

Syria: The end of Assad and what awaits

*International Resolution of the independent communist youth organisation
REVOLUTION*

Assads Regime has fallen in December. This article looks at the history of the Syrian struggle as well as the ongoing developments since then.

With the start of the Arab Spring in Tunisia at the end of 2010, a Series of Uprisings started in North Africa and the middle East. This forced many governmental changes and also started civil wars, such as in Libya, where Muammar al-Gaddafi was overthrown. Similarly the Revolution came to Syria which later ended in a civil war, because the Assad regime's security cracked down bloody on protests. In consequence, armed rebel groups like the Free Syrian Army (FSA) began forming, which often included deserters from Assad's Syrian army. The different rebel groups received weapons form Turkey, the Golf Cooperation Council (UAE., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman Kuwait, Bahrain) and some Western countries, and made advances in the beginning. The Assad Forces received Weapons as well as other Military and civil support from Russia and Iran at the time. Another actor appeared in 2013, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) current Leaders had coordinated the expansion of Al-Qaeda in Syria with ISIS between 2012 and 2013, but later had a fallout with them. The fight against ISIS happened largely on shoulders of the Kurds and their Allies, because ISIS encroached on territory Ethnically dominated by Kurds - which was also one of the reasons the prominent US support of the Kurdisch forces was made possible. The successful fight against ISIS roughly created the boarders for the following years, as well as an autonomous Region of Rojava under kurdish control. Several ceasefires were brokered between Assad and oppositions groups. Over this Period more than half a Million people were killed, 7,2 Million internally displaced and with a Diaspora of 8 to 13 million, the situation of the Syrian People dramatically deteriorated since 2011, 90% of the population in Syria are living in poverty.

Fall of Assad

The recent Fall of Assad happened due to an offensive from the Islamist and Syrian Nationalist Military Operations Command (MOC), which is Dominated by HTS. They wanted to Attack Aleppo at the end of 2023, but Turkey wanted to pursue negotiations with the Assad regime, which didn't lead to a result that was sufficient for Turkey. Today, we can say that Turkey likely gave the green light for the HTS operation; however, it does not have full control over them.

2023, HTS began looking for and creating Allies, by supporting the creation of the Southern Operations Room (SOR), which united 25 Militias south of Damascus. The groups of the MOC got weapons from Turkey from time to time, which further indicates Turkey's involvement in the offensive planned by the MOC on Aleppo. The resistance from Assad's forces started to crumble after Aleppo was taken. Four days after Aleppo, Hama was taken and only three days after that the MOC took Homs. The SOR took control of Damascus at the same day as Homs was taken. The capture of Latakia in the Alawite dominated west of the country, that borders with the Mediterranean, concludes the capture of the most important cities and regions of Syria in under a month.

With the capture of these important cities the large prisons that the Assad dictatorship had maintained were opened, so that the political prisoners could relish in the new regime change. The opening of the torture prisons was also a top priority in many military operations. The largest prison, Sednaya could hold up to 20.000 people, with the total amount of Syrians arrested since the begin of the civil war estimated to be in the 6 digits. Systematic killing and Torture of Prisoners was also practiced by Assad's Security Forces, with 11.000 being killed only from March 2011 to August 2013, leaving open the question of the total.

The successful overthrow of the Assad dictatorship, also seemed to be a surprise for the rebel groups. Indicator for that is the absence of a clear political program of HTS and it's Allies. The absence of a program is obvious in their handling of key questions such as their relations towards their

neighbors and other Regional actors, such as Israel, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran, Russia, the US, the Kurds in an outside of Syria, and Turkey. Further the question of the Syrian Diaspora, relations to Ethnic Minorities and that of Elections are only slowly and timidly being Answered.

Internationally the fall of the 54 year long dictatorship of the Assad family has been celebrated widely, especially in the Diasporas around the globe. Many of the people that had fled the country, fled because of the Assad regime, directly or because of the civil war. This presents a Historic change for the Syrian people in Syria and in the Diaspora, as well as for regional actors that reformulate their influence on Syria and in the whole region. Additionally with the Overthrow of the Assad dictatorship many countries have paused the granting of Asylum to Syrians, only days after the fall of Assad. This could force people to return to Syria, even if their future is uncertain and could be endangered easily if the Provisional Government should fall.

What are the interests of the actors and the problems of the region?

Having a look at relations of the largest of the fighting groups in the syrian civil war and the recent overthrow it is very clear that the groups fighting have international backers. With Turkey being a large benefactor of the fall of Assad, their constant fights with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are dominated by kurdish forces, in north eastern Syria, indicate their interest in continuing to fight against kurdish self-determination. Clearly exposed with the attack of the Syrian National Army (SNA), a Turkish backed group, on the SDF in north Syria, at the same time as the beginning of the fight over Aleppo by HTS, which later lead to the fall of Assad. Further, the attempt by Erdoğan to negotiate with Assad in 2023 shows the attempts by Turkey to force a power shift in Syria, which ultimately happened through the Overthrow by HTS. Turkey having international powers such as Russia and the US in its backyard didn't soothe the tension in and around Syria. Especially with the less than great economic situation in Turkey in recent times it is in its interest to expand its regional influence.

Russia which was and is a backer of Assad, has aided Assad with military support such as airstrikes on Opponents like HTS and stationing troops in the country. Russia also more recently granted Asylum to Assad in Moscow, after he fled the country. Russia's capability of supporting Assad has weakened in the last 3 Years due to the war in Ukraine. Russian Military bases stationed at the Mediterranean coast have strategic importance, because with their strategically and logistically useful locations, they enable Russia to conduct its imperialist interventions in Africa. Another actor that has lost a strategic ally is Iran. It lost its land connection to Lebanon and therefore the ease of transporting equipment into Hezbollah. Further it closely watches the actions of the Transitional Government towards Israel, with Iran wanting to maintain its Axis of resistance. Under Assad, Syria wasn't really hindering Iran, but it also didn't fight back against Israel, when it attacked Syria.

Taking advantage of the newly formed situation in Syria is Israel. It moved troops into the demilitarized zone in between the occupied Golan Heights and southern Damascus, so it could expand its settlements. This also could prepare an encirclement of Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. Israel's Airforce also took on one of its largest missions where it bombed military infrastructure in Syria, claiming they are eliminating military capabilities for a potential threat. The fact that numerous civilians were killed in the process is something they are willing to accept. Furthermore, Israel repeatedly tries to exploit the Druze and Alawites for its own interests, thereby advancing the destabilization of the country.

The biggest profiteers from the fall of Assad are the ones who are at the head of the transitional government in Damascus: HTS. They have risen from a regional actor in control of the Idlib province to a head of government, without a clear perspective but with the aim to stay in power, as islamists and nationalists. Their governmental structures in Idlib give them a blueprint to quickly unite the rest of Syria under their rule. They have announced that all rebel groups should become a part of a newly formed syrian army of whom a HTS member is minister over.

The actor with a somewhat unclear future is the Kurdish dominated SDF and the region it controls. The SDF have expanded their territory over the

Euphrates River and clashed with the SNA. Their political perspective for Syria is secular, democratic and federalized, which could be made compatible with the HTS perspective, or at least what has been visible of it. But the latest developments clearly show that Al Sharaa is more likely to reject a federalist Syria.

Parts of the SDF have also made publicly clear that they would support a HTS under Syria. At the same time support against the Turkish attacks in Rojava remains unlikely by the new Syrian government. The SDF receives a large amount of military support from the US, hundreds of millions of dollars of equipment, and 900 to 2000 troops are stationed in Syria to support them at this point in time. The SDF's reliance on US support means their decisions are not completely independent of US interests.

Why did this happen now?

Main Supporters of the Assad regime are occupied with different conflicts that necessitate their attention more than the support of Assad. Hezbollah is fighting Israel, with their ground invasion and Leaders of Hezbollah having been killed by Israel in targeted attacks, leaving them weak. Pulling back large amounts of troops from Lebanon wasn't feasible for Hezbollah. Similarly, Russia is very occupied with the War in Ukraine, where it binds most of its military capabilities. Russia doesn't have the capability to support a weakened Assad with the military equipment needed elsewhere more urgently. Turkey on the other hand has the capabilities and desire to fill the power vacuum created by the fall of Assad, and the lower engagement from Russia. Identifiable through the support of insurgent groups that continually attack the SDF and Turkey's relation to HTS. Iran clearly doesn't have an interest in larger participation in the conflict with Israel, where they had many possibilities to enter more directly and didn't. Similarly, it didn't try to support Assad with large amounts of Resources, further indicating internal instability. Other actors that have been in the region in the past such as ISIS have mostly been defeated and are too weak to pose a large threat at current time.

What will happen?

With the seizure of power by HTS and Israel's annexation of more territory in the Golan heights, it is not clear cut what will happen in Syria. Remnants of the Assad Government have agreed to work with the HTS administration to ensure public services for the next 1,5 years. With the persual of cementing their power it was announced that militias are going to be combined into a new Syrian Army, In the resent published Statements SDF agreed on beeing part of the army as its own military arm, but the Agreements and Statements are still uncertain and on thin ice."

The planning of elections has also been announced, with it taking up to 4 years to realize them, because they want to precede them with a census. More pressing questions, those of international relations have not definitively been answered, with the transitional government trying to not take a direct stance. An example of this is by suggesting to Russia that the relationship should benefit both parties. The bases at the mediterranean sea are of military importance, necessary for Russia to support and project its imperialist presence in Africa and for the naval presence of its black sea fleet, because parts of it were stationed there. The future of these bases will depend on the relation between HTS and Russia. To not lose their strategic access to Africa and the operations in Mail, Libya and elsewhere, a relocation to Libya could be possible, where Russia has a presence through the Wagner group, which supports Haftar. In Libya Turkey would also be the main external rival.

Iran being the less proactive power in the support of Assad, compared to Russia or any of the other imperialist and regional powers involved in Syria, such as Turkey or the US, could also be an indicator for Iran's future actions in Syria. The most important factor for Iran is the positioning towards Israel, and the possibility for supporting it's "axis of Resistance", by using the ground connection to Hezbollah for weapons Deliveries. If Syria where to continue maintain the relationship it had under Assad, Israel occasionally attacking Syria without a response, and continuing to allow Iran to transport weapons to Hezbollah, the relationship would not change Dramatically. It has to be made clear that the so called axis of resistance was always far more

focused on their own regional interest and in no way a reliable ally to Palestine as well as a true wall against western imperialism.

With Turkey being a probable supporter of the regime change in Syria, their actions and demands will play an important role for the actions in and around Syria, not only because Turkey borders Syria but also due to the amount of support Turkey supplies to groups in Syria, such as the Syrian National Army that has attacked the SDF with the beginning of the HTS insurgence. Turkey wants to destroy the YPG, which is a part of the SDF, and wants to destroy kurdish autonomy and regain land and control of different kurdish areas.

The SDF receives large support from the US in forms of Military equipment and Troops with the task of supporting them. Under the new Trump government it is much more likely a recall of the troops and military support is being prepared (similar to the last Trump administration). How this will develop and if the decision to withdraw troops will be similar to Afghanistan remains to be seen. At this point in time the US administration has not made any moves to do so – there was even a temporary increase in US troops. Communists generally support the withdrawal of imperialist forces from non-imperialist countries because their interests remain their own without any benefit for the people of the region. We also need to acknowledge the still ongoing fights and how to support the SDF against turkish attacks. The future position of the SDF is very dependent on the stance the new government has towards them, because attacks from Turkey and the Syrian National army are inevitable, and the possibility of a fight with the newly combined forces of the Syrian HTS government could pose a threat. The support of the population that the SDF has, especially in non ethnically Kurdish dominated regions are going to decide how successful a resistance from attacks the SDF is going to be. From past endeavors of the SDF the support is low due to them repressing demonstrations by the population of non ethnically Kurdish dominated regions, by shooting at them. Their former role in the Syrian Civil War is also an important factor regarding non-kurdish sympathies for them. First choosing a non engaging “third way” between parties, as to stay out of the revolution in Syria and then at some instances allying with Assads Army has not made them a reliable ally for the Syrian

people. At the same time the FSA and other oppositional forces have never considered independence and autonomy of the Kurdish resistance of any importance, so the problems lie deep.

New Developments around the declaration of the dissolution of the PKK (which has not happened as of now and does not include the structures in Syria who are officially independent) have to be viewed closely together with the developments in Syria.

HTS not having a clear political program and having changed their politics in the past, from trying to building up Al-Qaeda in Syria, after distancing themselves from them, and now their closer relation to Turkey makes a prediction to their future actions Difficult. The plans HTS has made with their respecting rights of minorities, could or could not include some form of self determination for the Kurds. A step in this direction was taken by including the SDF forces into the government led military - something that stands as a guarantee to not go more into the direction of the turkish states and its attacks of the region. This means a regional integration but also a commitment to kurdish rights in Syria.

Similarly, their relation to regional actors such as Iran are still open. HTS in its proclamations and actions are conservative, clerical chumming up to the west. If we compare them to the - still relevant but in no position of power - regime of the IS in the region, we can see that the clerical fascist elements are not the policies on which the HTS builds up its power. The promise of a somewhat democratic, and dependable western ally that protects minorities is more prominent as the origin of HTS from the same ideological current as the IS. But even though it is not a fascist force, does not mean that we can trust their promises and not see the reactionary practices they have already set in motion, like the lacking support for different attacked minorities or postponing elections instead of holding them now. Although it took some time, there were revenge killings in the region targeting the Alawite minority (the minority from which the Assads also come). After attacks by pro-Assad forces, the military and other armed groups intervened. A precise attribution of the perpetrators is difficult due to the chaotic situation, which makes independent research challenging. However, it is certain that parts of these

groups were linked to both HTS and the SNA, and could be categorized as Islamist and nationalist forces. In total, 1,500 civilians were killed during these outbreaks. Despite this massacre, spontaneous demonstrations broke out in support of the Alawites, demanding an end to the killings.

What are the tasks of revolutionaries?

The ousting of Assad and the end of the dictatorship of the reactionary nationalist Baath Party (Arab Socialist Baath Party) represent a victory not only for the HTS-led coalition but also for the Syrian masses. They must now seize this moment to revive the struggle for the original democratic, social, and economic demands of the Syrian revolution. It is crucial to emphasize at this moment: No trust in HTS, no trust in the transitional government! Similarly, under the rule of an HTS-led government, whether it initially includes parts of the old state apparatus or even representatives of national or religious minorities, such a development cannot be expected. Any such government will be partially or entirely shaped by a strong Islamist-reactionary influence. Moreover, it will attempt to „resolve“ the political and social crisis of the country in coordination with Western powers and their financial institutions, as well as in the interests of its own bourgeois and petty-bourgeois clientele.

Therefore, revolutionaries must not place any trust or support in such a government. Instead, they must warn the rural and urban masses about its reactionary nature, help them make use of the current opportunities for their own political, trade union, and social organization, create forms of self-organization at the workplace and local levels, and, where possible, establish their own self-defense forces to organize security in both urban and rural areas. Moreover, it is clear that, in reality, HTS stands for economic liberalism. According to them, the economy of future Syria should be „a competitive free-market system.“

Therefore, it is all the more important that the existing social movements, trade union, and workplace structures in Syria—who gained organizational and assembly freedoms with the fall of Assad—use and expand the current opportunities.

The Arab Spring demonstrated what the fighting masses of workers and the oppressed are capable of, but also the reasons for their defeat. The spontaneous uprising of the masses and its spread in 2011 clearly showed in Syria that people were demanding a better life in freedom and were willing to fight for it, even at the cost of their lives. However, as the regime became increasingly brutal and murderous towards its own population, two key weaknesses became evident: there was a lack of centralization in the movement and a program that outlined how to fight for specific demands and what could come after the fall of Assad. While the working class carried the movement, it lacked its own, class-conscious vanguard and, therefore, strength.

Therefor the most pressing task for revolutionaries is to build a revolutionary party that is able to make sure that the fall of Assad and the seizure of power by HTS does not turn into another dictatorship. This should be done by developing a revolutionary workers Party, by creating a party out of the most determined parts of the fighters of the working class and the most advanced from parts of the intelligentsia and youth. This should be supported by building workers councils, as well as councils of the youth in and outside of Syria, these should challenge the power over the means of (re)production. The tasks of democratic and socialist Syria have to be fought in combination, therefore an independent constituent assembly that discusses the political and social future of Syria is to be Pursued. This Party has to win over and include the (fighting) minorities in the region as well, foremost the Kurds and the Druzes.

A constituent assembly would still be a bourgeois institution, but the fight for the working class and the building of a revolutionary party would have a better terrain to expose the antidemocratic character of the HTS and it's allies. In a democratic election the right for refugees to vote has to be ensured.

This assembly should include minorities and give nationally oppressed groups the possibility of self determination, regardless of how this self-determination is done, as a semi-autonomous region or as an independent country. The assembly should also support the struggle of the oppressed nation elsewhere,

such as in Turkey or Iraq for the Kurdish and for the Palestinians in Palestine. For Syria this would also mean, the support of the Palestinian resistance and a fight against the oppression by Turkey, even if they played an important role in the overthrow of Assad.

The right to self-determination of oppressed nations and the possibilities for overthrowing regimes in the region, open the question of how such a success could be maintained. Imperialism or other Capitalist Hegemony would threaten the successes. By creating a socialist federation in the middle east and expanding the revolution internationally, the threat of deterioration can be avoided, due to removing the root of the cause of the system, which is private ownership of the means of productions.

Maintaining the right to return for Syrian refugees is an important task of the party, as well as the ensuring a safe accommodation and minimal income for those returning and already there. This and more generally the rebuilding of the country should be financed by expropriating the wealth of the Assad regime and from the ruling capitalists and large landowners. Further international aid should be provided by imperialist states without any condition. Continuing the sanctions on Syria would also complicate the rebuilding efforts and hit the weakest the hardest. Such tasks, of which only a few could be presented, are a collection of tasks that can't be performed by a bourgeois government: A worker's government is needed to accomplish them. Above all, the youth can play a key role in this. They were the ones who fought heroically on the frontlines during the Arab Spring. And even today, it is in their interest to fight for a future that they, along with the workers and peasants, can determine for themselves.

With the Fall of Assad many countries postponed the granting of refugee status to Syrians that fled the civil war or that were persecuted. With the shift towards the right, the aim of many bourgeois parties to do mass deportations grew more popular. Fighting these Racist policies is the task of revolutionaries in the imperialist centers of power, Just like the fight against the sanctions and the interference of imperialist forces in Syria.

We as revolutionary internationalists share the excitement about the

overthrow of Assad with the Syrian Masses around the world. But we are aware of the tasks to come to ensure a new, democratic, socialist Syria.