

Q The HTS Islamist Rebels have toppled Bashar al Assad regime in Syria. Evaluate the reasons & implications of Syria condition.

I INTRODUCTION

The historic toppling down of Bashar al Assad's regime on 8th December, 2024 following long periods of civil dissent and war marks an important event in Middle East ongoing crisis. Assad's regime had maintained a massively strong hold on Syria through its authoritarian and dictatorial policies, curbing opposition. However, this frustration culminated into unifying rebel groups like HTS (Hayat Tahrir Al Shams) and SNA (Syrian National Army), which launched a coordinated and calculated offensives against Assad's regime. However, to say that rebel uprising accounted to Syria's fall will be an underestimation; there was a complex interplay of factors that contributed as explained in the following answer.

II OVERVIEW OF THE EVENTS LEADING TO ASSAD'S FALL

2000 : Bashar al Assad came into power



2011 : Inspired by Arab Spring, civil uprising and protests against Assad regime

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- 2011-15 : A violent crackdown of peaceful protests by Assad's government, furthering the civil war
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- 2015 : Russian and Iranian intervention in Syria bolstered Assad regime fight against rebels
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- 2018-22 : Assad regains the areas it had lost in civil war. However, his government is faced by international condemnations due to use of chemical weapons
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- 2024 : Assad's regime collapses.

III REASONS BEHIND ASSAD'S FALL

The reasons behind Assad's fall are:

a) ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

Syria's GDP contracted by 60%, its rupee devalued by 90%, leading to hyperinflation. This made Assad's regime highly unpopular among masses

"Assad presiding over an economic implosion of historic proportions alienated even his staunchest supporters"

THE ECONOMIST,
2024

DATE: / /

b) Illegal CAPTAGON TRADE

Due to massive corruption and internal poverty, Syria's economy depended on the trade of illegal drug Captagon, tarnishing Assad regime.

"Syria has filled the Gulf with Captagon pills"

(A KSA Analyst)

c) WANING RUSSIAN SUPPORT

Russia, already occupied in its war in Ukraine, reduced its logistic and military support for Assad's regime.

"Assad's inability to stabilize Syria Russia is no longer a burden Russia can bear."

**Sergei Lavrov
(Russian foreign
Minister)**

d) REDUCED IRANIAN SUPPORT

Due to domestic unrest, international sanctions and its resources being exhausted in Israel-Hamas conflict, Iran reduced its military and militias deployment by 50%.

e) STRONG AND UNIFIED REBELLION

Rebel groups like HTS and SNA unified, launched coordinated offensives using advanced weaponry like drones. US and KSA's military and financial support bolstered HTS against Assad.

f) TURKEY-BACKED SNA TO COUNTER KURDS

Turkey, threatened by Kurds who want to establish Kurdistan in North-eastern part of Syria, supported SNA (Syrian National Army). This was because Kurds were being supported by Assad's regime hence Turkey supported SNA against Assad.

g) CIVIL DISSENT AMONG LOYALISTS

The Shiite Alawite - loyalists to Assad's regime were even disillusioned due to their high casualties as they were greater in Syrian Armed forces. The major defection was when General Hassan Turkmani along with others left the forces.

h) ASSAD'S BIASED POLICIES

Assad, belonging from Shiite sect,

favoured largely his Shiite Alawite group by giving them key positions in administration. This caused a lot of dissent and resentment against Assad.

- 1) KSA-BACKED ANTI-ASSAD REBELS
KSA backed anti-Assad rebel as it viewed Assad as an ally of Iran. KSA gave financial support to HTS to replace Assad and prevent Iran's influence in Syria.

IV IMPLICATIONS OF SYRIA'S FALL

The implications of Assad's fall are listed:

a) REFUGEE CRISIS:

The most pertinent implication is are the 16.7 Million refugees displaced in this war, causing humanitarian crisis.

b) SECURITY VACUUM

After Iran and Russia's withdrawal from Syria, a security vacuum is established which can be exploited by extremist factions like ISIS.

c) ISRAEL'S OVERARCHING INFLUENCE
Israel has occupied the Golan heights and the demilitarized UN Buffer zone. US always supports Israel's claim over this region to pre-empt any future attacks against Israel.

d) TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT BY HTS
HTS has established a transitional government in Syria which will be operational till March, 2025. It has also taken areas previously controlled by US-led SDF including some oil fields.

e) WEAKENING OF AXIS OF RESISTANCE
Syria acted as a gateway for Iran to support its axis of resistance including Hezbollah, Houthis, Hamas etc. This axis of resistance is now weakened.

f) TURKEY'S EXPANSION OF BUFFERZONE:
A. STRATEGY TO CONTROL KURDS
Turkey is expanding the buffer zone along Turkey-Syria border to control Kurds and resettle the Syrian refugees. Currently, it was catering to 3 Million refugees.

V CONCLUSION

The fall of Assad's regime stemmed from domestic factors like extreme poverty, biased policies, illegal captagon crisis and external factors involving key players like Iran, US, Israel, Turkey, RSA etc.

This has far-reaching implications for the region from creating a security vacuum, giving US and Israel an opportunity to expand their influence in the region, cornering Russia and Iran.