

US, Israel launch mass bombing campaign against Syria after fall of Assad

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After Syrian President Bashar al-Assad stepped down Sunday and ordered a peaceful transfer of power to “rebel” forces led by the Al Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militia, US and Israeli warplanes started a massive bombing campaign against Syria.

Washington and its regional allies are launching the rape and carve-up of Syria. As the Israeli army attacks north towards Damascus, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) is attacking south, targeting Kurdish forces in northern Syria, and HTS is taking over government in areas previously controlled by Assad. Statements by Israeli officials make clear that the US-Israeli bombings aim to annihilate Syria’s capability to defend itself militarily.

Last night, Israeli military sources told the *Jerusalem Post* they had carried out 350 air strikes on “the majority of strategic weapons stockpiles within Syria.” US warplanes struck 75 more targets in Syria. Israeli targets included air defense systems, missile stockpiles, airfields, warplanes, tanks, and drone fleets and military production facilities in cities, including Damascus, Homs, Palmyra, Latakia and Tartus. Israel also reportedly sank Syria’s navy at anchor in Al-Bayda and Latakia.

US-Israeli strikes are meeting no opposition from Syrian air defenses. Israeli officials told the *Post* they had “extended operational freedom” in Syria.

Washington’s arming of Israel throughout its genocide in Gaza has proven to be part of a broader offensive to subjugate the entire region. This was most bluntly laid out in a press conference Monday by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Hailing the collapse of the Assad regime as “a new and dramatic chapter” in history, Netanyahu proclaimed: “We are changing the face of the Middle East.”

Israeli units have crossed the border into Syria to

seize parts of the Golan Heights and have launched an armored offensive north towards Damascus. Al Jazeera reported that Israeli tanks had reached only 25km from Damascus and were located close to the Damascus airport. While Israeli officials denied that their forces were 25km from Damascus, they are calling to set up a “sterile” buffer zone controlled by Israel between the Golan Heights and the Syrian capital.

Yesterday morning, during a visit to a naval base at Haifa, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz announced: “Together with the prime minister, I have instructed the [military] to establish a sterile defense zone free of weapons and terrorist threats in southern Syria, without a permanent Israeli presence.” Whether or not there was a permanent Israeli military presence, such a zone would leave the city of Damascus permanently at the mercy of Israeli attack.

While US and European media claim that Assad’s handover of power to HTS is bringing Syria a new democratic dawn, reports on the ground paint a different picture. The Sunni Islamist militia backed by the NATO powers and Israel are terrorizing the population—particularly among the Christian, Druze and Shia Alawite communities.

Cardinal Mario Zenari, the Catholic Church’s envoy to Syria, reported to Vatican News the situation in Aleppo after its capture by HTS: “In certain zones, it’s fairly calm, but that is suspect. There is a lot of fear, government offices have shut down, as has the army, which has disappeared. Armed groups are circulating and are promising not to attack the civilian population. Until now, it appears they have respected this promise, but still people are terrified and are shutting themselves in at home. ... Fear, terror and uncertainty rule.”

Videos are already circulating on social media showing HTS fighters executing Alawites in the street.

HTS, like the broader Al Qaeda networks and their backers in the Sunni Muslim oil sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf, is violently hostile to Shia Islam, Shia-majority Iran, and Alawites, the community to which Assad belongs. One video shows HTS forces executing what they claim are Alawites in Lattakia:

Another video shows an HTS fighter threatening and shooting two men he says are Alawites:

US officials are hailing HTS's victory as a devastating blow to Russia and Iran, which supported the Assad regime in a nearly 14-year war with NATO-backed Islamist militias initiated by Washington in 2011. Assad invited Iranian and then Russian forces to fight Al Qaeda-linked or Islamic State militias which had NATO backing but little popular support. Now, US officials are exultant that their support for Israel against Gaza and Hezbollah, and for Ukraine's war with Russia, weakened Russia and Iran, letting Washington crush Syria.

"Our approach has shifted the balance of power in the Middle East," outgoing US President Joe Biden said on Sunday. "For the first time ever, neither Russia nor Iran nor Hezbollah could defend this abhorrent regime in Syria. This is a direct result of the blows that Ukraine and Israel have delivered in their own self-defense with unflagging support of the US."

In reality, putting Al Qaeda forces in power in Syria is a monumentally reckless and criminal action that will inevitably have consequences unintended by Washington. It will not resolve the bloody proxy wars between Israel, Turkey, Iran and the major world powers for influence in Syria and the Middle East, but ultimately pave the way for their escalation.

In this context, Assad's order to his regime to hand power over to the Islamist "rebels" and the collapse of the Syrian army are bitter experience in the bankruptcy and treachery of the Arab bourgeoisie. The speed of the Syrian regime's collapse points not only to the deliberate stand-down by Assad but also the complicity of his backers in Moscow and Tehran.

The Kremlin, which has withdrawn its warships from its Syrian naval base at Tartus, has given no explanation for Assad's collapse. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov confirmed yesterday that Assad is in Moscow but refused to say why he had fled. Ryabkov said, "He is secured, and it shows that Russia acts as required in such an extraordinary

situation. I have no idea what is going on with him right now. It would be very wrong for me to elaborate on what happened and how it was resolved."

On Monday, however, Iran's semi-official Mehr news agency posted an article detailing growing conflicts between Tehran and Assad before the HTS offensive. By its account, Iranian military commanders traveled to Syria amid signs HTS was preparing an offensive in Turkish- and US-controlled areas of northern Syria. According to Mehr, "Iranian officials, after hours of consultation on developments in Syria, concluded that this time the conditions for Iran's military assistance to Bashar Assad were not laid."

The Assad regime's collapse after a 14-year war is any case a bitter lesson in the bankruptcy of a bourgeois nationalist strategy to oppose imperialism. Opposing the descent into barbarism requires the mobilization and international unification of opposition in the working class to imperialist war and genocide, based on a struggle for socialism.



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