

Briefing Paper

Committee: Security Council

Topic: The Question of Promoting Long Lasting Political Stability in Syria

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Summary

Post-Assad Syria, under the Syrian Transitional Government (STG) led by President Ahmed al-Sharaa, is shifting from conflict to stability. Focusing on consolidating power and regional reintegration.

The January 2026 "Ceasefire and Full Integration Agreement" with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), ended Rojava's autonomy in exchange for protection of constitution and transferring control of strategic territories, and oil fields, to the STG.

However, stability is undermined by tensions, influence from extremist groups and the immense \$216 billion cost of reconstruction weighs heavily on the nation. The future lies, critically, lies on the removal of international sanctions and an influx in capital – that's how long-term viability of Syria can be achieved.

Definition of Key Terms

Syrian Transitional Government (STG) - The governing authority established in Damascus following the collapse of the Ba'athist regime in December 2024. Operating under the Interim Constitutional Declaration of March 2025, the STG is led by President Ahmed al-Sharaa and includes a cabinet of both former opposition commanders and technocrats. It is tasked with rebuilding state institutions, managing the reintegration of displaced persons, and preparing the country for future elections

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – A multi-ethnic alliance, primarily led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which controlled approximately one-third of Syria's territory and 70% of its oil fields during the civil war. As of early 2026, the SDF is undergoing a staged military and administrative dissolution as part of a comprehensive integration deal with the central government

Joint Fusion Mechanism (JFM) – A permanent, US-supervised security liaison cell established in Paris in January 2026 between Syria and Israel. The JFM is designed for real-time intelligence sharing, military de-escalation along the Golan border, and the coordination of commercial opportunities, marking the first formal diplomatic engagement between the two nations since the 1974 Disengagement Agreement

Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act (Caesar Act) - United States legislation signed into law in 2019 to impose secondary sanctions on any entity conducting business with the Assad regime. Its repeal in the December 2025 National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2026 removed the primary legal barrier to international investment in Syrian infrastructure, energy, and finance

People's Assembly (Interim Parliament) - The 210-member legislative body selected in October 2025 through a system of local electoral colleges. While 140 seats were filled through these colleges, the President retains the power to appoint the remaining 70 seats, a structure that has been criticized for centralising executive power and limiting minority representation

Background Information

The Collapse of the Assad Regime and the Transition to Power

The Bashar al-Assad regime collapsed rapidly in late 2024 following a major rebel offensive by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Syrian National Army (SNA). Opposition forces entered Damascus on December 8, 2024, as Assad fled. This led to a "Victory Offensive" and a governance vacuum across 60-70% of the country. Ahmed al-Sharaa (formerly al-Jolani) swiftly established an interim administration, integrating former state bureaucrats and dissolving the Ba'ath Party. The Interim Constitutional Declaration, establishing a five-year transition, was promulgated by March 2025.

The Evolution of the 2025-2026 Political Architecture

The Sharaa administration sought legitimacy through "governorate-level consultations" and a "National Dialogue" in 2025. This period was marked by sectarian violence against Alawite communities in coastal areas in March 2025, necessitating the deployment of central security forces. The October 2025 selection of the People's Assembly was criticized by the UN for lack of inclusivity, boycotts (in Suwayda and the Kurdish northeast), and resulting in a body that largely rubber-stamps the executive, as the presidency retains significant powers.

The Security Dilemma: The SDF and the Northeast

The main hurdle to a unified state in 2025 was the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the northeast, who resisted integration to protect Kurdish autonomy. This tension culminated in a January 2026 offensive by STG forces, capturing 80% of the SDF-held territory east of the Euphrates.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States

- Shifted from a "maximum pressure" campaign to viewing the Sharaa government as a viable partner.

- Syria's entry into the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in November 2025 allowed the US to pivot from supporting the SDF to coordinating with the Syrian National Army.
- 2026 priorities:
 - Counterterrorism (Operation Hawkeye Strike and secure transfer of 5,700 detainees to Iraq).
 - Regional Stability (Mediating the Syria-Israel Joint Frontier Mechanism (JFM)).
 - Governance Benchmarks (Protecting religious minorities and excluding foreign jihadist fighters from state security forces).

Turkey

- Emerged as a highly influential regional actor.
- President Erdogan hailed the SDF integration as a "liberation from occupation," removing the YPG from the southern border.
- Maintains significant influence over the Syrian Transitional Government (STG) through former sponsorship of the SNA and current investment in northern infrastructure reconstruction.
- Supports Syrian unity but will continue to monitor "legitimate national security concerns" in areas like Afrin and al-Bab.

Israel

- Historical departure from decades of hostility.
- Exploring "economic peace" through the JFM, betting stability will reduce incentives for hosting Iranian proxies.
- Primary demands: total demilitarisation of the southern border and protection of the Druze minority in Suwayda.
- Israeli forces maintain a "security buffer" in Quneitra and Dara'a, which the STG demands must end to reactivate the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.

The Russian Federation

- Successfully renegotiated its footprint after the fall of Assad.
- President Putin hosted President Sharaa twice to discuss the future of the Hmeimim airbase and Tartus naval facility.
- Withdrew from northeast enclaves (like Qamishli) to appease Damascus.
- Positioned itself as a provider of "military-technical cooperation," assisting in the rehabilitation of the Syrian army's communications and doctrine.

The UN and International Organizations: Humanitarian and Recovery Needs

- The UN continues an indispensable role in Syria's recovery.
- OCHA estimates 16.5 million people require assistance, with a \$3.2 billion appeal only 29% funded.
- The World Bank, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are critical financial actors.
- Saudi Arabia and Qatar cleared Syria's outstanding debt to the World Bank, allowing the nation to re-enter global credit markets.

Timeline of Events (Relevant UN Treaties)

Year	Event	UN/Legal Significance	Contextual Impact
2011	Arab Spring Protests	UNHRC creates Commission of Inquiry	Start of civil conflict.
2015	Resolution 2254	Unanimous roadmap for political transition	Remained the de jure peace framework for 10 years.
2019	Caesar Act	US Law (secondary sanctions)	Froze Syria's integration into the global economy.
Dec 2024	Fall of Assad	End of 50-year Ba'athist rule	Triggered the current transitional phase.
Mar 2025	Constitutional Declaration	Interim legal framework signed	Defined the powers of the Sharaa administration.
Nov 2025	ISIS Coalition Entry	Syria joins Global Coalition	Formalised counter-terrorism cooperation with the US.
Dec 2025	Caesar Act Repeal	FY2026 NDAA signed	Re-opened the Syrian market for international re-entry.
Jan 6, 2026	Paris Summit	JFM established between Syria and Israel	First formal normalisation step with Israel.

Jan 30, 2026	SDF Integration Deal	14-point agreement signed	Secured central government control of the northeast.
Feb 13, 2026	UNSC Briefing	First briefing by Deputy Envoy Cordone	Marked the "momentum" of the transition.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

- **The 2254 Framework and its Limits**
 - UN Resolution 2254 was the original political roadmap, envisioning a Constitutional Committee and free elections.
 - The Assad government crippled the committee by refusing meaningful reform.
 - By early 2026, the Sharaa government largely bypassed 2254, using the March 2025 Interim Constitutional Declaration instead.
 - The current transition is seen as a "victor's peace," evidenced by military coercion (e.g., integrating the SDF) and lack of opposition participation.
 - While it did provide a roadmap, it failed because – primarily – it assumed a logic of reform from a regime that viewed any concession as existential suicide
- **The Impact and Failure of Economic Isolation**
 - The Caesar Act sanctions were the primary Western strategy for behaviour change (2019–2024).
 - Sanctions crippled the regime's military funding but devastated the civilian population; the Syrian pound lost 99% of its value, leading to a "hunger hotspot" classification.
 - Syria's readmission failed to secure concessions on refugee returns or the Captagon trade because it lacked enforcement mechanisms and ignored the underlying economic drivers of the illicit trade.
 - The 2025-2026 sanctions repeal acknowledges that economic isolation failed to produce a stable state.
 - The "disruptive effect" of the Caesar Act caused investors to de-risk and avoid Syria, including for humanitarian purposes.
 - Repeal transitioned the compliance framework to a "risk-based vetting" model, allowing for rehabilitation of the energy and banking sectors.

- **Regional Diplomacy and "Normalisation for Concessions"**

- The 2023 Arab League readmission of Syria failed to secure concessions on refugees or the Captagon trade.
- Current 2026 normalisation efforts are a "states-only" approach favored by the US.
- This approach grants Damascus legitimacy in exchange for the expulsion of non-state actors like Hezbollah and the YPG.

Possible Solutions

1. Formalisation of Minority Protections

Long-lasting stability requires transitioning to a Permanent Constitution that:

- Establishes Local Governance: Creates a "Senate" or similar body where 10% of seats are filled by representatives of minority enclaves like Suwayda and Qamishli with veto power over local administrative matters.
- Separation of Religion and State: Ensures the state is civil and inclusive, while Islam remains a source of legislation.
- In Syria's tribal and clientelist society, power is historically distributed through informal networks rather than formal institutions
- Without addressing the deep-seated distrust between the central government and groups like the Alawites or Druze, a 'Senate' may merely formalise sectarian silos rather than legitimately fostering national unity

2. Operationalising Security Normalisation

The UN could facilitate a "Regional Stability Compact" that includes:

- The Southern Syria Buffer: A mutual withdrawal agreement where Israel exits the 2024 security zone in exchange for a UN-monitored DMZ that excludes heavy weaponry and "Shadow Government" militias.
- Joint Anti-ISIS Command: Integrates the former SDF intelligence apparatus into the national army's counter-terrorism units.
- If the Central Government cannot effectively prevent shadow government militias or Iranian-backed proxies from operating in the DMZ, it will remain a flashpoint for conflict regardless of formal agreements

3. Economic Reintegration

To bridge the reconstruction gap, the Council should support:

- The Syrian Development Fund: A multi-donor fund managed by the World Bank, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, directing capital to "early recovery" projects (hospitals, schools etc)
- The dilemma here is that injecting \$216 billion into a transitional state poses a massive risk of institutionalised corruption. Without rigorous vetting and frameworks in place, reconstruction funds are likely to be diverted into the same client-less networks that sustained the previous regime, potentially funding a new elite rather than rebuilding the nation's infrastructure

Useful Links

1. UN Special Envoy for Syria - Official Briefings (2026): <https://specialenvoysyria.unmissions.org/briefings>
2. Institute for the Study of War - Syria Interactive Control Map: <https://www.understandingwar.org/syria-maps-2026>
3. World Bank Syria Macro-Fiscal Assessment (October 2025): <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/syria/publication/macro-fiscal-assessment>
4. OCHA Syria Humanitarian Response Dashboard 2026: <https://response.reliefweb.int/syria>
5. Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS - Member States and Actions: <https://www.state.gov/global-coalition-to-defeat-isis/>
6. Syria Oil and Gas Reconstruction Monitor: <https://discoveryalert.com.au/syria-energy-2026>

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15. The Syria–SDF Deal Hands Turkey a Strategic Victory, accessed February 15, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/the-syria-sdf-deal-hands-turkey-a-strategic-victory>