in the region, but the speed with which it collapsed suggests that, in the end, it may have been mainly internal rather than external pressures that made the difference. Syria was under imperialist attack for the past 13 years. The U.S. (along with Turkey) backed and funded mercenaries and terrorist forces against Assad's regime, imposed economic isolation of the country through sanctions, and [denied plans](#) that would have contributed to reconstruction even though aid was desperately needed for civilians. In April 2017, the U.S. even ordered [direct military action](#) against Syria in retaliation for the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime. The Trump administration claimed to have been moved by the deaths of some 80 civilians; yet then-President [Donald Trump](#) refused to lift his ban on accepting Syrian refugees into the U.S.

But the Assad regime had created a hellish place, with [90%](#) of Syrians living in poverty and widespread malnutrition. The country was in a vicious downward spiral. The economy had plummeted by [85%](#) due to nearly 14 years of civil war. The [inflation rate](#) had risen to over 120% in 2024 while [electricity production](#) had dropped by 80%, with power outages having become a common phenomenon. And the only thing that the Assad's regime had to offer was more repression.

Still, the collapse of the regime, now celebrated throughout the Western world, raises more questions than answers. There are too many actors, both inside and outside Syria, with diverse interests and conflicting goals and aims. Assad's regime used secularism as a tool to repress opponents, but there should be no expectations for the emergence of stable secular nationalism in Syria anytime soon. The fear that Syria will face the same fate as Afghanistan is also unfounded. The country has too many hostile factions for a dominant group like the Taliban to take complete control of the country. If anything, it is probably destined to become a failed state like Libya following the overthrow of Moammar Gadhafi in 2011 with the help of NATO, an event that was also widely [celebrated](#) by the Western leaders of the time.

Indeed, when all is said and done, forcing regime change rarely succeeds. In fact, U.S. foreign policy has been an unmitigated disaster in the post-Cold War period, creating more problems that it tried to solve. Think of the Balkans, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East.

Syria will be no different. It was a hellish place under Assad but will more likely than not end up next as another “black hole” in the lost list of U.S. “achievements” in forcing regime change.

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