

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES REGARDING SYRIA

6332 Words (22 pages)

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Overview

After the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria in December of last year, the country and new government face economic challenges, ongoing security threats, concerns over extremism, and geopolitical tensions among regional and global powers, including Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel.

Given these complexities, the United States faces a critical decision on how to engage with post-Assad Syria. This report outlines key policy recommendations aimed at guiding American strategy in a way that promotes regional stability, addresses security risks, and prevents adversarial influence from dominating Syria's future.

Introduction to the Syrian Civil War and its Aftermath

The collapse of President Bashar al-Assad's regime on December 8, 2024, marked a turning point for Syria, ending decades of rule by the al-Assad dynasty and setting the stage for a difficult period of change after over a decade of fighting, destruction, and devastation in the Syrian Civil War. The conflict was initially sparked by widespread discontent over high unemployment, corruption, and lack of political and civil freedoms. Initial peaceful protests were met with violent suppression by President Bashar al-Assad's regime, escalating into a full-scale civil war, eventually involving multiple pro and anti-government factions. The conflict was not a single, uniform struggle, but rather a messy and complex war involving the Assad regime and its allies (Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah), opposition groups ranging from moderate rebels, such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), to extremist Islamist factions like ISIS, as well as Kurdish forces seeking their own independence (Marks, 2018).

Over the past decade and a half, the conflict resulted in over half a million deaths and displaced nearly fourteen million people, which is more than half of Syria's prewar population

(Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). Moreover, the severe economic impacts - the destruction of businesses, infrastructure, and livelihoods - can be clearly seen through tracking Syria's GDP; the figure went from a high of over 67 billion USD in 2011 to a low of just over 12 billion in 2020 (World Bank Group). This destruction gave rise to grave humanitarian situations such as the fact that "the health infrastructure in Syria is severely strained, more than ever," according to Christina Bethke, acting WHO Representative for the country (Mishra, 2024); or the 7,000 schools that lay damaged or destroyed, leaving about 2 million children without access to an education (UNICEF). Beyond the immediate human and economic toll, the civil war has left a lasting impact on Syria's political fabric. Years of sustained violence eroded any semblance of national unity and have only deepened existing sectarian and ideological divides. Yet even with the destruction and division within Syria, for years the conflict was frozen, with the zones of control between the different factions relatively unchanging.

The situation changed in December of last year, when a significant shift occurred as opposition forces, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), working in conjunction with the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), launched a decisive offensive. The campaign quickly saw the anti-government forces gained ground in the Western half of Syria, capturing major population centers such as Aleppo and Homs. It culminated in the fall of Damascus on December 8, 2024, when Assad fled to Russia with his top advisors, leaving government forces scattered and without leadership. The offensive thereby marked the end of the decades-long Assad regime (Radford, 2024).

In the immediate aftermath of Assad's exit, HTS emerged as the dominant force in Syria's new political landscape. Known for its jihadist roots, HTS now finds itself in the difficult position of transitioning from a militant group to a governing body. Its leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa (formerly Abu Mohammad al-Julani/al-Jolani), has assumed an interim leadership role, a move

that has sparked both cautious optimism and significant concern among Syrian citizens and international observers alike. The group's controversial ideology also raises questions about its long-term commitment to inclusive and democratic governance, although there have been assurances from Sharaa and the new government of its commitment to secularism, democracy, and human rights (Center for Strategic and International Studies).

Moreover, it's important to keep in mind that the conflict in Syria hasn't completely ended simply because the previous government has fallen. Recent violence in coastal cities, threatens to deepen sectarian divides. Syria has also found itself on the defensive against attacks from Hezbollah and Israel. Economically, Syria is still struggling with severe challenges. Years of war have devastated infrastructure, hampering the efforts of the interim government to rebuild. The recent agreement between the interim government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, recognizing Kurdish constitutional rights, offers a glimmer of hope for broader national reconciliation (Sawers, 2025).

The international community's role remains crucial. While Western nations have called for a democratic transition, the presence of Islamist elements within the new leadership complicates diplomatic relations. Moreover, regional actors, including Iran, Turkey, and Russia, continue to exert influence, each pursuing their strategic interests in the evolving Syrian landscape.

As Syria embarks on this uncertain path, the imperative for a comprehensive US policy response is clear. Stability in Syria is vital not only for regional security but also for global counterterrorism efforts, given the country's history as a breeding ground for extremist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates. A prolonged power vacuum could enable these organizations to regroup, posing a direct threat to US national security and international stability. Additionally, Syria's geographic position at the crossroads of the Middle East makes its stability

crucial for regional actors, including key American allies such as Jordan, Israel, and Turkey, all of whom have security concerns tied to Syria's fate. Finally, the US also has a military base within Syria's borders, giving it an inherent security interest in the nation (Salih, 2025).

The ongoing refugee crisis, which has displaced millions, continues to strain neighboring countries and Europe, fueling broader geopolitical tensions and humanitarian challenges. Moreover, adversarial powers like Russia and Iran have long leveraged Syria as a strategic foothold to expand their influence in the region, often in direct opposition to US interests. Without a well-defined policy approach, the US risks ceding ground to these actors, further complicating efforts to foster a democratic and stable Middle East. A nuanced strategy that balances diplomatic engagement, economic assistance, and security cooperation is essential to ensuring that Syria's transition leads to long-term peace and stability, rather than prolonged conflict and fragmentation.

Previous American Involvement in Syria

Prior to understanding how the current situation in Syria relates to American interests and creating a potential response from the US, one must understand the previous involvement of the United States in Syria, as well as why it was eventually scaled back.

In the early stages of the Syrian uprising, the US government imposed sanctions on the Assad regime in response to its violent crackdown on peaceful protesters. As the conflict escalated into a civil war, the US began providing non-lethal aid to opposition groups, including the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which consisted of defected Syrian military personnel opposing Assad's rule. This support aimed to bolster moderate factions within the opposition, promoting a democratic transition.

In 2013, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) initiated a covert program, codenamed "Timber Sycamore," to train and equip selected Syrian rebel groups. This initiative sought to strengthen moderate opposition forces against both the Assad regime and extremist factions emerging within the conflict (Mazzetti et. al, 2017). Concurrently, the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014 prompted the US to expand its involvement, leading to the formation of a global coalition conducting airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria. The US also supported Kurdish-led forces, notably the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which played a role in reclaiming territories from ISIS control, in addition to fighting for their own autonomy. (Associated Press, 2019)

The US conducted direct military actions against the Assad regime, notably the missile strike on Shayrat Airbase in April 2017, in response to the regime's use of chemical weapons on civilians. This was around the same time that Russia's support for the Assad regime was at its highest, with the Russian air force also conducting airstrikes against anti-government forces and civilians. Thus, this involvement brought the United States closer towards conflict with Russia, although there were no major direct military confrontations between the two nations (Taddonio, 2022).

Therefore, to summarize the causes behind American involvement in Syria, an initial entry into the situation was likely due to concerns over democracy in the wake of the Assad regime's suppression of protestors. This pro-democracy line was not too unlike certain aspects of American foreign policy towards Ba'athist Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s, though there were certainly key differences to be found. As the conflict escalated into a prolonged civil war, the US became increasingly involved to counter the growing influence of extremist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates, which posed direct threats to both regional and international security. To some extent, the US also sought to counter the influence of its geopolitical adversaries, such as

Russia and Iran, as well as provide support to its allies who had more direct interests in Syria, such as Turkey and Jordan.

However, in December 2018, President Donald Trump announced a complete withdrawal of US troops from Syria, arguing that ISIS had been territorially defeated and that continued military engagement was unnecessary. The decision, part of a broader strategy to reduce US involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts, faced criticism from allies who feared a power vacuum that could allow ISIS to regroup and expand Russian and Iranian influence. The withdrawal also strained US relations with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who were soon targeted by Turkish military operations. In response to these concerns, the administration partially reversed course, keeping around 400 troops in Syria, primarily to protect oil fields and support counterterrorism efforts (IISS, 2019).

Following the fall of the Assad regime on December 8, 2024, the US has been reassessing its role in Syria. HTS's leadership over the new government has raised concerns, given its extremist origins. The US Department of State also looks to the necessity of an inclusive, civilian-led government in Syria and is monitoring the actions of the new government under al-Sharaa, to inform policy in the near future (Salih, 2025). While recent government actions under the new Trump administration, such as the suspending of USAID operations, create new considerations and raise some concerns, the American government must nonetheless formulate a detailed approach towards Syria and address concerns regarding extremism, security threats, and the involvement of US adversaries in the region.

However, in order to create any sort of policy, key concerns must be analyzed, and the stances and involvement of other powers within Syria must be understood, as well as how both relate back to the current HTS-led Syrian administration.

The Positions and Involvement of Key Powers

Russia

As the largest backer of the Assad regime, providing military support as mentioned prior, the Russian Federation clearly had a large stake in its political integrity. Indeed, the fall of the regime and the apparent inability of Russia to support a key ally “represents a severe blow to its policies,” according to an analysis from the Centre on Eastern Studies (Rodkiewicz et. Chawryło, 2024). It brings into question all Russian military operations in the region, as well as Russia’s relationship with its other allies, such as Iran and Hezbollah. The country's military reputation could also be further tarnished if the void left by the regime's fall leads to the rise of extremist factions or greater instability, undermining Russian efforts to position itself as a regional stabilizer.

However, a decrease in the effectiveness of Russia’s support was no mistake, and was part of a larger pivot in foreign policy towards Ukraine. Directly prior to the fall of the Assad regime, the Russian government stopped referring to anti-government forces as “terrorists,” instead calling them “armed opposition” and “the new authorities,” after a period of reductions in support (Poroskoun, 2025). Moreover, according to a report from Nikolay Kozhanov for the Chatham House, the choice was, “to repeat the fate of the USSR in Afghanistan and take full financial, economic and military responsibility for Assad’s Syria, fully financing its economy and fighting for the Syrian army – or to step back” (Kozhanov, 2024). In other words, Russia could have either put all its resources and strength behind the clearly unstable Assad regime, or it could place a larger emphasis on its own war in Ukraine, which was of more geopolitical importance to President Putin. Evidently, Russia went with the latter, where its increased strength and influence are especially vital with a potential peace deal now on the table (Troianovski, 2025).

As it stands, “Russia is removing significant amounts of military equipment from Syria,” which is concentrated around three main bases - the Khmeimim Air Base, the Tartus Naval Base, and the Qamishli base in Kurdistan - which is already a great reduction from its peak capacity prior to 2022 (Poroskoun, 2025). At the same time, Russia hasn’t been reluctant to recognize the new Syrian government, with President Putin reportedly telling Syrian President Sharaa that he supports “efforts to stabilise the situation in the country,” and the Kremlin engaging in wider diplomatic communications with the new Syrian government (Reuters, 2025).

Therefore, it would appear that Russia is attempting to minimize its losses regarding the fall of the Assad regime as part of a pivot to Ukraine, with a willingness to collaborate with Sharaa’s government. This represents less of a concern for the United States when it comes to Russian involvement in Syria than it might have initially appeared, although the presence Russia *does* still maintain must be closely monitored. Finally, Russian diplomatic involvement will undoubtedly shift Syria geopolitical alignment in the months and years to come, which could be a door towards a renewed Russian influence in the country, another factor for the US to keep in mind when drafting its policy towards the new Syrian government.

Iran

Iran was another major backer of the Assad regime, providing “missiles...to Syria in addition to intelligence cooperation, with Tehran reportedly providing equipment and training to Syrian operatives” (Risseuw, 2018). Since 2011, Iran has this assistance has totaled between 30 and 50 billion dollars, including “military aid, oil transfers, and logistical support.” Iran’s reaction to the fall of the Assad regime was stronger than that of Russia, with Ayatollah Khomeini condemning it as orchestrated by foreign powers. However, Iran was unable to effectively come to the aid of Syria last year due to the draining of its political and military

strength as a result of its recent conflict with Israel, including to prop up Hezbollah against Israeli attacks on Southern Lebanon. Reportedly, Iraqi Shiite militias that had previously supported Iranian interests in Syria also refused to reenter the conflict as a result of domestic concerns and the potential cost of war (Azizi, 2024).

As a result, “Iran's once strong presence in Syria has almost entirely vanished,” according to a recent NPR article (Myre et. Rizkallah, 2025). This sentiment was corroborated by reports from the ground, as multiple Iranian military bases were left completely abandoned, often with sensitive documents left behind (Kohnavard, 2025). A top Iranian general even admitted that Iran was “defeated very badly” in Syria (Fassihi, 2025).

The prospect for collaboration between Iran and the new Syrian government seems improbable, unlike in the case of Russia, as Iran's ties to Hezbollah, a group actively opposing the new Syrian government, create a further vested interest for Iran's own opposition. Hezbollah has been a key proxy for Iran in the region, and its active opposition to a post-Assad government reflects the broader challenges Iran faces in adapting to the changing political landscape in Syria. Sharaa also criticized Iran in an interview, stating that, “The presence of Iranian militias under the previous [Syrian] regime posed a strategic threat to the entire region” (Myre et. Rizkallah, 2025). This has echoed the sentiments from Syrian civilians, for whom Iran's involvement, which included boots on the ground, had a major impact in their lives. One Syrian who lived near an Iranian base also claimed Iran's involvement “was an occupation. Iranian occupation” (Kohnavard, 2025).

In light of these tensions, it seems increasingly unlikely that Iran can maintain the same level of influence over Syria in a post-Assad environment, particularly if the new government seeks to restore national autonomy and appease the Syrian populace's desire for freedom from foreign interference. Iran's influence and policy moving forward must definitely be kept in mind,

especially with its proxy Hezbollah engaging in clashes with the Syrian military this March, prior to a ceasefire (Chehayeb, 2025). However, a decreased Iranian presence provides the opportunity for a geopolitical realignment for Syria, which could be done by promoting unity between the US and Syria in their mutual stance against Iranian intervention.

Israel

As part of its larger confrontation with its adversaries in the region - mainly Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran - Israel has both invaded Syria from the Golan Heights, and has also launched attacks on other key strategic locations and facilities. Immediately after the Assad regime fell, the Israeli air force launched over 100 air strikes on military targets in multiple locations across the country, such as “A research centre with suspected links to chemical weapon production,” as well as missile and air defense installations, and naval targets (Binley, 2024).

The official justification for these attacks has been countering potential extremism in Syria, noting the instability. It hopes to both keep weapons out of the hands of groups who might use them against Israel’s population or military, as well as establish an additional buffer zone of 60 kilometers to defend itself against a potential attack (Tyab, 2024). It’s hard to say how likely such as an attack on Israel would be, although ISIS and Hezbollah have previously been involved in the conflict, and Sharaa’s own HTS previously had ties to Al-Qaeda. (Bateman, 2024). However, Sharaa has publicly distanced the new government, as well as himself, from previous extremist ties. He claims the new government will be secular and respect the rights of every religious group. Therefore, it may be too early to tell if Israel’s concerns are justified. Additionally, UN Secretary-General Antonio Gutierrez urged Israel to halt its bombing campaign, calling it an “act of aggression” (VOA News, 2024).

Therefore, Israel's role in the conflict is a complicating factor for an American policy response. As a longstanding ally of the United States, Israel's security concerns and proactive military operations are linked to American strategic interests. Yet, its recent actions in Syria have not only destabilized an already volatile situation but have also strained relations with the newly established interim Syrian government. Both Israeli and Syrian concerns will need to be addressed when drafting policy, although given Israel's military power and demonstrated desire to protect its own security from any perceived threat, its potential to destabilize Syria must be prevented.

Turkey

Throughout the conflict, Turkey was one of the most important external backers of the anti-government forces, with the Syrian National Army (SNA) effectively being a Turkish-controlled entity. Ankara has not only provided political and military support to various opposition groups since the 2011, but has also engaged in supplying arms (including drones) and intelligence to the SNA (Barkey, 2024). At the same time, Turkey has directly and militarily opposed the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and Peshmerga, the Kurdish militia in Syria, demonstrating its complex motivations for its involvement in the conflict.

According to a report from the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Turkey's motivations included preventing a Kurdish independence movement, security threats from Syria, and the opportunity to assert itself on the world stage. First and foremost, Turkey's attacks on the PKK and Peshmerga are closely related to the fact that it has the largest Kurdish population in the region within its own borders, a region that has an active independence movement which could be emboldened by Kurdish gains in Syria. The PKK is a Kurdish militant and political organization that has waged an armed insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984, and

internationally recognized as a terrorist group (Britannica, 2025). Beyond the Kurdish issue, Turkey's involvement in Syria has also been driven by broader security concerns. The prolonged instability in Syria posed significant risks, including an influx of refugees, cross-border terrorism, and the potential for extremist groups to exploit the chaos. With millions of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, Ankara had sought to create a buffer zone in northern Syria to facilitate their repatriation and reduce domestic political pressures, which can now be carried out more effectively with a friendlier government in Syria (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2016).

Finally, Turkey's intervention has served as a means to bolster its geopolitical influence in the region. By engaging in negotiations with both the US and NATO as well as Russia and Iran, Turkey has sought to assert itself as a dominant regional power. More recently, its backing of both HTS and the SNA make it likely to be a key player in shaping post-Assad Syria (International Crisis Group, 2025).

Therefore, like in the case of Israel, Turkish concerns must be taken into account when creating an American policy response. Though it will be likely be easier due to the preexisting Turkish backing of the SNA, which helped the new government gain power, Turkey's opposition towards the PKK is nonetheless a complicating factor. Additionally, owing to Turkey's interest in improving its regional influence, their involvement within a potential solution must be carefully weighed.

Internal Situation and Challenges

As mentioned prior, solutions are complicated by the internal situation in Syria, which remains somewhat fragmented, the effects of which are compounded by the aftermath of the social and economic devastation of the civil war.

Fortunately, the Syrian government was able to recently reach a deal with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which control the majority-Kurdish regions in the Northeast of Syria. Specifically, it integrates the de facto independent civilian and military Kurdish institutions into the wider Syrian administration by the end of the year. The leader of the SDF, Mazloun Abdi, called the deal “real opportunity to build a new Syria” (Berry, 2025). It is also compelling evidence of the new government’s willingness to collaborate with other parties, as well as its dedication to guaranteeing rights and freedoms to the minority groups within the nation. Although the deal will undoubtedly reduce tensions regarding the Kurds, the nominally terrorist PKK is still active in the region. Turkey also views the SDF itself as an extension of the PKK, raising further concerns over complications that could arise from Turkish involvement (International Crisis Group, 2025).

Moreover, other instances of violence within Syria still continue, even if Kurdish tensions have been partially addressed. Widespread attacks have been reported against the country’s Alawites, a minority Islamic-sect that has historically had tensions with the wider Muslim population. According to the most reliable reports, the violence was driven in coastal areas by remnants of pro-Assad militia groups, although some claim that pro-government forces might have also been involved. (Reuters, 2025). According to reports from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, almost a thousand civilians, in addition to hundreds of militants on both sides, have been killed, although the number is likely to increase after the writing of this report. Regardless, al-Sharaa has vowed to “hold those responsible accountable” (Abdo et. al, 2025). Overall, the anti-Alawite attacks tarnish the record of the new government, even though the exact perpetrators have not been conclusively identified.

There have also been concerns about general extremism, in addition to the specific instances of violence that are occurring. Many, such as the Israeli government, have pointed to

the Islamic State (IS) and its groups, such as ISIS and ISIL, as potential sources of extremism. It's important to note that IS groups have been largely defeated in the country, with the loss of virtually all territory by 2019, as a result of direct opposition from essentially every other group and alliance involved in the conflict (BBC, 2019). Even then, Colin P. Clarke, the director of research at the Soufan Group, argues that the group's recent global surge may only be exacerbated by recent instabilities in Syria, making them a renewed concern (Clarke, 2025).

The more relevant concern now is regarding HTS, which, as mentioned previously, was an extremist group itself. It has its origins in the former Al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra but has since attempted to rebrand itself as a more pragmatic and nationalist Syrian opposition group rather than a global jihadist movement. For instance, President al-Sharaa has urged that the intends to form an "inclusive transitional government representing diverse communities that will build institutions and run the country until it can hold free and fair elections." (Reuters, 2025). Moreover, in addition to the deal reached with Kurdish forces, Sharaa hosted delegations from multiple Christian denominations within Syria on New Year's Eve in an effort to assure them that that his government will respect the rights of all Syrian ethnoreligious groups (Al Jazeera, 2024). Overall, there *has* been a lack of significant reports of the new Syrian government instigating or carrying out violence against any minority groups, as well as lack of enforcement of any religious set of norms, such as Sharia Law, by the government.

However, widespread concerns have still been raised, similar to Israel's, over the true intentions and allegiance of al-Sharaa and HTS. An article from the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, for examples, states that "the group's end goals have always been shaped by a commitment to armed jihad" (Ciddi et. Epley 2025). HTS's co-founders, in addition to al-Sharaa, include Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State from 2013-2019 (Counter

Extremism Project). This is clearly highly damaging for the organization's credibility towards creating a "secular" government.

In the end, it is impossible to tell what HTS's true intentions are in the short term, as only a long-term observation of the situation can tell, and there are evidently many factors and conflicts that still remain unresolved. Therefore, a cautious approach towards the new HTS-led government must be taken by the US. However, if the group is to be judged only by its actions after entering power, then hope for a secular and democratic government in Syria in the near future is likely justified, at least partially.

Policy Recommendations

Sanctions and Humanitarian Aid

Prior to any serious involvement through a policy plan, the United States must consider the impact of existing sanctions on Syria's economy and the broader humanitarian situation. Currently, the US still has many sanctions that remain, as outlined by the State Department (US Department of State). However, to implement any effective solution, as well as improve the humanitarian situation in Syria, sanctions must be lifted. The European Union has already lifted sanctions on the nation regarding key areas this February, "to support an inclusive political transition in Syria, and its swift economic recovery, reconstruction, and stabilisation," according to the European Council (European Council, 2025). A report from the Brookings Institution also highlights that, "To avoid a renewed eruption of economic grievances that could easily destabilize a precarious transition, the interim government will need to persuade Syrians that they are better off...than...under Assad" (Heydemann, 2025). This is corroborated by Hiba Zayadin, senior Syria researcher at Human Rights Watch, who claimed that, "sanctions now stand as a major obstacle to restoring essential services such as health care, water, electricity, and

education” (Human Rights Watch, 2025). In other words, American sanctions could easily undermine the stability of the new Syrian government, resulting in further instability and violence. Moreover, sanctions also indicate a lack of trust towards the new Syrian government, but if the US is to implement a policy solution, it will need to collaborate with the new government, and thus lifting sanctions is the first step towards establishing that collaboration.

Instead of sanctions, the Syrian population needs humanitarian aid. According to the Arab head of the UN Development Program (UNDP), 90% of the population live in poverty, with half the population (over 13 million) either internally displaced or having left the country as refugees (Ağlarıcı, 2025). This is in addition to the devastation to the medical and educational sectors of Syria discussed in the introduction, where millions of Syrian children are left without access to education. These conditions, according to Adam Abdelmoula, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria, have left 16.5 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance (Abdelmoula, 2025).

Therefore, the US must vastly expand USAID’s humanitarian support provided to Syria. USAID has long been involved in providing emergency assistance to Syrians, but given the scale of the crisis and the fall of the Assad regime, there is an urgent need for a significant increase in funding and resources. The US should prioritize direct aid aimed at alleviating poverty, providing food security, and supporting displaced populations. For the third case, it must both support those displaced inside Syria and in neighboring countries, and could provide support through countries hosting Syrian refugees, like it has previously done (International Refugee Assistance Project, 2014). Now, funds can also be allocated to facilitate the return of externally displaced Syrians back into the country, in order to bolster its recovery.

Moreover, USAID could partner with international organizations like the UNDP and local NGOs to strengthen infrastructure in areas such as healthcare, education, and clean water

access. This would not only help stabilize the country but also build goodwill toward the new government and demonstrate US commitment to alleviating human suffering, as opposed to maintaining punitive sanctions that might further harm the population. Humanitarian assistance should be seen as a pathway to fostering peace and stability in the region while addressing the immediate needs of millions of vulnerable Syrians.

One important concern would be the recent suspension of all USAID funding by the Trump Administration. However, the suspension of funding has been ruled unconstitutional by a judge and thus blocked, which theoretically means aid that was already allocated must continue to flow to its intended recipients or programs. (Gharib, 2025). Regarding the further allocation of funding, it is also unlikely that such a large aspect of American foreign policy is completely and indefinitely shut down due to the views of a single administration. However, humanitarian aid is an important short-term measure that should be taken regardless of the status of USAID.

Overall, a combination of the lifting of sanctions and an influx of humanitarian aid would allow for the short-term stabilization of the situation, provide for the immediate needs of millions of impoverished Syrians, and most importantly, establish a crucial amount of trust in the new government, opening the door for further collaboration.

Economic Investment and Reintegration

Although humanitarian aid may be essential, it is not a feasible long-term solution for Syria. In the end, the country will get itself back up on its feet economically, and recover from the damage caused by the civil war. However, American involvement in this recovery could potentially speed it up, and mutually benefit both countries. Encouraging private investment and offering loans for infrastructure and business development are key steps in rebuilding Syria's economy.

One potential avenue for American involvement could be through the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which provides financing and insurance to private sector investments in developing countries (US DFC). By offering loans or guarantees for projects focused on rebuilding Syria's infrastructure—such as roads, schools, hospitals, and energy facilities—the US could help stimulate the economy while providing opportunities for US businesses. The businesses themselves could also be encouraged to do trade with Syrian enterprises, creating flows of capital into the country to stimulate its economy.

Furthermore, the US could work with international organizations such as the World Bank Group's International Bank for Restructuring and Development (IBRD), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to provide low-interest loans or financial assistance specifically geared toward rebuilding Syria's essential infrastructure. These loans could be used for large-scale projects such as power grids, water systems, or housing, addressing the country's immediate needs and laying the foundation for long-term economic growth.

Involving American businesses in Syria's recovery would not only contribute to the country's economic development but also strengthen US-Syrian relations in a way that balances American interests with the genuine needs of the Syrian people. It would also work to reintegrate Syria into the international economic order, which it still remains relatively isolated from as a result of the war, when investment into the country dried up and the GDP greatly contracted (Strohecker et. George, 2025).

These actions would fulfill the crucial function of tying Syria closer to the US geopolitically, which is important in the context of Russian diplomatic overtures towards collaboration with the nation. They could be the key towards turning Syria into an American ally in the region, while preventing other foreign interests from effectively taking hold.

Geopolitical and Security Guarantees

The last and arguably most difficult steps the American government should take are in regard to the security situation in Syria, keeping in mind both the internal instability and conflicts of interest Syria has with Israel and Turkey. These tensions must be resolved through third-party mediation and trust-building measures.

Therefore, the American government must work to establish a multilateral negotiation forum, with Syria, Israel, and Turkey as key participants, but also involving regional powers and international bodies such as the Arab League, the United Nations, and potentially NATO. This platform would provide a neutral space for all parties to discuss their security concerns, set clear expectations, and work toward de-escalation. Such an approach could serve to address not only the ongoing tensions, but also the broader regional instability that affects Syria and its neighbors.

This forum would ideally be separate from previous spaces that were created during the Syrian Civil War, such as the Astana Process, so as to guarantee a fresh perspective that primarily takes the current existing conditions into account. It would also guarantee negotiations stay independent from unnecessary geopolitical interests. For example, the Astana Process itself heavily involved Russia and Iran, the two largest backers of the previous regime. The involvement of the Iran is also explicitly opposed by the current Syrian government (Mohamad, 2023).

However, trust-building measures would be the most effective measure in addressing the security concerns of both Syria and its regional adversaries. Intelligence-sharing agreements from Syria to Israel could play a significant role in fostering greater transparency and cooperation between the two nations, even if indirectly. It would do a great deal to assuage Israeli concerns about extremism in the region and the Syrian government if they received this transparency into the military operations and intelligence of that government. While Syria has

sharply criticized the Israeli attacks on itself, it has also not retaliated militarily, and still maintains the hope for collaboration. With increased trust and American mediation, this could be possible.

Moreover, if Syria were to provide intelligence on terrorist movements or groups operating within its borders, it could open the door to joint efforts in counterterrorism operations. These efforts could be aimed at taking down terrorist cells operating under groups like ISIS, or even groups like the PKK in order to resolve Turkish concerns (anti-PKK operations would likely have to be more toned down due to Syria's recent deal with the SDF, and the closer ties between the PKK and the wider Kurdish movement for autonomy). Syria would show a commitment to stability in the region, thereby fostering trust with Israel and Turkey. For Turkey, the cooperation could signal that Syria is addressing the PKK issue—a longstanding concern for Ankara—by working to neutralize its influence in Syria. For Israel, collaborating with Syria against common extremist threats could help mitigate the perception that Syria is harboring or enabling terrorism. Over time, these joint actions would reduce mutual distrust and enhance the credibility of each party's commitment to regional security.

Thus, the American government should build off any mediation forum it creates to serve as a party that fosters military collaboration and trust-building, even using what limited personnel it has at the Al-Tanf base to facilitate these. It is only through mediation and trust that any conflicts within Syria or the wider region can be addressed.

Conclusion

The collapse of the Assad regime has created a new and uncertain chapter for Syria, presenting both opportunities and challenges for the country and the broader region. The emergence of an HTS-led government under President Al-Sharaa raises concerns regarding

governance, stability, and extremism, while ongoing conflicts—both internal and external—threaten to derail reconstruction and stabilization efforts. With multiple actors involved, mainly Turkey, Israel, Russia, and Iran, it is essential for the United States to adopt a proactive and comprehensive approach.

A potential American response must balance multiple objectives: ensuring regional security, countering extremism, supporting humanitarian recovery, and preventing adversarial powers from filling the vacuum left by Assad's departure. To achieve this, the US must first take decisive action by lifting sanctions that hinder economic recovery. At the same time, Washington should substantially increase humanitarian aid, facilitating the rebuilding of Syria's devastated infrastructure while alleviating the suffering of millions. Additionally, by encouraging investment through international financial institutions and private sector engagement, the US can play a critical role in Syria's long-term economic stabilization and reintegration into the global economy.

In addition to economic measures, the American government must adopt diplomatic and security measures. Establishing a multilateral forum that brings together the key stakeholders can provide a structured space for conflict resolution and de-escalation. Furthermore, intelligence-sharing agreements and joint counterterrorism missions can serve as confidence-building measures. They would address concerns about extremism while ensuring that Syria doesn't become further destabilized.

Ultimately, the United States cannot afford to remain passive in shaping Syria's future. If left unchecked, instability in Syria risks further empowering extremist factions, prolonging regional tensions, and allowing geopolitical rivals like Russia to exert greater control. Instead, through adopting the outlined policy recommendations, the US can help steer Syria toward a

more stable and inclusive future—one that aligns with both American strategic interests and the broader pursuit of peace in the Middle East.

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