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ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (Author)

Information collection on developments regarding the fall of president Assad

How it came about

On 27 November 2024, the militant Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), whose control had previously been limited to parts of the provinces of Aleppo and Idlib, launched a major offensive in north-west Syria with allied rebel factions. The rebels initially captured Aleppo, the country's second largest city. On 5 December, the city of Hama fell and two days later Syria's third largest city, Homs ([BBC, 8 December 2024](#); see also [Der Standard, 8 December 2024](#), [ISPI, 8 December 2024](#)). Meanwhile, rebel forces from southern Syria advanced into the city of Daraa, which played a central role in the 2011 uprising, and gained control of more than 90 per cent of the province, while government forces gradually withdrew ([Rudaw, 7 December 2024](#)). In Sweida, Druze factions took over the administration of the region, consolidating the opposition structures in the south of the country ([Al-Jazeera, 10 December 2024](#)). These groups formed the "Southern Operations Room" to coordinate the uprising and were the first to arrive in Damascus ([The Guardian, 9 December 2024](#)). However, after the arrival of HTS in the capital, they retreated to Daraa ([France 24, 8 January 2025](#)). On 8 December 2024, the rebels declared victory in Damascus. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad left the country on the same day and applied for asylum in Russia, where he was granted asylum ([Tagesschau, 8 December 2024](#)).

Who are the most important rebel groups?

The Syrian groups that toppled al-Assad and took over the capital Damascus are heterogeneous ([ARD, 8 December 2024](#)) with partly conflicting ideologies and long-term goals ([DW, 9 December 2024](#); [Reuters, 9 December 2024](#)):

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

The most powerful group in Syria, which led the rebel advance, is the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. It began as an official al-Qaeda offshoot in Syria under the name Nusra Front and carried out attacks in Damascus at the beginning of the uprising against Assad. The group underwent several name changes and finally established a government in the province of Idlib in north-west Syria as the HTS. The US, Turkey and others classified HTS and its leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa (also Abu Mohammed known as), as terrorists ([al-JolaniReuters, 8 December 2024](#); see also: [BBC, 8 December 2024](#), [DW, 9 December 2024](#)).

Syrian National Army (SNA)

The Syrian National Army (SNA) is a fragmented coalition of different armed groups ([DW, 9 December 2024](#)) that hold a section of territory along the Syrian-Turkish border with direct Turkish military support ([Reuters, 8 December 2024](#)). Despite internal divisions, many SNA factions maintain close ties to Turkey, such as the Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade, the al-Hamza Division and the Sultan Murad Brigade. Other factions in the group are trying to assert their own priorities despite their cooperation with Turkey ([DW, 9 December 2024](#)). When the HTS and allied groups from the north-west advanced into Assad's government-controlled territory in early December, the SNA also joined them and fought in the north-east against government troops as well as Kurdish-led forces ([Reuters, 8 December 2024](#)).

The advance of the rebels against Assad's government troops was reportedly supported by Turkey ([ARD, 8 December 2024](#)).

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias supported by the USA and its allies. The SDF control most of Syria east of the Euphrates, as well as some areas west of the river. The current offensive has also seen fighting between the SDF and the SNA ([Reuters, 8 December 2024](#)). On 11 December, the SDF lost control of the city of Manbij. ([SOHR, 11 December 2024](#)).

Other

In addition to the groups mentioned above, there are a large number of local groups in Syria that have taken a stand against al-Assad. These groups represent a broad spectrum of Islamist and nationalist ideologies. In the north, some of them have joined the HTS military operations command. Groups dominating the south rose up in the current situation and took over south-west Syria ([Reuters, 8 December 2024](#)). For this purpose, the groups active in the southern provinces founded the coalition "Southern Operations Room" ([The Guardian, 9 December 2024](#)).

Latest developments

Political developments

Mohammed Al-Bashirthe, who headed the HTS-affiliated Syrian Salvation Government in north-west Syria until the fall of Bashar Al-Assad, was appointed interim prime minister on 10 December 2024 to lead the country's transitional government until 1 March 2025 ([MEE, 10 December 2024](#); see also: [Al Jazeera, 10 December 2024](#)). The ministers of the Syrian Salvation Government took over the national ministerial posts for the time being. According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), some officials and civil servants of the former government are still employed in the current government apparatus ([CRS, 13 December 2024](#)). On 21 December, the transitional government appointed Asaad Hassan Al-Shibani as Foreign Minister and Murhaf Abu Qasra as Defence Minister. Both are said to be allies of HTS leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa ([Al-Jazeera, 21 December 2024](#)). In an interview with the Saudi television channel Al-Arabiyya on 29 December, Al-Sharaa explained that it could take up to four years before elections are held, as the various forces in Syria would have to engage in political dialogue and write a new constitution ([AP, 29 December 2024](#)).

On 29 January 2025, Ahmed Al-Sharaa, who had effectively led the country since the fall of Bashar Al-Assad, was appointed interim president in Syria. At the same time, the 2012 constitution was suspended and the old parliament dissolved ([Tagesschau, 29 January 2025](#)).

Al-Sharaa declared on 17 December that all rebel factions would be disbanded and integrated into the ranks of the Ministry of Defence ([The Guardian, 17 December 2024](#)). AFP reported on 8 January that, according to a spokesperson for the Southern Operations Room, the fighters in southern Syria did not agree to the dissolution of their groups. However, they could imagine integration into the Ministry of Defence in their current form ([France24, 8 January 2025](#)). On 18 February, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) agreed to integrate their armed forces and civilian institutions into the new Syrian government ([The New Arab, 18 February 2025](#)).

On 29 December, a list of 49 people appointed as commanders of the new Syrian army was published. The names include some members of the HTS, as well as former army officers who deserted at the beginning of the Syrian civil war. According to Haid Haid, a consultant at the British think tank Chatham House, the seven highest ranks were occupied by HTS members. According to another expert, at least six non-Syrians are also among the new commanders ([France24, 30 December 2024](#)).

Since coming to power, the new leadership had pledged to uphold the rights of minorities ([The New Arab, 7 January 2025](#)). At the beginning of January, the transitional government's Ministry of Education announced a new curriculum for all age groups on its Facebook page, which reflects a more Islamic perspective and removes all references to the Assad era from all subjects. The proposed changes included the removal of the theory of evolution and the Big Bang theory from science lessons. Activists expressed concern about the reforms ([BBC News, 2 January 2025](#)).

Al-Sharaa also announced plans for a National Dialogue Conference aimed at promoting reconciliation and inclusion ([Levant24, 29 December 2024](#)). However, the conference, originally scheduled for early January 2025, was postponed in order to establish an expanded preparatory committee to ensure broad representation of all social groups in Syria ([Al-Mayadeen, 23 January 2025](#)). The conference finally took place on 25 February and brought together 600 conference participants from different Syrian communities. Various Syrian-Kurdish groups claimed that they had either not been invited or had decided not to participate. Some participants pointed out the lack of transparency regarding the criteria for the selection of participants and criticised the fact that participants only received their invitation one day before the conference. The conference itself only lasted one day. At the end of the conference, a declaration was prepared in which, among other things, the rejection of all forms of discrimination, respect for human rights and the principle of peaceful coexistence were emphasised ([DW, 26 February 2025](#)),

On 2 March, Al-Sharaa announced the formation of a committee tasked with drafting a constitutional declaration for the country's transitional phase ([France 24, 2 March 2025](#)).

According to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), there were 30 "massacres" against Alawites on 7 and 8 March on the west coast of Syria, in which around 746 civilians were killed. Together with the number of fighters killed, which both consisted of pro-Assad fighters and fighters of the new government, the total number of dead rose to over 1,000 people. President Al-Sharaa called for peace and unity and promised to bring those responsible to justice. However, he did not directly address the allegations that his supporters were involved in the killings of civilians ([BBC News, 9 March 2025](#)).

Control of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continued its offensive against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the area of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES). Over the past few days, the SNA captured areas of the north-western region of Shahba and the city of Manbij. On 10 December, SNA fighters attacked the strategically important, Kurdish-controlled Tishreen Dam in the province of Aleppo ([Rudaw, 10 December 2024](#)) and advanced on the city of Kobane ([Al-Monitor, 10 December 2024](#)). On 11 December, a ceasefire was agreed upon in the city of Manbij after mediation by US authorities. The agreement provides for the withdrawal of the "Manbij Military Council Forces" (affiliated with the SDF) ([SOHR, 11 December 2024](#)). On 17 December, this ceasefire was extended until the end of the same week ([Reuters, 17 December 2024](#)). On 18 December, a ceasefire agreement came into force in the region Ain Al-Arab (also Kobani) ([SOHR, 18 December 2024](#)). The SDF accused Turkey and its allies of not honouring the ceasefire agreement and continuing their attacks south of Kobani. At the same time, residents of the north-eastern Syrian city of Qamishli took to the streets to support the SDF's resistance against attacks by pro-Turkish fighters in the region ([France24, 19 December 2024](#)). On 21 December, five of their fighters were killed in attacks by Turkish-backed forces on the city of Manbij, according to the SDF ([Reuters, 21 December 2024](#)). The Pentagon declared on 30 December that the ceasefire between Turkey and the US-backed SDF around the city of Manbij was holding ([Reuters, 30 December 2024](#)). On the same day, the SDF claimed that Turkey was building two military bases near Manbij and that several military vehicles and radar systems had been destroyed by the SDF ([Rudaw, 30 December 2024](#)). At the same time, there were renewed exchanges of fire between Turkish-backed forces and the SDF. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), Turkish forces and armed groups allied with them attacked the village of al-Terwaziyah south of Slouk in rural Raqqa with heavy artillery and machine guns, which subsequently led to violent clashes. Special units of the SDF penetrated positions of the factions supported by Turkey in the village of al-Reyhaniyah near Tel Tamer in Hasakah province ([Kurdistan24, 30 December 2024](#)). At the beginning of January, over a hundred people were killed in clashes in several villages around the city of Manbij ([The New Arab, 5 January 2025](#)). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported fierce fighting in the Manbij region between the SNA and the SDF and rising casualty figures ([Shafaq News, 9 January 2025](#)).

Human Rights Watch accuses the coalition of Turkey and SNA of committing a war crime after a drone hit a Kurdish Red Crescent ambulance (on 18 January [HRW, 30 January 2025](#)).

Further clashes between the SNA and SDF began on 21 January. SOHR estimates that at least 423 people were killed in the SNA-SDF conflict between 12 December and 18 January; 41 of them civilians, 308 SNA fighters and 74 SDF fighters ([The New Arab, 21 January 2025](#)). Fighting continued in February ([BBC News, 26 February 2025](#)) and into early March ([North Press Agency, 1 March 2025](#)).

On 11 December, the coalition of former opposition forces led by HTS took full control of the eastern Syrian city of Deir ez-Zor ([Al Jazeera, 11 December 2024](#)). In the east of Deir ez-Zor province, there were protests and demands that the HTS-led forces should take control of the area. Some SDF commanders deserted as a result ([Syria Direct, 13 December 2024](#)).

At the end of February, the Kurdish-led authorities in north-eastern Syria began supplying oil from the local fields they administer to the central government in Damascus ([Reuters, 22 February 2025](#)).

Israeli attacks in Syria

The Israeli Air Force and Navy carried out more than 350 strikes in Syria between 7 and 11 December, destroying an estimated 70 to 80 per cent of Syria's strategic military assets between Damascus and Latakia. Israeli forces have also moved ground troops from the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights eastwards into a demilitarised buffer zone in Syria and, according to Israeli sources, just beyond ([BBC News, 11 December 2024](#)). According to Arab media, Israeli forces advanced into rural areas of Damascus province. This was denied by the Israeli side ([Enab Baladi, 10 December 2024](#); [Reuters, 10 December 2024](#)). On the night of 14-15 December, Israel attacked dozens of targets in Syria from the air. The airstrikes were preceded by a statement by the Israeli defence minister that Israeli troops would remain on Mount Hermon (Arabic: Jabel Sheikh), which had been captured the previous week, for the winter. Israel's Prime Minister also announced that he had agreed to a plan to expand settlement construction in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights ([The Guardian, 15 December 2024](#); see also: [BBC News, 15 December 2024](#)). On 20 December, Israeli forces shot at protesters in a village in the Maariya area of southern Syria who were protesting against the army's activities, injuring one of them. Israeli forces also operated in Syrian-controlled areas outside the buffer zone ([The Guardian, 21 December 2024](#)). On 29 December, Israel attacked a weapons depot near the city of Adra. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 11 people, mainly civilians, were killed in the attack ([Euro News, 29 December 2024](#)). According to Syrian media, the Israeli army advanced deep into the Quneitra area on 30 December and expelled employees from government offices ([Shafaq News, 30 December 2024](#)).

On 23 January, BBC News published satellite images showing Israeli army construction work inside the demilitarised buffer zone separating the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights from Syria ([BBC News, 23 January 2025](#)).

At the end of February, Israeli warplanes attacked military targets outside Damascus and in southern Syria. At the same time, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called for the complete demilitarisation of southern Syria ([The Guardian, 25 February 2025](#)).

Statements by UN organisations (security, socio-economic situation, refugees)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that around one million people were displaced from the provinces of Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Idlib between the start of the offensive on 27 November and 11 December. No figures are available, but according to reports, during the same period thousands of Syrian refugees returned to the country from Lebanon. Refugees also returned to north-west Syria from Turkey. At the same time, some Syrians fled to Lebanon ([UNHCR, 11 December 2024](#)).

On 17 December, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher reported critical shortages of food, fuel and supplies due to disrupted trade routes and border closures ([UN News, 17 December 2024](#)).

According to UNICEF, 7.5 million children in Syria need humanitarian aid. More than 2.4 million children do not go to school and a further million children are at risk of dropping out. Health care is also fragile. Almost 40 per cent of hospitals and health facilities are partially or completely inoperable. Almost 13.6 million people are in need of water, sanitation and hygiene services; and 5.7 million people, including 3.7 million children, need nutritional support ([UNICEF, 18 December 2024](#)).

The UN reports that hostilities and insecurity continued in the provinces of Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Latakia, Tartus, Deir-ez-Zor and Quneitra during the week of 23 December. Due to the tense security situation, humanitarian operations were still suspended in several areas as of 30 December. In November, around two million people throughout Syria had received food aid in various forms. The unstable security situation in the rural areas of Hama, Quneitra, Latakia and Tartous affected the ability of children to attend school ([UN News, 30 December 2024](#)).

As of 29 December, 94 of the 114 UNHCR-supported community centres across Syria have resumed their work. Since 27 November, 58,500 people have contacted the community centres to register and access protection services. According to UNHCR, between 8 and 29 December 58,400 people returned to Syria (mainly from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey). Since the beginning of 2024 (until 29 December), approximately 419,200 Syrian

refugees have returned; the majority of them to Raqqa (25%), Aleppo (20%) and Daraa (20%) ([UNHCR, 30 December 2024](#)).

The UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, stated in his briefing to the UN Security Council on 8 January 2025 that while the security situation in some regions was improving, unrest continued in the coastal regions, Homs and Hamain. Armed groups, including the terrorist network Islamic State - and over 60 groups with conflicting agendas - also posed an ongoing threat to Syria's territorial integrity. Pederson also reported on the conflict between the SNA and SDF described above, as well as Israel's violations. The humanitarian situation also remained critical: almost 15 million Syrians were in need of health care, 13 million were affected by acute food insecurity and over 620,000 were internally displaced. The damage caused to the Tishreen Dam limited the water and electricity supply for more than 400,000 people ([UN News, 8 January 2025](#)).

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) announced on 30 January that over 25,000 people had been displaced from the north-eastern city of Manbij. Fighting broke out, particularly in eastern Aleppo and around the Tishreen Dam. As a result of the escalating violence, the number of newly displaced people had risen to 652,000 by 27 January. Humanitarian aid was severely affected by a lack of public services and liquidity shortages. In cities such as Homs and Hama, there is only electricity for 45 to 60 minutes every eight hours ([UN News, 30 January 2025](#)).

In mid-February, OCHA declared that humanitarian aid for Syria significantly underfunded. By March, less than 10 per cent of the required 1.2 billion dollars had been provided. At the same time, in clashes and attacks with explosive devices continue to occur parts of north-eastern Syria, especially in eastern Aleppo, Raqqa and Hasakah ([OCHA, 12 February 2025](#)).

As of 26 February, humanitarian aid is reaching many communities, according to the UN, but fighting is restricting access to aid in several regions in eastern Aleppo ([UN News, 26 February 2025](#)).

Further information

On 16 December, Human Rights Watch confirmed the discovery of a mass grave in southern Damascus ([HRW, 16 December 2024](#)).

On 18 December, the first commercial flight since the fall of Bashar al-Assad, a domestic flight to Aleppo, took off from Damascus airport ([Al-Jazeera, 18 December 2024](#)).

On 27 December, supporters of Bashar al-Assad killed 14 people in clashes with soldiers of the new government in the west of the country,

near the city of Tartus ([BBC News, 27 December 2024](#)).

On 7 January 2025, the first international flight since the ousting of al-Assad landed at Damascus International Airport ([Al-Jazeera, 7 January 2025](#)).

In early January, the US granted a six-month exemption from sanctions, known as a general licence, to allow humanitarian aid to be delivered to Syria following the end of Bashar al-Assad's rule. The exemption, which is valid until 7 July, allows certain transactions with government institutions, including hospitals, schools and utilities at the federal, regional and local levels, as well as with HTS-affiliated entities throughout Syria. While no sanctions have been lifted, the licence also permits transactions related to the sale, supply, storage or donation of energy, including oil and electricity, to or within Syria. It also permits personal transfers and certain energy-related activities in support of reconstruction efforts ([Reuters, 6 January 2025](#)). Following the sanctions waiver, Qatar announced it would help fund a 400 per cent increase in public sector salaries promised by the Syrian interim government ([Reuters, 7 January 2025](#)).

On 29 January, the Syrian Baath Party, which was associated with Bashar al-Assad, was banned and 8 December was declared the country's new national holiday ([Tagesschau, 29 January 2025](#)).

Associated documents

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Syrian Arab Republic

Brief compilation on developments regarding the fall of president Assad

[Informationssammlung zu Entwicklungen rund um den Sturz von Präsident Assad](#) (Special or Analytical Report, German)

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2122723	Austrian Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)	Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien T +43 1 589 00 583 F +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net	Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice
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