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For Contemporary Studies

Reconstruction of Syria and the Political Solution



political research

Research Department of Harmoon Center



Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies

Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies is an independent nonprofit research institution, focusing on the production of political, societal and intellectual studies and research related particularly to the Syrian issue, and the possible outcomes of ongoing conflict in Syria. The center is concerned with bolstering civil society and democratic awareness. Harmoon Center also works on Arab issues and related conflicts, as well as Arab regional and international . relations

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Introduction

The completion of the ten years of the Syrian war is an occasion in which the Syrians look to a political solution that puts an end to their misery, which the world has never seen more horrific since World-War II. Because of the horror the Syrians faced, a large part of them welcomes any solution, no matter this solution. They are hoping to see an end to their personal afflictions, and to those of their families, which spanned a decade now, in the hope that a reconstruction phase will follow, so that they could recover what they have missed, and recover what remained of their homes, properties, and businesses, and what remained of their families. Towards this end, they do not hold preconditions, rather agree to any solution that fulfills their humble dream: "To return safe to their homes".

This leads us to the question: What is the political solution that allows the Syrians to have a safe return to their homes?

Between the dreams of the Syrians and the harsh reality, there is a wide isthmus, where no political solution for Syria has ever been conceived, and where expectations vary between many scenarios that range from good to bad, and where each scenario implies that it may be the most prevalent. The three potential scenarios that we will deal with in this paper differ radically in their consequences on the recovery of Syria and its society, ranging between creating a political climate that provides efforts and resources supportive of the solution and of the recovery of Syria from various aspects; and creating a negative climate that deprives Syria of the potential for its reconstruction, thus maintaining its tragedy and the suffering of its people.

Any political solution in Syria will have to address the unprecedented massive destruction not seen since WWII, which occurred over the course of ten years, and included physical destruction of cities, towns, service facilities, roads, lands, etc., and widespread social and economic destruction, in addition to the great political complications caused by the interference of regional and international parties in the Syrian conflict, and the transformation of Syria into an arena of conflict between rival powers. Not to forget the complex problems inherited from the Ba'ath rule, which extended from 1963 to 2010, and built a totalitarian regime based on the Soviet model in its beginnings, then began to flounder between the remnants of the Soviet model and the liberal openness that was designed according to the interests of the new fates of the ruling elite.

Accordingly, any future solution in Syria will have to address these interlocking difficult challenges. Despite that, the effectiveness of any solution lies in its ability to bring an end to



the tragedy, and to create an environment that allows the total reconstruction of Syria from various aspects. Any solution that does not lead to the aforementioned cannot be considered a political solution.

This paper will discuss the following issues:

- 1- Challenges of the devastation inflicted on Syria on all aspects, which in turn will challenge any reconstruction and any political solution in Syria in the future.**
- 2- Possible scenarios for the development of the situation in Syria, and defining the scenario that fulfills the conditions of facing the challenges of the reconstruction.**
- 3- Conditions and possibilities for achieving the desired scenario.**
- 4- The dangers of not achieving the political solution based on the political transition which fulfills the conditions for the reconstruction of Syria from all sides.**



Challenges of the devastation inflicted on Syria on all aspects, which in turn will challenge any reconstruction and any political solution in Syria in the future.

1. The challenge of the rupture of the Syrian geography:

The government that will be established as a result of any political solution in Syria will face the rift that afflicted the Syrian geography due to dividing Syria into several areas of influence after the intervention of regional and international powers in the conflict, and that will constitute a challenge for its reunification into a single central state. If we look at the map of Syria below, we will see that it has nowadays become divided into areas of influence, controlled by conflicting forces with differing objectives, (See Map Nbr1)

- A. The regime-controlled area, which constitutes two-thirds of the area of Syria, and which Russia and Iran compete over.
- B. The area of control of the so-called “Syrian Democratic Forces”, which constitutes a quarter of the area of Syria, and which is actually controlled by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) forces, the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), affiliated with the Kurdish -Turkish Kurdistan’s workers Party (PKK) classified as a terrorist organization, and which is supported by American forces.
- C. Three areas under the control of the Syrian opposition factions supported by the Turkish forces (Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch and Peace Spring).
- D. The Idlib governorate region, along with parts of Hama and Aleppo governorates, is controlled by the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant “tahrir al-sham HTS” (Al-Nusra), a militant jihadist organization that was affiliated with al-Qaeda, and previously sought to distance itself from the international organization.
- E. There are remnants of ISIS in the Syrian desert.

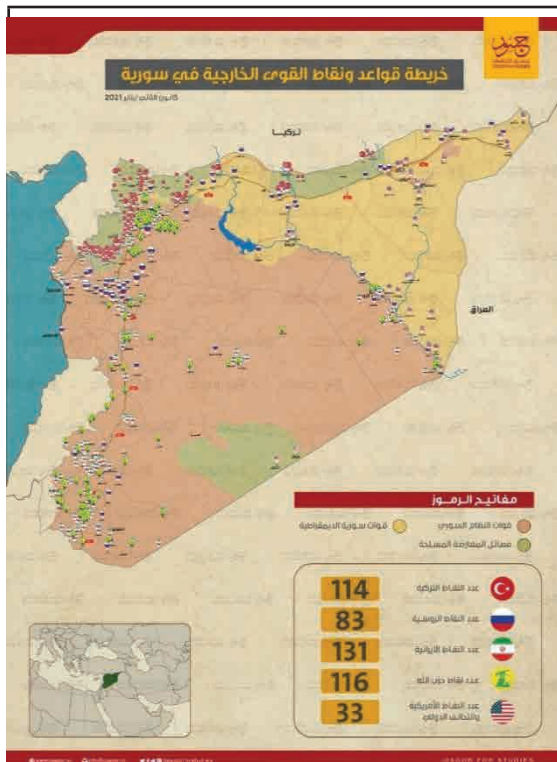
This division is associated with a heavy military presence, depending on the area of control, as there are now, according to a map published by Jusoor NGO, 476 foreign military bases and sites, distributed as follows: (See Map Number 2)

- A. 131 Iranian military bases and sites spread across 11 provinces



- B. 116 Hezbollah military bases and sites spread across 11 governorates.
- C. 114 Turkish military bases and sites spread over 5 provinces.
- D. 83 Russian military bases and sites spread across 12 provinces.
- E. 33 military bases and sites for the Global Coalition distributed over three governorates.

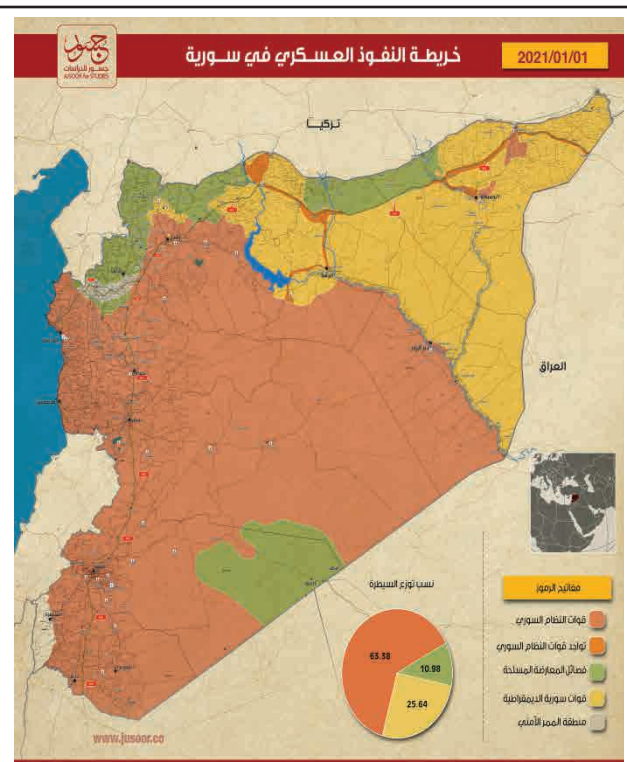
This hard reality makes Syria in need of a political solution capable of treating and restoring its unity, as well as achieving the departure of foreign forces from its territory, the dismantling of all militias and fighting factions - whether they are state-allied powers or opposition - the restriction of weapons in the hands of the state, the expulsion of all foreign militants, and Syria returning to being a unified state. Also, the restructuring of the army and security forces to be able to play a neutral national role in politics and in the government, in a way that restores stability and preserves security in Syria. Such a solution may seem like a dream under current complexities, but it is the only solution that can address all these complexities and challenges. The consequences of other possible scenarios will also be reviewed.



Map No. (2) The foreign military deployment in Syria

Source: Jusoor Center.

<https://2u.pw/qx3oa>



Map No. (1) Division of the Syrian geography between several parties. Source: Jusoor Center website

<https://2u.pw/Cwas5>

2. The challenge of physical reconstruction

- A. Any solution in Syria will deal with the unprecedented massive material destruction, since a large number of neighborhoods in many cities and towns have been completely or almost completely destroyed. The destruction includes **homes, schools, hospitals, public facilities, roads and others.** We can imagine the extent of the devastation that resulted from the regime's use of all types of modern weapons, by more than 450 thousand soldiers and security men (early 2011). These weapons were used against areas that witnessed demonstrations or became out of the regime's control. In fact, due to the inability of the regime forces and Iranian militias to undertake ground combat operations, they resorted to artillery shelling and aerial bombardment, even the Russian forces bombarded with long-range missiles from submarines.



As an example of the destruction of cities, we cite the 2017 World Bank report on residential damage in a study involving a sample of ten cities. The report showed that 27 percent of the residential buildings was damaged as a result of bombing, be it total or partial destruction⁽¹⁾. The report states that about 316,649 housing units in the ten studied cities have been destroyed, Aleppo accounting for the largest share with damage of 64% of the urban dwellings, followed by Homs with 16%. Of course, the extent of destruction is larger than the report shows in the ten studied cities, therefore; the number of houses totally or partially destroyed is higher, especially that heavy bombardment has continued after the release of the World Bank report (2017), and especially with the presence of the Russian air force, since September 2015, with its great destructive capacity. This raises the number of damaged houses, in

whole or in part, to one million homes, according to some estimates. The Syrian Network for Human Rights reports that within nine years the Syrian regime has dropped nearly 82,000 barrel bombs⁽²⁾.

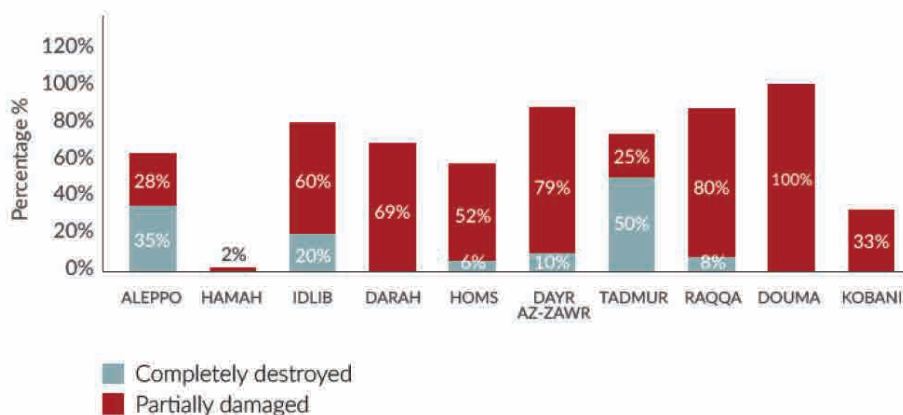
- B. The regime forces and its allies in the opposition-controlled areas have targeted health facilities in particular, to deny the wounded and injured access to medical services, and to force people to either enter into imposed settlements or emigrate. And according to the figure below, the extent of the destruction of health facilities was huge. In seven governorates and three major cities, 11 percent of public hospitals were completely destroyed, 50 percent partially destroyed, while 9 percent of private sector hospitals were completely destroyed, along with 40 percent being partially destroyed⁽³⁾.

(1) The Toll of War” The Economic and Social Consequences of the Conflict in Syria: World Bank 2017

(2) Syrian Network for Human Rights <https://sn4hr.org/arabic/2021/04/15/13441/>

(3) Ram El-Hakim, Reconstruction or mafia-style economy, Harmoon Center for Contemporary studies, 2018.

Figure 2.4: Damage to Total Health Facilities, by City



Source: World Bank staff calculations.

- C. 53% of educational facilities were partially destroyed, while 10% were completely destroyed⁽⁴⁾. The percentage of complete destruction in educational directorates was 33.3 percent, vocational institutes 14.5 percent, secondary schools 14.7 percent, primary schools 6.8 percent, and universities 5.8 percent. Aleppo received the largest share of the total destruction of educational facilities: 49 facilities, followed by Daraa, 21 facilities. It is estimated that 53 percent of educational facilities, all in the governorates and cities surveyed, have been partially destroyed, while 10

percent were completely destroyed, and that 57 percent of educational facilities are still operating in Syria⁽⁵⁾.

- D. Power stations located in areas of conflict were destroyed, due to bombing or looting by the factions that controlled them, this decreased electricity generation to 16,208 Gigawatts in 2015, compared to 43,164 Gigawatts in 2010, a decrease of 62.5%. This decline had an impact on various sectors and aspects of life, including the medical and educational sectors, potable and irrigation water, factory work, service departments and others. The situation has now deteriorated further due to the shortage of gas and lack of fuel, as electric power rationing became limited to a few hours daily at the beginning of 2021, in all areas controlled by the regime.
- E. The physical damage was not limited only to what we mentioned, as there is a large number of public administration facilities that have been destroyed; thousands of pri-

(4) World Bank report, The toll of an economic and social impact-analysis of the conflict in Syria, 2017.

(5) Ram El-Hakim, Reconstruction or mafia-style economy, Harmoon Center for Contemporary studies, 2018.



vate and public facilities and factories have also been destroyed and looted, roads and irrigation canals have been sabotaged, lands have been bulldozed or leveled, millions of fruit trees have been grubbed up, and large areas of forests have been burned. A large number of cars and engineering equipment were destroyed, in addition to the destruction and sabotage of a large number of oil fields and other mines.

- F. In addition to the physical destruction that can be measured in dollars, many archaeological areas and buildings in Syria have been destroyed as a result of the ongoing military actions since 2011⁽⁶⁾, including cultural heritage areas, including those on UNESCO World Heritage List dating back to more than 7,000 years. These losses are difficult to estimate in dollars. After analyzing about 18 cultural heritage areas using satellite images, the report concluded the following results: 290 sites within the studied areas were directly damaged and destroyed due to the ongoing conflict in Syria, of which 24 sites were completely destroyed, and 104 sites were severely damaged. 85 sites suffered moderate damage, while 77 sites suffered light damage.

3. The Challenges of Community Reconstruction:

Facing the challenge of community reconstruction is more complicated than physical destruction. Physical reconstruction is related to mainly financial resources, which is a measurable factor that can be defined and tackled at its source, and whose existence or lack thereof can be verified. Whereas the factors that prompt community reconstruction are linked to funding, and to many other factors that are difficult to pinpoint and capture, therefore difficult to predict or control.

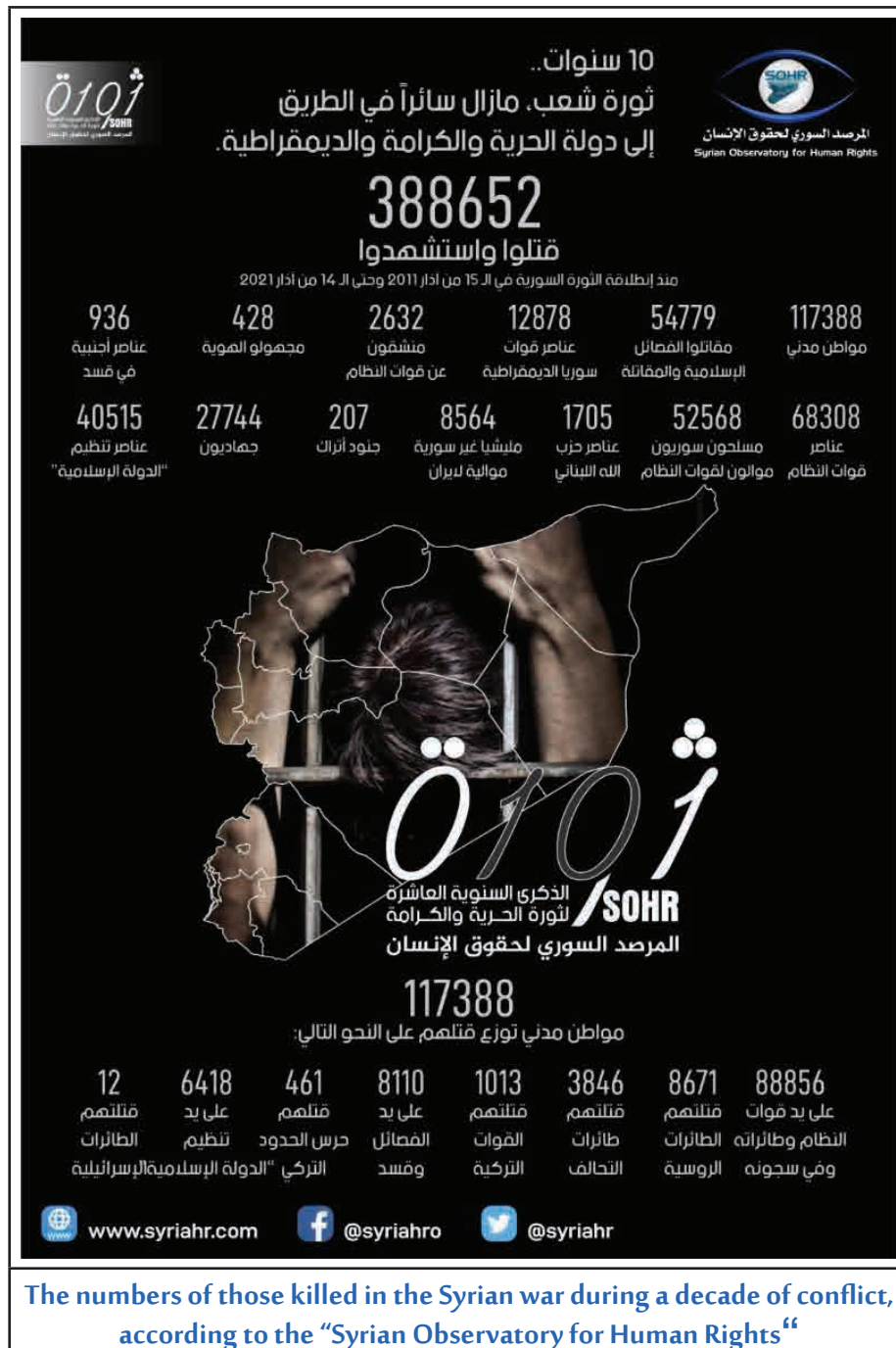
A. Human Loss challenge

According to the report of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights dated March 14, 2021, the number of victims of the Syrian war⁽⁷⁾ reached 594,000 Syrians (see Figure 1). The report states that continuous military operations, bombings and explosions resulted in more than 2.1 million Syrian citizens sustaining injuries ranging from various wounds to permanent disabilities. Other estimates add to this number more than half a million other Syrians who have died during this decade due to poor medical services, lack of nutrition, unclean water, or difficult living conditions.

(6) See Appendix number 1 of Unitar, the United Nations institute for Training and Research, March 2019.

(7) <https://2u.pw/ldnq9>

To the aforementioned number, we add the number of enforced disappearances, since the number of people who have been subjected to enforced disappearance have increased. Amnesty International was able to identify the characteristics of three categories of people who have been targeted with this method since 2011. They are as follows: peaceful opponents of the regime; persons whose loyalty to the regime has been questioned; family members of those wanted by the regime. ISIS, Al-Nusra, PYD forces and some armed opposition factions have practiced enforced disappearances against anyone who opposes them.





This large number of killed victims left behind many problems for hundreds of thousands of families who lost the father or the mother or both or one of its members. It left families without a breadwinner and orphaned the children, in addition to the large number of handicapped people whose rehabilitation, care and livelihood need great sums and efforts. The real political solution must help provide all this, which is a great burden for any future political solution.

B. The refugee's challenge

The political solution will face one of the most complex problems, the millions of refugees and displaced people. Nearly a decade has passed since the displacement began as a result of military operations or to escape the mandatory enlistment in military service, or to escape the dangerous conditions of war. The war left more than half of the population of Syria internally as well as externally displaced; and this is the biggest disaster that can affect any country.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website, the number of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries has reached more than 5.588 million people, in addition to about 534 thousand in Germany, 74 thousand in the Netherlands, 42 thousand in Austria, 17 thousand in Denmark, and 13 thousand in Greece, in addition to many in America, Australia, Sudan and many other countries.

Total Persons of Concern [JSON](#)

Total Persons of Concern by Country of Asylum [JSON](#)

Location name	Source	Data date		Population
Turkey	Government of Turkey	10 Feb 2021	65.4%	3,653,619
Lebanon	UNHCR	31 Dec 2020	15.5%	865,531
Jordan	UNHCR	4 Feb 2021	11.9%	663,507
Iraq	UNHCR	31 Jan 2021	4.4%	243,121
Egypt	UNHCR	31 Dec 2020	2.3%	130,577
Other (North Africa)	UNHCR	31 Jan 2020	0.6%	31,657

Source - UNHCR, Government of Turkey

While the number of people displaced inside Syria has reached about 6.6 million, knowing that this number has increased after this date, due to the military operations launched by the Russian air force and by the regime forces' air strikes on northern Hama and southern Idlib, which led to the displacement of more than 120 towns and villages towards the north, to join the residents in scattered camps.

The program for the safe return of refugees will be a complex challenge to any political solution, as the regime still arrests so-called wanted people among returning refugees. What is required is rather the provision of a safe residence for them in the neighborhood or the areas from which they were displaced. These areas fear sectarian, religious or ethnic friction, but will also require provisions for their needs in terms of restoring homes, and water and electricity services, among other basic infrastructure needs, in order to insure people a chance at an acceptable life standard.

C. food and health insecurity challenge

The political solution will face the issues of food and health insecurity, which is a huge problem that will not be easy to solve. The report "Syria, after eight years of war" issued by



ESCWA and the Center for Syrian Studies at St Andrews University in Scotland, stated that in 2019⁽⁸⁾ the number of people in need of assistance increased to 13.2 million people across the country. The delivery of UN food and medical supplies is becoming more and more difficult, due to regime and Russia hindering easy entry at the Turkish borders. UN reports indicate that nearly 77 percent of the population now lives under the poverty line in 2019, and a similar picture emerges when calculating the number of the poor based on regional poverty lines. This makes Syria the second poorest country in the world, after Yemen. The unemployment rate rose to 55 percent in 2017, and youth unemployment reached 75 percent in 2015, women being affected to a greater degree than men.

As for the year 2021, famine has become a threat to most Syrians residing in the regime controlled areas. The report states that in 2019 the health situation deteriorated, as 15.5 million Syrians lacked safe water sources, and only 13 percent of the population of Idlib and 16 percent of the population of Aleppo received water through pipes networks. Also, the proportion of contaminated groundwater wells exceeded 95 percent of the total 300 wells that have been monitored in Aleppo. Many previously eradicated diseases have reappeared in Syria, such as tuberculosis, measles, influenza, leishmaniosis parasite among others. According to WHO estimates one out of every 30 people in Syria suffers from a severe mental health disorder, such as severe depression or psychosis, and one in five people suffers from a more moderate form of psychological distress, such as depression or anxiety.

More than two-thirds of children need health services to treat physical and mental disabilities, having witnessed severe violence, lost one or both parents, saw their homes destroyed, and faced the daily reality of life in squalid conditions. The ESCWA report adds that UNICEF reported that around 50 percent of children suffer from sleep problems, including nightmares or bed-wetting.

A previous assessment, which included Syrian refugees living in urban areas in southern and central Jordan, revealed high levels of trauma in boys and girls under the age of fifteen. Symptoms of this trauma are manifested in various ways, including behavioral changes, aggressive tendencies, withdrawal symptoms, suicidal thoughts, and reactions based on fear.

The loss of an entire generation may be irreversible, because many of them have lost their formative childhood years, have been deprived of education, and have suffered traumatic experiences.

(8) Source mentioned earlier.



D. deterioration of education challenge

The political solution will have to deal with the deterioration of education. According to an ESCWA report, more than 40 percent of the school infrastructure is damaged. One out of every three schools was damaged, destroyed or used as a shelter. There are about 2 million children who are not enrolled in school, in addition to about 2.3 million children at risk of dropping out of school, not to mention the significant deterioration in the quality of education. There are also 140,000 teachers who have fled the country, and families' acceptance of their children working or being recruited into militias stands as a barrier to their going to school.⁽⁹⁾

The state of education in the regime-controlled areas is not much better since higher education collapsed and was characterized by chaos, low quality education, and lack of standards. It has lost important skilled and teaching staff, and university rankings decreased significantly, while it was almost completely absent in areas beyond its control.

Emigration and asylum seeking has resulted in the loss of a high percentage of academics and scientific skills in Syria. However, there is another type of loss of skills that occurred inside Syria among most of those who remained there, especially those between the ages of 25-40 years. This type of educational wastage and loss of local competencies revolved around death, arrest, unemployment, and early retirements. Mandatory military services were the most important factors causing these losses. School programs were not spared from spiraling into the Syrian war, but were rather one of the ideological indicators that revealed the identity of the conflict in Syria, of each of the parties of the conflict.

This disruption of Syrian education is considered a great loss, because it weakens the ability of the Syrian society to repair itself, this will be a challenge to any future political solution. The Syrian Center for Policy Research report states that the number of children between the ages of 5 and 17 who are out of school reached about 2.4 million children in 2019. The current outcome is catastrophic, because millions of children will suffer from shortages in skills and knowledge, in addition to other sequelae of the conflict. The conflict also caused an imbalance among school programs all over Syria, due to the establishment of different educational systems in each region, based on each ruling power's preference.

The Humanitarian Needs Report for 2018 highlighted the presence of 6 different curricula used in schools in Syria, and the direct loss of basic education years is estimated at 1.47 million years in 2019. The total loss in basic education was 25.5 million academic years until 2019 compared to the continuous scenario. Meanwhile, the total loss in years of education for all

(9) The report issued by the United Nations Organization for West Asian States «ESCWA» in cooperation with the Center for Syrian Studies at St. Andrews University, entitled «Syria after eight years of war».



educational levels was about 46 million years between 2011 and 2019, and the cost of this loss is estimated at about \$ 34.6 billion⁽¹⁰⁾.

E. Family disintegration challenge

The solution in Syria will have to deal with the issue of family disintegration and its effects on reconstruction of Syria, as many factors during the war have led to the breakdown of the Syrian family. The most important of which are forced displacement, changing or losing the place of residence, loss of a family member, impossibility of reunification, political division of family members, migration, loss of the breadwinner, unemployment, low income, low standard of living, exacerbation of the housing crisis, the spread of criminal gangs, and rampant kidnappings and murders.

This has brought about fragility to family cohesion, rupture in the social fabric, and many social problems such as divorce, polygamy, underage marriage, human trafficking, trafficking in human organs, violence against women and children, the increase in number of orphan and unaccompanied children, as well as the prevalence of child labor, school dropouts, and early marriage sometimes. All this in parallel to the phenomenon of reluctance to marry and the rise of celibacy rate among both males and females.⁽¹¹⁾

According to the study of Brookings Institution, more than 25 percent of all refugee families are headed by women, with the potential existence of similar numbers among the internally displaced, and these numbers increase over time. CARE NGO reports that female-headed households in Jordan are now 40 percent, and in Lebanon the figure has reached 30 percent.⁽¹²⁾

Years of war in Syria have led to clear socio-cultural changes in marriage practices, from early marriage for girls (underage marriage), to delayed marriage (spinsterhood), to customary marriage (not legally registered) to marriage to foreigners.

There is no doubt that the phenomenon of underage marriage was present in the Syrian society before the war, but the war contributed greatly to its increase, as the number of underage marriage registrations in Damascus went from 10% to 15% of all marriage registrations, which

(10) Syria: Justice to Transcend the Conflict - Syria Conflict Impact Report 2016-2019, Syrian Center for Policy Research, March 2020

(11) Shatha Dhafer Al-Jundi, after 7 years of war, the Syrian family between social disintegration, displacement and asylum. https://geiroon.net/archives/104076#_ftnref3

(12) Previous source.

is double of what it was before the revolution and the war.⁽¹³⁾

Because of insecurity, displacement, migration, asylum, enrollment in the army or the national defense militia, migration outside Syria, and death as a result of war, young people became largely reluctant to marry because of their unstable lives, and their number has reached a large percentage in some areas, where recent statistics indicate that the rate of spinsterhood in Syria has reached 70%.⁽¹⁴⁾

Among the indicators of the disintegration of the Syrian family is the escalation of the phenomenon of polygamy as a result of the increase in the number of females during the last five years, by more than 65%⁽¹⁵⁾. After the Syrian war, the rate of widowhood increased from 2 per thousand to at least one in every six women. Add to them those whose husbands are involved in the Syrian war, and who wait for the worst, expecting their spouses not to return, due to death in battles, or leaving the country, or losing track of them. In addition to those who head families in camps or in cities and rural areas, their number is no less than 30,000 women.⁽¹⁶⁾

F. the sectarianization of the conflict challenge

Perhaps the sectarianization of the conflict stands as a stubborn obstacle to the solution and one that requires complicated treatments in order to be overcome. One of the most dangerous aspects of societal devastation in Syria is the “sectarianization of the conflict”, and its adoption of a religious, sectarian and regional character. The sectarianization of the conflict had its roots prior to the rise of the Syrian uprising, before 2011, because the policy of sectarianizing society and sabotaging the relationship between its components was implemented by security officials. Since the start of the uprising in March 2011 the regime has found its interest in pushing peaceful demonstrations towards taking up arms and towards Islamization, so that the image would turn from an image of a regime firing at peaceful demonstrators into an image of armed Islamic rebels resorting to violence in order to change the regime by force. The regime has made tremendous efforts for this purpose, including the release of jihadists from prison, and the use of excessive violence to force protesters to take up arms.

The sectarian situation in Syria emerged with the start of the 2011 Syrian revolution. It began with Iran’s early support of the regime, even before March 2011. This was the milestone

(13) <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/160224#ixzz6WQgynC6a>

(14) Monday 18\1\2016- <https://middle-east-online.com/70-%D9%81%D9%8A->

(15) <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/160224#ixzz6WQgynC6a>

(16) Imran Younes, Widows in Syria: What the war did not tell you! <http://musawasyr.org/?p=15379>



for sectarianism, especially with the formation of Shiite factions from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, under the names of “Fatimiyoun, Zainabiyoun, and Haidariyuon.” Then came the speeches of Hassan Nasrallah, secretary-General of the Lebanese Hezbollah, who justified his intervention on the Syrian regime side under the pretext of protecting the Shiite holy places - the shrine of Sayyida Zainab and Ruqayah and others in Damascus - then followed the entry of Hezbollah members into Syria to support the Shiites; or for the largest sector of them, to support the authoritarian Syrian regime. The same goes for a number of multinational Shiite militias, especially Iraqi and Iranian.

This Shiite sectarian rhetoric by Hezbollah made it easier for Islamic Salafi organizations to display the Sunni sectarian discourse in return. Iran continued to enhance its religious and sectarian role in Syria, after sponsoring a new displacement agreement to empty two Shiite towns from north of Idlib, in exchange for the displacement of the residents of some Sunni towns in the countryside of Damascus.⁽¹⁷⁾

G. Organized crime challenge

Organized crime has evolved immensely during the war years in Syria. The insecurity after the outbreak of the revolution, the proliferation of weapons, and the lack of accountability have created an environment conducive to the rise of crime in Syria. The features of its criminal identity drowned in general violence, growing number of victims, and victims of organized crime. The poor performance of the Internal Security Forces, for fear of colliding with loyal armed groups, has contributed to the high level of crimes in the country.

Organized crime in Syria was active in the following crimes: kidnapping and trafficking of humans and human organs, kidnapping for ransom and human trafficking outside the regime’s areas, the detention trade, money laundering, the shift from drug trafficking to drug abuse, drug manufacturing and drug trading, illegal smuggling of goods, forgery and fraud of official and real estate documents .

The war transformed Syria from a country exporting wheat, fruits, clothes, and medicine to exporting drugs of all kinds to all parts of the world, under the direct sponsorship of the Syrian regime and its security services, which opened the doors for “investment” in this area for local militias and militias crossing the borders from Lebanon. In fact, the Syrian drug exports

(17) The Four Towns Agreement, April 2017, On April 11, 2017, representatives of «Hayat Tahrir al-Sham» and «Ahrar al-Sham» on the one hand, and representatives of Iran on the other hand, reached an agreement to empty the town of Madaya and the city of Zabadani in the countryside of Damascus from fighters and those among its residents who wish to leave, in exchange for the emptying of the pro-regime towns of Kafraya and Al-Foua in the northern countryside of Idlib, in what was known as the «Four Cities Agreement», after the Yarmouk camp in southern Damascus joined the agreement. For more details, see: <https://www.harmoon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/>

outcompeted that of Afghanistan which used to dominate the Gulf, Iraqi and Iranian markets.

The political solution in Syria must target this difficult issue and create an atmosphere that helps in fighting and eliminating organized crime, because its presence hinders any reconstruction process.

H. Transitional justice challenge

In addition to all the above-mentioned, the comprehensive program for reconstruction requires an appropriate Syrian national climate that promotes national reconciliation among Syrians. This cannot be achieved without “transitional justice” which is supposed to defuse the desire for revenge, the process of condemning the leaders who gave the orders to kill. Accountability must include all the major perpetrators on both sides, both the regime and the opposition. Wounds cannot heal without such transitional justice, but on the condition that it applies within a limited space and does not turn into “retaliatory justice”, with acts of revenge following the old tribal method; even tribes and clans are wise enough to protect lives. Transitional justice must not be turned into what is called “conciliatory justice” meaning “let bygones be bygones” and “to forgive is divine”, where no one is held accountable for anything. Designing an appropriate program for transitional justice is one of the most complex and challenging tasks in the Syrian context.

4. Challenge of conditions deteriorating in the year 2021

Despite the horror of what was mentioned above about what happened to Syria and the Syrians, the situation continues to deteriorate further, due to the impossibility of a political solution. After the Caesar Act was promulgated in December 2019 and activated in June 2020, and after its sanctions were added to the previous sanctions imposed on Syria by the United States, and after most international parties adhered to these sanctions, the crisis the regime faces became more severe, it became more and more unable to secure the most basic necessities of life such as bread and electricity.

One of the most important indicators of the effects of the law was the deterioration of the Syrian pound, from about 1,000 Syrian pounds at the beginning of the year 2020 to about 3500 in April 2021. With the regime’s inability to secure real resources, it resorts to printing large quantities of money, and this matter leads to a further deterioration of the currency value, and therefore to a further deterioration in the living standards of most Syrians, especially that the levels of most wages are between 50 and 100 thousand Syrian pounds, that is, between 15 and 30 dollars to spend on a family of five, on average, or less than one dollar per



family per day. Also, the labor economic report issued by the Federation of Trade Unions in Syria revealed that the average cost of living for a family amounts to 600,000 Syrian pounds per month, and the purchasing power of people with limited incomes - the vast majority of Syrians - has decreased by more than 90%. This is due to the huge gap between incomes and prices, and this leads us directly to rising poverty rates according to United Nations and the World Bank numbers, as a study by Syrian Center for Policy Research, conducted in cooperation with the American Association in Beirut, indicates⁽¹⁸⁾ that more than 93% of Syrians live in poverty, of whom about 60% live in extreme poverty, and these terrifying estimated rates include very high unemployment rates, exceeding 60%, and most of this high percentage is concentrated in industrial, construction and agricultural sectors, due to the absence of operating components of these sectors.

The World Food Program indicated that there are about 9 million Syrians going hungry every night, and that one person in two does not know where his next meal will come from. The report warned - in addition to the above - of the risk of 2.2 million Syrians reaching the brink of hunger and poverty, especially since Syria topped the list of poorest countries in the world, with a rate of about 82.5%, according to "World By Map" website.

Estimated numbers of the World Food Program indicate that 14% of families in Damascus have insufficient food consumption levels, while the highest rates of insufficiency are in Aleppo 41%, Raqqa 39%, Latakia and Homs 34%, same goes for the rest of the regions and governorates. Thus, the difference is linked to skills and opportunities and the challenges imposed by war, waste of resources, scarce opportunities, mismanagement and corruption⁽¹⁹⁾.

The announcement of the "military victory of the regime and its allies" marked the beginning of the aggravation of the economic crisis, on the official and popular levels. The operations to regain control over large parts of the Syrian territories by al-Assad and his allies, which were under the control of the opposition, constituted a significant additional financial burden on the regime, exceeding its poor financial capability.

The Syrian citizen is in despair: He no longer waits for solutions from the government, especially that the decisions the government made were faulty and only made matters worse, contributing greatly to this deteriorating living situation. Not to mention its unwillingness to find solutions, the government has proven that the citizens' livelihood is not one of their priorities, so Syrian families have resorted to strategies and coping methods specific to each family, according to their specific characteristics. Among these methods:

(18) Report of the Syrian Center for Policy Research, June 2019

(19) <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/world/bymap/Poverty.html>



- ◇ Dependence on external remittances from migrants or refugees, from family members or extended family.
- ◇ Seeking the presence of more than one source of income in the family, such as overtime work for the father, and the wife's job, or even children.
- ◇ Chronic borrowing from social networks, from acquaintances and relatives, as United Nations statistics indicate that 57% of the population borrows to survive.
- ◇ Recycling clothes and using them among family members, especially school clothes and school books, and buying used clothes that are "worn out" at a high rate.
- ◇ Shortening the components/ingredients of the lunch meal, reducing the content, and limiting it to everything that is cheap.
- ◇ Replacing the consumption of lamb with chicken, for a specific number of times, up to once a month.
- ◇ Food abstinence by adults in favor of feeding children.
- ◇ Home agriculture and poultry farming, which are adaptive methods specific to the countryside and the outskirts of cities.
- ◇ Some families are forced to enroll their children in fighting militias or semi-armed groups, out of necessity.
- ◇ The popularity of some jobs and activities that are alien to society, its values and traditions, and which have attracted people out of necessity.
- ◇ Changing the pattern of social life with regard to events, visits and social contact.
- ◇ The emergence of the phenomenon of the breadwinner woman who insures full support for her family, as a result of the man's absence, either because of death, or because of arrest or asylum.

Because of the lack of the basic necessities of life, Syrians spend many hours of their time waiting for a bundle of bread or a canister of gas.



Waiting for a canister of gas in Damascus



Queuing for bread in Damascus⁽²⁰⁾

The Americans are using sanctions as a weapon against the regime and against Russia and Iran. The United States does not want Russia and Iran to emerge victorious from the Syrian war, but rather wants to turn their military victory into defeat through sanctions. America is waiting for Russia to surrender as a result of the pressure of sanctions, and to accept a political solution in accordance with Resolution 2254, which is based on political transition of power, but the regime, Iran and Russia behind it, reject any political solution that includes a political transition, no matter how disastrous the consequences for the Syrians. For them, “power comes first.” Hence, it appears that the use of sanctions, and the inability of the regime and its supporters to confront them, even if they lead to the erosion of the legitimacy of the Assad regime, create very harsh living conditions for Syrians, and these sanctions cannot be considered an acceptable tool, unless they are accompanied by pressure for a quick political solution. This is because their negative consequences for the Syrian people will be certain, while its benefits are postponed for an unknown period.

(20) <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/world/bymap/Poverty.html>



5. The challenge of political reconstruction:

Any political solution will have to address the issue of political desertification, a phenomenon that Syria has experienced since 1958. Establishing a free democratic system based on the transfer of power requires a certain level of experience, culture and traditions that people acquire through practice. Such a system reinforces equal citizenship, human rights, tolerance, experience in building institutions, and more.

Syria will face the dilemma of choosing the right political system between a parliamentary system and a presidential system or a system that combines both.

Syria will have to keep in mind the tragedies that the presidential system has caused to its people, and this will push Syrians towards a parliamentary system, but then again the parliamentary system is more prone to instability, especially in countries where political forces are not well established, and democratic traditions have not yet been established.

Also, it will face the dilemma of choosing the appropriate administrative system between central and decentralized.

On one hand, the expansion of decentralization threatens the unity of an already fragmented country; on the other hand, returning to the old centralization is a hindrance, and has many negative effects.

Moreover, it will have to deal with the shift in the Kurds' demands. They went from asking for an equal treatment with the Syrians, non-discrimination against them, and the freedom of exercising their cultural rights, to aspiring towards governmental autonomy similar to northern Iraq "Iraqi Kurdistan". This aspiration is a precursor to cessation and to realizing the dream of a Greater Kurdistan, all of which threatens to tear Syria apart.

Therefore, a political solution must adopt broad lines that satisfy the various parties. The political solution will reset the balance between the Parliament (legislative authority), the Government (the executive authority) and the judiciary system - which have been corrupted- thus restoring the active political party life in Syria, and reviving the supervisory role of trade unions, media, and civil society, as well as ensuring the impartiality of the security and military institutions.

Without further details, it is impossible for the same regime to keep ruling Syria but at the same time, it will not be easy to build a modern, pluralistic, democratic political system.

There are strong polarizing tendencies under the name of "demanding federalism". There are also forces that wish to establish a religious or semi-religious regime with Islamic domi-

nance. Add to them, the strong traditions of military influence that cannot be easily ignored, and the growth of sectarian and regional tendencies that push for a solid decentralization. All of which may undermine the unity of Syria, another challenge for the political solution.

6. The challenge of economic reconstruction:

Economy was the first victim of the conflict in Syria, especially when it turned into an armed conflict. In fact, Syria's tourism sector collapsed completely, as well as industrial and agricultural production. The size of the internal market decreased, the transportation sector declined, and oil and gas production crashed after the withdrawal of operating companies.

The opposition factions took control of Oil and gas fields, and its production decreased from 380,000 barrels per day to less than 20,000 barrels per day, in regime-controlled areas, as well as in PYD-controlled areas in Hasakah and Deir Ez-Zor. Daily production is estimated, according to Jisr website, an online daily newspaper, at about 87,000 barrels per day, which the PYD monopolizes, of which it supplies up to 20,000 barrels per day to the regime, through tankers. Financial losses and missed development opportunities amounted to more than 400 billion dollars.

Economic indicators appear to be in continuous decline, from 2011 to 2019, which intensified in 2020 due to many additional factors, mainly international economic sanctions, the Corona pandemic, as well as administrative and financial corruption in the government.

Published figures estimate that the gross domestic product decreased by 66%, the cash reserve declined from \$21 billion to less than one billion, and the per-capita share declined from about \$3,000 annually before 2011, to about \$500 annually, for the first half of 2020. Exports declined, trade deficit increased, markets crashed, and the flow of any capital and transfers to Syria stopped, except for the transfers of Syrians abroad to their families at home, estimated at \$1.5 billion annually. In return the flight of capital and savings out of Syria increased, although it is difficult estimating the percentage.

Syrian expatriates have established thousands of companies in Egypt, and more than 6000 small and medium businesses in Turkey, especially in Gaziantep, Urfa, Antakya and Kilis in Southern Turkey, in addition to Istanbul and elsewhere.

This happened after industrial Aleppo, the economic capital of Syria, including its Sheikh Najjar zone, the largest industrial zone in Syria, has been under the control of the opposition for years, which stopped the flow of work. Not to mention that companies there have been looted instead of being managed rationally.



In addition to large numbers of people killed in the war and those recruited to fight, millions of Syrians have sought refuge outside Syria, leading to a significant shortage in the workforce, which is the production force.

According to the report of the Syrian Center for Policy Research, “the total employment recorded a sharp decline during the conflict, From 5.184 million workers in 2011, to 2.568 million workers in 2016,

and gradually increased to 3.058 million workers in 2019. The unemployment rate rose from 14.9% in 2011 to 51.8% in 2016, and gradually decreased to 42.3% in 2019, the labor market lost 3.7 million vacancies, and the huge loss of job opportunities raised the economic dependency ratio from 4.13 people per employee in 2010 to 6.4 people in 2019⁽²¹⁾.”

At the beginning of 2021, the bankruptcy of the Syrian state became more evident, since it has used up the entire public reserve, estimated at \$18 billion in 2010, to finance its military operations.

Financial deficit appeared in society after families spent their savings during the conflict years: Capitals fled abroad, whereas money transfer from abroad to Syria became very difficult.

After the unprecedented economic crisis, the desired political solution will have to establish a plan for economic reconstruction, and re-launch the economic activity since all its sectors are destroyed; such solution is considered to be a key pillar to the future of Syria.

Another aspect related to the first process is the implementation of an economic system that achieves high production capacity, provides a more equitable distribution of income, properly delineates the roles of the three parties to the social contract (society, business and power), and fixes the distorted structure of the Syrian economy that prevailed before 2011, which was designed to serve powerful groups, and to date remains governed by arbitrary administrative and security control. In fact, arbitrary management caused further losses in Syria’s economy.

7. The challenge of administrative reconstruction:

Due to the prevalence of bureaucracy and failure to develop modern administrative patterns, a reconstruction plan must include the rebuilding of the general administration for the civil and governmental economic sectors.

(21) Syria Justice for Overcoming the Conflict, Impacts of the Syrian Conflict Report 2016-2019, Syrian Center for Policy Research, March 2020.

This is a broad process that requires reconstructing the public administrations in areas that have been out of the regime's control for a number of years, some of which are still outside its control.

Reconstruction also includes "administrative reform", long overdue before 2011 but rejected by the regime. The current administrative regime is old and has been randomly formulated for up to 4 decades by a security force mentality, thus causing de-motivation among the Syrians. Therefore, Syria needs a modern administrative regime that manages society and public sector institutions, including legislative and organizational structures, executive work systems, personnel affairs and salary policies, and many others, in order to get rid of the severely obstructing centralization without causing chaos.

Reform will encounter opposition, due to the material and non-material benefits centralization offers, and will face pressure in terms of escaping any control, hence the need for an administrative reconstruction.

8. Legislative Reconstruction Challenge:

It is not possible to rebuild Syria completely, while at the same time keeping the distorted legal system, and the mostly corrupt judicial system, which is subject to the authority of the security services.

So, there must be a legal reform process that organizes the Syrian society from all sides, in line with the times and with the requirements of reconstruction, starting with the constitution, the basic laws, and ending with the executive orders, in a manner that achieves a sound and stable legislative structure, and guarantees the enforcement of law, and the integrity and efficiency of the judiciary system.

This reform must lay the foundations for building a modern judicial system that is as efficient as it can be, a task that will face the challenges of the current judicial body with its many diseases, limited efficiency, and rampant corruption, a challenge not easy to overcome.

9. The challenge of financing comprehensive reconstruction

All reconstruction plans without funding remain words on paper. The next government will have to secure sufficient resources in order to finance reconstruction. With huge destruction on the financial and society levels, reconstruction requires an equally huge funding and this cannot happen without international aid agreed on by various parties, a condition that has yet



to be fulfilled.

The report issued in 2020, by the United Nations Organization for West Asian States “ES-CWA”, in cooperation with the Center for Syrian Studies at St Andrews University, entitled “Syria after eight years of war”, estimates the damage to physical capital until the end of 2018 at about \$117.7 billion in 2020 prices.

Damage from the conflict has accumulated in seven of the most capital-demanding sectors: housing, mining, security, transportation, manufacturing, electricity and health. Adding the \$324.5 billion in lost opportunity damages - which brings the cost closer to \$442.2 billion, we reach a realistic estimate of the macroeconomic cost of the conflict. Of course, the extent of the damage did not stop at this number. The conflict continued after 2018, until the spring of 2020, and was the fiercest because of the destruction brought about by warplanes, whether those affiliated with the regime or Russia.

The March 2020 report by the Syrian Center for Policy Research estimates “the economic losses due to the conflict until the end of 2019 at about \$530.1 billion, compared to the continuous scenario, which is 9.7 times the GDP of 2010 at constant prices. This total loss consists of the loss in GDP and is equivalent to \$420.9 billion, the increase in military spending is about \$37.8 billion, the damage to the capital stock, which is estimated at about \$64.6 billion, and finally, the unofficial production of oil and gas, which is estimated at \$9.9 billion during the period between 2011 and 2019”⁽²²⁾.

We believe that the costs of destruction are greater than that, especially since these estimates date back to 2018, in addition to the fact that the costs of reconstruction exceed the value of what was destroyed, and it will be very difficult to secure large enough sums for a total reconstruction, despite the Gulf, Europe and others willing to donate to help Syria. But if these countries do not agree on helping Syria, the reconstruction process will remain a distant dream, and this means the Syrian tragedy will continue. Finally, we conclude that a political solution that donor countries and institutions do not agree to is not considered a political solution.

(22) Syria Justice for Overcoming the Conflict, Impacts of the Syrian Conflict Report 2016-2019, Syrian Center for Policy Research, March 2020.

Possible solution scenarios

1. The roles of international players in the political solution:

After nearly a decade of deadly conflict and mass destruction, the situation in Syria has entered a period of cautious calm, as the fighting has stopped, and the prospect of a return to armed conflict seem slim, although not excluded.

Syria today is divided into five areas of control, with no possibility of solution. The Geneva track is now suspended after being partitioned, and shortened to just a committee that is only drafting a constitution, that no one knows what the Syrians will do with it. So, the committee ended in failure. A kind of political stalemate prevails without anyone having any plan, and everyone is waiting without knowing what they are waiting for or what awaits them.

According to Professor Raymond Hinnebusch, the reconstruction in Syria has “become a new battlefield in the Syrian conflict, and it is continuously used by the regime to re-establish its control over the country, and also used by competing regional and international powers, to shape the internal balance of power, and to establish spheres of influence in the country.”⁽²³⁾

The regime, with Iran and Russia behind it, does not want any solution. Rather, it seeks to impose the solution it wants, which is holding elections for a new presidential term while keeping everything as it is, and procrastinating the Assad regime’s way, in order for this regime to force the international community to value it. The regime even started preparing its election campaign with its well-known results (Assad has already conducted his farcical elections and won by a landslide). Also, it is now seeking to promote that Syria is now stable in the areas it controls, and the refugees can return to their homes, in an effort to lure Europe into returning some refugees to Syria now that Europe is under pressure from the presence of relatively large numbers of Syrian refugees in its countries, and in hope that European countries would coordinate with the regime for their return, which would normalize the relations between them.

However, the regime does not actually want the return of refugees, because most of them have participated in demonstrations against its rule. It is looking forward to reformulating Syria according to its interests, those of which are not compatible with the return of many refugees. It seeks to use reconstruction as a weapon, despite its current inability to finance any reconstruction. It wants to prevent the residents of the areas that revolted against it, which are

(23) Raymond Hinnebusch; The Battle over Syria’s Reconstruction; Global Policy, February 2021; <https://2u.pw/JGx6V>



random residential areas on the outskirts of major cities as well as areas that witnessed war clashes and massive destruction and whose residents sought refuge in neighboring countries, from returning to their areas and homes. It also prepares to issue a number of laws, such as Law (66) of 2012 and Law No. (10) of 2018, which aims to seize properties and lands in those areas, and grant them to loyal businessmen to build new high-end residential neighborhoods thereby undermining the return of its original inhabitants.

Assad declares that the reconstruction projects will be granted to those who supported the regime, i.e. to Iran and Russia. He wants the Gulf, Europe and international institutions to provide funds for reconstruction, but he also wants to give the projects to others, Iran and Russia, who carried out war actions that caused the destruction on behalf of the regime.

Iran's position is characterized by firmness in supporting the Syrian regime and Bashar al-Assad personally remaining at the helm of power without any change. Syria - from Iran's point of view - is part of its regional agenda, and it views Syria as part of the Iranian bridge extending from Iran to Iraq, through Syria to Lebanon and Hezbollah, which has become dominant player in its foreign and domestic policy. Iran has provided all possible support to the regime since day one, providing military support and recruiting militias from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight with the regime, despite the US imposed sanctions and embargo. Iran has provided the Assad regime with funding "with more than \$16 billion since 2012. Tehran opened a credit line worth 3.5 billion dollars in 2013, and expanded it by one billion dollars in 2015. This helped keep the Syrian economy afloat. Iran gave the regime \$6.4 billion, and \$700 million to the loyal militias in Syria." It is working to consolidate its presence in Syrian society, and carries out many activities that lead to demography change, whether by preventing refugees from returning to their villages (For example, the Syrian border villages and towns overlooking the Lebanese Bekaa such as Fleita and Zabadani, or the city of Daraya adjacent to Damascus, among others) or carrying out population transfers, which threatens the emergence of upcoming conflicts likely to be bloody.

Russia does not want the Geneva process to succeed. Rather, it wants to take from Geneva its essence, and wants for the content of any solution to be through Sochi and Astana, that is, a Russian solution with an international visage. Therefore, it is pushing the regime to disrupt any international path to a solution. It sees, until now at least, that there is no alternative for Assad's survival, and it opposes any thought of replacing him, even from within the regime.

The American administration is confused. After Obama aligned himself with Iran's viewpoint, and Trump reversed course to being harsh on Iran, Biden came up with a policy that is still ambiguous towards Iran and toward a solution in Syria. His administration is made up of personalities whose orientations oscillate between extremism expressed by the non-accept-



tance of a president who committed such a large number of genocidal acts against his people, and leniency to the extent of accepting his survival under the name of “changing the behavior of the regime”.

They all know that the regime will not change its behavior, and to this day it still arrests social media activists, and puts them to trial for charges like “weakening the will of the nation”. The American administration’s circles say that The United States will maintain its position, whether by remaining to the east of the Euphrates or by imposing sanctions on the regime and placing a veto on the normalization of relations with it, until Moscow is convinced to accept a political solution based on political transition of power.

Other analyses suggest that the current situation does not produce any pressure on Washington, while it produces a lot of pressure on Moscow, and Washington does not want to make Moscow’s and Tehran’s mission in Syria easy. This stalemate in the American position threatens to prolong the conflict in Syria for more years, and by extension, the suffering of the Syrian people.

Turkey is present on the ground with military forces in three regions (North and Northwest of Syria). It strengthens its both its military and civilian presence there. It has a national interest in the stability of Syria with its borders of nearly 900 km; after all, the two societies have historically overlapped for 400 years, and there is population overlap between the two countries and sharing water sources, and Syria is Turkey’s road to the Gulf, just as Turkey is Syria’s gateway to Europe.

Turkey sees the separatist PYD as an imminent threat to its national security, and it has an interest in restoring the new Syrian state’s control over the entire Syrian territory, and makes this the priority of its considerations. There are both agreements and disagreements with Moscow on Syria, so the cooperation between them on the Syrian issue is worrisome, as their interests and goals are different, and even contradictory in the end. Turkey and its industrial, commercial, transport and contracting companies, will have a large share of the reconstruction contracts. Turkey has a great interest in achieving a political transition to a new political system on the ruins of the Assad regime. Assad’s survival means the failure of its policy towards Syria, despite all that Turkey has done and endured.

2. Features of a political solution that achieves reconstruction:

By analyzing the material, social, economic and political devastation that has occurred in Syria, and despite the complexities of the conflict after the intervention of many regional and international parties, and the difficulty of reaching reasonable understandings, and the vary-



ing possibilities of developments of the situation in Syria, it becomes clear that for the political solution to restore Syria as a peaceful state without being a threat to its neighbors and the region, the solution must be built upon the following features on which we will rely in order to assess the possible scenarios for the development of the situation in Syria:

- A. Preserving the unity of Syria's territory and people, and creating the necessary atmosphere to restore the solidarity of its society.
- B. Transforming Syria into a pluralistic democratic system based on the ruling through elections, while regaining public liberties and freedoms of expression, equal citizenship, human rights and the rights of political and ethnic minorities, so that Syria is administered in a decentralized manner, allowing all regions to have local administrations and control over resources, with the right to administer of many local affairs.
- C. Achieving the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Syria, dismantling all loyal and opposition militias and armed factions, expelling foreign fighters from Syria, and reserving the states monopoly of arms. And to secure job opportunities for those who lay down arms to encourage them to do so.
- D. Preserving state institutions from collapse, and creating a positive atmosphere for launching reform in the administration of the service sectors, and public economic sector.
- E. Restructuring the army and security to become a national institution independent of politics that preserves the safety of the homeland and society, in order to eliminate organized crime as a condition for stability, crucial for reconstruction.
- F. The solution-government must meet the conditions of securing more than \$100 billion in financing at least, within five to ten years.
- G. Secure the reconstruction of one million of completely or partially destroyed homes, within less than a decade, and rebuilding, restoring and equipping completely or partially destroyed hospitals and health facilities. The rebuilding and renovating of completely or partially destroyed schools.
- H. Addressing the cases of residential areas destroyed by bombing, where there is no documentation and specify the rights of the residents, including hundreds of thousands of cases. Correct the arbitrary measures taken by the regime aimed at changing the demographic geography of Syria.



- I. Reconstructing the infrastructure, including roads, bridges, irrigation canals, and power stations. Re-establishing thousands of factories that were destroyed and looted, and operating the oil fields at their highest capacities amounting to billions of dollars.
- J. Returning nearly two million Syrian children who have dropped out of school back to regular education.
- K. Providing treatment and appropriate conditions for the care of more than 3% of Syrians who are suffering from mental health disorders, and about a quarter of the Syrians who suffer from severe anxiety, depression and psychosis. Provide the necessary care for about two thirds of the children who witnessed acts of violence and need care of various kinds.
- L. Securing the safe return of about 6 million internally displaced people, and about 6 million refugees in other countries, to their homes in Syria.
- M. Securing clean and safe water sources for 15.5 million Syrian citizens, who are now suffering from lack of potable water.
- N. Providing food, humanitarian assistance and care for about 13 million Syrians, who require assistance immediately, until they can build normal lives again.
- O. Creating an investment climate that encourages private initiative, and initially develops the sectors of commodity, production, agriculture, industry and construction, for their great role in reconstruction.
- P. Securing adequate funding and appropriate climate to re-launch the Syrian economy, creating job opportunities for about half of the currently unemployed work force, and securing revenues for finance reconstruction. Improving the living standards for nearly 80% of Syrians who are living below the poverty line.
- Q. Providing means of care for tens of thousands of families who have lost their breadwinner, and for hundreds of thousands of disabled people.
- R. Creating an atmosphere that brings back hundreds of thousands of cadres and highly skilled professionals including doctors, pharmacists, engineers, teachers, lawyers, judges and professionals, who have sought refuge in other countries.
- S. Creating an atmosphere that solves issues resulting from marriages, divorces and births that occurred during the first ten years and were not properly registered.



- T. solving the issues resulting from sales and purchases that took place during the past ten years and were not properly documented.
- U. Dealing with cases of illegal appropriation of property that occurred during the years of conflict, whether by arbitrary decisions by the regime or by fraudulent operations that affected refugees' properties.
- V. Revealing the fate of tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared persons.
- W. Achieving appropriate transitional justice that contributes to restoring the cohesion of Syrian society, enabling Syrians to return to their abandoned homes, and the ability to reconcile with their neighbors and defeat the sectarianization of the conflict.
- X. Rebuilding Syria legislatively and legally, including an independent, efficient and impartial judiciary.

Of course, achieving this ideal solution that fulfills all these conditions all at once is difficult, and adherence to it in full may be unrealistic, but this ideal solution remains a criterion that ensures the efficacy of any upcoming political solution in Syria.

3. Possible scenarios for the development of the situation in Syria and the reconstruction

Through an extensive general analysis, three possible scenarios can be anticipated in Syria:

A. "No solution" scenario:

It is the failure to reach a political solution.

In other words, the continuation of the current situation of Syria's fragmentation among different Iranian, Russian, Turkish and American (the PYD region) control areas. According to a map published by Jusoor Center, there are 476 foreign military bases and sites, Figure (1) above. With the support of Russia and Iran, the regime began organizing presidential elections in the regime-controlled areas, to re-elect Bashar al-Assad for another seven years, which means ignoring and rejecting the political process run by the United Nations in Geneva.

With the "no solution" scenario, the current situation will continue, and the reconstruction process will witness sporadic actions by each party in its areas of control. The Americans support the efforts of the PYD in their areas of control east of the Euphrates, and there are American and European institutions that provide support and implement some projects. The PYD

benefits from the presence of oil resources at its disposal, which enables it to impose its control and conduct some public services at a minimum, according to its method and goals that aim to divide Syria in the long or short term. The PYD has no interest in achieving any political solution in Syria, and it will have to accept what is offered in the event the Americans leave Syria, and this is not to be expected within the solution as of now.

In the areas of Idlib and Aleppo countrysides, especially in Turkey's three areas of control, Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch and Spring of Peace, Turkey is now carrying out some infrastructure works, and is working to build administrative institutions that provide services to citizens at a minimum, and Turkish institutions are supervising these works.

As for areas controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra in Idlib and its countryside, there are no significant actions, and al-Nusra continues to impose its radical social organization ideology that is not compatible with the Syrian society.

The regime-controlled areas remain the areas that witness the worst conditions, especially the living conditions, where people lack all the necessities of decent life. It is enough to mention that the monthly salaries are between 15 and 30 dollars per month for most workers supporting families, except a few.

This ongoing scenario means the continuation of the tragic conditions for Syrians in the regime-controlled areas in particular, where Iran and Russia provide material support only within small limits, as they focus on military support, destruction and not on construction. The two states are interested in either acquiring corrupt, long-term monopoly contracts that benefit them in the event of achieving a potential political solution, or in starting any reconstruction process according to any other scenario, or in participating in current investments with quick returns. and accordingly; the bet on Russia and Iran regarding reconstruction is a losing bet, and the election of Bashar al-Assad in the summer of 2021 will not change anything in this tragic reality.

In this scenario; All manifestations of the physical, societal, political, economic and other threats will remain, and will worsen with time.

B. Regime survival scenario:

We first assume that the United States with the new Biden administration turned its back on the Syrian issue, considering that Syria belongs to Russia, and that the interests of the United States in Syria are limited and do not warrant all the trouble.

Another assumption would be that Biden decided to resume nuclear negotiations with Iran,



accepting the latter's condition which is that Iran would have a presence in Syria, and then decided to withdraw from east of the Euphrates, leaving the PYD to face its fate, while obliging the Russians to grant autonomy in Kurdish-majority areas.

However, after the regime regains control east of the Euphrates, the Russians will support the American withdrawal, and they see the course of the Constitutional Committee as the appropriate path, because it is an implementation of Security Council Resolution 2254, after they interpreted it in a way voided it of its content, and turned it into a mere constitution drafting process in preparation for elections that they can control despite the United Nations supervision.

The failure of the Constitutional Committee will be considered a failure of Russian diplomacy that pushed this unilateral interpretation of Resolution 2254, and the results of the elections will be known in advance, namely the re-election of Assad even if it was under United Nations supervision, Russia and Assad may form a government that includes a number of opposition figures, while choosing a number of opposition figures to be governors and directors of public institutions. They would also release those who remain in the regime's prisons, or those who were recently arrested solely in order to be released later, this will be accompanied by a media fanfare and presented as a "Syrian- Syrian political solution". Afterwards, they move towards the international community, to restore the regime and its new president, Bashar al-Assad, to help him in the reconstruction.

Although the US administration has abandoned Syria, according to this scenario it does not intend to help Russia in Syria achieving success in its Syrian intervention. On the contrary, it wants Russia and Iran to sink more into the "Syrian mud," and therefore will keep the sanctions on Syria. Europe and some other countries will keep up the sanctions as well, and will continue to veto the financing of reconstruction, and vetoing the restoration of diplomatic relations with the regime, at the same time supporting the Turkish presence in northwest Syria, demanding the implementation of the Geneva Declaration and Security Council resolutions 2118 and 2254, and the occurrence of Political transition of power and national rule without enough pressure on Russia, because they want to keep Russia involved in Syria without a solution or an end in sight. The Europeans will not allow Russia and Iran to achieve a successful resolution to their Syrian adventure, as a lesson for them and all those who seek their help.

Although some Arab and small European countries, and others, will see what happened as an invitation for restoring their relations with the regime, this political alliance will not turn into material aid and commercial relations with the regime, due to the continuation of US and European sanctions.

In this scenario, the fate of comprehensive reconstruction in all its aspects will not differ

from the reconstruction we talked about in the first scenario. There will be no reconstruction, there will be no return of refugees, and no return to stability. Of course, the Syrian people will pay a heavy price through this scenario as well, because the Syrian catastrophe will continue indefinitely, after it became clear that Russia and Iran were unable to provide a helping hand.

C. The scenario of the political transition to a democratic system.

This scenario is achieved in the event of a Russian-American-Turkish agreement and Iran's acceptance of it (even if it is forced), and by Russia being convinced that the political transition and Bashar al-Assad's departure will not overthrow its interests in Syria; and, if the US administration (the president and his advisors) is convinced that America has an interest in putting an end to a long-term human crisis, since the instability in Syria constitutes a source of instability in the region, most of which is regimes allies to the United States, starting with Egypt, the Gulf states, Jordan and Turkey, and that the solution reduces the role of Iran in Syria and Lebanon, and that stability will not be achieved without a political transition and the establishment of a new, strong central authority, and that Biden's team in the Middle East and Syria will contribute to persuading the US president to pursue an effective policy and to correct Obama's political mistakes.

This scenario is achieved when America puts Russia in front of two options: either the continuation of the current situation of tearing Syria between five powers on the ground, the continuation of the siege and the veto against the normalization of relations with the regime, and the prevention of its international re-legitimization (the further deterioration of the internal situation has created greater pressure on Russia); Or accepting a "balanced deal for a political solution in Syria" based on a political transition in Syria to a new elected authority on the ruins of the former Baath-Assad authority, in exchange for lifting the siege imposed on Syria, lifting the veto on its international rehabilitation, and lifting the veto on reconstruction.

At the same time, Syria is part of a network of Russian-American relations around the world, and these files affect each other. Therefore, Moscow cannot ignore the will of the US administration and the European Union, which linked the lifting of sanctions and the lifting of the veto on financing reconstruction to a real political transition in Syria.

Convincing Russia that the solution based on an organized political transition without Assad and his regime guarantees its interests in Syria and achieves greater political and material gains for it, and turn its intervention in Syria into a success story, while it has so far been a failure, as such intervention cannot be legitimized. The survival of a president and a regime that killed more than half a million people, caused the death of another half a million, displaced 13 million, destroyed a million homes, destroyed society, destroyed the economy, and created an



unparalleled human catastrophe, and Syria's conditions went from bad to worse, and Russia is the regime's partner in all of this. But all this will not matter to Russia, if it sees that the political transition threatens its interests. Rather, Russia will not be convinced of any solution, without American pressure and a deal, even if that solution does not threaten its interests.

The last thing for Russia is to separate its role in the conflict in Syria and its role in other conflicts around the world, especially the annexation of Crimea and its occupation of eastern Ukraine and the sanctions on them. To link all these issues together, means no understanding will be reached with Russia, but rather to push it not to link these issues to one another will be through placing it before two options under American pressure: the first is the option of the advantages of the solution, and the guarantee of its interests and gains from it, and the second is the persistence of deterioration.

Turkey is an active party in any solution in Syria, due to many well-known factors, and the solution in Syria cannot be achieved without it. Despite the dispute between Turkey and Russia on Syrian soil, Russia is obliged to take into account Turkey's role in the Syrian issue. On the one hand, Russia has enormous economic and political interests, and on the other hand, Turkey has a role and influence in a number of Central Asian countries neighboring Russia.

Turkey will support this scenario, motivated by its national interests first, because it will cut off the road for the PYD and prevent them from forming a semi-independent Kurdish canton on its southern borders. Secondly, Turkey will be motivated by its material interests, by its desire for a large share of the Syrian reconstruction cake, and the opening of the M5 international road that connects Turkey by land with the Arab Gulf countries, which allows its goods to flow by land. Thirdly, it is motivated by political interests, to confirm that its position on the side of the Syrian uprising was correct. Therefore, Turkey will show a great desire to cooperate with Russia in such a scenario, and will push opposition factions to cooperate with Moscow in order to achieve this solution.

The various groups of the Syrian people, loyalists and opposition, will have a great interest in this scenario, and they will rush to work to make it a success.

Russia itself will not rush towards this solution, despite American pressure, if it would pose dangers to its interests in Syria, and before it is sure that its interests are guaranteed through this scenario, and that it could produce significant benefits for materially and politically. As a result of all this, Russia may find that it is in its interest to abandon Assad, who has become an international and Syrian burden on, with Assad's clear inclination towards Iran at the expense of Russian interests, and that its interests continue in Syria with the new regime, that this scenario turns its presence in Syria into a success story, an example of its relations with its allies. Russia can achieve great material gains for its companies and investments and its control over

great interests for players who aspire to obtain a share of the reconstruction's huge profits, and enables it to invest in the agreements it concluded regarding phosphates, Tartus port, and Syrian marine natural gas fields in the Mediterranean. Syrian unity and freedom of any foreign military bases, and Russia will be able to maintain its military presence in Syria.

Israel supports the political transition, because it sees that it is in its interest to establish a new central authority in Syria, and it is confident that it will be an authority preoccupied with its enormous internal problems, whose priority will not be the conflict with Israel, as Assad used to do, maintaining a cold peace with Israel, with hot slogans in the media.

It is expected that all neighboring countries will welcome this solution, especially countries that host large numbers of Syrians, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq, because it facilitates the return of Syrian refugees. The Arab Gulf countries and European countries will also welcome it, because it is in accordance with US policy, and they will welcome it. The Arab League, and China will welcome it as well, as they will have an interest in this solution, as it will contribute to achieving stability, and they will find it beneficial to its great project "The Belt and Road", both in terms of contributing to reconstruction and security in terms of investment in a country overlooking the eastern Mediterranean.

Iran is already working on blocking such a solution, sabotaging any similar deal, and preparing the scene so that everything collapses if Assad goes, in order to push Russia to stick to Assad, and incite Assad not to make any progress towards any political solution.

Therefore, Iran has bet on Trump's loss and Biden's victory, expecting that he will pursue Obama's policy with them, or that he will not have the same Trumpian cruelty with them, so he will return to the nuclear agreement concluded in 2015, even if Iran made some concessions, an agreement that allows it to continue restricted enrichment until 2030, and unfettered enrichment after this date. But Iran will have to surrender, in front of the Russian-American-Turkish consensus, because the cost of non-acceptance will be high in this case.

This third scenario is the scenario that puts an end to the Syrian catastrophe, restores Syria's unity and the unity of its people, liberates it from the presence of foreign militias, Syrian militias and armed factions, confines arms to the state, distances Iran and its authoritarian religious regime and closed-political system culture, and stops its tampering with the Syrian social fabric. Moreover, it will stop Iran's manipulation of property and address previous actions. Such a solution will allow the disclosure of the fate of detainees and missing persons, open the way to implementing transitional justice, open the door to funding from several sources, provide financial, in-kind and human assistance for the reconstruction of Syria, achieve material and political conditions for the safe return of refugees and displaced persons, and open prospects for material and societal reconstruction, the return of public freedoms, and building



a political life in a democratic climate. Also, it will open the door to launching the Syrian economy, and open up prospects for income growth, job opportunities and an improvement in the standard of living, and fulfill the conditions for the reconstruction of the education system in all its stages, including technical and vocational education. Finally, this proposed scenario for a solution will increase the prospects of rebuilding the health sector, and will open the way for administrative, legal and cultural reconstruction, rebuilding Syria's Arab, regional and international role. An overhaul of Syria's future prospect through rebuilding on all levels.

4. What does regime survival mean?

This scenario, a political transition to a democratic system, which appears to be a rosy dream, is far from being realized, based on current data. Some consider the survival of the regime to be the realistic result that can be drawn from the overall prevailing conditions, as a result of the inability of the international community to reach a solution. Others call European parties to accept Assad's survival, despite all the crimes he committed, under the pretext that this is the only available solution. These calls come under humanitarian pretexts, and Russia is actively working to allow Syria to rejoin the Arab League as a first step, and push Arab regimes to side with the regime then convince European countries to follow, in an effort to rehabilitate the regime.

In fact, the survival of the Syrian regime - in addition to encouraging all murderous rulers to commit crimes against humanity - is like keeping the cancer in the body, due to the unavailability of the cost of the operation. This means that the consequences of its survival will be much greater, and we will mention here a number of reasons:

The Syrian regime is, first of all, an illegitimate military authoritarian regime, due to the lack of public freedoms. It is a regime that the Syrian people did not choose, and it has been ruling Syria since 1963, and time has passed.

- A. Despite everything that has happened, the regime returns to work with its same mentality: The Baath Party conferences, chanting the Baathist hymn in the morning, greetings to President al-Assad, praising the immortal leader, union conferences, rigged elections puppeteered by security intelligence apparatuses, and council meetings. The people greet Bashar al-Assad, the rude and extravagant celebrations of officials, and the emergence of new war tycoons and new warlords.
- B. The survival of the Assad regime means that Syria will remain a conflict zone and a source of instability in the region, especially since the regime has become completely dependent on Iran on the one hand, and a tool in the hands of Moscow on the other,



and the Baath Assad regime no longer has real power over anything in Syria.

- C. Because the Syrian people spoke out loud: “Bashar, leave for God’s sake,” in peaceful demonstrations that lasted for six months all over Syria, and millions of Syrians participated in them in the face of bullets. So, the Syrians have the right to a democratic political system.
- D. Syria is divided today into several areas of control, and there are 476 bases and military points belonging to several foreign countries, and the survival of the regime means these military forces remain in place, and Syria divide remain.
- E. The eruption of the Syrian people in the spring of 2011, the violent clash that took place with the regime forces, and the scale of material, human and societal destruction, show that there is no survival possible for the regime, because reconciliation with the regime is never possible.
- F. The regime, despite everything that has happened and is happening, does not care about anything except its hold on power, irrespective of the losses and destruction, it continues its repressive policies, this means the factors of conflict will remain, thus, the factors of explosion will remain.
- G. Bashar al-Assad said in one of his statements about the outcome of the destruction that took place in Syria: “The formation of Syrian society has become better.” By this, he means that he does not want those who have been displaced to return to Syria.
- H. Assad caused Syria to fall into large debts, and granted great privileges to Russia and Iran, depriving the state treasury of massive revenues. Assad had wasted state reserves on military operations, while Syrian families drained their savings, and the economy was destroyed, meaning that Syria no longer has any self-reconstruction capabilities, and needs great amounts of aid. Aid does not come without a political transition to a democratic system, nor does it come without reassuring donors of their interests.
- I. Russia’s control over Syria’s economic powers, including concession contracts for gas exploitation in the Syrian commercial maritime are the Mediterranean, and allocating 25% of the revenues from oil fields recovered from (ISIS) in the Deir Ez-Zor region to Russian mercenaries hired by the Russian businessman Yevgeny Brikhozin, known as “Putin’s cook”, under the pretext of contributing to the expulsion of (ISIS) from the area where the oil fields are located. Moreover, the regime granted permission to the Russian company “Stroygar” to invest in fields in the Syrian desert for a term of 50 years. In 2019, a law was issued to ratify the contract signed between the Ministry of Industry



and the Russian company STG Logistic to develop and invest the three factories of the General Fertilizer Company in Homs (phosphate fertilizer plant, ammonia urea plant, and nitrogen fertilizer plant). The contract set the investment period at 40 years, renewable with the consent of both parties, with the fertilizer company given a 35% share in return for 65% for the Russian company, which will spend \$200 million on developing these plants.

The Russian company has recently started operating, but many problems emerged during this process, including the increase in pollution in the city of Homs as a result of gas emissions, this led to the repeated disruption of schools due to suffocation affecting children. The Russian side pledged to reduce or stop emissions within a maximum period of 14 months. Syria has 1.8 billion tons of phosphate reserves, the largest in the world. A concession was granted to a company owned by Russia (Stroy Gas), to set up a resort on the Syrian coast near Tartus, and others, in addition to the naval base in Tartus port.

- J. As for Iran, it has not been able to obtain any of the Syrian economic facilities. Therefore, it is concentrating its efforts in the field of religion, culture and education. It applies Shiite projects, establishes Husseinias, universities and signs cooperation agreements with Syrian universities. For example, in 2018, an agreement was reached with the Ministry of Education to open branches of the Islamic Azad University of Iran, in all Syrian cities. Therefore; Iran's presence in Syria, and its interference in the re-engineering of the social and cultural fabric, is a matter that will lead to a continuous eruption of the situation in Syria.
- K. The experience of the United Nations in providing humanitarian aid to Syrians inside the regime-controlled areas shows that the regime gives it to its supporters and militias only, and deprives the areas that have revolted; while also monopolizing part of the aid, selling it to support its militias. This shows that this regime cannot be trusted with repatriation aid. "Reconstruction experiences in post-war countries warn that corruption, crony capitalism, and (rigged) laws exacerbate social and economic problems and fuel more violence, as Syria risks a repeat of this trend," Hinnebusch" says⁽²⁴⁾.
- L. Any aid provided to the regime now, or any political re-consideration of the current regime, will strengthen tyranny, and the regime will return to playing that role that it has always played at home and in the region.
- M. The Syrian regime has a history of allying with terrorism and using its relations with

(24) Raymond Hinnebusch: The Battle over Syria's Reconstruction; Global Policy, February 2021; <https://www.globalpolicy-journal.com/articles/development-inequality-and-poverty/battle-over-syrias-reconstruction>



terrorist organizations to blackmail the international community. It embraced al-Qaeda for a while, and contained the jihadist organizations that fought the Americans in Iraq. Damascus was the gateway for all those coming to fight in Iraq against the Americans, and it also contained the Turkish PKK organization. The Kurdish forces were financed and armed by Syria as well, and when (ISIS) took control of large areas in Syria, the regime did not fight (ISIS), because he saw its existence as an opportunity, because it would lead the international community to trade-off between (ISIS) and Assad. Reports show that none of the regime or Iranian militias or the Russian forces fought ISIS before its defeat at the hands of the international coalition.

- N. The experiences of other countries show that reconstruction cannot begin before a definitive political solution is achieved and its implementation on the ground begins.
- O. The reconstruction must be designed according to the needs of the affected people first, while what the regime is doing is no more than granting concessions to some businessmen to set up modern tower projects designed for the rich, including those who profited from the recent war.
- P. The regime issued many legislations depriving residents of poverty belts of their rights, which are the areas that revolted in Damascus, Homs, Aleppo and elsewhere. At the same time, demographics are being changed. The way Assad treats these areas will, for many years to come, be the subject of extensive property, housing, and residence disputes in various regions of Syria.
- Q. Al-Assad issued Legislative Decree No. 66, which entered into force in September 2012. This decree aims to re-design unlicensed or illegal housing areas, and replace them with real estate projects with high-quality modern services.
- R. In April 2018, the Assad regime issued Law No. 10, an amended version of Legislative Decree No. 66 of 2012, which stipulates that real estate owners must submit proof of their ownership of real estate within a year, to be involved in real estate development projects according to their rights. Otherwise, if they fail to prove their ownership within the specified period, they will be deprived of any compensation, and the ownership will be transferred to the municipality or the state. Most of the property owners and tenants in these areas are refugees, meaning that the legislation is intentionally directed against these people in particular, to deprive them of their rights.
- S. The regime's government has initiated urban re-engineering procedures in the areas that rose up against it, which includes many cities in Syria, such as the Basateen Al-Razi area east of the Mezzeh Highway in Damascus, and the establishment of the "Marota



City” project, the construction of towers comprising 12,000 housing units, which will be afforded only by the rich. Not to forget the concession to a new businessman, Samer Foz, who suddenly became a billionaire, while the regime did not announce any reconstruction project. In the Ghouta area surrounding Damascus, the regime is seeking to change the demographic make-up of Ghouta, as the governor of Damascus announced a reconstruction plan in the name of Basilia City south of Damascus on an area of 9 million square meters, including 4000 real estate units, the remaining residents of this area were evacuated under the pretext of starting reconstruction.

The concession was granted to a number of businessmen, and residents were deprived of their homes in exchange for promises of compensation. In addition to the areas of Barzet Al-Balad, Qaboun, Al-Tadamon neighborhood and neighborhoods south of Damascus, such as Yarmouk, Palestine, Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, Al-Qadam, Daraya and others. The regime’s decisions also included eight areas in eastern Aleppo, where it was estimated that about 45-50% of the houses were either completely or partially destroyed, and in Homs, the regime’s decisions included the suburb of Baba Amr, the Jobar district, Al-Sultaniyah and Al-Khalidiya. Most of the residents in these areas do not have title deeds. They lost them during their forced displacement to the regions of northern Syria or to neighboring countries.

- T. So far, the regime is arresting returnees, and has a list of 1.5 million people wanted by the security services, under the pretext of combating terrorism. It has also issued Law No. 19 of 2012, known as the “Anti-Terrorism Law”. The regime has seized the properties of tens of thousands of opponents who did not commit any crime except their opposition to the Baath Assad regime.
- U. Increasing opportunities for a political solution based on a political transition in accordance with international community and UN resolutions.

Based on the previously mentioned, it appears that the Syrian situation is open to more than one possibility, and so far the worst possibilities that do not serve Syria and its people seem the most likely.

Although international legitimacy constitutes a solid foundation for the hope Syrians have that their protracted crisis will be resolved, and that this legitimacy constitutes an element of strength, the effectiveness of this factor and its transformation into reality depends on other factors.

Human relations are based on power through its multiple elements, one of which is of course legitimacy. The international resolutions legitimacy concerning the conflict in Syria remain - until now - ink on paper, despite the ongoing slaughter of Syrians and heinous crimes

against them, in front of all the world to see, including states involved in Syria. All in all, the last thing to be recognized, by all the intervening parties and forces involved in the conflict, is the interests of the Syrian people and the interests of Syria as a nation.

Hence, the importance of the Syrians taking the initiative more effectively, and they have not yet done so. Their elites, who take the initiative in every society and in every field, remain divided subject to their whims and desires, preferring their narrow selfish interests or subordination to other external forces, or because of laziness and weakness, or other factors. All this contributed to Syria reaching this situation. Although the situation in Syria has become very complicated, with regional and international forces directly intervening with armies on the ground. Despite the weak impact of any Syrian initiative, this does not excuse the Syrians, specifically the elites that play the leading role in uniting or fragmenting the Syrians. So far, these elites have played an ineffective role, contributing to the fragmentation of the Syrian people, to fragmentation on the military front, and the political and social fronts, to the extent the Syrians are excluded from all measures related to self-determination and the determination of the fate of Syria. The others came together and decided the fate of Syria and its people's future, without Syrian participation.

This means that Syria has become under something worse than the colonial mandate in practice, and we do not mean to understate the gravity of their actions and what they have done in Syria, but it must also be said that the Syrians, led by their elites, have failed to be effective and proactive in order to impose themselves in all forums, armed with their right to be the defenders of the cause. It is not possible to determine the fate of Syria and their fate without their active participation, so it is time for the Syrian elites to play a positive and effective role in gathering the forces of the Syrian people in a major and influential initiative that expiates their previous failure.

The Syrian elites are faced with a historic challenge, to increase the effectiveness of Syrians in order to increase the chances of a political solution based on political transition. They are required to make a move and handle the case, and to initiate an effective political movement on two levels, the first is uniting Syrian people wherever they are, and the second uniting regional and international actors in the Syrian issue. Motivating Syrians is the only way available today, in order to present their cause before the widest audience on the international community. This would not be possible without a well-organized collective action to launch such an initiative with heavy Syrian participation wherever they are found. In fact, today there are a large number of small parties, and a large number of dialogue groups, via (Zoom) or (WhatsApp), and they collectively include large numbers of elites who discuss important issues and present many ideas, but these discussions remain confined in their narrow scope. No action is ever initiated. Several attempts were made and a few meetings were held to launch initiatives, but



all of them ended in just a small gathering or even failure.

The possible starting point for an “initiative that makes a difference” is by assembling representatives of these groups in one single organization that fuses all the organizations involved in the initiative, so that affiliation becomes an individual representation of groups in the form of “a front or an alliance”, because the effectiveness of the alliance formula is weak, and it is prone to internal interactions and blocs that end in failure. Therefore, we need an initiative with one name, one face and one opinion regarding the main issues related to the political solution based on political transition, and that it be opened to the largest number of Syrians of all stripes, that it be organized in a cluster, and that it works actively in various areas of the Syrian presence, inside and outside Syria, and in the active countries involved in the conflict in Syria, especially the United States. It works in an organized and specialized manner, and has specialized diplomatic, legal, political, media and organizational work teams. It would have a work program on two levels: The Syrian people and active regional and international countries, so that the issue is communicated to European and American societies, public opinion, political parties and forces, parliamentarians, foreign ministries, and to the circles of intellectuals, artists and academics in those societies.

The other thing that increases the impact of this initiative and this movement is arming itself with a comprehensive and integrated political solution, according to the third scenario, based on a political transition, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 2254 and 2118 and the Geneva statement 2012, in the form of a solution that combines the aspirations of the Syrian people and the interests of the countries involved in the Syrian issue. It is certainly a difficult equation, but it is possible. A solution that guarantees Syria’s stability, preserves state institutions while reforming them, preserves the army while restructuring it, and opens the way for Syria’s reconstruction, materially, socially, economically and culturally.

Formulating such a solution requires an in-depth analysis of the policies of regional and international actors on the Syrian stage, an understanding of their interests and the foundations of their policies towards the Syrian issue, and an understanding of the mechanisms by which that policy is formulated. Given the current reality of the situation in Syria, the solution to the political transition can be based on the possibility of reaching an American-Turkish-Russian consensus that guarantees Russia’s interests and achieves the neutrality of Iran and Israel.



The formulation of such a solution calls for a practical and tangible vision of the required steps, that answers all questions and is programmed in time (the transitional period, the government in the transitional phase, the army and its role in the transitional phase, foreign militias, militias and Syrian armed factions, ISIS remnants, the nature of the political system, the constitution, Elections, refugees and displaced persons, physical reconstruction, social reconstruction, addressing the effects of war, and other major matters.



The Syrian initiative:

Some Syrian groups have hope for stopping the tragedy, with a new US administration, through an organized initiative carried out by a pressure network consisting of groups of active Syrian elites in countries with influence in the Syrian issue, led by Washington, then Moscow and Ankara, in addition to Paris, Berlin, London, Doha and Riyadh; presenting an integrated and researched vision for a political solution, according to the third scenario, based on a political transition in accordance with Security Council resolutions 2254 and 2118 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

Of course, formulating this solution requires studying, analyzing and understanding the policies of these countries, especially The United States, Russia and Turkey, regarding the conflict in Syria and how to influence their positions and convince them. These groups should seek, through known means, to mobilize and influence members of Congress, parliaments, politicians, media persons, and research centers, and all that influences decision-making, to promote a well-formed political solution. This prompts the US administration to pressure Russia to accept this solution, and although convincing the US administration is difficult, it is possible, and it is an attempt that deserves every effort. Because it is the only way now, and there are factors conducive to success, although there are other obstructive factors as well.



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مركز حرمون للدراسات المعاصرة

هو مؤسسة بحثية مستقلة، لا تستهدف الربح، تُعنى بإنتاج الدراسات والبحوث السياسية والاجتماعية والفكرية المتعلقة بالشأن السوري خاصة، والصراع الدائر في سورية وسيناريوهات تطوره، وتهتم بتعزيز أداء المجتمع المدني، ونشر الوعي الديمقراطي. كما تهتم أيضاً بالقضايا العربية، والصراعات المتعلقة بها، وبالعلاقات العربية الإقليمية والدولية. يُنفذ المركز مشاريع ونشاطات، ويُطلق مبادرات من أجل بناء مستقبل سورية، على أسس وقيم الديمقراطية والحرية والمساواة وحقوق الإنسان وقيم المواطنة المتساوية، ويسعى لأن يكون ميداناً للحوار البناء، وساحة لتلاقى الأفكار.

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