



Ortadoğu Arařtırmaları Merkezi
مركز دراسات الشرق الأوسط
Center for Middle Eastern Studies

REPORT 44
SEPTEMBER 2025



SIX MONTHS INTO THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION: BUILDING LEGITIMACY AND STABILITY

ORSAM



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Publication Date: September 2025

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The transitional period in Syria following the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in December 2024 has been marked by key developments that reflect the new government's domestic and foreign policy orientations, along with the fundamental challenges it faces.

- Upon assuming power, the new administration under Ahmad al-Sharaa immediately embarked on a comprehensive legitimacy-building process designed to repair the political, social, and institutional damage inflicted by the war. This strategy was structured around four key pillars: restoring a unitary state, promoting social inclusivity, activating participatory mechanisms, and establishing legal safeguards through an interim constitution.
- In the post-revolution period, inclusivity has become a defining pillar of the new administration's political vision. This commitment is evident in its inclusive rhetoric, outreach to ethnic, religious, and sectarian minorities, attention to diversity in institutional repre-

sentation, and the integration of the principle of equal citizenship into the interim constitution.

- The al-Sharaa administration has outlined a political vision that prioritizes national unity as a safeguard against sectarian and ethnic fragmentation. This vision aims to centralize security and institutional structures domestically, while pursuing an independent and balanced course in foreign policy.
- The National Dialogue Conference marked one of the most critical turning points in the new administration's legitimacy-building process and stood as its most comprehensive attempt to establish political legitimacy on both institutional and normative grounds. The conference's emphasis on inclusive representation, the broad scope of its thematic discussions, and the foundational nature of its decisions all reflected the administration's effort to construct a governance framework rooted in public consent.
- The government's decision to launch a new constitution-making process reflects

both an urgent need for legal restructuring and a strategic effort to strengthen social legitimacy. Indeed, the constitutional process serves as one of the primary platforms through which the new administration seeks to redefine itself as a legitimate, inclusive, and institutionalized political actor.

- The formation of a pluralistic government in March, followed by the creation of the Supreme Committee for the People's Assembly Elections in June, underscores the administration's intent to establish a political order based on public consent. These steps reflect its broader aim of deriving legitimacy through a broad-based social consensus.
- In its first six months, the foreign policy of the new government was shaped by the fragility of its political, economic, and military structures, the security imperatives of transition, and the dynamics of regional geopolitical competition. In this context, the administration adopted a pragmatic approach aimed at reintegration into the international community, normalization of regional relations, and the easing of economic sanctions.
- Syria's evolving national identity, emerging political and economic structures, and the ideological orientation of its new leadership have necessitated a recalibration of foreign policy. These factors have facilitated Syria's pursuit of more cooperative relations with its neighbors, the wider region, and the international community—an orientation already evident in its diplomatic initiatives during the first half of 2025.
- The new administration embraced a pragmatic, dynamic approach to diplomacy, marking a decisive departure from previous practices. Within six months, Syria emerged as a partner to both regional neighbors and global powers, achieving sanctions relief and gaining broader international support.
- Al-Sharaa's first trip abroad to Saudi Arabia, his attendance at the Arab League Summit, and his active diplomacy with Arab countries marked a major shift in Syria's foreign policy. This move signals a break from the Iran-focused approach of the Assad era and a return to closer ties with the Arab world.
- In parallel with its outreach to the Arab world, Syria has been cultivating a strategic partnership with Türkiye, centered on defense and security. Al-Sharaa's three visits to Türkiye so far reflect the administration's drive to strengthen and expand this relationship.
- Syria's contacts with the United States (U.S.) reflected its desire to reintegrate into the international system. Talks with the Trump administration produced agreements on combating DAESH, providing security guarantees for Israel, and curbing Iranian influence, leading ultimately to the lifting of U.S. sanctions. Engagements with European states and participation in international forums further underscored Syria's commitment to cultivating constructive and balanced relationships with global actors in the new era.
- The military and security institutions of the new state were built on the structures that had emerged in Idlib during the civil war, but they were reshaped through reforms and integration processes to meet the demands of the new period.
- Remnants of the Assad regime represented the first major threat to internal security in post-revolution Syria. While the government largely managed this challenge through amnesty measures, reconciliation centers, and targeted military operations, the possibility of these groups re-emerging—particularly in coastal areas with potential external support—remains a long-term concern.

-
- Efforts to combat drug and arms trafficking have focused on the western border with Lebanon, the southern border with Jordan, and the eastern border with Iraq. By contrast, the Turkish border has stood out for its relative stability, owing largely to Türkiye's cross-border operations during the civil war and its effective control of the frontier.
 - ISIS/DAESH has shifted its strategy in Syria, increasingly targeting religious and sectarian minorities to exploit social fault lines and attract foreign fighters. Although DAESH activity sharply declined following the regime's collapse, indicators suggest a gradual resurgence in the second half of 2025. The normalization of U.S.-Syrian relations has created a new dynamic, enabling Damascus to coordinate more closely with Washington in combating DAESH.
 - A central goal of the new government has been to restore political unity across Syria. Yet the presence of armed groups that reject central authority—and the conflicts they provoke—has triggered severe political, military, and humanitarian crises. The main obstacles to unity during the transitional period include uprisings by remnants of the Assad regime in coastal regions, the resistance of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF/YPG) to integrate with the central government, and Israel's destabilizing interventions in the south.
 - The new government has pursued political negotiations aimed at disarming the SDF and integrating its forces into the central state apparatus. In March 2025, an agreement was signed outlining the reintegration of SDF-controlled areas into Syria in exchange for constitutional guarantees for the Kurdish community. However, the SDF has deliberately stalled implementation by insisting on maintaining its autonomous status. This stalemate generates significant uncertainty over the future of Damascus-SDF reconciliation and poses a major challenge to national unity in Syria.
 - In the post-Assad era, Israel has emerged as the most serious external threat to Syria's territorial integrity. Through airstrikes and ground incursions, Israel has pursued a strategy of keeping Syria weak and fragmented. Curbing such interventionist policies is essential for Syria's political unity and long-term stability.
 - The new government has inherited an economy in profound disarray. Years of civil war, compounded by international sanctions, have severely undermined infrastructure, state institutions, and human capital. These structural weaknesses are further exacerbated by persistent security challenges, social fragmentation, and constrained economic resources, all of which significantly impede prospects for a rapid and sustainable recovery.
 - By 2025, the lifting of international sanctions has reopened avenues for reconstruction and investment in Syria, presenting a major opportunity for economic recovery. Türkiye, Gulf states, and several European countries are preparing investment projects across key sectors, including infrastructure, energy, and construction. At the same time, the return of Syrians from the diaspora and their involvement in reconstruction efforts are gaining momentum.
 - The first six months of Syria under al-Sharaa's leadership have signaled a promising start, inspiring cautious optimism for the post-conflict era. This transitional period has demonstrated tangible potential for progress, indicating that the country can be reconstructed on the foundations of national unity, political legitimacy, and regional integration.

INTRODUCTION

The civil war, which started in Syria in 2011, has over thirteen years not only caused an immense humanitarian tragedy and physical destruction, but also brought about a profound legitimacy crisis at the political, institutional, and social levels. The crisis reached a historic breaking point with the toppling of the Ba'ath regime on December 8, 2024, ushering in a new era in Syria under the leadership of Ahmad al-Sharaa, the leader of the rebel groups that overthrew the Assad regime. This new era was not solely limited to a regime change, but at the same time brought a substantial responsibility to Syria's new leaders in addressing social devastation, reconstructing the state, and establishing an inclusive political system founded on national unity. This report assesses the primary steps taken by the new administration under al-Sharaa in domestic and foreign policy, the institutional regulations that have been established, and the structural transformations across the nation during the initial six months following the revolution, from a comprehensive and analytical perspective.

The focus of this study is to analyze the legitimacy construction of the new Syrian administration within a multidimensional framework at both domestic and international levels. In this context, the report thoroughly examines the efforts of the new administration to reflect ethnic, religious, and sectarian diversity in political representation within the framework of the principle of inclusivity, while also analyzing the policies developed for reestablishing the unitary state structure. The first six months of the

revolution have been critical in implementing measures that encourage the participation of Syrian minorities and various components in the political process, the establishment of the principle of citizenship, and the reconstruction of state institutions. Furthermore, the interim constitution announced on March 13, following the National Dialogue Conference, marks a significant step toward establishing a political system rooted in the will of the people by laying the legal and institutional groundwork for the interim period.

In this process, domestic legitimacy was deemed insufficient; efforts also focused on reconstructing it within the international arena. By adopting a pragmatic and reconciliatory approach to foreign policy, the Syrian government aimed to end Syria's regional and global isolation, regain diplomatic recognition, and secure access to foreign aid. Within this scope, it has engaged in intensive diplomatic contacts with regional actors such as Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Jordan, while actively pursuing their political and economic support. Especially the multidimensional cooperation established with Türkiye has expanded across a wide range of fields from security and the economy to border control and military coordination. With respect to the West, the meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Syria's Interim President al-Sharaa in May 2025 was a turning point, after which the lifting of sanctions against Syria was announced and diplomatic normalization accelerated. Contact was also established with European coun-

tries such as France and Germany during that period, while engagement with international organizations was initiated.

The first part of this report discusses efforts to build legitimacy in Syria's domestic and foreign policy. Domestic legitimacy is examined through five key aspects: inclusive political representation, a vision of a unitary state, the National Dialogue Conference, the declaration of an interim constitution, and the formation of the interim government. The analysis covers the new administration's political strategies for achieving social consensus, along with discussions on how ethnic and sectarian groups are represented and integrated into the political system. In the pursuit of international legitimacy, the Syrian administration concentrated on three main goals: rebuilding and strengthening ties with the Arab world, establishing a strategic partnership with Türkiye, and developing constructive and cohesive relations with Western states, especially the U.S. Active diplomatic initiatives taken within this context aimed to consolidate the legitimacy and recognition of the administration both regionally and internationally. Another key objective of this diplomatic outreach was to find a solution to the severe economic crisis in the country and mobilize foreign support mechanisms.

In the second part of the report, the reconstruction of Syria's domestic security architecture is discussed, and the main threats to the country's security and political unity are thoroughly examined. Within this framework, this chapter examines the integration of various armed groups into the national army and evaluates the

interim government's strategies for tackling key security challenges, such as DAESH, remnants of the Assad regime, and drug and weapons trafficking. This section also deals with critical challenges threatening Syria's political unity and stability. In this context, the uprising at the Syrian coast, the political negotiations between Damascus and the SDF, Israel's military intervention, and sectarian tensions in Suwayda are examined in detail.

In the third and final part of the report, the post-war economic situation in Syria is analyzed, focusing especially on the reconstruction of the economy and infrastructure. Within this framework, the main obstacles to economic recovery, the course of international sanctions, and opportunities for reconstruction and development in the new era are examined. Furthermore, the necessary political prerequisites to facilitate a sustainable recovery process and opportunities for international cooperation are also addressed.

This study, therefore, aims to develop an integrated framework for understanding Syria's economic and political reconstruction in the aftermath of the revolution. The initial six months following the revolution are not merely characterized as a transitional period; rather, they constitute a foundational phase during which the fundamental principles of a new political order are established, and both internal and external legitimacy are concurrently reconstructed. Understanding this period is crucial for anticipating Syria's future political, economic, and diplomatic trajectory.

I

LEGITIMACY AND STATE-BUILDING

1. DOMESTIC POLITICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL LEGITIMACY



Beyond triggering a regime crisis, the civil war in Syria resulted in the total collapse of political legitimacy across social, legal, and institutional domains. To address this issue, the new Syrian administration has not only filled the vacuum left by the former regime but also developed a comprehensive legitimacy strategy for building a new political order that will shape the country's future. Within the scope of this strategy, the administration recognized that the control of the government alone is not sufficient for legitimacy. Instead, it sought to legitimize its authority by embracing the principle of inclusivity, creating a unitary state structure, and initiating a process of political and legal institutionalization. This section aims to analyze the legitimacy-building efforts of the interim government in domestic politics, focusing on themes such as inclusivity, the unitary system, the pursuit of social consensus, constitutional declaration, and political representation.

1.1. Inclusivity: The Cornerstone of Political Legitimacy

After a destructive civil war lasting nearly fourteen years, the formation of a new government marks a significant turning point in Syria's political trajectory. The fall of the former regime has necessitated the creation of a new social contract and the establishment of a redefined administrative framework. At the heart of the legitimacy that the new government seeks to build in domestic politics lies the principle of 'inclusivity,' which serves as a central pillar of the new leaders' vision and approach.

The new Syrian administration and al-Sharaa himself have frequently emphasized their commitment to the inclusivity principle in their policies and statements from the revolution to the present. The victory speech delivered by al-Sharaa on December 8 at the Umayyad Mosque is an early example of this emphasis on inclusivity. The statement emphasizing that the

Syrian people are the true owners of the country warrants particular attention. The speech conveyed the message that a new page had opened with the revolution and that Iran's sectarian influence ended in Syria, while simultaneously underscoring the principle of inclusivity.¹ Mohammed al-Bashir, Syria's prime minister during the transitional period, also announced that the government would assume control of state institutions in Damascus smoothly, avoiding any transition enforced by force.² From this perspective, it is evident that the actors leading the revolution have, from the outset, sought a path distinct from previous governments, prioritizing the attainment of social legitimacy above all else.

Moreover, initial public concerns that the interim government lacked inclusivity in its early appointments have been mitigated through persuasion. Al-Sharaa explained that the uniformity of these appointments was a deliberate strategy, intended primarily to foster harmony among the various components of the new government. He said: "The current appointments were made out of necessity at this stage and not to exclude anyone because the current situation is a preparation for an interim government whose tenure will be much longer."³

When al-Sharaa officially assumed office as interim president on January 29 during Syria's victory conference, he proposed a constitutional framework grounded in Islamic law that also guarantees the rights of all ethnic and religious groups. In his address to the Syrian people after taking office, al-Sharaa stated: "We will form an inclusive interim government that reflects Syria's diversity. This government will rebuild

the nation's institutions and, ultimately, pave the way for free and fair elections."⁴

One of the clearest manifestations of the new government's inclusive vision in building domestic legitimacy was reflected in its statements and actions toward ethnic and sectarian minorities. On December 31, al-Sharaa met with Syrian Christian leaders and affirmed his commitment to protecting the right of religious communities to freely practice their faith.⁵ Additionally, al-Sharaa issued a congratulatory message to Christians on the occasion of Christmas. In this message, he stated that Christians were "a significant part of the Syrian people's fabric" and that "the bond between all components of the Syrian people reflects the strength of our unity and diversity."⁶ Following the bombing attack by DAESH on the Mar Elias Church in Damascus on June 22, emergency security measures were implemented to ensure the safety of the Christian community. After the attack, the interim president mobilized all security forces, condemned the assault, and stated that the government would protect all minorities "to defend national unity." In his message on June 23, where al-Sharaa expressed condolences for the families of those who lost their lives or were injured, he emphasized "the importance of solidarity and togetherness" while stating "today, in full unity, we reject all kinds of crimes and injustices."⁷ These statements and actions can be seen as carrying significant weight in fostering trust within the Syrian Christian community.

Besides, the al-Sharaa government took reflexive actions against direct threats toward minorities. In March 2025, it was announced that the state would create an independent inves-

1 "New history written' says HTS leader al-Julani in Syria victory speech", *Al Jazeera*, 8 December 2024.

2 "البشير للجزيرة: حكومة الإنقاذ السورية تتسلم الملفات من مؤسسات النظام المخلوع", *Al Jazeera*, 10 December 2024.

3 "الشرع: لم أحرر سوريا وتنظيم انتخابات قد يستغرق 4 سنوات", *Al Arabiya*, 29 December 2024.

4 "خطاب للرئيس السوري الانتقالي أحمد الشرع", *Youtube*, uploaded by Al Arabiya Screen (@AlArabiyaScreen), 30 December 2025.

5 "الشرع يلتقي وفدا من الطائفة المسيحية بدمشق والحكومة تشكل هيئة للمناقد", *Al Jazeera*, 31 December 2024.

6 "أتمنى تعزيز المحبة بيننا»، أحمد الشرع يهنئ مسيحيي سوريا بأعياد الميلاد", *Al Gomhor*, 31 December 2024.

7 "Deadly church bombing reignites Christians' fears in post-Assad Syria", *The Washington Post*, 23 June 2025.

tigative committee in response to attacks on Alawite civilians residing on the Syrian coast.⁸ Within this context, a seven-person committee was formed by presidential decree signed by al-Sharaa to examine violations reportedly occurring during domestic security operations in the country's coastal regions. Syrian sources reported that two members of the investigation committee were Alawites. The committee stated that its duty was to investigate violations against civilians, identify the culprits, and refer those involved to court. The decisiveness in identifying these violations and referring offenders to justice reflects the new administration's commitment to both establishing peace and building trust within the country, as well as ensuring harmony among ethnic and religious groups. This stance also demonstrates the government's attentiveness to simultaneously strengthening both domestic and international legitimacy.

The decisions reached during the March 10 meeting between President al-Sharaa and the SDF Commander Mazloum Abdi included provisions aimed at ensuring inclusivity for the Kurdish population in Syria. For example, the second article of the agreement declares that "the Kurdish population is an essential community in the Syrian state" and affirms that "the citizenship and constitutional rights of Kurds are under the guarantee of the state." Moreover, the article affirming the right of all Syrians—regardless of religion or ethnicity—to participate in politics and be represented based on merit is a cornerstone of inclusivity. Lastly, the agreement's emphasis on "the rejection of calls for partition, hate speech, and attempts to sow unrest among Syria's components" underscores

its inclusive nature, affirming the protection and recognition of all minorities.

The agreement signed with the Druze community in Suwayda on March 11 is also of critical importance. This agreement allowed the Druze to establish their local police force, preserve their cultural heritage, and become integrated into state institutions.⁹ Al-Sharaa's statement in July 2025 in response to Israel's air strikes during the Druze-Bedouin conflict—that "the security of minorities is the fundamental duty of the state"—demonstrates that a discourse encompassing both political and security inclusivity is being actively pursued.¹⁰

It should also be noted that the new administration's inclusivity policies have extended beyond ethnic and sectarian minorities to encompass the Sunni community within the country. Al-Sharaa's appointment of Osama al-Rifai, a prominent figure of the Sufi tradition, as Syria's Grand Mufti serves as a clear demonstration of this approach.¹¹ The Salafi background of those leading the revolution has not evolved into a source of pressure that could intimidate Syria's traditionally pluralistic religious community. On the contrary, al-Sharaa has prioritized appointing religious figures who embody the country's diversity.¹²

Al-Sharaa's inclusive policies toward minorities were expressed not only in normative terms but also in practical representation. In the interim cabinet announced on March 29, ministerial posts were allocated not only to Sunni Arabs but also to Alawites, Druze, Christians, and Kurds.¹³ Undoubtedly, the representation of ethnic and sectarian diversity at the administrative level is of great importance for the new

8 "الشرع يشكّل لجنة مستقلة للتحقيق في أحداث الساحل السوري", *Al Jazeera*, 9 March 2025.

9 "اتفاق بين الإدارة السورية وجهاء محافظة السويداء.. على ماذا ينص؟", *Al Araby*, 11 March 2025.

10 "US does not support Israel's Syria strikes, Sharaa vows to protect Druze", *Reuters*, 18 July 2025.

11 "الشرع يعين الشيخ أسامة الرفاعي مفتياً عاماً لسوريا", *Al Jazeera*, 29 March 2025.

12 Mehmet Ali Büyükkara, "Suriye'deki Yeni Dinî Otorite Devrimin Kuşatıcılığıyla Şekil Alıyor", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, 16/136 (May-June 2025), pp. 18-21.

13 Elizabeth Hagedorn, "US says Syria's transitional government a possible step forward", *Al-Monitor*, 31 March 2025.

The representation of ethnic and sectarian diversity at the administrative level is of great importance for the new administration in securing legitimacy among broad segments of society.

administration in securing legitimacy among broad segments of society. Taken together, these statements and actions on inclusivity indicate that the new Syrian administration seeks to build its legitimacy through an inclusive political vision that embraces all segments of society, while simultaneously pursuing the broader task of national reconstruction.

Concrete examples of these efforts include statements and actions directed toward ethnic, religious, and sectarian minorities; the promotion of diversity in institutional representation; a balanced approach to religious leadership and symbolic appointments; and the incorporation of the principle of equal citizenship within the interim constitution discussed below. The measures undertaken by the administration in this context represent an important first step toward alleviating social polarization and cultivating a favorable public perception of the new government. This construction of legitimacy, grounded in the principle of inclusivity, not only fosters trust in a society exhausted by years of conflict but also lays the foundation for a future constitutional order rooted in popular will and sustainability. Nevertheless, the overall success of this process will ultimately depend on the consistency with which the inclusivity principle is

internalized in political discourse and implemented across legal, institutional, and governance structures.

1.2. Unitary State: The Model for the Political System

With al-Sharaa de facto assuming leadership of Syria on December 8, one of the central themes in the discourse and actions of the new administration has been the reconstruction and consolidation of Syria's unitary state. This objective was not limited to rhetoric; it emerged as a core priority in negotiations on both domestic and foreign policy, as well as in the wider effort to restructure the country's institutions. Al-Sharaa's statement about the need to "transition from a revolutionary mindset to a state mindset," delivered in his first public speech at the Umayyad Mosque, underscores the new administration's objective of reestablishing central authority in a Syria fragmented and encircled by armed groups.¹⁴ In this context, a decree issued in December 2024 marked an initial step toward disbanding all armed groups and integrating them into a new security structure. This move clearly demonstrated the new administration's commitment to building a unified political order and ending the fragmented nature of the state.

¹⁴ "كلمة لقائد العمليات العسكرية أحمد الشرع في المسجد الأموي بدمشق", *Youtube*, uploaded by Al-Hadath (@AlHadath), 8 December 2024; "New President of Syria: Ahmed al-Sharaa", *Youtube*, uploaded by The Rest Is Politics: Leading (@LeadingTRIP), 10 February 2025.

Moreover, al-Sharaa's declaration of "the collapse of sectarianism and separatism" in his inaugural address—together with his designation of December 8 as "the day national unity was born"—is particularly noteworthy. Such rhetoric reflects a political vision aimed at dismantling sectarian divisions and curbing the influence of foreign powers that have exploited them in Syria. In the following days, the establishment of the interim government and the unification of all armed groups under a central authority marked the first tangible step toward administrative unification. The effort to bring Syria's armed factions under the umbrella of the Ministry of Defense and the restructured national army—designed to be inclusive across sectarian, religious, and ethnic lines—represents a pivotal move in restoring security and stability to the country.

Since its earliest days, the new administration in Syria consistently underscored its commitment to preserving a unitary state structure, particularly in statements concerning the SDF's presence in the country's northeast. Both the Syrian leadership and al-Sharaa repeatedly affirmed that the Kurds constituted an integral part of Syrian society, while making it unequivocally clear that the establishment of a federal entity east of the Euphrates would not be tolerated. In an interview with Saudi Arabia's *Al Arabiya* television channel, al-Sharaa stated that a federal system in Syria would never be allowed and that the country would not serve as a launchpad for PKK attacks.¹⁵ During negotiations with Kurdish groups—intensified and made more transparent after February 2025—the principle of a unitary state was firmly upheld, with Damascus proposing the integration of the SDF into the national army. This approach both reinforced the inclusion of Syria's multi-ethnic composition within the state framework and put forward a solution that categorically rejected federalism.

Under the agreement reached with the SDF in March 2025, it was decided that elements of the organization would be gradually integrated into the country's security and administrative institutions. This arrangement both facilitated the incorporation of the de facto autonomous structures in Syria's northeast and sought to ease conflict dynamics by strengthening Kurdish political representation. The most critical provision of the agreement, however, was the unification of all civilian and military institutions—including border crossings, airports, and oil and natural gas fields—under the authority of the Syrian state's central administration. This development marked a significant step by the Syrian administration toward its goal of reinforcing the unitary state structure.

The Syrian administration not only undertook initiatives to build a unitary state structure but also reacted promptly to developments that threatened it. For example, on April 26, the Syrian Presidency immediately responded to the declaration of the Kurdish National Dialogue Conference—organized in Qamishli by the SDF—which called for a decentralized administration. In its statement, the Presidency declared: "We reject initiatives such as the imposition of a separatist reality, the establishment of federal structures or autonomous administrations, as well as the monopolization of decision-making processes in Syria's northeast under the leadership of the SDF." The SDF was also urged to prioritize national interests and abide by the terms of the agreement, with the Presidency stressing that the statements of the organization's leadership and its federalist initiatives were in direct contradiction with the previously concluded accord. Moreover, by declaring that "Syria's unity and the integrity of its territory and population are our red line; all violations and departures from national prin-

15 "مقابلة خاصة مع قائد الإدارة الانتقالية في سوريا أحمد الشرع", *Youtube*, uploaded by AlArabiya Programs (@AlArabiyaPrograms), 30 December 2024.

ciples constitute an attack on Syria's unity," the administration reaffirmed its firm commitment to the unitary state model.¹⁶

Additionally, the Damascus administration rejected the request for negotiations by the 'Joint Kurdish Delegation'—composed of representatives from the Syrian Kurdish National Council (ENKS) and the SDF—on matters of federalism and decentralization. This rejection underscored the administration's determination to safeguard national integrity and resist demands for federalism. Damascus argued that the agreements signed by al-Sharaa and Abdi in March—which outlined the integration of military and civilian institutions east of the Euphrates into the Syrian state structure—already addressed all relevant matters, rendering further negotiations with a new delegation unnecessary. Similarly, all federalist initiatives in Syria's southern, Druze-majority Suwayda province that could threaten state unity were met with firm responses from the Syrian government, both rhetorically and in practice. No concessions were made regarding any proposals for autonomy.

The new administration in Syria has also been a strong advocate of the unitary state vision on the international stage. Al-Sharaa's statement that "Syria's unitary identity leaves no room for foreign intervention" served both as a call for regional stability and as a declaration of the government's commitment to building a centralized state. Likewise, his remarks in response to Israel's attacks on Syria—including references to the 1974 agreement and the assertion that Syria "will not be a base for attack"—can be understood as part of a broader strategy to counter perceptions of internal division.¹⁷ Lastly, in a statement issued on June 30, the notion of "transition from revolution to state" was re-

iterated, emphasizing that armed or factional structures, once deemed legitimate during the revolutionary period, must now give way to an institutional and lawful state order.¹⁸

In summary, the new Syrian administration under al-Sharaa articulates a political vision anchored in the principle of national unity, standing in direct opposition to sectarian and ethnic fragmentation. This vision seeks to consolidate security and institutional structures domestically while pursuing an independent, balanced foreign policy. Within this framework, the unitary state emerges not merely as an administrative preference but as a strategic political instrument guiding the administration's response to internal challenges. To this end, al-Sharaa's government has implemented comprehensive measures to dismantle the country's fragmented order and establish a legitimacy framework that reinforces national sovereignty. Key initiatives include integrating armed groups into the security apparatus, advocating an inclusive model that rejects federalism in negotiations with Kurdish actors, and responding decisively to separatist discourse and actions. These efforts aim to safeguard Syria's territorial integrity and restore popular allegiance to the state. Ultimately, the emphasis on unity has transcended debates over state structure; it now represents a deliberate strategy to rebuild legitimacy in the postwar era, strengthen social cohesion, and secure lasting political stability.

1.3. The National Dialogue Conference: A Concrete Step Toward Building Legitimacy

The Ba'ath regime's collapse in Syria also marked the beginning of a new phase in the country's protracted political legitimacy crisis, which had deepened considerably during the

16 "Syria's Sharaa rejects Kurdish demands for decentralisation", *Reuters*, 27 April 2025.

17 "الشرع: ملتزمون باتفاقية 1974 ولن أسمح باستخدام سوريا كنقطة انطلاق لهجمات ضد إسرائيلي". *CNBC Arabia*, 16 December 2024.

18 "Syria: From revolution to state mindset – deconstructing the duality", *Enab Baladi*, 30 June 2025.

civil war. To address this challenge, the interim government's most significant political initiative has undoubtedly been the National Dialogue Conference. Serving as both a symbolic and institutional mechanism, this conference has become the cornerstone of the new administration's efforts to ensure broad social representation and consolidate political legitimacy within domestic politics.

Syria's already fragile state authority—burdened by a long-standing crisis of legitimacy—along with the mechanisms of institutional continuity and political representation, nearly disintegrated with the fall of the Assad regime. As noted above, in his first public statement, al-Sharaa characterized the regime's collapse as a “historical rebirth” and pledged an inclusive transitional period for all Syrians. The new administration placed particular emphasis on the National Dialogue Conference in this context, recognizing that a sustainable transition depends not only on de facto control or international recognition but also on securing domestic legitimacy. Besides, one of the interim government's principal challenges was to forge unity among Syria's diverse sectarian, ethnic, and political groups under a new framework. In that regard, the National Dialogue

Conference was conceived as an effective mechanism to build political consensus and promote pluralism. Headed by spokesperson Hassan al-Daghim, the seven-member committee—comprising individuals from diverse ideological backgrounds, including two women—appears to have been deliberately structured for balanced representation, symbolizing the first stage of political transition. Its core responsibilities included organizing the conference, coordinating participation across regions, setting bylaws and participation criteria, and drafting the final declaration.¹⁹

In its first statement, the National Dialogue Conference's Preparatory Committee emphasized that the conference seeks to address social, political, economic, and administrative issues, while laying the foundations for a future grounded in national consensus, justice, reform, and broad representation. The statement also highlighted the importance of ensuring genuine participation that reflects Syria's social and political diversity and of fostering a comprehensive dialogue inclusive of all segments of the Syrian community, across provinces and constituencies.²⁰ Committee spokesperson al-Daghim stated that all conference participants were required to disarm, and that armed groups would be barred

The National Dialogue Conference was conceived as an effective mechanism to build political consensus and promote pluralism.

19 “Syria Forms Preparatory Committee for National Dialogue Conference”, *The Syrian Observer*, 13 February 2025.

20 “البيان الأول للجنة التحضيرية لمؤتمر الحوار الوطني: يؤسس لحوار جامع يتجاوز الحواجز والإصطفافات”, *Al-Thawra*, 13 February 2025.

from participation unless formally integrated into the Ministry of Defense. He affirmed that the Kurds are a significant component of Syrian society and would thus be an integral part of the Conference. However, he clarified that the participation of the SDF would only be possible if they disarmed.²¹ Moreover, al-Daghim noted that a new opposition is expected to emerge in the country once the elections are held and the political party legislation is enacted. He emphasized that this is a natural development in a citizenship-based state and reaffirmed that Syria will not become a one-party state.²²

In a press briefing following the completion of the preparatory phase, the committee stated: "Within the scope of the preparations of the National Dialogue Conference, over 30 meetings were held encompassing all provinces to ensure the representation of all segments of the Syrian society. Around 4,000 men and women participated while the committee held several dialogues to hear various perspectives and tendencies. It listened to and recorded over 2,200 interventions, and received more than 700 written contributions." In this context, the pluralist and conciliatory approach adopted during the preparation period served as a critical threshold in strengthening the legitimacy of the new administration. The committee spokesperson stated that the interim government would not directly intervene in the national dialogue process but might assist in implementing the proposals once the process was complete. Additionally, the spokesperson emphasized that the proposals resulting from the national dialogue would be more than mere suggestions and formalities; they would form the basis of the constitutional declaration, political identity, economic model, and institutional reform.²³

After the preparation period was completed, the National Dialogue Conference took place on February 24–25 in Damascus. Around 600 participants from diverse sectors, both inside and outside the country, attended the conference, marking the transitional government's first significant political initiative. The conference focused on six key themes: constitution drafting, transitional justice, personal freedoms and human rights, the economy, and the role of civil society. Delegates were organized into working groups corresponding to these themes and engaged in a structured negotiation process, ensuring that all participants had an opportunity to express their views within a designated timeframe.²⁴ Eighteen decisions were adopted at the conference, constituting a national agreement aimed at laying the foundation for the country's reconstruction. Among these key decisions—particularly notable for their potential to strengthen the new administration's legitimacy in domestic politics—are as follows:

- The unity of the Syrian Arab Republic, along with its sovereignty over all its territory, must be maintained. Any form of fragmentation, division, or concessions regarding any part of the homeland is unequivocally rejected.
- A constitutional committee must be established to prepare a permanent draft of the constitution for the nation. This constitution should delineate the separation of powers, reinforce the principles of justice, liberty, and equality, and establish a constitutional state along with its institutional framework.
- Freedom, a hard-won achievement for which the Syrian people paid with their blood, must be upheld as a fundamental societal value,

21 الدغيم: الرئاسة لا تتدخل بلجنة الحوار والتوغل الإسرائيلي على "، *AA Arabic*, 13 February 2025; "سوريا: استبعاد المجموعات الراضية تسليم سلاحها من الحوار الوطني"، *Al Jazeera*, 17 February 2025.

22 "الدغيم: مؤتمر الحوار الوطني ينفذ روح القرارات الدولية بقيادة السوريين أنفسهم"، *SANA*, 17 February 2025.

23 "سوريا.. بدء توجيه الدعوات للمشاركين بمؤتمر الحوار الوطني الاثنين"، *AA Arabic*, 23 February 2025.

24 "الشرع في افتتاح مؤتمر الحوار الوطني: سوريا لا تقبل القسمة"، *Al Jazeera*, 25 February 2025.

while freedom of expression and thought must be fully protected.

- Human rights must be upheld, women's roles in all areas must be supported, children's rights must be protected, people with special needs must be acknowledged, and the participation of youth in the government and society must be encouraged.
- The principle of citizenship must be established, all forms of discrimination based on race, religion, or sect must be rejected, and the principle of equal opportunities without ethnic or religious quotas must be guaranteed.
- Transitional justice must be firmly established. It is essential to ensure that individuals involved in crimes and violations are held accountable. Necessary legislative reforms should be enacted within the legal system to uphold justice, restore rights, and implement appropriate mechanisms.
- The principle of peaceful coexistence among all segments of the Syrian people must be established, and all forms of violence, provocation, and revenge must be rejected to strengthen social stability and domestic peace.
- Political developments must be guided by principles that ensure the full participation of society in political life. To this end, the necessary laws should be enacted, and procedures for political dismissal should be implemented in accordance with fair and transparent standards.²⁵

As a result, the National Dialogue Conference marked a crucial turning point for the al-Sharaa government in building legitimacy. It constituted a comprehensive effort to establish political legitimacy at both institutional and normative

levels. The conference's focus on participatory representation, the breadth of thematic topics addressed, and the foundational nature of its decisions all underscore the new administration's efforts to create an administrative framework grounded in the will of the people. Moreover, the regional meetings and inclusive rhetoric during the preparatory process demonstrated the interim government's intent to base its legitimacy on popular participation. In this regard, the Conference served as a clear indicator of the pursuit of a new political order seeking both institutional and social endorsement.

1.4. The Constitutional Declaration: A Legal Framework for Legitimacy

In post-revolutionary periods, the initiative to draft a new constitution is often regarded as a "founding moment," through which political leadership offers society a fresh beginning. As constitutions serve as a fundamental instrument for achieving consensus with the populace, governments typically undertake this process to establish legitimacy grounded in the will of the people. In doing so, a new political agreement is introduced, often accompanied by a declaration aimed at addressing historical injustices and signaling a definitive break with the past. The act of drafting a constitution communicates a commitment to depart from arbitrariness by establishing the framework for institutional structures and clearly defining the limits of governmental authority.

Following the fall of the Assad regime, Syria's new administration took one of its first major steps by fully abrogating the previous constitutional order. An official statement issued on December 12 declared that the constitution, parliament, and all institutions associated with the former regime would be suspended for three months, during which interim executive

²⁵ "مشاركون يتحدثون للجزيرة نت عن نتائج الحوار الوطني السوري", *Al Jazeera*, 26 February 2025.

mechanisms were to be established.²⁶ This move was primarily intended to eliminate the legal legacy of the previous regime and to assert the legitimacy of the new administration, conveying a clear message to the public that “a new clean page” was being opened.

In an interview on December 29, al-Sharaa stated that the government aimed to draft a permanent constitution designed to regulate social life and endure over time, noting that this challenging task would require at least three years.²⁷ On January 29, following al-Sharaa's appointment as Syria's interim president, the existing constitution was fully abrogated, and the establishment of an interim legislative parliament would be announced in its place. This new body was presented as the foundational framework for the political transition, intended to function until the adoption of a permanent constitution.²⁸ Subsequently, on March 2, a presidential decree established a seven-member commission of experts tasked with preparing a constitutional declaration to serve as the country's legal foundation during the transitional period. The decree emphasized that the commission's formation was “based on the will of the Syrian people to establish a state founded on the rule of law and on the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference.” The commission further announced that it would submit the draft to the presidency upon completion, declaring its aim “to transform Syria into a more stable and just country by inaugurating a new era grounded in law and institutions.”²⁹ Shortly thereafter, in an interview with *Reuters*, al-Sharaa reiterated that Syria is a constitutional state in which the law will be binding on everyone. He further emphasized that his red lines include safeguarding

life and property, as well as protecting privacy and fundamental rights and values.³⁰

Finally, on March 13, President al-Sharaa signed the Constitutional Declaration, which sets out the core provisions that will serve as the country's legal foundation throughout the transitional period. The declaration, structured in four parts, affirms the principle of absolute separation of powers and underscores a range of fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, freedom of thought, and the participation of women in political and social life. It was further stipulated that the declaration would remain in force for five years. The key provisions of the 44-article interim constitutional declaration are outlined below:

- The Syrian Arab Republic is a fully independent and sovereign state. Its territorial and political unity is indivisible, and no part of its land may be ceded.
- The religion of the President shall be Islam, and Islamic jurisprudence shall constitute the principal source of legislation. Freedom of belief is guaranteed. The State shall uphold all divine religions and safeguard the right to worship, provided that the exercise of this freedom does not infringe upon public order.
- All citizens are equal before the law and shall bear the same obligations. Discrimination based on race, religion, gender, or descent is strictly prohibited.
- The personal status of each religious community shall be preserved and applied in accordance with its beliefs and religious laws, within the framework of existing legislation.

26 “Syria new leadership suspends constitution, parliament for 3 months”, *Middle East Monitor*, 13 December 2024.

27 “Syria's de facto leader says holding elections could take up to four years”, *Reuters*, 30 December 2024.

28 “Leader of rebels who toppled Syrian President Bashar Assad is named country's interim president”, *The Associated Press*, 30 January 2025.

29 “الجنة صياغة الإعلان الدستوري بسوريا خطوة في مسار تنظيم المرحلة الانتقالية”, *Al Jazeera*, 4 March 2025.

30 “Highlights from interview with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa”, *Reuters*, 11 March 2025.

- The State shall regulate the national economy according to the principles of social justice, free competition, and the prevention of monopolization. It shall support production sectors, promote investment, and foster sustainable development while protecting the rights of investors.
- The State guarantees freedom of expression, thought, the press, publication, and media. These rights shall be exercised in accordance with the law to maintain public order and respect the rights of others.
- The State recognizes the right to political participation and the freedom to establish parties based on national principles. A commission shall be established to draft the legislation governing political parties, and party-related activities shall remain suspended until such legislation is enacted.
- The People's Assembly shall be appointed by the President and shall perform legislative functions until a permanent constitution is adopted and new parliamentary elections are conducted.
- The President shall serve as head of state, commander of the armed forces, and the highest authority responsible for the administration of the country.
- The constitutional declaration will be in effect for five years.³¹

In conclusion, the drafting of a new constitution in Syria not only provides a necessary legal framework but also presents a crucial opportunity for the new administration to establish social legitimacy. By nullifying the constitutional legacy of the former regime and creating a temporary legal structure, the authorities symbolically signaled a political fresh start and a clear break from the past. The interim consti-

tutional declaration, drafted in the immediate aftermath of inclusive political processes such as the National Dialogue Conference—which emphasized the will of the people—underscores the administration's intent to build a political order grounded in popular sovereignty. While certain provisions, including the scope of presidential powers and the role of religion within the legal system, have drawn scrutiny from some segments of society, the process as a whole represents a significant step toward establishing legal and institutional structures in the post-revolution period. Ultimately, constitution-making constitutes a foundational element of the administration's effort to position itself as a legitimate and inclusive political actor.

1.5. The Establishment of the Interim Government

The latest political initiative by the new Syrian administration, aimed at consolidating domestic legitimacy, was the formation of an inclusive interim government on March 29. The appointment of al-Sharaa as interim president marked a pivotal step in the establishment of the transitional government. In the following weeks, the National Dialogue Conference convened to lay the constitutional and institutional foundations for the transitional period. Aimed at fostering legitimacy, the conference brought together representatives from Kurdish, Arab, Turkmen, Druze, Christian, and Sunni communities. Its outcomes were reflected in both the diversity of the interim cabinet and the provisions of the interim constitution.

Upon completing the formation process on March 29, al-Sharaa announced the official establishment of the interim government. The 23-member cabinet was presented to the public during a formal ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Damascus. The new government

31 “نص الإعلان الدستوري لسوريا 2025”, *Al Jazeera*, 14 March 2025.

The interim cabinet was primarily composed of technocrats, many of whom had graduated from prestigious Western universities. Its composition also reflected ethnic and sectarian diversity, including ministers from Kurdish, Druze, Alawite, and Christian communities.

was structured around a model in which executive authority is concentrated in the presidency, departing from the traditional prime ministerial system. Consequently, al-Sharaa assumed a dual role, serving both as head of state and de facto head of government. The interim cabinet was primarily composed of technocrats, many of whom had graduated from prestigious Western universities. Its composition also reflected ethnic and sectarian diversity, including ministers from Kurdish, Druze, Alawite, and Christian communities. Notably, Yarub Badr, an Alawite, was appointed Minister of Transport; Amjad Badr, a Druze, became Minister of Agriculture; and Hind Kabawat, a Christian, assumed the role of Minister of Social Affairs and Labor.³² In his opening remarks at the swearing-in ceremony, President al-Sharaa stated that the formation of the new government represented “a declaration of collective will toward the establishment of a new state.”³³

As part of this process, President al-Sharaa issued a decree on June 14 establishing the Supreme Committee for the People’s Assembly Elections. The ten-member committee was tasked with forming election subcommittees for the 150-member People’s

Assembly and overseeing the electoral process, through which two-thirds of the members (100 seats) would be elected. According to the decree, the remaining one-third (50 members) would be appointed directly by President al-Sharaa.³⁴ However, in July, Taha al-Ahmad, chairperson of the Supreme Committee, announced that the assembly’s membership would be increased from 150 to 210. Under the revised arrangement, 70 members would be appointed by the president, and at least 20 seats would be reserved for women.³⁵

Efforts to establish the People’s Assembly, a crucial milestone in Syria’s political transition, began immediately after the formation of the committee tasked with selecting its members. This committee has actively promoted public participation by holding open sessions across the country’s provinces. Elections are scheduled for mid-September. Taken together, these developments reflect the interim government’s deliberate efforts to lay the institutional foundations of political legitimacy. The legal framework was set out in the interim constitution; inclusivity was emphasized through the appointment of a cabinet representing diverse social groups; and the

32 “Syrian president al-Sharaa unveils transitional government”, *Al Jazeera*, 30 March 2025.

33 “الشرع يعلن تشكيل الحكومة السورية الجديدة”, *Al Jazeera*, 29 March 2025.

34 “Syria Forms Supreme Elections Committee to Launch People’s Assembly Vote”, *Levant24*, 14 June 2025.

35 “Chairman of Higher committee for People’s Assembly elections: Seats raised to 210 to increase governorates’ shares”, *SANA*, 27 July 2025.

creation of the Supreme Committee for the People's Assembly Elections highlighted the government's commitment to fostering broad public engagement in the political process.

1.6. Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Syrian revolution, the new government immediately launched a comprehensive process to build political legitimacy. This effort aims to address the political, social, and institutional damage caused by the conflict. Central to this strategy are the implementation of policies prioritizing social inclusivity, the re-establishment of a unitary state structure, the

facilitation of public participation via platforms such as the National Dialogue Conference, and the provision of legal guarantees through the interim constitution. It is clear that the al-Sharaa administration seeks to construct a political order grounded in the will of the people and to derive legitimacy from broad social consensus. In this context, the new Syrian leadership has taken decisive steps toward reconstructing the state in a postwar society. The durability of this legitimacy framework will, however, depend on the continuity of political stability and the extent to which society internalizes the measures implemented.

Developments Regarding the Political Transition in Syria

December 8, 2024



Opposition forces captured Damascus and toppled the Ba'ath regime, bringing an end to 61 years of one-party rule.

December 12, 2024

The constitutional order of the former regime was formally abolished. The constitution, parliament, and all Ba'ath-affiliated institutions were suspended.

January 29, 2025

The Syrian Revolution Victory Conference convened in Damascus with the participation of military factions that overthrew the Assad regime. Ahmad al-Sharaa was appointed Interim President.

February 12, 2025



A seven-member Preparatory Committee, including two women and representing diverse ideological backgrounds, was established to organize a National Dialogue Conference.

February 24-25, 2025

The National Dialogue Conference convened in Damascus with the participation of nearly 600 representatives from both inside and outside the country. The conference's resolutions laid the foundation for the Constitutional Declaration and set the stage for the broader reconstruction process.

March 2, 2025

By presidential decree, a commission of seven legal experts was tasked with drafting a constitutional declaration to serve as the legal framework for the transitional period.

March 10, 2025

An agreement was signed between Damascus and the SDF/YPG, establishing a framework for the integration of all military and civilian institutions in northeastern Syria under central authority. In return, the accord guaranteed full citizenship and constitutional rights for the Syrian Kurdish population.

March 11, 2025

An agreement was concluded between Damascus and the Druze to facilitate Suwayda's integration into the central authority. The deal granted the Druze a role in local security structures, guarantees for the preservation of their cultural heritage, and a framework for their gradual incorporation into state administrative institutions.

March 13, 2025



President al-Sharaa signed the Constitutional Declaration, establishing the legal framework for the five-year transitional period. The document affirmed the separation of powers and guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of thought and expression.



March 29, 2025

The interim government was formed with a 23-member technocratic cabinet. It included representatives of minority communities—Alawites, Christians, Druze, and Kurds—alongside Sunni Arabs, signaling a commitment to inclusivity.

June 14, 2025



To re-establish legislative authority, an 11-member Supreme Committee for the People's Assembly Elections was created. The committee was tasked with forming subcommittees to organize elections and establish mechanisms for electing two-thirds of the new Assembly.

September 15–20, 2025

The Supreme Committee announced plans to hold parliamentary elections in mid-September. The number of seats in the People's Assembly was increased from 150 to 210, with representation adjusted according to the 2011 census.

2. FOREIGN POLICY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMACY



The collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Syria brought about significant changes concerning the nation's foreign policy. In the first six months following the revolution, several factors played a decisive role in shaping the country's foreign policy and alliance choices. These included the weakness of Syria's political, economic, and military institutions; the immediate priorities of the transitional period; the search for a new national identity; ongoing geopolitical rivalries; and the pressing economic challenges confronting the state. During this period, the al-Sharaa administration adopted a pragmatic foreign policy agenda focused on integrating Syria into the international community, normalizing regional relations, and alleviating economic sanctions. Given that the central authority of the Syrian state has not yet been fully consolidated, the new administration has opted for a balanced and pragmatic approach in foreign affairs. The Syrian administration has sought to establish a secure environment abroad to maintain internal stability. In this context, it has prioritized building constructive relations with

neighboring states and has reassured them that Syria poses no threat to their national security. Negotiations with Türkiye, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon on issues such as security, border control, and expanded bilateral trade serve as key examples of this policy direction. The unfavorable attitude of Israel towards the Syrian administration has impeded the development of a similar relationship with Tel Aviv. Nevertheless, the Syrian leadership pursued conciliatory policies, even in the face of Israeli aggression, signaling a preference for de-escalation over confrontation. Regionally, the Syrian government appeared to favor closer ties with Arab countries—particularly the Gulf states—as well as with Türkiye. On the international stage, it adopted a more cooperative and moderate foreign policy posture toward the West.

2.1. Re-engagement with the Arab World

One of the new administration's main priorities following the Syrian revolution was to repair relations with neighboring Arab and Gulf states,

The financial power of the Gulf states has been pivotal in Syria's reconstruction efforts, prompting the Syrian government to actively pursue diplomatic engagement with the Gulf.

which had been severely damaged during the Assad era. Within weeks of the regime's collapse, Arab leaders began reaching out to the new administration in Damascus. Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani's visit to Damascus in late January drew particular attention because he was the first Arab leader to visit Syria since the start of the civil war.³⁶ Qatar, which had decisively rejected Assad's rule, reopened its embassy in Damascus after 13 years following this visit. In return for visits by Arab officials to Damascus, Syrian President al-Sharaa and Foreign Minister al-Shaibani also undertook an extensive regional tour.

Saudi Arabia emerged as a key partner for Syria, with al-Sharaa making his first foreign visit as head of state to Riyadh in early February. During the visit, he discussed joint projects in energy, technology, education, and health, as well as cooperation in humanitarian and economic sectors with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Al-Sharaa emphasized that "Saudi Arabia has a genuine commitment to building Syria's future," highlighting Riyadh's role in the post-war recovery process.³⁷ Al-Sharaa's visit to Saudi Arabia symbolized Syria's geopolitical pivot toward closer ties with Arab states, marking a departure from the Iran-centered

alignment that characterized the Assad era.

Beyond merely establishing ties with Damascus, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states began supporting Syria through their regional and international influence. During his visit to Damascus in late January, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan informed Syrian officials that Riyadh was engaging in active dialogue with the U.S. and Europe to facilitate the lifting of economic sanctions. Reflecting this support, al-Sharaa stated that Saudi Arabia "will undoubtedly play a major role in Syria's future," while urging neighboring countries to recognize the significant investment opportunities in the country's reconstruction. The financial power of the Gulf states has been pivotal in Syria's reconstruction efforts, prompting the Syrian government to actively pursue diplomatic engagement with the Gulf. This effort is evident in the early diplomatic travels of Foreign Minister al-Shaibani, who, beginning January 1, embarked on a regional tour that included Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Jordan to secure broad-based regional support.

On January 5, during his meeting with Qatar's prime minister in Doha, al-Shaibani called for the lifting of U.S. sanctions, asserting that they "have effectively tar-

³⁶ "Qatar's Emir visits Syria, first head of state to visit Damascus since Assad's fall", *Reuters*, 30 January 2025.

³⁷ "Syria's interim president visits Saudi Arabia on first trip abroad, likely a signal to Iran", *The Associated Press*, 2 February 2025.

geted the Syrian people rather than the Assad regime."³⁸ During the visit, he also presented a roadmap for Syria's future, focusing on the formation of an inclusive government representing all Syrian communities, the restoration of relations with the Arab world, and the nation's reconstruction. The Qatari administration welcomed Syria's reintegration into the Arab system and pledged its support for the country's unity, sovereignty, and independence. By hosting al-Sharaa in Amman on February 26, King Abdullah II of Jordan also underscored his support for the new Syrian leadership and reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening bilateral relations. The discussions focused on the security of the Jordan-Syria border, the return of refugees, and avenues for economic cooperation.³⁹ In January, Royal Jordanian Airlines operated its first scheduled commercial flight to Damascus since the outbreak of the civil war and announced plans to resume regular services.

In April 2025, Syrian leader al-Sharaa met with President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan as part of an official visit to the UAE. The visit marked the continuation of Foreign Minister al-Shaibani's meetings with UAE officials in January. The Abu Dhabi administration, which had been the first Gulf state to normalize relations with the Assad regime during the Syrian crisis, swiftly adapted to the new political reality by establishing ties with the al-Sharaa government. During the meeting, al-Sharaa and Mohammed bin Zayed discussed the development of Syria-UAE relations and the possibility of UAE investment in Syria's reconstruction.⁴⁰ Similarly, Bahrain—which had normalized relations with Syria before the revolution—also reestablished

ties with the new administration. Al-Sharaa paid an official visit to Bahrain on May 10, meeting with King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Welcoming the Syrian delegation warmly, Bahraini officials signaled their support for Damascus' reintegration into the Gulf's diplomatic and economic networks.⁴¹ Kuwait, which had maintained a cautious stance during the war, demonstrated a supportive attitude toward the new administration. Al-Sharaa's visit to Kuwait on June 1 included meetings with Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other senior officials. Discussions focused on reopening diplomatic missions and Kuwait's potential role in humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts.⁴²

A notable aspect of Syria's rapprochement with Arab states has been the focus on combating the illegal Captagon trade, which has proliferated from Syria across Gulf countries—an issue long neglected by the Assad regime. By expressing a strong commitment to tackling the production and smuggling of Captagon, the al-Sharaa administration has reassured neighboring Jordan and Gulf states that this regional security concern will be addressed with the utmost seriousness. Through these diplomatic efforts centered on security, cooperation, and development, Syria made significant progress in reclaiming its regional role and regaining its place in regional forums. For example, President al-Sharaa traveled to Egypt to attend the extraordinary Arab League summit in Cairo, marking his first participation in a multilateral meeting.⁴³ At the summit, al-Sharaa met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and other Arab leaders, symbolically marking Syria's return to the Arab world.

38 "Syria's foreign minister urges US to lift sanctions during visit to Qatar", *Al Jazeera*, 5 January 2025.

39 "Jordan and Syria to combat arms and drugs smuggling, Islamic State's resurgence", *Reuters*, 7 January 2025.

40 "Syria's new leader makes his first visit to the United Arab Emirates", *The Associated Press*, 13 April 2025.

41 "Bahrain Visit Signals New Phase in Syrian-Gulf Relations", *Levant24*, 11 May 2025.

42 "Syrian president meets Kuwait emir on official visit", *Arab News*, 1 June 2025.

43 "Syria president in Cairo for Arab summit on Gaza", *Arab News*, 4 March 2025.

Gulf Investments & Financial Support in Syria



Qatar



Saudi Arabia



UAE

SECTOR	PROJECT / FINANCIAL SUPPORT	ESTIMATED VALUE
Energy	Energy consortium led by UCC Holding	~\$7B
Telecommunications & Digital Infrastructure	Fiber internet infrastructure (SilkLink)	~\$300M
Public Financing	Financing for public sector salaries	Not specified
Mixed	44 deals (infrastructure, energy, telecommunications)	~\$6B
Industry / Construction	White cement plant (ADRA)	~\$20M
Real Estate / Retail	Trade and hotel projects (Ethraa Holding)	~\$100M
Infrastructure / Real Estate	General infrastructure investments	~\$2.93B
Telecom & IT	Telecommunications and IT investments	~\$1.07B
Public Financing	Financing for public sector salaries	Not specified
Port & Logistics	Tartus Port modernization (DP World)	~\$800M

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By mid-2025, Syria rapidly restored its relations with the Arab world: embassies reopened, airlines resumed flights to Damascus, and Arab states actively lobbied for Syria's reintegration into the international community. Moreover, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE began providing financial aid to support Syria

in overcoming its economic crisis and signed agreements for large-scale investments. Notably, Qatar and Saudi Arabia leveraged their diplomatic influence with the U.S. to facilitate the lifting of Washington's sanctions on Syria. As part of his Gulf tour in May, U.S. President Trump met with al-Sharaa and Saudi Crown

Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan participating online. Following these discussions, Trump announced his decision to lift sanctions on Syria in response to pressure from the regional leaders.

2.2. Strategic Partnership with Türkiye

Another key feature of Syria's post-revolution foreign policy has been the pursuit of a strategic partnership with Türkiye. This alignment has been shaped largely by Türkiye's long-standing opposition to the Assad regime, its support for the Syrian opposition, and its hosting of around 3.5 million Syrian refugees over the years. Through a series of cross-border military operations in northern Syria, Türkiye also established safe zones that protected millions from attacks by the Ba'ath regime. Notably, the 2020 Operation Spring Shield—launched against regime forces—secured Idlib and its surroundings, enabling opposition groups to maintain a foothold in the region and ultimately overthrow the Assad regime. This decisive role afforded Türkiye a unique position in Syria's post-revolution foreign policy, and in turn, Türkiye places special importance on sustaining strong ties with the country.

The first official Turkish visit to Syria after the revolution was made by the director of the National Intelligence Organization

(MIT), İbrahim Kalın, while the first foreign minister to travel to Damascus was Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. Syrian leader al-Sharaa's second trip abroad—to Ankara—further highlights this deepening bilateral partnership. Immediately following the revolution, Türkiye reopened its embassy in Damascus, which had been closed since 2012. A high-level Turkish delegation, including Foreign Minister Fidan, National Defense Minister Yaşar Güler, and MIT Chief Kalın, conducted two visits to the Syrian capital. In addition, Turkish ministers responsible for trade, transportation, and infrastructure, alongside delegations from other ministries, civil society organizations, and business leaders, visited Syria to explore avenues for expanded cooperation. Thus, a deep and multidimensional cooperation began to take shape between Syria and Türkiye in the first six months following the revolution, paralleling Syria's broader re-engagement with the Arab world. Nevertheless, Türkiye distinguished itself from other countries in bilateral relations, particularly in the fields of security and defense. This distinction stems from Syria's priorities and Türkiye's institutional capacity. A top priority in Syria's new era has been the restructuring of its security apparatus, and Türkiye—with its extensive experience in strengthening the security institutions of allied nations—emerged as a vital partner in this endeavor.

A deep and multidimensional cooperation began to take shape between Syria and Türkiye in the first six months following the revolution, paralleling Syria's broader re-engagement with the Arab world.

or. Following the revolution, National Defense Minister Güler stated that "Türkiye is ready to cooperate with the new administration in Syria if Damascus requests it." A strong signal in this direction came with a visit by a senior Syrian delegation, including Foreign Minister al-Shaibani, Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra, and former Intelligence Chief Anas Khattab. Building on historical ties and institutional familiarity, both countries began forging security-related partnerships grounded in mutual trust.

Syrian President al-Sharaa made his second international trip to Türkiye on February 4, two days after his first visit to Riyadh. During his meeting with President Erdoğan in Ankara, al-Sharaa emphasized Türkiye's central role in Syria's new foreign policy vision. The leaders discussed restoring full diplomatic relations and enhancing security cooperation, particularly in northern Syria. Türkiye reiterated its commitment to supporting Syria's stability and collaborating for broader regional security. Both sides also exchanged views on countering the influence of the SDF and preserving Syria's unitary state structure. Al-Sharaa returned to Türkiye to participate in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF) in April. In addition to meeting President Erdoğan again, he held talks with regional leaders, including Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev and the prime ministers of Libya and Qatar, thereby expanding Syria's diplomatic reach. A third official visit took place in May, during which al-Sharaa met with officials in Istanbul and Ankara from the foreign affairs, defense, and intelligence ministries, as well as with President Erdoğan. These meetings culminated in a preliminary agreement to establish a cooperative framework centered on national defense and counterterrorism.

Türkiye's long-standing and close relationship with the Syrian opposition has fostered

expectations that it would emerge as one of the main actors in Syria's post-revolution landscape. Indeed, developments in the two months following the revolution indicate that the new Syrian administration places significant importance on a partnership with Türkiye. At the same time, Syria also explored alternative avenues to safeguard its sovereignty. While the Syrian leadership prioritized strengthening diplomatic, political, and economic ties with Türkiye, it simultaneously sought close relations with Gulf states and Western countries. What sets Türkiye apart in this process is its central role in the realm of security. This largely stems from the close relations Türkiye developed with the Syrian National Army (SNA) during the civil war. As elements of opposition forces were integrated into the new Syrian army, Türkiye naturally emerged as a key partner in this transition. Leveraging its influence over these groups, Türkiye supported the unconditional incorporation of the SNA into the Syrian Ministry of Defense.⁴⁴

In addition, Türkiye's military capacity, combined with the security challenges Syria has faced since the revolution, has made close cooperation indispensable. Internal threats include negotiations with the SDF, ongoing tensions over the group's federalist ambitions, clashes with remnants of the Assad regime in Latakia and Tartous provinces in March, and confrontations between Syrian security forces and elements of the Druze population in Suwayda province in July. On the external front, Israel has directly challenged Syria's sovereignty, supported certain Druze groups to undermine Syria's unity, and sought to cultivate ties with the SDF for similar purposes. In response to these growing risks, the Syrian administration has prioritized enhancing security cooperation with Türkiye—an alignment grounded in shared strategic interests and Türkiye's proven military

44 Sedat Ergin, "SMO, eski adıyla ÖSO Suriye'nin yeni ordusuna katılmayı taahhüt ediyor", *Hürriyet*, 1 February 2025.

capabilities. Reflecting this approach, the Syrian Defense Ministry called for official support from Türkiye to strengthen its defense capacities in a statement issued on July 20.⁴⁵ The statement emphasized that technical cooperation is particularly needed in border security, counterterrorism, and military training. The Turkish Defense Ministry, for its part, welcomed this request, confirming that initial talks between technical delegations had already begun. As a result, security is set to become one of the central pillars of Syria's foreign policy toward Türkiye in the new era.

2.3. Relations with the West and International Organizations

The primary foreign policy goal of the new Syrian administration was to gain international recognition and end the country's isolation. This pursuit was seen as a means to consolidate the administration's authority and address the nation's economic crisis. Following the end of the civil war, the al-Sharaa government faced the dual challenge of repairing economic damage and meeting the urgent needs of the population. In this context, its initial focus was on the removal of U.S. and European economic sanctions. Achieving this objective prompted a constructive approach toward relations with the U.S. and the West, as it was believed that without the lifting of U.S. sanctions, reintegration into the global financial system and national reconstruction would be extremely difficult. While some high-level U.S. delegations visited Damascus after the revolution, the most significant meeting occurred between the leaders of the two countries.

U.S. President Trump met with Syrian President al-Sharaa on May 14 during the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in Riyadh. The meeting was chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed

bin Salman and attended virtually by Turkish President Erdoğan. This encounter marked the first direct contact between U.S. and Syrian leaders in 25 years. Following the summit, Trump announced that all sanctions on Syria would be lifted and that normalizing relations with Damascus was now on the agenda. The meeting was widely seen as a pivotal moment in ending Syria's diplomatic isolation and securing international legitimacy for the new administration. It also helped ease skepticism among countries that had previously been wary due to al-Sharaa's political background and affiliations. Moreover, the encounter signaled that Syria, long estranged from the international system, may move toward greater alignment with it in the future.

The Syrian government responded positively to many of the American demands tied to the lifting of sanctions and the normalization of relations. During the meeting between Trump and al-Sharaa, the issues discussed included the fight against DAESH, Syria's potential normalization with Israel, restrictions on the activities of certain Palestinian groups within Syria, the deportation of foreign fighters, and the removal of Iranian influence from the country.⁴⁶ Syrian Foreign Minister al-Shaibani acknowledged the importance of bilateral cooperation, noting that most of Washington's demands aligned with Syria's political priorities. While Damascus stopped short of committing to full normalization with Israel, it pledged that no threats would emanate from Syrian territory against Israel. In the wake of Trump's announcement, high-level U.S.-Syrian talks were initiated. Later that week, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio met with Foreign Minister al-Shaibani in Türkiye and declared that Washington would review the terrorist designation of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) under U.S. law. Finally, on June 30, Trump

45 "MSB açıkladı: Suriye, Türkiye'den destek talep etti", *Hürriyet*, 23 July 2025.

46 "US issues demands to new Syrian government in exchange for sanctions relief", *Reuters*, 25 May 2025.

By mid-2025, the normalization process between Washington and Damascus had gathered meaningful momentum—reflected in reciprocal diplomatic gestures, the lifting of sanctions, and sustained high-level contacts

signed an executive order that eased a substantial portion of U.S. economic sanctions on Syria. The order underscored Washington's commitment to supporting "a stable and united Syria at peace with its own people and neighbors."

In short, Syria's new administration adopted a pragmatic and balanced approach in its dealings with the U.S. It responded positively to U.S. demands that aligned with Syrian priorities, while carefully safeguarding its national interests on sensitive issues such as foreign fighters and relations with the SDF. By mid-2025, the normalization process between Washington and Damascus had gathered meaningful momentum—reflected in reciprocal diplomatic gestures, the lifting of sanctions, and sustained high-level contacts. While Washington sought to assert its influence in the post-revolution order, Damascus aimed to rejoin the international system, viewing U.S. recognition as a critical stepping stone.

With regard to relations with Europe, the Syrian government hosted the foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Italy in Damascus shortly after the revolution, while President al-Sharaa held telephone conversations with the French and German leaders. In the aftermath of the revolution, Western countries initiated direct—though cautious—engagement with the new Syrian administration, with France

emerging as the leading European actor in this outreach. In May, President al-Sharaa paid his first official visit to Europe, traveling to Paris at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron. The talks centered on Syria's transitional period and urgent humanitarian needs. Macron expressed cautious support for Syria's transition, stressing that with the "commencement of a new era in Syria," the protection of minorities and refugees must be ensured within the framework of the forthcoming political settlement.

Syria also moved to re-engage with European-led institutions. In January, Foreign Minister al-Shaibani attended the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, marking Syria's first participation in the platform in more than a decade. On the sidelines of the forum, Syrian officials held discussions with global political and business leaders on the country's reconstruction process. Al-Shaibani's presence underscored Damascus's intention to strengthen ties with Western nations and highlighted the outward-looking and internationally oriented character of Syria's emerging economic strategy. The following month, the foreign minister took part in the Munich Security Conference, where he met with European and NATO officials and emphasized Syria's commitment to combating terrorism and contributing to regional stability. Collectively, al-Shaibani's engagements

helped ease European suspicions toward Damascus while signaling that Syria is prepared to cooperate on matters of international security.

The Syrian government took deliberate steps to confront the legacy of the Assad regime, particularly on issues that had strained its relations with the international system. A central measure in this effort was the restoration of ties with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Under Assad, Syria had been sanctioned for chemical weapons use and stripped of its voting rights within the organization. The new administration, however, adopted a markedly different stance. Foreign Minister al-Shaibani reaffirmed Syria's commitment to international security by participating in a session of the OPCW Executive Council in The Hague. He presented Syria's renewed engagement as a symbolic gesture—both to honor the victims of chemical weapons during the Assad era and to signal a break from past policies—while pledging to eliminate any remaining stockpiles in full compliance with international conventions.⁴⁷ As a further step toward transparency and reconciliation, the Syrian government invited the OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias to Damascus. In February, Arias met with President al-Sharaa, after which Syria's right to participate fully in OPCW proceedings was reinstated and its voting privileges officially restored.

2.4. Conclusion

The Syrian administration launched a comprehensive realignment of the country's foreign relations. The international isolation that had defined the Assad era gave way to active engagement with both regional neighbors and global powers. President al-Sharaa and Foreign Minister al-Shaibani pursued an intensive diplomatic effort aimed at enhancing the new

administration's international legitimacy and securing external support for Syria's recovery. The foreign policy of this period revolved around several key themes:

Reintegration and Legitimacy: The new government was formally recognized by Arab states and regained its seat in regional organizations. High-level contacts—such as the Qatari Emir's visit to Damascus and President al-Sharaa's diplomatic tour of the Middle East—underscored Syria's acceptance as a legitimate actor in regional politics. At the same time, by adopting a constructive approach toward the West, the Syrian administration has set itself apart from the confrontational foreign policy of the Ba'ath regime. By July 2025, it had become clear that the new leadership had achieved substantial progress in securing international recognition and restoring Syria's diplomatic standing.

The Lifting of Sanctions and Economic Opening: A central priority of the new administration was the removal of Western sanctions that had long crippled Syria's economy. Through strategic coordination with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Qatar, U.S. sanctions were lifted by mid-2025—a turning point that facilitated Syria's reintegration into the global economic system. In parallel, the government expanded outreach to international financial institutions and initiated efforts to attract foreign investment, with particular emphasis on Gulf-based capital. The resumption of commercial flights to Damascus by major airlines and the reopening of foreign embassies further underscored the tangible dimensions of this diplomatic and economic revival.

Alliances and Security Partnerships: The al-Sharaa administration has recalibrated Syria's strategic orientation by aligning more closely with regional powers such as Türkiye and Saudi

⁴⁷ "Syria's foreign minister makes landmark first visit to global chemical weapons watchdog", *The Associated Press*, 5 March 2025.

Arabia, while distancing itself from Iran and Russia. Notably, the development of security cooperation with NATO member Türkiye demonstrated a pragmatic commitment to preserving Syria's fragile post-revolution stability. The administration has also emphasized that its posture toward neighboring states, including Israel, is rooted in peaceful intentions and a commitment to non-aggression. This balanced, integration-oriented foreign policy stands in clear contrast to the confrontational approach of the previous regime and has been instrumental in reducing external pressures during the transitional period.

International Responsibility and Reputation

Restoration: The new administration has actively sought to shed the negative international image inherited from the Assad era by signaling a renewed commitment to global norms and standards. At the core of this effort lies the restoration of cooperation with international institutions. Syria's re-engagement with the OPCW, its acceptance of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) oversight to ensure nuclear transparency, and greater openness on sensitive issues such as refugee return and human rights all reflect a deliberate attempt to present Syria as a responsible actor within the international community. These steps have not

only laid the groundwork for cautious support from European nations but also encouraged the U.S. to frame its evolving relationship with Damascus as "a new beginning."

In conclusion, the collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Syria has precipitated a profound transformation in the country's foreign policy. This shift has been shaped by multiple factors: the emergence of a new national identity, structural changes in the political and economic order, the distinct choices of the new political elite, and the imperative to confront the consequences of years of civil war. Together, these dynamics have compelled a recalibration of Syria's external relations toward greater harmony with its neighbors, the wider region, and the international community. The diplomatic initiatives undertaken by the Syrian government during its first six months in power underscore this trajectory. By pursuing an active, outward-looking diplomatic agenda, the new leadership has signaled a definitive break from the confrontational legacy of the Assad era. Syrian foreign policy has clearly shifted toward normalization and reintegration, and this initial period can thus be regarded as the opening phase of the country's re-emergence on the global stage after more than a decade of diplomatic isolation.

II

**THE PURSUIT OF SECURITY
AND STABILITY**

3. SECURITY STRATEGIES AFTER THE REVOLUTION



Following the collapse of the Assad regime, the new Damascus administration faced the dual challenge of restructuring Syria's military and security institutions while addressing persistent security threats. It launched comprehensive operations across various regions, targeting militias loyal to the former regime, curbing drug and weapons smuggling, and combating the DAESH terrorist organization. Central to these efforts were the reestablishment of the national army under the Ministry of Defense and the restructuring of domestic security agencies overseen by the Ministry of the Interior. Coordinated initiatives in border security, anti-smuggling measures, and counterterrorism strategies have collectively shaped Syria's post-revolution security policies. This section analyzes these processes and their impacts on both domestic stability and regional dynamics.

3.1. The Formation of Military and Security Institutions

The new administration, following the success of the revolution in Syria, prioritized the restruc-

turing of the country's military and security institutions. Crucial for restoring national security and stability, this process represents a key component in rebuilding the state and consolidating its authority. In this context, post-revolution reforms have focused on rebuilding the national army under the Ministry of Defense to bring the army under full state control, thereby establishing legitimacy and securing a monopoly over the use of force. Simultaneously, intelligence and domestic security units under the Interior Ministry have been reorganized to ensure public order and the safety of citizens.

The first step in reorganizing Syria's military and security institutions was taken at a conference in Damascus on January 29, a historically and symbolically significant event that marked the formal victory of the revolution. At this conference, it was announced that all military and security agencies of the fallen regime had been disbanded. Additionally, all armed opposition groups active during the civil war were declared dissolved, with their fighters to be incorporated into a reestablished national army under the

All armed opposition groups active during the civil war were declared dissolved, with their fighters to be incorporated into a reestablished national army under the Ministry of Defense.

Ministry of Defense.⁴⁸ Following this decision, the army's leadership was restructured through new appointments in February, building on the command structure established in December. Concurrently, the armed forces were reorganized according to a divisional system: some groups were consolidated under single divisions, others merged with different units, and some were entirely dissolved.

On May 17, Syrian Defense Minister Abu Qasra announced that the integration of armed opposition groups, which had fought against the former regime during the civil war, into the national army was successfully completed.⁴⁹ In an interview with Syrian state television on May 26, Defense Minister Abu Qasra outlined the Ministry's ongoing reform and reorganization efforts. He stated that the army would be restructured to prioritize the protection of the population and national borders, guided by a professional doctrine based on voluntary military service. Emphasizing loyalty-driven participation, the minister noted that voluntary service had been adopted in place of mandatory conscription and that there was strong demand among the population to join the new army. As part of integrating armed opposition

groups into the national army, 130 military units were incorporated under the Ministry of Defense, while noncompliant groups were disbanded. The minister also clarified that the SDF's military integration would be handled separately, noting that negotiations were ongoing in line with the agreement signed on March 10.⁵⁰

Another key aspect of the restructuring of Syria's security institutions has been reflected in reforms within the Interior Ministry. On May 24, the Ministry announced a comprehensive restructuring aimed at overhauling its security apparatus. As part of this process, public security and police units were disbanded, and all units responsible for general security and public order were consolidated under the newly established Internal Security Forces. To strengthen coordination between the central government and provincial authorities, fully empowered Internal Security Commanders were appointed to oversee domestic security in each province. Appointments were made in twelve provinces across the country, while none were made in the SDF-controlled provinces of Hasakah and Raqqa east of the Euphrates.

Meanwhile, the notorious "Political Security Unit" of the Assad re-

48 "General Command appoints Ahmad al-Sharaa as President of Syria", *Enab Baladi*, 29 January 2025.

49 Murhaf Abu Qasra (@Murhaf_abuqasra), "إلى أبناء سوريا الأحرار، لقد بدأنا بعد تحرير سوريا فوراً بالعمل، على دمج الوحدات العسكرية ضمن إطار مؤسساتي موحد، واليوم ننقل لشعبنا الكريم نبأ دمج كافة الوحدات ضمن وزارة الدفاع السورية"، X, 17 May 2025, 9:05.

50 "وزير الدفاع للإخبارية: نعيد تشكيل الجيش للدفاع عن الشعب لا لقمعه", *Al-Ikhbariah Syria*, 26 May 2025.

gime was disbanded, and the "Criminal Security Unit" was renamed. In addition, the Interior Ministry established a new police academy, special forces, and nine departments focused on terrorism, border security, prisons, and diplomatic protection. Specialized units were also created for areas such as cybersecurity and communications. Reforms extended to civilian services, including the introduction of a mobile app for managing complaints, the establishment of complaint offices, and initiatives to modernize prison conditions.⁵¹

The reorganization of Syria's military and security institutions in the post-revolution period has been a fundamental step in ensuring national stability and security. This restructuring drew on the military and security framework developed in Idlib during the civil war, which served as the core of the state's post-revolution institutions. However, it went beyond this foundation, incorporating deep reforms and comprehensive integration processes to meet the needs of the new era. The integration of armed opposition groups into the national army under the Defense Ministry and the modernization of the Interior Ministry's security units have become the two main pillars of this effort. Overall, the reconstruction of Syria's post-revolution military and security apparatus aims to establish a professional, citizen-centered structure that reinforces the state's legitimacy and authority, drawing on lessons from the Idlib experience rather than starting from scratch.

3.2. Combating the Remnants of the Assad Regime

The fall of the Assad regime after an intense 12-day military operation led to the complete collapse of the Syrian army and caused tens of thousands of regular and semi-regular fighters

loyal to the regime to disperse across the country. The scattered, irregular, and uncontrollable nature of these armed groups made them the most significant internal security threat during the early months of the new government. Consequently, the Damascus administration prioritized operations against these militias as a key measure to restore security and stability.

The new government, after declaring a "general amnesty," established reconciliation centers across multiple provinces beginning in December to encourage members of the ousted regime to surrender their weapons within a designated period. Tens of thousands of individuals applied to these centers, which were tasked with determining the legal status of regime militias. After surrendering their weapons and registering, they were granted temporary ID cards, allowing them to resume civilian life.⁵² Although most elements of the Assad regime laid down their arms, many high-ranking military officials implicated in civilian abuses during the civil war refused to surrender and instead withdrew to rural and mountainous areas. The coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous—traditional strongholds of regime support—have become natural refuges for these armed remnants. As of March, officials estimated the number of fighters in the region at around 5,000.⁵³

Following attempts by high-ranking Assad-era military officials to reorganize, several armed groups have emerged—including the Syrian Popular Resistance in December, the Coastal Shield Brigade in January, and the Military Council for the Liberation of Syria in March. These groups carried out attacks against the security forces of the new administration, steadily escalating their operations over the year. Between May and early August, they conducted roughly

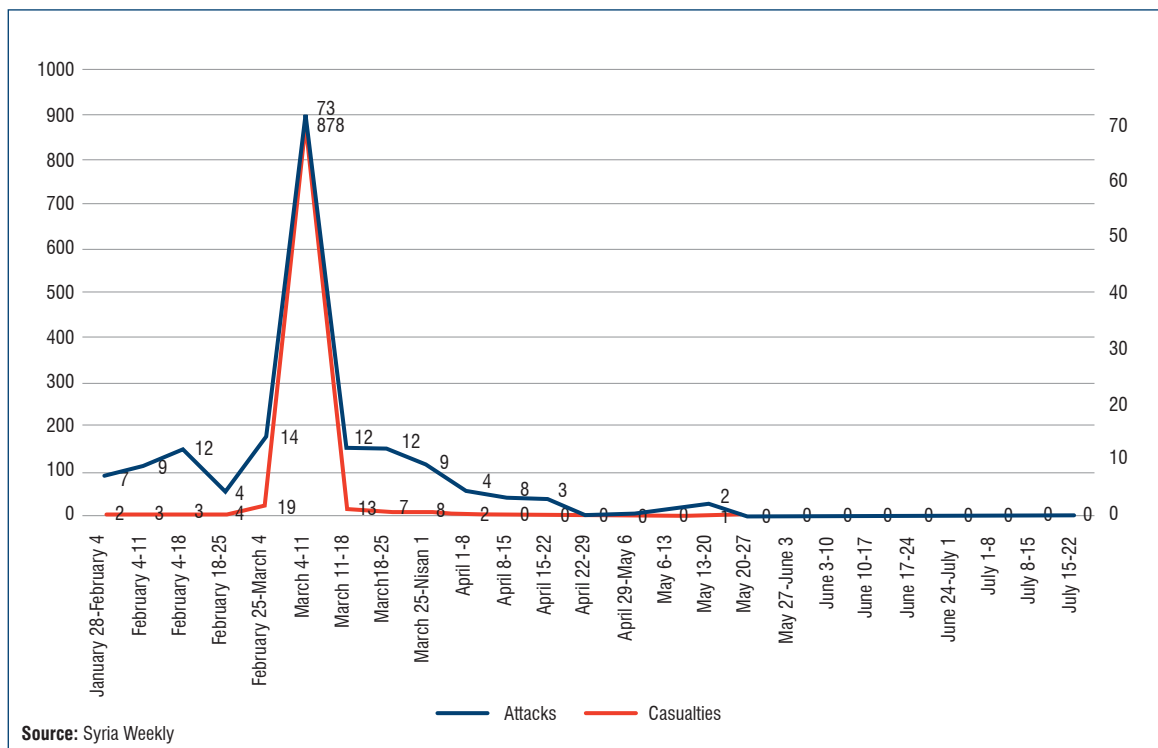
51 "Interior Ministry has created a new structure that relies on good governance and institutional work, ensuring the rule of law and security", *SANA*, 24 May 2025.

52 "Halep'te rejim unsurları yeni Suriye'ye adım atmak için silahlarını teslim ediyor", *Anadolu Agency*, 26 December 2024.

53 "محافظ اللاذقية يكشف للجريدة مباشرة تطورات الأوضاع في المحافظة", *Al Jazeera*, 9 March 2025.

140 assaults, with the violence reaching its peak on May 6-7.⁵⁴ In response to attacks by these armed groups, government forces conducted extensive internal security operations across the country, particularly along the Syrian coast. Hundreds of regime-affiliated militants were apprehended, and large caches of weapons and ammunition were seized in these operations. Consequently, the operational capacity of former regime elements declined markedly by April, and by the final week of May, their attacks almost entirely ceased.

Figure 1. Regime Loyalist Attacks and Resulting Casualties (January–July 2025)



Six months after the collapse of the Assad regime, the Syrian government has largely contained the security threat from emanating former regime elements through a combination of general amnesty, reconciliation centers, and extensive operations. Nevertheless, the capacity of armed groups to reorganize remains a persistent long-term threat to stability. To mitigate this risk, the government must develop comprehensive strategies targeting security challenges posed by remnants of the Assad regime.

3.3. Countering Weapons and Drug Trafficking

During the later years of the civil war, the Assad regime transformed Syria into one of the Middle East’s largest centers for synthetic narcotics production. This legacy has made counter-narcotics a central focus for the new administration in its efforts to restore security and stability. Produc-

54 Charles R. Lister, “Weekly Data Update (May 20-27, 2025)”, Syria Weekly, 29 May 2025.

tion and trafficking carried out by armed groups tied to the former regime—often in collaboration with cross-border networks in Lebanon—have created a complex security challenge in which narcotics and arms smuggling are closely linked. Open-source intelligence reports indicate that since December 8, remnants of the former regime have carried out attacks against Syrian security forces while continuing narcotics and arms trafficking, relying on informal routes, particularly along Syria's coastal strip and Lebanon's mountainous regions.⁵⁵ In this context, the convergence of security threats posed by regime remnants with the challenges of narcotics and arms trafficking has elevated border security to a top priority for the new administration.

The protracted civil war in Syria precipitated a severe economic collapse. In its later stages, the Assad regime increasingly relied on the production of synthetic narcotics, particularly Captagon, as an alternative source of revenue. According to World Bank estimates, this illicit trade generated approximately \$5.6 billion annually for the regime.⁵⁶ Open-source intelligence indicates that, despite the regime's overthrow in December, militias loyal to Assad have sustained narcotics and

arms smuggling operations, particularly in the Qusayr and Hermel regions near the Lebanese border. Owing to both its geography and weak security controls, the Syria–Lebanon border has become a major hub for such illicit activities. These operations are typically organized in border towns by tribes affiliated with Hezbollah. It is well established that the Assad regime's Fourth Division, under the command of Maher Assad, oversaw the Captagon production and distribution network in coordination with Hezbollah, leveraging Lebanese ports to channel narcotics into international markets.⁵⁷

Since February, Syria's new administration has pursued a comprehensive strategy to combat narcotics and arms smuggling and to strengthen border security. The first stage of this strategy involved a large-scale border security campaign targeting smuggling networks affiliated with Hezbollah. Operations concentrated particularly in the rural areas of Qusayr, west of Homs, as well as around the Syrian village of Hawik, resulting in clashes with Zoaiter and Jaafar clans active in these regions.⁵⁸ As a result of these clashes, the most significant smuggling route between Syria and Lebanon came under

Since February, Syria's new administration has pursued a comprehensive strategy to combat narcotics and arms smuggling and to strengthen border security.

55 "Assad loyalist Miqdad Fatiha using Lebanon for cross-border attacks on Syria", *The New Arab*, 12 March 2025.

56 Emir Nader, "What now for Syria's £4.5 billion illegal drug empire", *BBC*, 22 December 2024.

57 Taylor Thomas, "Smuggling and Clan Violence Fuel Escalating Tensions on Lebanon-Syria Border", *The Media Line*, 20 March 2025.

58 Rosaleen Carroll, "Four killed in Syria-Lebanon border clashes between HTS and clans:

government control, marking a major achievement in border security. Furthermore, under a reform enacted in May, the Syrian government restructured the Ministry of the Interior and created new administrative units to combat cross-border narcotics and human trafficking, establishing the "Border Security Directorate." This directorate is tasked with securing Syria's land and maritime borders, with a particular focus on dismantling smuggling networks.

In parallel with border security operations, internal security measures were implemented across several provinces, focusing on dismantling narcotics production facilities. Over six months, these efforts resulted in the seizure of approximately 200 million Captagon pills. Nevertheless, the increased pressure has prompted some laboratories to relocate to Lebanon, and reports indicate that narcotics production persists in Suwayda Governorate.⁵⁹

Syrian security forces intercepted a total of thirteen narcotics shipments and thirty-six arms shipments at various points along the Lebanese border in the six months following the revolution.⁶⁰ The seized Iranian-made weapons and ammunition were assessed to have been intended for Hezbollah militias, highlighting both the impact of these operations on the regional arms trade and Hezbollah's role within the smuggling network. These operations serve as concrete evidence not only of the new Syrian administration's determination to ensure security and stability at home but also of its efforts to curb Iran's regional influence across both Syria and Lebanon.

While conducting internal security operations

to combat narcotics and arms smuggling, the new administration has also prioritized enhancing cooperation and coordination with neighboring countries through diplomatic initiatives aimed at securing its borders. In this context, on January 7, Syria and Jordan reached an agreement to establish a joint security committee to ensure border security and combat narcotics and arms smuggling. Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi noted that the agreement would serve to strengthen trust between the two countries.⁶¹ On March 27, Syria and Lebanon signed a border security agreement in Saudi Arabia, intended to enhance security along their approximately 400-kilometer frontier and to formalize border demarcation.⁶² Under the agreement, the parties underscored the strategic importance of finalizing border demarcation and launched efforts to clarify the boundary lines. They also agreed to establish bilateral coordination mechanisms—including expert delegations and joint committees—to safeguard the frontier and address security and military challenges in the border region. The agreement specifically targeted the frontier areas where Hezbollah and smuggling networks operate, providing for joint measures to prevent clashes between the parties and to curb illegal crossings. Although Syria and Iraq have not yet concluded a comprehensive border security agreement, both sides have undertaken confidence-building measures to enhance security and coordination along their frontier. During the Iraqi intelligence chief's visit to Damascus in April, the two countries agreed to establish a working mechanism for the operation of the Tanf-Walid border crossing and to strengthen border security.⁶³

⁵⁹ "What to know", *Al-Monitor*, 7 February 2025.

⁶⁰ Karam Shaar and Roaa Obeid, "Captagon After the Fall of Assad: Transformations, Challenges, and Regional Implications", *New Lines Institute*, 17 June 2025.

⁶¹ Charles R. Lister (@Charles_Lister), "In 6 months, #Syria's gov't has seized the following related to #Lebanon...", X, 9 June 2025, 3:49.

⁶² "Jordan and Syria to combat arms and drugs smuggling, Islamic State's resurgence", *Reuters*, 7 January 2025.

⁶³ "Lebanon and Syria sign agreement on border demarcation and easing tensions", *The Associated Press*, 28 March 2025.

⁶⁴ "Cumhurbaşkanı El Şara, Irak İstihbarat Teşkilatı Başkanını Kabul Ederek, Bölgede Güvenlik Ve İstikrarın Sağlanması İçin

Since the revolution in December, Syria's most stable and secure border has been its frontier with Türkiye. While Syrian security forces have focused their operations against narcotics and arms smuggling along the borders with Lebanon to the west, Jordan to the south, and Iraq to the east, the Turkish border has been marked by relative calm and stability. This stability is largely attributable to the positive outcomes of Türkiye's cross-border operations during the civil war and its effective control over the frontier region. In addition, growing cooperation between Damascus and Ankara on border management has played a decisive role in sustaining this environment of security. A notable example came in May 2025, when an operation in Aleppo led to the seizure of nine million Captagon pills. According to Syrian state media, the operation was conducted in coordination with the Turkish Ministry of the Interior.⁶⁴ This incident highlights the growing cooperation and coordination between Syria and Türkiye, underscoring the significance of their joint efforts to secure the border and promote regional stability.

3.4. The Fight Against ISIS/DAESH

Countering DAESH has become one of the most pressing challenges for Syria's new administration following the fall of the Assad regime. In the wake of the power transition, efforts to combat DAESH have significantly shaped Western states' engagement with the country's new leadership. Seeking to ensure internal security while bolstering regional and international legitimacy, the Syrian government has pursued a multifaceted strategy against the terrorist group. Through this multidimensional approach, Syria aims both to degrade the operational capability of DAESH and to strength-

en cooperation with regional and international partners.

On January 11, Syrian intelligence announced that it dismantled a DAESH cell planning a bomb attack on the Sayyida Zaynab shrine in Damascus, arresting two militants and seizing explosives.⁶⁵ On February 15, Syrian intelligence sources reported the capture of Abu al-Haris al-Iraqi, a senior DAESH leader operating in Syria.⁶⁶ In a video-recorded confession released by the Ministry of the Interior on March 19, the captured DAESH leader stated that, following the collapse of the Assad regime, the group had planned attacks against minorities in Syria. As part of this plan, they initially targeted a church in the historic Christian town of Maaloula with a car bomb on New Year's Eve; however, security measures prevented the attack. The group then planned two suicide bombings against the Sayyida Zaynab shrine, with a third bomber stationed at the site disguised as a journalist. This third bomber was to detonate if al-Sharaa arrived at the scene or if a large crowd had gathered. Al-Iraqi also provided a detailed account of how the assassination of Abu Maria al-Qahtani, a senior HTS leader killed last year in Idlib by a bomb attack, had been organized.⁶⁷

It can be said that a new phase in the fight against DAESH in Syria began following President al-Sharaa's meeting with U.S. President Trump in Saudi Arabia on May 14. During this meeting, Trump requested that al-Sharaa ensure the removal of foreign fighters from Syria, take control of prisons holding DAESH militants and camps housing their family members, and carry out a more effective campaign against DAESH in cooperation with the U.S.⁶⁸ Following the meeting, *al-Naba*, the official publication of

Ortak İşbirliğinin Önemini Vurguladı", *SANA*, 26 April 2025.

64 "Syria, Turkey seize nine million captagon pills in joint operation", *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 May 2025.

65 "Syria foils Daesh attack on Sayyida Zainab shrine in Damascus", *SANA*, 11 January 2025.

66 "ISIS leader 'Abu al-Harith al-Iraqi' captured in Syria", *SANA*, 16 February 2025.

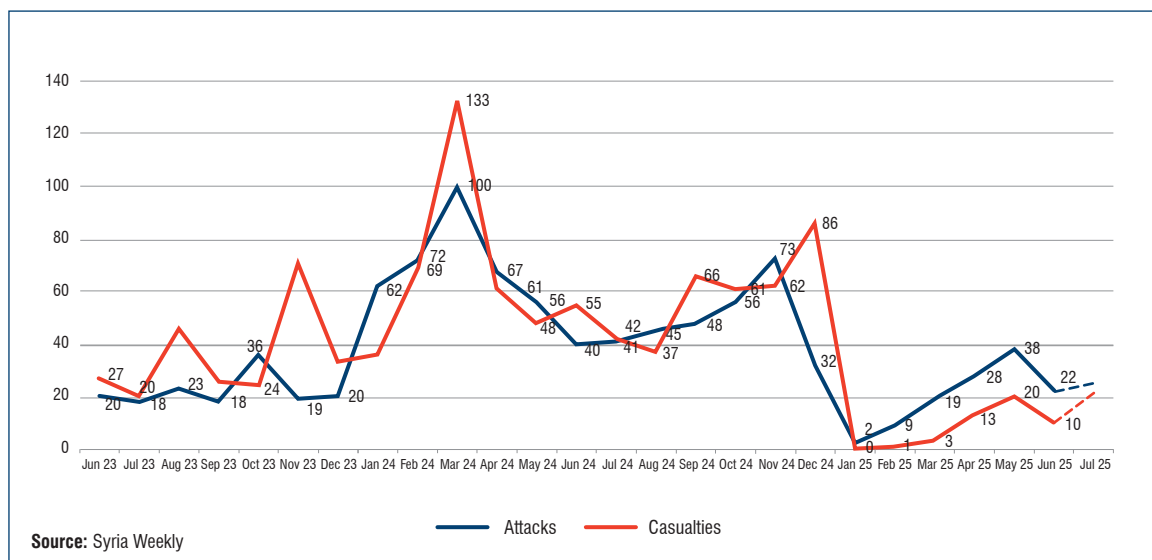
67 "في قبضة الأمن المصير المحتوم", *Youtube*, uploaded by Syrian Ministry of Interior (@syrianmoi), 19 March 2025.

68 Karoline Leavitt (@PressSec), "Today, President Trump, at the invitation of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, met with

DAESH, accused al-Sharaa of “apostasy” and “collaboration with the U.S. and Israel,” and called on all foreign fighters in Syria to join the group.⁶⁹ By framing al-Sharaa as someone who “could sacrifice foreign fighters for political interests,” DAESH aims to turn the situation into an opportunity, exploiting potential discontent among foreign fighters after the meeting with Trump. This move can also be seen as an attempt to expand DAESH influence—long confined to rural areas—and to reestablish a foothold in urban centers.

In the wake of these developments, Syrian security forces intensified their operations against the organization, conducting a raid on DAESH cells in Aleppo on May 17. The operation resulted in the deaths of three DAESH militants and the capture of four others, while two security personnel were killed in the clashes. Authorities seized weapons, improvised explosive devices, and explosive vests.⁷⁰ The clashes during the raid in Aleppo marked the first direct confrontation between DAESH militants and Syrian security forces since the collapse of the Assad regime. Following these clashes, DAESH carried out its first terrorist attack against the Syrian government in the post-Assad era. On May 18, a car bomb exploded at a police station in the town of Mayadin in

Figure 2. DAESH Attacks and Resulting Casualties in Syria (June 2023 – July 2025)



69 Aaron Y. Zelin, “The Islamic State – *Al-Naba* Newsletter #495”, *Jihadology*, 15 May 2025.

70 “At least three killed as Syrian forces raid ISIL hideouts in Aleppo”, *Al Jazeera*, 17 May 2025.

71 “Five Individuals were Killed and Two Others Injured in a Car Bomb Explosion in the City of Al-Mayadin in Deir ez-Zour”

Deir ez-Zor, killing five people, including four security personnel.⁷¹

On May 24, a government delegation, accompanied by U.S. officials, paid its first visit to the prisons in northeastern Syria holding DAESH detainees under SDF supervision, as well as to the camps housing their families.⁷² On May 26, it was announced that the Syrian government, the U.S., and the SDF reached an agreement to establish a joint mechanism for evacuating Syrian families from the al-Hol camp in Hasakah, which houses the families of DAESH militants.⁷³ The developments following the Trump–al-Sharaa meeting can be seen as part of Washington's broader strategy to scale down its military presence in Syria and shift responsibilities to local actors. In this context, the latest steps suggest that the SDF's role in the fight against DAESH has largely concluded, with this responsibility increasingly transferred to Damascus. Reflecting this shift, the Syrian administration has intensified its counter-DAESH operations; on May 26, security forces carried out a series of raids in the Damascus countryside, seizing a significant cache of weapons and ammunition and capturing several members of the organization.⁷⁴ In this regard, Interior Minister Anas Khattab, in a June 4 interview, emphasized that DAESH continues to pose "a major threat" in Syria and affirmed that the fight against the organization would persist with determination.⁷⁵

The DAESH presence in Syria is currently at its lowest level since the group first entered the country in 2013. Nevertheless, in the six months following the revolution, the organization has been observed to slowly but steadily expand its activities. In 2025, DAESH has thus far officially

claimed responsibility for thirty-three armed attacks. Until mid-May, these attacks primarily targeted SDF forces; from that point onward, however, the group increasingly shifted its focus to directly targeting Syrian security forces. At the same time, the growing indications that responsibility for combating DAESH would be transferred to Damascus—coinciding with the U.S. drawdown of its military presence—prompted the Syrian government to intensify its operations against the organization.

In this context, cooperation and coordination between the U.S. and the Syrian government have been gradually strengthening. A determined campaign against DAESH is essential both for fulfilling the new government's commitments to the West and for consolidating the legitimacy and credibility of Syria's new leaders. Joint operations in particular help dispel lingering doubts among Western policymakers and publics, presenting al-Sharaa as a reliable partner in counterterrorism. Moreover, such cooperation is expected to play a decisive role in reducing U.S. support for the SDF, thereby serving Damascus's strategic interests. For these reasons, sustaining and deepening joint efforts against DAESH represents a significant political and security gain for the Syrian government.

3.5. Conclusion

After the regime's collapse, the new Syrian government has taken significant steps to reshape its security strategies. In rebuilding military and security institutions, efforts have focused on integrating opposition groups into the national army and implementing reforms within the Ministry of the Interior to establish a people-centered structure that reinforces state authority.

71 "Five Individuals were Killed and Two Others Injured in a Car Bomb Explosion in the City of Al-Mayadin in Deir ez-Zour suburbs on May 18, 2025", *Syrian Network for Human Rights*, 21 May 2025.

72 "Damascus and SDF begin coordinating return of Syrians from ISIS-linked camps", *The National*, 24 May 2025.

73 "Damascus reaches agreement with AANES regarding al-Hol camp", *Enab Baladi*, 26 May 2025.

74 "Syria arrests ISIS members near Damascus", *Al Arabiya*, 26 May 2025.

75 "وزير الداخلية يكشف الهيكلية الجديدة للوزارة وأولويات مواجهة التحديات الأمنية", *Al-Ikhbariah Syria*, 4 June 2025.

The fight against militias loyal to the ousted regime has been largely contained through internal security operations, bolstered by a general amnesty and the establishment of reconciliation centers. Nevertheless, the possibility of these militias regrouping in the coastal regions with external backing remains a persistent long-term threat. In countering narcotics and arms smuggling, security operations—particularly along the Lebanese border—combined

with diplomatic cooperation with neighboring states, have both strengthened border security and dealt significant blows to cross-border trafficking networks. The multifaceted strategy developed against DAESH aimed both to maintain internal security and to foster regional and international cooperation. Since May, the normalization of relations with the U.S. has placed greater responsibility on Damascus in the fight against DAESH. In addition, cooperation with Türkiye in counterterrorism has played a crit-

4. CHALLENGES TO SYRIA'S POLITICAL UNITY



ical role in combating DAESH and promoting regional stability. Taken together, these developments have laid a crucial foundation for the new government's efforts to enhance internal security and consolidate its regional legitimacy.

Since the collapse of the Assad regime, the Syrian interim government has recorded notable gains, especially in foreign policy, securing regional and international legitimacy through intensive diplomatic engagement. Yet despite these advances, internal security and social stability remain fragile. This fragility stems from the new administration's difficulty in asserting authority nationwide and rebuilding political unity. The persistence of separatist actors that reject central authority—and the conflicts they have sparked—has triggered severe political, military, and humanitarian crises across the country. These developments have cast a shadow over the hopes for normalization and reconstruction that emerged after the revolution, underscoring the fragility of the transitional period. Among the political and military challenges that have placed the Syrian administration in its most difficult position are: insurgencies by militias loyal

to the former regime in the coastal regions; the uncompromising stance of the SDF toward Damascus; and Israel's interventionist policies in the south. This section of the report examines these three issues, tracing their evolution and assessing their implications for Syria's national security and internal stability in the post-revolution period.

4.1. The Uprising of Assad Loyalists

In the aftermath of the revolution, the first major threat to Syria's stability emerged from armed actions carried out by militias loyal to the deposed Assad regime in the coastal regions. Following the regime's fall, certain loyalist elements refused to disarm, retreating instead into the mountainous and rural areas of Latakia, Tartus, and Homs governorates, where they established operational bases. Throughout February, these groups mounted ambushes and attacks against military units affiliated with the new administration, culminating on March 6 in a coordinated and large-scale insurrection. During the uprising, control of several localities in the coastal region—most notably Jableh, Baniyas,

and Qardaha—temporarily fell into the hands of pro-regime militias. The involvement of former Syrian army officers, some of whom maintained links with the Iranian-influenced Fourth Division, fueled speculation that the insurrection was not simply a local revolt but may have been backed or encouraged by Iran.⁷⁶ The seizure of thousands of industrially produced improvised explosive devices and various heavy weapons in the country's western and interior regions made clear that the uprising was supported by external actors.⁷⁷

As the attacks spread from the Latakia countryside, state institutions, military checkpoints, hospitals, and other health facilities were directly targeted, while systematic acts of sabotage were carried out against the region's energy infrastructure. Heavy clashes soon broke out between remnants of the Assad regime and Syrian security forces deployed to the area, resulting in significant losses on both sides and the deaths of hundreds of civilians. The most alarming aspect of this episode, however, was the involvement of certain armed elements—dispatched to suppress the uprising but not yet fully integrated into the chain of command of the newly formed army—who targeted the civilian Alawite population in Latakia and Tartus. These actions carried the risk of deepening sectarian fault lines and reigniting a civil war dynamic. Beyond their domestic consequences, such violations also damaged the credibility of the new Syrian administration in the eyes of the international community. Nevertheless, the interim government acted swiftly and with restraint, preventing the escalation of sectarian-based violence and helping to ease social tensions. In the aftermath of the uprising,

al-Sharaa announced the establishment of an independent investigative commission to examine the incidents and pledged that all perpetrators of attacks against civilians would be held accountable.⁷⁸ In addition, another commission was set up to examine the political and economic issues, as well as the security concerns, of the Alawite community.

Although regime remnants have occasionally attempted attacks, the overall intensity of such actions has noticeably declined since April. Between early May and the end of July, only a single attack linked to the former regime was recorded.⁷⁹ The systematic and determined campaign carried out by Syrian security forces played a decisive role in bringing anti-government resistance to the brink of collapse. Complementing these military measures, the new administration's direct engagement with opinion leaders within the Alawite community and the implementation of a disarmament process in Alawite-majority areas significantly contributed to this outcome. The inclusion of Alawite ministers in the interim government further ensured the community's political representation in Damascus. As a result, the combination of political initiatives and military precautions has substantially minimized security challenges linked to former regime elements in the coastal regions. Nevertheless, sectarian tensions in Syria persist. Rooted in the Ba'ath era and exacerbated by the civil war, these divisions cannot be resolved in the short term. Rebuilding trust among the country's diverse social groups will require a sustained and determined long-term effort.

76 Aaron Y. Zelin, "Syria's Transitional Honeymoon Is Over After Massacres and Disinformation", *The Washington Institute*, 10 March 2025.

77 Charles R. Lister, "Rocket attack triggers Israeli retaliation in Syria & fears of self-fulfilling prophecies", *Syria Weekly*, 4 June 2025.

78 "Şara Lazkiye'deki olaylar için bağımsız soruşturma komitesi kurulduğunu açıkladı", *Rudaw*, 9 March 2025.

79 Charles R. Lister, "Weekly Data Update (July 15-22, 2025)", *Syria Weekly*, 24 July 2025.

4.2. Rising Tensions with the SDF/YPG

In the post-Assad period, the most significant domestic political challenge to Syria's unity and territorial integrity is the control exercised in the northeast by the SDF, the Syrian affiliate of the PKK terrorist organization. The SDF currently holds territory east of the Euphrates River, where it oversees much of the country's oil, natural gas, water, and grain resources. Backed by the U.S., the group has established an autonomous administrative structure and maintains an armed force of roughly 70,000 fighters equipped with heavy weaponry. The SDF's continued presence in northeastern Syria threatens not only the country's political and economic stability but also the security of Damascus itself. Addressing this issue has therefore become one of the top priorities of the new government. Seeking to consolidate both national and international legitimacy in the aftermath of the revolution, Damascus has thus far opted for political and diplomatic channels rather than military confrontation. A multilateral negotiation process—bringing in regional and international actors, most notably Türkiye and the U.S.—is currently underway. The outcome of these negotiations will be decisive in shaping the future of the so-called autonomous administration under SDF control.

The collapse of the regime has intensified both political and military pressures on the SDF. Damascus views the SDF's armed presence as a significant threat to Syria's territorial integrity, urging the group to disarm and integrate into the central authority within a unified state structure.⁸⁰ In the meantime, Türkiye accelerated its preparations for a potential military operation east of the Euphrates, further heightening mili-

tary pressure on the SDF.⁸¹ Furthermore, signals from the Trump administration suggesting a potential U.S. withdrawal from Syria indicated that the SDF's primary source of international support was weakening. In light of these developments and the prospect of a U.S. withdrawal, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) took on a mediating role in negotiations between the parties, exerting pressure on the SDF to reach an accommodation with the Syrian government.

As a result, Damascus and the SDF reached an agreement on March 10, establishing a consensus on the integration of SDF-controlled areas into the central government.⁸² This eight-point framework agreement broadly envisions linking northeastern Syria to the central government in return for the recognition of the constitutional rights of Syrian Kurds. Under the agreement, all civilian and military structures under SDF control—including border crossings, airports, and oil and gas fields—are to be integrated into the administrative framework of the Syrian state. To oversee implementation, joint committees were established between the government and the SDF to complete the integration process by the end of 2025.

Although uncertainties persist regarding the political status of territories under SDF control and the terms of the group's eventual incorporation into the Syrian army, the fact that the dispute has shifted onto a platform of political dialogue is widely regarded as a constructive step toward peace and stability in Syria. Early signs of progress included the cessation of armed clashes around the Tishrin Dam in eastern Aleppo, as well as the negotiated resolution of tensions in the SDF-controlled neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya in central Aleppo.⁸³ Moreover, adopting a stance

80 "Syrian groups must disarm to take part in national dialogue", *Middle East Monitor*, 13 February 2025.

81 "Türkiye threatens military action against Kurdish forces in Syria", *Al Jazeera*, 8 January 2025.

82 "Syria's interim president signs deal with Kurdish-led SDF to merge forces", *Reuters*, 11 March 2025.

83 H el ene Sallon, "In Aleppo, a testing ground for integration of Kurds into new Syria", *Le Monde*, 23 April 2025.

The SDF is deeply unwilling to recognize Damascus's political authority and shows little inclination to make concessions in the negotiations.

of 'cautious optimism' toward the agreement, Türkiye temporarily suspended its military operations in northeastern Syria to allow the Damascus–SDF negotiations an opportunity to yield a resolution to the SDF issue.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, an assessment of the process since the agreement suggests that achieving a lasting settlement between Damascus and the SDF remains highly challenging. Fundamental divergences persist regarding their respective visions for Syria's political future, and little meaningful progress has been made toward reconciling these differences. Although bilateral committees were established to implement the provisions of the Damascus-SDF agreement, these bodies have achieved only limited results. A key reason for this stall is that the prevailing assumption—that disputes will ultimately be resolved through political rather than military means—has eased pressure on the SDF, granting the group additional time and a wider margin for maneuver in negotiations. Capitalizing on this situation, the SDF has deliberately slowed the political process to safeguard the de

facto autonomy and military capacity it acquired with U.S. support.

Moreover, the steps taken and statements made by the SDF have further exacerbated tensions between the parties. The SDF's so-called representatives have refused to recognize the Constitutional Declaration issued by the Syrian government, and at the Kurdish Unity Conference, organized by the SDF in Qamishli, they demanded a model of decentralized governance from Damascus.⁸⁵ In areas under its control, the SDF has detained citizens sympathetic to the Syrian government and increased pressure on the region's Arab population. It has also been observed that the group continues to dig tunnels in strategic locations and relocate heavy weaponry to key military positions.⁸⁶ Furthermore, in clear violation of the spirit of the framework agreement, the SDF-led autonomous administration announced the creation of a 'general administration' to oversee the operation and management of Qamishli Airport.⁸⁷ Collectively, these developments make it abundantly clear that the SDF is deeply unwilling to recognize Damascus's political

84 Ragıp Soylu, "Turkey cautiously optimistic about Syria's deal with the Kurds", *Middle East Eye*, 11 March 2025.

85 "Syria's Kurds demand 'democratic decentralised' Syria", *France 24*, 26 April 2025.

86 Samer al-Ahmed, "The Damascus-SDF agreement two months on: Fragile progress or delayed collapse?" *Middle East Institute*, 9 May 2025.

87 "Qamishli airport dispute rekindles tensions between Kurds and Damascus", *The Arab Weekly*, 23 June 2025.

authority and shows little inclination to make concessions in the negotiations.

Despite maintaining its intransigent stance, the SDF's bargaining power appears to be steadily declining. One of the key factors driving this decline has been the policies pursued by external actors toward Syria. As in the past, both regional and global powers retain the capacity to influence the country's political balance through their strategic decisions. In this context, the new approach adopted by the U.S. under Trump has had a significant impact on the power dynamics between Damascus and the SDF. The most critical turning point came with the Trump–al-Sharaa meeting in Saudi Arabia in May. Prior to this meeting, Washington had maintained a relatively distant posture toward the new Syrian government; afterward, it undertook a marked shift in its Syria policy, openly signaling its willingness to cultivate closer ties with Damascus. This shift suggests that the U.S. has moved away from viewing the SDF as its primary interlocutor in Syria, instead orienting its strategy around Damascus.

The appointment of Thomas Barrack as U.S. Ambassador to Ankara, concurrently serving as Special Envoy for Syria, provides the clearest indication of Washington's shifting priorities on the Syrian issue. As one of President Trump's most trusted confidants, Barrack's dual role underscores the strategic importance the U.S. places on both Türkiye and Syria, while signaling recognition of Ankara's political and military influence in the country. This development suggests that Türkiye's priorities will be factored into U.S. policy on Syria, creating a highly unfavorable scenario for the SDF. Indeed, the likelihood that Washington will redefine its approach toward the SDF in accordance with Ankara's red lines appears increasingly strong.

Barrack's recent statements reinforce this assessment. After meeting with the SDF commander-in-chief, he stressed that the group should be integrated politically and militarily into the government, noting that the primary Syrian interlocutor for the U.S. has become the central authority in Damascus.⁸⁸ Barrack also emphasized that models such as autonomy or federalism are not viable in Syria, explicitly stating that the U.S. favors a unitary state structure with a strong central government, using the phrase: "one nation, one people, one army, one Syria."⁸⁹

Another significant factor weakening the SDF's bargaining power in negotiations with Damascus is the new U.S. policy aimed at reducing its military presence in Syria. According to press reports from April, the number of U.S. troops stationed in the country is slated to be reduced first to 1,400 and eventually to 500.⁹⁰ Within this framework, it has been indicated that only one of the eight U.S. military bases in northeastern Syria will be retained. Developments on the ground suggest that this policy is being implemented rapidly, with U.S. forces initially withdrawing from bases in Syria's Deir ez-Zor and Raqqqa governorates. These developments represent an extremely unfavorable trajectory for the SDF, whose political and military strength in the region has largely relied on the U.S. presence. Indeed, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from these predominantly Arab areas has raised the prospect of transferring these governorates directly to Syria's central authority. If the SDF continues to maintain control in the Arab-majority region, the risk of new uprisings by Arab tribes—similar to those witnessed in 2023 and 2024—remains a persistent concern.

The U.S. administration's shift toward cooperation with Damascus on counterterrorism is

88 "US envoy urges PKK/YPG to act quickly on integration to avoid issues with Türkiye, Syria", *Anadolu Agency*, 12 July 2025.

89 "ABD'li Büyükelçi Barrack: Tek millet, tek halk, tek ordu, tek Suriye", *Anadolu Agency*, 10 July 2025.

90 "US to scale down its military bases in Syria, envoy says", *Reuters*, 3 June 2025.

The U.S. administration's shift toward cooperation with Damascus on counterterrorism is further limiting the SDF's room for maneuver.

further limiting the SDF's room for maneuver. In this context, reports indicate that Washington has begun sharing intelligence and conducting joint operations with Damascus in the fight against DAESH.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the gradual institutionalization of a regional cooperation mechanism, initiated by Türkiye and seen as an alternative military framework to the U.S.-led International Coalition, is further diminishing the SDF's significance.⁹² In addition, statements from U.S. officials have underscored the need to transfer control of DAESH camps and prisons in northeastern Syria from the SDF to the central government. As the SDF begins to lose its most significant political asset, namely its claim to international legitimacy based largely on its role in combating DAESH, serious uncertainties are emerging regarding the group's future.

Despite mounting pressure, the SDF continues to maintain its intransigent stance toward Damascus. The group remains determined to preserve both its military presence and autonomous structure in the northeast, seeking to uphold its political and administrative autonomy in the face of the government's sovereignty claims. This posture complicates constructive dialogue between the parties and poses a significant

challenge to Syria's national unity. The group's uncompromising position was evident during a July 9 meeting in Damascus between the government and the SDF, attended by American and French officials. Press reports following the meeting indicated that, despite the proposals made by Damascus, the SDF insisted on its own demands and, even amid its weakening political position, refused to make any concessions.⁹³ Moreover, during the talks in Damascus, it became apparent that the group had requested a postponement of the timeline, despite the March agreement envisioning the SDF's integration into the central government by the end of 2025. These developments have dealt a significant blow to hopes that the disputes between Damascus and the SDF can be resolved peacefully.

Believing that the Syrian government lacks the capacity to launch a large-scale military operation in the northeast, the SDF has maintained a hardline approach at the negotiating table, refusing to compromise. A key assumption underpinning this position is that a new local or regional crisis might erupt within Syria, diverting Damascus's attention and thereby easing pressure on the SDF. Such a development is already taking shape in southern Syria:

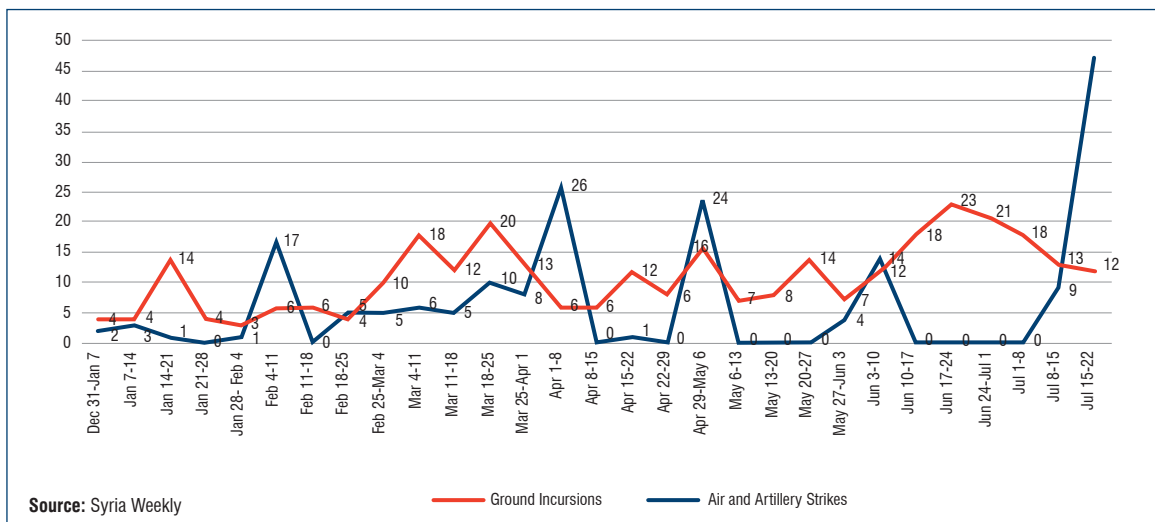
91 Charles R. Lister, "ISIS is on the ropes in Syria. A successful transition in Damascus could deliver a knockout blow", *Middle East Institute*, 14 April 2025.
92 "Türkiye, Syria, Jordan begin mission to combat terrorism in Syria", *Anadolu Agency*, 29 April 2025.
93 Abby Sewell, "Syria's government and Kurds still at odds over merging forces after latest talks", *The Associated Press*, 10 July 2025.

with Israeli involvement, certain Druze elements have refused to recognize Damascus's authority and are demanding autonomy. Closely monitored by the SDF, this situation could set a precedent for the northeast, making it highly consequential for the group's political and military status.

4.3. Israel's Intervention in Syria and the Druze

In the post-Assad era, the most significant external threat to Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity has emanated from Israel. On the very day of the revolution, in clear violation of international law, the Israeli military occupied the demilitarized buffer zone on the Syrian side of the Israeli-Syrian border, advancing its ground forces to within roughly 25 kilometers of Damascus.⁹⁴ At the same time, from the very first day of the revolution, the Israeli Air Force carried out extensive airstrikes across Syria. Since December 8, approximately 1,000 air and artillery strikes

Figure 3. *Israeli Military Operations in Syria (January–July 2025)*



have systematically targeted the former regime's military infrastructure, air defense and radar systems, and weapons and ammunition depots.⁹⁵ Despite these attacks, the Syrian army has not launched any retaliation or counteroffensive against Israel.

Despite the large-scale withdrawal of Iranian and Hezbollah-affiliated forces from Syria, Israel's continued airstrikes clearly demonstrate that Tel Aviv does not wish to see stability restored in the country. Israel aims to keep Syria weak, fragmented, and without a strong central authority, directly undermining Damascus's efforts to reassert sovereignty nationwide. Indeed, Israel has issued explicit threats against the redeployment of the Syrian army in the south and has targeted government forces attempting to reestablish control in the region.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Israeli officials' expressions of support for the Kurdish and Druze minorities are widely seen as part of a broader strategy to undermine central authority and weaken the government's control over the country as a whole.⁹⁷ All these developments demonstrate that Israel's objective is to weaken the Syrian

94 "Israeli forces escalate attacks on Syria, destroy key military sites", *The New Arab*, 10 December 2024.

95 Jennifer Holleis, "What are Israel's objectives in Syria?" *Deutsche Welle*, 17 July 2025.

96 "Israel won't allow Syria military forces south of Damascus: Netanyahu", *Al Jazeera*, 23 February 2025.

97 Shay Gal, "Defending the Druze, Supporting the Kurds: Israel's Strategy in Syria", *The Times of Israel*, 17 July 2025.

Israel has invoked the protection of the Druze as a pretext for political and military interventions, while simultaneously seeking to exploit internal divisions within the Druze community.

has so far maintained a relatively restrained posture toward Israel, Ankara's stance is hardening in response to Israel's escalating military provocations in southern Syria. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan explicitly stated that any attempt to partition Syria constitutes a national security threat to Türkiye and that Ankara will intervene if necessary.⁹⁹ Therefore, Israel's aggressive actions targeting Syria's stability are also heightening tensions with Türkiye, creating serious risks both for Syria's security and, more broadly, for regional peace.

At the core of Israel's Syria policy lies the Druze community in the southern province of Suwayda. Israel has invoked the protection of the Druze as a pretext for political and military interventions, while simultaneously seeking to exploit internal divisions within the community. Although most Druze support integration with the new government, a faction led by the prominent spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri seeks to establish an autonomous entity within Suwayda backed by Israel. The faction's military wing, the "Suwayda Military Council," was formed immediately after the rev-

olution and is led by former Assad-era soldiers,¹⁰⁰ with its ranks reportedly including individuals involved in narcotics smuggling between Syria and Jordan.¹⁰¹ Its ongoing coordination with Israel continues to pose a serious threat to Syria's political unity and territorial integrity.

Seeking to consolidate armed groups under the Ministry of Defense and establish a regular army, the Syrian government has prioritized integrating Druze factions into this military framework. While notable progress has been made, these efforts have repeatedly been obstructed by Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri. For example, a day after the March agreement with the SDF, a similar accord was reached with pro-government Druze leaders.¹⁰² Under this agreement, major Druze armed formations—such as Rijal al-Karama and Ahrar al-Jabal—along with prominent spiritual figures, pledged to recognize the authority of the central government and accept a centrally appointed governor and police chief. However, under al-Hijri's leadership, the Suwayda Military Council rejected the accord, labeled the new government "extremist," and, sup-

99 "Fidan'dan Suriye uyarısı: Bölmeye ve istikrarsızlaştırmaya çalışırsanız müdahale ederiz", *BBC Türkçe*, 22 July 2025.

100 Charles R. Lister (@Charles_Lister), "While other #Druze gunmen have been involved, the core resistance to gov't authority is Hikmat al-Hijri's '#Suwayda Military Council', which was established 24hrs after #Assad's fall & whose leadership contains 3 former #Assad regime generals. The SMC is #Israel's partner force.", X, 16 July 2025, 11:03.

101 Charles R. Lister (@Charles_Lister), "The #Suwayda Military Council is also assessed -- by regional intelligence -- to retain core control of #Syria's #Assad-era drugs trade (in #captagon, heroin, crystal meth & hashish). As it happens, #Jordan's military fought x2 drug smuggling raids from #Suwayda late on July 15", X, 16 July 2025, 11:05.

102 "Syrian Druze strike deal with Damascus to integrate into state institutions", *The Cradle*, 11 March 2025.

ported by Israel, took an openly anti-Damascus stance.¹⁰³

Similar agreements between the government and the Druze were signed repeatedly, yet al-Hijri consistently opposed them, urging his followers to resist. This stance triggered several clashes between government forces and Druze factions in the Druze-majority neighborhoods of Sahnaya and Jaramana in Damascus, significantly heightening tensions. Israel, portraying itself as the self-proclaimed protector of the Druze and labeling the presence of government forces in southern Syria a "red line," further escalated the confrontations by launching airstrikes during these clashes.

On July 12, clashes between Bedouin tribes and the Druze in Suwayda marked one of the most serious crises faced by the new Syrian government. Longstanding disputes dating back to the Assad era flared into armed conflict, with both sides engaging in mutual attacks that severely destabilized the security in the south.¹⁰⁴ Seizing the moment to reassert central authority in Suwayda, Damascus deployed military units to the city center. However, these forces were ambushed at the city's entrance by Druze groups, resulting in the execution of nearly twenty Syrian soldiers.¹⁰⁵ Israel, determined to prevent the government from consolidating control in the south, responded with a wave of intense airstrikes under the pretext of "protecting the Druze." These strikes targeted army convoys around Suwayda, military positions in Daraa, and even struck near the Presidential Palace and the Ministry of Defense in Damascus—a clear signal to the Syrian leadership. The attacks inflicted significant losses on government forces, further complicating Damascus's efforts to stabilize the region and establish state control.

As tensions escalated, a U.S.-brokered ceasefire was declared, stipulating that security responsibilities in Suwayda would be transferred to local actors. During this period, however, the Suwayda Military Council seized de facto control of the city and carried out retaliatory massacres against Bedouin communities in the area.¹⁰⁶ These attacks sparked outrage among Arab tribes across Syria, prompting them to launch a counteroffensive against Suwayda. After tribal forces encircled the city, a second ceasefire was negotiated, this time providing for the full transfer of Suwayda's control to the central government. Yet, the Suwayda Military Council's refusal to permit government forces to enter the city has left the crisis unresolved.

At the root of the tensions in Suwayda lie Israel's interventionist policies, which flagrantly violate international law. Following the collapse of the Assad regime, Israel intensified its military operations in southern Syria and pursued a strategy that emboldened Druze factions with separatist ambitions, encouraging a more defiant stance toward Damascus. The alignment between Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri and Israel is evident with Druze factions raising Israeli flags in Suwayda, and Israeli airstrikes frequently coinciding with al-Hijri's rejection of ceasefire agreements. Despite regional appeals for stability and Washington's stated commitment to a Damascus-centered settlement, Tel Aviv's support for separatist elements continues to undermine Syria's political unity and future stability. These policies have fueled a new cycle of violence that has claimed thousands of lives and deepened mistrust between the Druze community and the wider Syrian population. Unless Israel reverses its course, its belligerent posture will remain a major obstacle to political

103 "Druze Spiritual Leader Hikmat al-Hijri Escalates Against Damascus, Labels Government Extremist", *The Syrian Observer*, 14 March 2025.

104 Muhammed Sio, "Roots of rivalry: History of Bedouin-Druze clashes in Syria's Suwayda", *Anadolu Agency*, 23 July 2025.

105 "Syria announces ceasefire in Druze city of Suwayda after deadly clashes", *Al Jazeera*, 15 July 2025.

106 "Bedouins Evacuated from Syria's Suwayda Describe Massacres", *Democracy Now*, 23 July 2025.

normalization and social reconciliation in Syria.

The political and military struggle between Damascus and the Druze will shape not only Suwayda's future but also that of northeastern Syria. The de facto autonomy asserted by Druze factions directly influences the SDF's negotiating posture, setting a precedent for the political status of territories east of the Euphrates. If the Druze in Suwayda secure lasting concessions from Damascus, the SDF will likely harden its own demands for political and administrative autonomy. In this context, the restoration of lasting stability within a unitary Syrian state hinges on the central government's ability to reassert authority in Suwayda.

4.4. Conclusion

The transitional period that began in December 2024 represents not only a political turning point for Syria but also a renewed source of hope for a population scarred by over a decade of war, destruction, and authoritarian rule. This historic moment offers Syrian society the opportunity to build a new order grounded in justice and freedom, signaling a break from the sectarianism, corruption, and repression of the past. Yet this promise is overshadowed by significant risks to the country's political unity. The most serious threats to Syria's territorial integrity and national cohesion include the uprising of Assad loyalists in the coastal region, escalating tensions between the interim government and the SDF, and Israel's interventionist policies in the south. Although these crises involve different actors, they share a common root: a weakened central authority, deep mistrust among ethnic and sectarian communities, and a political

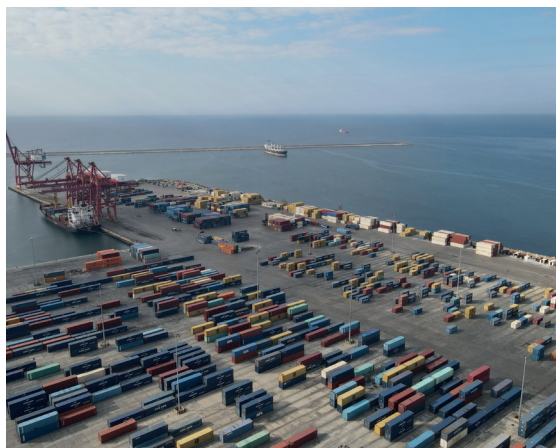
structure vulnerable to external manipulation. The insurgency in the coastal regions reflects more than the uprising of regime remnants; it embodies deeper divisions rooted in sectarian identity and external alignments. The confrontation between Damascus and the SDF highlights the persistence of centrifugal forces in the face of fragile central authority. Meanwhile, Israel's interventions demonstrate the capacity of external powers to shape Syria's internal dynamics for strategic gain—intensifying instability and undermining prospects for national reconciliation.

This picture illustrates that the threats confronting the interim government extend beyond security to encompass political legitimacy, social inclusivity, and regional power competition. Therefore, the administration's primary objective must go beyond establishing military control; it should focus on constructing an inclusive and representative framework for national reconciliation that incorporates all ethnic and sectarian communities. Equally critical is the pursuit of effective diplomatic initiatives to reinforce national sovereignty and deter external interference. Confronting Israel's violations of international law requires the active engagement of actors committed to Syria's stability—such as Türkiye, the U.S., the EU, and the Gulf states. Ultimately, many of the challenges facing the transitional period are inevitable, given the heavy legacy of nearly fourteen years of devastating civil war and authoritarian rule. Achieving political stability and rebuilding national unity will therefore be a gradual process—demanding time, patience, and sustained determination.

III

**REBUILDING SYRIA'S
ECONOMY**

5. PROSPECTS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY



In December 2024, the opposition groups that overthrew the Assad regime inherited a Syrian economy left almost entirely in ruins after fourteen years of devastating civil war. The extensive physical destruction caused by the conflict, combined with years of harsh international sanctions, deeply eroded the country's economic infrastructure and institutional capacity. Current economic indicators reveal that the Syrian economy has largely lost its functionality, with economic activity continuing only at a limited level. Faced with this grim picture, the new Syrian administration was confronted with the daunting mission of reviving a collapsed economy. Nevertheless, despite the immense challenges, the lifting of international sanctions, the launch of diplomatic initiatives with regional and global actors, and the pledges of international support have created a promising foundation for the country's reconstruction and the restoration of economic stability. This chapter examines the overall state of the Syrian economy in the immediate aftermath of the Assad regime's collapse, highlighting the primary obstacles to recovery, and provides a detailed analysis of recent changes in inter-

national sanctions as well as the prospects for reconstruction and revitalization of the national economy.

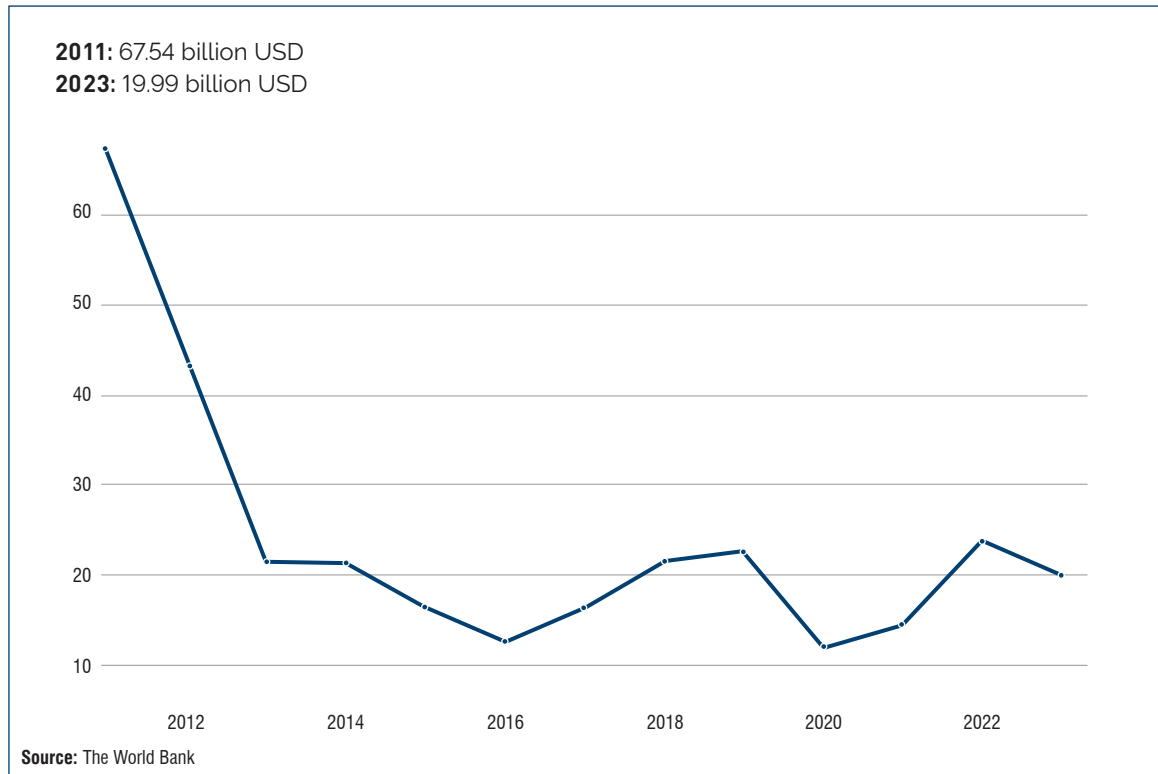
5.1. The Economic Legacy of the Assad Regime

By the end of 2024, the Syrian economy was experiencing one of the deepest collapses in its modern history. Before 2011, the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) stood at approximately \$60 billion; however, as a result of the massive destruction caused by the war and the impact of international economic isolation, it had fallen to around \$20 billion by 2023.¹⁰⁷ This dramatic contraction reduced Syria's economic standing to the level of countries with populations far smaller than its own. Alongside the economic collapse brought on by the civil war, inflation spiraled out of control, and the national currency, the Syrian pound, suffered a severe depreciation. At the outset of the war, one U.S. dollar was equivalent to roughly 47 Syrian pounds, whereas by the end of 2024, black-market rates had reached approximately 22,000 pounds to the dollar.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Karin Strohecker and Libby George, "Syria's economy: The devastating impact of war and sanctions", *Reuters*, 6 January 2025.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Waller, "Syria: Falling food prices ease pressure as lira recovers on markets", *Middle East Eye*, 8 January 2025.

Figure 4. Syria's Gross Domestic Product (2011–2023)



Years of protracted conflict severely eroded the Syrian state's revenue sources and fiscal capacity. The tax base contracted significantly; tax revenues, which accounted for 11 percent of GDP in 2011, had fallen to 5 percent by 2021.¹⁰⁹ The principal causes of this dramatic decline include the large-scale shift of economic activity into the informal sector due to the war and heavy international sanctions, as well as the dysfunction of state institutions. The foreign exchange reserves of the Central Bank of Syria were also nearly depleted. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) data, reserves that stood at \$18 billion in 2010 had dropped to only about \$200 million by the end of 2024.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, Western countries froze hundreds of millions of dollars in assets belonging to the Syrian state during the war. The status of public debt inherited from the Assad administration remains uncertain. Official data places Syria's largely bilateral external debt at around \$20–23 billion. However, when factoring in the financial and logistical "support" provided by Iran and Russia to the Assad regime throughout the war, the true scale of this debt is thought to be as much as \$30–50 billion.

Before the war, Syria maintained a largely self-sufficient economy, primarily sustained by agriculture and energy production. Until 2011, exports of wheat, phosphate, and petroleum, alongside small-scale manufacturing and tourism revenues, provided the main sources of national income. The outbreak of civil war, however, brought near-total devastation to these sectors. Production

¹⁰⁹ Alex Kozul-Wright, "Rebuilding Syria's economy: Can stability return after war?", *Al Jazeera*, 8 January 2025

¹¹⁰ "Syria's caretaker PM Bashir: Syria has very low foreign currency reserves", *Reuters*, 17 December 2024.

infrastructure was severely damaged, factories and businesses were forced to shut down, and unemployment surged dramatically. Although official figures placed registered unemployment at around 15 percent, independent estimates suggest that the real rate exceeded 50 percent. Millions of Syrians, unable to secure formal employment, were left with little choice but to migrate or turn to informal and precarious work.

Severe damage to infrastructure was another critical factor that rendered Syria's economy largely inoperable. Years of bombardment and armed conflict left roads, power plants, water networks, hospitals, and schools in a state of disrepair or complete dysfunction. Estimates indicate that up to 70 percent of the country's infrastructure was destroyed during the war.¹¹¹ In other words, approximately two-thirds of essential facilities are either completely destroyed or non-functional. According to United Nations Development Program (UNDP) data, rebuilding Syria's energy and transportation infrastructure—the backbone of economic activity—could take decades.

Alongside the physical devastation, Syria experienced a severe loss of human capital. The war prompted a mass exodus of skilled professionals, while disruptions to the education system further exacerbated the shortage of qualified labor. At least 500,000 people lost their lives during the conflict, and approximately six million Syrians fled the country as refugees. Among the remaining population—estimated at 17 to 18 million—around 90 percent now rely on humanitarian assistance.¹¹² Food security has emerged as a major concern. The collapse of the agricultural sector, compounded by drought, reduced annual wheat production

from 4 million tons before the war to less than 1 million tons by 2022. Declines in the agricultural workforce, coupled with restricted access to seeds and fertilizers, drove agricultural output in 2022 to historically low levels.¹¹³ As a result, much of the population can access even basic food items only through rationing or at inflated prices. Malnutrition and the high cost of living have become persistent features of daily life. Collectively, these indicators illustrate the depth of the crisis and the severe economic deterioration confronting Syria in the post-revolution period.

5.2. The Main Obstacles to Economic Recovery

Although large-scale conflict in Syria largely subsided by early 2025, the country's economic recovery continues to face significant challenges. Chief among these is the uncertainty surrounding the establishment of lasting security. While the central government has changed and the civil war is officially over, Syria remains vulnerable to external interventions and local-level security risks. In particular, Israel's military operations have exacerbated this fragile environment. Following the overthrow of the Assad regime, Israel intensified its attacks across multiple regions, conducting extensive air and ground operations under the pretext of national security. This instability—especially pronounced in the south—has created serious security gaps even within areas under the new administration's control.

In addition, tensions persist over areas under SDF control in northeastern Syria. Although an agreement has been reached regarding the integration of the SDF into the Damascus administration, the negotiation process is moving slowly, leaving open the possibility of renewed

111 Rabia Ali, "Stars appear aligned: Experts see Syria on road to economic revival", *Anadolu Agency*, 27 May 2025.

112 Gavin Blackburn, "Syria's post-war economy will require 'substantial' international support, IMF says", *Euronews*, 10 June 2025.

113 "Wheat Crop at a Historic Low", *The Syria Report*, 26 June 2025.

Without the permanent establishment of social peace, achieving the stability necessary for economic development will remain elusive.

disputes escalating into conflict. Furthermore, the threat posed by radical elements such as DAESH, operating through sleeper cells, has not been fully eliminated. Taken together, these factors underscore that Syria's security environment remains fragile and unstable. Under such conditions, achieving comprehensive and sustainable economic recovery is extremely challenging, as lasting improvements in security are a prerequisite for economic stability.

Under the Assad regime, repressive and discriminatory policies created deep fault lines within Syrian society. Governance structured around ethnic and sectarian favoritism pitted different segments of society against one another, while years of war fostered a profound sense of grievance and desire for revenge. The new administration appears to embrace a more conciliatory approach, avoiding revanchist measures and prioritizing institution-building. However, without the permanent establishment of social peace, achieving the stability necessary for economic development will remain elusive. If societal trust cannot be restored and the risk of conflict among different identity groups persists, planned investments and development projects are likely to be severely constrained. For this reason, national reconciliation efforts constitute an indispensable component of Syria's economic recovery.

War and sanctions have left Syrian state institutions nearly dysfunctional, eroding them from within. Fourteen years of conflict and crisis have severely weakened capacity across all levels of public administration, from ministries to local governments. These institutions—already characterized under the Assad regime by corruption, favoritism, and inefficiency—either collapsed or became largely ineffective during the war. The effects of international sanctions have further exacerbated institutional fragility. Service delivery in sectors ranging from education and healthcare to infrastructure and finance has been disrupted, while the state's core administrative capacity has been significantly undermined. Although the new government has pledged to restructure ministries, reform the tax system, and enhance transparency, restoring a bureaucracy depleted by years of wartime conditions to full functionality will remain an extremely challenging endeavor.

The limited administrative experience of the cadres now responsible for governing Syria should not be overlooked. Although opposition groups that helped overthrow the regime and their technocratic teams previously administered Idlib province, they are assuming responsibility for national-level economic decision-making for the first time. As a result, these cadres require external advisory and technical

support in areas such as good governance, fiscal policy, and institutional capacity-building. Without such assistance, the effectiveness of decisions that will shape the country's economic trajectory may remain constrained.

Throughout the war, Syria experienced a significant outflow of capital. Wealthy individuals moved their investments abroad, domestic capital accumulation nearly halted, and foreign investment inflows remained virtually nonexistent for years. The banking sector, severed from the global financial system by international sanctions, has left the private sector almost entirely cut off from financing sources. In the post-conflict period, securing the funding necessary to both revitalize the private sector and sustain public services will be a major challenge. Under these conditions, a nationwide liquidity shortage is highly likely.

The shortage of skilled human resources is also one of the significant obstacles to economic recovery.¹¹⁴ Hundreds of thousands of educated Syrians have either lost their lives during the war or fled the country. The generation that remained has had limited opportunities to acquire sufficient education or professional experience under wartime conditions. In particular, a significant portion of the expert workforce needed for critical reconstruction sectors, such as construction and engineering, is currently residing in Europe, Türkiye, or the Gulf states. The return and reintegration of this human capital will take time, and the shortage of skilled labor may delay both reconstruction projects and the restart of industrial production. In sum, Syria faces serious challenges across a wide spectrum—ranging from security and governance to national reconciliation and foreign policy. Overcoming these obstacles will require not only external resources but also strong political

will, a commitment to reform, and a sense of societal responsibility.

5.3. The Economic Impact of Lifting Sanctions

Another major factor that has stifled the Syrian economy nearly as severely as the war itself is the comprehensive system of international sanctions imposed since 2011. In response to the Assad regime's war crimes, human rights violations, and authoritarian practices, the U.S., the EU, and numerous other countries implemented extensive economic sanctions on Syria. These measures effectively excluded the country from the global financial system, severely restricting foreign trade, international investment inflows, and access to foreign currency revenues. With the fall of the Assad regime, however, many states began reassessing their sanctions policies, gradually lifting or suspending restrictions in an effort to give the new government a genuine chance at economic recovery and reconstruction.

The first concrete step toward lifting sanctions came from the EU, which in December 2024 announced the suspension of certain sanctions as a "gesture" toward the interim government.¹¹⁵ The U.S., however, adopted a more cautious stance, preferring gradual steps under a "wait-and-see" approach. In the early months of 2025, Washington granted limited sanctions exemptions, primarily within the humanitarian sphere. In January 2025, for instance, the U.S. Department of the Treasury temporarily authorized non-commercial personal money transfers via the Central Bank of Syria, enabling Syrians abroad to send foreign currency to their relatives. This measure partially reopened the flow of diaspora resources into the country, providing much-needed micro-level economic relief. At the same time, the U.S. partially relaxed its strict sanctions on the energy sector. For

114 Tamer Qarmout, "Rebuilding Syria requires much more than bricks and mortar", *Al Jazeera*, 22 December 2025.

115 "Syria: EU suspends restrictive measures on key economic sectors", *Council of the EU*, 24 February 2025.

years, American firms had been prohibited from importing petroleum and related products from Syria or investing in its energy industry. Following the regime's overthrow, however, limited activities related to the supply of oil, natural gas, and electricity were permitted. These measures signaled that Washington was pursuing a cautious yet potentially supportive approach toward the new administration.

The most significant step toward lifting sanctions came in May 2025. During a visit to Saudi Arabia, U.S. President Trump made an unexpected announcement declaring that all U.S. sanctions on Syria would be lifted. "I will be ordering the cessation of sanctions against Syria in order to give them a chance at greatness," Trump stated, signaling a dramatic policy shift and pointing to a comprehensive reorientation of Washington's approach toward Syria.¹¹⁶ Intense diplomatic engagement, led by Turkish President Erdoğan and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, played a decisive role in shaping this decision. During his meetings in Riyadh, Trump discussed the Syrian issue in depth with regional leaders and was ultimately persuaded to reconsider Washington's restrictive policy in order to break the cycle of crisis that had persisted for more than thirteen years. Summarizing this new approach with the words, "It's their time to shine. We're taking them all off [...] Good luck Syria, show us something very special," Trump signaled not only the lifting of sanctions but also the opening of a new era in U.S.–Syrian political and economic relations.

The Trump administration's decision effectively marks the beginning of a new chapter for the Syrian economy. The lifting of sanctions carries the potential to unlock foreign investment, normalize relations with international fi-

ancial institutions, and accelerate the process of economic recovery. This move has created a climate of opportunity and confidence for countries and companies that had previously refrained from engaging with Syria due to the uncertainty posed by U.S. restrictions. In practical terms, Trump's announcement removed the threat of punitive measures against states or firms seeking to assist Syria. While the sanctions were in force, even neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan hesitated to establish economic ties, fearing trade disruptions and banking complications.¹¹⁷ Similarly, wealthy Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia withheld financial support under the weight of these restrictions.¹¹⁸ With this barrier now lifted, the path has been cleared for regional economic integration, paving the way for renewed cross-border trade, infrastructure cooperation, and energy investment.

With the end of U.S. financial restrictions, the Central Bank of Syria has regained the ability to conduct transactions with international banks. This shift not only facilitates remittances and official money transfers but also restores the normal functioning of import–export payments. Most importantly, it reopens the door to international development financing. For years, sanctions had prevented institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the Islamic Development Bank from extending financial support to Syria. The removal of this barrier now allows these institutions to extend project loans once again, creating opportunities for large-scale reconstruction and economic recovery.¹¹⁹

In June 2025, an IMF delegation visited Damascus for the first time in 14 years, meeting with the new administration and assessing the country's economic needs.¹²⁰ IMF Managing

116 "Trump to remove US sanctions on Syria in major policy shift", *Reuters*, 14 May 2025.

117 "Syria poised for investment boom as US sanctions eased", *Deutsche Welle*, 14 May 2025.

118 "US sanctions hold up Qatar's support for Syria", *Middle East Monitor*, 26 February 2025.

119 Erhan Akkaş, "Suriye Ekonomisinde Yeni Bir Sayfa: Yaptırımların Kaldırılması Ne Anlama Geliyor?", *ORSAM*, 15 May 2025.

120 "IMF pays 1st official visit to Syria since 2009", *Anadolu Agency*, 10 June 2025.

Director Kristalina Georgieva publicly affirmed that the Fund was prepared to support Syria. Around the same time, the World Bank signaled its willingness to assist in critical areas, including financing the country's annual wheat requirements. To facilitate this process, Saudi Arabia and Qatar assumed and settled Syria's \$15.5 million overdue debt to the World Bank, effectively removing a key obstacle that had previously blocked the Bank from extending credits. This development opened the way for the World Bank to initiate new loan and grant projects, marking a significant milestone in Syria's reintegration into international development financing mechanisms.¹²¹

Following the lifting of sanctions, regional countries launched large-scale investment projects in Syria, effectively marking the beginning of an economic mobilization aimed at the country's reconstruction. Major regional economies—particularly Türkiye, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—accelerated their investment plans, entering a competitive race to secure a more prominent and influential role in Syria's rebuilding process.¹²² For Syria, this competition represents a significant opportunity. The revitalization of regional econom-

ic ties has the potential to both accelerate the recovery process and enhance its sustainability. A steady stream of investment announcements further confirms this emerging economic momentum, highlighting the region's growing commitment to supporting Syria's reconstruction and its integration into regional markets.

In May, a French company signed an agreement for the construction and operation of a new port on Syria's Mediterranean coast.¹²³ The UAE launched projects to establish a maritime company and a joint airline in the country.¹²⁴ Saudi Arabia announced plans to establish a multi-billion-dollar reconstruction fund, while Qatar has been sending delegations to explore investment opportunities in Syria's aviation and manufacturing sectors. Türkiye, leveraging its geographical proximity, has already launched key infrastructure projects. In May 2025, the natural gas pipeline linking Kilis to Aleppo was completed, with Ankara announcing that gas exports to Syria are set to begin in August.¹²⁵ The gas is designated for electricity generation, a critical requirement for both Syrians and the country's reconstruction efforts. In summary, the lifting of sanctions has provided Syria with vital economic relief, enhanced

Following the lifting of sanctions, regional countries launched large-scale investment projects in Syria, effectively marking the beginning of an economic mobilization aimed at the country's reconstruction.

121 "Syria's Arrears to the World Bank Group Cleared", *World Bank*, 16 May 2025.

122 Vivian Nereim, "Gulf States Lead Push to Invest in New Syria", *The New York Times*, 30 June 2025.

123 "Syria signs 30-year port deal with French shipping giant", *Le Monde*, 1 May 2025

124 "Syria and UAE's DP World sign \$800 million agreement for Tartus port development", *The National*, 16 May 2025.

125 "Bakan Bayraktar: Kilis'ten Halep'e doğru doğal gaz boru hattı bağlantısını bitirdik", *Anadolu Agency*, 23 May 2025.

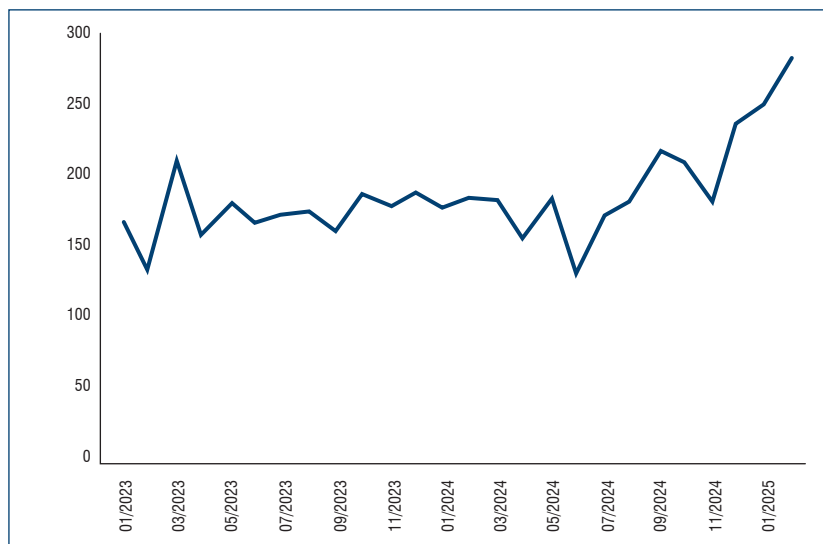
Newly signed investment agreements have paved the way for major infrastructure projects in energy, transportation, and construction, with active involvement from neighboring states.

regional cooperation, opened access to development financing, and bolstered its international political legitimacy. This shift has ended years of isolation, accelerated regional integration, and set the stage for Syria's reintegration into the global economy.

5.4. Assessing the Possibility of Recovery

Rebuilding Syria's shattered economy will demand a comprehensive, long-term effort. Despite severe destruction and structural challenges, recovery remains possible if key conditions are met—foremost among them, a successful political transition. An inclusive, transparent, and predictable transition is essential not only for economic stability but also for restoring investor confidence. Conversely, prolonged uncertainty could delay investments and hinder recovery. Syria thus faces a fragile yet pivotal transition, the outcome of which will determine whether the country can move from devastation to sustainable growth.

Figure 5. Türkiye's Exports to Syria (2023–2025) (Million Dollar)



As noted earlier, the lifting of sanctions has restored Syria's access to external resources that were long beyond reach. Initial progress has come from Türkiye and the Gulf states, highlighting the potential of regional economic cooperation as a key driver of reconstruction. Newly signed investment agreements have paved the way for major infrastructure projects in energy, transportation, and construction, with active involvement from neighboring states. Türkiye, in particular, is already building roads and hospitals in northern Syria, and Turkish companies are preparing to expand their presence in the construction sector.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Ceyda Çağlayan, "Turkish firms pursue ambitious plans in rebuilding of Syria's economy", *Reuters*, 4 February 2025.

Gulf capital is expected to play a key role in financing real estate, infrastructure, and industrial projects in Syria. In this context, Saudi Arabia announced in July a \$3 billion investment plan targeting housing and infrastructure development.¹²⁷ This plan represents one of the largest foreign capital pledges to Syria in recent years. Qatar is also conducting feasibility studies aimed at revitalizing the country's aviation sector and modernizing key industrial facilities.¹²⁸ The UAE has made various proposals for the modernization of the Tartus and Latakia ports, as well as for the establishment of joint economic free zones.

While European countries initially maintained a cautious stance, they have gradually shown growing interest in the Syrian market. France has taken a concrete step by acquiring the long-term operating rights to Latakia Port. Germany, meanwhile, plans to expand "the Syria Recovery Trust Fund" project it had implemented through Türkiye during the 2010s, transforming this initiative into development programs coordinated directly with the Damascus administration.¹²⁹ Companies from the U.S., Italy, and Spain have also expressed interest in bidding for projects related to Syria's energy infrastructure.

Estimates from various institutions place the cost of Syria's reconstruction between \$250 billion and \$1 trillion. Mobilizing such vast resources will require the effective engagement of international aid mechanisms and development funds. The lifting of sanctions has already allowed UN agencies and international NGOs to expand their operations in Syria. In early 2025, UNDP introduced emergency action plans to

address the humanitarian crisis and lay the groundwork for economic recovery.¹³⁰ Millions of dollars have been allocated to support food aid, healthcare services, and housing projects. The EU is also considering providing financial assistance for large-scale housing initiatives to encourage the voluntary return of Syrian refugees. As part of these efforts, the international donors' conference held in Brussels in March 2025 announced pledges exceeding \$5 billion for Syria.¹³¹ These resources have been directed primarily toward humanitarian assistance and urgent infrastructure repair projects.

The IMF's initiation of technical-level engagement with Syria in June 2025 marked a significant milestone. The delegation emphasized that Syria's economic recovery hinges on substantial international support, with macroeconomic stability as the foremost priority. The accompanying report underscored the importance of addressing basic humanitarian needs while restoring the functionality of key state institutions, including the central bank and the Ministry of Finance.¹³² While acknowledging Syria's limited institutional capacity, the report noted that Syrian officials have shown a strong commitment to reforms and reconstruction. The World Bank, for its part, has proposed the creation of a multi-donor mechanism to channel international financing for the rebuilding process. In this context, the concept of a 'Syria Reconstruction Fund,' supported by contributions from Gulf states, Türkiye, the EU, and the U.S., has been discussed on multiple international platforms. Given the scale of Syria's financing needs, such a mechanism appears increasingly indispensable.

127 "Saudi Arabia announces \$6.4 billion in Syria investments", *Reuters*, 24 July 2025.

128 Muhammed Sio, "Syria's new administration leader says Qatar to have active role in country's development process", *Anadolu Agency*, 23 December 2025.

129 "Syria poised for investment boom as US sanctions eased", *Deutsche Welle*, 14 May 2025.

130 "UN plans to provide \$1.3B in aid to Syria", *Anadolu Agency*, 21 March 2025

131 "EU and its partners pledge 5.8 billion euros for Syria and its neighbours", *Reuters*, 17 March 2025.

132 Gavin Blackburn, "Syria's post-war economy will require 'substantial' international support, IMF says", *Euronews*, 10 June 2025.

Private sector investment will be essential for restoring the Syrian economy to pre-crisis levels, as neither the state budget nor international aid alone can meet the immense recovery needs. In this context, the liberal, market-oriented policies adopted by the transitional government offer a significant advantage. Unlike the Ba'ath regime's centralized and nepotistic economic model, the new administration is committed to free-market principles and has signaled openness to foreign direct investment. Notably, cadres with HTS backgrounds appear ideologically more favorable toward private entrepreneurship.¹³³

One of the most decisive factors in Syria's economic recovery will likely be the reintegration of millions of Syrians displaced abroad. Many who left during the war possess valuable education, experience, and capital that can significantly contribute to reconstruction. The new administration is actively encouraging young Syrians—particularly those educated in Türkiye and Europe—to return and participate in development efforts. Since early 2025, some Syrian doctors, engineers, and entrepreneurs have returned, while others have supported reconstruction through remote investments and collaborative projects.¹³⁴ Media reports highlight that Syrian healthcare professionals who worked in Türkiye for years are returning to provide voluntary, free medical services in their homeland. The return of refugees is expected to stimulate domestic demand, further boosting the economy. Alongside human capital, financial resources are also flowing back into the country. Diaspora Syrians, previously constrained by sanctions, can now invest more freely. Following the lifting of money transfer restrictions, foreign currency inflows from the diaspora are projected to reach billions of dollars.¹³⁵

Despite these positive developments, expectations of a rapid, miraculous recovery for the Syrian economy would be unrealistic. While recovery is possible, it will be a long and challenging process. Decades of devastation cannot be undone solely through external resource inflows; sustained effort, time, and comprehensive structural reforms are also required. Under current conditions, the immediate goal for the coming years is to halt the Syrian economy's freefall and achieve a basic level of economic stability. Although modest, this target represents a realistic and meaningful starting point given the country's political and economic circumstances.

Short-term, concrete steps to support Syria's economic recovery include rapidly revitalizing agriculture and food production, restoring essential public services such as electricity, water, and healthcare, and launching publicly funded infrastructure projects to reduce unemployment. These initiatives would stimulate domestic demand while creating jobs. Similarly, removing barriers to trade with neighboring countries and reopening border crossings would further aid recovery. In the energy sector, restoring central government control over oil and natural gas fields in eastern Syria is crucial. Reclaiming these resources from the SDF would allow the government to satisfy domestic fuel demand and generate significant export revenue.

5.5. Conclusion

By the end of 2024, the Syrian economy was on the brink of total collapse. Yet the new geopolitical landscape emerging in 2025 has created a critical window of opportunity for reconstruction and economic recovery. Realizing this potential depends primarily on achieving internal peace,

133 Timour Azhari, "Exclusive: Syria's new rulers back shift to free-market economy, business leader says", *Reuters*, 10 December 2025.

134 "More than 1 million displaced Syrians have returned home since ouster of al-Assad", *Euronews*, 24 March 2025.

135 Ben Hubbard, "Syrians Are Elated and Optimistic as Trump Vows to Lift Sanctions", *The New York Times*, 14 May 2025.

establishing an inclusive and transparent political order, and implementing sound economic policies with determination. Equally essential is consistent, stable, and long-term international support. As the IMF has stressed, Syria's revival will not be possible without 'substantial international assistance.' By mid-2025, a growing consensus among the U.S., the EU, and regional states on Syria's reintegration into the international economic system has become a significant source of optimism.

Nevertheless, this economic reconstruction will not produce immediate results. Repairing the physical, institutional, and human damage caused by over a decade of conflict requires time, patience, and substantial reforms. Establishing lasting peace, ensuring the provision of essential public services, and rebuilding productive capacity are critical prerequisites for economic progress. If these conditions are met, the Syrian economy could gradually recover across sectors—from agriculture and energy

to industry and tourism—ultimately achieving a structure capable of providing the population with a basic standard of welfare. Each positive step in this process will not only advance Syria's recovery but also promote stability, development, and enduring peace throughout the wider Middle East.

The Syrian people, having endured immense suffering and loss, now face a historic crossroads, with the opportunity to rebuild their future on the foundations of peace and cooperation. The international community appears ready to support both the Syrian state and its citizens throughout this process. Under these conditions, the revival of the Syrian economy is possible and holds significant promise. Realizing this potential, however, requires careful planning, determined execution, and a comprehensive approach that emphasizes broad societal participation alongside strong international cooperation.

CONCLUSION



The political era that began with the collapse of the Ba'ath regime represents one of the most profound turning points in Syria's history. It ushers in an unprecedented phase of national reconciliation, institutional reform, and gradual reintegration into the international community after years of conflict. This report assesses the first six months of the new Syrian administration from both domestic and foreign policy perspectives. It examines this period through the lenses of legitimacy-building, security strategies, foreign relations, and economic developments. The analysis finds that the administration pursued a comprehensive approach to restoring political, social, and economic order at home while seeking international recognition and legitimacy abroad.

In domestic politics, the new administration's legitimacy-building strategy rests on a multi-layered framework, the first pillar of which is social inclusivity. The al-Sharaa government has implemented inclusive rhetoric and policies toward ethnic and religious minorities—particularly Christians, Alawites, Kurds, and Druze—ensuring their representa-

tion both symbolically and institutionally. This inclusivity is evident across diverse spheres, from public celebrations such as Christmas to firm responses against sectarian attacks, from security guarantees for minority communities to the appointment of ministers from minority backgrounds. Agreements with the Druze and Kurdish communities underscore that inclusivity is not merely rhetorical but embedded in governance. Notable measures include constitutional guarantees for the Kurdish community, formal recognition of their cultural rights, and their integration into state institutions.

The restoration of a unitary state has been at the core of the new administration's political vision. The al-Sharaa government has adopted a firm stance against federalist or decentralizing initiatives, investing substantial diplomatic and administrative effort to bring all armed groups—most notably the SDF—under central authority. While rejecting the autonomous administration in northeastern Syria, the government has nonetheless pursued an inclusive negotiation process grounded in the principle of state unity. In this context, the March agreement with the

SDF holds particular significance, as it paves the way for the integration of the group's armed and civilian structures into national institutions.

The new government has sought to consolidate its legitimacy not only through political discourse but also by establishing institutional and legal foundations. In this regard, the National Dialogue Conference served as a pivotal platform for affirming political pluralism and laying the groundwork for a constitutional order built on national consensus. The preparatory phase—characterized by local consultations and negotiation processes across the country—reflected the government's commitment to fostering a political system rooted in broad public participation. The outcomes of the conference, enshrining principles such as equal citizenship, the rule of law, transitional justice, and freedom of expression, now provide the normative framework of the emerging constitutional order.

The Constitutional Declaration marked both a symbolic rupture with the legal legacy of the former regime and a framework establishing the state's core principles for the transitional period. Designed to remain in force for five years, the declaration enshrined fundamental norms such as the separation of powers, equal citizenship, and freedom of religion and conscience. It also set out the basic contours of the provisional legislative structure, the political party law, and the electoral process. Building on this foundation, the transitional government—predominantly composed of technocrats—was deliberately structured to ensure both sectarian and ethnic inclusion, reflecting the new leadership's dual commitment to administrative competence and broad representativeness.

In foreign policy, the new leadership has pursued intensive diplomatic efforts at both the regional and global levels to overcome the post-war isolation. A central focus has been the restoration of ties with the Gulf states, where

reciprocal visits and investment agreements with Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have provided the foundation for economic assistance and political normalization. As part of this rapprochement, Gulf states have reopened their embassies in Damascus, while the Syrian leadership, in turn, has committed to cooperation on shared security concerns, notably the fight against Captagon trafficking.

In relations with Türkiye, the new administration has cultivated a strategic partnership. Türkiye's long-standing ties with opposition groups in northern Syria during the civil war provided an institutional foundation for post-revolution cooperation. One of the most significant aspects of this partnership has been Türkiye's support for the integration of the SNA into the state's armed forces, marking a key step in security sector restructuring. In parallel, efforts have advanced toward establishing bilateral mechanisms in areas such as border security, defense cooperation, and counterterrorism. The depth of this relationship is further underlined by al-Sharaa's three official visits to Türkiye.

On the global stage, Syria's engagement with the U.S. has underscored its determination to reenter the international system. In negotiations with the Trump administration, a consensus was reached on key issues, including the fight against DAESH, security assurances for Israel, and the containment of Iranian influence. These understandings paved the way for Washington's decision to lift sanctions on Syria. At the same time, renewed contacts with European countries—highlighted by a visit to France and participation in international forums such as Davos and Munich—further signaled Syria's commitment to pursuing more constructive and balanced relations with major global actors in the post-war era.

In the second part of the report, the security strategies and threats to political unity are discussed in detail. After over thirteen years

of conflict, the proliferation of armed groups throughout the country created a security situation that led to the rise of local power centers and left Syria vulnerable to external interference. To address these risks, the Syrian government prioritized the restructuring of military and internal security institutions as a cornerstone of stabilization. Under the Ministry of Defense, opposition factions were incorporated into the national army, while the Ministry of Interior brought together internal security forces through modernized organizational frameworks. Together, these reforms sought to consolidate legitimate state authority and lay the foundations for a professional, unified security architecture.

After the revolution, remnants of the Assad regime emerged as a significant security threat, particularly along the Syrian coast. While the new administration primarily pursued peaceful measures—such as general amnesties and reconciliation centers—to address this issue, it also carried out security operations against groups that continued armed resistance. These measures brought the threat largely under control within the first six months, though instability in the coastal regions remained a persistent concern. At the same time, narcotics and arms smuggling networks—deeply entrenched during the former regime—became a prominent post-revolutionary security challenge. In response, the new government targeted these networks, particularly through operations along the Lebanese border, and implemented reforms to strengthen border security. Complemented by diplomatic cooperation with Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, these efforts evolved into a broader regional campaign against transnational criminal networks.

In the fight against DAESH, the new Syrian government adopted a multidimensional strategy designed both to enhance domestic security and to strengthen its international cooperation.

In coordination with the U.S., operations were intensified to suppress the group's attempts at resurgence, while specific measures were introduced to deal with the challenge of foreign fighters. At the regional level, Damascus placed counterterrorism at the center of its diplomacy, expanding cooperation with neighboring countries—including Türkiye, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq—to establish a more integrated security framework.

In the new era, one of the government's foremost priorities was restoring political unity across the country. This objective, however, was complicated by the persistence of armed and political groups that refused to recognize central authority, as well as by ongoing clashes with these factions, which exacerbated political, military, and humanitarian crises nationwide. The most significant obstacles to national unification during the transition included pro-Assad insurgency along the coastal regions, the SDF's reluctance to integrate into the central administration, and Israel's destabilizing interventions in the south.

Damascus pursued a strategy of political negotiation to facilitate the disarmament and integration of the SDF into the central state apparatus. This process culminated in the March agreement, which provided for the recognition of Kurdish constitutional rights in exchange for the SDF's incorporation into the Syrian state. However, the integration process has largely stalled due to SDF intransigence, despite the group's increasingly weakened position. The U.S. policy shift toward engagement with Damascus—including a reduction of its military presence in Syria and coordination in counter-DAESH operations—has undermined the SDF's leverage. Coupled with Türkiye's pressure, which has eroded its external support, the SDF finds itself increasingly constrained vis-à-vis the central authority. Nonetheless, it continues to withhold necessary political conces-

sions, hindering the progress of negotiations. As a result, significant uncertainty surrounds the future of the Damascus-SDF settlement.

In the post-Assad period, Israel has posed the most serious external threat to Syria's territorial integrity, seeking to undermine the Damascus administration through both military occupations and airstrikes. The advance of Israeli forces from the Golan Heights, coupled with political support to Kurdish and Druze minorities, reflects Tel Aviv's strategic aim of maintaining a fragmented Syria. The eruption of Druze–Bedouin clashes in Suwayda in July further intensified the regional crisis, as Israeli intervention and the intransigence of certain Druze groups have hindered the central government's efforts to assert authority. These dynamics not only threaten stability in the south but also influence negotiations in the northeast, where the SDF is pursuing similar autonomy-related demands. As a result, lasting stability in Syria increasingly depends on Damascus securing full sovereignty over Suwayda.

The third part of the report provides an in-depth analysis of Syria's economic outlook, assessing the potential for recovery within the evolving political and strategic landscape. Following the overthrow of the Assad regime, the new administration inherited a profoundly devastated economy. Years of civil war, compounded by international sanctions, had severely weakened infrastructure, fiscal structures, and human capital. With economic output having contracted by more than 80 percent, inflation spiraling, and unemployment at extreme levels, production capacity had nearly ground to a halt. Public institutions were largely dysfunctional, while persistent security risks, social fragmentation, and the leadership's limited experience posed additional barriers to recovery. These challenges were further compounded by insufficient human resources, low capital accumulation, and

the continuing threat of external intervention.

In 2025, however, the lifting of international sanctions reopened channels for investment and aid, presenting a significant opportunity for Syria's economic recovery. The removal of U.S. sanctions, coupled with renewed engagement from institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, accelerated the country's reintegration into the international system. Türkiye, Gulf states, and several European countries began preparing investment plans targeting infrastructure, energy, and construction projects, while the return of Syrian diaspora communities contributed steadily to reconstruction efforts. Despite these positive developments, rebuilding Syria remains a long-term and challenging endeavor, requiring sustained reforms, political stability, and robust international support. Nevertheless, if these measures are effectively implemented, the country has the potential to regain economic vitality and provide its population with a minimum level of prosperity.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the first six months of post-revolution Syria have represented a dynamic transition, in which political leadership, institutional restructuring, and international diplomacy have operated in tandem. Under al-Sharaa's leadership, the new administration has rapidly established foundational institutions to secure domestic legitimacy while pursuing an ambitious diplomatic outreach abroad. Yet sustaining this early momentum will depend on several critical factors: institutionalizing social inclusivity, consolidating legal reforms, deepening security sector restructuring, and effectively implementing economic reconstruction. Al-Sharaa's initial six months thus offer a cautiously optimistic outlook for Syria's future, revealing tangible potential for rebuilding the country along the axes of national unity, political legitimacy, and regional integration.

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