

An International Mechanism for Stabilizing and Shaping the New Syria

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Main Points

With the rise of an Islamist regime in Syria, a new reality has emerged that presents both risks and opportunities for Israel. Although Iran has been pushed out of Syria, it is expected to attempt to renew its presence there. Meanwhile, Turkey is playing a central role in Syria, a development that could lead to political and military friction with Israel—potentially escalating in an extreme scenario to direct military confrontation. At the same time, Turkey is likely the only actor with both the motivation and capability to deploy ground forces to Syria. As such, it could play a positive role in stabilizing the country and reducing the risk of hostilities between Syria and Israel.

Syria's reconstruction and stabilization will require significant resources and international cooperation. To this end, Israel should present the Trump administration with a proposal to establish an international coordinating mechanism for Syrian reconstruction under US leadership. From Israel's perspective, an international mechanism such as this would help reduce the risks of military conflict with Syria; limit Turkey's freedom of maneuver in Syria, thereby maximizing the benefits of its involvement while minimizing the dangers; and reduce the likelihood of Iran reestablishing a foothold in Syria.

Overt Israeli involvement in this mechanism would likely jeopardize its chances of success. Therefore, Israel's role should be limited to presenting the idea to the US administration and working closely behind the scenes to safeguard its interests.

The Challenge

A new reality is taking shape in Syria following the rise of the Islamist regime. While Syria's future trajectory remains shrouded in uncertainty, it is expected to present both risks and opportunities for Israel. Although Iran has been pushed out of Syria, it will likely seek to reestablish its presence. Meanwhile, Turkey is poised to play a central role in shaping the new Syria, potentially leading to political and military friction with Israel, and in an extreme scenario, even to a direct military clash. At the same time, Turkey may be the only regional actor directly involved in Syria that has both the motivation and capability to deploy ground forces that could help shape the country's future. From Israel's perspective, Turkey could also play a constructive role

in helping to mitigate or even prevent hostilities between Israel and the new Syrian regime, its affiliated militias, or other forces operating in Syria.

After more than a decade of civil war, Syria has become a failed and fractured state. Most regional and international stakeholders, including Israel, have an interest in stabilizing the country and recognize that this will require extensive cooperation and resources. This shared interest provides the foundation for the proposed initiative.

The Central Idea

The establishment of an international mechanism, led by the United States and joined by Turkey, the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar), Egypt and Jordan, the E3—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—and other Western countries, as well as the UN, and any other country—including Russia—willing to adopt the mechanism’s Terms of Reference for shaping and stabilizing Syria, as outlined below.

It is important to emphasize: Direct Israeli involvement in the proposed mechanism would likely jeopardize its chances of being established and successful implementation. Therefore, Israel’s role should be strictly limited to presenting the concept to the US administration and working closely with it to secure Israel’s vital interests.

Policy Objectives

The proposed policy seeks to advance several goals critical to Israel’s national security:

- Stabilization of Syria and reduced risks of military friction between Syria and Israel;
- Maximizing the benefits of Turkish involvement in Syria while minimizing the dangers for Israel;
- Reducing the risks of renewed Iranian influence and entrenchment in Syria. This would further constitute a milestone in a broader effort to stabilize the Middle East in the aftermath of the multi-front war against Israel.

Terms of Reference

- An independent, sovereign, and unified Syria;
- A moderate Syrian regime that respects the human rights of all its citizens, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or gender, and that reaches an agreed-upon solution to protect the rights of Syria’s minority populations;
- A gradual transition to democratic governance, including elections, at a pace that aligns with Syria’s actual capabilities;
- Preventing renewed Iranian and Hezbollah entrenchment in Syria;

- A Syria that does not pose a threat to the security of its neighbors, including a ban on the hosting of terrorist entities and the dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction in Syria under international supervision;
- Maintenance of secure and recognized borders with Syria's neighbors—Israel, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon;
- Withdrawal of all foreign forces from Syria and dismantlement of all non-governmental armed groups, at a pace that accords with the stabilization process, in coordination with partners in the proposed mechanism and with the consent of the Syrian regime;¹
- Promotion and coordination of Syria's economic recovery and safe repatriation of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons who wish to return—including refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and EU countries;
- Termination of the international mechanism at Syria's request.

Structure and Functions of the International Mechanism

A high-level steering committee, comprised of all participating states, will be established to formulate the mechanism's policies. The mechanism will be led by the United States in coordination with the Syrian government, with both retaining veto power over its decisions. Dedicated subcommittees will operate under the steering committee's authority.

Proposed Subcommittees and Chairs:

- Political and Judicial Reform—Chaired by the E3;
- Security (including the dismantlement of non-governmental military forces)—Chaired by Turkey;
- Economic Reconstruction—Chaired by Saudi Arabia or the UAE;
- Refugees—Chaired by Saudi Arabia or the UAE;
- Israeli–Syrian Force Separation—Chaired by the UN (UNDOF?).

Every member state may join the subcommittees and contribute as it sees fit.

Advantages for Israel

- Improved prospects of rebuilding and stabilizing a moderate Syria that does not pose a military threat to Israel nor serve as a launchpad for hostile actions against it;

¹ To prevent Russia from acting to thwart the mechanism's establishment, it will be necessary to exempt its bases in Syria.

- Contains Turkey's ambitions by integrating it into an international framework, thereby minimizing its potential negative influence in Syria while leveraging its positive security contributions;
- Reduced risk of a political or even military confrontation between Israel and Turkey over Syria;
- Minimizes Iranian and Hezbollah influence in Syria;
- Ensures the continued existence of a buffer zone between Israel and Syria, although probably at the cost of a withdrawal from the additional buffer zones Israel established in the Golan Heights after the collapse of the Assad regime, including on Mount Hermon;
- Drawback: Some mechanism partners may demand that the Golan Heights and the Palestinian issues be included in the framework's terms of reference. To prevent this, close coordination with the United States, as the mechanism's leader, will be necessary.

Advantages for Syria

- Gives at least de facto recognition to the new regime and its interests;
- Preserves Syria's sovereignty and independence;
- Strengthens international and regional commitment to Syria's stabilization and reconstruction;
- Provides Syria with a veto over decisions made by the mechanism, but the need to coordinate with it somewhat limits Syria's freedom of action;
- Formalizes relations with the United States and Western nations;
- Restores ties with Arab states and facilitates reintegration into the Arab world.

Advantages for Turkey

- Recognition of its interests and role in Syria, including its military presence;
- Shares the burden of stabilizing Syria;
- Facilitates the return of Syrian refugees;
- Prevents Syrian-Kurdish independence;
- Weakens Iranian influence in Syria and the region overall;
- Drawback: The mechanism **limits Turkey's freedom of action** and reduces its influence as the primary foreign actor on the ground in Syria today.

Advantages for the Arab States (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan)

- Stabilizes Syria;

- Reduces the risk of direct competition between the Gulf states for reconstruction projects in Syria;
- Limits Turkey and Qatar's influence in Syria (a disadvantage for them);
- Prevents or limits a renewal of Iran's presence and influence in Syria;
- Drawback (for Egypt and Jordan): Stabilizes an Islamist regime.

Advantages for the United States

- Helps promote a broader effort to stabilize the Middle East (strengthening moderates and weakening destabilizing actors) under American influence;
- Reduces the likelihood of an international crisis that could complicate President Trump's efforts to promote higher-priority domestic and foreign policy issues;
- Aligns with broader efforts to intensify pressure on Iran and contain it;
- Allows President Trump to claim a success early in his term, with minimal American resource investment.

Policy Recommendations for Israel

- Conduct dialogue with the Trump administration to encourage it to lead the establishment of the proposed international mechanism. This is particularly important given the president's focus on domestic issues and other higher-priority foreign policy concerns, and, as a consequence, the only limited importance he attaches to Syria. It should be emphasized that this proposal could constitute a key component in the president's broader strategy for promoting regional stability, establishing a new regional security architecture, containing and weakening Iran, and advancing Saudi–Israeli normalization;
- Incorporate the proposal into a comprehensive strategy for stabilizing Israel's northern arena. Accordingly, efforts should be made to convince the US administration to expand the proposal to Lebanon—either as a standalone one or a joint framework for both Syria and Lebanon;
- Initiate immediate and discreet dialogue with Turkey to reduce the dangers of bilateral friction in Syria, irrespective of this proposal. To this end, establish a bilateral deconfliction mechanism to manage and mitigate tensions.