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The Syrian Civil War Revisited: Geopolitical Shifts, Humanitarian Fallout, And The Role of Regional Actors (2018-2025)

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Article Details

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Syrian Civil War, Proxy war, The research examines the development of geopolitical circumstances, Non-state actors, Humanitarian crisis, humanitarian effects, and local changes within the Syrian Civil War from 2018 to Authoritarian resilience, UNHCR and 2025. Changes in foreign policy allowed the government of Assad to recover humanitarian law, Chemical weapons in Syria, territorial power from the rebel groups, and the conflict came to an end. This ISIS and HTS militias

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research examines external factors, including Russia alongside Iran and Turkey, and America, that have influenced post-war Syria and discusses the hurdles to the return of refugees, accountability for war crimes, and rebuilding infrastructure under the sanctions. This research uses qualitative content analysis and policy review methods to examine the shift in format for action from active conflict in Syria to the current divided authoritarian regime's pursuit of stability. This study aims to contribute to the debates on proxy wars, post-conflict government arrangements, and regional stability in the Middle East.

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INTRODUCTION

Syrian Civil War holds its status as one of the most extensive conflicts of the 21st century and a destructive and strategic struggle for over ten years. The first revolution began in 2011, as public protests emerged in response to the Arab Spring, aiming to end President Bashar al-Assad's 30-year authoritarian rule (Noueihed & Warren, 2012). The demonstrations had remained calm at first, but security forces' inappropriate behavior pulled things back to violent confrontations and made the uprising a war with ethnic and religious features in addition to foreign intervention (Schmidt, 2013).

The dispute set a new course in 2018. Influence of decisive military support provided by Russia along with Iranian forces inevitably allowed for the Assad regime to take control of major urban areas and cities, including Daraa, Homs, and Aleppo (Cheema, 2023). The Islamic State (ISIS) lost spatial power after being defeated by the territorial force, so the battle is now fought with multifaceted actors such as regime loyalists and Kurdish-led forces for the presence of some dispersed jihadist groups (Kadercan, 2021). The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) hold the northern part of the country under US military backing as it possesses some degree of autonomous function (Firmian, 2023).

The Syrian civil war has completely changed not just the domestic and international relations of the country. Old antagonists of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have softened their stance on the Assad government, and at the same time, allowed Syria to rejoin the Arab League in 2023 (Hododi, 2024). The Turkish Armed Forces frequently enter northern Syria intending to prevent Kurdish expansion across Turkey's borders towards its southern frontier (Okuy, 2017). Russia maintains a global status, diplomatically and militarily, with influence waning from its periphery, in contrast to American military policies (Allison, 2013).

The humanitarian toll remains catastrophic. War resulted in the killings of 500,000 people, and up to 13 million people became refugees outside their country or internally displaced (UNHCR, 2022). The war exacerbated massive infrastructure failures, economic turmoil, and extreme health and education crises (Bank, 2021). The continuous deployment of chemical weapons in Syria leads to more tragedy because war criminals are accountable for no act of the regime forces or certain rebel groups, as per the OPCW (Aloklah, 2022).

The research examines the situation in the Syrian conflict after 2018 through situational analyses of the international power structure and human rights, and the possibilities for

rebuilding and changes in government leadership. The study approaches the topic through Qualitative content analysis and policy review methods to introduce fresh perspectives in discussions among scholars regarding the outcomes of the civil war, the durability of authoritarian regimes, and the stability of the Middle East region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Syrian Civil War was comprehensively researched, focusing on the origins of civil unrest, participants, and the regional aftermath. The first studies of the Syrian war primarily examined it through the lenses of authoritarian collapse, combined with a sectarian split, and a subtext of the Arab Spring aftermath (Haj Omar, 2016). The division of the Syrian opposition, coupled with the rise of jihadist groups due to the interference of the Free Syrian Army in the fighting, with the presence of tribal leadership, may prevent the development of democracy in Syria (Voller, 2022). Alexey V. Yurk examined how the Syrian conflict evolved into multiple parallel conflicts due to the competition between international powers, particularly Russia and the United States (Yurk, 2023). Earlier studies outlined key concepts that found Syria became a battleground in geopolitics while its citizens struggled with internal issues at home.

The theoretical study of proxy war evolved into a principal framework to explain precisely why various forces and interests became involved in the conflict (Farasoo, 2021). Outside support for both Assad's government and his opponents prolonged the conflict and recalled patterns of earlier Cold War-related wars, according to Mansour (Mansour, 2019). The study of authoritarian resilience examined how the Assad regime maintained its power through sectarian mobilization, military support, and coercive governance (Al Awwad, 2021). In addition, author Hinnebusch studied adaptive authoritarianism in Syria, demonstrating that the regime remained stable through elite unity with the process of outside elites (Hinnebusch, 2016).

Analysis of sectarian politics was one of the key issues that gained prominence during this period; both the regime and its opponents chose to utilize sectarian identities to exacerbate inter-community confrontations (Khater, 2022). Historically, the complex rivalry between Sunni and Shia became more pronounced through the systematic support that Iran and Saudi Arabia provided to each other during the period when they were at odds (Mabon, 2023).

Research since 2021, however, has focused on the changes and effects that have occurred since the war began. Some experts now examine the consequences of the Assad regime's normalization after its intensive military success and the dominant capture of a particular area

(Beijssens, 2021). According to Josiah Zeigler (2024), a combination of pragmatic security and economic interests of a few Arab states has led to their diplomatic recognition of Damascus (Zeigler, 2024). Some specialists examine how the establishment of relations affects legal procedures and ethical considerations, as the regime has already been documented as committing war crimes (Al-Kahwati & Mannergren Selimovic, 2021).

Reasons for the deportation of refugees have become highly contested. Data from UNHCR indicates that Syria is no longer in a state to ensure Voluntary Sustainable Return (VSR) (Cheema, 2023). (Alrababa'h et al., 2021) suggest that forced or premature repatriation will inject more community instability and toughen authoritarian control. There are records of the Syrian regime using reconstruction aid and urbanisation to gain support from its supporters while applying retaliation to opposition components (Naboulsi, 2022).

The issue of managing Syria's political governance after the conflict has become a key area of contemporary research in contemporary studies. Besides locals heading and paramilitaries, external actors split the power governing Syria among themselves according to Benedetta Berti (Berti, 2023), as Syrian unification could pose risks. The case of Syria is a case of "authoritarian peace" in the sense of (Zaamout, 2023), where peace flowered through exclusion forced rather than mediated by democracy.

The theory of international relations has gained valuable knowledge from the wars in Syria. This conflict has challenged liberal international norms' first premises, humanitarian intervention practices and the Responsibility to Protect principles. Averre argues with other scholars that the international community is guilty of inaction due to geopolitical priorities; they have been overridden by humanitarian necessity (Averre & Davies, 2015).

Research on Syria, therefore, moved from researching its beginnings to researching its long lasting effects. The current academic understanding of Syria is a highly-fractured, deeply oppressive country, outside controlled, despite a decline in combat. Maximal understanding of lasting peace confronts its major hurdles as domestic repression is detached from incomplete reconstruction and counters foreign normalization goals.

METHODOLOGY

Research on the Syrian Civil War is conducted using qualitative methods to observe its progression from 2018 to 2025. Qualitative research methods comprehensively analyse the Syrian conflict, encompassing various actors, including the state and non-state groups, the complex religious divisions and foreign intervention. By taking Syria as a primary case study,

this study extensively compares how international power relations, combined with domestic autocratic policy directives and humanitarian requirements, influenced the circumstances in Syria following the conflict.

All the data employed in this study are based on secondary sources of materials. Official documents, including UN reports (e.g., UNHCR, UN OCHA, OPCW), communiqués and statements from the Geneva and Astana peace processes, and international legal and policy statements, are researched and provide the basis for the evidence. Research is based on academic studies conducted between 2018 and 2025, utilising evidence from research briefs by Chatham House, the Carnegie Middle East Centre, and the European Council on Foreign Relations, as well as investigation reports from civil society organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The study's Literature review drew on international media sources, including Al Jazeera, Reuters, BBC, and The Guardian, to track ongoing developments and present varied viewpoints.

Content analysis also identifies core trends from the originators, examining geopolitical shifts, refugee repatriation processes, and trends in authoritarianism and reconstruction approaches in post-war countries. The systematic coding procedure enables the researchers to observe repeated patterns that explain continuous situations and changes. This paper examines official statements about debates surrounding conflict resolution, legitimacy, and sovereignty to demonstrate how Syrian, Russian, Iranian, and Western policymakers describe all sides. The study employs a dual methodology to assess government actions and the communicative means that influence global opinion and behaviour.

Several obstacles hinder the research. Conditions of instability in Syria forced researchers to forego fieldwork, losing direct access to the public's feelings and the administration's activities. Dependence on secondary sources from various sectors yields perhaps biased influences, particularly when dealing with politically sensitive topics. The available data shows inconsistencies because of the absence of data, particularly about the dispersal, use of chemical weapons, and changes to the Kurdish autonomous zone. The utilisation of multiple data selection criteria, combined with an initial thematic analysis, enables the collection of reliable evidence, despite potential limitations in the study.

GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE (2018–2025)

The structural configuration of the Syrian Civil War improved in 2018, but also deteriorated. Russia and Iran entirely backed the Assad regime, which enabled it to regain control over most

of Syrian territory after almost collapsing. In 2015, by entering the conflict directly, Russia established a shift of power that allowed Assad to regain his control. Moscow had completed its role as the leading international player in the Syrian civil war. The Russian impact extended beyond the battlefields, as it played a significant role as a mediator during peace talks alongside Turkey and Iran, as noted by (Çelik, 2024).

The Iranian government keeps its vital role in the Syrian war from both weapon shipping and armed instructor posting, besides dispatching Iranian-led militias to take control of portions of the country. The pro-Iranian forces have effectively controlled key strategic areas that Tehran considers significant (Kennedy, 2022). As a result of the Iranian military role in Syria, conflicts have been intensified with Israel because Israel has repeatedly struck Iranian assets inside Syria to prevent Tehran from establishing permanent military bases near the border (Kam, 2017).

The U.S. has largely pulled out its military from Syria after significant policy changes were made by the Trump administration and then by the Biden administration. While it only has a small military footprint in NE Syria through backing the Syrian democratic forces, abandoning regime change aims has helped Assad cement control following the power. The US continued to impose the Caesar Act sanctions in order to economically damage Syria, which has been a goal that sanctions have never successfully reached (BAYDEMİR, 2025).

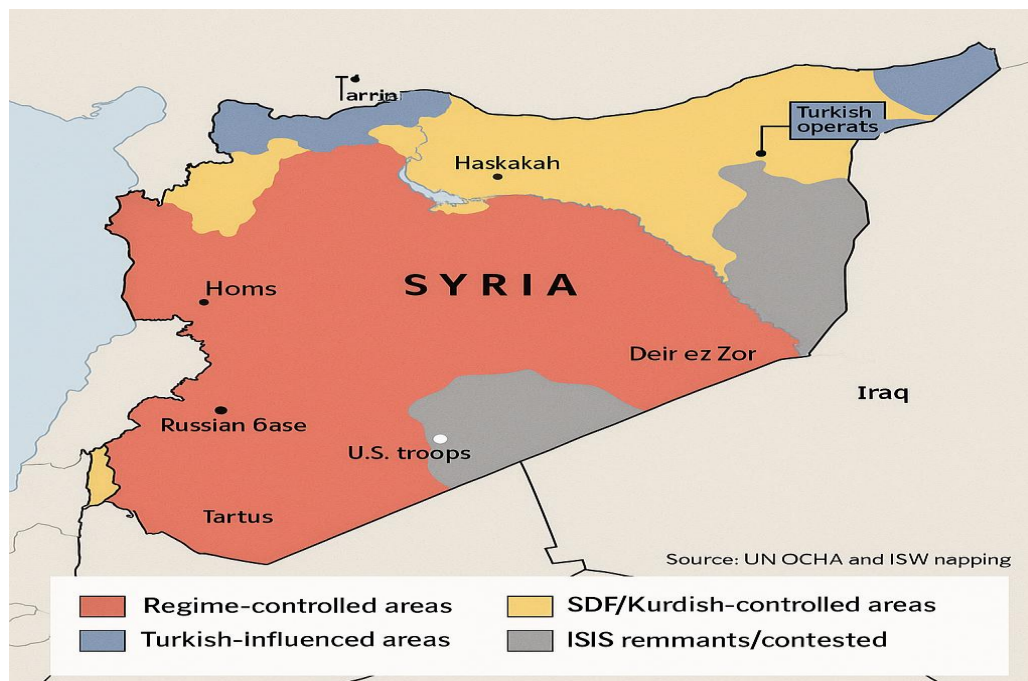


FIGURE: 1

Turkey has presented an attitude that is constantly changing and contains several ambiguities. Turkey transferred its earlier backing to the opposition groups into concerted attempts to stifle Kurdish independence movements along its border. The Turkish military interventions, Euphrates Shield and Peace Spring, concentrated on curbing the ability of the YPG Kurdish militia because Turkey considers them part of the PKK terrorist organization (Ismael & Ismael, 2023). Through the territorial situation over Turkish fabricated lands, Ankara imposed a government and security structure, which, notwithstanding, has caused additional Syrian sovereignty concerns.

The Arab States have turned their diplomatic position towards the Syrian side since 2018. Arab states that initially hoped to oust Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, including the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and even the newest entrant, Saudi Arabia, are now engaged with his government. The readmission of Syria to the Arab League in 2023 was a significant proof of the normalisation process. States in this area endorse Assad as president because they prioritise stability problems, concerns about refugee panic, terrorism operations, and not democratic reform.

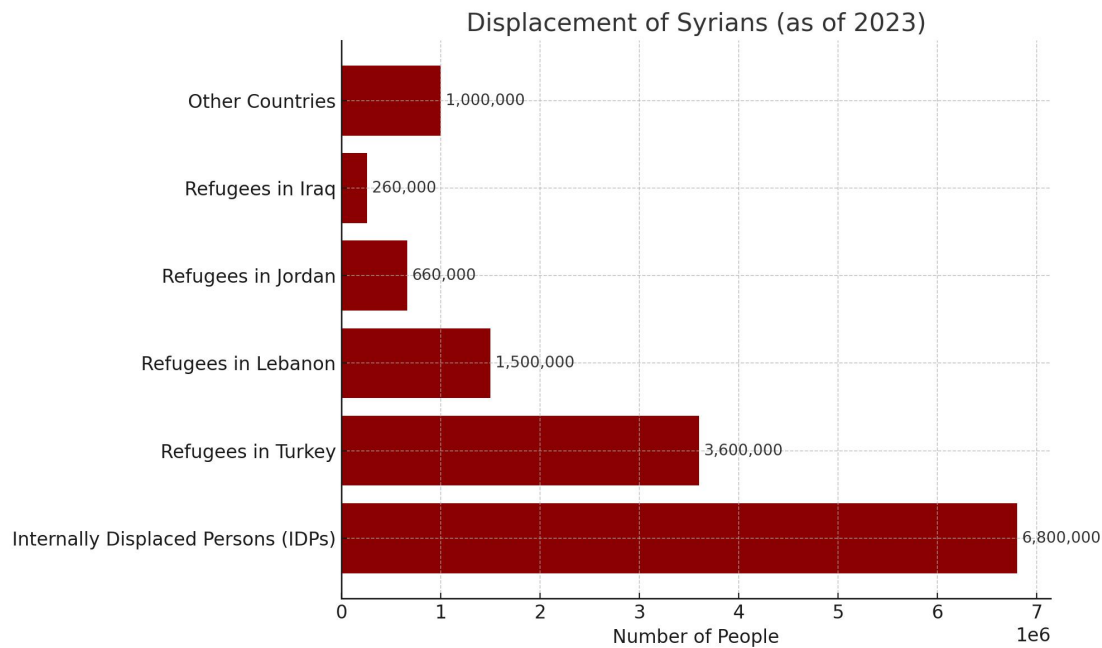
The global shifts confirm that Syria is experiencing further state fragmentation, mainly due to the decline in conflict intensity. Multiple foreign forces, including Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States, maintain exclusive control zones in various parts of the country as they implement various strategic goals. Foreign power projections pose colossal challenges to aggregating both Syrian national unity and independence in post-conflict Syria, and set the stage for longer-term instability and frozen conflicts. No consensus exists between Western-backed and Assad-backed forces that prevents them from achieving a comprehensive political settlement (Nwokoye, 2023).

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT AND REFUGEE REPATRIATION

Competition in large-scale operational warfare has assumed second place, but it is not the only loss that affects communities when the Syrian Civil War is described in human terms. The Syrian conflict since 2011 has killed half a million individuals and forced more than 13 million citizens of the country, who are now one of the most significant refugee movements following World War II (UNHCR, 2023). The internally displaced persons account for 6.8 million. However, 5.5 million have become refugees in nearby countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq (UNOCHA, 2023).

The Syrian crisis is now a whole lot more in the abyss due to economic downturns along with

food shortages, destroyed infrastructure, and shrinking health services, it is stated. Food despair, as per the World Food Program (2022), is affecting over 12 million Syrians, or over 60% of the population in Syria today. Residents in many areas are unable to access the basic services of electricity and water as well as healthcare, as utilities from an unreliable or nonexistent source, such as those forces of the Assad regime, whose military forces have pushed back rebel groups. Across national boundaries, COVID-19, cholera outbreaks, and fuel shortages have resulted in an unprecedented public health burden (Kaplan, 2025).



Source: *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR, 2023)

Currently, the pressing dilemma concerns the refugee repatriation issue. The conditions in Syria were reported to be not conducive to encouraging voluntary and dignified return of refugees, owing to an insufficient appropriate environment for such returns. The UNHCR (2023) emphasises throughout various reports that returnees encounter arbitrary arrests and conscription in forced military service and harassment upon trying to get back home. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), records of returnees being subjected to intimidation by torture, sexual violence and enforced disappearance were noted against those who were opposition supporters.

Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey have been pushing for fast Syrian refugee return as they feel the economic pinch and are getting more so from the refugees. The Turkish government wants to integrate settlement projects in Syrian territory under Turkish control into the return

assistance program for Syrian refugees living abroad amongst its population of 3.6 million (Içduygu & Nimer, 2020). Lebanon hosts around 1.5 million Syrian refugees in an indigenous population of 6 million, which puts considerable stress on its fundamental infrastructure and delivery of public services (UNDP, 2021).

Many international organizations have implemented assistance projects, which include the documentation and rehabilitation of shelters as part of refugee return programs. However, most humanitarian actors cite inadequate legal protection and weak accountability standards as barriers to triumphant return. The effort to aid refugees to return home becomes a problem of powerful political consequences because it raises questions about justice, post-war agreements, and governing responsibility (Ferris, 2013). The overall humanitarian situation remains in a fragile state. The Caesar Act and other Western sanctions implemented by the West remain the issue under which Syria's economic woes, which deliberately affected regime officials yesterday, are persisting today. Humanitarian aid delivery is further worsening since both cross-border access and UN Security Council vetoes, mainly one of them, are being directly imposed by Russia, which sticks to hindering the provision of relief to millions in territory held by opposition forces (Sebhatu, 2020).

The Syrian humanitarian crisis remains unsolved at this time. Syria endures a protracted period of multiplied suffering that combines economic hardship, large-scale displacement of people and a frozen politics. Refugee return is the most contentious issue in the future Syria peace process because geopolitical divisions habitually put their interests above humanitarian needs.

RISE AND DECLINE OF NON-STATE ACTORS

The Syrian conflict has been dramatically transformed since 2011 due to the rise of multiple non-state actors whose military and political influence has become more profound. The case of Syria is the prime example of the battle that has been heightened by the warrior groups and military of the Kurdish, militant secular anti-war wings, following the government's real power weakened. From 2018 to 2025, most non-state actors obtained an outcome of military defeat alongside political exile or splintered their power apparatus, substantially changing Syria's dominant forces (Şafak, 2025).

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) became one of the most significant non-state actors because its maximum dominion area covered Syrian eastern regions and Iraqi western sectors (Clancy, 2018). The self-declared caliphate of the Islamic State for Iraq and Syria in

Raqqa had lost its Syrian capital to the U.S.-led Global Coalition and Syrian Democratic Forces following a year's worth of campaigning from the militia in 2019 (DJELLALI, 2023). The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria now survives in central Syria's Badia desert as a level of insurgency group via a campaign of ambushes, taking place in conjunction with IED hits and espionage operations (McFate, 2015). The case of covert attacks indicates ISIS's adaptability as territorial control led to a decline in their political impact.

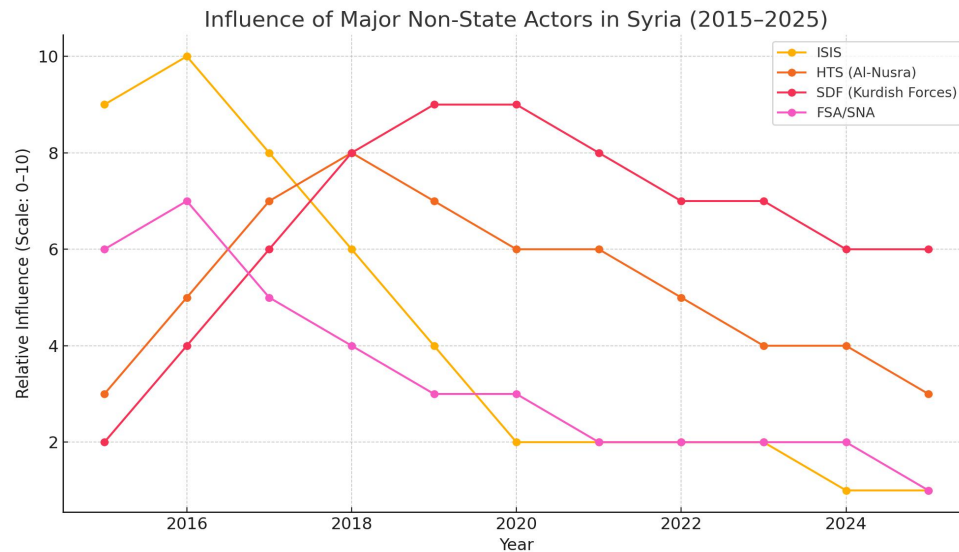


FIGURE 2. THE LOGIC OF NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS SURVIVAL IN SYRIA: A CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS (YEŞİLTAS & KARAKUŞ, 2025).

As the leading entity in Syria's affairs under its former name Jabhat al-Nusra, which operated as Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, the organisation is identified as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). HTS earlier controlled the northwestern Syrian area, but today, the group only operates within the lines of the province. The group continues with its hybrid government system under the Salvation Government and runs courts, law-enforcing forces, and administrative entities. However, it declared independence from Al-Qaeda in 2017. The group suffers from three main limitations arising from international sanctions, followed by financial shortages, as well as intensified air raids by Syrian and Russian military forces against its bases.

In the Syrian conflict, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), under US sponsorship, has made most use and is universally recognised as an independent entity, as the Kurds run it. The SDF was established under the command of the People's Protection Units (YPG) to push ISIS and now governs much of the territory through the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The SDF faces continuing challenges in that the Turkish military

offensive targets YPG-held territory based on its alleged relationship with the PKK, and Assad, and the U.S. forces' withdrawal from Syria leads to regional insecurity risks (Firmian, 2023).

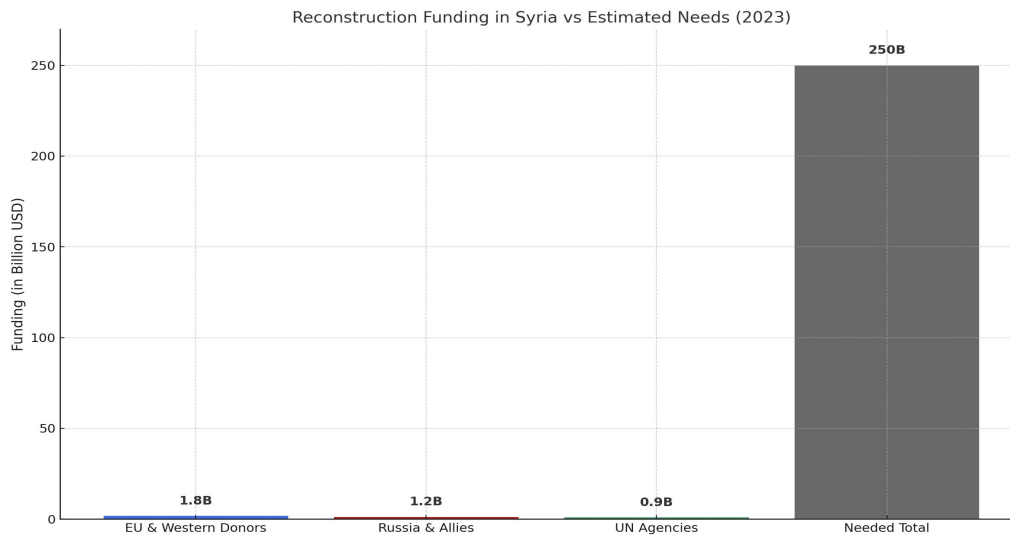
FSA and Syrian National Army (SNA) face a big problem as effectiveness has decreased in operational unity and popularity among the citizens. Once a central actor in the early uprising, the original FSA fragmented under the weight of ideological divisions, insufficient coordination, and inconsistent foreign support. The remaining forces of the group work as component members of the Turkish Syrian National Army, which patrols northern Aleppo and Afrin. The bad reputation because of human rights violations and corruption, combined with lawlessness, has created community distrust in these groups in Syrian society, in combination with opposition general disapproval (Çora, 2024).

Militia forces tied up through relational and ethnic identities have found changing degrees of effectiveness since the start of Syria's civil war. Assad gets military help from Pro-Iranian groups Liwa Fatemiyoun and Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba. However, both groups have become part of Iranian operational schemes instead of working independently (Kennedy, 2022). The configurations of power of Druze militias in Suwayda and local Sunni militant groups in Deir ez-Zor have superseded with reliance on the regime or to an extent to the status of external foreign backers. Non-state actors in Syria lost their ability to shape the Syrian situation after 2018 due to territorial loss of power and strategic influence. HTS plus the SDF continue to hold specific territory, but many other actors have either lost militarily or been defeated politically. The reconsolidation of the Assad regime, plus changed foreign objectives and declining international backing of armed opposition organisations, has lessened the non-state military in Syria (Mazur, 2021). These groups keep up their influence in governance and security circumstances with local identity construction issues within territories of poor or disputed central rule.

RECONSTRUCTION AND POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

International and domestic actors have shifted their focus from military endeavours to reconstruction and political settlement because the Syrian Civil War changed its character from comprehensive warfare to various governance structures. However, reconstruction and political settlement processes come under resistance because of the politically dominant mechanism deployed by the Assad regime and the lack of agreement on inclusivity. Since 2018, the Assad government has scored military victories but failed to gain national stability or enact wide-ranging post-war reconstruction efforts. The Syrian regime prefers to raise support areas

through the intentional development of pro-regime parts, excluding counterparts who had backed the opposition for restoration projects (Al Taweel, 2025). The Syrian state government has the legal power to appropriate property without judicial proceedings, meaning the large-scale removal of millions of displaced people.



Source: (McGee et al., 2024)

The international financing streams for the reconstruction work occur under limited and segregated premises. The European Union, the United States, and other Western donors offer reconstruction support only to governments endorsed by the UN Security Council through Resolution 2254 for constitutional changes and UN electoral oversight. Russia and China promote non-economic precondition reconstruction before economic and political demands because it is in humanitarian intervention that stability is engendered. Major reconstruction projects are still on hold as Syria crumbles economically, as the international community cannot agree on sharing efforts (Nadiyah, 2024).

Pursuits of a political agreement remain out of reach at this time. The UN-led Geneva Process since 2012 has produced no results due to regime opposition to reform and opposition divisions. The Astana Process indeed led to progress on local de-escalation zones and military arrangements through the leadership of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. However, it has no achievements in establishing legitimacy and sustainable political change. Despite the 2019 UN-backed Constitutional Committee comprising regime, opposition and civil society representatives, it failed to progress due to procedural complaints and regime "interference".

Through its plan, the Assad regime has made localized ceasefires instead of lasting national

agreements. This plan accommodates partial amnesties for territories controlled by the opposition but requires surrender as a condition. The actualization of these zones through regime actions resulted in repression, arrests, and failed service delivery, which boosted distrust and eroded the credibility of reconciliation (Goodwin, 2024). The regime's step toward security centralization occurred while the country was politically fragmented.

Now, the Syrian political settlement process relies heavily on the participating regional countries to develop normal diplomatic relationships. In 2023 the Arab League re-admitted Syria, and so preferred stability to democratic transition (Farley, 2023). The U.A.E. and S.A., together with Gulf countries, endeavour to establish a relationship with Syria in operational re-engagement programs that seek to confront the Iranian integration while dealing with the return of the refugees despite the absence of new constitutional provisions. A realist shift in Arab foreign policy is an in-the-tempo adjustment with little long-term consequences, but it has the unintended outcomes of persistent authoritarian rule and missed justice reforms.

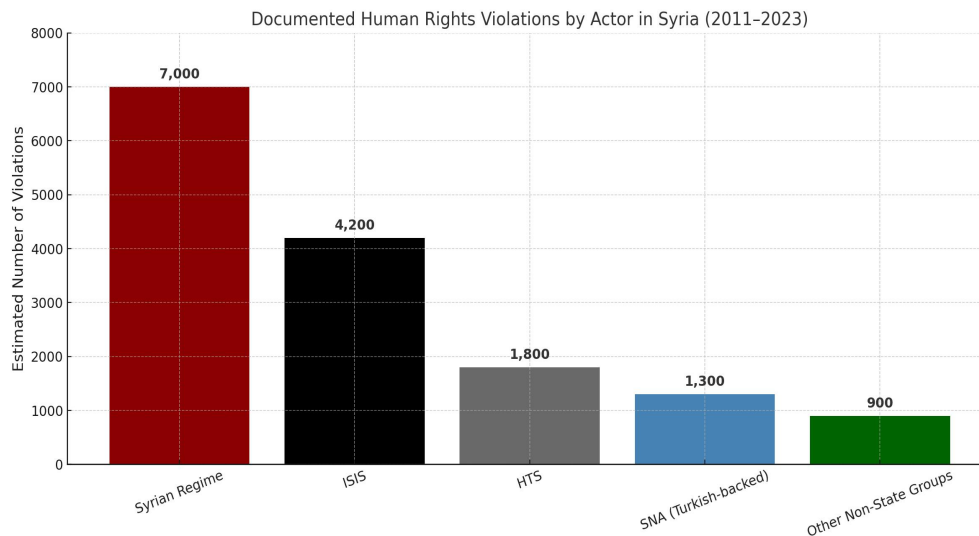
The reconstruction and building of the state in Syria after the wartime period is an incomplete system because of foreign influence on decision-making. The Assad regime's capacity to endure has altered international strategies from regime change to regime engagement. Despite the change, it did not resolve the basic disease of the conflict, including political disobedience, sectarian exploitation and authoritarian management. A rights and inclusivity-based approach must be in place to avoid further situations that led to an uprising ten years ago, emerging during political settlements or reconstruction efforts.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

International humanitarian law applies to the Syrian Civil War, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, and also the illegal use of hazardous weapons. Civilian abuses by state and non-state actors are so brutal that they have been named by the UN investigative team as a litany of horrors (UNHCR, 2023). Justice for Syria's crimes is met with global political barriers as well as a complicated legal framework and growing acceptance of the Assad regime.

Chemical arms wielded by the Syrian government are certainly to be located amongst the most heinous weapons wreaked havoc by this civil war. Joint military action by the US came close to happening in 2013 due to the Ghouta sarin gas attack that killed over 1,000 civilians. Syria's entry into the Chemical Weapons Convention was a result of an agreement concluded with Russia and brought about the elimination of their declared chemical weaponry stocks, but from 2014 to 2022, a number of toxic agent and chlorine and sarin armed attack

incidents were documented (OPCW, 2022). The string of attacks such as on opposition cities like Khan Sheikhoun and Douma elicited international outcry but only triggered economic sanctions and a tokenize military strikes against the perpetrators.



Source: *United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Amnesty International, and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR)*

The Syrian regime persists in augmenting its tactics by way of the utilization of chemical warfare, as well as excessive detention and rigorous torture. Human rights Activists deny that tens of thousands of civilians have died in government detention facilities, especially in Saydnaya prison. Experts, after analysis of the so-called Caesar files that a former military photographer secretly made, discovered shocking records about widespread detainee abuse, and also starvation and killings (Rizkalla et al., 2022). The revelation has led to a universal jurisdiction adopted by European Courts, where, recently, a former Syrian intelligence officer was convicted in a German court in 2022 (ECCHR, 2022).

War criminals have been made up of both State agents and groups that are not the government. Foreign Terrorist Organisation ISIS fulfilled part of systematic mass killings along with sexual enslavement and ethno-religious cleansing campaigns against the Yazidi and other ethnic groups across their expanding territorial frontiers. The jihadist groups chaired by HTS, together with other actors, retain control of territory in which they practice unlawful detention and conduct mass executions and religiously motivated persecution. The Syrian National Army's Turkey-backed opposition militants have been caught cheating their Kurdish nationals in north Syria, fending them off with abuses and forced deportations, further looting

entire districts (UNHCR, 2023).

During the last decade of grave human rights abuses, state and international court and trial structures have not become more effective. Syria's adoption of the Rome Statute is missing, while Russia and China hold veto power in the UNSC to prevent ICC involvement in the Syrian conflict (Chikwati, 2022). They have taken the initiative to prosecute cases through universal jurisdiction by civil society organisations in collaboration with European judicial systems that accomplish symbolic tasks but lack systematic organizational accountability.

The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism was mandated by the UN General Assembly in 2016 to collect and preserve evidence that may be used to prosecute crimes against humanity. The International Impartial and Independent Mechanism has collected thousands of testimonies from witnesses and physical evidence yet is hampered by the lack of information from areas under the regime's control because it has no enforcement power (IIIM, 2023). Today, victim support, together with transitional function, remains poorly funded and ill-supported by the World.

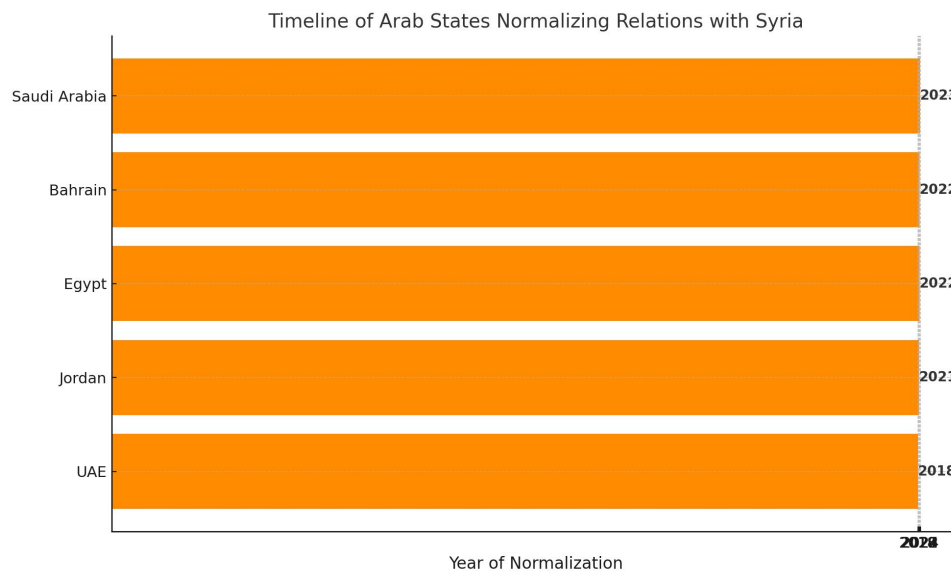
Conditions of foreign relations between Arab countries and the Assad regime preclude demands for accountability through the mechanisms of justice. These countries act in a way that is contrary to international law by maintaining unconditionally diplomatic relations with states that perpetrate impunity, and by deciding to normalize diplomatic relations. The one great future challenge is to keep the system just amid geopolitical interests.

The global accountability system has failed somewhere in spectacular fashion when applied to Syria. World documentation reveals definitively that atrocities were committed and their accountabilities fall way off into thin, politicized and organizationally uncorrelated judicial processes. Identifying and prosecuting those who have committed atrocities against humanity in Syria is necessary for establishing a legitimate basis of peace after war and reconciliation between the parties involved.

SYRIA IN REGIONAL NORMALISATION

Regional Arab states began to normalize their relations with the Assad regime in 2018. Syria began returning to regional diplomacy amidst more than 10 years of global economic and political isolation. The Arab League finally admitted Syria back into membership in May 2023, contrary to what Arab leaders had decided before, that Assad no longer had legitimacy, because of his violent repression against protests, and his lack of international and human rights law (Ali, 2024).

The grounds for this normalization turn out to be strategically and pragmatically based. Several Gulf countries use engagement with Damascus to pursue several political objectives, including reducing Iranian influence in the Levant, handling the repatriation of refugees, and reviving international trade and countering regional extremism, to which they donate. The countries allied in a rapprochement with the Syrian regime have effectively given up their efforts to change politics in the country as they turn towards regionwide stability by standing by security arrangements under an authoritarian government.



Source: *Barnes-Dacey, J. (2023). Syria's re-entry into the Arab fold: Normalization or necessity? European Council on Foreign Relations.*

The UAE has since 2018 restored its Damascus embassy and the Syrian leader paid a state visit to the UAE in 2022. Jordan was able to resolve their communications issues in managing border security as well as logistics of movement through Syrian borders (Shaar et al., 2024). Saudi Arabia switched its backing of opposition groups in Syria due to more significant shifts in the region because of Iranian ties with China mediated and Saudi involvement in regional conflict intervention (Awaad, 2024).

The normalization run with Syria led to conflicting views from various parts of the world. European Union states and the United States still embargo any normalisation with Syria as long as Damascus carries out full implementation of meaningful reform efforts and accepts responsibility for war crimes. The measures set by the U.S. through the Caesar Act keep influencing Syrian entities and security players involved in the war economy. The Arab states have been pursuing normalisation with Syria individually with diplomatic activity and

private bilateral negotiations rather than mutual regional structure partnerships, as Lund (Zaamout, 2023).

Normalize the ways of criticism, which argues that the changes erode attempts to reach political agreements with inclusive participation. The lack of legislative achievement on the Assad executive regime's commitment to governance transition and humanitarian aid limitation forces Arab states to face a serious risk because it encourages the "authoritarian peace" model over Justice and Human rights (Zaamout, 2023). The return of Syria to the League of Arab did not lead to any changes in the Syrian political situation because repression is still present, and economic difficulties and social destruction continue.

Regardless of the fact that Assad has gained much, his ability to govern is still severely limited. Syria's diplomatic successes have been offset by the ongoing decline in the economy, along with stagnant reconstruction funding due to Western sanctions and the increasingly widespread public discontent in the government-controlled territory. The regime looks at its Arab neighbouring countries mainly because it requires funding to develop the country and purchase fuel to cope with domestic challenges (Noueihed & Warren, 2012).

Syria's normalization of diplomatic relations follows a regional trend of *prevue de force*, real-political, realistic diplomatic approaches in the Middle East. The efforts to normalise relations between Syria and its neighbours are merely a short-term solution, which restores regional ties and wrecks international conventional and peacebuilding strategies in the interest of long-term peace. The normalisation process will achieve neither democracy nor reconciliation without some international diplomatic push and civil society activism oriented towards accountability.

DISCUSSION

Since 2018, the Syrian crisis has turned into authoritarian post-war rule of the region, in conjunction with foreign interventionism and partial political openings. This research looked at the military, geopolitical, humanitarian, and legal dimensions, and it found consistent antagonism amid rebuilding and justice programs, governance transformation projects, and long-term stability-creating games.

Assad remains in power thanks to the backing provided by Russia and Iran. The Assad regime has managed to retake control over Syrian national territory since false expectations of significant political change and regime collapse led people to make minimal concessions to internal or external protocols. The data confirms authoritarian resilience ideas even as it shows

the limitations to "exporting democracy," tactics which counter entrenched elite networks.

The strength of non-state actors has reduced, but they remain active alongside the Syrian political environment. ISIS with HTS stay as militant and governance forces despite losing Syria and territory. The SDF is among the several actors here that stand as best organized, though it is in a precarious situation due to Turkey's hostility and the US backing down. The decline of those groups had neither all national power brought to a central place nor led to a consensus. However, it did contribute to several local authority structures, which negates national unity.

This current discussion shows that regional diplomatic initiatives are off-limits to tried and tested means of accountability. A change in the politics of the Arab League is going on because it is accepting of Syria getting back into its membership due to security-based alliances and investment in development that can lead to insistence on democratic changes or real investigative work to bring justice to groups who have been neglected. The normalisation process holds the risk of creating an environment where perpetrators are not punished and therefore are taking away the rights of victims, more so when this normalisation lacks responsibility and the refugee safe return sectors.

International legal systems cannot meet the required legal accountability of perpetrators of crimes. The UN Security Council has remained dormant because Russian and China have blocked motions to send Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Universal jurisdiction justice procedures are now taken under European courts for accountability cases, and this limits the scope, and justice delivery takes a long time. The International Impartial Independent Mechanism (IIIM) effectively gathers evidence but lacks effectiveness due to resistance from political players and the lack of its enforcement capabilities.

Authoritarian engineering through reconstruction emerges when the Syrian Assad regime selects particular reconstruction projects for the Syrian reconstruction of the state. Decree 10 implementation removes the opposition territory from development opportunities by keeping it from investing in pro-Assad populations instead. Nevertheless, the UN supposition for a political transition led to a reconstructive lull, which Russia, Iran, and Gulf investors are now taking advantage of to impose their own selfish agenda instead of equal development.

Post-conflict governance and sovereignty, allied with international law, pose definitive questions about the Syrian case. Mass atrocities in Syria revealed significant built-in flaws within global governance through a challenge to the Responsibility to Protect norm. The

Syrian war illustrates that modern civil wars consume more than national political disputes, given that regional and international powers prioritise their geopolitical interests over the population's economic interests.

The fundamental reasons behind the Syrian conflict persist unresolved as the fighting subsides. Defeating the war has not led to lasting peace in the country because the country is suffering from a dangerous, divided state of affairs during its post-conflict period. Syria's prospect of stable peace remains remote, given political exclusion, impunity, and economic and social failure.

CONCLUSION

To put it in another way, it makes the Syrian Civil War the most devastating and of all wars of the twenty-first century. Rephrase the following sentence. The Syrian Assad regime has shown the capacity to survive, to regain control via significant ally aid as it turns the battlefields into various vying sovereignty spots, foreign control zones.

Currently, military forces dictate the conflict in favour of central authorities. However, the role of ISIS, along with HTS and the SDF, is to operate independently over contested areas between political entities. The prospect of beheading the Free Syria Army as well as the opposition forces, coupled with eager normalisation of policies in Arab states, tells regional states have accepted Syrian regime durability even as it owns a disastrous record of war crimes. The existence of worldwide systems, each for justice management and accountability reasons, has demonstrated limitations. This lack of framework for holding the finger of primary perpetrators accountable and the deficit of transitional justice delivery to victims continue to the surface despite expansive documentation and some universal jurisdiction cases. The readmission of Syria to the Arab League, along with diplomatic ties, has gone unattached to meaningful reforms and no conditions, in the wake of creating serious ethical and legal problems.

Reintroduction of post-conflict rehabilitation aims to entrench pre-war injustices through the disenfranchised decision-making process. The lack of rights defenses alongside entrance will bring about an environment of oppression, which includes creating sectarian splits that have brought the Syrian conflict. Any peace built on turning its back on core causes political denial and the government oppression, aka foreign actor interference, is likely to collapse and be enveloped in the hostilities again. The current trend in Syria signifies a prolonged conflict scenario that contains authoritarian outcomes as world powers deal with the

current ruler and stand for justice, but it cannot continue forever. This research stresses the need for the best cultural, governance, and humanitarian practices in intellectual fields and the state of affairs in policy. Real peace needed for incoming Syria depends heavily on the continuation of international presence and open democratic participation that leads to establishing permanent just foundations within Syria.

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