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## *The Collapse of Syria, the Rise of HTS\*, and Israel's Expanding Influence*

Amnesty International's\*\* sharp criticism of Israel's actions, amid grave setbacks for the Iran-led “Axis of Resistance” and growing divisions between Muslim states, highlights the wider geopolitical chaos in the Middle East.



### **Unconditional Support for Israel and Its Impact on the Palestinian Cause**

The report drew antisemitism cries from Germany, the US, and other Western allies of Tel Aviv who supported it diplomatically as well as militarily. This unconditional support has encouraged Israel to continue its war crimes against humanity, particularly women and children. Scores of horrifying images and footage of victims of Israel's indiscriminate bombing of civilians in the Gaza Strip continue to emerge.

Israel's occupation of Syria and the collapse of the Assad regime in the country has increased complications for Iran as well

The Abraham Accords, signed between the Gulf States and Israel, also suggest that the Arab states are now ready to betray their Palestinian brothers and contribute to bolster the Zionist state's occupation of Palestine. Recent events demonstrate that the Arab world is content with the destruction of Palestine and is weary of carrying the burden of the Palestine issue.

### **Syria's Invasion and the Rise of HTS\*: A Strategic Shift for Israel**

The Iran-led axis of resistance, Syria, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and Yemen's Houthis – attempted to help the Palestinians militarily and economically, the Western technological and military supremacy assisted Israel in countering them effectively. After effectively countering and sabotaging Hezbollah's military and communication capabilities, Israel and the West's next target was Syria due to its role in supplying weapons to Hezbollah. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS\*) – led by Abu Mohammad al-Jolani – the former commander of Al-Qaeda\*, the swift takeover of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria has made this invasion suspicious.

Even al-Jolani's statement to offer friendship to all, including Israel, has further added to the suspicion regarding the recent invasion of Syria. This also shows the organization is a puppet of the West, just like ISIS. He further added, *"We don't have enemies other than the Assad regime, Hezbollah and Iran. What Israel did against Hezbollah in Lebanon helped us a great deal. Now we are taking care of the rest."* The group seeks to capture Homs, the main supply route of Hezbollah. It also wants to sever road links between the Western coastal area, the strongest headquarters of Bashar al-Asad, and Damascus. The northwest advances of the HTS\* have also pushed the Kurdish forces near the Turkish border.

### **The Escalating Geopolitical Crisis and Its Ramifications**

However, all this has provided leverage to the Israeli forces. Israel has launched the ground invasion of Syria, for the first time in 50 years. It seems that this swift invasion of HTS\* was actually to facilitate Israel in its invasion of Syria and expand the war beyond Gaza and Lebanon. Russia, Iran, and Turkey urged the Assad administration and HTS\* to resolve the issue through dialogue. However, the fall of Assad's regime in the country has sent shocking waves to all his allies and regional governments.

Russia, Turkey, Iran, and all of the Middle East will be impacted by this unfolding situation in Syria. Israel's invasion of Syria will provide the former and its Western allies an upper hand in the region. However, this would only lead to further devastation in the Middle East. HTS\* has made it easier for Israel to occupy Syria and establish its bases inside the country. Moreover, the people of Syria would face new waves of abuse and oppression under HTS\*

and Israel. The former is a Wahabi/Salafi militant organization. While, the majority population of Syria is Sunni, a bit different from Wahabism and comparatively a peaceful sect of Islam. The Salafi organizations hold a history of unleashing brutality on Sunni scholars and people. They are also hostile against the Shia minority of Syria. Therefore, a new wave of brutality and tyranny could be observed in Syria under HTS's\* rule.

Another major impact of this invasion is that it has diverted global attention from Gaza to Syria, another major ambition of Israel. The latter has grabbed land in Syria's Golan Heights, a violation of the 1974 disengagement agreement, according to the United Nations. It seems that creating instability inside Syria and then occupying it was part of Israel's plan to achieve its ambition of "greater Israel." The latter is committing historical war crimes in Gaza by using starvation, ammunition, and armed drones in concert to ethnically cleanse the region from its native population. The Western media is further assisting Israel to push out its genocidal campaign from the headlines.

Israel's occupation of Syria and the collapse of the Assad regime in the country has increased complications for Iran as well. The country was already facing criticism from within the Muslim world for not effectively countering Israel. Its inability to save Bashar al-Assad has raised further questions about its military capabilities and sincerity in defending its allies. Moreover, Israel's occupation of Syria would also impinge Iranian interest in the Middle East region. Although the axis of resistance has been severely degraded in this Israel-Middle East war, the Palestinian cause has also been weakened by the incapable leaders of the Muslim world and their internal divisions. Israel has achieved its multiple targets through the predicament in Syria while the people in Gaza would suffer the most from the ongoing Syrian crisis.

\*- *banned in Russia*

\*\*-*recognized as a foreign agent in Russia*

Abbas Hashemite, December 11, 2024

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