

through formal and international diplomatic interactions, it does not conflict with building connections through various Sunni factions with the governing groups in Syria. Iran can use this approach to establish relationships and exchange messages with any ruling group in Syria, regardless of who they are, to lay the groundwork for reestablishing initial relations between the two sides. However, there may be misconceptions on both sides. For example, al-Jolani, on the one hand, speaks about expelling Iran from Syria, and on the other hand, declares readiness for strategic engagement with Iran. If informal channels of interaction with Syria's new ruling council can be established and a minimal level of mutual trust regarding the future relations and policies of both sides is achieved, then formal and diplomatic engagement can follow. Iran has previously collaborated with Sunni groups, whether in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood in Pal-

estine (i.e., Hamas), the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, or even Syria itself. I believe there are no obstacles to activating these channels, and we can use various strategies to enhance maneuverability for building trust and confidence with Syria's new ruling council.

How likely do you think it is for Syria's border with Jordan to become insecure?

I find it unlikely. Jordanians follow a policy of ensuring that the problems of neighboring countries do not spill over into Jordan. Jordan itself is a vulnerable community, and with around 700,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan — some estimates claim double that number — Jordan is affected not only politically and militarily but also socially by the situation in Syria. Moreover, due to Jordan's demographic composition, the country is highly susceptible to both internal as well as regional and international developments. Given the significant presence of individuals of Palestinian descent in Jordan,

ongoing developments can impact Jordan's situation. There is no doubt that the root cause of the current regional tensions is related to the Palestinian issue, and Jordanians strive to prevent additional tensions and conflicts from being imposed on them beyond what has already been imposed. I doubt that the Jordanian government would allow the borders between Jordan and Syria to be affected. In the initial hours following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government, we observed that on the same day, December 8, Jordan closed its borders with Syria. Overall, I find it unlikely that any incident will occur along the Jordan-Syria border. In my view, among Syria's neighbors, the most vulnerable borders belong to Turkey in northern Syria, where forces known as the Syrian National Army, supportive of Turkey, are stationed. To the east, the border with Iraq is also vulnerable, as internal conflicts in Syria could easily spill over into these two areas

more than into any other Syrian border.

Do you think that Shia armed groups in Syria, who were previously trained and organized under General Soleimani, are currently dormant but may become active against the new order in Syria in the future?

The forces that were trained in Syria as Basij or the Popular Mobilization Forces have apparently been integrated into the Syrian army and seem to have become irrelevant after the end of the conflicts in Syria. However, it is unlikely that these groups would take action. The root cause of the recent events in Syria largely stems from the Syrian army's unwillingness to resist insurgents. If we delve deeper into the factors behind the army's reluctance to resist, it might be primarily due to Syria's severe economic situation and the sanctions imposed by the US, which have crippled Syria's economy and led to extreme poverty among its citizens,

especially the Syrian army. Furthermore, one can point to Bashar al-Assad's lack of commitment to implementing structural and fundamental changes in the government and his inability to alter his approaches, which failed to endear the people to his regime. This has significantly damaged the Assad family's standing due to their reluctance to pursue necessary reforms and fundamental changes. Based on the available evidence, I doubt that the groups in question currently play any significant role in Syria's present situation, although future developments could lead to other arrangements. Overall, I find it unlikely that such groups can be relied upon. However, the reality is that Syria's future is so ambiguous and the conditions are so bleak and complex that making definitive predictions about the future is impossible.

What do you know about Israel's future plans for Syria? Now that there are no military forces in Syria, do you consider Isra-

el's threats regarding its ability and plan to strike Iran as psychological warfare or a serious threat?

Israel has completely destroyed one of the region's most powerful armies. Regardless of how much the new Syrian ruling council disagrees with the former government, Syria still needs an army and military equipment to defend its sovereignty. Israel is truly exploiting the current situation, and one could say that Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the president of Turkey, has paved the way for one of the largest Islamic countries to fall into a dire and defenseless state. However, I doubt that Israel's capacity to strike Iran through Syria has significantly increased as Israel has taken the same path before. It is true that Syrians had radar and tracking capabilities in Syrian airspace, but Israel always targeted these radars. If Israel wanted to carry out an attack on Iran, it could easily use Syrian airspace. I believe that the strikes Israel made on Syrian military equipment

and armaments were intended to neutralize Syria as a threat and eliminate Syria's military capabilities for their own security. Regarding Iran, I do not think these developments and Israel's access to Iran through Syria have much importance. Israel has previously utilized Syrian airspace, passing through southwestern Syria, and used Jordanian airspace. Accessing Iraqi airspace to strike Iran was not particularly complicated or difficult, either. Now, with the Syrian army dismantled, it might seem that a significant transformation has occurred regarding Israel's ability to attack on Iran. In reality, however, Israel has just eliminated a potential threat nearby. In other words, regardless of who controls Syria in the future, Syria cannot quickly rebuild its military capabilities and obtain the means to counter Israel if it seeks to reclaim occupied territories.

The interview first appeared in the Farsi-language newspaper Ham Mihan.

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OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

Why did Assad fall?

Before answering the reason for the rapid fall of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, we have to touch on how states theoretically survive. Every state needs four basic elements to survive, which are: nation, state, territory, and history.

Nation

Every state relies on a mass of human beings or people. These people live together and also have a shared identity or characteristic or, at least, a common goal in mind. There is no doubt that states are in the hands of the people and the power of any government depends on their level of satisfaction. Of course, nationality itself is a modern political term that defines the overall identity of every human being in the world. It shows who belongs where and how everyone describes themselves with it. The extremely common nature of the feeling of belonging to a territory and a state indicates how deep the concept of nationalities runs among human societies. In the case of Syria, its Kurds and Turkmens were part of the same society alongside Arabs, but their basic rights were ignored by the Assad government. We see that the name of the country was the Syrian Arab Republic, and the name of their national army was the Syrian Arab Army. These show that the Syrian nation failed to include their ethnic minorities.

State

The second element is the state. Its sovereignty includes the entire territory of that country. Of course, there are two types of states or governments. In the West or developed countries, there are con-

ventional pluralistic governments that are built with the participation of all social entities such as both minorities and majorities, whether they are differentiated by religion, language, or anything else. Another form of state belongs to undeveloped countries. Syria was one of them. There was no type of participation in the creation of its sovereignty as Syria's power was controlled by oligarchs or some minorities. Let us not forget that the government or state has the exclusive right to use power. The Baath Party, which controlled the army and the state, ruled the country without allowing the participation

of ordinary people or the elites of society.

Territory

Every country has its own borders that define its territory. After the 1967 war, part of Syria was occupied by Israel, and even after the Arab Spring in 2011, Syria lacked territorial integrity due to the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous government by the SDF forces in the country's northeast. For this reason, the government was not at all useful in

its territory and lacked the necessary efficiency.

History

The most important element that makes states stronger is history. History can create a common sense of existence between people. States can also use history as an element to build great people. Syria has a great history as a land of pluralities. In the past, Syria was the homeland of some pivotal civilizations. Due to its geopolitical location, it has connected various cultures, thoughts, and religions throughout history, which has enriched its cultural



Two men stand in a cemetery near the site of a suspected mass grave in Najha, a southern suburb of Damascus, on December 14, 2024. Thousands of bodies are thought to be buried here, but excavations and identification procedures have not started yet.
● LORENZO TUGNOLI/THE WASHINGTON POST

heritage in return. However, these lessons were ignored by the Assad government as it chose to define Syria in a different way that weakened the national identity of Syrians. In fact, I think, more than anything, the denial of history led to the denial of Assad's Syria. Of the four elements need-

ed to build a strong modern state or government, Syria had all four, but due to wrong policies and external pressures — such as numerous Israeli attacks and Western sanctions — it could never become a developed and strong country. The accumulation of popular demands, espe-

cially in the economic and welfare arenas, and the government's inability to respond to them ultimately fanned the flames of a war against the Assad government in 2011, and 14 years later, the Syrian government was overthrown by armed rebel groups.

A little girl waves Syria's new flag in eastern Aleppo.
● SKY NEWS

