

# Journey to Damascus: An Interview with Wassim Nasr, Journalist, France24

By Paul Cruickshank and Julika Enslin

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*Editor's Note: In mid-December 2024, Wassim Nasr traveled to Syria where he interviewed Syria's new de facto leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, in Damascus for France24. He described his previous meeting in the spring of 2023 with the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader al-Sharaa (formerly known as Abu Muhammad al-Julani) in "Journey to Idlib," which was published in the May 2023 issue of CTC Sentinel.*

**CTC: Last month, you interviewed Syria's de facto new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus. This was your second meeting with him. You were one of the first Western journalists to meet with him back in the spring of 2023 when the world knew him as Abu Muhammad al-Julani. Your insights in our publication<sup>1</sup> back then on his ideological journey away from the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida to what might be termed pragmatic Islamism were invaluable to international security analysts. You said at the time: "What I saw is the beginning or the premises of a third path, another path that could be useful for the international community to try to implement or to build upon in other places. These days, HTS is less radical than the Taliban."<sup>2</sup> Fast forward to the present day and al-Sharaa is now in power in Damascus after his forces overthrew the Assad regime in a lightning advance across Syria and seems, at least for the time being, to be exhibiting the kind of pragmatism you described in 2023. It would be great if you could walk us through your trip to Syria, your most recent sit-down with al-Sharaa, and your impressions of the new Syria that is taking shape.**

**Nasr:** I entered Syria on December 15, 2024, a Sunday, from Turkey through the Bab al-Salama border crossing into an area that at that point in late December was controlled by the pro-Turkish Syrian National Army (SNA) group. I preferred not to tell them that I had come to Syria to interview al-Sharaa because of what were then tense relations between the SNA and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). I mention this because it's very significant that this border crossing is now under the control of the HTS-led transitional government, which tells you a lot about who is now in control in Syria and who now has the upper hand in the HTS-SNA relationship.

**CTC: Talk to us about meeting al-Sharaa on your most recent trip.**

**Nasr:** I arrived in Syria on the Sunday and got the meeting with him on the Monday (December 16), which was really quick. There was a waiting moment in the Ministry of Media in Damascus, where actually HTS took over everything inside. And the funny thing about it was that you could still see Ba'ath books and VHS tapes of all the Assad speeches on the shelves. They were pretty organized, meaning that on the inside you could still see employees of the Ministry of Media, but on the outside, you still had to go through HTS bearded guys with the Kalashnikovs. I think it's different now. There was a small waiting moment there and then they took us to the government building, which I took a picture of. It was at night—I don't remember exactly what time—and actually we waited there maybe half an hour while we talked with one of his aides, a very sharp guy who has been with him for 12 years. There were other Western journalists with me, too. At one point, I had to go to the bathroom, and I saw various offices turned upside down, with shoes on the floor as if they'd just been abandoned five minutes previously. There were still Syrian regime flags with the eagle of the Ba'ath.

Eventually, our group of foreign journalists was ushered in to see al-Sharaa in the big reception room. Conditions had been placed on us, including that nothing could be filmed or recorded. But we could ask him questions and report his answers.

The interview lasted a little bit longer than an hour.<sup>3</sup> Al-Sharaa said that his top priority was rebuilding Syria, and it was key for sanctions to be lifted. He stressed the importance of national unity and emphasized that HTS was in dialogue with Syria's various sects. He stated, "In Syria, we spoke with all the communities, the Druze, who fought alongside us, the Christians, the Alawites, and the Kurds." Zeroing in on the Kurds, al-Sharaa stated, "We have absolutely nothing against the Kurds as long as they don't advocate separatism and division."

Al-Sharaa stated: "We ask for the international community's help in prosecuting the Assad regime's criminals and recovering the money stolen from Syrians. We also call for pressure on Israel to put an end to its operations in Syria." He added: "We don't want conflict either with Israel or with other countries. Syria won't be used to target other countries. Syrians are tired and just need to live in peace."

Addressing the future direction of Syria, al-Sharaa stated, "The institutions we've set up in Idlib have helped us, but it's premature to define the exact form of the new regime we're putting in place." He added that "writing a new constitution will take time, and elections could be held. But as things stand, we don't even know how many voters there are in Syria. A huge census has to be taken to recreate a register." In an interview in late December with the Saudi media outlet Al Arabiya, al-Sharaa provided a possible timeline of three years to draft a constitution and up to four years to hold elections.<sup>4</sup>

He stated that "our first concern is to get people to return home, whether from abroad or displaced people in Syria. We need to secure



*Wassim Nasr*

this transitional period, while providing the necessary assistance for the return of displaced persons, refugees, and Syrians in general.” When he was asked about what kind of Syria he wanted to build, al-Sharaa stated, “it will be a reflection of real Syria, in its customs and habits.” He stressed: “Our mission is to build Syria.”

Comparing the man I saw in 2023 with the man I saw in late 2024, he was the same. He spoke very slowly, very quietly. It was the same impression I had a year and a half ago, which was very surprising to many people. I was very cautious a year and a half ago, asking myself, ‘Okay, should I take what he is saying for granted?’ But I was reassured. Because I saw that when they took Aleppo, [when] they took Damascus, actually he applied what he said to me a year and a half ago. It can’t be dismissed as just talk. He’s actually really applying what he said a year and a half ago to me, and it was quite reassuring to me because I took a risk in 2023 by reporting on his transformation. I’m the only foreign reporter that saw him both in 2023 and after the fall of Assad.

**CTC: Let’s go back to your meeting with al-Sharaa in the spring of 2023. What did he tell you about his journey away from Islamic State and al-Qa`ida jihadism?**

**Nasr:** In 2023, he said to me: ‘I was young, I made this choice, but when I went into Syria, mandated by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, at a certain point, I began refusing his orders, meaning I did not want to target a number of Syrian rebel commanders [the Free Syrian Army, etc].’ I should point out here that the reality is more complex because under the leadership of al-Sharaa, Jabhat al-Nusra also targeted the Free Syrian Army and other factions at numerous occasions.

When he left ISIS for al-Qa`ida, many foreign fighters went with ISIS, so he had to keep his jihadi credentials to keep some of the fighters with him. And I guess this is, in part, why he joined

al-Qa`ida. Additionally, it prevented him from being overrun by other rival Islamist rebel factions. And he became actually the most successful branch of al-Qa`ida at the time in the world. Eventually, he left al-Qa`ida and put huge pressure on the remaining al-Qa`ida loyalists that became known as Hurras al-Din. He fought them and even maybe facilitated or at least turned a blind eye [to] some of the targeting of them by the Americans. And this is why, it’s not a secret, he’s not been targeted himself since 2017. So, I guess he made these moves out of conviction but also self-interest for his own survival and broadly for the survival of the Syrian revolution. He made clear that global jihad was a mistake. This was not a guy who had just been arrested saying this. It was a guy in power telling me: ‘It was a mistake. We have another path, and let’s create another path for the people of this region.’

It is certainly not liberal or democratic. It is certainly Islamist, but it is indeed, as I like to call it, a third path away from ISIS and al-Qa`ida.

In 2023, al-Sharaa told me, ‘My focus is on toppling Assad, that’s objective #1. Objective #2 is pushing the Iranians out and fighting the Russians.’ He said: ‘We are keeping ISIS and al-Qa`ida under control. We are fighting them, and like the Ukrainians, we are fighting your enemies meaning Russia. So, why are we still sanctioned?’

**CTC: Coming back to the present day, al-Sharaa has been pragmatic so far. But what happens if something happens to him? You’ve met others in the group. When it comes to the direction of travel toward pragmatism, how much does this depend on him? Does this come off the rails if something happens to him? Or is this more solidly grounded than just him?**

**Nasr:** Listen, that’s what they tried to do in Idlib—to create a system of governance via the Salvation Government that goes beyond him, but as you know, in this part of the world, it’s always about the leader, regardless of the country. His track record and credibility within jihadi and Islamist circles as someone who has ‘fought the fight’ is what allowed him to move the group in a more pragmatic direction and keep hold of power, despite these moves being very dangerous for him. Each move he made away in the past from jihadi activity and away from hardcore implementation of the *sharia* was very costly for him. He’s going to have to be *more* moderate each day that passes. For example, the warm words he expressed about Saudi Arabia in his Al Arabiya interview would have been unimaginable just a few months back.<sup>a</sup> Also he has been pragmatic so far with Russia, despite the enmity caused by Russia’s past actions in Syria, because he does not want to alienate a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council given he wants sanctions removed. So, he has to tackle all this—neighboring countries, international powers, and the hardliners in his ranks.

The new Syria is going to have to be different to how HTS ran things in Idlib. It is important to recognize that Idlib is a mostly homogeneous society, conservative Sunni society. So, I don’t know

<sup>a</sup> Editor’s Note: Al-Sharaa told Al Arabiya, “Saudi Arabia has a major role in Syria’s future, and I take pride in everything it has done for us.” “Exclusive - Syria’s new elections and draft constitution: Al-Sharaa outlines timeline,” Al Arabiya, December 29, 2024.



if they're going to be able to apply that same model all over Syria. I guess that if they want to rule, they have to get even more moderate.

A key figure in the new government is Syria's new foreign minister, Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani. He is a very smart man. He was previously heading the political bureau of HTS. I spent more than an hour with him in Idlib in the spring 2023 just before I met al-Sharaa.

**CTC: Does al-Shaibani share al-Sharaa's worldview?**

**Nasr:** Yes. He's the man behind most of this outreach to the world.

**CTC: Because people are saying, 'Who is advising al-Sharaa? He must be very well advised right now.' And so, al-Shaibani is one of those people.**

**Nasr:** Al-Shaibani is a key advisor, with access that goes way beyond the Syrian landscape, which explains his appointment as minister of foreign affairs.

**CTC: So, he's the one advising him. It's not like he's just got Turks whispering in his ear. He's got al-Shaibani behind him.**

**Nasr:** Yes, but al-Shaibani has good relations with the Turks. And al-Shaibani was the one who opened the door with the West. Al-Shaibani knows his stuff, and on the political level, what the political bureau did is the work of Shaibani. He's the man behind the outreach to the world.

**CTC: During your trip to Idlib in the spring of 2023, you met with Mohammed al-Bashir who was then a leading figure in the HTS-led Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) in Idlib and is now the prime minister in Syria's transitional government. What were your impressions of him?**

**Nasr:** When I met him, he was the minister of Development and Human Relief in the HTS Salvation Government in Idlib. He would later become the prime minister of the SSG and is now Syria's prime minister. He gave me the impression of being a technocrat. He was very precise and technical in everything we addressed. He's an Islamist, 100 percent. He's not a jihadi. He's not a fighter. He's a technocrat. He's a politician. And in this regard, he represents the will of al-Sharaa to remove the military from political affairs and direct governance. I think he is trusted by al-Sharaa. It was because of this and his technical abilities and being a known counterpart of U.N. envoys and aid agencies, that al-Sharaa appointed him.

**CTC: You also traveled to other parts of Syria during your recent trip. What were your impressions?**

**Nasr:** I also spent time in Aleppo, on my way in and out of Syria. I was immediately struck by how huge parts of the city were still in ruins after the fighting in 2016. I was also struck by the scenes of everyday life, including people playing music and smoking *shisha*, with none of this activity restricted by HTS. The flags of the revolution were everywhere, no doubt sold by some of the same hawkers who had sold Syrian regime flags. This was also at the time when people were still putting the portrait of al-Sharaa on their cars, before he forbade that from happening. When I met



*Wassim Nasr (at right, in top image) and other foreign journalists interview Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus on December 16, 2024.*

him in Idlib in 2023, al-Sharaa had talked to me about how he had terminated the operations of the Hisbah—the religious police. The police forces that deployed in Idlib were the same that HTS deployed in Aleppo, to do regular police work.

In Aleppo, I met a prominent Sunni tribal leader with ties to the HTS leadership in his apartment. He and his men had just accompanied the HTS fighters in their advance from Idlib into Aleppo. During this meeting and in messages he exchanged with me afterwards, he told me that the military buildup for the operation by HTS started four years ago. He played a key role in getting his clan to switch from backing Assad to tacitly supporting the HTS rebellion. He explained that part of his tribe had thrown their lot in with the regime because of blood feuds in years gone by with rebel forces, but the corruption of the regime and the 4th Army Division within Aleppo had eroded this support for Assad.

It was these kind of shifts in allegiances that paved the way for the HTS takeover. He told me he had started working on getting his tribe to switch allegiance two-and-a-half years ago and that he had arranged for the head of the tribal militia to be brought into Turkey,



*The renovated church in the Idlib village of Yaqoubia (Nasr)*

where he and another likeminded figure in his tribe talked to the head of the tribal militia and convinced him. Then they brought him into Idlib to show him how Idlib was faring under HTS control, and at the end of the day, after two and a half years of efforts, they convinced him that once the battle for Aleppo started, he should stay out of it. Six months ago, they talked about what would be the on-the-ground measures when HTS launched its offensive. This explains so much about how HTS took the city so easily because the regime was relying on these militias to defend the city. The tribal leader told me that when he and the HTS fighters advanced on Aleppo, “we agreed to notify the pro-regime tribal fighters in front of us while we were advancing, and they retreated accordingly.” He added that “the political factor” was key to the “swift and mostly clean liberation of Aleppo.” He emphasized that “the decision of Ahmed al-Sharaa and the HTS leadership to use political as well as military means—and to provide guarantees to those who dropped their weapons—avoided bloodshed and was key to the liberation of Hama, Homs, and Damascus after the fall of regime defenses in Aleppo.”

While I was in the apartment, there were lots of fighters going in and out, including two Hezbollah members from the nearby towns of Nubl and al-Zahraa who were seeking an accommodation with Aleppo’s new rulers to avoid bloodshed.

The Aleppo Sunni tribal leader with ties to HTS messaged me on January 7 to say that “one of the biggest issues now is upholding the agreements cut between HTS and the Sunnis previously aligned with the regime and getting the services to work in a proper way.”

While I was in the city, I also went to see the bishop of Aleppo Hanna Jallouf. In my 2023 interview with you, I described meeting

members of the Christian community in HTS-controlled areas of Idlib. I saw firsthand how HTS were allowing Christians to rebuild churches and monasteries.<sup>5</sup> Jallouf was one of the Christians that I met in Idlib, and he was subsequently appointed by Pope Francis as bishop of Aleppo. When I caught up with him in the city, the first thing I noticed was that he was wearing his priest clothes with the cross, which wasn’t at all the case in Idlib a year and a half ago. Back then, he had been wearing civilian clothes and was forbidden from wearing his clerical clothes. When I met him after the fall of the regime, he was very hopeful that the takeover of Damascus would have good repercussions, including for the Christians in Idlib, meaning they will have more space and more liberty. He was very confident about the future, but he still had some worries for the Christian minorities in Syria. He said that talks were going well and that HTS should be applauded for preventing the most radical elements within Islamist rebel ranks from doing things that could create turmoil. He said there was a long road ahead and his concern was not just over radical HTS elements but also “other elements” who do not want things to go well. He didn’t name anyone, but my guess is that he was referring to the Iranians and the remnants of the former regime. Very soon after we spoke, Bishop Jallouf met with Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus.<sup>6</sup>

During my recent trip to Syria, I went back to the villages in Idlib that I had visited in 2023. This time I met up with the priest who replaced Jallouf and another priest. They were now openly wearing the robes of the Franciscans. The priest who replaced Jallouf told me: “We rang the bells on the 8th of December because we were happy that Assad fell.” He said: “40 Christian families have returned to the villages” over the last year and that “the restitution of property



and land is underway, more than 140 plots have been returned.<sup>77</sup> In my 2023 interview, I spoke about how the church in one of the villages was being renovated. When I returned, the church in the village of Yaqoubia had been fully restored. The picture I took tells its own story. There is a lot of uncertainty ahead because figuring out how to deal with minorities are difficult subjects for HTS internally. But now that they have taken power, they have to confront these issues. HTS opened up a line of communication with the Druze community in Suwayda in southern Syria when they started demonstrating in 2024. Fast forward to late 2024 and among the first people who pulled the Assad statues down in Damascus were Druze people in Jaramana. Al-Sharaa told me: “They fought with us” when I interviewed him in Damascus. So, an opening of a dialogue with minorities is not just about optics. It pays. It is in their interest.

In reflecting on the rebel takeover of Aleppo, there’s a key thing to stress. The SNA only opened up a front north of Aleppo three days after the beginning of the battle for the city. The primary objective was to cut off retreating YPG forces from reaching Kurdish-controlled areas, but also to maintain a balance with HTS who had already liberated most of the town.

This is important to grasp because it reveals the nature of the relations between Turkey and HTS, which is not a relation of a proxy; it is a relation really of a *relation de force*, as we say in French. So, the person who turned the table is al-Sharaa and everybody was forced to follow, including the Turks. Now, after the takeover of Damascus, of course, the balance has changed, and of course the Turks made their choices, as I said in the beginning of our discussion, by giving the border crossings to the new government. Because when they handed over the border crossings, they deprived the Syrian National Army from revenue. It’s a huge deal, even though the SNA is not dissolved yet.

One has to recall that Turkey would have preferred not to have al-Sharaa in Idlib. They would have preferred to have someone similar to the Syrian National Army, which they actually fund and train and have the upper hand on [regarding] their political decision-making. And you have to remember, for example, that just a few months before this battle, Turkey was forced to send its tanks to stop HTS from going further into Turkish administrated areas and from cannibalizing the Syrian National Army.<sup>8</sup> So, it’s a relation of tension. We have to remember that HTS is still labeled as a terrorist organization in Turkey.

**CTC: So, for you, this was an HTS-initiated campaign rather than something that was orchestrated by Ankara or Doha, and everyone was playing catch up and adjusting to al-Sharaa’s plans and HTS’ plans?**

**Nasr:** One hundred percent. He grabbed his moment. The week before, Erdogan was still trying to have good relations with Assad. When I talked to al-Sharaa in 2023, I asked him about rumors of a deal being cut between Russia and Turkey for HTS to retreat behind the M4 highway. He replied: ‘It’s not true. We’re not going to lose territory. We’re going to take territory because we have a lot of displaced people and we need to put them back in their homes. We need to enlarge our territory, and the military option is the only viable option.’ At the time, I thought to myself, *Okay, this is just political talk*. But at the end of the day, the military option worked for him.

**CTC: Did the HTS folks you met in Syria speak about worries that Iran and Hezbollah may try to play a spoiler role within Syria?**

**Nasr:** Yes. They are worried about that, but they think they can handle it. The biggest issue for them now—for all the people I saw because I saw people also from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—the main issue for them now is how to put the country on track, like lifting the sanctions that were put on Assad. In my interview with al-Sharaa, he complained that ‘we are living the sanctions that were imposed on our dictator as we are victims.’ That’s on one hand, and when you see what I saw—I drove from Damascus to Aleppo and from Aleppo, I went all over the place in Syria—you cannot imagine the destruction. It’s not just destroyed cities. As you head into Damascus from the north, there’s nothing apart from piles of rubble. There’s really nothing.

If you want people not to be attracted by Iran for financial reasons or others, you have to put the country on track. And the clock is ticking. If people still don’t have anything and the situation is still as it is, of course Iran will have more cards in its hands. What’s reassuring regarding this—and this is why I’m telling you that rebuilding is important—is that the operations that HTS has been conducting in the areas that are loyalist to the regime to catch regime loyalists are more like police operations. You don’t see urban fighting. You don’t see a resistance from the communities, Christians, or Alawite even, and you see them going in and picking up people from their homes. Sometimes they are fighting; sometimes they are not fighting. I’m not seeing parts of the country defending themselves from HTS and the new government, including the Alawite territory.

I went through the Alawite territory from Jisr ash-Shughur. And we went through the old frontline and went down to all the way to Latakia, the town. You cannot imagine the poorness of the villagers. I had the impression I was in 19th century villages, the Alawite villages. So, you see the Alawite community did not profit as a community from the rule of Assad. And this may explain why the Alawites are not actually putting up a fight against the HTS in a massive way. Those who are putting up a fight are regime people who were not able to flee when Assad fled and who have blood on their hands and who know that if they get caught, either they are going to get killed on the spot—because killings on the spot have happened—or they’re going to get judged and jailed for a long time and maybe executed later.

This is important: If you put reconstruction and rebuilding of the country with recognition from the neighboring countries, with the displaced people going back to their homes, and you give them the means to reconstruct their homes, Iran will have fewer cards in its hands. But if you leave it as it is under sanctions, no rebuilding and something like 90 percent of people living under the poverty line, of course Iran and other players, including Hezbollah, will have more cards in their hands. With a small investment, they can create a turmoil.

**CTC: Did anybody talk to you about ISIS and concerns that they could exploit the situation?**

**Nasr:** I spoke to the Sunni tribal leader in Aleppo about ISIS. He told me that some ISIS elements from the *badiyah* desert are trying to reach out to demobilize. I don’t know if it’s 100 percent true.



The Al-Hamidiyeh Souk in Damascus in mid-December 2024, after the fall of Assad. The banner refers to “terrorist Iran” and accuses it of having used the Palestinian cause as a pretext for occupying Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq. It also accuses Iran of having planted the seeds of turmoil between religious communities in the Muslim world. (Photo credit and translation: Nasr)

This is only him saying it. It could be that now you have a winner in Syria’s civil war, ISIS will be less ‘attractive’ at least for Syrian youngsters. Al-Sharaa showed that his path was the winning path—the third path, as I put it in my 2023 interview with you. So maybe it will get some Syrian ISIS members to demobilize, but ISIS, as an organization, which still has a presence in Syria, is strongly ideologically opposed to the new HTS-led government and will try to create problems for the new Syrian government just to prove that they cannot secure their new rule. On December 7, the Aleppo Sunni tribal leader messaged me to say, “We are concerned about the latest liberations of ISIS fighters by the Kurds,<sup>9</sup> and of potential Iranian involvement to aid ISIS cells in the *badiya*.”

**CTC:** Your reporting creates considerable hope that things will go right but also concern that things could go wrong. In late December the Israeli foreign minister depicted the new HTS-led government as Islamist extremists who are wolves in sheep’s clothing and expressed the view that it is problematic

for Israel that they now control Syria.<sup>b</sup> Based on the time you spent there, what are your key takeaways about the direction this is all heading?

**Nasr:** They are reaching out to the world. Look how HTS handled the issue of Travis Timmerman, the U.S. citizen who was found in the outskirts of Damascus.<sup>c</sup> They handed him straight away to the head of the American forces in Syria. That’s one thing. On the other hand, Israeli concerns are understandable because what concerns Israel is its own security, and this is why they have been destroying what is left of the armaments of the Syrian army, even though it puts HTS and the new Syrian government in a bad position, because

b In an interview with *The Jerusalem Post* in late December 2024, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar described the new rulers of Damascus as “Islamists with a highly extreme worldview.” He added “these players are deceiving the West, yet the world rushes to Damascus” and stated, “this an Islamist regime, not a moderate one.” Amichai Stein and Zvika Klein, “FM Gideon Sa’ar: The regime in Damascus is ‘a gang – not a legitimate gov’t,” *Jerusalem Post*, December 28, 2024.

c Editor’s Note: Timmerman “was found by local residents near Damascus ... after he was freed by hammer-wielding armed men.” A U.S. military helicopter took Timmerman out of Syria “after Syrian rebels from the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group brought him to US forces in the town of Tanf.” Bernd Debusmann Jr., “US military flies freed captive Travis Timmerman out of Syria,” BBC, December 13, 2024.



people in the region sympathetic to Iran are asking HTS, ‘How can you permit this? How can you let Israel do what it wants?’ especially when, as you know, they accuse HTS of being an “Israeli puppet.”

So, HTS are between two fires, but al-Sharaa said himself when I saw him a year and a half ago and now publicly again when I interviewed him, ‘I’m not seeking any war with anyone. The Syrians are tired. We just want to live in peace,’ and he mentioned Israel by name the last time I interviewed him.

Israel is right to be concerned because its national security is at stake. But was it better to have Shi`a militias stretching from Iran

to Lebanon, on the security level?

The ‘War on Terror’ was strategically blinding, meaning that it permitted Iran to stretch its power all over the region because the West was only fighting against jihadis including the Islamic State. Since the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, the era of letting Iran get away with such activity is over. We saw the choices made by a former U.S. administration 10 years ago work to Iran’s advantage, but after October 7, Iran got burned by its own overreach. I don’t think that the Americans and their allies will make the same mistake twice. **CTC**

## Citations

- 1 Paul Cruickshank, “Journey to Idlib: An Interview with Wassim Nasr, Journalist, France24,” *CTC Sentinel* 16:5 (2023).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Editor’s Note: For the details published by France24 on the interview, see Wassim Nasr, “Exclusive: Syria’s de facto new leader Ahmed al-Sharaa calls for lifting of sanctions,” France24, December 17, 2024.
- 4 Editor’s Note: See “Exclusive - Syria’s new elections and draft constitution: Al-Sharaa outlines timeline,” *Al Arabiya*, December 29, 2024.
- 5 Cruickshank.
- 6 Charles Lister, “NEW, and historic. #HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa met today with #Syria’s Christian leadership . . .,” X, December 31, 2024.
- 7 Wassim Nasr, “Carnet de route d’AleP à Damas, après la chute du régime syrien,” France24, January 8, 2025.
- 8 Wassim Nasr, “#Syrie manifestations et affrontements avec l’armée turque dans le nord . . .,” X, July 2, 2024.
- 9 Editor’s Note: For a report on a recent release, see “Kurdish authorities of northern Syria release 50-ISIS linked prisoners after pardon,” *New Region*, September 2, 2024.