

What will Turkey do with Syria's Kurdish population? - opinion

Although Erdogan might deplore the effect on Turkey's domestic political scene, he may yet see an autonomous Kurdish region recognized within a new Syrian constitution.



WOMEN TAKE PART in a rally demanding that the new Islamist rulers in Damascus respect women's rights and condemn Turkish-backed military campaigns in Kurdish-led regions of the north, in the northeastern city of Qamishli, Syria, last month. If any ethnic group deserves justice, it is the Kurds. (photo credit: orhan qereman/reuters)

Extraits :

What is to become of the Kurds, by far Syria's largest minority, with some two million people? (...)

TURKEY, A long-time supporter of the rebel movement that overthrew the dictatorial regime of Bashar al-Assad – the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham – now has strong political influence with its leader, Abu Mohammed al-Julani. Erdogan no doubt hopes to use it to control his perennial Kurdish problem by continuing to occupy the swaths of Syria that he has overrun. But despite his dominant political position in post-Assad Syria, it is far from certain that he will be able to do so.

Julani's intentions regarding minorities in general, and the Kurds in particular, are still very unclear. Ever since the fall of the Assad regime Julani has presented a moderate face to the world, consistently declaring that he intends to be as inclusive as possible in establishing Syria's new governance.

In short, he may not endorse the continued occupation by Turkey of large areas of sovereign Syria. Moreover, he has said several times that Kurds are "part of the Syrian homeland" while assuring the nation that "there will be no injustice."

THOUSANDS of years ago, a proud and independent nation lived and thrived in its own land in the heart of the Middle East. Subject to many foreign invasions, this ethnically-distinct people refused to be integrated with their various conquerors and retained their own culture.

At the start of World War I, their country was a small part of the Ottoman Empire. In shaping the future Middle East after the war, the Allied powers, especially Britain, promised to act as guarantors of this people's freedom. That promise was subsequently broken.

Although this sounds similar to the story of the Jewish people, it is in fact the broad outline of the long, convoluted, and unresolved history of the Kurds.

The nearly 35 million Kurds are the largest stateless nation in the world. Historically, they inhabited a distinct geographical area flanked by mountain ranges, once referred to as Kurdistan. No such location is depicted on current maps, for the old Kurdistan now falls within the sovereign space of four separate states: Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

Most Kurds – some 25 million – live within Turkey's borders. There are 2 million in Syria, while within Iraq the 5 million Kurds have developed a near autonomous state. Nearly 7 million Kurds are trapped inside Iran's extremist Shi'ite regime.

The Treaty of Sevres, marking the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, stipulated a referendum would decide the issue of the Kurdistan homeland. That referendum never took place, and the Sevres treaty itself was rendered null and void in 1922 by the establishment of the Turkish Republic under Kemal Ataturk.

The Treaty of Lausanne followed, giving control of the then-Kurdistan homeland to the new republic. With a stroke of the colonial pen, over 20 million Kurds were declared Turkish.

Kurdish autonomy achieved its greatest recognition in the 2005 Iraqi constitution, which established the Kurdistan region as a federal entity within Iraq, with its own local government and legal framework.

The Kurds in Syria will be well aware of that. (...)

In September 2017, Syria's then-foreign minister stated that Damascus would consider granting Kurds greater autonomy once ISIS was defeated. Events overtook these aspirations, and nothing of the sort materialized. But they might provide Julani with a template for a future accommodation with the Kurds within the constitution of a unified and restored Syrian state.

Although Erdogan might deplore the effect on Turkey's domestic political scene, he may yet see an autonomous Kurdish region recognized within a new Syrian constitution – and even, eventually, some form of alliance between that and the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

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<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-837218>

The Jerusalem Post, 14 janvier, article payant

Sudan: The real genocide

Whether you call it an obsession or antisemitism, social convenience or just ignorance, the international silence on the Arab genocide in Sudan adds up to the same thing: an egregious moral outrage.



MASALIT WOMEN gather under a tree to share stories about the deaths of their children and other family members, mostly male, at a refugee camp in Adre, Chad, in 2023. The women had fled to Chad as a result of an ethnically targeted massacre in Sudan's West Darfur state. (photo credit: EL TAYEB SIDDIG/REUTERS)

The writer is founding director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies and author of more than 20 books about Jewish history and the Holocaust.

Full article here: <https://kinzler.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/14-anvier.pdf>

Link: <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-837219>

The Wall Street Journal, 13 janvier, article payant

Hamas Has Another Sinwar. And He's Rebuilding.

Under Yahya Sinwar's younger brother, Hamas is recruiting new fighters in Gaza, drawing Israel into a war of attrition



A billboard tribute in San'a, Yemen, to Hamas's Yahya Sinwar soon after the Israeli military announced he was killed.
PHOTO: YAHYA ARHAB/SHUTTERSTOCK

Extrails :

Hamas suffered a severe blow last fall when Israel killed Yahya Sinwar, the group's [leader and strategist](#) behind the Oct. 7 attacks.

But now the U.S.-designated terrorist group has another Sinwar in charge, Yahya's younger brother Mohammed, and he is working to build the militant group back up.

Israel's 15-month campaign has reduced Hamas's [Gaza Strip redoubt to rubble](#), killed thousands of its fighters and much of its leadership, and cut off the border crossings it might use to rearm. The well-trained and well-armed cadres who surged into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, are badly weakened.

But the violence has also created a new generation of willing recruits and littered Gaza with unexploded ordnance that Hamas fighters can refashion into improvised bombs. The militant group is using those tools to continue to inflict pain. The Israeli military in the past week has reported 10 deaths among soldiers in the area of Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza. Hamas also has fired some 20 rockets at Israel in the past two weeks.

The recruitment drive and persistent fighting under Sinwar pose a fresh challenge for Israel. (...)

"We are in a situation where the pace at which Hamas is rebuilding itself is higher than the pace that the IDF is eradicating them," said Amir Avivi, a retired Israeli brigadier general, referring to the Israel Defense Forces. "Mohammed Sinwar is managing everything." (...)

Mohammed Sinwar is believed to be about 50 and has long been considered close to his older brother, who was more than 10 years his senior. Like Yahya Sinwar, he joined Hamas at an early age and was considered close to the head of the movement's armed wing, Mohammed Deif.

Unlike his brother, who spent more than two [decades in an Israeli prison](#), Mohammed hasn't spent a significant amount of time in Israeli jail and is less understood by Israel's security establishment. He has operated largely behind the scenes, according to Arab officials, earning him the nickname "Shadow."

“We are working hard to find him,” said a senior Israeli official from the Southern Command, which runs the battle in Gaza. (...)

Before the war, Israel believed that Hamas had up to 30,000 fighters arranged into 24 battalions in a structure that loosely resembled a state military. The Israeli military now says it has destroyed that organized structure and has killed about 17,000 fighters, and detained thousands of others.

Hamas, which Israeli and Arab officials say still controls large areas of the Gaza Strip, hasn't said how many fighters it has lost. The number of new Hamas recruits also remains unclear. (...)

The new fighters, while inexperienced, are launching hit-and-run attacks in small cells of just a few fighters. They are using guns and antitank weapons that require little military training.

Hamas is recruiting the new fighters with promises of more food, aid and medical care for young men and their families, according to Arab officials, who say the militants sometimes steal humanitarian aid or co-opt civilians to work with the militant group. (...)

Hamas militants are also targeting funerals and prayer gatherings to find aggrieved young Palestinians inclined to sign up, these officials said.

The recruiting drive is extending a war that was triggered by the Hamas-led attacks on Oct. 7, 2023, which left around 1,200 people dead and about 250 taken hostage. About 400 Israeli soldiers have died fighting in Gaza. More than 46,000 people have been killed in Gaza during the war, according to Palestinian health authorities, who don't say how many were combatants. (...)

https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hamas-has-another-sinwar-and-hes-rebuilding-0a16031d?mod=hp_lead_pos3

The Jerusalem Post, 12 janvier, article payant

Blinken's parting words: No hostage deal? Blame Hamas, not Netanyahu - analysis

Blinken's comments in the interview Saturday were not all that predictable when nearly 20 minutes of the 50-minute conversation turned toward Israel, Hamas, and Gaza.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken attends an interview, in Brussels, Belgium December 4, 2024.
(photo credit: REUTERS/Johanna Geron)

Extraits :

The way [US Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#) began his swan-song interview with *The New York Times* some three weeks before leaving office was predictable: The [Biden administration](#) he served left America better placed around the world than when it came into office. (...)

But his comments in the interview Saturday were not all that predictable when nearly 20 minutes of the 50-minute conversation turned toward Israel, Hamas, and Gaza.

Here are some key takeaways: (...)

Blinken, who has been closely involved in the negotiations, probably has a pretty good idea. And here is what he said when asked by the interviewer whether Netanyahu blocked a ceasefire deal in July that would have led to the hostages' release.

“No, that’s not accurate,” he said. “What we’ve seen time and again is Hamas not concluding a deal that it should have concluded.”

Blinken said there have been times, such as when Israel killed Hamas head Yahya Sinwar, that Israeli actions have made getting to a conclusion of a deal more difficult, but unlike Golan, he clearly placed the onus not on Netanyahu but on Hamas. (...)

Blinken said there were two main impediments to Hamas reaching an agreement to free the hostages. One impediment, he said, was when there was public daylight between the United States and Israel and the perception that pressure on Israel was growing: “We’ve seen it: Hamas has pulled back from agreeing to a ceasefire and the release of hostages.” (...)

The other main impediment to Hamas making a deal, Blinken said, was their belief and hope that there would be a much wider conflict: “that Hezbollah would attack Israel, that Iran would attack Israel, that other actors

would attack Israel, and that Israel would have its hands full, and Hamas could continue what it was doing.” (...)

Blinken, again to his credit, flagged this, though not specifically referring to her.

“Look, one of the things that I found a little astounding throughout is that for all of the understandable criticism of the way Israel has conducted itself in Gaza, you hear virtually nothing from anyone since October 7 about Hamas,” he said. “Why there hasn’t been a unanimous chorus around the world for Hamas to put down its weapons, to give up the hostages, to surrender – I don’t know what the answer is to that.

“Israel, on various occasions, has offered safe passage to Hamas’s leadership and fighters out of Gaza. Where is the world? Where is the world saying, Yeah, do that! End this! Stop the suffering of people that you brought on!

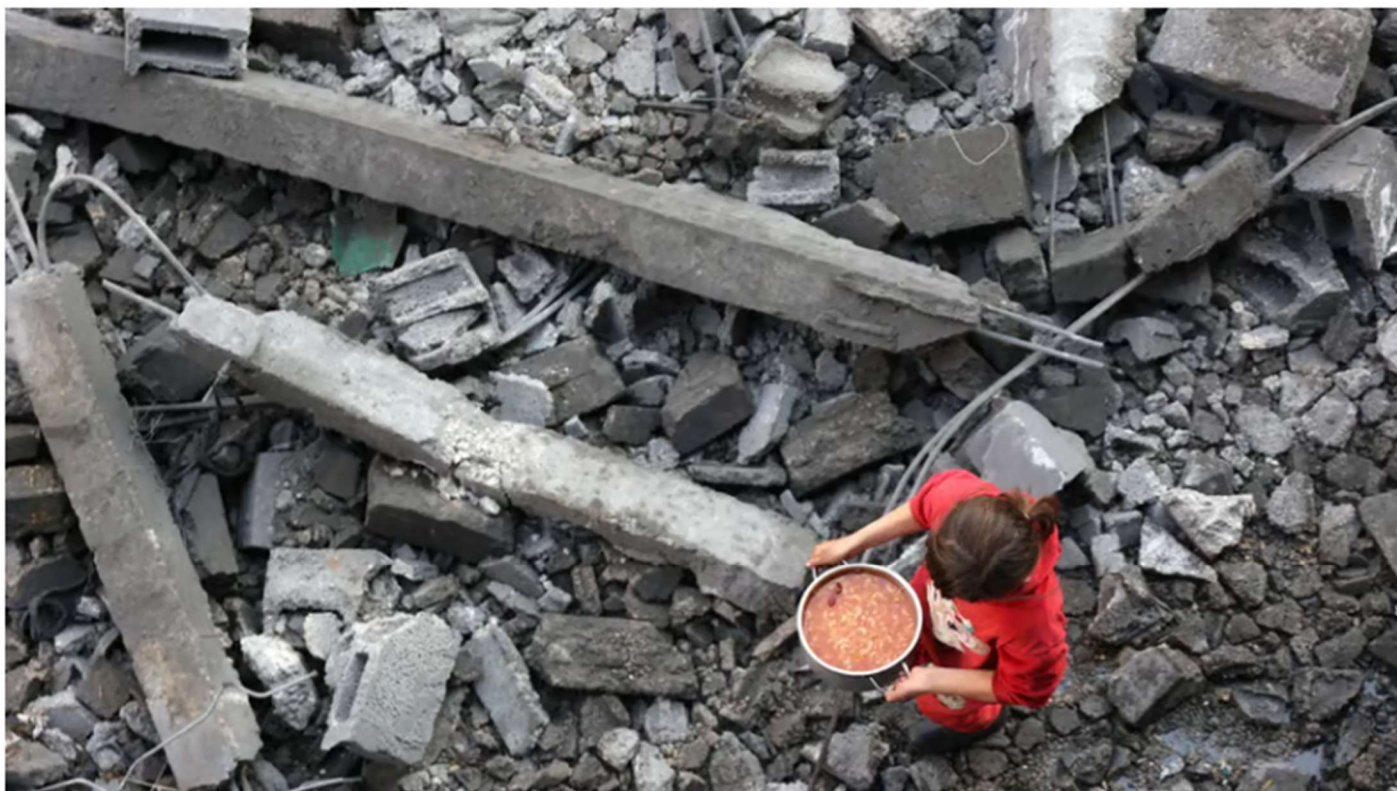
“Now, again, that doesn’t absolve Israel of its actions in conducting the war. But I do have to question how it is that we haven’t seen a greater sustained condemnation and pressure on Hamas to stop what it started and to end the suffering of people that it initiated.” (...)

<https://www.jpost.com/international/article-836195>

The Economist, 12 janvier, article payant

All talk and no truce : From inside an obliterated Gaza, gunfire not a ceasefire

In north Gaza the IDF is now facing “a bitter guerrilla war”



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

Extraits :

Once home to nearly 200,000 residents, [Jabalia](#), the main town in northern Gaza, is a deserted wasteland of destroyed buildings and churned-up mud. But the soldiers of the Israel Defence Forces (idf), now on their third offensive there since [the war in Gaza](#) began in October 2023, have no idea when they are leaving.

“We still have a mission here,” insists Major Omer, commander of an infantry company, who accompanied *The Economist* on a brief visit to Jabalia. “There are still Hamas snipers hiding, carrying out ambushes. It is now the

most basic and bitter guerrilla war.” The young soldiers and officers may still believe in the mission, but their former commander, Yoav Gallant, the defence minister [who was fired in November](#), has admitted in private that the idf no longer has a military [purpose in Gaza](#). Occasionally, the major’s men encounter civilians, whom they force towards the seething mass of misery of around 1.5m displaced Gazans huddled in southern Gaza. The operation in Jabalia, which is in its fourth month, could drag on indefinitely. Or it could end in days, if a ceasefire being negotiated in Cairo and Doha is agreed.

Only a few thousand civilians remain in Gaza’s northern quarter. Some right-wing Israeli politicians and generals want to prevent those who lived there ever returning. Others insist that Israel’s military presence is temporary, until a deal is reached with Hamas, the Islamists behind the October 7th attacks. But that remains elusive.

The odds of a ceasefire have little to do with the situation in Gaza, where at least 45,000 people, well over half of them civilians, have been killed in the war. Policy is driven neither by Israel’s military objectives—or lack thereof—nor the immense suffering of most Gazans, now entering a second winter in a cramped “humanitarian zone” where several babies have died of hypothermia. The main considerations of both sides are political.

The basics of the notional deal supposedly on the table have not changed since May, when they were first laid out: Israel would withdraw fully from Gaza, in stages, in return for the release of 98 Israeli hostages, around half of whom are assumed to be alive. But in public Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel’s prime minister, insists Israel will fight on until it achieves “total victory” over Hamas, whatever that means. Hamas, despite its shattered state, is showing little flexibility, refusing to release hostages before Israel guarantees a withdrawal.

Mr Netanyahu is under pressure from his far-right allies, who talk of building settlements in Gaza. Ending the war could bring down his government and bring on the public reckoning he has been evading. Hamas leaders are anxious to retain some control over the rubble of Gaza and keep some hostages as bargaining chips.

America’s secretary of state, Antony Blinken, insisted on January 8th that “we’re very close to a ceasefire and hostage agreement.” But those close to the talks believe a deal to end the war and free all the hostages is extremely unlikely before Donald Trump takes power. It is more likely that a smaller number of hostages will be released in return for a truce of a few weeks. For now, even a short respite for Gaza seems too much to hope for. ■

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2025/01/08/from-inside-an-obliterated-gaza-gunfire-not-a-ceasefire>

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 12 janvier, article payant

Syrien: Die Finanzquellen der neuen Machthaber

Die Rebellen haben ihre Arme wie eine Krake über ihre Gebiete ausgestreckt. Ein verzweigtes Netzwerk verschaffte ihnen das Geld, das sie brauchten. Ein Modell für ein neues Syrien ist dies nicht, erklärt die Konfliktforscherin.



Extraits :

Anfang Dezember eroberten syrische Rebellengruppen unter Führung der islamistischen Hai'at Tahrir al-Scham (HTS), was so viel wie Befreiungsfront für die Levante oder Syrien bedeutet, in weniger als zwei Wochen Damaskus. Sie beendeten damit einen fast vierzehnjährigen Bürgerkrieg. Seitdem regiert in Syrien eine von der HTS dominierte Übergangsregierung. HTS wurde 2011 als syrischer Ableger des „Islamischen Staats“ (IS) im Irak gegründet, damals noch unter dem Namen Dschabhat al-Nusra (Unterstützungsfront). In den ersten Jahren zählte die Gruppe einige Tausend Kämpfer, heute sind es Zehntausende. Wie kam es zu diesem rasanten Aufstieg? Eine zentrale Rolle spielte das komplexe Finanzierungsmodell der Gruppe.

Um zu verstehen, wie die Finanzierung und damit die Macht von HTS funktioniert, muss man an den Anfang zurückgehen. Zunächst wurde HTS vom IS im Irak und von Al-Qaida finanziert, als die beiden dschihadistischen Netzwerke noch zusammengehörten. Doch schon bald eignete sich die Gruppe lokale Ressourcen an, indem sie Waffen, Munition und Treibstoffvorräte des Regimes erbeutete. Schon 2013 kontrollierte die HTS zusammen mit anderen Oppositionsgruppen weite Teile Nordsyriens. Die Gruppe konzentrierte sich auf die Kontrolle lebenswichtiger und gewinnbringender Ressourcen wie Getreidesilos, Wasserkraftwerke und Elektrizitätswerke. Sie eroberte auch Ölquellen in Deir ez-Zor im Osten des Landes, bevor diese im Sommer 2014 vom IS eingenommen wurden. Auch Entführungen zur Erpressung von Lösegeld gehörten zu ihrem Portfolio. Die Gruppe legte daher großen Wert auf Eigenfinanzierung und Diversifizierung der Einnahmequellen. Dazu zählten auch ausländische Quellen.

Hier sind vor allem wohlhabende Salafisten aus den Golfstaaten zu nennen, die in den Jahren 2012 und 2013 radikal-islamistische Gruppen in Syrien regelrecht mit Geld überschwemmten. Vor allem in Kuwait ansässige religiös-politische Organisationen und Netzwerke wie die Umma-Partei spielten eine wichtige Rolle bei der Finanzierung salafistischer Gruppen wie Ahrar al-Scham. Es ist davon auszugehen, dass auch Gelder an HTS und IS geflossen sind. (...)

Seit 2017 hat sich die finanzielle Lage der Gruppe grundlegend verändert. Bis Mitte 2017 war Ahrar al-Scham – Hauptpartner und Rivale von HTS – die zentrale Macht im Nordwesten Syriens und kontrollierte die wichtigsten wirtschaftlichen Ressourcen wie den Grenzübergang Bab al-Hawa zur Türkei. Dieser erwirtschaftete durch den Import von Waren schätzungsweise bis zu 4 Millionen US-Dollar pro Monat. Mitte 2017 eroberte HTS Bab al-Hawa und übernahm sukzessive die Kontrolle über Idlib und die umliegenden Gebiete. Darüber hinaus kontrollierte HTS weitere Grenzübergänge im Landesinneren, auch zwischen Rebellengebieten und vom Regime kontrollierten Gebieten, die ebenfalls Millionenbeträge durch Gebühren und Zölle einbrachten.

Die Gruppe monopolisierte auch die Verwaltung, die zuvor in den Händen verschiedener Rebellengruppen lag. Zu diesem Zweck gründete HTS Ende 2017 die Syrische Rettungsregierung. Diese war nominell unabhängig, doch hinter den Kulissen zog HTS weiterhin die Fäden.

Durch die enge Verflechtung mit dieser Regierung erschloss sich die Gruppe neue Finanzierungsquellen: Sie erhob Steuern und Abgaben auf alle Dinge des Lebens und monopolisierte die Wirtschaft. So kontrollierte HTS über mit ihr verbundene Unternehmen und Händler die Verteilung von Lebensmitteln und anderen Gütern wie Gas und Treibstoff. Auch Internet- und Kommunikationsdienste wurden von einer Behörde monopolisiert, die durch ungünstige Konditionen für Internetanbieter hohe Gewinne machte. Der Stromsektor wurde von einem mit HTS verbundenen Unternehmen kontrolliert. Die gesamte Finanzierung lief über die Cham-Bank in der Stadt Idlib, die aus der HTS eigenen Hawala-Gesellschaft hervorgegangen ist.

Seit 2018 dominierte Wadat Petroleum, ein eng mit HTS verbundenes Unternehmen, den Treibstoffmarkt in Idlib. Dieses Unternehmen war lange das einzige, das eine Lizenz für den Import und Vertrieb von Öl und Gas nach und in Idlib besaß und damit auch die Treibstoffpreise kontrollierte. Zivilisten, aber auch Krankenhäuser und Bäckereien litten unter den oft hohen Preisen. Im Jahr 2022 löste sich das Unternehmen aufgrund von Vorwürfen und Krisen auf und übertrug die Verantwortung für die Treibstoffversorgung der Generaldirektion für Erdölderivate, die ihrerseits die Importlizenz an Unternehmen vergab, die sich im Besitz von HTS nahestehenden Personen befanden.

Die Zivilbevölkerung wurde auch selbst zur Kasse gebeten, zum Beispiel durch eine Straßengebühr, die von Menschen entrichtet werden musste, die durch von der HTS kontrollierte Gebiete fuhren. Gebühren wurden auch für Autos, Motorräder, Straßenreinigung, Müllabfuhr, Strom und Wasser erhoben. Außerdem konfiszierte die Gruppe landwirtschaftliche Flächen und Immobilien, die zuvor in staatlichem oder privatem Besitz waren und nun an Flüchtlinge und Bauern vermietet oder verpachtet wurden. (...)

Kurzum: Alles, was in der Provinz Idlib geht, steht und fährt, wurde besteuert, aus allen Notwendigkeiten des Lebens hat die Gruppe Profit geschlagen. Ein Großteil der Gelder floss in militärische Ausrüstung und Ausbildung, aber auch in den Bau von Straßen und die Versorgung der Zivilbevölkerung mit Gütern und Dienstleistungen. Die Diversifizierung der Einnahmequellen stärkte die Resilienz der Gruppe und trug schließlich dazu bei, dass sie zu der wichtigen Rebellengruppe wurde, die die entscheidende Militäroperation Ende November 2024 anführte.

Es ist zu erwarten, dass viele dieser Unternehmen und Geschäftsleute nun in ganz Syrien aktiv werden und sich weiter bereichern. Obwohl der Wirtschaftsminister der Übergangsregierung eine Liberalisierung der Wirtschaft anstrebt, ist dies angesichts der Geschichte von HTS schwer vorstellbar. Ihr komplexes Finanzierungsmodell hat sich für die Gruppe bewährt, es kann aber kein Wirtschaftsmodell für das neue Syrien werden.

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<https://www.faz.net/pro/weltwirtschaft/weltwissen/syrien-wie-sich-hts-finanziert-110215906.html>

The Economist, 12 janvier, article payant

No easy fix : The West is making a muddle of its Syria sanctions

Outsiders should be much clearer about how and when they will be lifted



Where does my help come from? PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

Extraits :

FOR many Syrians, the past month has been bewildering. They have watched one Western envoy after another rush to Damascus to celebrate the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the longtime dictator deposed in December. Yet as they depart, those same envoys insist it is far too early to ease the web of sanctions on Syria's economy. America and Europe seem eager to meet Syria's new rulers, but not to help them. (...) if Syria is to recover from a decade of civil war, it will need more than piecemeal exemptions. So far, though, that is all that many Western policymakers seem prepared to offer. (...)

Proponents of a take-it-slow approach believe that America and Europe should use sanctions as leverage to push for an inclusive government in Syria. Lifting them would not forfeit that leverage, though: they can always be reimposed. And while inclusion is a laudable goal, it is a squishy one. Mr Assad often appointed women and religious minorities to his cabinet. He also gassed his own people. If Western policymakers want the new government to be inclusive, they will need to spell out exactly what that means. (...)

Europe may move faster. On January 3rd the French and German foreign ministers met Ahmad al-Sharaa, Syria's de facto ruler, in Damascus. Annalena Baerbock, the German foreign minister, said it was premature to lift sanctions. In private, though, German diplomats are circulating a proposal which would do just that.

The eu would probably start by dismantling sanctions on a few key sectors, such as Syrian banks and the national airline. Reconnecting banks could make it easier for Syrians in Europe to send remittances, a lifeline for many inside the country. The bloc is expected to discuss the German proposal at a meeting of foreign ministers later this month.

There will be a separate debate around Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Islamist rebel group which led the offensive that toppled Mr Assad. America, Britain and the eu all label it a terrorist organisation, as does the United Nations. Some of these prohibitions date back more than a decade, to a time when hts was still known as Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria. It has since ditched the jihadists and moderated its views.

But unwinding the sanctions will be tricky. The secretary of state could revoke America's designation, but that is politically fraught. The EU's 27 members would all have to agree. Delisting the group at the UN could take more than a year. Even if HTS dissolves itself, as Mr Sharaa has promised to do, lifting sanctions on it will not be straightforward.

Western governments should make all this a priority. A six-month exemption might allow donors to send power barges, but investors will need stronger assurances before they promise to build new power plants. If sanctions remain in place, Syria could remain a charity case. ■

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2025/01/09/the-west-is-making-a-muddle-of-its-syria-sanctions>

The Wall Street Journal, 11 janvier, article payant

Annexing Parts of Gaza Is the Way to Unleash ‘Hell’ on Hamas

The terror group doesn’t care about Palestinian lives. Losing territory would be a humiliation.

Extraits :

President-elect Trump delivered an unequivocal message to Hamas in a Dec. 2 Truth Social post: “If the hostages are not released prior to January 20, 2025, the date that I proudly assume Office as President of the United States, there will be ALL HELL TO PAY in the Middle East, and for those in charge who perpetrated these atrocities against Humanity. Those responsible will be hit harder than anybody has been hit in the long and storied History of the United States of America.”



Palestinians run through rubble in Jabalia in the Gaza Strip, May 30, 2024. PHOTO: OMAR AL-QATTAA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

With only a week and a half until Mr. Trump’s inauguration, the question arises: How can hell be unleashed on hell?

I recently visited Jabalia, north of Gaza City, which before the current war was one of the Middle East’s most densely populated areas and a source of great pride for Hamas. Today, Jabalia is in ruin. Most residents heeded the Israeli military’s repeated orders to evacuate. Packs of starving dogs roam the desolate streets.

The Israel Defense Forces unleashed hell on Gaza. Most of the strip has been decimated by Israeli bombs. But the population still isn't rising up against Hamas, the regime that brought this catastrophe upon them. What good would another barrage of explosives do? There's no benefit to turning tens of thousands more Gazans into refugees. Gaza's refugee population is already bloated, as refugee status extends not only to those who lost their homes in Israel's 1948 War of Independence, but also to their descendants.

Hamas sees the suffering of the Gazan people as a benefit, not a cost. Terrorists who locate their headquarters in hospitals, schools and kindergartens do so not only to protect themselves from possible attacks but also to exploit the inevitable killing of civilians for propaganda: More killing equals more world empathy. Hamas also steals humanitarian aid from its own citizens and then sells food at exorbitantly high prices to a starving population. Further civilian suffering won't change Hamas's lack of care for Gazans' welfare.

Mr. Trump should take two steps. The more urgent is to stop Hamas's systemic seizure of the humanitarian aid that Israel sends to Gaza. (...) Mr. Trump should honor Mr. Blinken's promise and call for the transfer of aid only by IDF soldiers or private entities with the ability to ward off Hamas terrorists. Without the ability to steal aid and exploit its starving population, Hamas would be at great risk of collapsing within weeks.

Another strategic move would be to allow Israel to annex parts of the Gaza Strip. In the Middle East, nothing hurts more than loss of territory. In the Palestinian dialect of Arabic, *sumud*, or "steadfastness," is closely associated with the concept of attachment to the land. Territory is the most precious and stable currency in the region. The worst outcome of a war meant to conquer Israel would be Israel's ending with more territory than when it began. (...)

Today, the world demands that Israel withdraw to its original borders after every conflict it wins. Is it surprising that aggressors repeatedly try to destroy the Jewish state, knowing that they face little to no threat of loss of territory? This status quo must change.

There is nothing sacred about Gaza's borders, which were created in 1949 to mark the line of separation between Egypt and Israel. Gaza was under Egypt's control until 1967, and it was controlled by Israel until 2005, when the Jewish state unilaterally withdrew.

There is a clear security justification for shrinking Gaza's borders: Annexing a 1-mile perimeter around Gaza would create a buffer zone between Hamas-governed territory and the Israeli communities that Hamas brutally attacked on Oct. 7. The zone should also include a 3-mile stretch along the northern border of Gaza, which was the site of Israeli settlements before Israel withdrew and Hamas converted them into terrorist bases.

The borders of the Middle East were drawn arbitrarily in the 20th century by European diplomats representing colonial powers. This contributed to nearly a century of bloody violence, as artificial borders can't protect nations from conflicting tribes. Bashar al-Assad's fall in Syria is only the most recent example of tribal turmoil in a Middle Eastern country.

During Mr. Trump's first term, he signaled his openness to rethinking the Middle East by recognizing both Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights and some form of Israeli sovereignty over Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria. Mr. Biden, for his part, tacitly permitted the IDF to create a buffer zone in portions of southern Syria. Mr. Trump can extend this approach to Gaza to signal that terrorism doesn't pay. This map change could represent a significant advancement toward peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Segal is chief political commentator on Israel's Channel 12 News and author of "The Story of Israeli Politics."

https://www.wsj.com/opinion/annexing-parts-of-gaza-is-the-way-to-unleash-hell-on-hamas-8e6f4748?mod=hp_opin_pos_5#cxrecs_s

«Un intrus dans la vie politique», Joseph Aoun, le président qui incarne une nouvelle donne géopolitique au Liban

PORTRAIT - Ce chrétien maronite originaire du sud du pays, favori des États-Unis et de la France, prend la tête d'un pays meurtri par la guerre avec Israël et la crise économique.



Le commandant en chef de l'armée libanaise, devenu président du Liban. *Mohamed Azakir / REUTERS*

Extraits :

[Joseph Aoun](#) est le cinquième commandant en chef de l'armée à accéder à la présidence du Liban. Il aura besoin de ses épaules solides et de sa carrure de combattant, pour exercer ses nouvelles fonctions dans un pays en lambeaux, épuisé par une [guerre meurtrière avec Israël](#) et ruiné par plus de cinq ans de crise économique et financière. Après plus de deux ans de vacance à la tête de l'État, il succède à un homonyme, [un autre général Aoun, Michel](#) (sans lien de parenté), qui l'avait nommé commandant en chef en 2017. Ce n'est pas seulement parce qu'elle met fin à une longue crise institutionnelle que l'élection de ce militaire de carrière a réveillé parmi les Libanais l'envie de renouer avec l'espoir. Son discours d'investiture suggère une volonté de rupture avec « *les guerres, les attentats, les ingérences, les attaques, les convoitises et la mauvaise gestion de nos crises* ».

Le sexagénaire, dont les orientations politiques sont peu connues jusqu'ici, a inscrit son mandat de six ans dans une perspective de renouveau en se présentant comme le « *premier président élu après le centenaire de la création de l'État du Grand Liban, en plein bouleversement du Moyen-Orient* ».

L'élection par le Parlement de ce [chrétien maronite](#) - une communauté à laquelle est réservée la fonction - est le résultat d'un forcing diplomatique américano-franco-saoudien. (...)

Sa première mission est de mettre en œuvre l'accord [de cessez-le-feu conclu le 27 novembre dernier](#). Le texte prévoit le retrait israélien du sud du Liban et le déploiement de l'armée libanaise en lieu et place des combattants du Hezbollah qui doivent livrer leurs armes dans la zone située au sud du fleuve Litani.(...)

S'ils n'ont pas applaudi comme leurs pairs à ce discours, les députés du Hezbollah et leurs alliés ont voté en connaissance de cause pour le nouveau président qui marque le passage du Liban à une sphère d'influence pro-occidentale.

« *L'équation a changé. La fonction militaire du Hezbollah au service de l'Iran est terminée. Cela qui ne signifie pas que son rôle politique au Liban l'est aussi. Bien qu'il entretienne de très bonnes relations avec les Occidentaux, Joseph Aoun a toujours pris soin de ne pas susciter l'adversité du Hezbollah* », explique Johny Mounayer, un analyste politique réputé proche de l'ancien commandant en chef. (...)

Est-ce que cette réputation de « *propreté* » suffira à impulser un changement dans la pratique du pouvoir à Beyrouth ? La question est d'autant plus ouverte que le régime politique libanais n'est plus le système présidentiel qui avait permis au général Fouad Chehab de moderniser l'État dans les années 1960. (...)

« *Joseph Aoun est un intrus dans la vie politique* », explique Fadi Assaf, fondateur du cabinet Middle-East Strategic Perspective. « *Même si ses années à la tête de l'armée l'ont préparé à affronter les intrigues, il est loin d'être immunisé face à une classe politique aguerrie dont il a eu un avant-goût le jour même de son élection : la séance électorale a été pratiquement interrompue entre les deux tours de scrutin pour tenter d'engager avec lui des négociations sur une série de dossiers clés.* » (...)

Face à des défis gigantesques, c'est la personnalité du chef militaire originaire du sud du Liban qui est mise en avant par certains de ceux qui l'ont côtoyé. « *C'est un homme humble, à l'écoute, avec la volonté de servir plutôt que de se mettre en avant. Il sait s'entourer et inspirer confiance* », témoigne le président de l'Ordre de Malte au Liban, Marwan Sehnaoui, qui collabore avec l'armée depuis des années sur de nombreux projets humanitaires.

Face à l'effondrement du pouvoir d'achat de la solde des militaires après la crise de 2019, la façon dont le commandant en chef de l'armée a maintenu la cohésion de la troupe, notamment grâce à des aides financières étrangères, montre « *sa capacité à apporter des solutions concrètes, à anticiper, et préserver la confiance dans l'institution* », estime Lamia Moubayed Bissat, présidente de l'Institut des Finances Basil Fleihan, en charge de plusieurs programmes de formation des officiers. Et d'ajouter : « *Joseph Aoun est un véritable leader. Il incarne la réussite des institutions là où les politiques ont échoué de manière désastreuse.* »

<https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/un-intrus-dans-la-vie-politique-joseph-aoun-incarne-une-nouvelle-donnee-geopolitique-au-liban-20250110>

Le Monde, 9 janvier, article payant

Syrie : « On est face à un mouvement qui s'est déradicalisé par le haut »

Grand spécialiste de la Syrie, le chercheur Patrick Haenni analyse la nature du nouveau pouvoir issu du groupe Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham et les défis stratégiques et sécuritaires auxquels vont être confrontées les nouvelles autorités de Damas.



De gauche à droite : Ali Keda, conseiller d'Ahmed Al-Charaa, et son ministre des affaires étrangères Assad Hassan Al-Chibani à Damas, en Syrie, le 23 décembre 2024. AMMAR AWAD / REUTERS

Extraits :

Chercheur associé à l'Institut universitaire européen de Florence, Patrick Haenni étudie le groupe Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham (HTC) et parcourt l'ensemble des territoires des oppositions syriennes depuis une décennie. Il s'est régulièrement entretenu avec la direction du mouvement, dont son chef, Ahmed Al-Charaa, dans son ancien fief d'Idlib, puis à Damas après la chute du dictateur Bachar Al-Assad, le 8 décembre 2024. Il livre ici son analyse de la stratégie actuelle du mouvement.

Comment Ahmed Al-Charaa capitalise-t-il sur sa victoire face au régime d'Al-Assad ?

Cette victoire a impliqué de nombreuses factions et près de 30 000 hommes. C'est le fruit d'un effort collectif mais, in fine, le résultat du coup de poker calculé du nouvel homme fort de Damas. Elle s'est faite en dépit de tous : de ceux qui, à Idlib, auraient préféré s'appuyer sur l'expérience de la gouvernance locale pour négocier une lente normalisation avec la communauté internationale ; de l'Occident et de l'ONU, qui maintenaient HTC sur la liste des organisations terroristes et prêchaient le cessez-le-feu ; des Etats de la région, qui normalisaient leurs relations avec Al-Assad et redoutaient un nouvel aventurisme militaire dans une région en pleine ébullition depuis la guerre à Gaza.

Cette victoire, le mouvement ne la doit donc qu'à lui-même. Maître de cette dernière séquence de la révolution, le nouveau pouvoir en place à Damas entend bien rester aux commandes de la transition qui s'amorce. D'où ce chassé-croisé entre pressions extérieures pour la placer sous le parapluie onusien d'un côté, et renforcement d'un nationalisme sourcilieux de l'autre. (...)

La prise de pouvoir du 8 décembre 2024 n'est en effet pas le simple prolongement du mouvement contestataire de 2011. Il y a d'abord une mutation sociologique en profondeur. En 2011, la révolution ratissait large et la participation des élites urbaines était significative. Aujourd'hui, l'équipe dirigeante est une force militaire profondément brassée par douze années de guerre, par de nouveaux recrutements, et elle se caractérise, en partie au moins, par un certain provincialisme. C'est une révolution qui s'appuie sur les petites classes

moyennes, comme on le voit au regard des profils de certains nouveaux gouverneurs : ni idéologues radicaux ni représentants des élites urbaines cosmopolites, mais technocrates islamistes conservateurs.

Deuxièmement, la prise de pouvoir change de modalités. En 2011-2012, les « printemps arabes » ont été le fait de mobilisations de masse dans une situation de passivité des appareils militaires. Ici, c'est un *blitzkrieg* qui a réussi pour des raisons liées à la tactique militaire, à une diplomatie de guerre efficace et à la destruction continue de la bureaucratie étatique et militaire opérée par un régime ayant souvent fait le pari des milices et de la privatisation sauvage.

Troisièmement, l'idéologie portée par l'équipe dirigeante actuelle est plus conservatrice et islamique que ne pouvait l'être la révolution en 2011-2012. Héritage de la radicalité des débuts autant que produit d'un lobbyisme conservateur, un populisme islamiste travaille au corps les élites intermédiaires et la base sociale du mouvement. Cela a parfois contraint la direction de HTC à recentrer le curseur idéologique et à tempérer les velléités conservatrices de la base de son gouvernement sur des enjeux comme les manuels scolaires à Damas ou la moralité publique à Idlib.

On est donc face à un mouvement qui s'est déradicalisé par le haut, ce qui crée un constant rapport de force entre la direction et une partie de ses cadres. Cette déradicalisation n'est pas adossée à un quelconque aggiornamento idéologique modéré ; elle est plutôt le fruit d'un pari thermidorien des chefs ayant fait, à Idlib, le choix de s'appuyer sur les majorités silencieuses contre les minorités radicales agissantes. Le mouvement s'aligne sur un *mainstream* sunnite conservateur et révolutionnaire dominant son environnement à Idlib mais encore bien éloigné du centrisme dans lequel se reconnaissent les élites urbaines, à Damas ou Alep, et plus encore les « minorités ».

En raison de son rôle dans la prise du pouvoir et de la satisfaction populaire provoquée par la chute de Bachar Al-Assad, il se voit comme détenteur d'une légitimité révolutionnaire à remettre aux autorités qui émaneront du processus de transition. Lequel devra redéfinir la nature de l'Etat, la Constitution et se conclure par une échéance électorale.

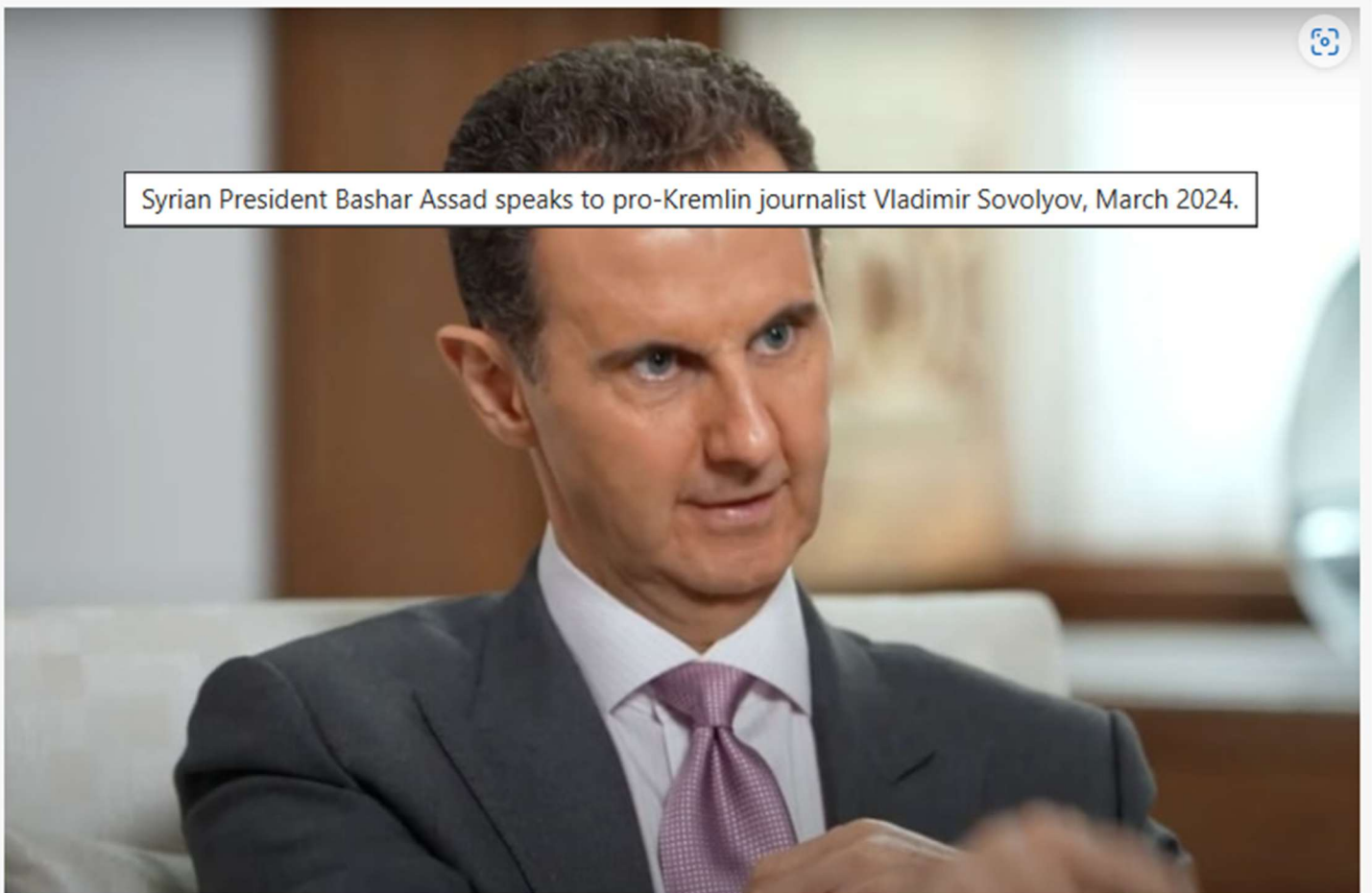
Les modalités de la transition ne sont pas, à ce jour, clairement définies. (...)

https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2025/01/08/syrie-on-est-face-a-un-mouvement-qui-s-est-deradicalise-par-le-haut_6488489_3210.html

The Jerusalem Post, 27 décembre, article payant

Selective moral outrage causes double standard across Middle East

If social justice warriors truly care about justice, they must broaden their focus beyond selective targets and confront the realities of regimes like Assad's. Anything less is moral bankruptcy.



Syrian President Bashar Assad speaks to pro-Kremlin journalist Vladimir Sovolyov, March 2024.
(photo credit: screenshot)

Extractions:

Let's talk about selective moral outrage – that peculiar phenomenon where the world's loudest advocates for justice are suddenly silent when confronted with atrocities that don't fit their preferred narrative.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the global response to the horrors of [Bashar al-Assad](#)'s regime in Syria. As the details of Assad's atrocities come to light, it becomes painfully clear how indifferent the so-called social justice warriors on American college campuses are to the mass killings of innocent people – so long as those atrocities cannot be blamed on Jews.

While the suffering of Palestinians in [Gaza](#) is a legitimate concern, anyone with a moral compass can discern the difference between a war initiated by a terror organization and crimes against humanity like those we are now uncovering in Syria.

Yet, there are zero college protests, zero arrest warrants for Assad, and zero street campaigns against him. The absence of outrage over the industrialized violence and mass killings perpetrated by Assad is striking. The question is: Why?

We have long known that Assad used chemical weapons on his own people, but now that his regime has been toppled, we are learning even more about the horrors of Sednaya Prison. (...)

Beyond Sednaya, a vast network of mass graves, torture sites, and execution chambers dots Syria's landscape, each telling its own story of systematic violence. Near Damascus alone, mass graves like Al-Qutayfah and Najha reveal the scale of the slaughter – tens of thousands of bodies buried in attempts to erase evidence of genocide. Over 150,000 Syrians remain missing, with 66 unverified mass graves suspected across the country.

This isn't random violence; it's a calculated, industrialized apparatus of repression and extermination. (...)

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in March 2011, over 500,000 people have been killed, the overwhelming majority of whom were civilians targeted by the Syrian regime.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights reports that, as of July 2020, at least 3,196 Palestinian refugees were killed by regime forces. Other estimates place the number of Palestinian refugees who have died due to war-related incidents in Syria at over 4,022. A UNRWA spokesperson highlighted the dire situation, stating, “Palestinians are among those worst affected by the Syrian conflict.”

Yet, the pro-Hamas rallies and encampments express no outrage on behalf of Syrian Palestinians. (...)

Jewish communities worldwide have become all too accustomed to the double standards and antisemitism driving many “social justice movements.” But the selective moral outrage and indifference to the atrocities in Syria reveal a new level of hypocrisy. The disproportionate focus on criticizing Israel, while ignoring Assad’s crimes – even when his regime murdered Palestinians – lays bare the antisemitism at the core of these movements. (...)

If social justice warriors truly care about justice, they must broaden their focus beyond selective targets and confront the brutal realities of regimes like Assad’s. Anything less is moral bankruptcy.

The writer is the co-founder and CEO of Social Lite Creative, a digital marketing firm that specializes in geopolitics.

<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-834884>

The Wall Street Journal, 26 décembre, article payant

The Obama Era Is Finally History in the Middle East

The threat from Iran is greatly diminished, but Turkey poses new challenges.



An Israeli military vehicle parked between Syria and the Golan Heights, Dec. 23. PHOTO: RONEN ZVULUN/REUTERS

Extraits:

The consequences of Bashar al-Assad's fall from power in Syria will reverberate for years across the Middle East, but one great fact is already clear. The Obama era in Middle Eastern history has, thankfully, come to an end.

Barack Obama's misguided diplomacy made Iran the de facto master of Syria and Lebanon and massively reinforced Russian power and prestige. Almost every significant authority in the region loathed Mr. Obama's Middle East order. Israelis detested what they saw as appeasement of a genocidal regime in Tehran. Sunni Arabs abhorred the "Shia Crescent" from Iran to Lebanon that Mr. Obama's vision was ready to accept. The Gulf Arabs feared Mr. Obama's Middle East so much that they brushed Palestinian objections aside to form strategic partnerships with Israel. Turkey, which saw the American president deliver Syria and Lebanon on a silver platter to Iran even as he supported Kurdish groups aligned with domestic terrorists, was equally horrified by the world Mr. Obama tried to make.

Turkey and Israel, with a boost from Ukraine, succeeded in killing Mr. Obama's dream. Benjamin Netanyahu, using American weapons but wisely ignoring Team Biden's muddled strategic advice, broke Iran's military power through a succession of attacks on Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan steadily helped anti-Assad forces with roots in extremist Sunni Arab organizations like al Qaeda survive and thrive until the Assad regime was vulnerable. With Iranian power tamed and Russia preoccupied in Ukraine, Assad was exposed, and the Turkish-backed Arab forces moved in for the kill. (...)

What's dawning in Syria today is a new era of regional and religious competition. Already many Arabs, remembering the centuries of Turkish hegemony under the Ottoman Empire, fear that Turkey will replace Iran as the chief threat to the independence of the Arab world. That's good news for the strategic partnerships between Israel and some of the Gulf states. Mr. Erdogan's Turkey is if anything an even greater potential threat to the security of the Gulf states than Iran managed to become. By linking himself to the cause of Sunni Islamist "democracy," Mr. Erdogan can hope to develop a more potent ideological threat to the Gulf monarchies than Iran's Shia model ever became.

Both Israel and the Gulf Arabs have reason to worry about Mr. Erdogan's Palestinian policy. Turkey's alignment with the Muslim Brotherhood is a powerful political weapon for Ankara in any competition with the Gulf states for the position as the leaders of the Sunni world. Supporting the Palestinians can help Turkey polish its political image on the Arab street.

Syria's future is up for grabs. (...)


History, however, isn't ending in the Middle East just yet. With Iran sinking and Turkey rising, our ability to manage an increasingly complex relationship with Ankara will become more difficult and more important in the years ahead. Keeping Turkey on side while promoting deepening cooperation between Israel and its Arab associates will be the keys to successful American policy in the new Middle East. Let's hope the new administration can get the job done.

https://www.wsj.com/opinion/obama-era-is-history-in-the-middle-east-assad-israel-biden-16fe019c?mod=opinion_lead_pos10

The Wall Street Journal, 26 décembre, article payant

Israelis See Chance to Remake Middle East in War's Wake

Despite criticism over conduct of Gaza war, some see new diplomatic opportunities



Israelis See Chance to Remake Middle East in War's Wake

Extraits:

TEL AVIV—Since the [Hamas attacks on Oct. 7, 2023](#), Israel has dealt a series of damaging setbacks to its most dangerous regional adversaries. It has hobbled Hamas in Gaza, severely damaged Shiite militia Hezbollah in Lebanon and fended off missile salvos from Tehran while landing its own blows in Iran.

Israel's military operations—especially its conduct of the war in Gaza, where local authorities say more than 40,000 Palestinians have died—have hurt the country's international standing. The International Criminal Court [has issued arrest warrants](#) for its prime minister and former defense minister.

But Israel's leaders say the military gains are worth the trade-off in [reputational damage](#) and argue that the country's stronger strategic position opens the door for diplomatic gains in the future as Arab countries look for partners to keep Iranian power at bay.

“For the first time in the history of Zionism, there is an opportunity for Israel to be a regional power,” said Avner Golov, a former senior director at Israel's National Security Council, who is now a vice president at MIND Israel, which advises governments on national security. (...)

Current and former Israeli officials are pushing for aggressive steps to build an Israeli, American and moderate Arab alliance that includes Saudi Arabia and is aimed at checking Iran's influence. The re-election of [Donald Trump](#), who confronted Iran in his first term and is returning to the presidency next month, has raised hopes for such an alliance, said Golov. (...)

The Gaza war set in motion a sequence of events that has helped lay the groundwork, said Danny Danon, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations. Israel has weakened Iran by largely incapacitating its military allies Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Those successes triggered the recent fall of the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, a key Tehran ally. Israel has also decimated Iran's air defenses in two rounds of tit-for-tat airstrikes, leaving Tehran vulnerable in any future confrontation.

“We expect our determination and strength shown over the past year will lead to more regional stability,” said Danon. (...)

Israelis overwhelmingly oppose a Palestinian state now, but Israel could give Palestinians a clear road map to self-governance in Gaza and the West Bank, Golov said. It is unclear whether Saudi Arabia would accept such a compromise.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would struggle to pass such measures with his current coalition, analysts say, because it relies on far-right parties who want to tighten rather than loosen Israeli control over the Palestinian territories. Netanyahu himself has stressed since the current war began that he would oppose a Palestinian state. (...)

Not everyone agrees Israel's military achievements have made itself or the region safer, and there are risks that the war's trade-off could still prove costly to Israel.

The widely televised devastation in the Gaza Strip and the rising death toll there have sowed the seeds for future conflicts between Israel and its neighbors, said Hussein Ibish, senior resident fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute, a think tank in Washington. (...)

"It is really surrounded by bitter enemies who have much more reason to be bitter enemies today than they did on Oct. 7," he said.

Across the Middle East and in many developing countries, meeting with Israeli leaders has become taboo, stifling future cooperation, said William Wechsler, senior director of Middle East programs at the Atlantic Council, a think tank in Washington. (...)

From the start of the war, one of the key questions for Israel in weighing the war's trade-offs was whether it would have a free hand to pursue its military goals before the diplomatic consequences became overwhelming, said Micah Goodman, an Israeli author and philosopher.

"We needed to restore deterrence—and in order to restore deterrence, we needed to do things that reduce our legitimacy," Goodman said. But on balance, he added, "I think Israel managed to pull it off."

https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/israel-regional-power-global-struggle-dfd9e694?mod=hp_lead_pos3

Le Point, 25 décembre, article payant

Non, Jésus n'était pas palestinien

L'histoire, la culture et le lien des Palestiniens avec le Proche-Orient se suffisent à eux-mêmes. Il n'est ni nécessaire ni juste de s'approprier ou de falsifier l'histoire juive.



Le vrai Jésus était un rabbin juif vivant en Judée romaine au I^{er} siècle. © Lefteris Pitarakis/AP/SIPA / SIPA / Lefteris Pitarakis/AP/SIPA

Extraits:

Dans l'histoire du Proche-Orient ou même du monde, peu de [figures suscitent autant de débats que Jésus de Nazareth](#). Pour les chrétiens, il est tout à la fois le Messie, le Fils de Dieu et Dieu incarné, la pierre angulaire de

leur religion, aujourd'hui la première au monde en nombre de fidèles. Le [vrai Jésus était un rabbin juif](#) vivant en Judée romaine au premier siècle.

Aux yeux de ses contemporains, qu'il puisse fonder une nouvelle religion tenait sans doute de l'extravagance – mais c'est littéralement ce qui est advenu. Plusieurs facteurs expliquent la fulgurance du développement du christianisme : le rejet de Jésus comme Messie par les courants dominants du judaïsme, le puissant attrait de son message universaliste promettant le salut à tous les croyants, quelles que soient leurs origines, et le zèle missionnaire de ses disciples, à l'instar de saint Paul, après sa crucifixion.

Aujourd'hui, dans le monde, les chrétiens sont bien plus nombreux que les juifs. Si l'on peut comptabiliser dans les 15 millions de juifs, les chrétiens sont plus de 2 milliards, auxquels on peut ajouter les 2 milliards de musulmans qui reconnaissent eux aussi Jésus comme prophète de leur foi. Un déséquilibre numérique à l'origine de tensions interreligieuses spécifiques, notamment dans le contexte explosif du conflit israélo-palestinien, où l'histoire elle-même est devenue un champ de bataille. Ces dernières années, et surtout depuis l'escalade du conflit à Gaza, il est de plus en plus fréquent d'entendre que Jésus et Marie, sa mère, étaient palestiniens. Que Noël est une « histoire palestinienne ».

Pour voir si une telle affirmation tient debout, il est essentiel de commencer par définir ce que signifie véritablement être un Palestinien. Si les traces du terme « Palestine » remontent à l'Antiquité, la notion de nationalité palestinienne moderne date de l'effondrement de l'Empire ottoman. Sous le règne ottoman (1517-1917), la région qui, plus tard, deviendra la Palestine sous mandat britannique n'était ni officiellement désignée sous ce nom ni administrée comme une unité politique unique. (...)

À l'époque, la majorité des habitants de la région étaient des musulmans sunnites, descendants de populations converties à l'islam lors des conquêtes islamiques survenues un millénaire plus tôt. Des conquêtes qui avaient instauré la domination islamique et transformé le paysage religieux local. Dans le même temps, divers groupes chrétiens – orthodoxes syriaques, catholiques et chrétiens arméniens – y coexistaient. La communauté juive, bien que plus restreinte, était solidement implantée dans des villes comme Jérusalem, Hébron, Safed et Tibériade. Et sa population allait se renforcer au XIX^e siècle par la naissance du mouvement sioniste, mais également avant, avec des arrivées motivées par le désir ancestral de nombreux Juifs de la diaspora de retourner sur la terre de leurs ancêtres. Un désir qui s'enracinait dans une histoire marquée par l'esclavage, les exodes forcés sous l'Empire romain et autres déplacements successifs sous les divers empires ayant régné sur la région. (...)

Après l'effondrement de l'Empire ottoman à la suite de la Première Guerre mondiale, la Palestine est devenue un mandat britannique. Dès 1920, la domination britannique va entraîner [une augmentation significative de l'immigration juive](#) en Palestine. Les décideurs britanniques, séduits par les idéaux du mouvement sioniste, percevaient dans l'établissement d'une patrie juive en Palestine une réponse aux problèmes historiques de la dispersion des Juifs et de l'antisémitisme à l'échelle mondiale.

Sauf que la population non juive de Palestine s'opposait fermement au sionisme. (...)

Dans ce contexte, de violentes tensions intercommunautaires allaient éclater, avec leur lot de tragédies, comme les pogroms survenus à Hébron et à Safed dans les années 1920 et 1930. Un [conflit qui s'est d'autant plus intensifié](#) avec l'affrontement entre des [groupes musulmans antisionistes](#), menés par des figures telles que Hadj Amin Al-Husseini et Izz Ad-Din Al-Qassam, et des milices sionistes, au premier rang desquelles le Lehi et l'Irgoun.

Jésus occupe une place centrale dans la conscience palestinienne. Les chrétiens palestiniens, dont les origines remontent aux premiers disciples de Jésus, se perçoivent comme les gardiens des traditions et des sites sacrés de la région, de Bethléem à Nazareth en passant par Jérusalem. Pour eux, Jésus n'est pas seulement une figure théologique, mais aussi un lien vivant avec leur héritage et leur histoire sur cette terre.

Dans l'islam, Jésus occupe une place spirituelle majeure, ce qui lui confère une grande importance pour les Palestiniens musulmans. Il est vénéré comme une figure miraculeuse, né de la Vierge Marie, et sa stature de prophète crée un lien spirituel entre les Palestiniens musulmans et leurs homologues chrétiens. Pour ces

derniers, Jésus incarne la justice, l'histoire et l'autorité morale. Les musulmans, quant à eux, voient en lui non seulement un prophète ayant précédé l'islam, mais également un véritable musulman, bien que la religion islamique soit apparue plusieurs siècles après sa mort.

(...) Dans une région où l'identité est profondément liée à la lutte pour la terre et les droits, l'idée d'un Jésus palestinien s'est imposée comme une revendication spirituelle et culturelle affirmant une continuité historique. Cependant, bien que les Palestiniens entretiennent des liens géographiques et religieux avec Jésus, elle n'est pas historiquement exacte. Et elle constitue également une tentative d'appropriation d'un chapitre majeur de l'histoire juive.

À l'époque de Jésus, sa région faisait partie de l'Empire romain et portait le nom de Judée. (...)

Affirmer que Jésus était palestinien est non seulement anachronique, mais, également, aussi inexact que de le dire israélien, ottoman, byzantin ou croisé chrétien... vu qu'aucune de ces identités n'existait à son époque. Chacune de ces désignations appartient à une période historique différente, marquée par des réalités sociopolitiques spécifiques. Imputer l'une ou l'autre de ces identités à Jésus ne reflète pas la réalité du premier siècle, et ne colle ni à son ministère ni à ses disciples. (...)

L'identité de Jésus était profondément juive. Ses enseignements, tels qu'ils sont rapportés dans les Évangiles, s'enracinent profondément dans les écritures et les traditions juives. Ses disputes avec les chefs religieux des différentes factions juives de l'époque – Pharisiens, Sadducéens, Zélotes et autres – étaient avant tout des discussions internes au judaïsme. Jésus a vécu dans une société juive, s'est adressé aux préoccupations de ses compatriotes juifs et a finalement été exécuté par les Romains en tant que « roi des Juifs », un titre reflétant autant la perception de ses partisans que de ses ennemis.

Un poids historique qu'on ne peut pas simplement ignorer. L'idée, contemporaine, selon laquelle Jésus était palestinien sert souvent d'outil rhétorique pour minimiser et délégitimer le lien historique des Juifs avec le Proche-Orient. D'aucuns pourraient dire que l'exactitude historique importe moins que le pouvoir du symbole, et que Jésus constitue une figure emblématique pour les Palestiniens en raison de son importance universelle. Cependant, tenter de réinterpréter sa vie à travers le prisme d'une identité nationale moderne revient à occulter la réalité historique de la Judée du premier siècle, au profit de l'invention de nouvelles mythologies.

En tant qu'Arabe palestinien, je ne ressens pas le besoin d'enrichir notre identité par des mensonges ou des exagérations. Notre histoire, notre culture et notre lien avec la terre se suffisent à eux-mêmes, sans qu'il soit nécessaire d'usurper ou de déformer les récits des autres, ni de chercher à remplacer Israël par la Palestine. Chaque peuple a le droit d'être libre et de déterminer son propre destin, qu'il puisse ou non compter Jésus de Nazareth parmi ses membres. Affirmer que Jésus était palestinien repose sur des anachronismes qui ne résistent pas à un examen sérieux et n'a aucun lien avec la question fondamentale du droit des Palestiniens à disposer de leur propre gouvernement. Il est temps de laisser ce mythe derrière nous et de se concentrer sur l'essentiel.

**John Aziz est un musicien de père palestinien et de mère britannique. Il est aussi militant pour la paix et analyste de la politique et de l'histoire du Proche-Orient.*

https://www.lepoint.fr/debats/non-jesus-n-etait-pas-palestinien-24-12-2024-2578632_2.php

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 24 décembre, article payant

Judenhass, Schwurbler und Esoteriker: Evangelische Gemeinden auf Abwegen

Eine Kirche im Bundesland Hessen hat einen antisemitischen Weihnachtsmarkt veranstaltet. Unsere Recherche zeigt, wie katastrophal die Zustände wirklich sind. Der Fall sagt einiges über die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland aus.



Daniel Peter / Imago

ZDF-Fernsehgottesdienst zum Auftakt einer Tagung der 13. Synode der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland im

Extraits:

Statt Besinnlichkeit und Glühweinschwips gibt es nach einem Weihnachtsmarkt in Darmstadt ordentlich Zoff. Die Jüdische Gemeinde Darmstadt hat Strafanzeige gegen die lokale Michaelisgemeinde gestellt, und die Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau hat sich der Anzeige in einer bemerkenswerten Form von Krisenmanagement angeschlossen. Die Staatsanwaltschaft ermittelt.

Die Gemeinde nämlich hatte den Weihnachtsmarkt am 14. und 15. Dezember veranstaltet, und zwar mit einer Gruppe namens «Darmstadt 4 Palestine». Der Markt geriet zum Hamas-Propaganda-Fest. Das Zeichen der Terrororganisation Hamas, ein rotes Dreieck, und der Slogan «From the river to the sea», der die Vernichtung Israels einfordert, wurden als Plätzchen und Mitbringsel angeboten.

Ein Weihnachtsmarkt ist ein Symbol deutsch-christlicher Freundlich- und Gemütlichkeit, ein Ort der Nächstenliebe und eine winterliche Oase in den Städten mit Nussknackern, Nikolaus, Plätzchen, Glühwein und mit Namen beschrifteten Tassen. Wie kann es sein, dass eine solche Veranstaltung zu einem Ort des Hasses gegen Juden wird?

Damit Terrorsymbolik auf einem Weihnachtsmarkt landen kann, müssen Dinge über einen langen Zeitraum schiefgelaufen sein, Entscheidungsträger blind oder mit völlig falschen Werten ausgestattet sein. Ein Milieu muss sich ausgebreitet haben, das die Rahmenbedingungen für den Tiefpunkt schafft und ihn so ermöglicht.

Deshalb ist diese Recherche nicht nur eine über die Michaelisgemeinde in Darmstadt, sondern auch eine, bei der man Pars pro Toto vieles über die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland lernt wie auch über ein Milieu, das

in der Kirche dominant ist, das die Gottesdienste gestaltet und die Gemeinden prägt. Der Zustand der Gemeinde lässt Rückschlüsse auf das System zu, in dem er geschehen konnte. (...)

Besonders sticht ein Satz in der Einladung hervor: «Palästina ist ein multireligiöses Land, in dem nicht nur muslimische, sondern eben auch jüdische und christliche Menschen zu Hause sind.» Er lässt sich nur so interpretieren, dass Israel eigentlich Palästina ist, denn nur dort leben jüdische und christliche Menschen. In dem Fall wäre Israel hier – auf der Website einer deutschen Kirchengemeinde – das Existenzrecht abgesprochen; Israel wird zu «Palästina» gemacht. Eine andere Auslegung, nämlich dass die palästinensischen Gebiete als Heimat der Juden gemeint sind, ist so unsinnig, dass sie auszuschliessen ist.

Der Weihnachtsmarkt wurde an unterschiedlichen Stellen als «antikolonialistischer Weihnachtsmarkt» angekündigt, Israel kommt demnach die Rolle einer Kolonialmacht zu; das ist politisch und historisch inkorrekt und entspricht dem Narrativ radikaler Israel- und Judenhasser. (...)

Dafür, dass der Pfarrer und sein Team die Hamas-Abzeichen in Wahrheit nicht weiter schlimm fanden, spricht einiges. Kurz bevor der Weihnachtsmarkt stattfand, war Ende November Johannes Zang in der Gemeinde zu Gast. Er ist der Autor des Buchs «Kein Land in Sicht? Gaza zwischen Besatzung, Blockade und Krieg».

Das Buch ist in weiten Teilen eine Rechtfertigung des [Hamas-Massakers vom 7. Oktober](#) an Israeli; es stellt das Ausmass und teilweise die sexualisierte Gewalt an dem Tag gegen die Opfer weitgehend infrage und insinuiert bereits durch seine Aufteilung, aber vor allem durch seinen Inhalt, dass das Massaker nicht so schlimm wie in den Medien dargestellt und vor allem zu rechtfertigen sei. 160 Seiten befassen sich mit Gaza, unter anderem ausführlich selbst mit kleinsten Themen, wie dem, dass israelische Behördenformulare für die Bewohner Gazas schwer auszufüllen seien. Dann folgen lediglich zehn Seiten über das Massaker am 7. Oktober, dann wiederum 75 über «Israels Krieg». (...)

Den Christen in Darmstadt wird mehr geboten als Politik. Im kommenden Jahr kommt noch ein oder eine «Dr. Kia» vorbei, um vor «elektropathologischen Frequenzen» zu warnen. Und mehrmals die Woche finden Yogakurse statt; Yoga ist deutscher Alltag, aber genau genommen eine indische, hinduistisch geprägte Philosophie, die mit der evangelischen Kirche so viel zu tun hat wie Fridays for Future mit dem Porsche 993.

Natürlich erlaubt die Michaeliskirche allein kein Urteil über den Zustand der ganzen protestantischen Kirche zu fällen. Aber Äusserungen der Mitglieder des Kirchenvorstands zeigen die Sympathie für bekannte Köpfe der Institution wie Margot Kässmann. Die prominente Protestantin legt das christliche Streben nach Frieden so aus, dass Israel keine Waffen mehr geliefert werden sollen. Für das ständig attackierte Land wäre das schnell das Ende seiner Existenz. Die «friedensbewegte» Kässmann ist fest verankert in dem Milieu, das in Darmstadt auftritt und Weihnachtsmärkte organisiert.

Die sogenannten [Friedensbewegungen](#) – die mit ihrer Argumentation in Wahrheit den Kriegstreibern dieser Welt einen Gefallen tun – zeigen sich auch auf den Kirchentagen; ebenso der Hang zur Esoterik, zur altlinken Israel- und USA-Feindlichkeit und die naive Zuneigung – die häufig als Toleranz getarnt ist – zu muslimischen und selbst islamistischen Bewegungen.

Dergestalt alt-links und grün grundiert hat sich die evangelische Kirche auch einem jüngeren Zeitgeist geöffnet: zum Beispiel in der St.-Johannes-Kirche in Köln, in der nachts queere Partys stattfinden, also primär Partys für Menschen, die nicht heterosexuell sind und sich nicht als Mann oder als Frau definieren. Der Pfarrer präsentiert seine Arbeit als «Kirche with a twerk», also Kirche mit sexuell provozierendem Wackeln des Pos. Passt das zur Botschaft Gottes?

Was man allgemein weniger findet – und hier zählt auch die anekdotische Evidenz privater Gottesdienstbesuche: Feier der Sakramente, Verkündung des Wortes Gottes, Gebet und Anbetung, Verkündigung von Segen, Bekenntnis und Vergebung, Liturgie, Feierlichkeit, Ritual und Ästhetik.

Im vergangenen Jahr schrieben die evangelischen Landeskirchen einen negativen Rekord. Nur noch 22 Prozent der deutschen Bevölkerung gehören ihnen an. Pro Jahr treten mittlerweile regelmässig über eine halbe Million Menschen aus.

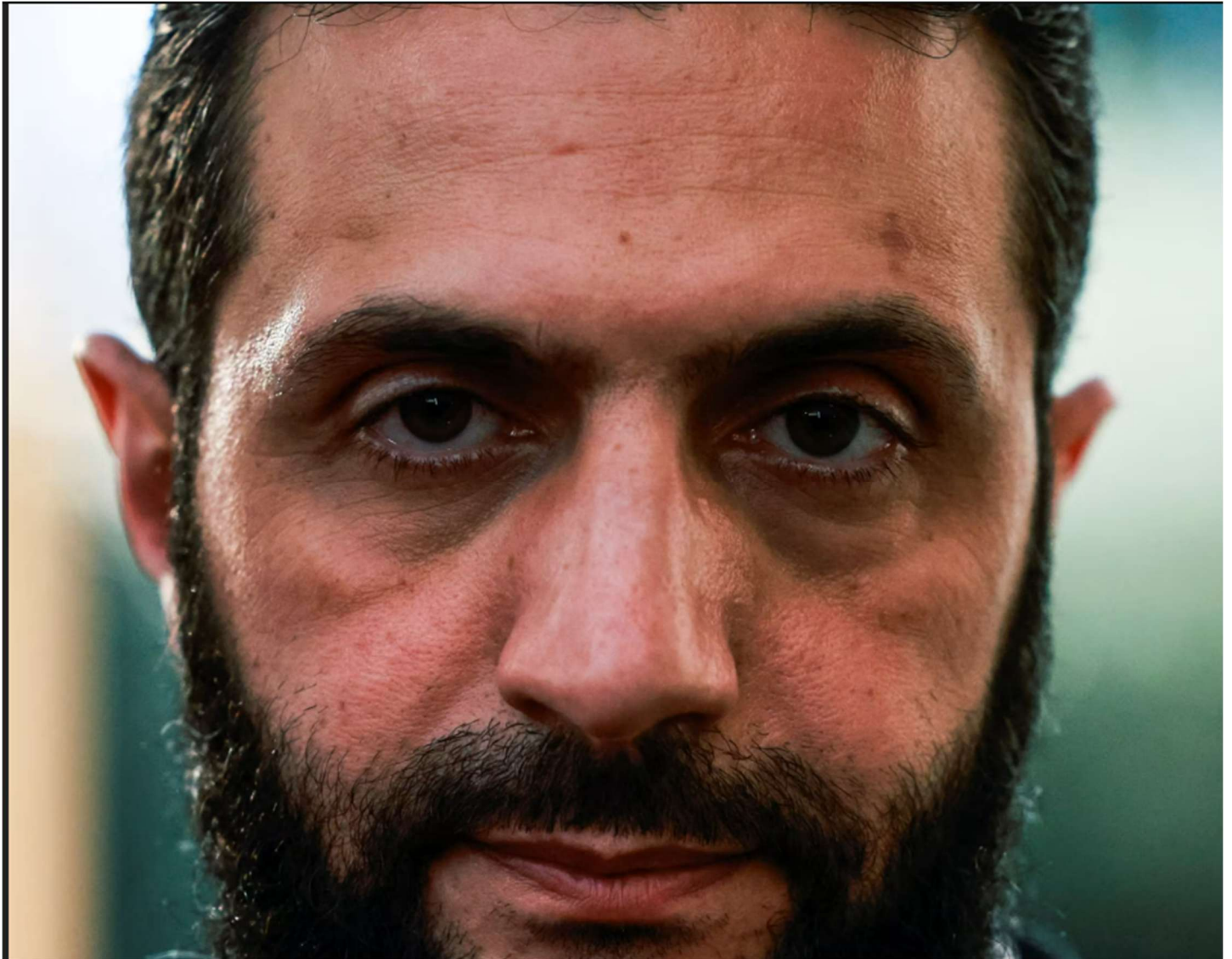
Yoga gibt es eben auch woanders, Powackeln auf Instagram, Queer-Partys in jedem x-beliebigen Klub, Friedensbewegungen à la Croissier und Zang bei Sahra Wagenknecht und der AfD – und Hass auf Juden und Israel ist ohnehin Alltag in Deutschland. Für all das braucht kein Mensch die Kirche.

<https://www.nzz.ch/international/evangelische-kirche-in-deutschland-wenn-schwurbler-den-ton-angeben-ld.1863484>

Wall Street Journal, 24 décembre, article payant

Syria's Rebel Leaders Have Control of the Country. Now What?

The new Islamist-led government promises moderation, but officials aren't committing to such issues as women's rights or free elections



Extraits:

DAMASCUS, Syria—Victorious Islamist [rebel leader](#) Ahmed al-Sharaa spends his days conferring with advisers and meeting a stream of visitors—U.S. diplomats and leaders from Turkey, Jordan, Qatar and Syria's religious sects.

They all want to know the same thing: How does [Sharaa](#) plan to govern the war-battered nation of 23 million people?

Sharaa, a guerrilla fighter who led the campaign that [toppled the regime](#) of [Bashar al-Assad](#), is seeking an answer. So far, the U.S.-designated terrorist has shed the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani, which drew the world's attention, and swapped combat fatigues for a suit.

Sharaa fought with al Qaeda in Iraq as an anti-U.S. jihadist and, in recent years, has sought to recast himself as a more moderate figure, promoting a pragmatic brand of Islamist politics. He now counsels patience.

“People have big ambitions, but today we must think realistically,” he told reporters after the rebels' swift victory. “Syria has many problems, and they won't be solved with a magic wand.”

Sharaa's rebel group, which had for years been running a tiny swath of northwest Syria, now controls cosmopolitan Damascus and rules over millions of Syrians including Alawites, Christians and Kurds. In Aleppo, the first city claimed in the recent offensive, the group left churches untouched and promised to govern inclusively.

Sharaa, leaders of his Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, HTS, as well as allied resistance groups, face decisions that open the door to peaceful rebuilding after more than a decade of civil war or new rounds of sectarian fighting fueled by the meddling of outside powers. (...)

HTS political affairs bureau member Mohamed Khaled described in a briefing with reporters the group's to-do list: Merge rebel groups into a national army, bring back Syrian refugees, write a constitution and staff government ministries.

Khaled said he and Sharaa envision a yearlong transition to lay the framework for a new government. Such hot-button social issues as women's dress codes, the treatment of LGBT people and alcohol consumption will be discussed, they said, and elections will have to wait. (...)

Barbara Leaf, an assistant U.S. Secretary of State who met Sharaa on Friday, said she heard “some very pragmatic and moderate statements on various issues from women's rights to protection of equal rights for all communities.”

“It was a good first meeting,” Leaf said. “We will judge by deeds, not just by words. “

“At the end of the day they're pragmatic, they're utilitarian, they're politicians, they're incomparable to the regime in terms of their policies,” said Daren Khalifa, a senior adviser at International Crisis Group who has interviewed Sharaa many times. “But they are conservative Islamists.”

Some Western officials and analysts argue for removal of the group's U.S. designation as a terrorist organization. (...) “I don't think they have a detailed plan yet,” said Ford, the former U.S. ambassador to Syria. “I think, in part, they're making it up as they go.” (...)

In a meeting with foreign journalists, Khaled was asked how his government would approach social issues such as LGBT rights and the sale of alcohol at bars.

“It's open for discussion,” Khaled said. “There will be committees, there will be a constitution, and this is all going to be decided by the laws.”

That transition will take time as laws and a constitution are written, he said. Until, he added, there will be no elections.

https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/syria-new-leader-priorities-ahmed-al-sharaa-jawlani-4dd71b01?mod=hp_lead_pos7

The Guardian, Opinion, 24 décembre, [libre accès](#)

Assad's demise has been widely celebrated – but it spells an uncertain future for Syria's Kurds

The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham regime, which has friendly relations with Turkey, is unlikely to tolerate Kurdish autonomy



📷 A woman at the funeral of five Kurdish fighters killed in Manbij during clashes with Turkish-backed opposition factions, 14 December 2024. Photograph: Delil Souleiman/AFP/Getty Images

Extraits:

The fall of Bashar al-Assad after the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) takeover in Syria is bad news for the country's [Kurds](#). It is worth charting how things got here from the start of the war in Syria in 2012. During the conflict, the Democratic Union party (PYD) emerged as the biggest and most influential Kurdish political actor in Syria, taking territorial control in the north and maintaining an autonomous administration, albeit a fragile one.

The PYD's position is even more precarious after the HTS takeover. Turkey, emerging as the most influential foreign actor in [Syria](#), is laser-focused on limiting any Kurdish push for autonomy domestically and regionally. Another challenge the PYD faces is that the HTS-led regime is very unlikely to tolerate existing Kurdish autonomy in Syria.

The emergence of an autonomous region run by the Kurds in northern Syria was unexpected. Syrian Kurds, who make up about 10% of the population, had been more suppressed and less visible than Kurds in Turkey, Iraq and Iran. However, very quickly after the war started, this hitherto quiet Kurdish presence evolved into a highly active political and military movement that garnered significant regional and international attention.

From the beginning of the Syrian war, the PYD chose to side with neither Assad nor the anti-regime rebel groups, and instead sought to secure its position in the north. In 2012 it unilaterally declared the establishment of an autonomous region called Rojava (Western Kurdistan), formed of three territorially separate cantons: Afrin, Kobane and Cizre.

All this has been difficult to digest for Turkey. Its concerns run deep because the PYD has links with the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK), an armed group that has been fighting Turkish forces for four decades and is designated as a terrorist organisation by Turkey and its allies. The PYD follows the ideology of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, even if it maintains that it is a separate entity. Turkey, however, sees them as one and the same and refuses to accept any form of Kurdish political entity connected to the PKK on its borders. It did all in its power to oppose Rojava diplomatically and by supporting Islamist forces. (...)

That is not to say everything has been a model of ideal democracy. The PYD has been criticised for its treatment of political rivals and attempts to indoctrinate the population with its ideology. But this is a new project, with a lot of appeal to many communities in north Syria and to the west – and it seemed to promise a different future to a historically suppressed group.

Now, with the collapse of the Assad regime, the position of the PYD has become even more precarious. The new emerging regime is unlikely to maintain the tacit agreement between Damascus and the PYD that allowed Kurdish control of the north while Damascus continued to supply, albeit poorly, the population there with resources, services and salaries.

The HTS has a hostile relationship with the PYD and friendly relations with Turkey. Turkey may now escalate its military intervention in Kurdish-controlled areas with more freedom and ease. Its [recent push](#) into the north-east and the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army's [takeover of Manbij](#) signals that.

However, Turkey is also exploring talks with its own Kurds in the hope of winning their support to change the constitution in a way that could possibly allow the president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to hold office for another term. Turkey will want to enter any negotiations with the Kurds from a position of as much power as possible in Syria, where the PYD would ideally have as little strength and influence as possible.

The Syrian war has been a process of change and flux. Indeed, war and regime change can create opportunities for non-state political groups, but they also pose significant risks for such groups. The Kurds are all too familiar with these ebbs and flows of history, whether thinking of the short-lived Sulaymaniyah administration in Iraq in the early 1920s, the Republic of Mahabad in Iran in 1946, the Kurdistan region in Iraq since 1991 or Rojava in Syria since 2012.

Whether any outcome in the post-Assad period will be a positive one for stability, peace and democracy for the Kurds – and for all Syrians in the region – remains to be seen.

Dr Zeynep Kaya is a lecturer in international relations at the University of Sheffield. She is the author of [Mapping Kurdistan: Territory, Self-Determination and Nationalism](#)

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/dec/23/assad-syria-kurds-future-hayat-tahrir-al-sham>

New York Times, 23 décembre, article payant

Organized Looting Throws Gaza Deeper Into Chaos

Gangs are filling a power vacuum left by Israel in some parts of southern Gaza, hijacking desperately needed aid for Palestinian residents.



Trucks carrying humanitarian aid entering Gaza via the Rafah crossing have become easy prey for organized gangs. Said Khatib/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Extraits:

Hazem Isleem, a Palestinian truck driver, was passing through the ruins of southern Gaza last month with a truckload of aid when armed looters ambushed his convoy.

One of the gunmen broke into his truck, forcing him to drive to a nearby field and unload thousands of pounds of flour intended for hungry Palestinians, he said by phone from Gaza. By the next morning, the gang had stripped virtually all of the supplies from the [convoy of about 100 trucks](#) of United Nations aid, enough to feed tens of thousands of people, in what the United Nations described as one of the worst such episodes of the war.

“It was terrifying,” said Mr. Isleem, 47, whom the looters held for 13 hours while they pillaged the flour. “But the worst part was we weren’t able to deliver the food to the people.”

Israel’s bombardment and invasion of Gaza in response to the Hamas-led Oct. 7 attack last year has unleashed a humanitarian crisis in the enclave, with more than 45,000 people dead, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants. Hunger is widespread, and Israel has placed restrictions on the entry of aid into Gaza and blocked movement of aid trucks between the north and south.

Though Hamas has been routed in much of the territory, Israel has not put an alternative government in place. In parts of southern Gaza, armed gangs have filled the resulting power vacuum, leaving aid groups unwilling to risk delivering supplies. (...)

Hundreds of truckloads of relief are piling up at the crossing in part because aid groups fear they will be looted.

What began as smaller-scale attempts to seize aid early in the year — often by hungry Gazans — has now become “systematic, tactical, armed, crime-syndicate looting” by organized groups, said Georgios Petropoulos, a senior U.N. official based in the southern city of Rafah. “This is just larceny writ large,” he said. (...)

International aid workers have accused Israel of ignoring the problem and allowing looters to act with impunity. The United Nations does not allow Israeli soldiers to protect aid convoys, fearing that would compromise its neutrality, and its officials have called on Israel to allow the Gaza police, which are under Hamas's authority, to secure their convoys.

Israel, which seeks to uproot Hamas, accuses the group of stealing international aid and says that the police are just another arm of the militant group. They have repeatedly targeted Hamas's police force, severely weakening it, and police officers are rarely seen in much of Gaza, residents say. (...)

"Today, the ordinary Gazan's dream, his aspiration, is to obtain a piece of bread," Mr. Awad said. "I can't say anything sadder than that."

Gazan transportation company owners, truck drivers and aid groups say multiple gangs have participated in looting recently. But many people involved in aid delivery named Yasser Abu Shabab, 35, as the man who runs the most sophisticated operation.

They say Mr. Abu Shabab's gang dominates much of the Nasr neighborhood in eastern Rafah, which the war has transformed into a wasteland. Mr. Petropoulos, the U.N. official, called him "the self-styled power broker of east Rafah." (...)

Mr. Isleem, the truck driver who was ambushed in Rafah, said the looters who captured him told him that Mr. Abu Shabab was their boss. Awad Abid, a displaced Gazan who said he had tried to buy flour from Mr. Abu Shabab's gang in Rafah, said he had seen gunmen guarding warehouses containing stolen cartons of U.N.-marked aid.

"I asked one of them for a sack of flour to feed my children," Mr. Abid said, "and he raised a pistol at me." (...)

Mr. Abu Shabab denied looting aid trucks on a large scale, although he conceded that his men — armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles — had raided half a dozen or so since the start of the war.

"We are taking trucks so we can eat, not so we can sell," he said in a phone interview, claiming he was feeding his family and neighbors. "Every hungry person is taking aid." He accused Hamas of being primarily responsible for stealing the aid, a claim that Hamas has denied. (...)

The looters' chokehold on supplies and soaring prices are undermining Hamas in the areas that it still controls. On Nov. 25, Hamas's security forces raided Mr. Abu Shabab's neighborhood, killing more than 20 people, including his brother, Mr. Abu Shabab said.

Official Hamas media reported at the time that its forces had killed 20 members of "gangs of thieves who were stealing aid." (...)

In late November, Israeli forces opened fire on looters waiting to waylay trucks in Rafah, forcing them to retreat, according to an internal U.N. memo. With the path cleared, U.N. aid trucks rushed toward central Gaza.

But the gangs were far from deterred.

The looters soon regrouped and hijacked them on the road, the U.N. memo said. The trucks were stripped bare.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/23/world/middleeast/gaza-looting.html>

Wall Street Journal, 23 décembre, article payant

End the Houthis' Threat to Global Trade

The Trump administration will be well-positioned to stop Iran's proxy attacks on international shipping.



This still image from a video shows Houthi fighters firing two missiles toward Israel from Yemen, Dec. 19. PHOTO: HANDOUT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Extractions:

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia last week fired two ballistic missiles at Israel. One hit an empty school; the other wounded more than a dozen people in Tel Aviv. But the Houthis haven't been focused on Israel: Earlier this month, they launched a drone attack on three commercial vessels in the Gulf of Aden, south of Yemen. The Houthis pose a greater threat to international shipping than to the Jewish state—a problem the Biden administration has allowed to fester.

The group has raised prices on goods by disrupting international trade. The cost to ship a container from China to the West Coast has more than doubled over the past year, partially because of the Houthis' attacks.

With Iran's axis of resistance reeling from defeats in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, the Trump administration will be well positioned to deal forcefully with the Houthis—putting pressure on Tehran, restoring American credibility, and lowering prices on imported goods. (...)

The Houthis claim their attacks are part of the Oct. 7 war against Israel. Most of the ships they've attacked have no direct link to Israel. It's more likely that their goal is to assert Iranian control over world trade.

The economic effects have been significant. Red Sea shipping has declined by more than 50% over the past year. Major shipping companies including Maersk have opted to sail around Africa rather than risk Houthi fire. War risk insurance costs have more than doubled. All this translates into higher costs for American consumers. JPMorgan predicted that the attacks could “add 0.7 percentage points to global core goods inflation.”

The world confronted a similar problem during the surge in Somali pirates' attacks on vessels in the Gulf of Aden beginning in 2007. The international community rallied with a unified response. (...)

The Houthi threat to global trade is greater but has been met with a weaker response. While the Somali pirates were armed with rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, the Houthis have missiles and drones. Somali pirates generally sought to hijack a vessel to ransom its crew; the Houthis seek to damage or sink the vessel.

The U.S. has tried to organize an international flotilla to deter Houthi attacks—but other than the U.S., only the U.K., Sri Lanka, Greece, Denmark and the Netherlands contributed vessels. The European Union put together a Red Sea force but with a narrow defensive mandate and only four ships. (...)

As the world's largest importer, only the U.S. has sufficient interest and ability to deter threats to shipping. But aside from a few limited airstrikes, which don't seem to have altered Houthi behavior—including one over the weekend—the Biden administration has done little.

Ending the Houthis' attacks should unite U.S. officials across foreign-policy camps. (...)

The Trump administration should begin by redesignating the Houthis as a terror group. The U.S. should seek a significant expansion of attacks against Houthi targets. In this, America need not put more of its service members in harm's way. It can rely on its ally Israel, which this month executed extensive airstrikes on Houthi ports. Israel could do more with sufficient munitions. But only the U.S. can provide the naval assets, and the pressure on Iran, needed to remove the Houthi threat.

Mr. Kontorovich is a professor at George Mason University Scalia Law School and a scholar at the Kohelet Policy Forum, a Jerusalem think tank.

https://www.wsj.com/opinion/end-the-houthis-threat-to-global-trade-international-shipping-attacks-iran-240617da?mod=hp_opin_pos_4#cxrecs_s

The Economist, 22 décembre, article payant

Syria's horrors : One of Assad's mass graves is found, with as many as 100,000 bodies

But justice for the victims of the Assad regime will be slow



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

Extraits:

AMOUND OF dirt blocks the road to a walled compound on the outskirts of al-Qutayfa, a town around 30km north of [Damascus](#), the Syrian capital. It is silent, save for the occasional bark of two stray dogs and the faint buzz of power lines running over the compound. Breeze-block walls enclose an area roughly the size of two football fields. For more than a decade, [Bashar al-Assad's](#) army turned this wasteland into a [mass grave](#)—believed by Syria's new rulers to be one of his largest.

For years, earthmovers would arrive late at night, followed by refrigerated trucks packed with bodies, locals said. Initially the graves were not deep enough; stray dogs would burrow into the dirt and pull up corpses. So Mr Assad's soldiers were ordered to dig deeper.

Until a week ago, this was one of the most sensitive areas in Syria—a garrison town where stopping your car in the wrong place could mean being arrested. Locals kept silent, paralysed by fear. “Whatever they sent me, I was supposed to bury,” says Haj Ali Saleh, a former mayor of the town who still lives there. He resigned in 2012 and was then briefly detained by the authorities after refusing to follow orders to construct a mass grave.

But the regime found others who were more willing. It was the early years of Syria's civil war, and Mr Assad's grip was tightening. Prisons were overflowing and the regime turned to increasingly brutal methods to suppress dissent. Torture and execution became commonplace. (...)

In recent years human-rights organisations have used satellite imagery to determine that there was a mass grave on the outskirts of al-Qutayfa. They could not say anything definitive about the number of bodies it contained. In the years that followed, the regime attempted to cover its tracks. Residents describe trucks that would arrive to exhume bodies, moving perhaps thousands elsewhere. A foul stench would engulf the town as the trucks unearthed the graves. “Everyone in the town knew what they were doing,” says a farmer who lived nearby. (...)

Everyone in al-Qutayfa seemed to have known that something horrifying was going on. But to say anything was to risk ending up in the grave. So far there has been no talk from those now in charge of Syria of exhumation and forensic testing to confirm the scale of the atrocity. The residents of al-Qutayfa are outraged. They are desperate for the world to know what happened in their town.

After more than a decade of war, millions of Syrians have missing relatives. A handful of survivors have limped out of the regime's prisons in recent weeks, but for many, the only hope for answers lies in the mass graves being discovered across the country. Ali Schwaat is a farmer in al-Qutayfa who worked just a few hundred meters from the grave site for over a decade. “The mother of a dead person can sleep,” he says, “but the mother of a missing son never will.” ■

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/12/18/one-of-assads-mass-graves-is-found-with-as-many-as-100000-bodies>

The Economist, 22 décembre, article payant

The other war's winners and losers : Conflict is remaking the Middle East's economic order

Iran is boxed in as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Turkey look to capitalize



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

Extrails:

THE LIQUIDITY crunch could not have come at a worse time. Usually, most of Hezbollah's budget arrives on a plane in Damascus, the Syrian capital, with the country's Iranian ambassador. The cash is then transported across the Lebanese border to the Shia militia. But on December 8th, just weeks after Hezbollah stopped fighting with Israel in Lebanon, Bashar al-Assad, Syria's president and Iran's ally, was overthrown. Iran evacuated officials and soldiers in Syria. Already financially emaciated, Hezbollah faces rebuilding deprived of its surest cash flow.

Iran has long vied with Gulf states for influence over the Middle East, despite being under American sanctions. Its financiers and traders have outfoxed Western officials with a labyrinthine economic system, built primarily across friendly countries, which funded proxies, traded arms with Russia and took oil payments from India and China. That was, at least, until October 7th 2023, when Hamas's attack on Israel plunged the region into chaos and started to blow holes in Iran's networks. *A year on, the Islamic Republic looks like the war's big economic loser. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey, all jostling to pick up lost trade and influence, are its likely winners. (...)*

The loss of financiers in Damascus and Beirut, Lebanon's capital, is also a headache. As much as half of Iran's revenues come from oil exports in a typical year, despite the American sanctions. Payments flow through a series of correspondent banks and small exchanges, registered to international aliases and allies. One of many such arrangements made use of Hezbollah's supporters in Lebanon's diaspora, who, through companies affiliated with the militia, took payments for Iranian oil from countries ranging from Turkey to Senegal, and kept some profit for themselves. But Muhammed Qasir, the man who ran the network, died in October in an Israeli air strike. According to Israeli officials, Iran has had a hard time getting things going again in his absence. (...)

Such losses could be disastrous for Iran's remaining supporters in the Middle East. With Hamas and Hezbollah greatly weakened, and Mr Assad in exile, only the Houthis, the proxy over which Iran has the least influence, fighting for control over Yemen, are not in disarray.

Iran is now struggling to get weapons or cash to Beirut and the Palestinian territories to replenish forces, as much materiel arrived through Syria. The alternative is moving supplies covertly, but that limits the size of shipments to what can be hidden and takes longer. Extra cash is desperately needed. (...)

It does not help that Iran's finances have also been hit by debts that must now be written off. Its government has lost billions of dollars in loans to Mr Assad, which propped him up while Syria was shut out of global markets. Officials suggest a combination of personal loans to Mr Assad and credit lines for oil came to \$5bn a year.

Meanwhile, the Gulf and Turkey are hoping to scoop up lost influence. As America has grown less willing to spend in the Middle East, Gulf states have become the biggest external financiers to its poorer countries. Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE lent \$34bn across the Middle East and North Africa in 2021-22, compared to \$17bn in 2019-20. Their loans are also lubricating economies that Iran previously helped finance, including Kuwait. Long friendly with Iran, even as it enjoyed good relations with the West, Kuwait has recently become less willing to trade with the Islamic Republic, Iranian officials complain.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia are negotiating with America to pick up some of the reconstruction bill in Gaza in return for a Palestinian state. In Syria, Turkey hopes to profit from its support for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the biggest presence in the new government. Some Western officials worry that Syria under the thumb of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president, would be little better than it was under a leader loyal to Iran and Russia. But on December 18th the Iranian rial plunged to its lowest ever level against the dollar. The Syrian pound, meanwhile, has soared by 25% in two weeks. The market, at least, disagrees. ■

<https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2024/12/19/conflict-is-remaking-the-middle-east-economic-order>

Le Figaro, 21 décembre, [libre accès](#)

Rima Hassan appelle «les Franco-Palestiniens» à rejoindre «la résistance palestinienne armée»

«La seule chose qui vous empêche de l'envisager, c'est la colonialité du monde», a-t-elle publié sur X.



Extraits:

Rima Hassan, eurodéputée de [La France Insoumise](#), créé à nouveau la polémique. «*Si les Franco-Israéliens sont autorisés à servir dans l'armée israélienne tout en jouissant des acquis de la double nationalité*», a-t-elle publié sur X ce mercredi, «*tout Franco-Palestinien doit pouvoir rejoindre la résistance armée palestinienne dont la légitimité est reconnue par les résolutions des Nations unies relatives au droit à l'autodétermination des peuples*». «*La seule chose qui vous empêche de l'envisager, c'est la colonialité du monde*», ajoute-t-elle.

L'eurodéputée se réfère à la [résolution du 30 novembre 1973 de l'ONU](#) qui «réaffirme la légitimité de la lutte des peuples pour leur indépendance, leur intégrité territoriale et leur unité nationale et pour se libérer de la domination coloniale et étrangère et de l'occupation étrangère par tous les moyens à leur disposition, y compris la lutte armée».

Mais la «résistance armée palestinienne», comme le Hamas, est qualifiée de terroriste par la France, comme l'a rappelé [le ministère des Affaires étrangères](#). De plus, la France ne reconnaît pas l'État de Palestine et donc, de facto, la nationalité palestinienne. (...)

En revanche, le service militaire est possible pour un Franco-Israélien. Une [convention bilatérale](#) signée entre la France et Israël prévoit que les binationaux peuvent être appelés sous les drapeaux en cas de conflit. 4815 soldats de nationalité française, la deuxième la plus représentée après les États-Unis, ont été mobilisés par Tsahal, l'armée israélienne, [révélaient Europe 1](#) en octobre dernier. L'eurodéputée est connue pour sa virulence envers Israël et un soutien affichée à la cause palestinienne. Elle avait été convoquée par la justice pour «apologie du terrorisme» le 30 avril pour avoir affirmé que le Hamas menait «une action légitime».

<https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/rima-hassan-appelle-les-franco-palestiniens-a-rejoindre-la-resistance-palestinienne-armee-20241220>

The Economist, 19 décembre, article payant

Meet the boss : Everyone wants to meet Syria's new rulers

But a flurry of diplomatic meetings in Damascus points to the obstacles ahead



PHOTOGRAPH: AFP

Extraits:

IT WAS a very social week for a man with a \$10m bounty on his head. Foreign diplomats rushed to Damascus to talk with Ahmad al-Sharaa (pictured), the rebel commander who led the offensive that ousted Bashar al-Assad. His Islamist faction, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), is blacklisted as a terrorist group by America, Britain, the European Union and the United Nations. That did not prevent him from meeting Geir Pedersen, the UN special envoy for Syria, or delegations from Britain, France, Qatar, Turkey and other countries.

After more than a decade of civil war, Syria is emerging from isolation. But Mr Sharaa's meetings this week point to the challenges ahead: sceptical foreign powers, uncertain politics and a worsening conflict in the country's north-east.

An interim government, dominated by HTS, is meant to rule until March. One of its priorities is to persuade Western governments to lift the sanctions imposed during Mr Assad's reign. (...)

In a letter to Joe Biden, the lawmakers who wrote one of America's sanctions bills urged the president to move quickly in removing the restrictions. "The fall of the Assad regime presents a pivotal opportunity," they argued. But other members of Congress seem inclined to wait. So do European governments. Kaja Kallas, the EU's foreign-policy chief, said the bloc would only start lifting sanctions once HTS has taken "positive steps" towards creating an inclusive government.

Early signs of that are mixed. In recent days Mr Sharaa has met representatives of minority groups, including the Druze, and rival rebel groups, like the faction that led the uprising in southern Syria earlier this month. Meeting them is one thing, though; giving them a role in a post-Assad government is another. (...)

Syria will soon have a pressing need for basic commodities. Iran had been shipping as much as 80,000 barrels of free oil per day. Those deliveries have been halted. Syria could buy oil on the spot market, but that requires hard currency, which is scarce. Foreign reserves are believed to have fallen as low as \$200m, down from \$17bn before the war. Mr Assad and his cronies are thought to have stolen billions.

After more than a week of silence, on December 16th a statement attributed to Mr Assad appeared on a social-media account he previously used. He claimed he never wanted to flee Syria—"the only course of action was to continue fighting"—but that his Russian backers forced him to evacuate. Though it could not be authenticated, the missive sounded like Mr Assad. It was widely mocked by Syrians, and then forgotten: another sign of how quickly the former president, who loomed so large over Syrian life for decades, has faded into irrelevance. ■

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/12/19/everyone-wants-to-meet-syrias-new-rulers>

The Economist, 19 décembre, article payant

Prospects of a ceasefire in Gaza : Israel and Hamas look close to some kind of deal

Lebanon, Syria and Donald Trump have all been important



PHOTOGRAPH: FLASH90

Full text:

A series of meetings in Cairo and Doha have led to renewed optimism about the prospect of a deal between Israel and Hamas, the Palestinian Islamists in Gaza, ending the war there after over 14 months. A number of factors, including a ceasefire in Lebanon and the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, which have isolated Hamas, and pressure on Israel from Donald Trump, who would like to take credit for a deal, have brought new flexibility on both sides. But Israel's military presence in Gaza and the question of the release of 100 Israeli hostages remain obstacles. A truce of some weeks will probably precede a longer-term ceasefire. ■

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/12/19/israel-and-hamas-look-close-to-some-kind-of-deal>

Wall Street Journal, 17 décembre, article payant

Assad's Fall Upends the Middle East's Largest Drug Empire

Captagon helped sustain the Syrian regime, and fueled war and addiction across the region



A Syrian rebel standing beside material for manufacturing captagon at a warehouse near Damascus on Friday. PHOTO: HUSSEIN MALLA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Extractions:

The fall of Syria's Bashar al-Assad overturned the most profitable drug-smuggling network in the Middle East, exposing the former regime's role in manufacturing and trafficking pills that fueled war and social crises across the region.

Captagon, a methamphetamine-like drug that has been produced for years in Syrian labs, [helped the Assad regime amass huge wealth](#) and offset the impact of punishing international sanctions, while also allowing allies such as Lebanon's Hezbollah militia to profit from its trade.

Days after [they ousted Assad](#) in a lightning offensive last week, rebels circulated videos from industrial-scale manufacturing and trafficking facilities inside government air bases and other sites affiliated with former top regime officials. (...)

Used by everyone from taxi drivers and students working late hours to militia fighters seeking courage, Syrian-produced captagon helped drive a demand for drugs across the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia, and became a source of international tension between Syria and its neighbors.

The disclosures provide evidence of what had long been alleged: that the Assad regime was the driving force behind an estimated \$10 billion annual global trade in captagon, which in recent years has become the drug of choice across the Middle East. Assad used the funds to sustain its rule and reward loyalists.

“This absolutely proves that the regime was systematically involved in captagon production and trafficking,” said Caroline Rose, an expert on the captagon trade at the New Lines Institute, a Washington think tank. “They were able to make these facilities as large as they wanted to, and plug and play.”

While captagon has long been known to have been produced in smaller labs across Syria—despite Syrian denials—the size and scale of the newly disclosed facilities show the staggering extent of the trade at every level of the regime.

“You can imagine the manpower, the resources that were required. It shows such investment into this illicit trade,” Rose said. “It penetrated so many elements of the regime: its political apparatus, patronage networks, the security apparatus.”

Captagon was the brand name of a drug originally manufactured in Germany in the 1960s to treat conditions such as narcolepsy and attention-deficit disorder. After it was banned in most countries for being too addictive, criminal groups moved production of the drug to Lebanon and then to Syria after its civil war broke out in 2011. Most of the world's captagon has been produced there in recent years. (...)

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, [the Islamist rebel group](#) leading the blitz offensive that toppled Assad, has attacked the captagon trade as an example of the former regime's moral and financial corruption. In a victory speech at Damascus's Umayyad Mosque on Friday, [HTS leader](#) Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani said Assad had turned Syria into "the largest captagon factory in the world. Today, Syria is being cleansed, thanks to the grace of Almighty God."

The dismantling of the Assad captagon empire will also strain the resources of Hezbollah, which according to U.S. and Arab security officials facilitated trafficking in areas under their control and secured the houses of drug dealers in southern Syria.

Economic activities in Syria such as taxation and smuggling, including of captagon, helped Hezbollah deflect the damage of international sanctions—which also affect its sponsor, Iran—and become more financially self-sustaining.

"Captagon allowed Hezbollah to diversify its source of revenue," said Joseph Daher, visiting professor at the University of Lausanne and author of a book on the political economy of Hezbollah.

Uprooting the captagon trade is unlikely to dent the growing appetite for drugs in the Middle East, experts say. The industrial-scale production in Syria amplified a demand for captagon since the late 2010s, which will remain high, Rose said.

If the blow to Syria's captagon production leads to a permanent supply shortage, drug users will likely either pay more for captagon or turn to other and more dangerous stimulants that are surging in the region, such as crystal meth, she said. (...)

https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/syria-assad-captagon-drug-trade-a8b30615?mod=hp_lead_pos7

The Jerusalem Post, 14 décembre, article payant

What the new Middle East chessboard means for Israel - opinion

The collapse of Assad's regime marks the start of a new and volatile chapter.



REBELS LED by HTS capitalize on their swift takeover of Aleppo in northern Syria and Hama in the west-central region by pressing onward to Homs, in Hama, last Friday. Having pounded anti-Assad factions for years, Russia cannot expect accommodation from HTS, say the writers.
(photo credit: REUTERS)

Extraits:

(...) With Assad gone, Iran's influence has suffered a decisive blow. The offensive that toppled his regime also weakened Hezbollah and isolated Iranian forces, removing a linchpin of Iran's "Axis of Resistance." Yet this strategic gain for Iran's opponents does not guarantee stability. Rival factions are competing to fill the vacuum, leaving Israel confronted with new and unpredictable threats.

Israel faces a profoundly altered security environment. While the demise of a longstanding adversary offers a brief reprieve, the ascent of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham near its northern frontier is alarming. HTS, rooted in al-Qaeda, has seized major territories and proclaims ambitions extending beyond Syria's borders. (...)

Lacking prospects for Western reconstruction aid due to its extremist credentials, the rebel group may consolidate power through radicalism, openly threatening Jerusalem and Mecca. This places Israel and Saudi Arabia in the crosshairs of a group adept at exploiting chaos. For the next US president, Donald Trump, who vowed to end foreign entanglements, the rise of HTS complicates any aspirations for disengagement.

Russia's position in [Syria](#) is also uncertain. The hasty withdrawal from several bases amid HTS's advance raises the question: Will Moscow abandon its prized naval facility at Tartus? (...) Having pounded anti-Assad factions for years, Russia cannot expect accommodation from HTS. (...)

Israel, aware of these shifting dynamics, is already moving to secure its northern border. Recent operations aimed at creating a buffer zone in southern Syria reflect a strategic priority: pre-empting extremist advances and deterring Iranian proxies. This approach underscores a broader effort to recalibrate security postures across the region. (...)

Syria's collapse also reverberates through neighboring states. Lebanon, economically fragile and politically beholden to Hezbollah, faces further destabilization as Tehran's influence wanes. Without reliable Syrian support, Hezbollah may intensify its grip on Lebanon's politics, worsening an already dire crisis. (...)

For Israel, the priority is to leverage the strategic openings created by Assad's fall while mitigating the risks of emboldened extremists. It must reinforce intelligence capabilities, neutralize remaining Iranian proxies, and deepen diplomatic engagement with partners like Jordan and the Gulf states. Such efforts are essential in a region now defined by shifting alliances, fragmented authority, and the uncertain role of global powers.

The collapse of [Assad's regime](#) marks the start of a new and volatile chapter. Whether this upheaval leads to a more stable order or plunges the Middle East into further discord depends on the strategic choices that regional and international actors make now. For Israel and its neighbors, the challenge is to navigate an environment reshaped by the simultaneous weakening of Iran, the unsettling rise of jihadist actors, and the uncertain recalculations of global powers.

Catherine Perez-Shakdam is executive director of We Believe In Israel and the Forum for Foreign Relations. Dr. Stepan Stepanenko is director of research and strategy at the Forum for Foreign Relations.

<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-833035>

Le Point, 13 décembre, article payant

Hugo Micheron : « Il n'y a pas de djihadistes modérés »

Chercheur à Sciences Po, le spécialiste du djihadisme analyse les forces et les dynamiques à l'œuvre en Syrie après la chute d'Assad.



Pour Hugo Micheron, c'est à des fins tactiques qu'Abou Mohammed al-Joulani renonce à la dimension globalisante du djihad.
© ©Francesca Mantovani ©Gallimard/opale.photo

Extraits:

(...) Quelques semaines plus tard, la riposte israélienne avait lieu au Liban ; [la Russie, l'Iran et le Hezbollah devaient repositionner certaines troupes hors de Syrie](#), permettant ainsi au groupe djihadiste HTC de mener une incroyable offensive et de renverser le régime de Bachar el-Assad.

Enseignant-chercheur à Sciences Po, Hugo Micheron connaît bien cette milice et [son leader, Abou Mohammed al-Joulani](#). Il nous invite à nous méfier de sa prétendue conversion en guerrier libérateur de la Syrie.

Le Point : Après avoir survécu à de nombreuses crises et tragédies, le régime Assad s'est effondré. Que vous inspirent ces jours historiques ?

Hugo Micheron : C'est la fin d'un régime haï en Syrie, qui est responsable d'une guerre civile ayant fait 400 000 morts et 11 millions de déplacés en interne et en externe. Un régime qui aurait probablement perdu la guerre civile sans l'intervention de l'Iran et de la Russie. La Syrie était de facto un condominium russo-iranien, c'est-à-dire un régime ayant perdu sa souveraineté. Il s'est effondré en quelques jours, mais il était en sursis depuis dix ans. Cela rappelle le scénario afghan. À Kaboul, le régime était soutenu par une puissance extérieure, en l'occurrence les États-Unis, et semblait solide. Il a été renversé sous les coups de boutoir des talibans, un groupe qui, par certains aspects, rappelle la coalition menée par HTC.

Comment qualifier Abou Mohammed al-Joulani, le nouvel homme fort de la Syrie ?

Il est trop tôt pour dire ce qu'il est devenu. Il suffit de regarder son « pedigree ». C'est un Syrien, né dans une famille plutôt aisée. Il rejoint le djihad en Irak en 2003 et se retrouve dans une prison tenue par les Américains, où il est en contact avec tous ceux qui deviendront l'état-major de Daech.

Entre 2011 et 2012, il est envoyé en Syrie par le chef de l'État islamique d'Irak et futur chef de Daech, Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, avec qui il se brouille, avant de monter son propre groupe autonome, le front Al-Nosra, rien de moins que la filiale d'Al-Qaïda en Syrie.

Il mène alors une politique de syrianisation du djihad, très différente des pratiques de Daech. Il est plus politique que l'État islamique et ne recourt pas à l'ultra-violence. Il s'est d'abord cassé les dents contre le régime soutenu par l'Iran et la Russie. Mais quand il a vu le soutien au régime diminuer, il a repris la route, avec de l'équipement fourni par la Turquie et son soutien direct ou indirect, et il a rempli son premier objectif : faire tomber Bachar et s'emparer de Damas. (...)

Al-Joulani s'est un peu taillé la barbe et il a troqué l'habit du cheikh pour celui du chef militaire. Mais il faut se méfier, il est très doué pour la politique et a bien compris les signaux qu'il fallait envoyer sur la scène internationale, notamment aux Occidentaux. Un peu comme les talibans qui avaient promis aux Américains et aux médias occidentaux qu'ils avaient changé. On voit aujourd'hui qu'il n'en est rien. (...)

Je vois deux grands scénarios se dessiner : soit la Syrie devient comme la Libye – l'opposition se fragmente en plusieurs fiefs et le pays connaît une sorte de guerre civile prolongée –, soit elle suit l'exemple irakien après la chute de Saddam Hussein : le pouvoir est stabilisé par une puissance étrangère. En Irak, c'est l'Iran qui était à la manœuvre. En Syrie, c'est la Turquie qui pourrait structurer le nouveau régime. (...)

Faut-il prendre Al-Joulani au sérieux quand il dit avoir renoncé au djihad global et au terrorisme ?

Il a peut-être renoncé à la dimension globalisante du djihad d'Al-Qaïda à des fins tactiques. Ça ne veut pas dire qu'il a renoncé à l'intégralité du corpus idéologique djihadiste. (...)

Quand il dit avoir renoncé au djihad global, Al-Joulani nous dit : « Ne vous en faites pas, laissez-moi faire, je vais stabiliser la région. » Le problème, c'est qu'il n'y a pas de djihadistes modérés. Cela n'existe pas. (...)

Son groupe administrait déjà la région d'Idlib, où il appliquait la charia. Va-t-il étendre la loi islamique à l'ensemble du pays ?

Al-Joulani est un tacticien qui pense sur le court, le moyen et le long terme. À Idlib, le régime repose sur une interprétation extrêmement rigoriste de la charia, comme le font les salaf-djihadistes. L'espace public est régi par la morale religieuse, même si, contrairement à Daech, il existe une forme de tolérance envers les chrétiens et les minorités religieuses.

HTC n'a pas mis en place d'exécutions publiques filmées, mais c'est un régime extrêmement brutal et qui n'a aucune considération pour un gouvernement non religieux. L'idée qu'il puisse y avoir des lois qui émanent d'une justice humaine est pour lui une hérésie. Le paysage d'Idlib sous le régime de HTC montre un rigorisme qui n'avait jamais existé auparavant dans la région.

On est sur des bases qui ne sont pas celles de l'islam traditionnel syrien. Il ne faut pas être naïf. Al-Joulani est un très bon politique, mais son projet est religieux, il n'y a aucun doute. (...)

Le Figaro, 13 décembre, article payant

À Idlib, vitrine du nouveau pouvoir syrien, «on vit proche du Coran»

REPORTAGE - La ville est administrée par le groupe rebelle islamiste HTC depuis 2017. Elle offre un aperçu de son projet de société, qui pourrait être répliqué au niveau national.



Des Syriens célèbrent les premiers succès des rebelles de HTC, le 1^{er} décembre, dans la province d'Idlib. *Middle East Images / ABACA*

Extraits:

Au North Café, situé à la bordure d'Idlib, deux femmes discutent à mi-voix autour d'un smoothie. De leurs visages, on ne distingue que des yeux rieurs. Comme de nombreuses habitantes de la ville située à l'extrême nord-ouest de la Syrie, elles portent le niqab. Dans ce café, une palissade coupe la terrasse en deux. À gauche, les hommes. À droite, l'espace réservé à la gent féminine. Ici, pas d'alcool, ni de cigarette pour les femmes. Chem, qui habite la ville depuis 2017 et est combattant indépendant rallié à HTC, désigne les clientes du café. « *Un conseil, si tu peux t'habiller avec des vêtements amples pour que les gens ne te distinguent pas, c'est mieux pour ta sécurité. Par exemple comme les sœurs assises là-bas* », lance le rebelle de 38 ans armé d'une kalachnikov.

Depuis 2017, l'enclave d'Idlib est sous la coupe de Hayat Tahrir al-Cham (HTC), groupe rebelle ayant mené l'offensive éclair qui a fait tomber le régime demi-centenaire de la famille el-Assad le 8 décembre. Ils administrent une zone d'une superficie d'environ 6500 kilomètres carrés grâce à un « gouvernement de salut syrien », qui rejetait jusqu'à sa chute la légitimité du gouvernement de Bachar el-Assad.

Le territoire n'utilise pas la livre syrienne. Ici, on ne paie jusqu'à présent qu'en livres turques, en dollars ou éventuellement en euros. De nombreuses incertitudes demeurent sur la nature du régime que l'organisation HTC souhaite mettre en place en Syrie. Dans ce contexte, Idlib est un proto-État qui peut être considéré comme une vitrine du fonctionnement et de l'idéologie du groupe. (...)

Sur la place adjacente au lycée pour filles Hussam-Hijazi, les habitants se retrouvent à grands coups de frappes dans le dos et de sourires. « *Ici nous vivons une vie normale. Vous pensez que la Syrie, c'est Hiroshima... Oui il y a eu la guerre mais il y a une vie, les gens ont besoin de manger, les enfants d'aller à l'école comme tout le monde* », commente Chem, le combattant rattaché aux rangs de HTC. Il porte un treillis et un foulard noir sur la tête, dont seule dépasse une longue barbe brune. Au niveau de son abdomen, trois réserves de cartouches. Il s'interrompt pour montrer le stade de football à la pelouse flambant neuve que l'on aperçoit depuis le café. « *J'espère que d'ici à quelques années, le Barça, Ronaldo et Messi viendront jouer ici* », lance-t-il.

À l'instar d'un État régulier, le « gouvernement de salut syrien » dispose de ministères allant de la Sécurité à la Santé, de forces de l'ordre, d'une université et d'hôpitaux. Ici comme à Damas, les rebelles de HTC se veulent rassurants, soulignant la mue qu'ils ont effectuée depuis 2012. D'abord rattachée à [al-Qaida](#) sous le nom de « [Front al-Nosra](#) », l'organisation a pris ses distances avec le djihad global et a coupé tout lien avec l'organisation terroriste en 2016.

Son idéologie demeure néanmoins particulièrement rigoriste. À Idlib, les porteuses de niqab représentent environ un tiers des femmes présentes dans l'espace public, alors qu'elles sont rares dans le centre de Damas. « *Je suis allé à Damas pour la première fois la semaine dernière lors de l'offensive. Je remercie Allah de vivre ici, lâche Chem. Ici, on vit proche du Coran, on respecte les règles de l'islam.* »

Il réfléchit, avant de trancher : « *Notre exemple, [ce sont les talibans d'Afghanistan](#) (qui interdisent notamment aux filles et aux femmes d'étudier, imposent un code vestimentaire strict et des lois basées sur une lecture ultrarigoriste du Coran, NDLR). Ils se sont battus pendant 42 ans, et maintenant ils vivent chez eux selon leurs propres règles. Quelle fierté !* » Le combattant ne porte pas la parole officielle du groupe. Mais ses mots reflètent des idées partagées par d'autres rebelles de HTC que nous avons rencontrés à Damas et Idlib. (...)

« *On verra ce que l'avenir nous réserve. En tout cas tout le monde a sa place ici, il n'y a pas de divisions dans notre pays* », élude Adel Badaoui sous le regard avisé de son père. Le HTC, en passe de diriger le pays, multiplie les déclarations publiques et les initiatives selon lesquelles les minorités, [notamment les chrétiens](#), ne seront pas discriminées. (...)

Malgré les inquiétudes, l'optimisme demeure. « *J'ai rencontré Abou [Mohammed al-Joulani](#) (le nom de guerre du chef du HTC, NDLR), je lui fais confiance* », avance au téléphone M^{gr} Hanna Jallouf, évêque des catholiques de rite latin en Syrie basé à Alep. En 2014, le franciscain a été enlevé par le Front al-Nosra.

Libéré, il se bat plus que jamais pour maintenir le dialogue entre les communautés, persuadé qu'un avenir commun peut exister en Syrie entre chrétiens et musulmans. « *Maintenant, si Dieu le veut, la guerre est finie, et on va ouvrir un nouveau chapitre* », espère Adel Badaoui, à l'instar de tous les autres habitants que nous avons rencontrés. Un message lancé depuis le bastion de la résistance islamiste au régime de Bachar el-Assad, devenu laboratoire d'un gouvernement de transition que le monde entier regarde avec appréhension.

<https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/a-idlib-vitrine-du-nouveau-pouvoir-syrien-on-vit-proche-du-coran-20241212>

Le Monde, 11 décembre, article payant

En Syrie, les premiers témoignages accablants des prisonniers sortis des geôles du régime d'Al-Assad

Reportage : L'hôpital Al-Nafis, dans le nord de Damas, a la lourde tâche de recueillir des hommes brisés, libérés de l'enfer carcéral du clan Al-Assad. Les médecins n'avaient jamais vu une telle détresse psychologique. Les familles, elles, tentent désespérément de retrouver les leurs dans les couloirs des urgences ou à la morgue.



Extraits:

L'homme est comme suspendu entre le monde des morts et celui des vivants, allongé sur une civière en cuir noir à l'hôpital Al-Nafis, dans le quartier de Barzeh, dans le nord de Damas, mardi 10 décembre. La tête posée sur la paume de sa main, son regard est perdu dans le vide et sa bouche reste bée. Son œil gauche est tuméfié, son nez épaté par une vieille fracture. D'autres fractures à la colonne vertébrale et au crâne ont brisé son corps fragile, dénutri. Une maladie de peau lui ronge les jambes.

Une quinzaine de personnes l'entourent, certaines, un téléphone à la main avec la photo d'un proche qui, comme lui, a disparu, un jour, dans l'enfer carcéral du clan Al-Assad. Ils n'en sont pas encore revenus. « *Tu as vu mes fils ? Bassem et Ahmed Alala* », lui crie un Syrien d'une cinquantaine d'années, brandissant un portrait de ses deux enfants âgés d'une vingtaine d'années, avant leur disparition, il y a dix ans.

« *Il ne se souvient même pas de son propre nom...* », souffle un médecin qui n'arrive pas à retenir la foule autour de l'homme. Quand il reprend parfois ses esprits, le trentenaire tient des propos décousus. « *Il s'appelle Khaled Badawi. Il était soldat et a déserté. Il a été arrêté, il y a deux ans, à Alep et transféré à [la prison de] Saydnaya. Nous n'avions plus de nouvelles de lui depuis* », dit son frère Tarek, posté au pied du lit.

Lorsqu'il l'a reconnu, la veille (lundi ?), sur une vidéo circulant sur Facebook, Tarek s'est mis immédiatement en route, avec toute la famille, depuis Alep, à 350 kilomètres plus au nord. Seuls les deux enfants de Khaled Badawi, âgés de 3 et 5 ans, et leur mère, de qui il est séparé, sont restés à Alep. « *On est contents de le retrouver. Il va un peu mieux qu'hier* », poursuit Tarek. Deux de leurs cousins, 24 et 34 ans, sont encore portés disparus, dix ans après leur arrestation à un barrage de sécurité.

Khaled Badawi a été le premier prisonnier à être arrivé, dimanche, à 7 heures du matin, à l'hôpital Al-Nafis. Il a été libéré de Saydnaya, la sinistre prison située à 20 kilomètres au nord de Damas, décrite par l'ONG Amnesty International comme un « *abattoir humain* », au moment où les rebelles syriens emmenés par Hayat Tahrir Al-Cham (HTC, Organisation de libération du Levant, ancienne branche d'Al-Qaida en Syrie) se sont emparés de Damas. (...)

Pour les familles dont les proches ont disparu dans les geôles syriennes, la libération des griffes du clan Al-Assad s'est transformée en une éprouvante quête. De la prison de Saydnaya aux mosquées et aux hôpitaux de Damas, où ont été transférés les prisonniers, morts ou vifs, après que les portes des prisons se sont ouvertes. A l'hôpital de Damas, près de la vieille ville, des Syriens s'engouffrent par dizaines dans les couloirs qui mènent à la morgue. Trente-cinq corps ont été amenés dans la nuit. (...)

Des corps sont disposés sur les tables, dans des sacs mortuaires bleus. Certains sont morts, il y a longtemps. Leur peau est noircie, tannée comme le cuir. D'autres semblent avoir péri ces derniers jours. Les médecins légistes les examinent pour déterminer la date et la cause de leur décès. « *La plupart sont morts depuis longtemps. Certains ont été tués par balles. Ils ont des traces de coups sur le corps. Il est possible qu'ils aient été torturés* », affirme un médecin légiste, qui préfère ne pas se prononcer avant la fin des examens. (...)

« *On était traités comme des insectes. Les gardiens n'étaient pas humains, c'étaient des démons. Nous n'étions même pas autorisés à les regarder dans les yeux, sinon ils nous frappaient ou nous exécutaient* », raconte Aouni Said Khalaf, un masque noir lui couvrant la bouche. (...)

https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/12/11/en-syrie-les-premiers-temoignages-accablants-des-prisonniers-sortis-des-geoles-du-regime-al-assad_6441638_3210.html

The Economist, 11 décembre, article payant

Who are the main rebel groups in Syria?

They were united against the country's dictator. Now they have little in common



PHOTOGRAPH: AFP

Extraits:

WHEN REBELS [reached Syria's capital](#), Damascus, on December 8th, they did so from two directions. Fighters from the south were the first to arrive. From the north came members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former affiliate of al-Qaeda that had led the push against the [country's dictator](#), Bashar al-Assad, over the preceding fortnight. The Syrian National Army (SNA) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), two other important groups, were also involved in the fight to topple Mr Assad. This was the culmination of 13 years of bloody civil war. Soon after rebels reached the city, the president fled, ending more than 50 years of his family's rule.

Mr Assad is a member of Syria's Alawite minority: he terrorised both the Sunni majority and other minorities, including Kurds, Christians and Druze. Over the course of the civil war, hundreds of militias sprang up. Rebel

groups with disparate aims were united in their opposition to him. Now that he is gone, those militias may find that they lack a common purpose. Who are Syria's main players and what do they want?

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham

This group, led by Ahmed al-Sharaa (also known as Abu Muhammad al-Jolani), is believed to have 10,000-30,000 fighters. It is an Islamist movement rooted in Salafism, an ultra-conservative branch of Islam. HTS was founded in 2011, under the name Jabhat al-Nusra, as an affiliate of al-Qaeda. It broke with the group in 2017 and has sought to distance itself from jihadism, purging al-Qaeda loyalists from its ranks. Since that year HTS has ruled a slice of Idlib governorate, in Syria's north-west, pushing the bulk of Islamic State (IS) fighters out of the area. It established the Syrian Salvation Government there, which taxes residents, provides social services and issues identity cards. Syria's new prime minister, Muhammad al-Bashir, previously served as the head of that administration. Mr Sharaa has sought to present HTS as a religious nationalist group tolerant of minorities: it does not impose dress codes on women and permits church services. But America, Britain, Europe and the United Nations still classify HTS as a terrorist group (though they are pondering whether to change that). (...)

Syrian Democratic Forces

East of Idlib governorate, in the north of the country, the SDF runs a fief that encompasses roughly a quarter of Syria. The SDF is Kurdish-led, though it also has Arab and Christian fighters. Its military wing is led by the People's Protection Units, many of whom are veterans of the Kurdistan Workers Party, a militant group that fought for years inside Turkey for an independent Kurdish state. Turkey considers the SDF a terrorist group, and the country's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, sees the presence of a Kurdish force on his doorstep as a threat. But the SDF is backed by America, which has spent hundreds of millions of dollars training and arming the group to help it fight IS. (...)

Syrian National Army

HTS may have led the offensive, but the SNA's role has also been decisive. It too is influential in the north. Mr Erdogan established the group in 2017, bringing together a network of anti-Islamist militias who opposed Mr Assad. Many SNA fighters were once members of the Free Syrian Army, a collection of opposition groups made up of defectors from Syria's armed forces, and the group remains fairly decentralised. Turkey, which funds, trains and arms it, uses the SNA as a proxy to fight the SDF. (...)

Islamic State

IS is a diminished force in Syria—but the uncertainty created by the overthrow of Mr Assad could provide it with an opportunity. The jihadist group originated in Iraq, where its members fought alongside al-Qaeda as part of the Iraqi insurgency that sprang up after America and Britain deposed Saddam Hussein. In 2014 IS seized a large chunk of north-eastern Syria, as well as territory in Iraq, where it imposed an extremist interpretation of Islamic law. By 2019 its caliphate had been dismembered: the land it had held was divided between rebel groups and its fighters retreated to small pockets of rural Syria. Some 10,000 of its fighters are imprisoned by the SDF. If fighting in Kurdish areas intensifies, and leads to their escape or release, IS could pose a renewed threat to Syria and the West. ■

<https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2024/12/10/who-are-the-main-rebel-groups-in-syria>

New York Times, 10 décembre, article payant

Hanna Notte: Putin Just Suffered a Huge Defeat

Hanna Notte is the director of the Eurasia Nonproliferation Program at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, Calif.



Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin in 2017. Illustration by The New York Times; source photograph by Mikhail Klimentyev/Sputnik, via Associated Press

Extraits:

This time, when Bashar al-Assad started to fall, Russia was not there to catch him.

Russia largely watched from the sidelines as Syrian rebels swept through the country in less than 10 days, overtaking Aleppo, Hama and Homs before entering Damascus, the capital, on Sunday. Mr. al-Assad is now gone, his departure celebrated by crowds of ecstatic Syrians. In Russia, where Mr. al-Assad has fled, the fall of his government amounts to a devastating loss. Decades of Russian military and political investment to carve out a foothold in the Mediterranean are now at risk. Vladimir Putin may yet manage to retain some stakes in a post-Assad Syria, but there's no way around it: He just suffered a significant defeat. (...)

Besides seeing its partner [Iran weakened](#), Russia will lose leverage to other regional heavyweights, especially Israel and Turkey. Russia's partnership with Mr. al-Assad and Hezbollah made it an Israeli "[neighbor to the north](#)," which meant that Israel had to inform Russia when it was conducting strikes against Iranian proxies in Syria. Israel also had to navigate with caution on Ukraine, even as Russia moved closer to Iran and adopted a pro-Palestinian position on the Gaza war. With Mr. al-Assad gone and the Iranians sidelined in Syria, Israel has more room to maneuver.

With Turkey, with which Russia has a longstanding rivalry, the loss is arguably greater. Having already accumulated leverage over Russia since the invasion of Ukraine, Turkey [could have](#) formidable bargaining power in any negotiations over Russia's future influence in Syria thanks to its patronage of Syria's armed opposition.

Mr. al-Assad's ouster could also lead to the more tangible loss of the bases, Hmeimim and Tartus. Russia will do all it can to retain the bases, of course. The shift in its language when talking about its new Syrian interlocutors — from "terrorists" to "armed opposition" — suggests diplomatic efforts are already underway.

In that, Russia may succeed. But its influence in Syria — and the regional clout that came with it — will never be quite the same.

The Jerusalem Post, 10 décembre, article payant

Operation 'Bashan Arrow': IDF destroys over 350 Syrian Military targets

IDF says most of Syria's military capabilities were destroyed within 48 hours.



A bombed hangar after the IDF hit weapons depots near the Mazzeh military airport, outside Damascus, on December 9, 2024. (credit: BAKR ALKASEM/AFP via Getty Images)

Extraits:

(...) The aim of the operation was to prevent them from falling within reach of terrorist groups in Syria.

The Israeli navy struck both the Al-Bayda and Latakia ports, in which were some 15 Syrian naval vessels, the military added.

The military struck anti-aircraft batteries, air force fields belonging to the Syrian military, and weapons production facilities in Damascus, Homs, Latakia, Palmyra, and Tartus. The IDF also degraded cruise missiles, surface-to-sea missiles, UAVs, fighter jets, radars, tanks, and attack helicopters, among other things.

<https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-832749>

The Economist, 10 décembre, article payant

Pass the port : Syrian rebels have dealt a blow to Vladimir Putin's naval ambitions

The loss of a key Mediterranean port could hobble the Russian navy



PHOTOGRAPH: AP

Extraits:

FOR 50 YEARS Russia's foothold in the Mediterranean has been bound up with the Assad dynasty in Syria. It was in 1971 that Hafez al-Assad—father of Bashar, Syria's dictator until last week—became president of the country. And it was the same year that the Soviet Union signed a deal with Syria to lease a port at Tartus on Syria's coast. That enduring Russian military presence now hangs by a thread, following the [swift collapse of the Assad regime](#). The Kremlin appears to have avoided a panicked and disorderly departure, but its influence on NATO's southern flank is likely to wane. (...)

A spokesman for the Kremlin said that Russia had taken “necessary steps to establish contact in Syria with those capable of ensuring the security of military bases”. One of those steps appeared to be a more emollient tone to the people that Russia once bombed: Russian media have hurriedly switched from describing rebels as “terrorists” to the “armed opposition”. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the [most powerful rebel group](#), “has been pragmatic in its tone and seems to be keeping its engagement options open,” says Michael Kofman of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a think-tank. It is possible that the group would allow Russia to keep the base in exchange for arms, diplomatic support or some other quid pro quo. What is more likely is that any deal will be a temporary arrangement. Russia is “negotiating the terms”, says Mr Kofman, but is on the way out. “One way or another, Moscow will likely have to abandon its bases in Syria.” (...)

Nine years ago, Russia's intervention in Syria marked its resurgence as a major military power beyond Europe. Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, fresh from invading eastern Ukraine and annexing Crimea the previous year, swooped in to save his ally with a decisive show of air power thousands of miles from home. The events of the past week mark a sharp reversal in fortunes. Mr Assad's fall “is a major blow to Putin's dream of Russia as a global player in a multipolar, post-Western world,” writes Sabine Fischer of the SWP think-tank in Berlin.

Many influential Russians appear to have reached much the same conclusion. The new rulers of Syria “create the impression of being rational and civilised”, wrote Fyodor Lukyanov, an analyst close to the Kremlin, adding that Russia's “absolute priority” was Ukraine. Russia, he concluded, was better off being a regional power, focused on Europe. “Moscow does not have sufficient military forces, resources, influence and authority to intervene effectively by force outside the former Soviet Union,” agreed Ruslan Pukhov, an expert at the CAST think-tank in Moscow with close ties to the defence establishment. Russia had won fast, but failed to consolidate their victory politically. “The Americans have been through this before in Iraq and Afghanistan,”

wrote Mr Pukhov, “but the Russians, by our national tradition, must necessarily step on the same rake themselves.”■

<https://www.economist.com/europe/2024/12/10/syrian-rebels-have-dealt-a-blow-to-vladimir-putins-naval-ambitions>

Le Figaro, 10 décembre, article payant

Renaud Girard: «Le grand gagnant de la chute de Damas, c’est Erdogan»

CHRONIQUE. - Erdogan a pris pas surprise la totalité des observateurs du Proche-Orient. Il va désormais s’adonner sans entraves à son sport favori : la répression des Kurdes.



Extraits:

La prise de Damas, le 8 décembre 2024, par les rebelles du HTC (Hayat Tahrir al-Cham, organisation de libération du Levant), après une folle course de douze jours, les ayant amenés, de la poche d’Idlib contrôlée par la Turquie, à Alep, puis Hama, puis Homs, puis la capitale syrienne, est un événement, au Moyen-Orient, comparable en importance géopolitique à ce que fut la chute du mur de Berlin de 1989 en Europe.

Le grand gagnant de cette affaire, ayant pris par surprise la totalité des observateurs du Proche-Orient, est le Frère musulman qui préside aux destinées de la Turquie depuis le début du XXI^e siècle. Non seulement ses proxies (supplétifs étrangers) ont chassé ceux de l’Iran dans le contrôle de la Syrie voisine, mais il va pouvoir désormais s’adonner sans entraves à son sport favori : la répression des Kurdes, ce peuple musulman mais non arabe, qui aspire à la liberté, à l’indépendance et à la laïcité. (...)

Lors des printemps arabes de 2011, le président Erdogan, dans une forte pulsion néoottomane, a essayé de mettre la main sur l’Égypte, la Libye, la Tunisie, en y encourageant les Frères musulmans. Sauf en Tripolitaine, cette stratégie a lamentablement échoué. Voilà qu’il a maintenant la chance inouïe d’offrir une troisième

manche à sa stratégie néottomane – la deuxième ayant été le succès de ses alliés azerbaïdjanais dans leur guerre d'agression de septembre 2020 contre les Arméniens.

Joulani, le nouveau patron de la Syrie, se présente comme un nationaliste, respectueux des droits des minorités. Les naïfs ont le droit de le croire. Personnellement, j'ai du mal à croire qu'un homme qui a fait des allers et retours entre al-Qaida et l'État islamique soit vraiment un militant de la tolérance religieuse. Il a peut-être changé, mais pas au-delà de l'idéologie des Frères musulmans, qui est aussi celle, depuis sa jeunesse, du président turc. Napoléon exigeait de ses généraux qu'ils aient de la chance. Incontestablement, Erdogan en a.

<https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/renaud-girard-le-grand-gagnant-de-la-chute-de-damas-c-est-erdogan-20241209>

Le Point, 9 décembre, article payant

Kamel Daoud : ce que révèle la révolution syrienne

CHRONIQUE. La chute de Bachar el-Assad, provoquée par des islamistes rêvant de restaurer le califat, illustre l'échec des élites progressistes du monde arabe.



Extraits:

« Irhal ! » (« Pars ! ») rugit la foule sur la place Tahrir. Le dictateur s'appelait [Moubarak](#), c'était en Égypte, le 25 janvier 2011. On connaît la suite. Idem pour la Libye, la Tunisie ou l'Algérie. L'opportunisme islamiste (mieux armé, mieux financé), puis le retour à l'autoritarisme sous prétexte de « stabilité » face au « chaos » de la « démocratie » déjà maudite, car trop occidentale...

Faut-il donc toujours croire à une « révolution » dans le monde dit « arabe » ? Peu probable, si l'on considère les échecs répétés depuis un siècle dans cette région engluée dans la sacralité de Dieu ou de l'autoritarisme. Mille raisons de rester en mode observateur sceptique, entre le califat à venir et la dictature en ruine. L'empathie ne change pas la réalité.

D'abord, l'équation du changement est toujours verrouillée entre une dictature, qui prétend offrir « la stabilité » au prix des libertés, et un islamisme, qui demeure la seule force politique organisée depuis la fin des colonisations ou des protectorats. Au milieu de ce piège, les progressistes, laïcs ou « gauche arabe », souvent

engoncés dans des attitudes ambiguës face à l'Occident ou rentiers des décolonisations et du sentiment anti-occidental. Des minorités spéculatives qui ne pèsent plus dans le rapport de force, comme les baathistes panarabes au Proche-Orient ou les mouvements décolonialistes au Maghreb. Ces castes idéologiques ne contrôlent ni les institutions, ni les médias, ni la ténacité du travail de proximité des foules, ni la production du leadership.

Il y a deux décennies, les printemps « arabes » avaient démontré la réalité arabe, aussi cruelle soit-elle : un échec dans les deux sens de la rupture politique. Celui de la démocratie impossible, car non préparée, et celui des dictatures invivables, parce qu'elles sont violentes et prédatrices. Aujourd'hui, la Syrie, grand pays exemplaire de la douleur d'être « arabe » au présent, confirme encore une fois cette équation.

Trois jours à regarder, de loin, le scénario de la « libération », érodé, voire refroidi, par les décevantes années précédentes : prisonniers libérés, statues déboulonnées, dictateur en fuite, cris des foules et des pleurs de joie. On ne peut rester insensible à cette émotion, car elle réactive ce rêve millénaire politique dans le monde arabe : un jour, nous serons libres, un jour, nous serons heureux.

Mais, au cœur de cet enthousiasme, il y a désormais une fêlure : le soulèvement est encore une fois « islamiste », la dictature est tombée, mais « sur la tête du peuple » encore une fois. (...)

La Syrie continue d'offrir le même message inquiétant et discret : dans le monde dit « arabe », ce qui devait changer, c'est l'idée de... changement. Aujourd'hui, si l'on n'est pas islamiste, on ne rêve plus que de fuir vers l'Allemagne et l'Occident. Cette force politique, ventriloque des prédatrices internationales, dangereuse et barbare, est l'unique dynamique du changement. C'est aussi un échec. C'est l'échec des élites progressistes à accepter l'idée de sacrifice et de mort, de « travailler » l'éducation, les syndicats, la « culture » et les propagandes, de reproduire les idéaux par les écoles et les livres. (...)

La Syrie, c'est un peu le monde dit « arabe », entre le califat à venir et la dictature qui ne veut pas renoncer. On lui souhaite de meilleurs jours.

https://www.lepoint.fr/debats/kamel-daoud-ce-que-revele-la-revolution-syrienne-08-12-2024-2577452_2.php

Wall Street Journal, 9 décembre, article payant

After the Fall of Syria's Assad

It's a defeat for Russia and Iran, and it offers openings for Trump.



A woman waves a Syrian opposition flag as she celebrates at Umayyad Square in Damascus on December 8 PHOTO: BAKR AL KASSEM/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Extraits:

The weekend collapse at long last of the Assad family regime in Syria is no cause for mourning unless you are the leaders of Russia and Iran. The fall creates risks but also opportunity for a better Syria and a more stable Middle East.

The Kremlin said Sunday that Bashar al-Assad had fled Damascus, and Russian state media reported that he had been granted asylum in Russia. It speaks volumes about Russia that it has become the ultimate protector of the man who murdered more of his own people than even his father, Hafez al-Assad. (...)

It's worth recalling Barack Obama's role in keeping Mr. Assad in power. Mr. Obama declined to support the opposition in any important way and then refused to enforce his "red line" against Mr. Assad's use of sarin and chlorine gas to kill his own people.

Incredibly, Mr. Obama invited Russia to help end the civil war. [Vladimir Putin](#) obliged by joining with Iran to prop up Mr. Assad, elbowing the U.S. out, and establishing an air base and a long-desired naval base on the Mediterranean. This misjudgment helped Iran expand its Axis of Resistance from Tehran to Beirut. It also reversed the strategic triumph achieved by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in the 1970s in minimizing the Soviet Union's influence in the Middle East.

The fall of the Assad government is a defeat for Russia and Iran. (...)

None of this is the result of President Biden's foreign policy. Like Mr. Obama, his Middle East priority has been appeasing Iran. (...)

But Israel turned the tables, first by diminishing Hamas in Gaza, then by eliminating Hezbollah's leadership, and demonstrating it can strike even heavily defended targets in Iran. Tehran's mullahs couldn't protect

Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah, Hamas's leader Yahya Sinwar, and now Mr. Assad in Syria. All of this is the result of Israel's daring and fortitude in self-defense, even in the face of Mr. Biden's opposition. (...)

Then there is Iran, which may respond to its new weakness by accelerating its nuclear program. The Institute for Science and International Security, run by close Iran-watcher David Albright, said Friday: "From today's IAEA [U.N nuclear watchdog] update on Iran, it is clear that Iran is instituting a capacity to make weapon grade uranium, under the guise of making 60 percent, at the Fordow underground enrichment plant."

Mr. Trump will face an early decision on whether to destroy this capacity before Iran gets a nuclear weapon.

Optimism is rarely warranted in the Middle East, but realism and strength can increase deterrence. The Oct. 7 Hamas massacre is turning out to be a miscalculation for the ages, leading to defeats for the forces of Mideast mayhem. Mr. Trump can exploit the opportunities.

https://www.wsj.com/opinion/after-the-fall-of-syrias-assad-middle-east-russia-iran-red-lines-trump-32633dff?mod=hp_opin_pos_0

Le Figaro, 9 décembre, article payant

Gilles Kepel : « La chute de Bachar el-Assad est la manifestation cruciale d'un bouleversement du monde »



Gilles Kepel. *Fabien Clairefond*

GRAND ENTRETIEN - Des rebelles, menés par des islamistes radicaux, ont annoncé la chute du président syrien et la «libération» de la capitale Damas. Pour le spécialiste de l'islam et du monde arabe contemporain*, cette déroute signe l'effondrement de l'« axe de la résistance antisioniste » dirigé par Téhéran.

*Professeur émérite des universités, Gilles Kepel a récemment publié « Le Bouleversement du monde : l'après-7 Octobre » (Plon, 2024).

Voir « Article du Jour » !

<https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/gilles-kepel-la-chute-de-bachar-el-assad-est-la-manifestation-cruciale-d-un-bouleversement-du-monde-20241208>

The Jerusalem Post, Opinion, 9 décembre, article payant

The fall of Assad: A message to those who rely on Iran and Russia - opinion

The future of Syria is at a foundational moment. What comes next can always be worse.



Extraits:

(...) The immediate question is – what does this mean for Russia and Iran's abilities to pursue foreign assets? I previously believed the duo would swoop in to save Assad as they had before, but this time they did very little to save him. While Israel reportedly prevented Iranian aid and troops from reaching Damascus, it is unlikely it was enough to prevent the siege of the capital. Will Western powers move to capitalize on a sense that Iran and Russia are spread too thin?

Iran and Russia spent decades propping up proxy powers across the region, including Assad in Syria. Historically, Iran would deploy Hezbollah from Lebanon to assist the Assad regime, but they were largely dismantled fighting Israel.

Iran also relies on Syria to get arms to Hezbollah. The collapse of Syria cuts Iran off from Hezbollah, unless they travel through northern paths that require passing US military installations or Israeli surveilled zones. Iran is not positioned to take Israel on directly, which is clear based on their inability to reach Syria. Israel should capitalize on this.

Israel can seize the moment by reinforcing the Golan Heights and ensuring all northern passages to Lebanon are severed. Israel must also make clear to the rebel factions controlling the northern border that challenging Israel comes with grave peril. Strategic aerial strikes and military operations can prevent Iran from rearming Hezbollah. (...)

Regarding Russia, it is known that the war in Ukraine has drained its resources. Some estimates suggest Russia has lost over 600,000 men in Ukraine and countless amounts of treasure. If Russia cannot defend its operations in the Middle East, its investments in Libya and across central Africa could become targets. (...)

The argument that Russia being spread thin allowed for the collapse of Syria will be a boost to all who advocate for funding the Ukrainian defense effort. Funding Ukraine against Russia is undeniably better than the US directly combating it, but this shows quantitative results for the investment outside Ukrainian territory. It is in the US's interest for Russian allies to fail globally from a strategic standpoint. If we can cut Iran off from its proxies in the process, that is an incredible bonus. (...)

The future of Syria is at a foundational moment. What comes next can always be worse. The international community cannot allow Syria to fall into control of Islamic fundamentalists. The easiest way to counter this is to demand Turkey cease its support of the HTS and potentially support the Kurdish forces in the north who have been allies to Israel and the US for decades. Kurdish communities lost tens of thousands fighting ISIS on behalf of Western coalitions; we can support them against attacks from Turkey and remnants of the Assad regime.

I admit I thought Assad's regime would last longer than a couple of days once the war kicked off again. But what this shows is that Russia and Iran are not positioned to protect one of their longest-standing allies.

Israel and the US can send a message to all who stand under the Iranian-Russian umbrella: They are not your friends and will not save you if you challenge our countries. If done properly, we can reshape global dynamics for decades, but we must be methodical and precise to capitalize on an overexposed enemy.

<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-832577>

The Economist, 9 décembre, article payant

After Assad: Who will rule Syria now the Assad regime has been toppled?

Syrians are hoping for a peaceful transition of power. They may not get it



PHOTOGRAPH: AFP

Extraits:

ON THE ROAD to Damascus from Syria's border with Lebanon on December 8th, Syrian army posts lay deserted. The asphalt was littered with uniforms left behind by Bashar al-Assad's forces, who had swiftly changed into civilian clothes and fled from advancing rebels. Posters with the former dictator's face had been [torn and defaced](#). Less than two weeks after rebels [began their advance](#), the regime had fallen and Mr Assad had fled to Moscow. In Damascus and across the country, Syrians were cheering a fresh start and a reboot of their relations with the world.

What kind of fresh start will they get? Much depends on whether Syria's multi-pronged opposition, suddenly bereft of its common enemy, will band together to form a pluralist, federal civilian government over all of Syria, or descend into infighting that plunges the country into a new civil war.

The early signs have been encouraging, though it is far too soon to be sure of anything. The rebels, foremost among them Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former al-Qaeda affiliate that has ruled a slice of north-western Syria for the past few years, say they have learnt the lessons of past regime changes in the Arab world. Unlike in Iraq and Libya, the transition is being managed locally, rather than by foreign powers and returning exiles. Russia and Iran, previously Mr Assad's main backers, have retreated into the shadows.

The rebels have appealed to the police and civilian authorities to remain in their posts pending the announcement of a unity government. They have imposed a curfew, which by the evening of December 8th appeared mostly to have stopped looting in the capital (the pilfering of crockery from the presidential palace aside). And though most of the rebels are from the Sunni majority that was particularly terrorised by the Alawite Assads, they have toned down their sectarian triumphalism and have promised to protect Syria's many minorities.

But things in Syria have a habit of getting complicated. The de facto partitioning of Syria that took place under Mr Assad has intensified since his fall. Rebels from the north, east and south of the country co-ordinated their takeover with remarkable discipline in recent days. Yet because Mr Assad's regime collapsed far faster than they expected, they have not had time to plan for the day after. Each of the four main factions—Turkish-backed Sunni rebels in the north-west, Kurds in the north and east, Jordanian-backed rebels in the south, and the remaining loyalists from Mr Assad's Alawite sect in the west—has its own army. All of them have been bolstered by the weapons, land and economic holdings seized from the Assads in recent days. Each group will

want its share of the spoils and a slice of whatever package is arranged to reconstruct the devastated country, with needs estimated to cost some \$200bn.

Within hours of Mr Assad's fall, the fragile truce between the different groups had begun to break down as fighting flared at Manbij, on the line dividing Turkish-backed Arabs in the north-west from the Kurds in the north-east. (...)

The strongest contender to rule Syria is Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, the 42-year-old head of HTS, which launched the rebel offensive from its seat in Idlib in north-western Syria only 11 days ago, on November 27th. Mr Jolani (pictured) has ditched his Islamic nom de guerre (his Telegram channels now refer to him as "President Ahmed al-Shara"), and assured Christians and women that he has no plans to impose strict Islamic codes. On the evening of December 8th he delivered a sermon in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus; Syrian state television broadcast a statement in which he claimed that "the future is ours". He is said to like comparisons to Saudi Arabia's Muhammad bin Salman, another young Sunni strongman.

But Mr Jolani's past as al-Qaeda's leader in Syria and his brutal suppression of rivals makes others wary. (...)

That America, Russia and the UN all regard Mr Jolani as a terrorist and HTS as a terrorist organisation could also complicate things if he does indeed take charge. His close ties with Turkey and Qatar irk Arab powers who want to limit their zone of influence. Some opposition figures talk ominously about how convenient his assassination would be. (...)

Whoever takes charge in Damascus will have trouble controlling all of Syria. (...)

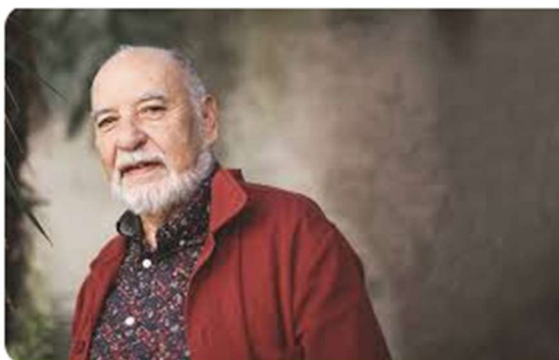
Some hope foreign powers could help the rebels cobble together political and military councils or even a unity government and pave the way for a power-sharing transition. America, though, will probably do little to help. "THIS IS NOT OUR FIGHT," Donald Trump wrote in capitals on his social-media account. "LET IT PLAY OUT. DO NOT GET INVOLVED!" After 13 years of civil war and penury, an exhausted population is praying for a peaceful handover that has proved vanishingly rare in the Arab world. With so much division inside and outside Syria, consensus will be hard to find. ■

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/12/08/who-will-rule-syria-now-the-assad-regime-has-been-toppled>

Le Figaro, 9 décembre, article payant

Tahar Ben Jelloun : « Aujourd'hui, Bachar est en fuite comme un pauvre type »

CHRONIQUE. Pour l'écrivain franco-marocain, la chute du régime de Bachar el-Assad, renversé par des rebelles islamistes, constitue une bonne et une mauvaise nouvelle.



Extraits:

Comme au moment de la fuite de Saddam Hussein, le palais de Bachar el-Assad est envahi par les « rebelles libérateurs » d'un pays sous la dictature des el-Assad depuis un demi-siècle. Des images pathétiques.

La fuite ! C'est ce que Bachar a trouvé de mieux pour échapper à un procès qui l'aurait condamné, vu que cet homme a massacré délibérément son peuple qui, au moment du « Printemps arabe », en mars 2011, a manifesté pacifiquement, réclamant la démocratie et la liberté. Bachar a donné l'ordre à son armée de tirer sur les manifestants.

À partir de là, Bachar n'a rien voulu entendre. Une élimination de son peuple a été programmée et mise à exécution. Ce qui s'est traduit par des centaines de milliers de morts et par six millions de réfugiés dans le monde. (...)

Aujourd'hui, ce qui arrive est assez surprenant : une bonne et une mauvaise nouvelle. Bonne, parce que Damas est tombée et que Bachar est en fuite comme un pauvre type, un lâche, un criminel de la pire espèce. Mauvaise, parce que le mouvement « Hayat Tahrir al-Sham » (HTS) agit au nom d'une idéologie islamiste intégriste. Il est composé d'anciens membres d'Al-Qaïda.

Pour le moment, les habitants sortent crier leur joie et leur soulagement, disant : « Ça ne peut pas être pire ! » Ensuite, on ne sait pas ce qui va se passer et surtout comment ce groupe va gouverner un pays blessé, dépeuplé et martyrisé.

https://www.lepoint.fr/debats/tahar-ben-jelloun-aujourd-hui-bachar-est-en-fuite-comme-un-pauvre-type-08-12-2024-2577446_2.php

The Economist, 8 décembre, article payant

The road to Damascus : The fall of Syria's dictator

After the rebels' astonishingly swift advance, Bashar al-Assad has fled



PHOTOGRAPH: AFP

Extraits:

SYRIANS HAVE seen these scenes before: their countrymen tearing down posters of Bashar al-Assad, overrunning his army bases, storming the jails where he keeps political prisoners. But that was ten years ago and more. They had not expected to see them again. And they certainly had not expected what came next:

abandoned by his army and his foreign allies, Mr Assad has fled the country. The Syrian dictator's brutal 24-year reign has come to a sudden end.

His defeat took less than two weeks. (...)

The regime's ever-shrinking rump state, consisting of Damascus and the coast, was almost totally encircled by the evening of December 7th. Nobody had seen Mr Assad in days. His office claimed that he was still in Damascus, working as usual, but there were no images to confirm it. Many Syrians thought he was long gone. His family was already thought to be in Russia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). (...)

In a video message hours later Muhammad al-Jalali, the Syrian prime minister, said the regime was prepared to hand control to a transitional government. The army chief told officers that Mr Assad's reign had ended. There is still no official word on the president's whereabouts.

Syrians are in shock at the regime's swift collapse—even though it had looked inevitable for days. (...)

A desperate Mr Assad then tried courting Arab states. Multiple sources say he made a personal appeal to Muhammad bin Zayed, the president of the UAE, who has a well-known hatred of Islamist groups like HTS. He has also begged for help from Egypt, Jordan and other countries. But nobody was willing to help a regime that seemed like a lost cause. "He's telling everyone he wants to fight," one well-connected Syrian said of Mr Assad before his fall. "The problem is that no one else wants to fight for him."

What happens next is impossible to predict. (...) But HTS probably lacks the resources to govern a big, diverse country. (...)

As the rebels advanced on Damascus, officials from Iran, Russia and Turkey met on the sidelines of a conference in Qatar to discuss Syria's future. They did not agree on much. (...)

Turkey, which has backed the rebels in northern Syria, will have the most influence over how they act. Donald Trump, America's president-elect, seems content to let others sort out the mess: "THIS IS NOT OUR FIGHT," he wrote on social media.

For many Syrians, though, such questions can wait. There is great unease about the future—but greater relief that the end of the Assad regime, which brought so much death and destruction, has finally come. ■

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/12/07/the-fall-of-syrias-dictator>

Le Point, 8 décembre, article payant

« **Les Occidentaux doivent tendre la main au nouveau pouvoir en Syrie** »

INTERVIEW. Après la chute d'Assad et la prise de Damas par les rebelles islamistes, l'ex-ambassadeur Michel Duclos souligne les risques de la transition dans un pays épuisé par la guerre civile.

*Conseiller spécial géopolitique à l'Institut Montaigne, [Michel Duclos](#) a été ambassadeur de France à Damas de 2006 à 2009. Il est l'auteur du livre *La longue nuit syrienne, 10 années de diplomatie impuissante* paru aux Editions de l'Observatoire.*



À Damas, avec le drapeau de l'opposition syrienne, le 8 décembre 2024. © Firas Makdesi / REUTERS

Extraits:

Le Point : Après la « Longue nuit syrienne », pour citer le titre de votre livre, l'aube se lève-t-elle sur la Syrie ?

Michel Duclos : Il y a une chance, mais les choses peuvent encore tourner mal. On ne peut pas exclure un scénario à la libyenne, où les groupes rebelles se divisent. Ou un scénario à l'afghane, où un groupe écrase les autres, là-bas c'était les talibans. Il y a quand même, dans le peuple syrien, un certain degré de maturité politique. Et peut-être aussi que les hommes comptent, et que nous avons dans Ahmed al-Chareh, le chef du groupe Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), un vrai politique. Il a montré qu'il avait su tempérer son islamisme par une ouverture aux minorités et par un gouvernement relativement responsable à Idlib. Il y a des éléments d'espoir d'une reconstitution d'un contrat national syrien. (...)

Qui sont ces rebelles du HTS, qui ont mené l'essentiel de l'offensive sur Damas ces derniers jours ?

Il s'agit d'une filiale d'Al-Qaïda, reconvertie dans un agenda national syrien. Beaucoup de gens s'interrogent sur la sincérité de cette conversion. Pour moi, la rupture avec Al-Qaïda a bien eu lieu et la question serait plutôt de savoir si leur chef a l'étoffe d'un grand homme politique, quelqu'un qui comprend qu'il faut transcender son ADN pour réunir un pays. En outre, bien que l'attention soit focalisée sur lui et son groupe, il faut se souvenir qu'il y a beaucoup d'autres groupes rebelles, soit directement soutenus par la Turquie, réunis dans ce qu'on appelle l'Armée nationale syrienne, soit au sud, soutenus par les Jordaniens, les Américains.... Ces différentes sensibilités sont-elles capables de s'entendre ? La Syrie est un pays qui n'a pas connu la démocratie ; l'idée de compromis n'est pas évidente. (...)

Comment doivent réagir les Occidentaux ?

Ils doivent sortir de leur incompréhension radicale. Le 1er décembre, la déclaration quadripartite [Etats-Unis, France, Royaume-Uni et Allemagne, ndlr] appelaient à « une désescalade »... *Il est nécessaire aujourd'hui que les Occidentaux, et en particulier les Français, qui ont une responsabilité historique vis-à-vis de la Syrie, tendent la main au nouveau pouvoir.* Il faut envoyer des signaux, montrer que la France partage la joie des Syriens, la joie de la libération de la Syrie. Même les soutiens d'Assad sont soulagés aujourd'hui ! Il faut saluer les sacrifices de tous les Syriens morts pour la libération de leur pays, la souffrance de toutes les victimes d'un régime criminel entre tous, la foi de tous ceux qui croient encore dans la capacité à revivre de ce pays.

Mais passer d'un dictateur sanguinaire à un pouvoir islamiste, n'est-ce pas troquer un mal contre un autre mal ?

Cela va être le sentiment général. Mais il faut se souvenir que si les rebelles sont devenus islamistes, c'est parce qu'on les a lâchés en 2013. Il ne faut pas renouveler cette erreur ! Au départ, le centre de gravité de la rébellion n'était pas islamiste ; c'est à partir du moment où on les a lâchés que les Syriens se sont tournés vers ceux qui leur apparaissaient comme les plus résistants, les plus hostiles au régime.

Le grand vainqueur régional est-il la Turquie ? Quel est le plan du président Erdogan derrière toute cette opération ?

Je pense que son idée initiale consistait plutôt à infliger une leçon à Assad, et donc de donner un feu vert à Ahmed al-Chareh et à son groupe HTS pour faire le coup de feu à Alep. La prise d'Alep a surpris la Turquie ; j'en veux pour preuve le fait que les groupes qui sont plus directement affiliés à la Turquie, regroupés dans ce qu'on appelle l'Armée nationale syrienne (ANS), au nord-est d'Alep, ne sont intervenus que quelques jours plus tard. Cela laisse penser que les Turcs n'avaient pas planifié tout ce qui s'est passé. (...)

Dans quel état est la Syrie après 13 années de guerre civile ?

Un état épouvantable, où 80 % des habitants vivent dans la pauvreté, souvent dans une pauvreté abjecte. Il y a encore un peu de pétrole, mais il n'y a plus vraiment d'industrie. Les gens survivent grâce à l'argent envoyé de l'étranger par les Syriens exilés. La grande ressource du régime Assad, c'était la drogue captagon. L'une des immenses difficultés à relever pour le nouveau pouvoir, quel qu'il soit, sera de rétablir une économie. Mais il sera peut-être aidé par le fait que beaucoup de Syriens exilés manifestent une grande envie de revenir au pays. https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/les-occidentaux-doivent-tendre-la-main-au-nouveau-pouvoir-en-syrie-08-12-2024-2577441_24.php

Erreur ! Nom du fichier non spécifié.

The Guardian, 8 décembre, libre accès

Fall of Damascus sidelines Russia and brings Turkey to the fore

As Moscow's top diplomat reeled in Doha, his Turkish counterpart appeared to know he had the upper hand



📷 A Syrian Kurdish fighter flashes a victory sign in north-east Syria after the fall of Damascus to anti-opposition fighters. Photograph: Delil Souleiman/AFP/Getty Images

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/08/syria-fall-of-damascus-sidelines-russia-and-brings-turkey-to-the-fore>

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 8 décembre, article payant

Damaskus ist gefallen: Der Sturz von Bashar al-Asad verändert Syrien und den gesamten Nahen Osten

In atemberaubender Geschwindigkeit haben die islamistischen Rebellen die syrische Hauptstadt erobert. Asad ist offenbar geflohen – auf den Strassen Syriens herrschen Freude und Ungewissheit. Für die Region bedeutet das eine Zeitenwende.



Die Rebellen feiern die Kontrolle über Damaskus.

Omar Sanadiki / AP

Extraits:

(...) Der Vormarsch markiert eine neue Ära: In atemberaubender Geschwindigkeit haben die Rebellen die Herrschaft der Familie Asad gestürzt, die das Land seit 54 Jahren unterdrückt hat. Bashars Vater Hafiz al-Asad hatte sich im Jahr 1970 in Damaskus an die Macht geputscht und Syrien ebenfalls jahrzehntelang mit eiserner Faust regiert.

Nun haben die Rebellen geschafft, was ihnen im Jahr 2011 nicht gelungen ist. Als damals der Arabische Frühling Syrien erreichte, antwortete Asad auf die Forderungen nach Reformen mit unfassbarer Gewalt und setzte in den Jahren darauf auch Giftgas gegen seine eigene Bevölkerung ein. Das Resultat war ein blutiger Bürgerkrieg, in dessen Folge Hunderttausende Menschen vertrieben wurden und unter anderem der Islamische Staat die Macht in einigen Teilen des Landes übernahm.

Die Rebellen bringen nun auch Damaskus unter ihre Kontrolle

● Jihadisten ● Geländegewinne Jihadisten ● Kurdische Gruppen ● Türkische Einflusszone



Kartengrundlage: © Openstreetmap, © Maptiler

Stand: 8. Dezember 2024, 12 Uhr. Es sind die Geländegewinne seit dem 26. November dargestellt.

Quelle: [UAMaps](#)

NZZ / jum., sih., adi.

Mit ausländischer Hilfe konnte sich Asad allerdings wieder fangen: Russland, Iran und der libanesische Hizbullah gaben Asad Schützenhilfe im Krieg gegen das eigene Volk. Doch die Schutzmächte des Autokraten haben nicht mehr die Kraft, die Schreckensherrschaft Asads zu stützen. Russland hielt sich bis auf wenige Luftangriffe im Nordwesten Syriens aus den Kämpfen heraus. Iran hatte jüngst einige Militärberater geschickt, die aber laut der [«New York Times»](#) schon am Freitag wieder abgezogen wurden. Für beide Mächte ist der Verlust Syriens ein schwerer Schlag. (...)

Im Rest der arabischen Welt hat der rasante Fall Asads vor allem Besorgnis ausgelöst. Man wolle bloss kein weiteres Chaos, wiederholen etwa Vertreter vom Golf in privaten Gesprächen. Auch deshalb hatten sich die Golfstaaten dem einst verhassten Asad in letzter Zeit wieder angenähert und versucht, ihn mit Versprechen und Hilfen gefügig zu machen. (...)

Jetzt blicken sie skeptisch in die Zukunft. Gerade in Abu Dhabi oder Riad gelten die protürkischen Islamisten der HTS als alles andere denn als vertrauenswürdige Partner. (...)

In Syrien herrscht derweil Ekstase, gemischt mit Ungewissheit. (...)

Die Rebellen der HTS hatten sich in den letzten Jahren einen moderateren Anstrich verliehen. Ihr Anführer, [Mohammed al-Julani](#), hat seinen Bart gestutzt und zeichnet seine Dekrete nun mit seinem zivilen Namen Ahmed al-Sharaa. Am Sonntagmorgen verbot er seinen Kämpfern, die Institutionen des Staates in Damaskus gewaltsam einzunehmen. Diese sollten vom bisherigen Ministerpräsidenten in einem geordneten Prozess übergeben werden. Auch Freudenschüsse in die Luft sind offenbar verboten. (...)

In Syrien hat am Sonntagmorgen die Stunde null geschlagen: Es ist völlig offen, wer auf Asad folgt und ob das Land nicht von neuem in blutigen Kämpfen versinkt, die entlang konfessionellen Grenzen ausgetragen werden. Klar ist beispielsweise, dass die kleine Minderheit der Alawiten, aus der Asad stammt, über ein Ende der Herrschaft ihres Schutzherrn nicht glücklich sein wird.

Doch auch im alawitischen Kernland, etwa in der Hafenstadt Latakia, brach am Sonntag vereinzelt Jubel auf den Strassen aus. Dass Damaskus ohne Blutvergiessen fiel, ist ebenfalls ein Hoffnungsschimmer: Ein langer Kampf um die Hauptstadt hätte den Bürgerkrieg neu entfachen können. «Ich hoffe auf eine neue Verfassung und freie Wahlen», sagt Anas al-Rawi. Noch fühle sich das allerdings sehr weit entfernt an, und die Begeisterung überschattete alles. «Ich hätte nie gedacht, dass ich die Stunde null noch erleben darf.»

Israel bombs Iran : Israel's limited missile strike on Iran may be the start of a wider assault

Whatever Iran's response to the attack, it carries risks for the regime (The Economist, 28 octobre, article payant)

Extraits :

AFTER DECADES of shadow war between the Jewish State and the Islamic Republic, in the early hours of October 26th Israel carried out its first officially acknowledged [attack on Iran](#). Dozens of warplanes flying at least 1,300km from their bases in Israel launched missiles against air-defence facilities and missile factories in three Iranian provinces, including on the outskirts of the capital, Tehran.

It is a measure of the sky-high levels of tension in the Middle East that the targets chosen by Israel, which were purely military, were perceived to be among the [more limited of its options](#). Since Iran launched 181 ballistic missiles [against Israel on October 1st](#), officials close to Binyamin Netanyahu had been talking up the Israeli prime minister's view that a "historic opportunity" had opened up for landing a strategic blow on Iran.

Instead Israel mainly hit Iran's Russian-made S-300 air-defence radars and missile launchers, avoiding its nuclear sites. Nor did the Israelis destroy vital economic targets such as oil-export terminals. This suggests that Israel is, for once, taking into consideration the pressure from its American ally. It may also suggest Israel is preparing the ground for a subsequent, much more devastating, strike.

The key to understanding Israel's decision is the [American political calendar](#). With America's presidential election just ten days away, Israel had the choice of retaliating against military targets, with America's tacit blessing, or defying President Joe Biden's explicit warnings not to attack nuclear or energy-related facilities on the eve of the vote. The latter would have jeopardised future co-operation with a Democratic administration, should Kamala Harris win on November 5th. In the event of victory for Donald Trump, who has already expressed his support for an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear programme, then there is always an opportunity for future strikes. (...)

This time Mr Netanyahu has chosen to exercise strategic patience, at least for now. But if he is prepared to pay a political price for choosing a more measured course of action against Iran, it almost certainly means that on the other fronts Israel is waging war—Gaza and Lebanon—he will be less receptive to pressure for ceasefires. Add to that the pressure from his far-right allies, who have the power to topple his government during the next session of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, which begins on October 27th, and any kind of cessation of Israel's other wars looks less likely.

The nature of this strike on Iran appears to show that when America cares to apply serious pressure, it can still shape Israeli policy. Israel has repeatedly escalated the fighting in Gaza and Lebanon this year, in defiance of the Biden administration's urgings. This time it acted in full co-ordination, so far avoiding a move that could have caused both regional conflagration and a global energy price spike. However the risk is that this attack was only a prelude to a more serious assault to follow. ■

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2024/10/26/israels-limited-missile-strike-on-iran-may-be-the-start-of-a-wider-assault>

Who are Gaza's 'civilians'? Inside Gazan identity, Hamas ties - opinion

Not everyone in Gaza should be declassified as a "civilian," but I do think that another review of the identity of Gaza's "civilian" population is required. (Le Jerusalem Post, 28 octobre, article payant)

Extraits :

A year has passed since an estimated 2,500 [Gaza civilians followed in the footsteps of the Hamas](#) Nukhba units that broke through the [Gaza](#) security barrier, and ransacked and decimated a dozen Jewish border communities.

Some assisted the Hamas terrorists by pointing out specific homes, while others looted.

Several dozen had themselves photographed joyfully celebrating the day's victory by standing on burning tanks and at ripped open fences, smiling with their fingers in the V-sign held high.

Multiple video clips display their actions, including one old Arab limping on his cane as he enters the back gate of the kibbutz.

Many hundreds more joyfully greeted the returning Hamas terrorists with live or dead hostages on their trucks, cars and motorbikes.

They shouted and cheered and several are pictured stomping on dead Israelis as well as hitting and spitting at the hostages.

Ironically, despite the expulsion of all Israelis from Gaza in 2005, tens of thousands of Gaza civilians had been in contact with Israelis, mainly due to the effort Israel made to provide employment in Israel so as to wean Gazans from terror.

Some 50,000 others, according to a CNN report, had benefited from the Israeli Road to Recovery NGO whose volunteers, many from the Gaza border communities, transported sick Gazans into Israel for medical treatment.

(...) A complex relationship

JEWS AND Arabs have had a complex relationship over the past century and a half. (...)

THE FIELD of biopolitics investigates how political power shapes the behaviors of whole populations through diverse strategies and controls. Gaza, however, acts in the reverse: The politics of the location is influenced by the demographic makeup of the Gaza Strip.

The current population of Gaza is estimated at two million. More importantly, more than 70% of that population is defined as refugees of Palestine. In other words, the "native" Gaza population is a small minority. The refugees cared for by UNRWA make up almost three-fourths (74%) of the current population of Gaza.

A 1988 study found that in 1948 Arabs, from some 144 cities, towns, and villages came to Gaza. The area's population tripled by 1950 with 42% originating from the Lydda District and more than 50% from areas surrounding what became the Gaza Strip.

These now "refugees," their identity maintained through food handouts, schools and summer camps, all overseen by Hamas, were indoctrinated that they are "foreign" to where they live.

Add to this the high rate of under-18 year olds, who are most prone to be attracted to violent behavior patterns, and the result is a constant wave of Hamas reinforcements.

To that reality, and taking into consideration the history outlined above regarding Gaza's violent reactions to the Jewish resettlement enterprise of the last 120 years, the mantra of "Gaza's civilians" and "Gaza's non-combatants" must be reappraised. (...)

This analysis is not suggesting that everyone in Gaza should be declassified as a "civilian," but I do think that another review of the identity of Gaza's "civilian" population is required.

The writer is a researcher, analyst, and opinion commentator on political, cultural, and media issues.

<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-826338>

The Dilemma Iran's Leader Faces (NYT, Guest Essay, 25 octobre, article payant)

Extraits :

If a person is fortunate enough to live into his ninth decade, life often turns toward quiet reflection, relaxation and the comforts of family and community. Not for the 85-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The sunset years of Iran's supreme leader have been defined by a series of daunting challenges: regional humiliations, domestic uprisings, the looming threat of war with Israel and a pivotal decision on whether to pursue nuclear weapons — a choice with profound implications for his political legacy and the country he has ruled for 35 years.

In the past 100 days, Mr. Khamenei has endured devastating losses. Israel struck decisive blows against Iran's so-called axis of resistance, including the assassination of the Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and Yahya Sinwar in Gaza and the elimination of Mr. Khamenei's most important ally, the Lebanese Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah. Additionally, on Oct. 16, the United States [sent B-2 stealth bombers](#) — \$2-billion-dollar aircraft capable of delivering 30,000-pound bunker-busting bombs — to destroy weapons depots in Yemen linked to Iran's Houthi allies. It was another blow to Iran's proxy armies, and a clear signal to Tehran that its underground nuclear sites are within reach. (...)

In short, Mr. Khamenei has spent the autumn of his life violently repressing a population that wants to unseat him while simultaneously engaging in a sophisticated military and financial conflict with Israel and the United States. Now, on the cusp of a major military attack by Israel, a nuclear power, the supreme leader faces a critical choice: whether to pursue nuclear weapons. (...)

Until now, Iran has maintained a strategy of nuclear ambiguity, attempting to deter its adversaries by staying just short of developing a nuclear weapon without the severe economic and diplomatic penalties associated with one. Although Iranian officials long emphasized that Mr. Khamenei issued a fatwa forbidding nuclear weapons under Islamic law, they now openly acknowledge their capacity to build such weapons if they choose, echoing U.S. intelligence assessments. Iran's domestic media estimates the total cost of the country's nuclear program — including sunk expenditures, lost energy revenue and foreign investment due to sanctions — can be measured in the hundreds of billions of dollars, yet it contributes a mere 1 percent to Iran's energy needs.

Perhaps the most important role that Iran's nuclear program has served for the last two decades is diverting attention away from its cultivation of missiles, drones and potent regional proxies. As a senior Gulf official once told me about the U.S.-led strategy toward Iran: “We spend all of our time trying to prevent them from acquiring a weapon they will never use, while neglecting the weapons they and their proxies use against us every single day.” (...)

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Mr. Khamenei now faces a dilemma of his own making. Having ruled since 1989 — the last time he left Iran — he is caught in a high-stakes military, financial and psychological battle against America and Israel at a time when his own mental faculty and energy are undoubtedly fading. Hesitating to respond to adversaries' provocations risks further diminishing his authority, yet a strong response could jeopardize his survival.

As he navigates these challenges, the growing pressure for succession discussions in Tehran will only intensify, raising critical questions about Iran's future direction and stability. In this last chapter of his life, Mr. Khamenei must grapple not only with his legacy but also with the existential fate of the regime he has led for decades.

Russia Provided Targeting Data for Houthi Assault on Global Shipping

Moscow's assistance in attacks that are disrupting trade shows how the Kremlin is seeking to tie up the U.S. in the Middle East (WSJ, 25 octobre, article payant)

Extraits :

Russia provided targeting data for Yemen's Houthi rebels as they [attacked Western ships](#) in the Red Sea with missiles and drones earlier this year, helping the Iranian-backed group assault a major artery for global trade and further destabilizing the region.

The Houthis, which began their attacks late last year over the Gaza war, eventually began using Russian satellite data as they expanded their strikes, said a person familiar with the matter and two European defense officials. The data was passed through members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, who were embedded with the Houthis in Yemen, one of the people said.

The assistance, which hasn't been previously reported, shows how far Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) is willing to go to undermine the U.S.-led Western economic and political order. Russia, in this case, supported the Iran-backed Houthis, which the U.S. designates as a terrorist group, as they carried out a series of attacks in one of the world's most heavily traveled shipping routes.

More broadly, Russia has sought to stoke instability from the Middle East to Asia to create problems for the U.S., analysts say. The widening conflict in the Middle East, triggered by last year's Oct. 7 attack on Israel, has absorbed resources and attention at a time when Washington has [sought to focus on the threats](#) from Russia and China.

“For Russia, any flare up anywhere is good news, because it takes the world's attention further away from Ukraine and the U.S. needs to commit resources—Patriot systems or artillery shells—and with the Middle East in play, it's clear where the U.S. will choose,” said Alexander Gabuev, director of Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, a think tank based in Berlin. (...)