CHARTING SYRIA'S FUTURE

A Strategic Framework for Recovery and Renewal

Edited by Salam Fayyad

TIME BOOKS

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Acronyms

3RP .....Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan

AANES .....Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

AQ .....Al-Qaeda

CENTCOM...U.S. Central Command

CIHRS .....Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

CRPD .....Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CSIS .....Center for Strategic and International Studies

CSSR.....Civil Society Support Room

CT .....Counterterrorism

DDR.....Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

DIC .....Department of International Cooperation (within MoFA)

DPI.....Digital Public Infrastructure

ERW .....Explosive Remnants of War

E.U. .....European Union

FSIA.....Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act

FTO.....Foreign Terrorist Organization

G2P .....Government-to-person

GCC.....Gulf Cooperation Council

GID .....General Intelligence Directorate

GL 25 .....General License 25

GSS .....General Security Service

HaD .....Hurras al-Din

HNAP .....U.N. Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme

HTS.....Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

ICC .....International Criminal Court

ICCPR .....International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

IDLO .....International Development Law Organization

IDP.....Internally displaced person

IFI.....International financial institution

IIIM.....International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism

IMF .....International Monetary Fund

IOM .....International Organization for Migration

IRGC.....Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps

ISF.....Internal Security Forces

ISIS.....Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

ISP.....Internet Service Provider

JFS.....Jabhat Fateh al-Sham

JOC-I.....Joint Operations Command-Iraq

LMS .....Learning Management System

MoD .....Ministry of Defense

MoFA .....Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoI .....Ministry of the Interior

MoSAL.....Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor

OFAC .....Office of Foreign Assets Control

OPCW .....Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

PKK .....Kurdistan Workers' Party

PMF .....Popular Mobilization Forces

RPBA.....Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment

SAA .....Syrian Arab Army

SARC.....Syrian Arab Red Crescent

SCD .....Syrian Civil Defense

SDF .....Syrian Democratic Forces

SNA .....Syrian National Army

SNHR .....Syrian Network for Human Rights

SSR.....Security sector reform

SST .....State Sponsor of Terrorism

STD.....Syrian Trust for Development

SWIFT .....Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication

U.N. .....United Nations

UNDP.....United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR .....United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNSC .....United Nations Security Council

UNODC .....United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

USCIRF .....U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

UXO.....Unexploded Ordnance

YPG .....People's Protection Units

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Timeline and Key Events

A Brief History of the Conflict

The Syrian civil war raged across the nation for nearly 14 years. It began in March 2011, when fifteen school children in the southwestern city of Deraa spray-painted slogans criticizing the regime. In response, these boys were arrested and tortured. This was the catalyst for a war that had been fermenting for decades. The Assad family had implemented authoritarian rule since Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970 and had only intensified its control once Hafez's son Bashar began his rule in 2000. The family governed through a system that an American think tank, the Council on Foreign Relations, called "not just autocratic but also kleptocratic, doling out patronage to bind Syrians to the regime."[1] The Assad family empowered Alawite allies to dominate the security apparatus, exercising tight control over the Sunni majority. By 2011, anger with the strict Assad regime had long been mounting, compounded by critiques of corruption and economic stagnation. A severe drought from 2006 to 2010 only worsened the situation, with over a million rural Syrians having been internally displaced to the cities.

Protests continued to grow, and when the fifteen children were tortured in March 2011, outrage erupted. This quickly led to one of the most complex armed conflicts of the twenty-first century. In just a few months, the Free Syrian Army had formed, and within two years the Islamic State had seized Syrian territory across the eastern provinces (as well as western Iraq). Numerous foreign actors were also involved, with Turkey, Gulf states, and Western states

[1] "Syria's Civil War: The Descent into Horror," Council on Foreign Relations (December 2024).

supporting various opposition groups while Russia and Iran backed the regime and provided military support. With intense proxy warfare, civilian infrastructure was heavily damaged across the country, including hospitals, water and electric plants, and schools. By the time a ceasefire somewhat took effect in 2020, granting a measure of autonomy to opposition groups under Abu Muhammad al-Julani's Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in the province of Idlib, around 500,000 people had been killed and over half of the pre-war population had been displaced either internally, or as refugees in the Middle East, Turkey, Germany, and beyond.[2]

Although the civil war was grueling, its end was swift. In November of 2024, with Assad allies Russia and Hezbollah (an Iranian-backed militia in Lebanon) weakened from their own wars, HTS was successful in launching an offensive that captured Aleppo and swept through Hama and Homs. On December 8, Assad fled for Moscow as Damascus fell to the opposition. HTS took over under al-Julani, who dropped his nom de guerre and resumed the use of his name Ahmad Hussein al-Sharaa, and installed himself as interim president in January 2025. In March, a constitutional declaration establishing a five-year transitional framework began, with executive powers concentrated in the presidency.

[2] "Conflict in Syria," Global Conflict Tracker, Council on Foreign Relations (updated February 2026).

Key Events in Post-Conflict Syria

November 27-December 8, 2024: A coalition of Syrian opposition forces led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) carries out an offensive against the Assad regime in which they capture Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, and other important towns.

December 8, 2024: HTS-led opposition forces capture Damascus, ending more than 50 years of rule by the Assad family. Thousands of political prisoners are freed from Sednaya prison, the Assad regime's most notorious torture facility.

December 2024: Syria's new authorities arrest nearly 300 people, including informants, pro-regime fighters and former soldiers, in a crackdown on regime loyalists.

January 2025: Ahmad al-Sharaa declares himself interim president, then transitional president.

January 2025: Turkey establishes its "Go-and-see" policy for Syrian refugees. UNHCR launches their Operational Framework for Voluntary Return of Syrian Refugees and IDPs, predicting that 1.5 million refugees and 2 million internally displaced persons will return in 2025.

February 24-25, 2025: A National Dialogue Conference is held in Damascus to lay the groundwork for an interim constitution, including several representatives from former opposition governments and civil society.

March 6-7, 2025: Political violence erupts in Latakia and Tartus when a group of pro-Assad regime fighters ambush the new government's security forces, leading to deaths of security force members and clashes between the two groups. Government forces and aligned armed groups regained military and security control of most of the

region, but the clashes are estimated to have led to approximately 1,400 civilians killed.

March 9, 2025: President al-Sharaa forms two committees to address the violence, one an independent committee of judges and lawyers to investigate the violence on the coast and hold those responsible accountable, and the other a "Supreme Committee for Civil Peace" with a mandate to engage with coastal residents and safeguard their security.

March 11, 2025: The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) sign a deal with the interim Damascus government to integrate SDF-controlled civilian and military institutions in the northeast with Syria's new state institutions, although details on how SDF military operation would be integrated into Syria's Defense Ministry are not specified.

March 13, 2025: An interim constitution drafted by the constitutional committee is signed by President al-Sharaa, establishing a five-year transitional period, outlining the powers of the new government, and scheduling elections for 2030.

March 29, 2025: President al-Sharaa announces a transitional government with 23 ministers. While ministers are predominantly male and Sunni Arab, the cabinet does include members who are Druze and Alawite, as well as a Christian woman. The transitional government does not include a prime minister, and al-Sharaa consolidates executive power.

April 28, 2025: More than 100 people were reportedly killed in fighting between gunmen from the Druze religious minority, the new security forces, and allied Sunni Islamist fighters in the outskirts of Damascus and in Suwayda governorates. The violence erupted after a blasphemous audio recording falsely attributed to a Druze religious leader was shared widely on social media. During the fighting, Israel conducted airstrikes, including one near the

Presidential Palace in Damascus on May 3, in what Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said should serve as a "clear message" that Israel would not allow Syrian forces to be sent South of Damascus.

May 13, 2025: U.S. President Donald Trump announces that the U.S. will lift all sanctions on Syria and normalize relations with Syria's new government. Ten days later, the U.S. Department of the Treasury issued Syria General License 25 (GL 25), authorizing transactions prohibited by the Syrian Sanctions Regulations, and the U.S. Department of State issues a Caesar Act waiver.

May 16, 2025: Qatar and Saudi Arabia settle Syria's outstanding World Bank debt of USD 15.5 million, allowing the World Bank Group to reengage with the country to fund reconstruction and economic recovery.

May 17, 2025: Decree establishes the National Authority for Transitional Justice and the National Missing Persons Authority.

May 17, 2025: Syria's Defense Minister announces all major military units have been merged under the Ministry of Defense, formalizing the integration of most armed factions into a unified national army. He announces a 10-day deadline for any remaining small groups to join the ministry.

May 20, 2025: European Union foreign ministers agree to lift the remaining economic sanctions on Syria, completing a process of sanctions removal that they began in January 2025. However, the E.U. will maintain weapons-related sanctions on Syria.

May 20, 2025: U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio testifies before the U.S. Senate that Syria may be only weeks away from "potential collapse and a full-scale civil war of epic proportions."

May 29, 2025: The Syrian government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a consortium of international companies led by UCC Holding and U.S. partners to develop major power generation projects in Syria, with a foreign investment valued at approximately $7 billion.

June 19, 2025: Syria carries out its first international bank transaction via the SWIFT system since the outbreak of its 14-year civil war, a milestone in its push to reenter the global financial system.

June 22, 2025: An attacker kills 25 people and injures 63 at a Greek Orthodox church in Damascus. The transitional government announces that the attacker was affiliated with ISIS.

July 5, 2025: Syria and the United Kingdom re-establish diplomatic relations following UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy's visit to Damascus.

July 7, 2025: The United States revokes the foreign terrorist organization (FTO) designation for al-Nusra Front, also known as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

July 13–19, 2025: Fighting breaks out between Druze and Bedouin armed groups in Suwayda and surrounding villages in southern Syria. The violence is triggered by the robbery and assault of a Druze merchant by Bedouin fighters on July 11. The Syrian transitional government deploys armed forces to the area between July 14-16. A ceasefire is announced on July 15, but it collapses on July 18 with renewed fighting. Israel launches airstrikes targeting Syrian government forces with the stated goal of defending the Druze community. At least 1,013 people — including 26 children and 47 women — are killed in Suwayda during the violence, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights.

July 18, 2025: U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Envoy for Syria Tom Barrack announces that Israel and Syria reached a ceasefire agreement "embraced by Turkey, Jordan and its neighbors."

July 19, 2025: President al-Sharaa announces another ceasefire to end the Southern Syria clashes. Syria also announces 47 investment agreements with Saudi Arabia valued at more than USD 6 billion.

July 24, 2025: U.N. Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, briefing the Security Council, stresses that it is "absolutely vital that all major Syrian groups and components" and women be included as electors and candidates in any electoral process, and notes the political transition is "not yet fully inclusive."

July 26, 2025: Israel and Syria hold talks in Paris, facilitated by international partners, on a security arrangement.

July 27, 2025: The chairman of Syria's Higher Committee for People's Assembly Elections announces that Syria will hold its first parliamentary elections since Assad's fall between September 15–20.

August 1, 2025: The Syrian government announces the formation of a fact-finding committee to investigate the July Suwayda violence.

August 21, 2025: U.N. experts issue an alarm over the wave of attacks on Syrian Druze communities, noting that at least 105 Druze women and girls were abducted by groups affiliated with the Syrian government, with 80 still missing. In at least three cases, Druze women were allegedly raped before being killed. Approximately 192,000 people are displaced by the fighting.

August 26, 2025: The U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) publishes a final rule removing the Syrian Sanctions Regulations from the Code of Federal Regulations, consistent with the earlier executive order lifting sanctions on Syria.

September 24, 2025: President al-Sharaa addresses the U.N. General Assembly in New York — the first Syrian head of state to do so since 1967 — pledging accountability and national rebuilding.

October 5–23, 2025: Syria holds indirect elections for 122 of 210 seats in a transitional People's Assembly, including 119 initial elections and, subsequently, another three in a by-election, constituting the first elections since the fall of the Assad regime. Elections are postponed in Suwayda, al-Hasakah, and Raqqa due to security and political issues. Of those elected, 13 percent are women and minorities.

October 6–7, 2025: Clashes break out between the interim government's forces and SDF forces in Aleppo. A ceasefire is agreed the next day, brokered by the U.S.

November 6, 2025: The U.N. Security Council votes 14–1 (China abstaining) to lift U.N. sanctions on President al-Sharaa and Interior Minister Anas Khattab, which had been imposed during their time as leaders of HTS.

November 10, 2025: Syria formally joins the U.S.-led Global Coalition against the Islamic State. Syrian Information Minister Hamza al-Mustafa notes the agreement is "political and until now contains no military components."

November 2025: President al-Sharaa meets with President Trump at the White House.

November 28, 2025: An Israeli raid and airstrikes on the town of Beit Jinn in southern Syria kills 13 people, including two children, and wounds 25.

December 4, 2025: A delegation from the U.N. Security Council visits Damascus — the first such visit since the Council's founding

in 1945 — meeting with authorities, civil society, and affected communities.

December 5, 2025: Canada removes Syria from its list of countries that support terrorism and revokes its designation of HTS as a terrorist organization.

December 13, 2025: Two American soldiers and a civilian interpreter are fatally shot by a gunman during a joint patrol near Palmyra. U.S. Central Command attributes the attack to an ISIS gunman, and President Trump vows retaliation.

December 26, 2025: An attack on an Alawite mosque in Homs kills and injures civilians. The extremist armed group Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah claims responsibility, one of a series of attacks it has conducted on minority communities.

December 29–30, 2025: The Syrian government introduces new banknotes for the Syrian pound to replace those issued under the Assad regime. A curfew is imposed in Latakia following sectarian violence in the city.

January 2026: The Syrian interim government forcefully reasserts control over vast areas of eastern Syria previously controlled by the Kurdish-led SDF and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), after the March 2025 integration agreement stalled over disputes about Kurdish autonomy.

January 29, 2026: The Syrian interim government and the SDF reach a new agreement to integrate Kurdish forces and governing institutions into national government structures.

January 31, 2026: Large protests break out in Suwayda, with Druze demonstrators calling for self-determination and accountability for the violence committed against their community in July 2025.

February 4, 2026: The Syrian Petroleum Company, Chevron, and Qatar's Power International Holding sign a memorandum of understanding at the Syrian Presidential Palace in Damascus for offshore oil and gas exploration.

February 14, 2026: U.S. Central Command announces that U.S. forces have killed or captured over 50 ISIS fighters and struck over 100 ISIS infrastructure targets in Syria over the preceding two months.

February 27, 2026: The U.N. Security Council's sanctions committee removes HTS from its ISIS/Al-Qaeda sanctions list, a significant step toward legitimizing Syria's interim government internationally.

February 28 – March 2026: Regional escalation following U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran creates spillover effects on Syria, with both Israeli and Iranian strikes targeting each other's assets and violating Syrian airspace, causing deaths and injuries on Syrian territory.

March 18, 2026: U.S. Special Envoy for Syria Thomas Barrack chairs a U.N. Security Council meeting on Syria, reaffirming the U.S. commitment to facilitating Syrian-led processes and supporting a unified Syria at peace with itself and its neighbors.

March 27, 2026: A U.N. human rights report concludes that more than 1,700 people were killed and nearly 200,000 displaced in the July 2025 Suwayda massacres, calling for greater accountability measures.

March 28, 2026: Individuals from the Sunni-majority town of Qalaat al-Madiq storm the neighboring Christian town of Suqaylabiyah, attacking shops, homes, and cars, before government forces restore order.

March 31, 2026: President al-Sharaa meets UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer in London to discuss opportunities for British businesses to contribute to Syria's reconstruction.

April 11, 2026: Hundreds of Druze hold protests in Suwayda, again calling for self-determination and accountability for the July 2025 violence.

May 11, 2026: The European Union announces plans to fully resume its 1978 cooperation agreement with Syria and begin formal talks on strengthening economic and security ties.

May 21, 2026: Syria joined the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law. Syria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ibrahim Olabi, submitted the accession document to the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva.

May 22, 2026: The U.S. Department of State releases a set of "Investor Guides" to encourage U.S. companies to consider investment opportunities in Syria, signaling American confidence in Syria as a destination for responsible investment across sectors including electricity, oil and gas, technology, telecommunications, real estate, and banking.

May 24, 2026: Legislative elections for the People's Assembly are held in the formerly Kurdish-controlled areas of Hasakah governorate and the Ain al-Arab (Kobane) district to fill eleven seats left vacant following the September 2025 elections, owing to the government's lack of control over the northeast at that time.

Early June 2026: The People's Assembly convenes its first session, following the September 2025 elections and the May 2026 supplementary elections in the northeast.

June 14, 2026: U.S. Special Envoy Tom Barrack indicates that Syria and Israel are close to concluding a de-escalation agreement; meanwhile, reporting notes that Syria's government has located remnants of the former Assad regime's clandestine chemical weapons program, including raw materials and munitions.

June 16, 2026: President Trump publicly suggests that Israel allow Syria to "deal with Hezbollah," asserting that Damascus would do a "better job," a proposal raising acute anxieties in Lebanon given Syria's long history of intervention there; al-Sharaa denies reports of Syrian intervention in Lebanon as "completely false."

Executive Summary

I. Overview

The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 ended more than six decades of authoritarian rule that had killed hundreds of thousands, displaced half the country's population, and reduced one of the world's most storied civilizations to rubble. Eighteen months later, Syria stands at a crossroads that will not remain open indefinitely. Sanctions have been lifted, embassies reopened, and billions in investment pledged. A transitional government is in place. Reconstruction has begun. But the window for getting the fundamentals right is narrow, and the costs of getting them wrong are severe.

This report examines eight policy domains critical to Syria's stabilization and recovery: security sector reform, minority protection, digital public infrastructure, designing a disability justice framework, strengthening Syrian civil society, reintegration of refugees and IDPs, rebuilding digital public infrastructure, external stakeholder alignment through diplomacy, and leveraging the removal of sanctions. Across each of these domains, a single pattern emerges. While Syria's transition has made tangible progress in restoring state authority, with ministries functioning, courts resuming operations, and security forces reconstituted, the harder work of building state legitimacy remains incomplete. Approximately one in every two Syrians remains displaced, either internally or externally as a refugee. Minority communities seek fuller representation in transitional institutions, government services are limited, and security gains remain fragile. These are not obstacles to dismiss but leading indicators of where Syria's efforts must now focus if the transition is to consolidate into durable

stability. This report presents a framework for Syria's stability, recovery, and renewal that builds on progress already achieved, and it outlines the steps needed to earn public trust and build strong institutions. The policy recommendations here are further intended to inform international thinking about Syria based on what is essential for transitioning into a future the Syrian people both want and deserve.

The most urgent priorities are:

- **Centralize the government's budget and payroll through the Ministry of Finance.** Syria cannot be governed until Damascus controls its own finances. As of spring 2026, the government operates without a published defense budget, no unified salary scale for military personnel, and no transparent mechanism for tracking how international support flows into or through state institutions. Some soldiers go months without pay; others receive salaries through consumer applications rather than treasury accounts. Turkey continues funding SNA factions directly, bypassing Damascus's chain of command entirely. But the problem extends beyond the military. Across ministries, the absence of centralized budget authority and auditable payroll systems creates conditions for misallocation, ghost payments, and the kind of institutional opacity that deters the foreign investment Syria desperately needs. Until the Ministry of Finance is established as the sole disbursing authority for all government personnel and financial operations — with a published budget, transparent pay scales, and a biometrically linked payroll — Damascus cannot credibly claim to command its institutions or account to its citizens and international partners for how reconstruction resources are being used.
- **Appoint a U.N. Special Envoy for Syria and a dedicated U.S. Syria envoy.** The vacancy of the U.N. Special Envoy position

is actively hampering coordination at a critical moment. The current U.S. Special Envoy portfolio spans Turkey, Iraq, and Syria — competing priorities that limit depth of engagement. Both appointments are low-cost, high-leverage, and overdue.

- **Restore the civil registry.** Since December 2024, Syria's civil registry has been severely disrupted nationwide. Without a valid identity document, a Syrian cannot access benefits, register a business, claim property, vote, or enroll a child in school. This is an administrative void through which reconstruction funds will be lost to fraud and misallocation. Restoring and digitizing the civil registry is a foundational prerequisite for nearly all reconstruction investments.
- **Establish measurable minority inclusion benchmarks.** Without a structured framework conditioning international support on verifiable progress on civilian protection, accountability, and equal protection under the law, external engagement will remain disconnected from conditions on the ground, and the conditions that caused the Druze and Alawite crises – which have already cost thousands of lives – will continue to compound.
- **Formalize the ISF-first model in the northeast and implement a DDR process that closes the reintegration gap.** ISF forces are integrating, a Kurdish governor is appointed, and the SDF's 60th Division is under organization within the MoD. The question, now, is whether this integration holds. As the January 2026 agreement progresses, SNA-affiliated units with anti-Kurd records should be geographically restricted from Kurdish-majority areas to limit their capacity as spoilers. Furthermore, Syria needs to implement a more comprehensive nationwide DDR program for fighters not absorbed into the MoD or ISF. The Syrian MoI, U.N., and international partners need to work together to

expand formal support for DDR programs, especially civilian reintegration.

Good governance for the Syrian people – safety, service delivery, rule of law – is in reach, but Syria's transition will not succeed on momentum alone. President al-Sharaa's transitional government and its international partners have a narrow window to provide the right kind of support before either complacency or renewed violence forecloses the options this moment has opened.

II. Key Recommendations

The following recommendations for the government of Syria and the international community are intended to inform broader international thinking on Syria and reflect the authors' view of what is necessary for a successful post-conflict transition. They are aimed at helping pave the way for a future the Syrian people want and deserve — one grounded in security, freedom, dignity, and economic opportunity.

A. Recommendations for the International Community

(1) External Engagement Recommendations

Reopen embassies in Damascus to promote stronger political and economic engagement.

The international community should reopen embassies in Damascus to strengthen political, economic, security, cultural, and social engagement. Without resident diplomatic missions that can engage daily with Syrian government counterparts, as well as actors in academia, civil society, and the private sector, prospects for effective coordination on reconstruction and foreign investment in Syria will be significantly hampered.

Create an International Policy and Aid Coordination Framework.

Promote the creation of an International Policy and Aid Coordination Framework, with Syrian government participation, that aligns security priorities and reconstruction incentives through coordinated, sequenced conditionality among key regional and international actors. Replace inconsistent external demands with a unified governance framework for Syrian stabilization and recovery.

Appoint a U.N. envoy for diplomatic reengagement.

Urgently appoint a U.N. envoy with cross-pillar leverage over political, humanitarian, and early recovery coordination.

Establish a discrete Israel-Turkey deconfliction mechanism.

Appoint a dedicated U.S. envoy to convene discrete bilateral engagement between Israel and Turkey that can help manage short-term escalation risks and begin working toward a long-term, mutually acceptable settlement.

(2) Security Recommendations

Establish and support diplomatic working groups.

The U.N. should appoint a full Special Envoy for Syria and establish a Special Political Mission with DDR chapter authority and a Security Monitoring mechanism. The U.S. should designate a senior director of assistant secretary equivalent with direct liaison authority to Syria's intelligence, defense, and interior ministries. The U.S. and regional partners should establish a hub-and-spoke system of diplomatic working groups to manage Turkish and Israeli security interests and minority integration.

Apply targeted legislative actions.

Increase security assistance to the MoI, conditional on reaching measurable minority recruiting benchmarks. Retain targeted sanctions on the MoD contingent on SSR progress. Oppose blanket economic sanctions.

Use U.S. leverage to advance a Syria Security agreement.

The U.S. should use its position to provide political cover for Damascus to take domestically risky actions while pressuring Israel to limit military action in Syria that undermines Syrian stability.

(3) Leverage the Lifting of Syrian Sanctions

Negotiate a settlement framework with judgment holders.

Following the removal of Syria's State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) designation, negotiate a structured settlement framework between the U.S. and Syria to resolve outstanding legal judgments entered against Syria over the course of its designation. Drawing on the Libya and Sudan models, explore burden-sharing models with contributions from regional partners. This would provide victims with at least partial recovery — more than they are likely to see otherwise — while restoring Syria's sovereign immunity.

Leverage delisting.

Leverage delisting to advance the prospects of stability and sustainable economic recovery in Syria. A stable, reconstructed Syria is a strong partner in counterterrorism and a viable market for foreign investment in infrastructure, energy, and natural resources — whereas continued instability fosters the conditions in which groups like ISIS thrive. Delisting should be coupled with a snapback mechanism should Syria resume support for terrorist groups.

(4) Recommendations for the Reintegration of Displaced Syrians

Guarantee voluntary return and protect refugee status during exploratory visits.
Host countries must ensure Syrian refugees do not lose their legal status for making temporary visits back to Syria. Return must remain voluntary, safe, and dignified, in accordance with UNHCR standards and the principle of non-refoulement.
Expand and formalize reintegration services with the Syrian state.
Establish formal partnerships between the transitional government and UNHCR, IOM, and host country agencies to streamline cash grants, short-term shelter, and legal assistance for returnees. Community reception centers should be expanded and recognized as entry points into state service systems.

(5) Digital Public Infrastructure Recommendations

Establish a coalition of public and private partners.
Syria's digital public infrastructure should be developed through a coordinated international coalition involving multilateral institutions, key regional states, private-sector technology firms, and implementation partners with experience in digital governance systems. The coalition must prioritize Syrian ownership by investing in local technical capacity, leveraging diaspora expertise, and adopting open-source systems.
Commission a full-scale feasibility and costing study.
A major collaborative study led by international think tanks and technical institutions, as well as Syrian experts is needed to

develop a detailed roadmap for Syria's digital public infrastructure, including cost estimates, implementation timelines, financing strategies, and risk assessments to guide donor coordination and private-sector engagement.

Security commitments.

Security safeguards for Syria's digital public infrastructure should be embedded from the outset through enforceable legal protections, citizen audit mechanisms that enable any Syrian to see who has accessed their data, and independent international oversight, with U.S. and donor support conditioned on adherence to these standards.

Sequence investments deliberately.

Reconstruction assistance to Syria should be sequenced to prioritize the development of digital public infrastructure. Donors should condition sector-specific investments—including social welfare programs, DDR initiatives, and education projects—on the prior establishment of enabling systems such as digital payment rails, biometric registries, and credential databases, even where doing so may require delaying more visible reconstruction efforts.

(6) Civil Society Recommendations

Create a CSO-led registration database.

Through a Civil Society Support Room, centralize independent documentation of registration requirements and timelines, approval outcomes, and operational restrictions.

Consolidate and institutionalize CSO representation.

Create a more unified coordinating mechanism capable of both representing Syria's diverse civic actors and articulating shared positions in formal negotiations.

B. Recommendations for the Government of Syria

(1) Security Recommendations

(a) Recommendations for Immediate Priorities

Launch an International Task Force for the Badiyah.

Establish an intelligence fusion and deconfliction cell, hosted by Damascus, to coordinate multinational operations against ISIS in the central Syrian desert.

Lead with Internal Security Forces in reintegrating the northeast.

Formalize the Ministry of the Interior-first model in achieving the January 2026 SDF agreement and as standard practice for integrating contested and minority majority areas. The ISF should accelerate minority representation by giving local commanders hiring authority in Raqqa, Dier ez-Zor, and Hasakah. Concurrently, the MoD should geographically restrict SNA-linked units from operating near Kurdish-majority areas outside formal inclusion in peace and reconciliation activities.

Approach Suwayda with patience.

Lead engagement with Suwayda through infrastructure investment rather than security deployments. Pursue moderate leaders as primary interlocutors with the Druze community. Suspend further MoD deployments south of Damascus pending political progress and seek security agreement with Israel through intermediary diplomatic channels.

(b) Recommendations for Security Sector Reform

Publish a National Defense Strategy.

Publish a coherent National Defense Strategy establishing a tiered security architecture including MoI-led counterinsurgency with subordinate MoD support for large-scale violence and ISF-exclusive authority over internal policing and community security. Restructure the MoD around a brigade-centric model better suited to Syria's actual threat environment, embed civilian command accountability provisions, operationalize the May 2025 Code of Conduct with enforceable command accountability standards, and establish a formal pathway for foreign fighters to continue service contingent on enhanced vetting and allegiance to the Syrian state.

Build stratified counterterrorism units.

Establish regionally assigned counterterrorism units alongside a single national-level capability. Formally designate the Al-Asa'ib al-Hamra (Red Bands) as the national CT unit and structure it under the General Intelligence Directorate to insulate it from factional pressures in the MoD and facilitate international intelligence-sharing.

Centralize payroll disbursement.

As an integral component of much-needed reform of the public financial management system, establish the Ministry of Finance as the sole disbursing authority for all MoD and MoI personnel, approve a formal defense budget, publish transparent pay scales, and link the existing unified ID system to biometric enrollment and centralized payroll.

Implement a formal DDR plan.

Seek external support, formalize the Tasmiya voluntary disarmament process and establish a Civilian Reintegration

Office under the MoI. Explicitly include former SAA members in the DDR process.

Modernize detention infrastructure.

Prioritize biometric enrollment, guard force professionalization, and the relocation of terrorism-related prisoners to segregated, purpose-built facilities. Apply the same biometric and professionalization standards while pursuing deradicalization programming in ISIS family camps.

Establish returnee vetting and monitoring systems.

Require pre-registration for returnees to request information from host-country security services. Digitize border screening procedures and maintain a centrally accessible database to facilitate diaspora repatriation.

Expand UXO remediation.

Prioritize clearance in areas most susceptible to extremist recruitment and deploy all security force elements in remediation efforts. Pursue additional funding through HALO Trust from European and Gulf states in support of remigration and stabilizing conditions for investment

(2) Minority Protections Recommendations

Establish constitutional guarantees for inclusive governance.

Establish constitutional guarantees for equal citizenship and core freedoms. Adopt flexible electoral systems that reflect Syria's diversity while preserving national cohesion. Uphold these principles through constitutional and independent institutional safeguards.

Ensure minority inclusion through representative governance.

Guarantee minority inclusion within the transitional government through meaningful representation in national institutions, equal access to political leadership, and a decentralized unitary model that strengthens local participation while preserving national sovereignty.

Build inclusive and trusted security structures.

Expand minority representation across security and military institutions, develop community-based policing in minority areas, and provide credible, equitable security guarantees to all communities.

Advance justice, accountability, and reintegration.

Implement individualized accountability for conflict-related crimes, establish reintegration pathways for non-criminal actors, and support credible independent investigations that balance justice with long-term stabilization.

Address high-risk minority flashpoints through integration and protection.

Support Kurdish integration within a unified state, advance Alawite reintegration and stabilization, and strengthen protection frameworks for smaller vulnerable communities in coordination with international partners.

Restore rights, property, and social trust.

Implement property restitution mechanisms, protect religious and cultural rights across communities, and enforce clear anti-incitement and anti-hate measures to strengthen long-term stability.

Embed inclusion in economic recovery.

Direct stabilization funding toward high-risk and mixed communities, ensure equitable access to economic opportunity,

and establish transparent mechanisms for regional resource distribution in coordination with international partners.

Condition normalization and reconstruction on inclusion.

Condition diplomatic normalization, sanctions relief, reconstruction assistance, and economic engagement on measurable progress in minority protection, institutional inclusion, and civilian security.

Monitor inclusion through national benchmarks.

Establish a National Minority Inclusion Benchmark Framework to track progress in civilian protection, security-sector representation, local participation, and safe return. Calibrate international assistance and diplomatic engagement to verified progress against these benchmarks.

(3) Disability Justice Recommendations

Strengthen legal protections and establish a national disability database.

Amend Legislative Decree No. 19 to fully align with CRPD obligations, including adoption of an internationally standardized disability classification system. Establish and regularly update a national disability database to enable evidence-based policy planning. Ensure that disability definitions and certification processes do not place undue administrative burdens on persons with disabilities or their families.

Centralize implementation authority while strengthening independent oversight.

Vest primary implementation authority for disability policy within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, with formal coordination mandates across the Ministries of Health,

Education, Justice, and Local Administration. Strengthen the National Council for Persons with Disabilities as an independent oversight body empowered to conduct periodic performance reviews, require transparent reporting, and make findings publicly available.

Enact disability employment incentive legislation and expand vocational training.

Enact tax credits and licensing incentives for businesses that meet defined thresholds for employing persons with disabilities, phased in gradually beginning with larger enterprises. Pair incentive legislation with targeted vocational training and job placement programs, with programming designed to address the distinct barriers faced by women, older adults, and persons with mobility or sensory impairments.

Build enforcement capacity through international partnerships.

Partner with the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) to rebuild judicial and administrative capacity for enforcing disability-related protections. Adopt the World Bank's community-driven development approach to disability inclusion, which centers the participation of persons with disabilities in identifying local priorities and shaping policy implementation.

Rebuild a coordinated, community-based primary care system.

Prioritize rebuilding a state-led health system in which healthcare is treated as a public good delivered through locally embedded teams responsible for defined populations. Emphasize prevention, home visits, early intervention, and continuous monitoring, with rehabilitation services integrated into primary care. Integrate mental health services, including trauma-informed care for PTSD, into primary care delivery.

Integrate inclusive education into community-based service model.

Invest in teacher training for inclusive education and improve school-based access to assistive technologies. Coordinate education reform with health and rehabilitation service delivery at the community level to ensure that children with disabilities are not excluded from early learning opportunities.

Expand and accelerate UXO clearance as disability prevention.

Prioritize ERW clearance in areas with the highest rates of civilian return and displacement. Pursue additional funding through the HALO Trust from European and Gulf partners. Frame clearance efforts explicitly as disability prevention: each injury avoided reduces long-term pressure on Syria's healthcare system and social services.

(4) Civil Society Recommendations

Transition to a notification-based registration and funding system with a clear presumption of approval.

Replace discretionary prior-authorization procedures with a notification-based system that includes clear timelines and a formal presumption of approval when MoSAL and MoFA fail to respond.

Organize joint audit trainings for CSO staff and ministry officials.

Provide joint audit trainings facilitated by third-party actors (IFIs, pro bono arms of international audit firms, or nonprofit partners with regional experience) to strengthen compliance capacity, reduce arbitrary dissolutions and improve transparency and accountability across both government and civil society.

Pilot an ombuds institution within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.
Establish a dedicated mechanism within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor providing CSOs with a neutral channel for appeals, consultation, and dispute resolution to strengthen trust between government and civil society.

(5) Recommendations for the Reintegration of Displaced Syrians

Prioritize civil documentation access for returnees.
As civil documentation is a prerequisite for accessing housing, employment, education, and political participation, provide pro bono legal services to returning Syrians to obtain civil documentation, identity papers, and passports, with expedited processes for children born in exile.
Establish legal support and interim housing for dispossessed property claimants.
Provide legal assistance for Syrians reclaiming homes that were destroyed, seized, or occupied during displacement, paired with affordable transitional housing while claims are adjudicated. Develop accessible, digitized land registries when resolving the backlog of competing claims.
Design an expanded educational curriculum for returning youth.
Develop an inclusive educational framework that accommodates varying academic levels, language backgrounds, and interrupted schooling histories.
Plan for a multi-year, phased return process and invest in absorption capacity.

Syria and its international partners should prepare for a decade-long return process in which households stagger migration as conditions improve. Investments in housing, services, and employment must precede large-scale return flows rather than lag behind them.

(6) Diplomacy Recommendations

Adopt a 12-Month sequencing package built around credible governance.

Prioritize five deliverables that converge across stakeholder interests: (1) launch a public financial management reform that channels all government revenues through the Ministry of Finance and disburses funds to line ministries and agencies exclusively in accordance with an approved budget, eliminating all extrabudgetary spending; (2) establish a border coordination cell with public reporting; (3) publish a quarterly counter-Captagon dashboard with a UNODC monitoring role; (4) advance early recovery projects under third-party-verifiable safeguards; and (5) maintain command discipline in the northeast and south to prevent local spoilers from triggering Turkish or Israeli escalation.

Frame transparency and monitoring as sovereignty-building.

Establish a "Delivery and Assurance Unit" attached to the president's office to interface with U.N. agencies and IFIs and produce a single implementation dashboard for investors and donors. Present safeguards domestically as anti-corruption instruments.

Pursue northeast integration as governance.

Sequence integration to prioritize border management, customs, and service delivery first, building joint command arrangements

gradually and avoiding gestures that signal collective punishment. Use U.N. Security Council language on stability and territorial integrity as multilateral validation when arguing domestically for sequencing over coercion.

Establish a refugee returns framework tied to absorption capacity.

Link district-level return facilitation to basic service restoration and housing rehabilitation, monitored through U.N. channels. This protects Syria's credibility with European donors for whom voluntary, dignified return is a condition of continued support.

(7) Financing Reconstruction

Seek alternative avenues of financing to fund reconstruction.

With Syria's post-conflict GDP in shambles after nearly fourteen years of civil war, the government must pursue alternative financing mechanisms for a reconstruction effort that international institutions estimate will exceed $200 billion. Options include:

- Resort to international institutions that assist with international security and capacity building. Examples include the United Nations Mine Action Service ("UNMAS") to assist with mine-clearing and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to provide capacity-building and training for Syrian government officials at no cost to the Syrian state.
- Mobilize coalition partners. Member states of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS share Syria's interest in regional security. Press them to contribute military training and security assistance.

- Solicit donor state funding. Remind prospective donors that Syria's humanitarian crisis remains acute and that early investment in stability serves their own long-term interests.
- Tap international foundations and trust funds. Pursue dedicated funding to address the substantial volume of Assad-era legal claims filed against the Syrian state — whether through litigation defense or negotiated settlement.