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Civil War Paths

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THE CAUSES OF THE FALL OF BASHAR AL- ASSAD'S REGIME

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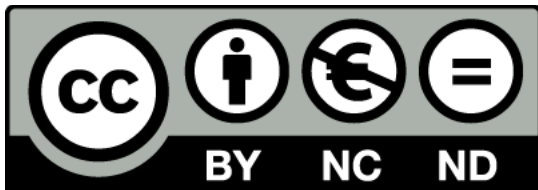
The causes of the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime

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THE CAUSES OF THE FALL OF BASHAR AL-ASSAD'S REGIME

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On December 8, 2024, the decades-long regime of the al-Assad family came to an end. What were the causes that led to the regime's downfall? The combination of internal and international dynamics exposed the structural weaknesses of the regime and its allies, resulting in its collapse following a rapid military operation.

In the final weeks of 2024, **Syria witnessed a historic political shift**: following a [large-scale offensive](#) by a coalition of opposition groups—including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Syrian National Army (SNA)—the government forces (SAA) disintegrated, leading to **the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime**. The former president's escape to Russia and the establishment of a provisional government marked a **turning point not only in the Syrian conflict but also in the international dynamics of the Middle East**.

The 2020 ceasefire

To understand how Assad's Baathist regime, which had endured nearly 14 years of civil war after the 2011 Arab Spring protests, collapsed in just ten days, it is crucial to **analyze the conflict's last four years**. Following the SAA's successful campaigns in Idlib Governorate, Turkey and Russia reached a **ceasefire agreement in March 2020**, stabilizing borders and spheres of influence: Assad's government controlled two-thirds of the country, including major western cities,

while the Kurds managed Rojava in the northeast, and Salafi-jihadist opposition groups held Idlib and parts of the northwest.

Despite ongoing airstrikes by Damascus and Moscow, **HTS used the truce to improve governance in Idlib**, strengthening the quasi-state institutions of the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), which it had founded three years earlier. Concurrently, **HTS began to reform its ideological foundations**, softening its ties to jihadism and Salafism, and emphasizing its role in the revolution against the central government.

Damascus' failure to consolidate

For the Syrian government, the 2020 ceasefire aimed to **bolster institutional authority**, especially in SAA-reclaimed areas, **improve the struggling national economy**, and **break out of regional isolation**. However, the first two goals were **never achieved**. The oligarchic, kleptocratic structure of Damascus's establishment stifled any serious political or economic reforms. Furthermore, relying on post-war reconstruction efforts from Russia and Iran—both under international sanctions—worsened living conditions. Combined with **limited investment and development opportunities**, this situation drove some of Syria's bureaucracy and military to [profit from Captagon trafficking](#), transforming the country into a **narco-state**.

Internationally, Assad managed to **restore relations** with several Arab states, including the UAE (beginning in 2018), Jordan, Egypt, and Tunisia, culminating in **Syria's re-admittance to the Arab League in May 2023**, facilitated by Saudi Arabia. However, Assad's role in the Arab world remained **marginal** due to his near-total dependence on its main allies, Russia and Iran, and his [inability to curb Captagon trafficking](#), a growing social issue in most of the Gulf countries neighboring Syria.

Domestic, regional, and international dynamics

The success of HTS and SNA's offensive can be attributed to a **specific confluence of events** in the past two years: **the regime's failed internal reforms, deteriorating living conditions** exacerbated by the February 2023 earthquake, and **shifting regional power dynamics** that weakened the pro-Assad bloc. Iran, preoccupied with regional confrontations with Israel, could not provide adequate military support to Damascus. **Hezbollah**, engaged in a second front with Israel following Hamas's "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation on October 8, 2023, suffered significant losses from Israeli strikes, losing key leadership and military personnel. Meanwhile, **Russia**, entangled in the Ukraine conflict, withdrew infantry units from Syria over the last two years, maintaining only its bases in Tartus and Hmeimim. In addition to losing allied support, Assad's army faced **severe operational and structural challenges**. Despite victories from 2015 to 2019, the regime failed to professionalize the SAA due to corruption and heavy Russian and Iranian interference. The reliance on Shia militias marginalized Sunni conscripts, **undermining cohesion within the SAA**. Furthermore, reduced soldier salaries demoralized troops.

Conversely, **HTS developed a sophisticated military apparatus**, including an academy and centralized leadership. Their use of advanced weaponry, armored vehicles, and drones accelerated their offensive. Many fighters were displaced persons or refugees who joined HTS to return to their towns and villages. Notably, HTS opened **dialogue with the Alawite community**—the Shia minority to which the Assad family belongs—promising amnesty in exchange for defection. The Alawite community, seeing a better future role in a new Syria, **shifted allegiance from a crumbling regime**.

Finally, **improved relations between HTS and Turkey** played a crucial role. After Ankara's failed negotiations with Assad, Turkey likely facilitated collaboration

between HTS and the SNA, a diverse group of militias supported by Ankara through military and intelligence channels.

Conclusion

The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024 marked the culmination of **years of internal decay and the latest shifting regional dynamics**. A failing economy, rampant corruption, and reliance on sanctions-hit allies like Russia and Iran left the **regime vulnerable**. Meanwhile, opposition groups, particularly HTS, capitalized on the regime's weaknesses by **modernizing their military capabilities and fostering alliances**, including with Turkey and even parts of the Alawite community. The combination of Assad's declining internal support and reduced backing from allies ultimately led to a **rapid collapse during a decisive offensive**, reshaping the trajectory of the Syrian conflict, and the evolving regional and international dynamics.



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