

New Taipei Model United Nations

Forum: United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

Issue: (101) Maintaining stability in Syria following the fall of the Assad Regime

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Introduction

After more than a decade of civil war, foreign intervention, and humanitarian disaster, the collapse of the Assad regime marks a profound turning point in Syria's modern history. The fall of an authoritarian government may appear to open the door to peace and reconstruction, yet it also creates a period of extreme uncertainty. Multiple actors such as political factions, ethnic and sectarian groups, foreign militaries, and non-state militias, now have the opportunity to reshape Syria's future, which makes the post-Assad landscape volatile and unpredictable. Ensuring stability during this transition has therefore become one of the most urgent international security challenges of the twenty-first century.

The crisis in Syria involves a wide range of destabilizing dynamics: fragmented governance, competing claims to legitimacy, armed non-state groups regaining influence, rapidly emerging power vacuums, and the risk of sectarian revenge. Additionally, millions of displaced Syrians begin returning home, placing pressure on fragile infrastructure, strained resources, and local communities still recovering from conflict. These challenges unfold alongside collapsing economic conditions, widespread human rights violations, and the long-term consequences of foreign military involvement. As a result, maintaining stability in a post-Assad Syria extends far beyond ending active conflict; it requires rebuilding institutions, restoring public trust, and preventing the resurgence of extremism or the rise of new separatist movements.

While regime transitions are not new in global politics, Syria's case is uniquely complex due to its deep sectarian divisions, multi-front conflicts, and intense geopolitical competition. The sudden collapse of long-standing authoritarian rule can leave behind unresolved grievances, fragmented institutions, and communities deeply distrustful of one another. At the same time, foreign powers with competing interests continue to shape developments on the ground, influencing military movements, political negotiations, and control over key territories. All of these factors overlap and create an unpredictable environment where progress and instability can

appear at the same time. Understanding these dynamics is essential for analyzing the challenges of maintaining stability in a post-Assad Syria.

Definitions of Key Terms

Alawites

The Alawites are a religious minority in Syria commonly associated with Shia Islam. Despite their small population size, Alawites historically held significant political and military influence under the Assad family. Following the collapse of the Assad regime, many Alawite communities face heightened insecurity due to fears of collective blame or retaliatory violence linked to their perceived association with the former government (International Crisis Group, 2025).

Negative Peace / Positive Peace

Negative peace refers to the absence of direct violence without addressing the underlying causes of conflict, such as political exclusion or social inequality. Positive peace describes long-term stability supported by effective institutions, justice mechanisms, economic opportunity, and social cohesion. Post-conflict societies that achieve only negative peace often remain vulnerable to renewed instability (Galtung, 1969; United Nations, 2018).

Power Vacuum

A power vacuum occurs when a central governing authority collapses or loses the capacity to rule effectively, leaving no single actor in control. In post-conflict environments, power vacuums frequently lead to competition among armed groups, fragmented governance, and heightened instability. In Syria, the fall of the Assad regime has created conditions in which multiple actors seek to fill the absence of national authority (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025).

Sectarianism

Sectarianism refers to conflict or tension rooted in religious or ethnic identity. In Syria, sectarian divisions among Sunni Arabs, Alawites, Kurds, Druze, Christians, and other communities were intensified by years of civil war and political manipulation. These divisions continue to complicate reconciliation efforts and remain a major obstacle to national unity following Assad's fall (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Transitional Government

A transitional government is a temporary governing authority established during the shift from one political system or regime to another. Its primary role is to maintain basic order, oversee institutional reform, and guide the country toward long-term governance arrangements. In Syria, transitional authorities face challenges related to legitimacy, representation, control over armed forces, and international recognition (United Nations Security Council, 2015).

Transitional Justice

Transitional justice refers to a set of processes designed to address past human rights abuses committed during periods of conflict or authoritarian rule. These processes may include truth-seeking initiatives, accountability mechanisms, reparations for victims, and reconciliation efforts. Transitional justice is often viewed as essential for rebuilding trust and preventing cycles of revenge violence in post-conflict societies (United Nations, 2014).

Threat Multiplier

A threat multiplier is a factor that intensifies existing political, social, or economic tensions rather than causing conflict on its own. Issues such as climate change, drought, economic collapse, and mass displacement can place additional strain on fragile institutions and vulnerable populations. In Syria, these factors significantly increase the risk of renewed instability during the post-Assad transition (United Nations Development Programme, 2023).

Political Legitimacy

Political legitimacy refers to the extent to which a governing authority is accepted as lawful and representative by the population it governs and by the international community. In post-conflict contexts, legitimacy is often contested, particularly when multiple actors claim the right to rule. In Syria, questions of legitimacy are central to maintaining stability following the collapse of the Assad regime (United Nations Security Council, 2015).

Background Information

Syria Before and During the Assad Regime

Before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Syria had been ruled for decades by the Assad family under an authoritarian system dominated by the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. Hafez al-Assad governed the country from 1971 until his death in 2000, after which his son, Bashar al-Assad, became president. Political power was highly centralized, with very limited political competition, restricted media freedoms, and extensive surveillance carried out by state security agencies. Although the regime appeared stable on the surface, it relied heavily on repression, patronage networks, and emergency laws to suppress opposition and dissent (BBC News, 2025).

Sectarian dynamics were an important feature of Syria's political system. While Sunni Muslims make up the majority of the population, many senior positions in the military, intelligence services, and political elite were dominated by members of the Alawite minority, from which the Assad family originates. This imbalance fueled long-standing grievances among marginalized groups and reinforced feelings of exclusion. Economic problems such as corruption, unemployment, and neglect of rural areas further increased public frustration, especially in the years leading up to 2011 (International Crisis Group, 2025).

In March 2011, peaceful protests inspired by the Arab Spring began in the southern city of Daraa. The government's violent response quickly escalated unrest across the country, turning demonstrations into an armed uprising. Over time, the conflict developed into a multi-front civil war involving opposition forces, extremist groups, and foreign powers. The Assad government relied on military force and external support to retain control, while opposition-held areas formed fragmented and loosely coordinated governance structures (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025).

Civil War, Foreign Intervention, and Institutional Fragmentation

As the conflict escalated, Syria became a major site of foreign intervention. Russia's military involvement beginning in 2015 was crucial in keeping the Assad regime in power, while Iran and its allied militias expanded their presence in key strategic areas. Türkiye supported opposition groups in northern Syria and carried out military operations to counter Kurdish forces near its border. At the same time, the United States maintained a limited presence in northeastern Syria, primarily focused on counterterrorism operations against ISIS. As a result, the conflict developed into a multi-front civil war involving opposition forces, extremist groups such as ISIS, and foreign powers (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025)

Although the Assad government managed to regain control of several major cities, these territorial gains came with significant costs. State institutions weakened as governance increasingly depended on foreign military support, while corruption and economic decline worsened. International sanctions, currency collapse, and widespread destruction of infrastructure greatly reduced the government's ability to provide basic services. Meanwhile, non-state actors (including Kurdish-led administrations and Islamist factions) established de facto autonomous regions, further fragmenting political authority (World Bank, 2024).

By the early 2020s, the war had produced one of the largest displacement crises in the world. More than half of Syria's population was displaced internally or forced to flee abroad, placing heavy pressure on neighboring countries and humanitarian systems. Despite multiple diplomatic efforts, including the Geneva and Astana processes, no comprehensive political settlement was reached, and Syria remained deeply divided in terms of governance and control (United Nations Security Council, 2015).

Collapse of the Assad Regime and Recent Developments

By the mid-2020s, a combination of severe economic collapse, weakening military cohesion, and growing public dissatisfaction significantly reduced the Assad regime's ability to govern. These pressures came to a head in March 2025, when renewed clashes erupted in western Syria. The fighting was marked by military defections and stronger opposition offensives, revealing deep divisions within state institutions and accelerating the breakdown of central authority (UN Security Council Report, 2025).

By mid-2025, the Assad regime had effectively collapsed, leaving behind weakened institutions and multiple competing centers of power. Opposition coalitions, Kurdish-led administrations, local militias, and remnants of former state structures began asserting control over different regions. No single group gained nationwide legitimacy, creating a political vacuum defined by instability and uncertainty (International Crisis Group, 2025).

The post-Assad situation is further complicated by the continued presence of foreign forces, unresolved sectarian tensions, and the possible return of millions of refugees. Large-scale refugee returns present serious challenges, including destroyed housing, property disputes, limited access to basic services, and tensions within local communities. At the same time, extremist groups remain capable of exploiting security gaps, raising fears of renewed violence if stabilization efforts are unsuccessful (UNHCR, 2025).

Humanitarian Conditions and Governance Challenges

After years of conflict, Syria's humanitarian situation remains extremely serious. Access to aid has been limited by ongoing insecurity, damaged infrastructure, and political fragmentation. Humanitarian operations have

faced persistent challenges, including interference by armed groups, restricted monitoring capacity, and the risk of aid diversion in contested areas (OCHA, 2025). These conditions make it difficult to ensure that assistance reaches those in need in an effective and transparent manner.

The collapse of centralized governance has further weakened oversight mechanisms, increasing the risks of corruption and mismanagement during recovery efforts. As a result, building legitimacy and public trust in post-conflict institutions depends not only on political agreements, but also on the fair and accountable delivery of basic services. These conditions provide essential context for understanding the challenges involved in maintaining stability in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime.

Key Issues

Power Vacuums and Fragmented Governance

One of the most immediate challenges following the fall of the Assad regime is the emergence of widespread power vacuums across Syria. For more than a decade, the Assad government maintained central authority through its military, intelligence apparatus, and patronage networks. With these structures weakened or dismantled, numerous regions are now governed by local militias, tribal councils, Kurdish-led administrations, or foreign-backed groups. The absence of a unified national authority creates an environment in which competing actors may seek to assert control, either through political negotiation or force. This fragmentation threatens to prolong instability and impede the formation of a functional transitional government. Analysts have warned that Syria risks becoming “a patchwork of competing authorities rather than a unified state” (International Crisis Group, 2025).

Complicating matters, different regions have developed distinct governance models during the conflict, ranging from local councils supported by opposition factions to the autonomous structures established by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Aligning these systems with a unified national framework requires careful negotiation, mutual recognition, and guarantees of local autonomy, all of which are politically sensitive. Without effective coordination, Syria risks devolving into de facto zones of influence, setting the stage for long-term division or renewed armed conflict.

Sectarian and Ethnic Tensions

Syria’s complex mosaic of communities including Sunni Arabs, Alawites, Kurds, Druze, and Christians has been profoundly reshaped by years of war. Sectarian grievances, forced displacement, and patterns of violence have

deepened mistrust among groups, making inter-communal reconciliation a core requirement for stability. In particular, Alawite communities, who were closely associated with the Assad regime, may fear collective punishment or reprisals in the aftermath of the regime's collapse. Ensuring their protection is essential to preventing cycles of revenge violence that could spark broader conflict. According to Human Rights Watch, post-conflict transitions often fail when "entire communities are perceived as collectively responsible for past abuses" (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Ethnic tensions also play a central role in shaping Syria's future. Kurdish aspirations for autonomy in the northeast clash with the priorities of both the Syrian opposition and neighboring Türkiye, which views Kurdish self-administration as a security threat. Meanwhile, minority groups such as Christians and Druze may seek guarantees of political representation and security. These overlapping concerns require a carefully designed political transition that balances inclusion, decentralization, and accountability. The failure to address such tensions risks exacerbating fragmentation or triggering sectarian conflict.

Foreign Military Presence and Competing Regional Interests

Syria's conflict is deeply intertwined with the strategic interests of foreign states, many of which maintain military or political influence on the ground even after the fall of the Assad regime. Russia is determined to preserve its naval and air bases and maintain regional leverage. Iran and affiliated militias have entrenched themselves in southern and central Syria, establishing networks designed to secure long-term regional influence and logistical routes connecting Tehran to the Mediterranean. Türkiye continues to occupy parts of northern Syria and seeks to limit Kurdish autonomy, while Israel regularly conducts airstrikes against Iranian positions to prevent weapons transfers to Hezbollah. Iran's involvement in Syria is often described as part of the "Axis of Resistance," a network of state and non-state actors (including Hezbollah and allied militias) aimed at countering Israeli and Western influence in the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025).

These overlapping foreign interests pose a significant obstacle to stabilization. Competing agendas may undermine unified governance, obstruct ceasefire negotiations, or escalate into direct confrontation. Furthermore, the presence of foreign forces complicates efforts to establish a credible transitional authority, as local groups may align themselves with external patrons to secure resources or military support. Without coordination among major foreign actors, post-Assad stabilization efforts may be severely limited.

Extremist Resurgence and Security Vacuum

The collapse of a central authority creates conditions that extremist organizations can exploit. Although ISIS no longer controls significant territory, it retains clandestine networks in eastern Syria and the cross-border region

with Iraq. Similarly, groups such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) remain influential in the northwest. Power vacuums, weakened security structures, and widespread economic deprivation increase the risk of extremist recruitment and attacks. A resurgence of terrorism could destabilize transitional governance, undermine public trust, and threaten regional security. UN briefings have noted that “security vacuums remain a key enabler of extremist regrouping” in post-conflict Syria (United Nations Security Council, 2024).

Additionally, the proliferation of weapons and the militarization of local communities complicate security sector reform. Many armed groups that emerged during the conflict may resist disarmament, fearing loss of autonomy or retaliation. Establishing unified security forces requires careful integration of former rebels, Kurdish forces, tribal militias, and defected regime soldiers—an extremely sensitive process. Failure to manage this transition risks deepening instability or creating competing armed coalitions.

Humanitarian Crisis and Return of Refugees

Syria's humanitarian environment remains among the most severe globally, with widespread destruction of housing, infrastructure, and essential services. The fall of the Assad regime may prompt large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return home, yet areas of return often lack water, electricity, medical facilities, or functional schools. The sudden influx of returnees could strain local communities and create competition over limited resources (UNHCR, 2025).

Moreover, questions of property rights pose a significant challenge. Many Syrians no longer possess documentation proving ownership of their homes, and properties previously seized by the government or armed groups may now be occupied by others. Disputes over land and housing could fuel conflict if not addressed transparently and fairly. Ensuring safe and voluntary returns while preventing social tensions requires coordinated humanitarian, legal, and economic planning (OCHA, 2025).

Economic Collapse and Reconstruction Challenges

Years of conflict have devastated Syria's economy. Currency collapse, sanctions, corruption, and the destruction of industrial and agricultural infrastructure have left the country with limited economic capacity. Rebuilding essential sectors, healthcare, electricity, transportation, and education, will require massive financial investment. Yet uncertainty about political authority, competing foreign interests, and risks of corruption may discourage international donors or private sector involvement. The World Bank has described Syria's recovery needs as “among the largest and most complex globally” (World Bank, 2024).

A weak economy also threatens stabilization directly. High unemployment, lack of services, and food insecurity may push vulnerable populations toward armed groups or criminal networks. Additionally, disparities in

reconstruction funding between regions could exacerbate political grievances. Designing an equitable economic recovery plan is therefore central to sustaining long-term peace.

Legitimacy of Transitional Governance

A central question in the post-Assad era is: who has the right to govern Syria? Multiple political bodies including opposition groups, remnants of former state institutions, Kurdish authorities, and foreign-backed coalitions claim legitimacy. Without broad public acceptance and clear international recognition, transitional governance structures may struggle to implement laws, maintain order, or secure cooperation from diverse communities. Previous UN-led transitions have shown that “legitimacy cannot be imposed externally” but must be socially accepted (United Nations Security Council, 2015).

Repeated failures of transitional governments in other conflict-affected states highlight the dangers of weak institutions, internal rivalries, and exclusionary decision-making. Creating a legitimate and representative governing body requires addressing deep-seated mistrust, incorporating minority protections, and ensuring transparency in political processes. The absence of legitimacy is likely to perpetuate instability or trigger renewed conflict.

Climate Change and Environmental Stress

Syria’s environmental conditions particularly droughts, water scarcity, and soil degradation have historically contributed to rural displacement and social unrest. These pressures remain acute in the post-Assad period, especially in agricultural regions dependent on rainfall. Water shortages can heighten tensions between communities, undermine agricultural recovery, and intensify competition over resources. As a “threat multiplier,” climate stress does not cause conflict on its own but makes existing vulnerabilities more severe, complicating stabilization efforts (UNDP, 2023).

Major Parties Involved and Their Positions

Syrian Opposition Coalitions

The Syrian opposition is made up of several political organizations and armed groups that fought against the Assad regime during the civil war. Major components include the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), the Syrian Interim Government, and a network of local councils. These groups generally support creating a democratic, decentralized state and seek international recognition as the legitimate representatives of the Syrian people.

However, the opposition faces significant internal divisions like ideological, territorial, and ethnic that make it difficult to present a unified plan for Syria's future. Many opposition leaders argue that former regime officials should be excluded from any transitional government, while others believe some level of power-sharing is necessary to prevent institutional collapse. Their position is further complicated by dependence on foreign sponsors, whose interests often influence their political goals and negotiating strength.

Kurdish-Led Autonomous Administration (AANES / SDF)

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), supported by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), has established one of the most stable governance models during the conflict. Kurdish authorities seek political autonomy, decentralized federalism, and the preservation of administrative and security structures developed over the past decade. Their priorities include safeguarding Kurdish rights, maintaining control over internal security, and preserving gains made in gender representation and local governance. However, these goals conflict with the positions of Türkiye and some Syrian opposition groups, who view Kurdish self-rule as a threat to Syria's territorial unity. The AANES is willing to take part in a transitional political framework, but only if it receives guarantees of meaningful autonomy and protection from external threats.

Russia

Russia has been a principal supporter of the Assad regime since 2015 and maintains significant military assets in Syria, including the naval base in Tartus and Hmeimim airbase. After Assad's fall, Russia's main goal is to preserve its strategic presence and regional influence. Moscow favors a political transition that maintains stability and protects the interests of institutions and communities historically aligned with the regime, especially Alawite populations. Russia is likely to back a negotiated settlement that keeps parts of the former state structure intact in order to prevent fragmentation. It may oppose transitional plans that threaten its military presence or strengthen Western-backed groups. In its diplomacy, Russia is expected to emphasize Syrian sovereignty, counterterrorism, and the continuity of the Syrian state.

Iran

Iran's involvement in Syria has centered on preserving a friendly government in Damascus and securing regional influence through military and political networks. Following the fall of the Assad regime, Iran-backed militias—including Hezbollah and various Shia groups—retain a strong presence across southern and central Syria. Iran's key priorities include protecting supply routes connecting Tehran to Lebanon, ensuring the safety of Shia communities, and preventing the rise of Sunni-led leadership seen as hostile to its interests. Iran is likely to resist

transitional arrangements that limit its influence or seek to remove its affiliated militias. However, its continued military presence remains a major source of tension for Israel, Gulf states, and parts of the Syrian opposition.

Türkiye

Türkiye has played a major role in northern Syria, supporting opposition factions and launching military operations against the Kurdish YPG, which Ankara views as an extension of the PKK. After Assad's fall, Türkiye's main concerns include preventing Kurdish territorial expansion, enabling the return of Syrian refugees, and preserving its security buffer zones along the border. Türkiye supports a transitional government that excludes Kurdish-led armed groups from holding major positions of power and prefers decentralization models that restrict Kurdish autonomy. Ankara is also likely to shape political developments through its partnerships with Syrian opposition groups, positioning itself as an important actor in determining Syria's post-conflict structure.

United States

The United States maintains a limited but strategically important presence in northeastern Syria, focused mainly on countering ISIS and supporting Kurdish-led forces. Washington's priorities include preventing the resurgence of extremist groups, stabilizing liberated areas, and restricting Iranian influence. The U.S. supports a negotiated political transition but is cautious about committing to major reconstruction or long-term governance efforts without meaningful reforms. American policy emphasizes human rights protections, inclusive governance, and continued counterterrorism operations. However, U.S. support for Kurdish forces puts it in conflict with Türkiye, adding complexity to broader diplomatic negotiations.

Israel

Israel's involvement in Syria is mainly shaped by security concerns about Iran and Hezbollah. Israel aims to prevent Iranian forces from becoming firmly established in southern Syria and regularly carries out airstrikes on Iranian-linked military sites. The fall of the Assad regime creates uncertainty about who will control border areas, including regions near the Golan Heights. Israel is likely to support transitional arrangements that reduce Iran's military presence and maintain stability along its northern border. In addition, Israel has shown concern for the safety of minority groups such as the Druze communities near the Golan which may also influence its diplomatic approach.

Arab League and Gulf States

Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Jordan, hold diverse but important interests in Syria's transition. Many Gulf states opposed Assad during the early years of the conflict but

later renewed diplomatic ties in pursuit of regional stability. After Assad's fall, their main priorities include limiting Iran's influence, supporting economic reconstruction, and promoting a political solution led by Arab states. Some may try to strengthen Sunni-led factions or invest in reconstruction to help restore regional order. However, differing political priorities among Arab League members make collective action challenging.

United Nations and International Humanitarian Organizations

The United Nations and its affiliated agencies continue to play a significant role in addressing Syria's humanitarian crisis, assisting refugees, and supporting political dialogue. The UN does not back any specific political faction but instead, it seeks to create an inclusive transitional framework that upholds international law and human rights. Humanitarian organizations stress the importance of safe conditions for refugee returns, demining efforts, restoring basic services, and establishing accountability for past abuses. However, the UN's ability to influence Syria's transition depends heavily on the Security Council reaching consensus, something that remains difficult due to geopolitical tensions among its permanent members.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
15 Mar. 2011	Peaceful protests break out in Daraa after the arrest of schoolchildren, marking the start of the Syrian uprising. Government crackdowns intensify the unrest and spread it across the country.
July. 2011	The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is formed by defected soldiers, marking the shift of the uprising into an armed conflict.
30 June. 2012	The Geneva Communiqué proposes a framework for a political transition in Syria, but it fails to advance because parties cannot agree on Assad's future role.
Aug. 2013	Chemical attacks in Eastern Ghouta kill hundreds, prompting global condemnation and resulting in a UN-backed agreement for Syria to dismantle its chemical weapons stockpile.
Sept. 2014	ISIS captures large areas in Syria and Iraq, prompting the U.S.-led coalition to begin airstrikes against the group.

- 30 Sept. 2015
Russia launches a military intervention in support of the Assad regime, reversing opposition gains and strengthening regime control in western Syria.
- Dec. 2016
Government and Russian forces recapture Aleppo, marking a major turning point in the war and significantly weakening the opposition.
- 23 Jan. 2017
The Astana peace talks begin, with Türkiye, Russia, and Iran acting as guarantors. The process creates de-escalation zones but excludes major opposition factions.
- 10 Mar. 2019
The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) capture Baghouz, the last ISIS stronghold, formally ending ISIS's territorial control.
- May. 2020
Syria's economic collapse accelerates due to currency depreciation, sanctions, and corruption, triggering anti-government protests even in regime-held areas.
- Mar. 2023
Earthquakes along the Türkiye–Syria border devastate northwest Syria, further weakening local governance and increasing humanitarian needs.
- 14 Mar. 2025
Major clashes erupt in western Syria between regime forces, defected military units, and opposition coalitions. Regime fragmentation accelerates as key divisions withdraw support.
- 28 Apr. 2025
Kurdish-led authorities in the northeast consolidate control and announce willingness to join national transition talks if their autonomy is protected.
- 6 June. 2025
Large protests and widespread defections in Damascus signal the near-total collapse of central authority. Several regime institutions stop functioning.
- 12 July. 2025
Bashar al-Assad flees Damascus, and the regime effectively collapses. Multiple factions begin forming provisional governance structures across Syria.
- Aug. 2025
Rival political groups including opposition coalitions, Kurdish authorities, and remnants of state institutions announce competing transitional frameworks. No single actor gains broad legitimacy.
- Sept. 2025
Refugee return increases, placing strain on infrastructure and communities already struggling with poverty and resource shortages.

13 Oct. 2025	Clashes break out among opposition factions in Idlib and rural Aleppo, raising concerns about intra-opposition conflict and undermining prospects for unified governance.
Dec. 2025	Foreign actors including Russia, Iran, Türkiye, and the United States, issue statements outlining conditions for maintaining their military presence, underscoring ongoing geopolitical tensions surrounding Syria's transition.

Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties, and Frameworks

- *Geneva Communiqué, 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522):*

The Geneva Communiqué created the first internationally recognized framework for a political transition in Syria. It called for establishing a transitional governing body formed through mutual consent between the Syrian government and the opposition. Although it did not explicitly require Assad's removal, it outlined a roadmap for constitutional reform, elections, and restructuring state institutions. The Communiqué remains a key reference point for later peace initiatives and continues to shape discussions about post-Assad governance.

- *UN Security Council Resolution 2254, 18 Dec. 2015 (S/RES/2254):*

Resolution 2254 supports a Syrian-led political process under UN supervision and calls for inclusive governance, a nationwide ceasefire, and the drafting of a new constitution. It also requires that elections be held under UN supervision. The resolution is widely viewed as the legal foundation for future political settlements and remains central to discussions about transitional justice, political legitimacy, and post-conflict reconstruction.

- *Chemical Weapons Convention Framework Agreement, 14 Sept. 2013 (S/2013/553):*

This document outlines the international agreement requiring Syria to dismantle its chemical weapons program under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Its significance continues into the post-Assad period, as mechanisms for chemical weapons accountability and verification play an important role in debates on war crimes prosecution and transitional justice.

- *UN Security Council Resolution 2449, 13 Dec. 2018 (S/RES/2449):*

Resolution 2449 renews authorization for cross-border humanitarian aid to enter Syria without needing approval from Damascus. This mechanism is essential for providing life-saving assistance to areas outside government control. In a post-Assad context, the resolution underscores the international community's continued commitment to humanitarian access and highlights the importance of neutral aid channels during political transitions.

- *Astana Joint Statement on De-escalation Zones, 4 May 2017:*

Signed by Türkiye, Russia, and Iran, this agreement created de-escalation zones across Syria to reduce fighting. Although its implementation was uneven, the document highlights how competing foreign interests have shaped security conditions on the ground. The terms of the Astana framework continue to influence territorial control and foreign military deployments in the post-Assad period.

- *UN General Assembly Resolution on the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), 21 Dec. 2016 (A/RES/71/248):*

This resolution established the IIIM, which is responsible for investigating and preserving evidence of war crimes in Syria. The mechanism plays a key role in transitional justice after the regime's collapse by supporting future prosecutions and truth-seeking efforts. Its work also shapes proposals for accountability frameworks in a post-Assad government.

- *Arab League Decision on Syria's Readmission, 7 May 2023 (Council of the League of Arab States Resolution):*

This decision restored Syria's membership in the Arab League after years of suspension. Its significance lies in shaping regional expectations for Syria's diplomatic and economic reintegration following Assad's fall. The document reflects shifting regional priorities and highlights the role of Arab states in influencing post-conflict stabilization.

Previously Attempted Solutions

UN-Backed Peace Processes (Geneva I–IV and Constitutional Committee)

Over the past decade, the United Nations has led multiple diplomatic initiatives aimed at reaching a political settlement to the Syrian conflict. Beginning with the Geneva Communiqué in 2012, these efforts sought to

establish a transitional governing body, draft a new constitution, and organize nationally supervised elections. The creation of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in 2019 represented the most concrete institutional attempt to advance political transition by bringing together representatives from the government, opposition, and civil society.

Despite sustained international support, these initiatives failed to produce meaningful progress. The Assad government consistently rejected proposals that threatened its hold on power, while divisions within the opposition weakened negotiating leverage. In addition, foreign actors often prioritized military objectives over diplomatic compromise, undermining UN mediation. As a result, the Constitutional Committee became largely symbolic and failed to deliver substantive constitutional reform. This experience highlights the limitations of negotiations that lack enforcement mechanisms and genuine political buy-in from key actors.

Astana and Sochi Processes

Launched in 2017 by Russia, Türkiye, and Iran, the Astana and Sochi processes marked a shift away from UN-led negotiations toward regionally driven security arrangements. These talks aimed to establish de-escalation zones, reduce active fighting, and negotiate localized ceasefires. In some areas, the agreements temporarily lowered levels of violence and enabled limited humanitarian access.

However, the Astana framework was widely criticized for prioritizing military stabilization over political transition. Implementation of ceasefires was inconsistent, and government forces frequently violated agreements with limited consequences. Moreover, the process sidelined broader Syrian political participation and strengthened the influence of its guarantor states. While Astana demonstrated that regional actors could coordinate security arrangements, it failed to address governance, accountability, or long-term stability.

Localized Reconciliation Agreements (2016–2018)

During the later stages of the conflict, the Assad government (often with Russian mediation) implemented localized reconciliation agreements in areas such as Homs, Eastern Ghouta, and Daraa. These deals promised amnesty, restoration of services, and civilian safety in exchange for opposition surrender or acceptance of government authority.

In practice, many of these agreements resulted in forced displacement rather than genuine reconciliation. Opposition fighters were evacuated to northern Syria, while civilians faced arbitrary arrests, property confiscation, and renewed violence. Although the agreements temporarily reduced fighting, they deepened mistrust between communities and the state and contributed to long-term demographic and social instability. These outcomes illustrate the risks of coercive reconciliation processes that lack transparency and accountability.

International Counterterrorism Operations

International counterterrorism efforts, particularly against ISIS, represent one of the few areas where limited success was achieved. Operations led by the U.S.-led coalition and supported by Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces dismantled ISIS's territorial control by 2019, improving regional security and preventing further mass atrocities.

However, these operations focused primarily on military objectives and did not address the underlying political, economic, and social grievances that enabled extremist recruitment. ISIS continues to operate through clandestine networks, and the instability following the Assad regime's collapse risks creating new opportunities for resurgence. The experience demonstrates that counterterrorism efforts alone are insufficient without parallel political and governance reforms.

Potential Solutions

Inclusive Transitional Governance Framework

One possible way to maintain stability in post-Assad Syria is to create an inclusive transitional governance framework that brings together a wide range of political, ethnic, and sectarian actors. This could involve representatives from opposition groups, Kurdish-led administrations, civil society organizations, minority communities, and technocratic figures from existing state institutions. Inclusive governance can help reduce violence by giving different groups a role in political decision-making and preventing power from being concentrated in the hands of a single faction.

Given Syria's fragmented territorial control and diverse population, limited forms of decentralization may also play a role within a broader transitional governance framework. Granting local authorities greater administrative responsibility in areas such as education, policing, and service delivery (while preserving national unity) could help reduce tensions between central institutions and peripheral or minority communities. However, inclusion also presents serious challenges, including deep mistrust between groups, competing claims to legitimacy, and concerns about accountability, particularly regarding the participation of former regime officials or armed actors.

Phased Security Sector Reform and Disarmament

Stabilization efforts in Syria may benefit from a phased approach to security sector reform that focuses first on ceasefire monitoring, weapons control, and the gradual integration of armed groups into unified security institutions. Instead of immediate disarmament—which could trigger resistance—this step-by-step strategy could emphasize confidence-building measures, local security guarantees, and the professionalization of forces under civilian oversight.

However, this approach carries serious risks. Armed groups may resist integration out of fear of marginalization or retaliation, and uneven implementation could create new power imbalances. In addition, foreign-backed militias may refuse to participate in reform efforts, weakening national unity. Despite these challenges, gradual reform may offer a practical way to reduce violence while avoiding sudden breakdowns in security.

Transitional Justice and Accountability Mechanisms

Addressing past human rights violations through transitional justice mechanisms may play a critical role in preventing cycles of revenge violence. Options include truth commissions, documentation initiatives, reparations programs, and selective criminal prosecutions supported by international mechanisms such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM). These measures aim to acknowledge suffering, promote reconciliation, and restore public trust.

However, transitional justice can also provoke resistance, particularly among groups that fear collective punishment. Overly punitive approaches risk destabilizing fragile political arrangements, while blanket amnesties may undermine credibility and justice. Striking a balance between accountability and reconciliation remains one of the most difficult aspects of post-conflict stabilization.

Economic Stabilization and Anti-Corruption Measures

Economic recovery is closely tied to political stability in Syria. Efforts such as restoring basic services, rebuilding agricultural production, stabilizing the currency, and reducing corruption can lower incentives for armed mobilization. Targeted economic assistance and job creation programs may also support demobilization and help rebuild social cohesion.

However, economic stabilization faces serious challenges, including sanctions, donor fatigue, entrenched corruption networks, and uncertainty over political authority. Without transparent oversight, reconstruction funding risks benefiting elites rather than supporting broad recovery. While economic measures alone cannot guarantee stability, their absence greatly increases the likelihood of renewed conflict.

Economic recovery is also closely linked to the potential return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Without mechanisms to address housing reconstruction, employment opportunities, and unresolved property disputes, large-scale returns may strain local economies and deepen social tensions rather than contribute to stabilization.

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