

Syria Let's start with the good news: Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship has fallen. As regime defences crumbled, Moscow and Tehran appeared to have accepted HTS's guarantees that Iran could safely pull assets out and Russia pull back to its Mediterranean port at Tartus or air base in Latakia (whether Russia will keep the port and base, which serve as hubs for its operations in Africa, is unclear). Assad, banking on the continued support of Hizbollah, Iran and Russia, neglected his own forces, relying on conscripts, poorly paid reservists, and predatory militias. The truce left Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former al-Qaeda affiliate that had broken with the global jihadi movement, in charge of Idlib province. In 2020, Turkey sent in troops and struck a deal with Russia, which used its ties with Assad to halt an assault on Syria's north west that Ankara feared would drive millions more refugees into Turkey. The Syrian army's rout owed partly to the well-drilled force that HTS had assembled and partly to the regime's own decay.