

SYRIA AT WAR, EIGHT YEARS ON TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



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1413



E/ESCWA/CL3.SEP/2020/POLICY BRIEF.1



Introduction

After several years of conflict involving Syrian and non-Syrian actors, the Syrian Arab Republic has exhibited many of the symptoms of State failure, including loss of monopoly over the use of violence, compromised territorial control and, in many areas, a complete breakdown of order.

Despite the multiple peace processes and the significant decline in armed combat as the conflict entered its ninth year, there has been no comprehensive political settlement. The Government regained control of large swathes of territory, which has dramatically lowering rates of death and destruction, but violence continues, quite heavily, in some parts of the country, and the potential for devastating conflict relapse remains. Thousands of people also remain imprisoned, displaced or missing.



War economy,

pervasive in both, areas controlled by the Government and areas outside Government control, along with **fragmented governance** and **institutional deterioration**, present significant **challenges** to re-establishing rule of law and **returning to normally functioning institutions**

The lack of a comprehensive political agreement means that the situation remains precarious. There is no declared intention, nor mechanism, for meaningful accountability and reconciliation for the gross violations and brutal crimes committed during the conflict. Moreover, the root causes of the conflict have not been adequately addressed, which disempowers Syrian civil society.

This policy brief outlines how the conflict has negatively affected governance in the Syrian Arab Republic. It also presents policy options aimed at reversing and remedying such effects, as well as safeguarding the State from being susceptible to future relapse.

Our Findings

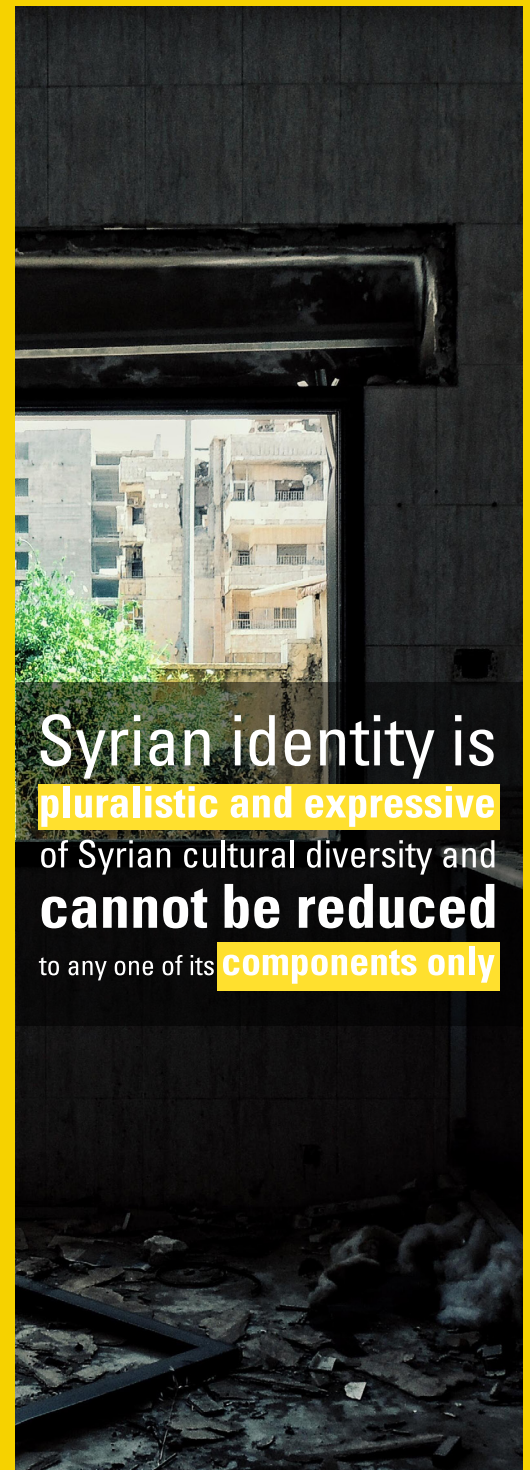
Starting in 2012, many areas fell outside Government control and the Syrian Arab Republic witnessed a proliferation of non-State armed groups. As the conflict worsened, the rise of different groups fighting the Government led to territorial fragmentation, which was exacerbated by the external backing of various rival groups with weapons, funds, and foreign fighters. Armed groups opposed to the Government were in conflict not only with the Government but with each other as well.

The consequences of the ongoing conflict on governance in the Syrian Arab Republic have been dramatic. As territory was segmented under different areas of control, the governance vacuum was filled by Islamist movements and organizations, driven by a combination of sectarianism, jihadist ideology, and competition for control of resources. While ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra were the most radical and effective, differences in doctrine and practices between them and the likes of Ahrar al-Sham were, generally, only a matter of degree. As a result, Syrian refugees lived under varied structures, laws and practices, depending on their location.

The internationalization of the conflict will be one of its enduring legacies. International actors – States and intergovernmental organizations – acquired enhanced leverage over the Syrian Arab Republic's fate. Foreign countries like Iran, the Russian Federation, Turkey and the United States have a direct military presence and are involved in political, humanitarian, and economic affairs.

The Government also lost control over its borders, which were contested by internal opposition groups, trans-State movements and external powers. As the State's control contracted, the Syrian Arab Republic's borderlands became disputed areas where tribes and trans-State movements were empowered, and safe havens for fighters and platforms for international NGOs were concentrated.

Multiple countries, mainly European ones and the United States, maintain international sanctions against Syrian Government agencies and individuals. There have also been multiple parallel peace processes sponsored by international actors and the devastating



Syrian identity is
pluralistic and expressive
of Syrian cultural diversity and
cannot be reduced
to any one of its **components only**

impact of the conflict has given rise to a wide international humanitarian presence.

Later in the conflict, a growing wave of truces or de-escalation zones led to a patchwork of power-sharing arrangements on frontlines. The Government resorted to imposing settlements, piece by piece, via bombing and/or sieges, on the margins of areas it controlled. These settlements or reconciliation agreements varied in form, with some amounting to virtual surrender and others entailing ex-fighters remaining in place but pledging loyalty to the Government and enjoying some real autonomy.

Fragmentation of governance in the Syrian Arab Republic transformed the economy. As the productive capacity of the normal economy declined, a war economy – lacking cohesion and with regional and transnational connections – emerged, empowering a sector of middlemen, war profiteers, warlords, smugglers and a host of other intermediaries.

Food provision was weaponized, with supplies cut to areas held by the opposition. Starving besieged populations into submission was a strategy used frequently in the conflict.

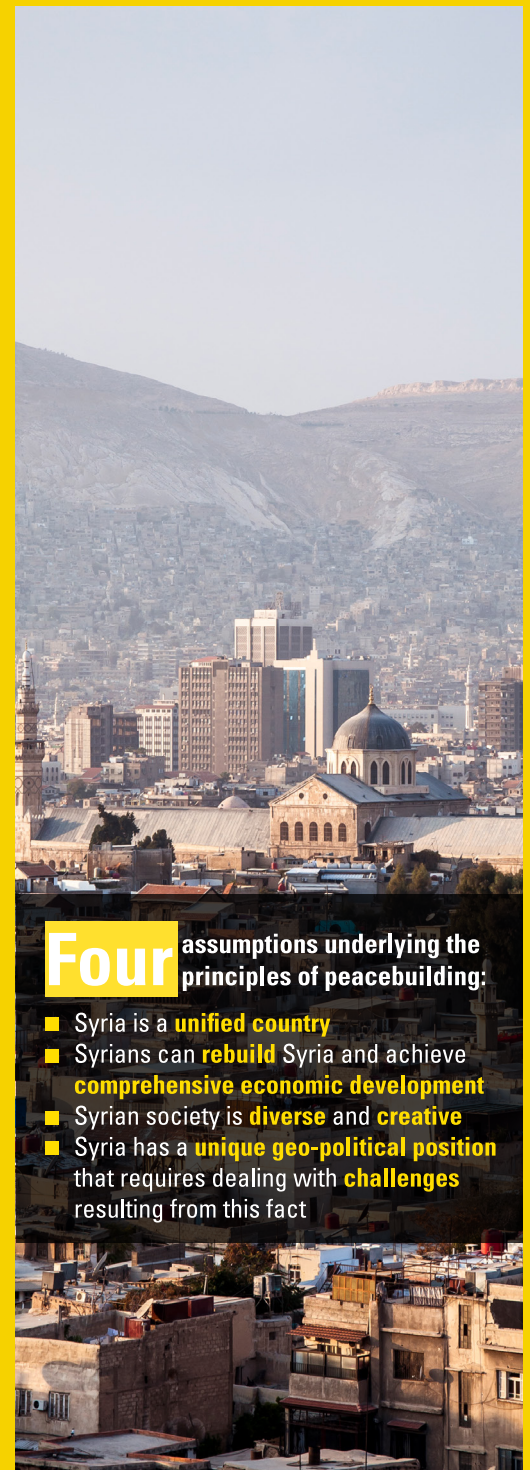
Rights violations, crimes of the conflict, and lack of accountability still threaten attempts at sustainable peace. Gender-based violations, rife almost since the onset of conflict, have reached unbearable levels. And though the worst of it often occurred inside the country, violence and discrimination has continued to affect Syrian women and girls after their displacement.

Finally, it is of utmost importance to note that centralization and decentralization, and their relationship to administrative governance, lie at the heart of governance issues. The Syrian Arab Republic's administrative structure was characterized by extreme centralization, and the de facto decentralization of power which the conflict gave way to is likely to have lasting effects.

The Peacebuilding Process

The scale of the Syrian conflict and its geopolitical complexity implies recovery and reconstruction is of global importance. Before the conflict, the Syrian Arab Republic was classified as a middle-income country, but gains in development have been reversed. All socioeconomic indicators have significantly deteriorated. Each Syrian has been affected differently, but the conflict has negatively impacted the lives of nearly all Syrians.

It is imperative that the reconstruction of the Syrian Arab Republic transcends mere restoration, for it would not be sensible to



Four assumptions underlying the principles of peacebuilding:

- Syria is a **unified country**
- Syrians can **rebuild** Syria and achieve **comprehensive economic development**
- Syrian society is **diverse** and **creative**
- Syria has a **unique geo-political position** that requires dealing with **challenges** resulting from this fact

replicate the conditions that gave way to the conflict. Reconstruction must be holistic in that it follows a comprehensive, interlinked process that includes transformation at the economic, social and governance levels. It must be inclusive of all Syrians, be they inside the country or refugees, and must pay particular attention to the role of women. Finally, the process must be sustainable in all aspects. Thus, the principles of peacebuilding are:

- A.** A political transformation based on UNSC 2254 that guarantees a political transition towards a Syria where a culture of democracy is built and practiced, mutual political trust is re-established among the main political players, and the rule of law, equality and citizenship is established. Based on UNSC 1325 special attention should be paid to the role of women as victims of war and leaders in the peacebuilding process.
- B.** The right of the displaced and the refugees to a safe, dignified and voluntary return to their homes (or to any other location inside the country they voluntarily choose to return to).
- C.** A national reconciliation unto which all Syrians are invited and encouraged to contribute
- D.** A balanced and equitable citizen-centered development that:
 - directly contributes to stability, peacebuilding and reconciliation at the local and the national levels
 - that is tangible and felt in the availability of rehabilitated social and physical infrastructure
 - empowers people, especially the most vulnerable and poor, to attain their basic needs
- E.** Moving towards a governance framework and national administrative structure that is comprehensive, participatory, transparent, accountable, and increases gender equality.

Key areas of concern in the peacebuilding phase are:

1. The provision of emergency response, services, and basic needs:

Entails all issues related to the 'emergency phase' or immediate and ongoing responses to basic humanitarian needs, and the provision of services. While stressing the principle of voluntary repatriation and non-refoulement, it is important to prepare for the return of refugees, and to guarantee their personal safety and well-being and

alleviate their fear of persecution and arrest. Delivery of basic needs and services should be equitable and non-discriminatory, either in appearance or practice. Attention to basic needs should incorporate and respond to local priorities in an inclusive manner and allow local people a central role in articulating them. Anything else signals a continuation of the conflict.

2. Institutional reform in political and administrative governance:

Issues related to governance, rule of law and political life were some of the root causes of conflict. There is now an opportunity to consider "big" governance issues, such as the constitution, separation of powers and rule of law, and also basic rights and freedoms, to promote sustainable development and rebuild the social fabric. Building an inclusive legal framework implies a move away from the zero-sum game of winners and losers towards a consensus-based exercise that recognizes the rights of Syrians from across the political spectrum inside the country or in locations of refuge, respects their human rights and empowers women.

3. Social reconciliation, cohesion, and the revival of Syrian society as diverse and unified:

Social and national reconciliation can begin only if hostilities end and all parties meaningfully commit to finding a political solution. Negotiations to end the military conflict and national reconciliation, the two parts of diplomatic activity, must accompany and be informed by one another. The aspiration is to benefit Syrian society rather than achieve a minimal level of agreement or bargain between the opposing parties. It is important to recognize that a comprehensive reconciliation process is intimately connected to rebuilding national identity and social capital degraded as a result of the conflict and polarization. All Syrian sides need to recognize each other and accept that all Syrians, regardless of political perspective, have the right to live and be part of society. Further, the efforts of war entrepreneurs to invest in sectarian politics, hate speech and polarizing repertoire need to be countered.

4. Economic recovery and the dismantling of the war economy that grew out of the conflict:

It is necessary to look beyond emergency measures and humanitarian aid towards economic growth. To that

end, the emergency response process should be linked to long-term rehabilitation and economic development. This includes sustained investment in human capital, rehabilitating physical infrastructure and selecting strategic sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, for targeted support. At the same time, the Syrian Arab Republic must confront the legacy of the war economy which has entrenched warlords and promoted distorted development, illegal forms of wealth accumulation and illicit transnational transfers.

By combining relevant United Nations resolutions and the ESCWA-convened deliberations of Syrians from various walks of life, the following recommendations are put forward for the consideration of all relevant parties:

1. Formal and informal policies that directly improve the quality of life of all Syrians throughout Syria and in the neighbouring countries and without discrimination based on political affiliation are key. Humanitarian relief and livelihood revival are a minimum and should never be a bargaining position.

2. Release of detainees and clarifying the fate of tens of thousands of missing persons. This issue has been repeatedly emphasized first and foremost by Syrian civil society as well as the United Nations and most recently by the Tripartite letter to the United Nations of Russia, Iran and Turkey.

3. Wider spectrum of Syrian voices and revival of Syrian societal initiatives inside and outside Syria.

4. Joint economic, cultural, and social cooperation at the local level that revive economic interdependency within the country, provide for livelihood opportunities, and serve to build positive social capital and unite Syrians.

Four assumptions underlie the principles and guidelines addressed above: that Syria is a unified country, that Syrians themselves can rebuild Syria and achieve comprehensive economic development, that Syrian society is diverse and creative, and that Syria has a unique geopolitical position that requires particular attention and care.



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