

Syrian Rebels Declare End of Assad Family Rule as They Capture Damascus

The Syrian Prime Minister also spoke to the nation by video, addressing the opposition.

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People celebrate with rebel fighters at Umayyad Square in Damascus, Syria, on Dec. 8, 2024. Louai Beshara/AFP via Getty Images



By Melanie Sun

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Syrian insurgents, led by terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), announced on Sunday that Damascus is “now free of Assad.”

“We declare the city of Damascus free from the tyrant Bashar al-Assad,” read a post on Telegram. “After 50 years of oppression under Baath rule, and 13 years of crimes and tyranny and (forced) displacement ... we announce today the end of this dark period and the start of a new era for Syria.”



Meanwhile, the rebel forces also said that President Bashar al-Assad had fled Damascus.

Acknowledging the dramatic and quick fall of the 54-year-old Assad regime, Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi Jalali said in a video statement that Assad’s Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party was ready to “extend its hand” to the opposition and hand over its functions to a transitional government.

“I am in my house and I have not left, and this is because of my belonging to this country,” Jalali said.

Jalali did not address the rumors that Assad had boarded a plane, destination unknown. Two senior army officers told Reuters that Assad had flown out of Damascus on Sunday.

Jalali promised to go to work as normal in the morning and cooperate with any leadership chosen by the Syrian people. He was seen being escorted by rebels out of his home on Sunday morning.

Earlier, the prime minister called on Syrian citizens not to deface public property. Videos across social media showed statues of former president Hafez al-Assad, father of Bashar al-Assad, being brought

down by Syrian residents across the country—an action that would have just days ago been met with execution.

Posters of deceased IRGC's Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and Hassan Nasrallah were also seen being removed by Syrian residents at the Iranian Embassy compound in Damascus.

Israel's Ministry of Defense also confirmed reports of the collapse of the Assad regime overnight in Syria.

On Sunday, rebels also took control of the state television broadcasting headquarters in Damascus.

“Damascus has been liberated and the tyrant Bashar al-Assad has been overthrown, and oppressed prisoners in regime prisons have been released,” a spokesperson, surrounded by around a dozen other rebels, read from a statement to viewers.

“We ask people and fighters to protect all property in Free Syria ... long live Syria free for all Syrians of all sects.”

According to reports, thousands of Syrians detained by Assad in the notorious Saydnaya Military Prison north of Damascus and a military prison in southern Homs City were also released. Many were political prisoners held since the deadly civil war that was triggered by the Arab Spring uprising in 2011.

Hundreds of thousands of people have since been killed and half the country's prewar population of 23 million displaced, while several foreign powers were drawn by the chaos.



Syrian and Lebanese people celebrate the fall of the Syrian regime, in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, on Dec. 8, 2024. Ibrahim Chalhouh/AFP via Getty Images

According to Reuters, the Syrian General Staff has notified officers of Assad's Syrian Arab Army (SAA) across the country that the Assad regime has fallen, ordering those remaining in Damascus to surrender.

Hundreds of SAA officers with their tanks surrendered to the Iraqi Army and the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led socialist rebel group Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) at the Al-Qa'im Border Crossing leading to western Iraq.

Assad continues to enjoy support from prominent Iranian-backed Iraqi militia leader, Badr Organization Secretary General Hadi al Ameri.

Shock Offensive

Insurgents, led by the HTS terror group, took control of Damascus after launching a shock offensive starting on Nov. 27, when they captured Syria's largest city Aleppo in the north and the central city of Hama, Syria's fourth-largest city.

The HTS has its origins in al-Qaeda and is considered a terrorist organization by the United States and the United Nations, although the group has said in recent years that it has cut ties with al-Qaeda and made efforts to remake its image, leading many hardliners loyal to al-Qaeda to defect.

HTS leader Abu Mohammed al-Golani told CNN in an exclusive interview on Dec. 5 from Syria that the aim of the offensive is to overthrow Assad's government. But **concerns** remain for freedom of religion and belief under HTS after years of sectarian violence in the region.

Forces of the Assad regime in Syria were left to fend for themselves in recent months, with allies Russia and Iran distracted by other conflicts, and Iranian proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon weakened by its war with Israel.

Before entering and capturing Damascus, rebel forces seized control of Homs, Syria's third-largest city and a strategic national crossroads when the SAA withdrew. The fall of Homs cut off Assad's forces in Damascus from their stronghold on the coast, where Russia also has a naval and air base.



Local residents cheer as they gather on a street in the Damascus suburb of Jaramana on Dec. 8, 2024. Louai Beshara/AFP via Getty Images

President Joe Biden's National Security Council spokesman Sean Savett said in a statement on social media, "President Biden and his team are closely monitoring the extraordinary events in Syria and staying in constant touch with regional partners."

U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Dec. 6 that U.S. policy remains in favor of a "political solution to the conflict," in line with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254.

President-elect Donald Trump posted on social media on Saturday in his first comments on the developments in Syria.

"The United States should have nothing to do with it," he [wrote](#) in all-caps in a Dec. 7 post on Truth Social. "This is not our fight. Let it play out. Do not get involved!"

Opposition forces have not been in the Syrian capital since 2018, when Assad's troops recaptured the city following a yearslong siege.

Fireworks, car horns, and gunfire celebrating the fall of the Assad regime were heard across Syria and in neighboring countries on Sunday.

People in the capital rushed to stock up on supplies, as leadership of the country is now uncertain and there could be further fighting if a political process fails.

The governments of the United States, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom in a joint statement on Dec. 1 urged "de-escalation by all parties" in Syria to work toward a diplomatic settlement in line with U.N. resolution 2254.

Security Council Resolution 2254 outlines a framework for a nationwide cease-fire, transitional government, new constitution, elections within 18 months, and addressing the humanitarian crisis left by the civil war.

Tom Ozimek and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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