

A New-Old Partner in Damascus: Is Qatar Rebuilding Syria in Its Image?

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Since Ahmed al-Sharaa's rise to power in Syria, Qatar has played a central role in the country's reconstruction process. With the open support of the United States and coordination with Turkey, Doha has positioned itself as a leading actor in shaping the new Syrian order. It reopened its embassy in Damascus, sent aid, launched infrastructure projects, and invested in the energy, health, and transportation sectors. Combining diplomacy with a "bottom-up" economic strategy, Qatar offers an alternative to other Gulf states regarding Syria's stabilization. Yet, this policy carries risks: Syria's fragile internal situation, the multiplicity of militias, the jihadist threat, and the issue of minorities all present serious challenges to the al-Sharaa regime and thus to Qatar, such that failure would render Qatar's investment a mistaken gamble.

Since the fall of Bashar al-Assad and the rise of Ahmed al-Sharaa to power in Syria, Qatar has become an increasingly influential player in the country. Like Turkey, Qatar supported the Syrian rebels for years, but unlike other Arab states, which eventually sought reconciliation with Assad, Doha refused to grant him any political recognition. Qatar was thus the only Arab state not to normalize relations with Assad and, after his fall, the first to recognize the new Syrian regime. Within a week of al-Sharaa's rise to power, Qatar reopened its embassy in Damascus, provided humanitarian aid, and advanced economic and infrastructure projects to rebuild the country. Doha's involvement in Syria reflects both its desire to position itself as a mediator in the Arab world and its aspiration to shape the new order in Syria in a way that serves its own interests and goals.

On August 6, 2025, at a festive ceremony in Syria, entities led by the Qatari UCC corporation, along with Emirati and Italian companies, [signed](#) an investment agreement with Syria that includes the construction of a new airport and subway in Syria. The presence of the US Special Envoy to Syria, Tom Barrack, testified to the deal's importance for the US administration. At the event, the chairman of the Syrian Investment Authority, Talal al-Halali, [declared](#) that "the meeting was not just an official event, but a clear and explicit declaration that Syria is open to investment." A total of 12 large strategic projects, [worth \\$14 billion](#), were announced. This is the largest deal so far between the new regime and Qatar, part of their steadily deepening partnership.

Qatar's longstanding support for the Syrian opposition and its refusal to normalize relations with Assad's government paved the way for its central role in the post-Assad era. This position now allows Doha, in partnership with Ankara, to enjoy greater legitimacy than any other Arab actor in shaping relations with Syria's new leadership. For years, Qatar has been operating in the Middle East in full coordination with the United States, and its involvement in Syria has

also received Washington's blessing. Its role during and after the fall of the Assad regime was positively welcomed in the West. The United States, in particular, seems interested in leveraging Qatari influence in Syria to undermine the "Shiite crescent" of pro-Iranian states and organizations, in which Syria once played a central role.

Qatari activity has also been evident in the diplomatic sphere. In January 2025, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, [became the first Arab leader](#) to visit Damascus following the change of government. The visit symbolized more continuity than change—a [state that had openly supported](#) the Syrian opposition against the Assad regime was now sponsoring the state's reconstruction under a new government led by the same opposition. Qatar also sought to stake its claim in Syria before its Gulf rivals, especially the United Arab Emirates, which remained somewhat cautious about the nature and intentions of the new Syrian leadership. Later, [reciprocal visits](#) by senior officials from both states led to joint declarations on closer relations, infrastructure assistance, and Syria's integration into the regional system. Qatar also mediated between the new regime and regional actors, even exploring [channels of mediation](#) with Israel.

Alongside Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Qatar is gradually becoming a leading source of funding for Syria's reconstruction. It was Saudi Arabia that pressed the United States to lift the sanctions on Syria (a move that enabled investments to begin), and Mohammed bin Salman personally persuaded President Trump to meet with al-Sharaa. In March 2025, the Trump administration gave Qatar the green light to transfer natural gas to Syria via Jordan. In April, Qatar and Saudi Arabia jointly announced their intention to settle Syria's debts to the World Bank. On May 16, [the World Bank confirmed](#) that Doha and Riyadh had repaid Syria's debt of \$15.5 million, thereby enabling "the [World Bank Group to renew](#) its involvement in the country and assist the needs of the Syrian people."

Another central pillar of Qatari involvement in Syria is in the energy sector. Qatar signed a \$7 billion [memorandum of understanding](#) to build four gas-based power stations and a solar farm, in cooperation with companies from Turkey and the United States. Upon completion, the five power stations are expected to provide more than half of Syria's electricity needs. The agreement was signed just days after the Trump administration began lifting sanctions on Syria, attesting to the coordination between the United States, Qatar, and Turkey and reflecting American approval of the warming of ties between Doha, Ankara, and Damascus. This move also fits into a [broader plan](#) to supply electricity to Syria using gas piped from Azerbaijan through Turkey.

Moreover, Qatar has also financed a program to pay the salaries of Syrian public sector workers, amounting to \$29 million per month for three months. This step was carried out in cooperation with [Saudi Arabia and in coordination](#) with the United States, and within the framework of UN sanction relief. At the same time, Qatar sent aid, including medicine, medical equipment, food, and rehabilitation for water and sewage systems, particularly in rural areas and those affected by war. The Qatari Development Fund and the Qatari Red Crescent also established joint medical programs with Syrian institutions, including international workshops in Damascus for training local doctors and providing trauma care.

Qatari involvement in Syria has also expanded into aviation infrastructure. In June 2025, Qatar Airways [renewed direct flights](#) between Damascus and Doha, alongside training Syrian pilots in Qatar. This move reflects Qatar's intention to reintegrate Syria into the regional economic and transport sphere, with particular emphasis on direct links to Gulf economic centers. Similarly, in the security field, a Qatari security delegation visited Damascus in April 2025 to explore [training Syrian security forces](#) in technology, logistics, and civilian control. Qatar also expressed its support for integrating the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into the Syrian state's military and security institutions, as a step toward reconstituting centralized rule. This stance places Qatar as a potential mediator between Syria's fragmented parts, including those supported by the United States and the Kurds.

Doha and Damascus—Intertwining Interests

Qatar's interests in Syria are diverse. It seeks to establish long-term footholds of influence in the "new" Syria, from a geopolitical perspective focused on civil and economic influence, not necessarily direct military power. At the same time, Qatar positions itself as an alternative to Saudi and Emirati influence, which relies primarily on macroeconomic investments and conditional loans. In contrast, Qatar prefers intensive involvement in infrastructure, medicine, education, and local governance sectors—a model that allows it to build "from below." In the broader regional context, Qatar seeks to reduce Iranian influence in Syria while maintaining open channels with Turkey and some former opposition groups.

The multi-layered nature of Qatar's involvement distinguishes Doha from other states: beyond providing aid, it shapes the institutional, economic, and civil frameworks within which the new Syrian government operates. The competition with other actors in the Syrian arena is therefore not only economic but also relates to the question of Syria's socio-political identity in the next decade. Through its extensive network of activities, Qatar seeks to ensure that post-Assad Syria will be a moderately conservative state aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood's outlook and one that allows wide operating space for external actors—a model consistent with Doha's national security concept and the global influence paradigm it promotes.

However, Qatar's growing influence, alongside Turkey, could pave the way for the establishment of an Islamist state in Syria—a possible scenario given the jihadist past of some of Syria's new leadership. Although the United States and Europe hope to see the new Syrian government as a moderate force, Doha's active presence and the scale of its investment suggest that such moderation should not be taken for granted.

Syria's interest in deepening cooperation with Qatar reflects both urgent needs and a long-term strategic vision. After more than a decade of war, international sanctions, and political isolation, the Syrian economy is in ruins. Half of the country's infrastructure is destroyed, electricity is available only a few hours a day, unemployment exceeds 25%, and there are severe shortages in health, water, and housing services. The connection to Qatar and its willingness to invest in Syria may help ease the economic and humanitarian crisis and revive the local economy at a relatively rapid pace compared to financing from formal international institutions. Moreover, after a decade of being seen as a failed and isolated state, Syria's

strengthening ties with Arab states in general, and with Qatar in particular, signal reconstruction, openness, and renewed confidence. Transport, tourism, and trade links now made possible by Qatari investments also contribute to Syria's reintegration as a regional transit hub, thereby strengthening its regional status.

Following cautious optimism within Syria after the fall of Assad's brutal regime, the violent clashes that have occurred in Syria during the past six months—including the deaths of more than a thousand Druze—have increased distrust and suspicion toward al-Sharaa among some Syrians. Economic recovery, however, could improve citizens' welfare and strengthen Syria's regional position, thereby bolstering public legitimacy for al-Sharaa's rule.

Turkey's long-standing presence in northern Syria and its influence over armed groups align closely with Qatar's economic and diplomatic ambitions. It is therefore likely that Doha will continue coordinating its various initiatives with Ankara. However, many challenges remain. In addition to competition for influence with other Gulf states—each pulling in a different direction—the armed groups in Syria remain divided, and attempts to unify them under a single governing framework have not yet succeeded and are likely to face continued difficulties. While economic investments may alleviate immediate hardships, they do not resolve the underlying problems and challenges facing al-Sharaa: minorities unwilling to integrate into state institutions on his terms, the presence of jihadist fighters and other extremist elements fueling violence and conflict (particularly against minorities), and threats from ISIS and forces aligned with Iran and Hezbollah. These dynamics raise doubt not only about al-Sharaa's ability to stabilize the state in the near future but also about his political survival. Should al-Sharaa lose his grip on the country, Qatar's investment in him will prove a misguided gamble.

Given the close coordination between Doha and Washington in the Syrian arena, Israel has reason to propose to the United States the formulation of a responsible and cautious policy toward al-Sharaa. Such a policy would gradually condition investments in Syria on reforms and responsible conduct by the regime at both the domestic and regional levels. One of Israel's main concerns is the potential for Islamist influence within the Syrian–Qatari partnership. To mitigate this risk, it is important to encourage diversification of sources of assistance and “pillars of support” for Syria's new leadership and, in particular, to encourage broader involvement by all the Gulf states, to balance and moderate the ideological influence of Turkey and Qatar.

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