

“Arab countries will work to prevent the Muslim Brotherhood from long-term rule in Syria.”

Interview with Tarek Ajib

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*On December 8, the Syrian dictator **Bashar al-Assad** fled to Russia leaving the country to be occupied by a coalition of armed fighters led by **Ahmad al-Sharaa**, the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).*

The HTS and the numerous affiliated armed groups have taken over the administration of the country, and have not carried out any massacres or threatened the public safety. They say they will be caretakers until March when a transition government will be formed in Damascus and later elections to be held. The HTS and their affiliates are now conducting themselves in the role of a police force.

However, the Syrian people, the neighboring countries, the Middle East as well as Europe and the US are extremely worried about the radical Islamic ideology of the fighters and their leadership. Al-Sharaa has referred to the current state of Syria as an ‘Islamic State’.

Syria was ruled for 50 years as a secular socialist form of government. The Muslim Brotherhood is viewed in many countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Russia as a banned terrorist organization.

Experts warn of the possibility of Syria turning into a new version of Afghanistan under the Taliban. Syria is a mixed population of Sunni, Alawi, Shiite and Christian. The Muslim Brotherhood ideology is not acceptable to the majority of Syrians who seek a secular democracy.

Steven Sahiounie of MidEastDiscourse interviewed Tarek Ajib to gain further insight into the events happening on the ground.

Tarek Ajib is a Syrian journalist and researcher. He has been a member of the Syrian Journalists Union and the Arab since 1998. He is editor-in-chief of Midline-news, and a founding member of the Paris Forum for Studies and Research.

Steven Sahiounie (SS): Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a radical Islamist group supported by Turkey, is now in control of Syria. In your opinion, why does Turkey’s President Erdoğan want a radical group in charge of Syria?

Tarek Ajib (TA): It is important to know at the beginning that the ideology and doctrine of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is very close to the ideology of the ruling Justice and Development Party in Turkey, and during the years of the crisis, Turkish intelligence was able to attract it,

reformulate it and adapt it to serve it, and it seems that it has moved to the bosom of the Muslim Brotherhood who rule Turkey through their arm, the Justice and Development Party, and Turkey was able during the past years to provide the requirements for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's victory in Syria politically and militarily, and if the group is able to consolidate its rule in Syria, this will be tantamount to expanding Turkey's influence in the region and increasing its role in the world.

SS: Israel has invaded the south of Syria, and is very close to Damascus, the Syrian capital. But, there has been very little international condemnation. In your opinion, why is the world silent?

TA: In the international political game, the world we are talking about is the West led by the Americans, and the countries that are allied with it or subject to it, and there are countries that have good relations or strategic relations with Israel, and everyone clearly and frankly declares that what matters most to them in the region is the security of Israel, and they considered that the weapons of the former Syrian regime constitute a threat to Israel, and the fall of the regime at the hands of armed factions led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, classified as terrorist by international consensus, may lead to strategic and heavy weapons falling into the hands of these terrorist groups, and thus they may use them against Israel, so the "silent world" considered that what Israel did were preemptive strikes to defend itself by destroying those weapons so that they would not fall into the hands of extremist groups.

SS: We hear the deafening silence of the Arab world after the fall of Syria to the HTS coalition, even though it reminds everyone of Afghanistan and the Taliban. In your opinion, will the oil-rich Arab countries take action to prevent a long-term Islamic State of Syria?

TA: The existence of an Islamic state that carries the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, which all Arab countries have suffered from, or a state that carries extremist ideas, is the last thing that the Arab countries want, and they will certainly work hard to prevent that, and this is what we are waiting for how it will be translated on the ground, and the coming short period will show whether the Arab countries are able to prevent that, and how.

SS: Reports say that the extremist groups and ideology that took over Syria, may spread to other countries in the region. In your opinion, what country will be next and why?

TA: Extremist thought has a major goal, which is to establish a caliphate state over the widest geography it can control, so it never stops thinking about expanding this geography and does not set or see specific limits for its project.

Unfortunately, Iraq is the next target for these terrorist organizations and those who stand behind them.

SS: On December 20, the US Congress will meet either to renew sanctions on Syria, or lift them. In your opinion, will the US lift these sanctions?

TA: I do not think that the US Congress will provide any support to these organizations classified as terrorist on its lists, or lift any sanctions on Syria before there are clear steps and decisions consistent with the ministerial statement issued by the Aqaba meeting on the 14th of this month, which was attended by a number of foreign ministers of major and influential Arab countries, with the presence of US Secretary of State Blinken, the Turkish Foreign Minister, and the representative of the European Union, which called for the actual

translation on the ground of the statements of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham about a smooth political transition in Syria and the transition to a state of institutions and a state of law that takes into account all components of Syrian society and its political spectrum.

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