

# WEEKLY ANALYSIS

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## FOREIGN POLICY OF SYRIA'S INTERIM GOVERNMENT: PRINCIPLES, ACTIONS, AND CHALLENGES

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Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.



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Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS)



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## FOREIGN POLICY OF SYRIA'S INTERIM GOVERNMENT: PRINCIPLES, ACTIONS, AND CHALLENGES

### Introduction

After years of civil war and widespread destruction, Syria has been grappling with deep political, social, and economic crises. In many ways, its current situation resembles Afghanistan under the rule of the Islamic Emirate. Both countries face significant challenges in governance, international isolation, diplomatic relations, and internal instability. These similarities make it crucial to examine Syria's foreign policy not just as a regional issue but as a case study in crisis governance and the complexities of managing international relations under constrained circumstances.

With the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government and the establishment of an interim administration led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, Syria has entered a new phase of political transition. This shift presents an opportunity for fundamental changes in both domestic and foreign policies. However, the country remains entangled in severe challenges, including international sanctions, security threats, and economic hardship.

The interim government in Syria is now working to navigate these crises while seeking to rebuild diplomatic relations, particularly with regional powers, Arab states, and global actors. This study explores the efforts of the interim government in achieving its foreign policy objectives, including breaking political isolation, attracting international aid, and restoring ties with Arab and international partners. It also examines the broader implications of these policies on Syria's domestic and global landscape, as well as the key challenges that hinder its foreign policy ambitions.

### PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY

Statements made by key figures in Syria's interim government, including Prime Minister Ahmad Al-Sharaa and Foreign Minister Asaad Sheibani, provide clear insight into the guiding principles of their foreign policy. Below are some of the most significant ones:

#### Expanding Diplomatic Relations with Regional and Global Partners

During Bashar al-Assad's rule, Syria faced severe sanctions and international isolation due to its close ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran and its support for groups such as Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Houthis in Yemen. This led to particularly strained relationships with key Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan.

With the establishment of the interim government, a strategic shift in Syria's diplomatic approach has been pursued. The new leadership has worked to distance itself from previous policies and adopt a fresh diplomatic strategy. One of its first major foreign policy moves was

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engaging in dialogue with these Arab nations. High-level visits and diplomatic meetings—particularly those led by Foreign Minister Asaad Sheibani—marked the initial steps toward restoring Syria’s ties with the Arab world.

Additionally, rebuilding relations with Turkey has been a top foreign policy priority. Relations between Syria and Turkey had deteriorated significantly during and after the civil war, especially as Turkey actively supported opposition groups against Assad. However, the interim government now seeks to foster constructive economic and security cooperation with Turkey, recognizing its influence as a regional power and the critical role it could play in shaping Syria’s future.

### **ATTRACTING FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

Syria’s economy has been severely damaged by years of civil war, international sanctions, corruption, and financial crises. The urgent need to attract foreign investment and strengthen economic partnerships with other countries has become more evident than ever.

In response, the interim government has taken steps to secure financial assistance and economic cooperation. Prime Minister Ahmad Al-Sharaa has actively engaged in diplomatic visits and negotiations, particularly with resource-rich Gulf nations such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as well as regional and Western powers like Turkey, Germany, and France. The goal is to secure financial aid and investment opportunities that could help rebuild the country.

Foreign investments in Syria could play a crucial role in restoring infrastructure, revitalizing damaged industries, and creating job opportunities for the Syrian people. In particular, Gulf countries that once supported Syria economically before the war are now showing renewed interest in collaborating with the interim government in economic and trade initiatives.

### **Combating Terrorism and Extremism**

One of the most serious challenges Syria has faced during the civil war is the security threat posed by terrorist groups, in addition to opposition forces that took up arms against Bashar al-Assad’s regime due to oppression and injustice. Some of these groups, including the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), also posed a security threat to neighboring countries such as Turkey. These groups not only destabilized Syria internally but also took control of certain regions.

Recognizing the critical need to address these security threats, the interim government has made it a priority to ensure that Syria does not pose a danger to its neighbors. Alongside military actions, it has pursued diplomatic efforts and international cooperation to combat



terrorism and restore stability. If the international community provides genuine support, Syria's internal security challenges could be effectively managed.

These efforts reflect the interim government's commitment to fighting terrorism and establishing peace and security in the country.

### **Commitment to Human Rights and Democracy**

In addition to focusing on security and economic recovery, the Syrian interim government has consistently emphasized human rights and democratic principles. One of its key objectives in this regard is constitutional reform and the organization of free and fair elections—an issue frequently highlighted by Prime Minister Ahmad Al-Sharaa. During a national dialogue held at the Presidential Palace in Damascus, he reiterated the government's commitment to these democratic reforms.

These reforms aim to establish an inclusive and democratic government in Syria, ensuring that all ethnic, religious, and political groups have a role in shaping the country's political future. A significant step in this direction has been the interim government's agreement with Mazloum Abdi, the leader of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), to integrate SDF personnel into the country's civil and military institutions in northeast Syria. This effort is seen as part of a broader strategy to strengthen national unity and rebuild the country.

The interim government's human rights policies are centered on peaceful coexistence, respect for minority rights, and the promotion of a democratic process. These principles are directly linked to creating a united, decentralized, and just Syria—one that is acceptable to regional and global powers, as well as international organizations. As a result, the government's commitment to human rights plays a crucial role in shaping Syria's foreign relations and engagement with the international community.

### **Foreign Visits and Diplomatic Engagements**

Foreign visits and high-level meetings with officials from various countries have become key diplomatic tools for the Syrian interim government. These visits are not only significant from a diplomatic standpoint but also have far-reaching economic and social impacts on Syria. Below are some of the most important diplomatic engagements undertaken by the interim government.

#### **Engagements with Arab Nations**

The first official visit of Prime Minister Ahmad Al-Sharaa was to Saudi Arabia, followed by trips to Turkey, Qatar, and Jordan. These visits were strategic moves aimed at restoring and improving Syria's relations with Arab and regional countries. As previously mentioned, Syria's



ties with Arab nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Jordan, had been strained during Bashar al-Assad's rule and marked by political and economic tensions.

A particularly significant milestone was Al-Sharaa's participation in the Arab League Summit in Cairo, which signaled the growing recognition of the interim government within the Arab world. Additionally, reciprocal visits by foreign leaders, such as Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani's trip to Damascus and the Saudi foreign minister's visit to Syria, marked a turning point in rebuilding Syria's relations with Arab and regional countries. These engagements are expected to yield positive results not only in the political sphere but also in strengthening economic cooperation.

### **MEETINGS WITH TURKISH AND WESTERN OFFICIALS**

Beyond its engagement with Arab countries, the interim government has also prioritized improving Syria's relations with Turkey and Western nations. Following his visit to Saudi Arabia, Al-Sharaa traveled to Turkey, highlighting the importance of Syrian-Turkish relations. Furthermore, diplomatic meetings, such as the visit of the Turkish foreign minister, the arrival of a U.S. delegation, and discussions with European diplomats, have opened doors for further cooperation in key areas, including security, economic recovery, and reconstruction.

These interactions are crucial for securing financial and technical support to rebuild Syria's infrastructure and address its economic and social challenges. By fostering these relationships, the interim government aims to create a stable and sustainable future for Syria.

### **Impact of the Interim Government's Diplomatic Efforts**

The diplomatic initiatives of the Syrian interim government have had significant effects, both internationally and domestically. Below, we examine their key external impacts:

#### **1. Attracting Foreign Investment**

One of the main objectives of the interim government's foreign visits is to secure international investment, which is crucial for Syria's post-war reconstruction. The country's infrastructure has been severely damaged due to the civil war, and rebuilding efforts require substantial financial support. Resource-rich Gulf nations such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia have shown interest in investing in Syria's reconstruction projects, particularly in sectors like energy, industry, and agriculture.

#### **2. Lifting Sanctions and Boosting Foreign Trade**

Economic sanctions have been a major factor in Syria's financial crisis. Through diplomatic engagements and negotiations with various countries, the interim government is working to



ease these restrictions and improve Syria's trade relations. Reducing sanctions will facilitate international trade, attract businesses, and ultimately contribute to the country's economic recovery.

### **3. Ending Diplomatic Isolation**

Under Bashar al-Assad's rule, Syria faced severe diplomatic isolation due to widespread human rights violations and violent crackdowns on civilians demanding their basic rights and freedoms. This led to strained relations with both regional and Western countries.

In contrast, the interim government has actively pursued diplomatic engagement to rebuild Syria's international reputation. By initiating talks with key regional players such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey, it aims to secure financial and political support. Additionally, the interim government is working to strengthen international cooperation in counterterrorism efforts and enhance security and stability within Syria.

These diplomatic efforts reflect the interim government's commitment to establishing responsible and constructive relationships with regional and global partners, fostering economic growth, and ensuring long-term stability for the country.

### **Domestic Impact of the Interim Government's Foreign Policy**

Despite the diplomatic progress made under the leadership of Ahmad al-Shar'a, Syria continues to face significant internal challenges that affect both reconstruction efforts and foreign relations. However, if the interim government's foreign policy goals are successfully realized, these challenges could be mitigated, leading to positive domestic outcomes.

#### **1. Economic Recovery and Infrastructure Rebuilding**

Foreign investments and international aid can play a crucial role in revitalizing Syria's economy. Improved economic conditions would not only help reduce unemployment but also create new job opportunities and increase national income, ultimately improving the overall quality of life.

Additionally, securing international support and investment would enable the reconstruction of critical infrastructure damaged during the civil war. This includes rebuilding transportation networks, energy systems, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. Such developments would enhance public confidence in the interim government and contribute to long-term stability.

#### **2. Security and Stability**

Regional and international cooperation in counterterrorism efforts and the establishment of secure zones could significantly improve Syria's security situation. A more stable environment



would, in turn, foster economic and social development, making the country more attractive for foreign investment and international partnerships.

Furthermore, improved security conditions would encourage the return of refugees and displaced persons, playing a vital role in Syria's social and economic recovery. Reintegrating these individuals into society would strengthen local communities and support national rebuilding efforts.

### **3. Strengthening Diplomatic Relations and Reducing Sanctions**

Improved diplomatic ties with regional and global partners could ease political tensions and promote international cooperation. Strengthened relations may also lead to a reduction or removal of economic sanctions, which have placed significant strain on Syria's economy.

Easing sanctions would facilitate greater access to essential resources and technology, accelerating the reconstruction process and economic recovery. Additionally, stronger diplomatic engagement could increase international support for humanitarian and development projects in Syria, leading to better living conditions and enhanced institutional capacity.

In summary, the success of the interim government's diplomatic efforts has the potential to transform Syria's internal landscape, revitalizing the economy, improving security, and strengthening governance. These changes would not only benefit the Syrian people but also contribute to the country's long-term stability and development.

## **CHALLENGES FACING SYRIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

### **1. Presence of Foreign Forces**

One of the most significant challenges to the authority of the interim government is the presence of foreign military forces in Syria. In the northeastern regions, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are predominantly Kurdish, receive substantial support from the United States and maintain control over large territories. Although the interim government has recently reached an agreement with this group, continued U.S. backing may impose certain limitations on Syria's foreign policy, particularly in its relations with other nations.

Additionally, Russian military bases in various parts of Syria and the presence of Bashar al-Assad, the exiled leader of the former regime, in Russia have further complicated Syria's political landscape. These factors, along with recent uprisings by Assad loyalists in coastal regions, have intensified external and internal threats to the interim government's stability. As a result, Syria's foreign policy remains heavily influenced by global powers and various armed groups, limiting its ability to exercise full sovereignty over national decision-making.





## 2. International Sanctions

Extensive international sanctions, which have been significantly reinforced since the onset of the civil war, present another major obstacle to Syria's foreign policy. These sanctions have contributed to severe economic issues, including hyperinflation, high unemployment rates, and financial shortages, all of which have hindered the country's reconstruction efforts and discouraged foreign investment.

Currently, around 90% of Syria's population lives below the poverty line, making economic recovery one of the most pressing concerns for the interim government. The impact of sanctions extends beyond the economy, also straining Syria's diplomatic relations with Western nations and limiting its ability to restore its position in the international arena.

In conclusion, Syria's foreign policy faces complex and multifaceted challenges, primarily stemming from foreign military presence and economic sanctions. Addressing these issues will require strategic diplomacy, economic resilience, and careful navigation of international relations.

### **THE REFUGEE CRISIS AND REGIONAL TENSIONS: CHALLENGES FOR SYRIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

#### 1. The Refugee Crisis

The refugee crisis remains one of the most significant challenges facing Syria's foreign policy. According to international reports, over 13 million Syrians have been displaced, with 6.2 million seeking refuge in other countries. The return of these refugees depends on stable security conditions, reliable public services, and the reconstruction of critical infrastructure. However, ongoing economic sanctions, financial shortages, and persistent security concerns have made this process extremely difficult.

Many displaced Syrians, especially those in neighboring countries, are reluctant to return due to the lack of basic services such as electricity, clean water, healthcare, and education. This crisis is not only a humanitarian issue but also a diplomatic challenge for Syria, as it affects the country's international relations and negotiations with host nations. Without a concrete plan for reintegration and rebuilding, the refugee situation will continue to strain Syria's foreign policy and international standing.

#### 2. Regional Tensions

Syria is situated in one of the most politically volatile regions in the world, and its relationships with neighboring countries remain complex. Border tensions with Turkey, particularly in northern Syria, where Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have control, are a significant factor shaping Syria's foreign policy. At the same time, the continued presence of



U.S. forces in the northeast, supporting Kurdish groups, has added another layer of complexity to the situation.

Furthermore, frequent Israeli airstrikes on Syrian territory, justified by security concerns, pose an ongoing threat to Syria's national stability. These external pressures, combined with internal security challenges, make it difficult for Syria to develop a cohesive and independent foreign policy that aligns with its national interests. The country remains caught between competing regional and global influences, which further complicates efforts to stabilize and rebuild.

Addressing both the refugee crisis and regional tensions requires a multifaceted approach, including diplomatic engagement, economic recovery, and strategic security measures. Without these efforts, Syria's ability to regain stability and improve its international position will remain limited.

## CONCLUSION

Although the interim government in Syria has only been in place for three months, it has made notable progress in both domestic and foreign affairs. Under the leadership of Ahmad Al-Shara, the government has taken significant steps to reduce Syria's international isolation. These efforts include rebuilding diplomatic ties with Arab countries, seeking international support for reconstruction, and securing financial and technical assistance from regional and global partners. While these initiatives have faced challenges, they demonstrate that even an interim government can break out of isolation through active diplomacy.

Domestically, the interim government is working towards reforms in human rights, democracy, and inclusive governance, ensuring that the interests of all groups and minorities are considered. A national dialogue was held at the Presidential Palace in Damascus to discuss fundamental reforms in these areas. However, achieving these goals remains difficult due to ongoing international sanctions and the reluctance of many Western powers to fully support democratic transitions in Syria. Nevertheless, sustained efforts and international cooperation are essential to overcoming these obstacles. Despite being in its early stages, the interim government's actions towards improving internal conditions and foreign relations can serve as a model for progress.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To maintain national sovereignty and independence in foreign policy, the government should carefully manage its interactions with external actors while continuing national dialogues.



2. Achieving long-term success in foreign policy requires setting aside internal conflicts and exercising restraint in domestic disputes.
3. Creating stable conditions, ensuring security, and providing essential services will encourage refugees to return to Syria.

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