

## Geopolitics of Power Shifts: Analyzing Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's Victory Over Assad and the Humanitarian Crisis in Syria

Bangkit Adi Saputra\*

Pascasarjana Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Email: [bangkitadisaputra000@gmail.com](mailto:bangkitadisaputra000@gmail.com)

\*Corresponding Author

Received: April 22, 2025

Revised: May 27, 2025

Approved: June 30, 2025

**Abstract:** This study examines the factors contributing to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) military success against the Bashar al-Assad regime and analyzes the subsequent humanitarian governance challenges faced by HTS-led interim authorities in Syria. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in historical and geopolitical analysis, the research utilizes library-based data to assess: (1) HTS's effective guerrilla warfare strategies, (2) the impact of external actor involvement (particularly Turkey's support for HTS versus diminished Russian or Iranian backing for Assad), and (3) the socioeconomic consequences of prolonged conflict. Findings reveal that HTS's ascendancy stems from tactical military proficiency combined with the Assad regime's weakening under Western sanctions and reduced support from traditional allies (Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and the Houthis). However, the group's political consolidation has exacerbated Syria's preexisting humanitarian crisis, with interim governance structures proving inadequate to address postwar displacement, infrastructure collapse, and international isolation. The study concludes by emphasizing the urgent need for coordinated international engagement to: (a) mitigate large-scale human suffering, and (b) develop conflict-sensitive governance frameworks that account for Syria's complex geopolitical realities. These insights contribute to broader discussions on non-state actor transitions to governance and humanitarian management in contested states.

**Keywords:** Bashar al-Assad, *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*, Interim Government, Humanitarian Crisis

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor di balik kemenangan *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS) atas rezim Bashar al-Assad dan tantangan pemerintahan sementara dalam menghadapi krisis kemanusiaan di Suriah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif metode *library research* dengan kerangka historis dan geopolitik untuk mengeksplorasi strategi militer, pengaruh aktor regional dan internasional, serta tantangan sosial-politik dan krisis kemanusiaan bagi pemerintahan sementara Suriah yang dibentuk HTS. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan HTS disebabkan oleh taktik perang gerilya yang efektif, melemahnya kekuatan rezim Assad akibat sanksi ekonomi Barat, bantuan logistik dan persenjataan militer dari Turkiye untuk HTS, serta berkurangnya dukungan Rusia, Iran dan kelompok non negara seperti; Hizbullah di Lebanon dan Houthi di Yaman yang selama ini menjadi pendukung rezim Assad. Namun, naiknya HTS sebagai pemegang kendali Suriah memiliki konsekuensi besar atas krisis

kemanusiaan hasil dari perang saudara berkepanjangan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa dunia internasional harus mengadopsi strategi yang lebih efektif untuk menangani tantangan sosial-politik pemerintahan sementara Suriah dibawah HTS dan upaya taktis untuk mengatasi krisis kemanusiaan pasca perang.

**Kata Kunci:** Bashar al-Assad, *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*, Pemerintahan Sementara, Krisis Kemanusiaan



© 2025 by the authors. It was submitted for possible open-access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY - NC - SA 4.0) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## INTRODUCTION

The Syrian conflict, which erupted in 2011, was part of the Arab Spring protests that shook the Middle East and North Africa. Initially, this movement was driven by the Syrian people's demands for political and economic policy reforms under the leadership of Bashar al-Assad. However, the Assad regime's brutal response to peaceful demonstrations triggered an escalation of the conflict, which later developed into a prolonged civil war. The conflict became increasingly complex with the involvement of various actors, both domestic and foreign, including opposition armed groups, transnational jihadist organizations, as well as regional and global powers with their respective interests.<sup>1</sup>

One of the main groups that emerged in this conflict was Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a jihadist faction rooted in Jabhat al-Nusra, the official Al-Qaeda branch in Syria. Although initially affiliated with Al-Qaeda, HTS later claimed independence and established a new identity as a military-political organization focused on resisting the Assad regime. HTS played a significant role in battles within Idlib and its surrounding areas, making it the most organized opposition force among the various rebel groups. The relationship between HTS and Al-Qaeda remains a subject of debate among international political analysts. Although HTS has formally separated from Al-Qaeda, many argue that its ideology and military strategy are still heavily influenced by the principles of global jihad promoted by Al-Qaeda. HTS has adopted a pragmatic approach in dealing with the political and military realities in Syria, including efforts to establish a semi-autonomous governing structure in the territories under its control. This has made HTS more than just an armed group; rather, it has become an entity striving to create an alternative government to the Assad regime.<sup>2</sup>

HTS resistance against the Assad regime is not an isolated struggle. Since the beginning of the conflict, various opposition groups with diverse ideological backgrounds have taken part in the fight against government forces. However, over time, many of these groups have faced fragmentation or weakened due to military pressure from the regime and its allies. Nevertheless, HTS has managed to survive and

---

<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Menshaw, "Constructing State, Territory, and Sovereignty in the Syrian Conflict," *Politics* 39, no. 3 (August 1, 2019): 332-46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395718770348>.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Masud, "Authoritarian Claims to Legitimacy: Syria's Education under the Regime of Bashar al-Assad," *Mediterranean Studies* 26, no. 1 (2018): 80-111, <https://doi.org/10.5325/mediterraneanstu.26.1.0080>.

even consolidate its strength, particularly in northwestern Syria, thanks to its adaptive military strategies and ability to manage local resources.<sup>3</sup>

The success of HTS under the leadership of Ahmed al-Sharaa, better known as Mohammad al-Jolani, in defeating Assad's forces on December 8, 2024, marked a significant milestone in the history of the Syrian conflict. This victory not only demonstrated HTS military strength on the global stage but also signified a shift in the balance of power on the Syrian battlefield. The event sparked various reactions at the international level, with some actors such as Russia, Iran, and non-state military groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen viewing it as a new threat to regional stability. Meanwhile, others, such as Türkiye, saw it as a momentum for the opposition to further challenge Assad's dominance, given that Türkiye, under President Erdogan, has long maintained close ties with HTS and fully supported the Sunni militant group in its fight against the Assad regime.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the sustainability of the Assad regime heavily depends on support from external actors, particularly Russia and Iran. Russia, as Assad's main ally, has played a crucial role through direct military intervention since 2015. Russian air and logistical support have helped Assad's forces reclaim many territories previously controlled by opposition groups. Additionally, Iran has provided significant support through the Quds Force, a division of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which has been involved in ground operations alongside Shiite militias backing the Assad regime.<sup>5</sup>

Besides Russia and Iran, non-state military groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen have also contributed to the survival of the Assad regime. Hezbollah, which has strong ties with Iran, has sent thousands of fighters to Syria to assist Assad's forces in battling opposition groups, including HTS. The presence of Hezbollah has not only strengthened Assad's defenses but has also prolonged the conflict by escalating combat intensity on multiple fronts. Meanwhile, although the Houthis' involvement has been more limited, they continue to provide moral and political support for Assad as part of a broader alliance among Iran-backed groups.<sup>6</sup>

The combined support from Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and the Houthis has created conditions that allow the Assad regime to persist despite facing intense opposition pressure and international sanctions. However, HTS's victory on December 8, 2024, demonstrates that opposition groups still can challenge Assad's rule, albeit on a limited scale. This success has also heightened tensions among international actors

---

<sup>3</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) Actor Profile," June 26, 2023, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.

<sup>4</sup> Ziryan Rojhelati, "Post-Assad Syria: What the Fall of the Regime Means for the World," December 8, 2024, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.

<sup>5</sup> Itamar Rabinovich, "Iran's Quest for Regional Hegemony," *Source: Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, no. 26 (2024): 92–101, <https://doi.org/10.2307/48790022>.

<sup>6</sup> Nakissa Jahanbani and Suzanne Weedon Levy, "Report Part Title: Background on Iranian Proxy Involvement in Syria Report Title: Iran Entangled: Report Subtitle: Iran and Hezbollah's Support to Proxies Operating in Syria," April 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep40421.6>.

involved in the Syrian conflict, with some parties considering new measures in response to the evolving dynamics.<sup>7</sup>

However, some countries are concerned that the fall of the Assad regime in Syria could mark the beginning of the rise of international terrorist groups, given the past ties between HTS and Al-Qaeda. These countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, and several European Union nations. Nevertheless, the U.S. has engaged in diplomatic contact with HTS, followed by the U.K., as revealed by David Lammy, the British Foreign Secretary. In the humanitarian context, the conflict in Syria has led to a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions displaced and suffering endlessly due to the prolonged civil war. HTS victory over the Assad regime does not automatically provide a practical solution to these issues, as the interim Syrian government under HTS remains unstable and is still undergoing reconciliation among opposition groups following the fall of the Assad regime.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, this study will focus on a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to HTS success in defeating the Assad regime and the broader implications for Syria's future. It will also explore in depth the process of HTS victory in the Syria conflict, assess its impact on regional stability, and examine how the international community can respond to these developments in seeking long-term solutions for the stability of the new government under HTS, as well as addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach was chosen because it enables researchers to deeply explore the dynamics of conflict and the factors influencing Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) victory over the Assad regime. Using a historical and geopolitical analytical framework, this research aims not only to reveal empirical facts but also to comprehensively interpret various variables that contribute to the conflict situation in Syria.<sup>9</sup> Data in this research were collected through searches of relevant academic literature, policy reports from official institutions, and credible media sources. This process was conducted systematically to obtain a comprehensive understanding of HTS's historical power patterns and the influence of global geopolitical developments on the course of the conflict. The sources used were critically analyzed to ensure validity and relevance to the research focus.<sup>10</sup> Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach focused on reconstructing events and geopolitical dynamics that influenced HTS's position on the battlefield. By using this method, researchers can trace the connections between

---

<sup>7</sup> Ewa Czarkowska and Magdalena Kumelska-Koniecko, "Iran-Russia-Türkiye Triangle," *Source: Insight Turkey* 25, no. 3 (2023): 199–222, <https://doi.org/10.2307/48744767>.

<sup>8</sup> Dawn Chatty, "Chapter Title: Refuge in Syria: Where Duty Outweighs Human Rights-Based Approaches," in *Urban Displacement*, ed. Are John Knudsen and Sarah A Tobin, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2024), 214–32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.9891587.14>.

<sup>9</sup> Zuchri Abdussamad, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, ed. Patta Rapanna, vol. 1 (CV. Syakir Media Press, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Abdul Fattah Nasution, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, ed. Meyniar Albina, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Bandung: CV. Harfa Creative, 2023).

local historical narratives and international policies in shaping the political constellation in Syria. The results of this analysis are expected to contribute to Middle Eastern conflict studies, particularly in understanding the transformation of non-state actors in the contemporary global order.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Effective Guerrilla Warfare Strategy of HTS**

Guerrilla warfare has been one of the key elements in Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) victory over Bashar al-Assad's regime. Unlike conventional warfare, which relies on open battles and large-scale force deployment, HTS utilizes asymmetric strategies that allow them to maneuver flexibly against Syrian government forces. By taking advantage of difficult terrain, executing sudden attacks, and relying on support from local networks, HTS has successfully hindered Assad's military operations and achieved victories on various battlefronts.

The success of HTS guerrilla warfare is largely attributed to its use of hit-and-run tactics—striking enemy positions swiftly and unexpectedly before quickly relocating to another location. Such attacks not only create chaos within Assad's forces but also minimize risks for HTS fighters. As a result, they can exhaust the enemy's energy and resources without engaging in prolonged battles that could weaken their strength.<sup>11</sup>

HTS also relies on strong local intelligence to enhance the effectiveness of its guerrilla attacks. This enables HTS to strike with high precision, target enemy weak points, and avoid unfavorable confrontations. This intelligence advantage is one of the main factors that make their attacks more organized and difficult for the Syrian military to predict. Additionally, the battlefield conditions in Syria, which include urban areas and mountainous regions, provide a strategic advantage for HTS. In such environments, guerrilla warfare is far more effective than conventional warfare, as it allows fighters to hide, launch ambushes, and control supply routes more efficiently. The mountainous areas of Idlib and northern Syria, for example, serve as HTS main defensive strongholds, which are difficult for Assad's forces to penetrate.<sup>12</sup>

The speed and mobility of HTS forces are also key factors in the effectiveness of their strategy. Unlike government forces, which must coordinate movements on a large scale and require a long time to respond to attacks, HTS can move quickly using light vehicles and alternative routes that are difficult to detect. Thus, they are able to capitalize on momentum and adjust their strategy according to battlefield conditions. The use of weaponry suited to guerrilla warfare also contributed to HTS's victories. Instead of relying on heavy weaponry that is difficult to transport, HTS prioritizes light weapons such as rocket launchers, mortars, and assault rifles, which are easy to use in

---

<sup>11</sup> International Crisis Group, "Report Part Title: Containing Transnational Jihadist Groups in Idlib Report Title: Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West," March 7, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47445.8>.

<sup>12</sup> International Crisis Group, "Report Part Title: Shades of Jihadism in Idlib Report Title: Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West," March 7, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47445.6>.

fast-paced combat. They have also successfully acquired weaponry from various sources, including captured arms from government forces and support from external actors with vested interests in the Syrian conflict.<sup>13</sup>

HTS has also demonstrated its ability to establish an efficient logistical network to support its guerrilla warfare. By controlling supply routes and utilizing underground tunnels and hidden pathways, they can maintain the supply of ammunition, food, and medical necessities without being easily detected by Assad's forces. Support from the local population is another factor that strengthens HTS's guerrilla warfare. By spreading propaganda that portrays them as protectors of the people against a repressive regime, HTS has gained sympathy from certain segments of society, particularly in areas that feel oppressed by Assad's policies. This support is not only in the form of shelter and intelligence information but also logistical aid and the recruitment of new fighters, allowing them to remain strong on the battlefield.<sup>14</sup>

The combination of all these elements has made it difficult for Assad's government forces to defeat HTS directly. Every attempt to launch a large-scale offensive often ends in failure due to their inability to counter the asymmetric strategies employed by HTS. Even when government forces manage to capture territory, HTS can quickly launch counterattacks through infiltration and sabotage, destabilizing enemy positions from within. With all the advantages they possess in guerrilla warfare, HTS has successfully turned this strategy into their primary weapon against Assad's forces. Their resilience in withstanding attacks and their ability to continue launching effective offensives have made them one of the key actors in the Syrian conflict.

### **Western Economic Sanctions and Turkiye's Support for HTS**

The economic instability of Syria under the Assad regime has been one of the crucial factors weakening the government's ability to counter attacks from various opposition groups, including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011, Syria has experienced a sharp economic decline due to various factors, such as the downturn in industrial production, destruction of infrastructure, and loss of access to financial resources and international trade. As a result, the Assad government has faced significant difficulties in financing state operations, particularly in the defense and military sectors, which serve as the backbone of its survival.

The primary cause of the economic crisis affecting the Assad regime is the economic sanctions imposed by the West. These sanctions include asset freezes, trade bans, and restrictions on access to the international banking system, further limiting Syria's ability to generate revenue from exports. Moreover, the energy sector embargo has deprived the government of one of its main sources of income, oil and natural gas.

---

<sup>13</sup> Syarif Bahaudin Mudore et al., "Dinamika Perang Suriah: Aktor Dan Kepentingan," *POLITEA : Jurnal Kajian Politik Islam* 2, no. 2 (December 2019): 67–92.

<sup>14</sup> Erwin Van Veen and Olivia Macharis, "Clingendael Institute Hope Springs Eternal: EU Options for Dealing with the Assad Regime," March 2020, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep24650>.

The inability to sell these energy products has made it difficult for the government to acquire the foreign exchange necessary to support its military operations.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, economic sanctions have directly impacted the lives of Syrian citizens, who have suffered from soaring prices of necessities, fuel shortages, and rising unemployment rates. This situation has fueled public dissatisfaction, leading some to join HTS, which promises stability in the areas under its control. Consequently, the economic burden has not only weakened the Assad regime militarily but also eroded its political legitimacy in the eyes of its people. Under such conditions, government forces face logistical constraints, while opposition groups like HTS gain an advantage by leveraging illegal trade routes and external support.<sup>16</sup>

One of the external actors supporting HTS by supplying logistics and military weaponry is Türkiye. Türkiye has strategic interests in Syria, particularly in maintaining stability along its borders and preventing a massive influx of refugees into its territory. Additionally, Türkiye aims to curb the influence of Kurdish groups in northern Syria, which it perceives as a threat. In this context, Türkiye provides support to opposition groups opposing the Assad regime, including HTS, which controls Idlib and its surrounding areas.<sup>17</sup>

Türkiye's assistance to HTS comes in various forms, including the supply of ammunition, light combat vehicles, and communication and medical equipment. This support is often delivered through opposition-controlled border routes, especially via Hatay Province, which directly borders Idlib. Furthermore, Türkiye plays a role in facilitating alternative trade routes for HTS, enabling the group to secure financial resources through economic activities in the areas under its control. With this logistical support, HTS has been able to maintain its position against regime forces, which have been weakened due to limited resources.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from logistical and arms supplies, Türkiye is also suspected of providing intelligence support that helps HTS in planning attacks against Assad's forces. Information regarding government troop movements, weaknesses in the regime's defenses, and exploitable supply routes has been a crucial factor in HTS's success on the battlefield. With this support, HTS can optimize its military strategy and launch more effective attacks on strategic positions controlled by the regime.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> José Ciro Martínez and Brent Eng, "Stifling Stateness: The Assad Regime's Campaign against Rebel Governance," *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 4 (August 1, 2018): 235–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618768622>.

<sup>16</sup> Prince H R.H. Al Faisal Turki, "Global Uncertainties (What Lies Ahead in the Middle East)," *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 2024, no. 26 (2024): 12–23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/48790015>.

<sup>17</sup> Fany Anggun Abadi, Ali Muhammad, and Takdir Ali Mukti, "Konflik Bersenjata di Idlib: Pertarungan Antar-Kepentingan Nasional," *Jurnal ICMES* 6, no. 2 (December 2022): 166–81, <https://doi.org/10.35748/jurnalicmes.v6i2.130>.

<sup>18</sup> International Crisis Group, "Report Part Title: Idlib as Safe Haven and Holding Pen Report Title: Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West," March 7, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47445.5>.

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group, "Report Part Title: The HTS Conundrum Report Title: Silencing the Guns in Syria's Idlib," May 15, 2020, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.

This economic instability has also led to dissatisfaction within the Syrian military itself. Many soldiers do not receive their salaries on time, and some even face allowance cuts due to the state's limited budget. This situation has weakened the morale of government forces, making them more vulnerable to defeat by HTS in battles across various regions. In contrast, HTS has been able to offer more attractive incentives to its fighters, including more stable wages and access to resources in the territories under its control.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, economic difficulties have made it challenging for the Assad government to maintain control over economically strategic regions. Major cities such as Aleppo and Idlib have become fierce battlegrounds due to their significant economic value. The regime's inability to effectively manage these areas has provided HTS with the opportunity to seize and consolidate its power, particularly by offering an administrative system that is perceived as more functional by the local population.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, economic sanctions have also led to a reduction in the supply of weapons and ammunition for government forces, hindering their efforts to counter attacks from opposition groups. The destruction of heavy weaponry in battles and the lack of replacements from foreign sources have worsened the situation on the battlefield. In contrast, HTS has managed to obtain weapon supplies through alternative routes, either via smuggling or assistance from Türkiye, which has a vested interest in the continuation of the conflict in Syria.<sup>22</sup>

With the Assad regime's economic and military strength weakening, HTS has gained a strategic advantage in multiple aspects. Not only has it been able to exploit weaknesses in the fragile governmental system, but it has also successfully attracted support from those disillusioned by the government's failure to manage the economic crisis. As a result, HTS has evolved not only as a military force but also as a political entity that continues to solidify its position within the dynamics of the Syrian conflict.

### **Weakening External Support for the Assad Regime**

The victory of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in battles against the Assad regime cannot be separated from the weakening external support that previously served as the backbone of the regime. Two major countries that had provided military and political assistance to Assad for years, Russia and Iran, began shifting their attention to other geopolitical priorities. This shift directly affected the regime's defensive

---

<sup>20</sup> Irdayanti Irdayanti, "Kebijakan Penolakan Rusia Terhadap Strategi Barat Di Suriah," *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 37, no. 2 (2012): 154–62, <https://ejournal.uin-suska.ac.id/index.php/Anida/article/viewFile/323/306>.

<sup>21</sup> Syuryansyah Syuryansyah, "Intervensi Militer Amerika Serikat Dalam Konflik Suriah Tahun 2011," *TAZKIR: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-ilmu Sosial dan Keislaman* 9, no. 2 (December 2023): 206–22, <https://doi.org/10.24952/tazkir.v9i2.8851>.

<sup>22</sup> Danar Hafidz et al., "Keterlibatan Amerika Serikat Dalam Konflik Suriah Sebagai Konsekuensi Dari Politik Engtangling Alliance," *Arajang: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Politik* 6, no. 1 (2023): 22–38, <https://doi.org/10.31605/arajang.v4i1>.



effectiveness, creating an opening for HTS to intensify military pressure and secure victories on various strategic fronts.<sup>23</sup>

Russia, which had actively intervened in Syria's military affairs since 2015, started reducing its involvement as tensions in Eastern Europe escalated. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has intensified since 2022, has significantly drained Moscow's military and diplomatic resources. Assad's dependence on Russian air support and weaponry meant that the reduction in Moscow's assistance dealt a severe blow to the regime's survival. Russian airstrikes, which had previously played a decisive role in securing key Syrian territories, became increasingly rare, providing HTS with opportunities to launch more aggressive attacks.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, Iran also faced limitations in fully supporting Assad. Tehran's involvement in multiple regional conflicts, particularly tensions with Israel and increasing Western economic sanctions, restricted its ability to provide financial and logistical aid to Syria. Previously, Iran relied on Shiite militia networks from various countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, to bolster Assad's position. However, as threats to Iranian interests in the Middle East escalated, many of these militias were redirected to other fronts deemed more critical by Tehran.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the reduction of direct support from Russia and Iran, non-state militia groups that once allied with Assad also faced their own challenges. Hezbollah, a key factor that had deployed thousands of fighters to Syria, became increasingly focused on its conflict with Israel along the Lebanese border. Rising tensions with Israel forced Hezbollah to divert its resources toward defending its own territory, reducing its ability to assist Assad's forces in fighting HTS in Syria. Meanwhile, the Houthis in Yemen, despite ideologically supporting the pro-Assad bloc, were unable to make a significant contribution to the battle against HTS. Yemen's geographic distance from Syria posed a major obstacle to providing direct assistance. Although the Houthis actively condemned HTS's actions and voiced support for the Assad regime in international forums, these efforts were more symbolic than militarily impactful.<sup>26</sup>

The lack of sufficient support from Assad's key allies led to a decline in morale among Syrian government forces. Since the beginning of the civil war, the Syrian army has relied heavily on foreign assistance, whether in training, logistics, or air support. As this stream of aid weakened, Assad's forces struggled to maintain their positions in various areas targeted by HTS offensives. Furthermore, the reduced support from Russia and Iran also affected Syria's defense capabilities. Without a steady supply of advanced weaponry from Russia, Syria's air defense and artillery systems became

---

<sup>23</sup> International Crisis Group, "Report Part Title: HTS versus ISIS Report Title: Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West," March 7, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47445.7>.

<sup>24</sup> Bashar Al-Assad, "Syria's President Speaks: A Conversation with Bashar al-Assad," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2015): 58–65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483482>.

<sup>25</sup> Jennifer Cafarella and Jason Zhou, "Report Part Title: Russia, Iran, and Assad Report Title: RUSSIA'S DEAD-END DIPLOMACY IN SYRIA," November 2019, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep19570.5>.

<sup>26</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Regional Overview Middle East May 2023," June 8, 2023, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.

increasingly vulnerable to HTS's intensified attacks. The absence of optimal air cover made Syrian ground troops more exposed to enemy assaults and diminished their ability to maintain the initiative in battle.

On the international diplomatic front, Russia and Iran's diminishing involvement in the Syrian conflict further isolated Assad. With limited resources at its disposal, the Assad regime struggled to maintain its strategic alliances on a global scale, while HTS and other opposition groups continued strengthening their networks with actors invested in regime change in Syria.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), which previously played active roles in crafting resolutions for the Syrian conflict, began losing focus due to other pressing global issues. Instead of dedicating special attention to developments in Syria, these organizations allocated more resources to addressing the refugee crisis in Europe and rising political tensions in various countries. As a result, international pressure on HTS diminished, granting the group greater freedom to expand its territorial control and solidify its governance structures in the areas it occupied.<sup>28</sup>

The United States and its allies, which had previously focused on eliminating extremist groups in the Middle East, began redirecting their resources toward addressing other threats, such as rising tensions with China and Russia. Beyond geopolitical factors, global economic dynamics also contributed to declining international attention to the Syrian conflict. Economic crises affecting multiple countries, including high inflation and energy market instability, caused many governments to prioritize domestic issues over foreign conflicts.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, the decline in support from Russia and Iran was a crucial factor that accelerated HTS's victory over the Assad regime. As these two key allies diverted their focus to other regional conflicts, the Assad regime lost the primary pillars that had long sustained its survival. HTS capitalized on this situation by enhancing its informal diplomacy and engaging with regional actors and international communities that had vested interests in Syria.<sup>30</sup>

HTS sought to present itself as a more stable entity compared to other extremist groups, allowing it to gain support from international stakeholders interested in Middle Eastern stability. With a more moderate image than other opposition factions, HTS successfully attracted sympathy from parties advocating for regional stability. Rapidly expanding its influence and enhancing its military effectiveness, HTS ultimately achieved victory in its strategic battle against Assad's government, seizing

---

<sup>27</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Regional Overview Middle East May 2024," June 10, 2024, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.

<sup>28</sup> Mohammed Sarmini, "Syria's Political Stalemate," *Source: Insight Turkey* 26, no. 2 (2024): 45–56, <https://doi.org/10.2307/48778416>.

<sup>29</sup> Hamidreza Azizi and Julien Barnes-Dacey, "Beyond Proxies: Iran's Deeper Strategy In Syria And Lebanon," June 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep60706>.

<sup>30</sup> Dita Arum Kusumastuti, "Alasan Rusia Melibatkan Diri dalam Konflik Bersenjata Suriah Tahun 2011-2015," *Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 4 (2017): 143–50, <http://ejournal-s1.undip.ac.id/index.php/jihi>.

Damascus, the capital of Syria, and forcing President Bashar al-Assad to flee to Russia.<sup>31</sup>

### **Challenges of the HTS Interim Government and the Humanitarian Crisis in Syria**

The newly formed interim government in Syria, established under the leadership of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), marks a new chapter in the prolonged conflict that has afflicted the country. After overthrowing the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, formerly known as Mohammad al-Jolani, was appointed as the interim supreme commander, while Mohammed al-Bashir was designated as the head of the interim government until March 1, 2025. The primary objectives of this government are to stabilize the country, provide basic services to civilians, and prevent power struggles among the armed factions that have long competed for resources and influence in Syria.<sup>32</sup>

One of the biggest challenges facing the interim government is ensuring national stability and providing essential services such as electricity, water, sanitation, and internet access. According to Thomas Pierret, a Syria expert from the Institute for Research and Studies on the Arab and Muslim World, the interim government is necessary to keep the country functioning. However, its credibility could be threatened if HTS refuses to share power after three months. This raises concerns that the interim government may merely serve as a tool for HTS to solidify its grip on Syria.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, the new administration faces the challenge of establishing a fair and credible legal system. HTS has a notorious record of human rights violations, including enforced disappearances and torture of its critics. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has reported that HTS has carried out repressive actions against political opponents. If the interim government fails to establish an independent and just legal system, earning the trust of the Syrian people will be difficult.<sup>34</sup>

Political transition is another crucial issue for this interim government. Experts such as Robin Yassin-Kassab emphasize the importance of a clear roadmap for political transition. The interim government must propose a plan that involves all stakeholders, including civil society, and adheres to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254. This resolution calls for an 18-month transitional period to draft a new constitution and prepare for elections under UN supervision. Without an inclusive transition plan, the interim government risks losing legitimacy both in the eyes of the Syrian people and the international community.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Regional Overview Middle East April 2024," May 10, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep59839>.

<sup>32</sup> Ofir Winter, "A Pivotal Player: Jordan and the New Syria," January 12, 2025, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep66544>.

<sup>33</sup> Andre Bank and Ronja Herrschner, "Syria Is Not Safe: A Look to Its Regions," August 2024, <https://doi.org/10.57671/gfme-24052>.

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Fakhry Ghafur, "Problems Of The Power Of Political Islam In Yemen, Syria And Algeria," *Jurnal Penelitian Politik* 12, no. 2 (October 25, 2015): 119–35, [www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/khazanah/15/04/30/](http://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/khazanah/15/04/30/).

<sup>35</sup> Carmit Valensi, Raz Zimmt, and Gallia Lindenstrauss, "The Rebel Offensive in Syria: Strategic Shift or Fleeting Incident?," December 4, 2024, <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.

Mohammed al-Bashir, appointed as interim prime minister, is a technocrat with a background in electrical engineering and project management. He previously led the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) in Idlib, a northwestern province that has served as an opposition stronghold since the Syrian uprising began in 2011. Al-Bashir is seen as a suitable figure to lead the interim government due to his experience in managing basic services in Idlib. However, his ambitions to retain power beyond three months remain questionable. Assad Al Achi, executive director of Baytna Syria, has warned that extending the interim government's mandate beyond three months could raise concerns.<sup>36</sup>

The interim cabinet consists of ministers who previously held positions in the SSG in Idlib. They will temporarily assume national ministerial roles. Some key ministers include Mohammed Abdul Rahman as Minister of Interior, Basel Abdul Aziz as Minister of Economy and Resources, and Shadi Muhammad al-Waisi as Minister of Justice. The composition of this cabinet reflects HTS's efforts to maintain control over the interim government while leveraging the expertise of technocrats who have proven capable of administering HTS-controlled territories.<sup>37</sup>

Syria's devastated economy poses another major challenge for the interim government. According to the World Bank, Syria's GDP ranks 129th out of 196 countries. HTS has managed to increase revenue in Idlib through taxation and control over humanitarian aid, but it remains unclear whether they have sufficient resources to support the national economy in the short to medium term. The possibility of sanctions relief could serve as an incentive for HTS to undertake political reforms, but this would require a strong commitment from HTS to share power with other stakeholders.<sup>38</sup>

International legitimacy is also a significant challenge for this interim government. HTS is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. Furthermore, Western-imposed economic sanctions on Syria complicate economic recovery efforts. To gain international support, HTS must demonstrate a commitment to power-sharing and political reform. Without international legitimacy, the interim government will struggle to secure the economic and political assistance needed for Syria's reconstruction.<sup>39</sup>

A key concern among experts is that HTS may attempt to consolidate power over all of Syria with an iron grip rather than establishing an inclusive and democratic government. Robin Yassin-Kassab suggests that HTS should propose a roadmap

---

<sup>36</sup> Rebecca Bryantr et al., "Chapter Title: Conclusion. Growing Up and Moving On," in *Lives in Limbo: Syrian Youth in Turkey* (Berghahn Books, 2024), 150–56, <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805395126>.

<sup>37</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Syria: Which Groups Have Been Fighting Each Other and Where?," December 11, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep65596>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibrahim Hamidi, "Source: Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development," *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 2024, no. 25 (2024): 10–19, <https://doi.org/10.2307/48761177>.

<sup>39</sup> Lars Hauch and Erwin Van Veen, "How the Aid Fund for Northern Syria Can Upgrade Humanitarian Aid and EU Geopolitical Engagement," April 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/>.

detailing when negotiations with other stakeholders will begin before forming a broader coalition. This plan should aim to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which calls for an 18-month transitional period. Without an inclusive process, the interim government risks losing support from both the Syrian people and the international community.<sup>40</sup>

Overall, the interim government under HTS and Mohammed al-Bashir faces significant challenges in stabilizing Syria, building a fair legal system, reviving the economy, and addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the post-war period. The success of this government will largely depend on its ability to share power with other stakeholders, engage civil society, and follow an inclusive transitional roadmap. If HTS fails to do so, the interim government risks losing credibility both domestically and internationally, and Syria's prolonged conflict may persist.<sup>41</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The victory of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) over Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria was influenced by several key factors, including the effective use of guerrilla warfare strategies, the weakening of Assad's military power due to Western economic sanctions, and logistical and military support from Türkiye to HTS. HTS successfully exploited the regime's vulnerabilities through well-organized asymmetric attacks, reliance on local support, and access to weaponry through illicit channels and external assistance. Additionally, the reduced support from Russia, Iran, and non-state actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen further accelerated Assad's downfall. HTS's victory also reflects a shift in the balance of power in the Middle East, where the opposition now has a greater opportunity to dominate Syria in the post-Assad era. However, this success does not automatically bring stability, as the ongoing socio-political challenges and the humanitarian crisis that has persisted for over a decade remain complex issues.

In the context of the interim government established by HTS, the primary challenges include stabilizing the country, building an inclusive governance system, and addressing the worsening humanitarian crisis. Although HTS has attempted to develop administrative and economic structures in the territories under its control, its international legitimacy remains in question due to historical ties with extremist groups. Western nations, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, remain cautious in responding to these political changes, despite indications of limited diplomatic engagement with HTS. Furthermore, the political transition envisioned by the international community through UN Security Council Resolution 2254 presents a significant challenge, particularly if HTS refuses to share power with other opposition

---

<sup>40</sup> Gumilar Irfanullah et al., "Al-Fariq Ad-Dini Asy-Syababi As-Suri: Kristalisasi Sejarah Panjang Kebijakan Keagamaan Suriah Dan Perannya Pasca Perang Sipil Suriah," *Jurnal Tamaddun: Jurnal Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Islam*, vol. 12, 2024, <https://www.syekhnuurjati.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/tamaddun/index>.

<sup>41</sup> Fatmawati Fatmawati, "Perubahan Politik Luar Negeri Rusia Terhadap Suriah Dalam Konflik Internal Suriah (2011–2017)," *JDP (Jurnal Dinamika Pemerintahan)* 3, no. 1 (February 3, 2020): 23–41, <https://doi.org/10.36341/jdp.v3i1.1192>.

factions. Therefore, while HTS's victory over Assad marks a significant milestone in the history of the Syrian conflict, the sustainability of its governance remains dependent on its ability to manage political transition and address the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

## REFERENCES

- Abdussamad, Zuchri. *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Edited by Patta Rapanna. Vol. 1. CV. Syakir Media Press, 2021.
- Al-Assad, Bashar. "Syria's President Speaks: A Conversation with Bashar al-Assad." *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2015): 58–65. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483482>.
- Anggun Abadi, Fany, Ali Muhammad, and Takdir Ali Mukti. "Konflik Bersenjata di Idlib: Pertarungan Antar-Kepentingan Nasional." *Jurnal ICMES* 6, no. 2 (December 2022): 166–81. <https://doi.org/Doi.org/10.35748/jurnalicmes.v6i2.130>.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. "Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) Actor Profile," June 26, 2023. <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.
- . "Regional Overview Middle East April 2024," May 10, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep59839>.
- . "Regional Overview Middle East May 2023," June 8, 2023. <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.
- . "Regional Overview Middle East May 2024," June 10, 2024. <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.
- . "Syria: Which Groups Have Been Fighting Each Other and Where?," December 11, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep65596>.
- Azizi, Hamidreza, and Julien Barnes-Dacey. "Beyond Proxies: Iran's Deeper Strategy In Syria And Lebanon," June 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep60706>.
- Bahaudin Mudore, Syarif, N Mahasiswa, Pps Uin, and Sunan Kali. "Dinamika Perang Suriah: Aktor Dan Kepentingan." *POLITEA: Jurnal Kajian Politik Islam* 2, no. 2 (December 2019): 67–92.
- Bank, Andre, and Ronja Herrschner. "Syria Is Not Safe: A Look to Its Regions," August 2024. <https://doi.org/10.57671/gfme-24052>.
- Bryantr, Rebecca, Maissam Nimer, Aysen Ustubici, and Amal Abdulla. "Chapter Title: Conclusion. Growing Up and Moving On." In *Lives in Limbo: Syrian Youth in Turkey*, 150–56. Berghahn Books, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781805395126>.
- Cafarella, Jennifer, and Jason Zhou. "Report Part Title: Russia, Iran, and Assad Report Title: RUSSIA'S DEAD-END DIPLOMACY IN SYRIA," November 2019. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep19570.5>.

- Chatty, Dawn. "Chapter Title: Refuge in Syria: Where Duty Outweighs Human Rights-Based Approaches." In *Urban Displacement*, edited by Are John Knudsen and Sarah A Tobin, 1st ed., 214–32. Berghahn Books, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.9891587.14>.
- Czarkowska, Ewa, and Magdalena Kumelska-Koniecko. "Iran-Russia-Türkiye Triangle." *Source: Insight Turkey* 25, no. 3 (2023): 199–222. <https://doi.org/10.2307/48744767>.
- Fakhry Ghafur, Muhammad. "Problems Of The Power Of Political Islam In Yemen, Syria And Algeria." *Jurnal Penelitian Politik* 12, no. 2 (October 25, 2015): 119–35. [www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/khazanah/15/04/30/](http://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/khazanah/15/04/30/).
- Fatmawati, Fatmawati. "Perubahan Politik Luar Negeri Rusia Terhadap Suriah Dalam Konflik Internal Suriah (2011–2017)." *JDP (Jurnal Dinamika Pemerintahan)* 3, no. 1 (February 3, 2020): 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.36341/jdp.v3i1.1192>.
- Hafidz, Danar, Adi Wardhana, Achmad Fauzi Kusmin, Muhammad Sajidin, Dewi Nuraliah, Nurfadilah Nasiruddin, and Rezky Ramadhan Antuli. "Keterlibatan Amerika Serikat Dalam Konflik Suriah Sebagai Konsekuensi Dari Politik Engtangling Alliance." *Arajang : Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Politik* 6, no. 1 (2023): 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.31605/arajang.v4i1>.
- Hamidi, Ibrahim. "Source: Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development." *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 2024, no. 25 (2024): 10–19. <https://doi.org/10.2307/48761177>.
- Hauch, Lars, and Erwin Van Veen. "How the Aid Fund for Northern Syria Can Upgrade Humanitarian Aid and EU Geopolitical Engagement," April 2024. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/>.
- International Crisis Group. "Report Part Title: Containing Transnational Jihadist Groups in Idlib Report Title: Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West," March 7, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47445.8>.
- . "Report Part Title: HTS versus ISIS Report Title: Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West," March 7, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47445.7>.
- . "Report Part Title: Idlib as Safe Haven and Holding Pen Report Title: Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West," March 7, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47445.5>.
- . "Report Part Title: Shades of Jihadism in Idlib Report Title: Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West," March 7, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47445.6>.
- . "Report Part Title: The HTS Conundrum Report Title: Silencing the Guns in Syria's Idlib," May 15, 2020. <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.

- Irdayanti, Irdayanti. "Kebijakan Penolakan Rusia Terhadap Strategi Barat Di Suriah." *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 37, no. 2 (2012): 154–62. <https://ejournal.uin-suska.ac.id/index.php/Anida/article/viewFile/323/306>.
- Irfanullah, Gumilar, Dewi Anggraeni, Uin K H Abdurrahman, and Wahid Pekalongan. "Al-Fariq Ad-Dini Asy-Syababi As-Suri: Kristalisasi Sejarah Panjang Kebijakan Keagamaan Suriah Dan Perannya Pasca Perang Sipil Suriah." *Jurnal Tamaddun: Jurnal Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Islam*. Vol. 12, 2024. <https://www.syekhnrjati.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/tamaddun/index>.
- Jahanbani, Nakissa, and Suzanne Weedon Levy. "Report Part Title: Background on Iranian Proxy Involvement in Syria Report Title: Iran Entangled: Report Subtitle: Iran and Hezbollah's Support to Proxies Operating in Syria," April 2022. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep40421.6>.
- Kusumastuti, Dita Arum. "Alasan Rusia Melibatkan Diri dalam Konflik Bersenjata Suriah Tahun 2011-2015." *Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 4 (2017): 143–50. <http://ejournal-s1.undip.ac.id/index.php/jihi>.
- Martínez, José Ciro, and Brent Eng. "Stifling Stateness: The Assad Regime's Campaign against Rebel Governance." *Security Dialogue* 49, no. 4 (August 1, 2018): 235–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618768622>.
- Masud, Muhammad. "Authoritarian Claims to Legitimacy: Syria's Education under the Regime of Bashar al-Assad." *Mediterranean Studies* 26, no. 1 (2018): 80–111. <https://doi.org/10.5325/mediterraneanstu.26.1.0080>.
- Menshawy, Mustafa. "Constructing State, Territory, and Sovereignty in the Syrian Conflict." *Politics* 39, no. 3 (August 1, 2019): 332–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395718770348>.
- Nasution, Abdul Fattah. *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Edited by Meyniar Albina. 1st ed. Vol. 1. Bandung: CV. Harfa Creative, 2023.
- Rabinovich, Itamar. "Iran's Quest for Regional Hegemony." *Source: Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, no. 26 (2024): 92–101. <https://doi.org/10.2307/48790022>.
- Rojhelati, Ziryan. "Post-Assad Syria: What the Fall of the Regime Means for the World," December 8, 2024. <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.
- Sarmini, Mohammed. "Syria's Political Stalemate." *Source: Insight Turkey* 26, no. 2 (2024): 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.2307/48778416>.
- Syuryansyah, Syuryansyah. "Intervensi Militer Amerika Serikat Dalam Konflik Suriah Tahun 2011." *TAZKIR: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-ilmu Sosial dan Keislaman* 9, no. 2 (December 2023): 206–22. <https://doi.org/10.24952/tazkir.v9i2.8851>.
- Turki, Prince H .R.H. Al Faisal. "Global Uncertainties (What Lies Ahead in the Middle East)." *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 2024, no. 26 (2024): 12–23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/48790015>.



Valensi, Carmit, Raz Zimmt, and Gallia Lindenstrauss. "The Rebel Offensive in Syria: Strategic Shift or Fleeting Incident?," December 4, 2024.  
<https://about.jstor.org/terms>.

Veen, Erwin Van, and Olivia Macharis. "Clingendael Institute Hope Springs Eternal: EU Options for Dealing with the Assad Regime," March 2020.  
<http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep24650>.

Winter, Ofir. "A Pivotal Player: Jordan and the New Syria," January 12, 2025.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep66544>.