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# THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL STABILITY IN SYRIA ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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## Abstract

Following the collapse of the Assad regime in December 2014, the Syrian crisis entered a new stage marked by a transition from civil war toward relative political stability. This phase has centered on rebuilding state institutions and restoring the foundations of governance, alongside efforts to reestablish internal cohesion. Despite the substantial challenges accompanying this transition — including questions surrounding the nature of the political system and national identity, the incorporation of armed factions into official security structures, the pursuit of national reconciliation and transitional justice, reconstruction, refugee repatriation and economic recovery — the prospects for strengthening stability in Syria remain significant. Such stability could carry important implications for both regional and international security.

Syria has reportedly avoided becoming a front in the US-Israel war with Iran and has, in this context, also avoided the serious consequences such a confrontation entails. This outcome is attributed to its distancing from Iranian influence.

The study examines the repercussions of the end of armed conflict and the relative improvement in Syria's stability indicators on regional and global security. It addresses several principal dimensions, including the conceptual framework

of political stability and its connection to regional and international security, the transformations that have shaped the Syrian landscape following the fall of the Assad regime and the broader security implications of political stability in Syria.

*Keywords:* Syria, political stability, political transition in Syria, regional security, international security.

## **Introduction**

The Syrian crisis has constituted one of the most consequential shocks to regional and international security. Since its outbreak in 2011 and subsequent escalation into a protracted civil war that eroded state stability and undermined core institutions, the conflict has extended far beyond domestic boundaries. It has evolved into a multilayered geopolitical confrontation in which local, regional and international dimensions have become deeply interwoven. Its political, security, economic and social repercussions have spread across neighboring countries and the wider international system. These repercussions have been driven by extensive destruction, intensified sectarian fragmentation, the expansion of extremist organizations, escalating cross-border security threats and large-scale displacement flows. The aforesaid have, in turn, contributed to social tensions and rising populist and xenophobic sentiments within host countries.

With the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, the crisis reached its endpoint, marking a transition from civil war — understood as the apex of instability and insecurity — to a new phase characterized by relative political stabilization. This phase is oriented toward rebuilding state institutions, restoring internal cohesion and rebalancing relations among the country's diverse social segments. Despite the considerable challenges associated with this transition — including questions related to governance structure, national identity, the integration of armed factions into the security apparatus, national reconciliation, transitional justice, reconstruction, return of refugees and economic recovery — there remains a significant opportunity to consolidate stability in Syria, with potential positive spillovers for regional and international security. This assessment is further reinforced by Syria's reported success in avoiding the severe consequences of the US-Israel war against Iran, as well as its ability to remain outside the conflict's frontline dynamics. This is attributed to its disengagement from Iranian influence and its distancing from regional bloc politics.

Against this backdrop, the paper seeks to examine the implications of the end of armed conflict and the relative improvement in stability indicators in Syria for regional and international security, based on hypotheses such as the following:

**Hypothesis 1:** There exists a dialectical relationship between internal political stability and regional and international security, whereby each shapes and is shaped by the other. Stable political orders tend to reinforce security at both regional and global levels — or at a minimum, do not constitute a destabilizing factor — while stable and secure regional and international environments, in turn, provide conducive conditions for domestic stability.

**Hypothesis 2:** The higher the level of domestic political stability within a state, the greater its contribution to regional and international security. Stable political systems are generally less likely to generate transnational security threats and less inclined toward external aggression, while being more predisposed to participation in cooperative and complementary security frameworks.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a positive correlation between the consolidation of political stability in Syria — given its position as a pivotal actor within the Arab regional system — and the strengthening of both regional and international stability and security.

In light of these hypotheses, the paper is structured around three main analytical axes: first, a conceptual examination of political stability and its relationship to regional and international security; second, an analysis of transformations in the Syrian landscape and the post-conflict stability environment; and third, an assessment of the implications of political stability in Syria for regional and international security.

## **A Conceptual Approach to Political Stability and Its Relationship With Security**

### **Political Security: Conception and Dimensions**

To properly assess the dimensions of political stability in Syria and its implications for regional and international security, it is first necessary to clarify the conceptual foundations of these terms and to delineate the broader analytical framework governing the relationship between them.

Political stability constitutes a foundational pillar of the state, reflecting the equilibrium between the political system, societal forces and institutional performance. It is a multidimensional concept that encompasses political legitimacy, governance capacity, social cohesion and the ability of institutions to manage change and conflict through peaceful and orderly mechanisms. A clear understanding of political stability and its constituent dimensions is essential for analyzing its effects, which often extend beyond national boundaries to shape regional and international security environments.

In one sense, political stability denotes the absence of radical or fundamental transformation within the political system, or the occurrence of change within broadly accepted limits.<sup>(1)</sup> It also refers to a relative absence of violence and popular unrest within the political process of a given state.<sup>(2)</sup>

From a broader analytical perspective, political stability may be defined as the capacity of a political system to mobilize its institutions in order to implement necessary reforms that respond to public expectations and aspirations, while containing emerging conflicts without resorting to political violence, except in the most limited circumstances required to reinforce its legitimacy and effectiveness.<sup>(3)</sup> Political stability can be understood as comprising three principal factors:

■ **Effectiveness of political institutions:** This factor refers to the capacity of state institutions to respond to citizens' needs and to address political, economic and social challenges efficiently. It includes the provision of security, the protection of rights and freedoms, the improvement of socioeconomic conditions and the pursuit of development objectives.

■ **Legitimacy of the political system:** This factor concerns the extent to which the ruling authority is consistent with prevailing societal norms, values and priorities, thereby justifying its exercise of power and securing public acceptance without reliance on coercion.

■ **Political behavior:** This factor encompasses two interrelated aspects. The first is the absence of political violence, which includes both state violence directed by governing authorities against citizens or specific groups, and societal violence expressed through acts of resistance against the state or its symbols, as well as intergroup violence within society driven by political, economic, social or religious cleavages. The second is adherence to constitutional and legal frameworks, meaning compliance by state institutions with established legal rules governing their functions and responsibilities, alongside respect by societal actors for legitimate channels of political participation and opposition, as well as observance of laws regulating interactions among individuals and groups within society.

### **The Concept of Regional Security**

Regional security represents one of the principal tiers of security analysis, alongside individual, national and international security. It refers to the security condition of a group of geographically proximate states whose interests and objectives are partially aligned, and which face comparable political and security challenges or threats.

In this sense, regional security denotes the condition in which the security of each state is structurally linked to the broader regional environment, such that it cannot be fully achieved in isolation from the regional system to which it belongs.<sup>(4)</sup>

The concept is closely associated with that of a "security complex," understood as a set of states or units whose security dynamics are deeply interdependent, to the extent that their security problems cannot be adequately analyzed or resolved independently. This interdependence is typically driven by geographical proximity, overlapping threat perceptions and shared strategic concerns.<sup>(5)</sup>

The concept of regional security overlaps with that of a "security community," understood as a group of states that have reached a high level of coordination and shared understanding on security matters, underpinned by substantial mutual trust. Within such a framework, two core conditions are generally assumed: first, that member states possess diplomatic instruments or mechanisms enabling them to intervene early to prevent the outbreak of conflicts; and second, that they are capable of presenting a unified position or collective front in response to external actors, whether state or non-state.<sup>(6)</sup>

Within this framework, the concept is applicable to the security of the Arab states, which collectively form a regional system shaped by historical, cultural and social linkages, in addition to geographic contiguity. These states exhibit broadly convergent strategic interests and similar political and security challenges, thereby generating a degree of interdependence in their respective security environments.

Achieving stability is commonly regarded as the central objective of any regional security system. This involves preserving the prevailing political and security order, limiting abrupt or disruptive transformations and sustaining a workable balance of power and interests. Such stability is typically grounded in regional consensus and cooperative arrangements that can take different institutional forms, which may increase or decrease depending on aims, operational mechanisms and the evolving nature of perceived threats. Among the principal models are collective defense arrangements, in which states align with others that share their perception of a common or potential threat, with the aim of deterrence — particularly against direct military challenges to the sovereignty of any member. Another model is coordinated security, which tends to emerge in environments marked by rivalry but not full-scale conflict or structured cooperation; here, coordination itself becomes the main mechanism for sustaining limited security cooperation among regional actors. A third approach is cooperative security, based on jointly agreed regional norms of behavior that prioritize mutual security over purely individual concerns, extending cooperation beyond military issues to encompass a broader set of security-related domains.<sup>(7)</sup>

### **The Concept of Global Security**

International security constitutes the most comprehensive tier of security, encompassing and transcending individual, national and regional levels. It relates to the protection of the institutions, norms, rules and values of the international community from a wide range of transnational threats, both military and non-military in nature.

Beyond its traditional military dimension, international security also incorporates political, economic, social and environmental components. In this respect, it overlaps with the broader concept of human security, reflecting the growing interdependence generated by globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of the international system, as well as of individuals and communities within it.

This heightened interdependence has produced a reality in which disturbances originating in the most vulnerable regions can generate spillover effects that reach even the most powerful actors, thereby undermining the possibility of any region remaining insulated from security risks emerging elsewhere in the international system.<sup>(8)</sup>

International security threats have become increasingly numerous, complex and interdependent. They are no longer confined to conventional interstate wars

or proxy conflicts between major and regional powers, but now include a wider spectrum of challenges such as transnational terrorism, prolonged regional conflicts, proliferation pressures involving weapons of mass destruction, cyberattacks, transnational organized crime, refugee flows and irregular migration, as well as ongoing competition among international and regional actors that contributes to sustained instability across various regions. Collectively, these threats affect state stability both directly and indirectly, by weakening internal security structures, eroding political systems and obstructing economic development through the production of persistently unstable political and security environments.<sup>(9)</sup>

### **The Relationship Between Political Stability and Security**

There exists a close and reciprocal relationship between political stability and regional and international security, whereby both influence the other. In this sense, each functions simultaneously as a determinant and an outcome of the other.

The consolidation of domestic or national political stability often exerts a positive influence on the regional and international environment by reducing the likelihood of conflicts and violent disturbances that may spill over across borders. It also strengthens patterns of regional and international cooperation and integration, while enhancing states' capacity to contribute to collective security frameworks. This contribution may take the form of participation in regional and international security institutions, engagement in security coordination and intelligence-sharing mechanisms, or active involvement in mediation processes, conflict resolution initiatives and peacekeeping operations.

A notable illustration of this dynamic can be found in Western Europe, where a high degree of stability has been achieved. This stability has enabled states in the region to pursue long-term integration strategies, which in turn have further reinforced both domestic stability and broader regional and international security. In the European case, stability — largely shaped through the European Union's (EU) economic, diplomatic and security integration frameworks — has strengthened member states by converting historically adversarial relationships into structured and enduring institutional cooperation. It has helped establish conditions for economic growth, provided mechanisms for collective protection and supported the development of stable and peaceful inter-state relations across the continent. At the same time, the creation of supranational institutions has reduced the likelihood of conflict by deepening interdependence and enhancing coordination among member states in both political and security domains.<sup>(10)</sup>

In contrast, when political instability becomes entrenched within a state, its effects are rarely contained within national borders. Instead, they tend to extend outward into the surrounding regional environment through what is commonly described as spillover dynamics or regional contagion. Such instability often creates fertile conditions for transnational threats, including refugee movements, terrorism, insurgent activity and the trafficking of weapons and other

contraband. This pattern is evident in a number of cases, including Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen, as well as Syria prior to the attenuation of the crisis, where domestic instability has had pronounced repercussions for both regional and international security.

By contrast, regional and international environments that are relatively balanced and free from major security threats or disruptive external interference tend to create favorable conditions for domestic stability. By limiting cross-border risks and encouraging a more conducive setting for development, such environments can support internal consolidation.

The experience of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) illustrates this dynamic. Through mechanisms of regional cooperation, ASEAN has helped reduce the likelihood of conflict among its member states and has, since the late 1960s, contributed to a shift in the region from one marked by disputes and mutual mistrust toward a more cooperative framework. This transformation has, in turn, supported higher levels of political stability and sustained economic growth across much of its membership.<sup>(11)</sup>

Regional and international insecurity can weaken the stability of national regimes by generating both economic and political pressures, as well as through external interference. Such interventions may take direct forms, including support for internal rebel groups or armed factions, or indirect and covert forms, such as media disinformation campaigns, acts of sabotage within targeted states or assassinations of political figures and leaders. The overarching objective is typically to destabilize existing regimes or to reshape internal political balances in ways that serve the interests of external actors.

The stability and security of states are closely linked to the broader regional and international environment. A more stable and cooperative environment tends to expand opportunities for domestic stability, while regional conflicts and external interventions facilitate the cross-border transmission of threats and disrupt internal security balances. This pattern is reflected in multiple cases, including the Middle East, where the Arab-Israeli conflict has affected the political and security stability of regional states, and East Africa, where interstate tensions and conflicts have similarly influenced domestic stability.<sup>(12)</sup>

This is further illustrated by the situation in Syria during its crisis, where regional and international interventions, alongside competition among external powers, contributed to prolonging the conflict and intensifying economic, political and security pressures, thereby undermining internal stability. A comparable dynamic is observed in West Asia more broadly, where regional and international tensions and rivalries — including the Iran–Iraq War, the Second Gulf War, the US invasion of Iraq, Iranian interventions in the region and ultimately the US–Israel war against Iran — have heightened security threats and weakened stability across several countries in the region.

## **Transformations in the Syrian Landscape and Political Stability Post-Assad**

The fall of the Assad regime on December 8, 2014, marked a pivotal turning point that fundamentally reshaped the political landscape in Syria. This transformation encompassed wide-ranging changes affecting the governing system, internal power balances and the country's relations with its regional environment and the broader international community. As is often the case with major historical ruptures, these developments ushered Syria into a sensitive and complex transitional phase in which opportunities and challenges became closely intertwined.

While new prospects emerged for rebuilding the state on more participatory and equitable foundations, advancing development, ending international isolation and restoring Syria's regional and global standing, a set of profound dilemmas also came to the forefront. These challenges constitute a genuine test of the ability of various Syrian actors and constituencies to overcome the legacies of conflict, address sectarian and regional fragmentation and formulate a new social contract capable of securing national consensus, preserving state unity and reinforcing political stability.

### **Transitional Phase Interactions**

From the earliest days following the collapse of the previous regime, the new administration moved to address the political vacuum created by the disintegration of existing state institutions. A caretaker government was established to oversee the management of state affairs, while Ahmed al-Sharaa was appointed president for the transitional period with the mandate to form a temporary legislative council. This process followed the dissolution of the People's Assembly, the annulment of the previous constitution and the promulgation of a new constitutional declaration. A high-level electoral commission was subsequently established, and general elections were conducted to form the legislative council.

At the same time, intensive societal and political discussions emerged concerning the trajectory of the transition. The National Dialogue Conference was convened as a platform intended to facilitate dialogue among the various Syrian political, military and social components, enabling them to articulate their demands and perspectives in pursuit of a consensual vision for the country's future. The conference also aimed to formulate a clear roadmap for addressing critical national issues and threats to civil and social peace.<sup>(13)</sup> Parallel to this process, trials involving figures and officials associated with the former regime commenced as an initial step toward the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms.<sup>(14)</sup>

On the security front, the army and all security agencies affiliated with the former regime — across their various branches and structures — were dissolved, together with the militias established under its authority. A new security institution was subsequently formed, while efforts began to dismantle armed factions and revolutionary political and civil entities, with the objective of integrating them into formal state institutions.<sup>(15)</sup>

In the sphere of foreign relations, Syria experienced a substantial transformation in its external orientation. A new phase of diplomatic and economic openness emerged, accompanied by an accelerating restoration of relations with numerous regional and international actors. Particularly notable was the role of Saudi Arabia, whose efforts contributed to the lifting of US sanctions on Syria — readmitting Syria into the international community as an important actor for regional security and stability — and encouraged other states to reestablish diplomatic relations with Damascus and declare support for the new authorities. This development contributed to Syria's gradual reintegration into regional and international frameworks. The process also coincided with the strengthening of relations between Syria and Türkiye, alongside a marked decline in Russian influence and the near-total erosion of Iranian clout within the Syrian arena.<sup>(16)</sup>

In this context, the visit of Syrian President Sharaa to the United States marked a significant turning point, as it constituted the first official visit by a Syrian head of state to Washington since Syria's independence. It also signaled Washington's intention to support the new leadership, facilitate Syria's normalization of relations with Western countries, open pathways for international investment and encourage its participation in regional alliances.<sup>(17)</sup>

On the economic front, indicators of a relative recovery began to emerge following the easing of sanctions — especially those imposed on the Assad regime under the Caesar Act<sup>(18)</sup> — and the inflow of Arab and international investments, particularly from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Both countries supported the Syrian energy sector<sup>(19)</sup> and provided joint financing to the new authorities with the aim of reinforcing economic stability and advancing reconstruction efforts.<sup>(20)</sup>

Alongside these positive political, security, diplomatic and economic developments, the Syrian arena also experienced a number of serious tensions and security challenges. Most notably, violent clashes erupted between government forces and elements loyal to the former regime in the predominantly Alawite coastal region. Additional confrontations took place in the Suwaida region involving Druze militias, Bedouin tribal fighters and government forces, with Israel intervening under the pretext of protecting the Druze minority.

At the same time, repeated clashes occurred in the eastern regions between the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and government forces.

These tensions represented a significant test for the new Syrian authorities and exposed the scale and complexity of the challenges associated with the broader process of state-building and the consolidation of political stability.

### **State Building and Challenges**

The process of political transition and state-building in Syria faces a complex array of challenges, most notably the following:

- **Reconciliation and transitional justice:** The Syrian conflict has deepened societal fragmentation and generated extensive cycles of violence, resulting in large numbers of deaths, disappearances and displacement. This reality

necessitates substantial efforts aimed at restoring social cohesion and reinforcing civil peace through a comprehensive framework of reconciliation and transitional justice. Such an approach extends beyond the prosecution of those responsible for violations and abuses to include reparations for victims and the reform of the institutions implicated in these injustices.

- **Reform of state institutions:** Under the previous regime, state institutions were widely characterized by inefficiency, weak accountability, entrenched corruption and patronage networks, and a limited capacity to respond to the basic demands of society. Consequently, these institutions require deep structural reform encompassing both institutional and administrative reforms, with the objective of strengthening integrity, enhancing institutional independence and improving the state's capacity to formulate and implement effective public policies.<sup>(21)</sup>
- **Strengthening security and preventing a return to widespread violence:** This challenge concerns the capacity of the ruling authorities to extend effective control across all Syrian territory, consolidate the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force and reform the security sector. Central to this issue is the integration of armed factions into the official security establishment, one of the most sensitive and complex dimensions of the broader state-rebuilding process. Years of conflict have produced a large number of armed groups characterized by diverse loyalties and ideological orientations. Some factions — such as the SDF in northeastern Syria and certain Druze formations in the Suwaida region — continue to seek varying degrees of autonomy or localized influence.<sup>(22)</sup>
- **Reconstruction and economic recovery:** The reconstruction of Syria and the restoration of economic activity following years of devastating civil war constitute a major challenge extending far beyond the economic dimension to encompass complex political and administrative considerations. The country has experienced widespread destruction of infrastructure, deterioration across virtually all economic sectors and a shortage of qualified personnel resulting from displacement and migration. These conditions render the process of economic recovery both slow and highly demanding.
- **Formation of a unified national identity:** The prolonged conflict deepened sectarian, ethnic and regional divisions, weakened social cohesion and eroded the broader sense of shared national belonging. As a result, the construction of a unified national identity in post-war Syria has emerged as one of the most difficult dimensions of the state-building process. Debate has intensified over the foundational character of the future state — whether primarily Islamic or secular — as well as over its structural organization. This debate places advocates of decentralization, who regard it as a mechanism for ensuring equitable representation of Syria's diverse social groups, in opposition to supporters of a centralized state model who fear the fragmentation of the national entity.

Addressing this challenge requires the formulation of a new social contract grounded in the principle of equal citizenship as the basis for rights and obligations, transcending narrow communal and regional loyalties. It also necessitates the development of an inclusive national discourse that redefines identity based on participation, acceptance of diversity and pluralism and peaceful political competition within a framework of mutual respect.

### **Political Stability in Syria: Realities and Indicators**

The Syrian political transition has entered its most delicate and consequential phase following the collapse of the previous regime. Transitional periods of this nature are typically characterized by heightened fragility, as the process of rebuilding state institutions unfolds before a new political order has fully consolidated. In Syria's case, institutional vacuums have intersected with escalating and often competing societal expectations, while political and social forces continue to contest the shape of the emerging order and the future distribution of power, influence and resources. Such conditions are commonly accompanied by weak institutional capacity, fluctuating security conditions, economic hardship and shifting sources of political legitimacy, rendering stability provisional and vulnerable to reversal in the event of major crises.

The challenge confronting Syria extends beyond addressing the legacies of the former regime or pursuing reconciliation and transitional justice. It also involves redefining the social contract governing relations between the state and society on new foundations rooted in participation, accountability, equality and justice. Consequently, any mismanagement of the transitional process — whether through excessive haste or prolonged delay — risks reproducing conflict in new forms. The Syrian transition therefore constitutes a critical test of the ability of the ruling authorities and emerging institutions to transform political fragility into sustainable stability and to convert transitional legitimacy into enduring legitimacy capable of securing both political and societal order.

Against the backdrop of the dynamics and challenges shaping this transitional period, it becomes evident that, despite the persistence of risks linked to security tensions, incomplete institutional consolidation and disagreements among political and social actors, Syria's political stability appears comparatively improved relative to the previous phase. This development is tied to indicators of the gradual normalization of public life and the country's slow transition from a revolutionary environment toward a state-building process.

This relative improvement in Syria's political stability is reflected in several indicators:

- **Decline in manifestations of political violence:** The reduction in political violence — in terms of frequency, intensity, geographical scope, the diversity of actors involved and the number of casualties resulting from armed attacks — constitutes a composite indicator of improving political stability in Syria. The decline in armed confrontations, terrorist attacks, political assassinations,

arrests and enforced disappearances; the transformation of sectarian and social protests into comparatively peaceful and disciplined forms of expression; the dissolution or integration of numerous militias into the official military structure; and the emergence of indications that the restructured security apparatus is beginning to establish a legitimate monopoly over the use of force all point to a gradual transition from the logic of coercion to that of institutionalization, reflecting a relative decline in instability.

Despite notable exceptions — particularly the disturbances and violent incidents witnessed in the coastal region, in Suwaida, and in the eastern areas, in addition to sporadic retaliatory assassinations and acts of violence — these developments, while serious, remain limited in scope and insignificant when compared with the scale of widespread political violence that accompanied the civil war, which represented the height of instability and the collapse of security in the country.<sup>(23)</sup>

- **Improved effectiveness of political institutions:** The relative improvement in the performance of Syria's reconstituted political institutions represents an important indicator of the consolidation of the country's new political order. Gradually, the state has begun to recover some of its defining institutional characteristics, as several public institutions have resumed their core functions after years of deterioration and fragmentation. In coordination with local administrations and civil councils, the central authorities have managed to restore and reorganize essential public services — including education, healthcare, electricity and communication — in numerous areas despite severe resource constraints.

Although indicators of institutional fragility remain evident, this partial recovery is also reflected in the state's ability to manage emerging economic and social crises, including the fuel shortage crisis and rising prices of basic commodities, alongside efforts to restructure and reform the financial and banking sectors. These developments suggest the gradual emergence of public institutions that are more adaptable and increasingly capable of transitioning from emergency crisis management toward the restoration of relatively normal administrative governance.

- **Relative expansion of political participation:** Since the fall of the previous regime, Syria has witnessed a relative expansion in political participation. Within this context, the country held what were widely regarded as its first genuinely competitive elections in more than half a century in October 2025. Under the Assad regime, elections had largely functioned as procedural formalities devoid of meaningful competition or transparency.<sup>(24)</sup> Although the electoral process remained incomplete due to delays in the governorates of Hasakah, Raqqa and Suwaida, the elections nonetheless represented a significant step toward establishing the foundations of political participation and pluralism after decades of authoritarian rule,<sup>(25)</sup> thereby constituting an important indicator of relative political stability.

- **Expansion of state authority across different regions:** The extension of the new Syrian government's authority over various parts of the country, particularly eastern regions previously controlled by Kurdish forces, constitutes another important indicator of post-conflict stabilization. On January 29, 2026, the Syrian government and the SDF signed an agreement providing for the integration of the Autonomous Administration's institutions into state structures, as well as the incorporation of Kurdish fighters into the Syrian army and security services. This development reflects a transition from fragmented authority toward the reunification of sovereign institutions under a single central government, while simultaneously recognizing Kurdish rights and facilitating Kurdish participation within the state framework.<sup>(26)</sup> Such measures could reduce fragmentation, diminish the risk of renewed armed confrontation through the consolidation of weapons under state authority and reinforce broader national cohesion.
- **Rising political legitimacy:** Political legitimacy remains one of the most significant indicators of political stability and a central prerequisite for its sustainability. No political regime can realistically ensure continuity and stability without securing an adequate degree of legitimacy. Conversely, political systems often become unstable — and may ultimately collapse — when their legitimacy experiences severe erosion at either the domestic or international level.

In this context, the new Syrian regime has strengthened its stability by acquiring a reasonable degree of domestic legitimacy through the support of relatively broad social sectors, particularly groups and political forces that had previously experienced marginalization or repression. This support has not been driven solely by political or sectarian considerations, despite the fact that the new governing forces largely emerge from the Sunni majority. Rather, it also derives from the reality that many of the dominant political organizations within the new order were formed within the framework of the popular uprising against the former regime, thereby granting the new authorities a considerable degree of revolutionary legitimacy.

At the external level, the new Syrian government has also gained substantial legitimacy through recognition, acceptance, and support from a wide range of regional and international actors, including Arab states, Türkiye, the United States, EU states and other international actors and organizations. This legitimacy has stemmed from the government's demonstrated willingness to cooperate on issues related to regional security and counterterrorism, as well as from its openness to Arab and international diplomatic initiatives that helped end Syria's previous isolation and facilitated its reintegration into the regional and international system.

- **Decline of negative foreign interventions:** Negative foreign interventions constitute one of the principal factors undermining political stability and security. Such interventions are frequently aimed at reshaping domestic polit-

ical balances in ways that serve the interests of external actors, expand their influence or generate instability and tension within the targeted state, thereby adversely affecting the stability and security of the surrounding regional environment.

In Syria, negative foreign interventions constituted one of the principal factors undermining stability during the previous phase of the conflict. The interventions of Iran and Russia contributed to escalating tensions, intensifying the conflict, deepening sectarian and regional divisions and weakening prospects for stability. Rather than facilitating a comprehensive national settlement, both states reinforced the predominance of military solutions at the expense of a genuine political resolution. The Assad regime had relied heavily on the military and political backing provided by Iran and Russia to preserve its rule, reducing its willingness to undertake meaningful reforms or engage in substantive power-sharing arrangements with the opposition.

Iran, for its part, expanded its sectarian and political influence through affiliated militias and sought to reshape demographic balances in certain Syrian regions, thereby exacerbating societal divisions and weakening the concept of a unified national identity. Russia, meanwhile, utilized its military and political intervention to reshape the geopolitical landscape and expand its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, effectively imposing a model of stability through coercive force. This intervention transformed the Assad regime into a fragile structure dependent on external powers and turned Syria into an arena for regional and international rivalry. As a result, the conflict was prolonged, prospects for building unified national institutions were weakened, and the possibility of achieving genuine political stability was significantly undermined.

With regional dynamics and balances increasingly shifting against Iran — particularly following intensified Israeli and US strikes during the 12-Day War in June 2025 and the subsequent war that erupted in February 2026 — alongside Russia's growing preoccupation with the war in Ukraine and the success of Syrian opposition forces in overthrowing the regime, Iranian influence in Syria declined substantially. Russia's role also became increasingly confined to safeguarding its strategic military bases in Syrian territory. These developments contributed to a reduction in instability by diminishing the intensity of polarization and military competition for influence within Syria. They also provided the new Syrian authorities with greater opportunities to consolidate state authority, regain a degree of political independence and distance themselves from regional alliance politics — thus preventing Syria from turning into an active front in the US-Israel war against Iran. Furthermore, the decline in foreign intervention helped reduce armed tensions and weaken the influence of foreign-backed militias, thereby creating conditions more conducive to balanced internal settlements. In this sense, the decline of external interference represented an important step toward establishing a more stable political environment.

More broadly, negative foreign interventions in Syria have declined overall, despite certain notable exceptions. The most significant among these remains Israeli intervention targeting Syrian military capabilities, penetrating or occupying some border areas, and supporting the Druze minority. These actions appear primarily aimed at weakening Syria's strategic capabilities to prevent it from posing a future threat to Israel.

Conversely, positive external interventions — particularly those undertaken by Saudi Arabia and Qatar — contributed to reinforcing the trajectory of political stability in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime. Both countries adopted an approach centered on supporting emerging national institutions and financing reconstruction projects and essential public services, including education, healthcare and infrastructure. These efforts helped ease the economic and social pressures resulting from years of conflict, thereby reducing the likelihood of renewed instability. In addition, the two states played a role in facilitating dialogue among Syrian political actors with the aim of promoting national reconciliation and fostering political consensus. This contributed to creating conditions conducive to the gradual restoration of Syria's political and diplomatic legitimacy. Türkiye enhanced cooperation between regional and international actors to support the political transition and safeguard the unity and stability of Syria.

In this sense, such interventions served as an important stabilizing factor, helping transform Syria from a deeply volatile conflict arena with severe cross-border repercussions into an environment increasingly oriented toward political and economic recovery, with positive implications for both regional and international stability and security. These developments confirm that stability is the bedrock of successful development programs. Riyadh has chosen the path of stability, in stark contrast to the strategy of exploiting chaos and instability — an approach Iran pursued during the Assad era to expand its regional influence, and which Israel later adopted to consolidate its dominance in the region.

### **The Impact of Political Stability on Syrian Security**

It is evident that the repercussions of political transformations in Syria extend beyond the domestic sphere, owing to Syria's geostrategic position as a connecting point between the Arabian Peninsula, the Eastern Mediterranean, Türkiye, Europe and North Africa. This grants Syria a pivotal role within the regional security structure of the Middle East, such that both instability and stability within the country are inevitably reflected in its immediate regional environment — particularly the Arab states and Türkiye — as well as in the broader international environment, especially among actors heavily affected by regional developments, including European countries.

Accordingly, improvements in indicators of political stability in Syria are likely to generate positive effects on both regional and international security. These effects are particularly evident in interconnected issues such as cross-border se-

curity threats, including terrorism and organized crime; the refugee crisis and its repercussions for host countries; regional and international security and economic integration; and the broader balance of power and competition for influence among regional and international actors in the Middle East.

### **Curbing Cross-border Security Threats**

In the preceding period, prior to the fall of the Assad regime, Syria constituted a major hub of security risks and a source of multiple threats extending to its immediate neighbors — Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Türkiye — as well as to its more distant regional surroundings, including the Gulf states. The erosion of state institutions and the emergence of competing centers of authority transformed Syrian territory into an open arena for transnational terrorist organizations, which exploited the security vacuum to recruit fighters and launch cross-border attacks. This threat reached its peak with the expansion of ISIS operations across eastern Syria and western Iraq, generating a serious challenge to both regional and international security. At the same time, organized crime networks and the smuggling of arms and narcotics expanded significantly, in some cases benefiting from elements within the former regime, turning Syria into a sustained source of pressure on regional national security systems.

With the end of the crisis, the gradual improvement in Syria's political and security stability has led to a marked reduction in cross-border threats and risks that previously preoccupied neighboring states. As state institutions regained a degree of effectiveness and the widespread security breakdown of the conflict years subsided, the operational capacity of terrorist organizations to move freely within Syrian territory or use it as a base for attacks against neighboring countries was significantly curtailed. Enhanced control over border crossings further contributed to limiting the activities of organized crime networks and reducing the smuggling of weapons, drugs and human trafficking. Collectively, these developments helped restore a greater degree of order to the security environment and contained the spread of non-traditional threats across the region.

### **Easing Tensions Emerging From the Refugee Crisis**

The Syrian refugee crisis, which intensified during the years of the Assad regime, had severe repercussions for host countries both in the immediate region and in Europe, and came to represent one of the largest displacement waves in modern history. In Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Türkiye and Egypt, the influx of millions of refugees placed heavy pressure on already strained infrastructure and public services, including education, healthcare, housing and utilities. This weakened the capacity of these states to meet domestic needs and contributed to rising unemployment and poverty in local communities, partly due to increased labor market competition.

In addition, refugee inflows disrupted existing social balances and deepened internal divisions, particularly in countries such as Lebanon and Türkiye, while

also generating political and security tensions fueled by populist rhetoric and anti-refugee sentiment.<sup>(27)</sup> In Europe, the crisis became a major challenge for European policies on migration, security and integration, contributing to the rise of populist and far-right movements, as well as disputes over the distribution of humanitarian and security responsibilities.<sup>(28)</sup> In this sense, the refugee crisis extended beyond a humanitarian dimension to become a broad structural phenomenon that reshaped social and political dynamics across many countries in the Arab region and beyond.

With the end of the war in Syria and the gradual improvement in political and security stability, a qualitative shift occurred in the trajectory of the refugee crisis, which had persisted for more than a decade. The reduction in conflict intensity and the restoration of state control over large parts of Syrian territory contributed to the cessation of large-scale displacement flows toward neighboring countries and created more favorable conditions for the gradual and voluntary return of significant numbers of refugees to their areas of origin. Since December 8, 2024, nearly 1.6 million Syrian refugees have returned home from neighboring countries and beyond as of April 2026. In parallel, approximately 1.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their regions of origin.<sup>(29)</sup> This development had direct implications for host countries — particularly Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye — which faced mounting economic and social pressures due to the prolonged presence of large refugee populations.

As the number of Syrian residents in these countries declined, a relative easing of pressure on public service systems began to emerge, along with a partial reduction in social tensions linked to employment competition and resource allocation. Although the return of refugees remains limited and they face significant socioeconomic obstacles, the broader trend toward greater stability within Syria suggests the early stages of a gradual decline in one of the most complex displacement crises in the region and globally. This shift is likely to have positive implications for regional and international security by reducing the tensions and instability associated with prolonged displacement, as well as mitigating risks linked to extremism and transnational crime that often develop in contexts of protracted refugee conditions.

### **Creating the Conditions for Security and Economic Integration**

The gradual consolidation of political stability in Syria constitutes a strategic entry point for advancing broader Arab security integration, with the potential to extend into wider regional and international frameworks of security and economic interdependence. As Syrian state institutions progressively recover their functional capacity, conditions become more conducive to integrating Syria into the regional security architecture and strengthening coordination with other actors to address and mitigate shared threats.

This evolving context also provides a supportive environment for deeper regional stability, which is a necessary prerequisite for large-scale economic inte-

gration initiatives. Such initiatives include the development of energy and gas pipeline networks and the establishment of free trade zones, as well as land and maritime transport corridors linking the Levant and Gulf states with Türkiye and the Eastern Mediterranean, ultimately extending toward Europe through Syrian territory, which occupies a pivotal geographical position between these regions. The realization of these projects would generate a significant development transformation and improve economic and social conditions, thereby reinforcing security in its broader political, economic and social dimensions. At the same time, it would deepen interdependence among participating states, encouraging coordinated action for their collective security.

These integrated projects have started to take shape, fueled by the increasing awareness of Syria's critical role as a secure connector between the region and global markets — an alternative that avoids risky chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, exploited by Iran as a tool of leverage, and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, which remains vulnerable to instability in Yemen and the Horn of Africa.

The initial phase of such integrated projects reportedly began with Iraq's commencement of oil exports via Syria in April 2026, following disruptions to supply routes through the Strait of Hormuz amid the US-Israel war on Iran. Plans envisaged the export of approximately 2.5 million barrels of oil per day through a proposed pipeline connecting Basra and Haditha, with three export routes extending to the Syrian port of Baniyas, the Turkish port of Ceyhan and the Jordanian port of Aqaba.<sup>(30)</sup>

The Gulf states have also begun transporting oil and other goods overland through Syria to cargo ships. In parallel, efforts are underway to revive infrastructure and economic projects that were damaged or suspended during the civil war — most notably the Arab Gas Pipeline, designed to carry natural gas from Egypt to Lebanon via Jordan and Syria. These initiatives form part of the new Syrian leadership's strategy to position the country as a vital link in regional and global supply chains.<sup>(31)</sup> Additionally, the UAE has significantly increased its investments in Syrian ports, particularly following recent disruptions in Gulf navigation and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. This aligns with the UAE's broader strategy, which views Syrian ports as key nodes in its regional logistics network and aims to integrate Syria into the network of commercial corridors it is developing across the Middle East and the Horn of Africa.<sup>(32)</sup>

### **Regional Equilibrium and the Decline of Global Competition Over Influence**

The gradual improvement in political stability in Syria constitutes a key factor in easing regional competition for influence. It helps reduce the polarization that intensified throughout the years of conflict and alleviates tensions generated by proxy wars that had turned Syria into an arena of rivalry among multiple regional and international actors. As the Syrian state progressively restores its sovereignty and stabilizes its internal situation, the necessity for both direct and indirect foreign intervention diminishes, opening space for a more balanced

and pragmatic relationship among regional powers, including Arab states, Iran, Türkiye and Israel, while reducing the risk of mutual escalation.

This stabilization also contributes to a recalibration of the geopolitical order in the Eastern Mediterranean, which had been significantly disrupted by the expansion of Iranian and Russian influence during the conflict, prompting heightened US involvement in response. Accordingly, Syria's movement toward stability supports a broader adjustment in regional power relations, strengthens prospects for collective security, helps prevent the recurrence of conflict and encourages a more stable and cooperative trajectory within the international system.

### **Conclusion**

The fall of the Assad regime represented a historic watershed, ushering in a fragile transitional phase that reshaped internal power dynamics and repositioned Syria within both regional and international frameworks. In the midst of this transformation, the new governing authority confronted a wide array of challenges, including the need for reconciliation and transitional justice, the restructuring of state institutions, the reinforcement of security and prevention of renewed violence, reconstruction and economic recovery and the construction of an inclusive national identity capable of transcending sectarian and regional divisions.

Despite the magnitude of these challenges, Syria has registered tangible progress, most notably a relative strengthening of political stability. This is evidenced by several key indicators, including a reduction in political violence, partial improvements in institutional performance, an increase in political legitimacy and a decline in negative external interference. This development has had positive spillover effects on the broader regional and international environment, contributing to a reduction in cross-border security threats, easing pressures associated with the refugee crisis in host countries and creating more conducive conditions for regional security and economic integration among Arab states and neighboring countries. It has also contributed to a recalibration of geopolitical balances and a moderation of international competition for influence in the region.

Nevertheless, the consolidation of this trajectory remains dependent on the ability of Syrians to reinforce national consensus, as well as on sustained regional and international support for the political transition and the prevention of any reversal. Ultimately, Syria's ability to entrench stability would not only constitute a domestic achievement but also a significant contribution and support to regional and international security. This is because Syria's success can energize local, regional and international efforts to address tensions and crises in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, Sudan and Somalia — helping to pull the region out of the protracted cycle of violence toward stability, cooperation, integration and development.

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