

Assad's fall is Israel's triumph

By Conrad Black

The sudden collapse of the Assad government in Syria after 53 years of frequently brutal oppression and many years of civil war is a triumph for Israel, a severe defeat for Iran, and a strenuous slap in the face for Russia. Almost the whole world was refreshed when U.S. President-elect Donald Trump posted on social media, "This is not our fight" and with respect to the possible expulsion of Russia from Syria he added: "There was



An image of ousted Syrian President Bashar Assad covers the facade of a provincial government office in the aftermath of the opposition's takeover of Hama, Syria, Dec. 6, 2024. PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/OMAR ALBAM

no reason for Russia to be there in the first place." It illustrates once again that it is unwise to become too dogmatic about categorizing people as terrorists too morally

odious to treat seriously as legitimate representatives of anybody.

President Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, famously said to the mujahidin fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the late 1970s "Your cause is right and God is on your side!" as the U.S. armed them with

sophisticated weapons including anti-helicopter rockets that proved very effective. Fifteen years later the United States led a large international coalition in deposing the same people as the government of Afghanistan and 15 years after that President Trump was so heavily criticized for inviting what are now the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan to the presidential country home at Camp David that he rescheduled the meeting to an urban location. The same people or their direct successors were the beneficiaries of scores of billions of dollars of military hardware abandoned behind in Afghanistan when President Biden abruptly withdrew from that country three years ago.

The apparent leader of the victorious faction that drove Bashar Assad out of Syria and occupied Damascus last weekend, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani (Also known as Ahmed al-Sharaa) in the last week has been celebrated on the U.S. State Department's website as a blazer-clad ostensibly westernized Syrian political leader even as he was portrayed elsewhere on the same site as hirsute and wearing fatigues as a terrorist for whose death or capture the U.S. government would pay \$10 million. (This discrepancy has now been corrected.) The former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was only admitted to the United States on a United Nations visa and was expelled from the Lincoln Center (by then-mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani) as an international outlaw, but a few years later was welcomed to the White House. The treatment of these designated terrorists replicates the devolution of relations between states.

The Japanese government led by Emperor Hirohito surrendered unconditionally to the supreme Allied commanders, General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz ending the Second World War in September 1945; less than eight years later, then-U.S. Vice-President Richard Nixon was urging the same Emperor Hirohito to re-arm Japan as part of a containment strategy directed towards former ally China. General Dwight Eisenhower received the unconditional surrender of Germany in the West in the

spring of 1945; 10 years later President Eisenhower sponsored the admission of West Germany into NATO over British and French objections, to help contain the former ally, the USSR.

With rare exceptions for people whose conduct has been so abominably wicked that they become permanent moral outcasts, like Hitler and Pol Pot, what is important is not the identity of leading national or factional personalities but the correlation and current ambitions of strategic forces. In order to delay the reconciliation of Israel and Saudi Arabia, Iran likely ordered its terrorist proxy Hamas in Gaza to commit a barbarous act of war against Israel in October 2023. Israel has now almost completely exterminated Hamas as a terrorist force. The international anti-Israeli demonstrations largely funded and otherwise encouraged by Iran did not deter Israel and Iran caused its terrorist proxies in Lebanon and Syria, Hezbollah, to escalate its rocket attacks against Israel.

Israel has responded so efficiently against Hezbollah, that its forces propping up the Iranian and Russian protégé Assad regime in Damascus were unable to continue as Assad's chief protector. Hezbollah withdrew in tatters from Syria, Assad and his family fled to Moscow, the Iranian Embassy in Damascus was sacked and the Iranians are being pushed out of Syria. Iran was so unwise as to engage in direct aerial warfare with Israel, in which Iran was unable to hit a single target, while Israel has smashed Iran's aerial defenses and left that country a sitting duck to future missile attack. Both President Trump in his debate with President Biden that ended Biden's career and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in his address to the U.S. Congress last summer stated that they would not tolerate Iran becoming a nuclear power. On this subject, both men should be taken at their word.

In the destruction of its principal terrorist proxies and its air defences and its expulsion from Syria, and in the imminent elimination, either voluntarily or by military interdiction,

of its nuclear military capacity, Iran will have suffered an overwhelming strategic defeat; that might induce the collapse of the ayatollahs' oppressive regime in that country, as the defeat of the Greek attempt to annex Cyprus in 1974 and the Argentinian attempt to conquer the Falklands in 1981 brought the collapse of the military regimes in those countries. But it is worth remembering that the mullahs would never have seized power in Iran and turned that country from a great Western ally into a very dangerous threat to world peace if President Carter had not, as Brzezinski put it, thrown out the Shah of Iran "like a dead mouse." Hamas would not have governed in Gaza nor Hezbollah have become entrenched in Lebanon if President George W. Bush had not succumbed to the insane and ahistorical notion that democratic elections always produce pro-Democratic governments which would always be guardians of the peace. We might also wish to remember that the victorious powers in the First World War established or resurrected five countries: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The first disintegrated, the next three blew up, and Lebanon is a failed state.

In geostrategy as in military strategy, the wise course is to maneuver around fixed points. In the Middle East these are Turkey, Iran, Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. All the West wants and needs in the rest of the Middle East is the avoidance of a terrorist breeding ground as Afghanistan became, and the absence of a continuous humanitarian tragedy like Cambodia or Rwanda once were. The chances of avoiding both of those outcomes in Syria appear to be good, and for this, as for the well-earned pasting administered to Iran, as for much else, we have chiefly the Jewish State to thank. Once again, the world has left it to the Jews to do the dirty work. The anti-Israel protesters be damned.

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