

# **A Path to Conflict Transformation in Syria**

## **A Framework for a Phased Approach**

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## I. Executive Summary

Over the past year, Syria has seen less violence than at any other point since the civil war began 10 years ago. But the country remains in crisis: None of the main drivers of the conflict have been resolved, human rights abuses are rampant, regional tensions are acute, and increased U.S. sanctions are contributing to a spiraling economic crisis. These factors are exacerbating the country's already desperate humanitarian situation and sowing the seeds of future instability.

For all intents and purposes, international diplomacy on Syria is stalled. U.S. and European efforts to isolate the Syrian government diplomatically and economically have not persuaded the Syrian government to modify its behavior, let alone accept a political transition. Russia's initial hope that the West would help to fund Syria's reconstruction, absent meaningful political change in Damascus, has proved equally misguided.

In public, at least, there is little sign that any side is willing to abandon maximalist demands. There is growing recognition that, on the current trajectory, the likely outcome will be a failed state in Syria for years, and possibly decades, to come. This has important consequences: It would (1) prolong the suffering of the Syrian people; (2) cause a new wave of refugee flow to neighboring countries and beyond; (3) prevent any solution to the refugee crisis and quite possibly expand it; (4) provide fertile ground for violent extremist organizations to regroup; (5) sharply increase the likelihood of a broader conflict arising from a confrontation between the many foreign militaries currently operating inside Syria; and (6) destabilize neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon.

A new approach is urgently needed and a conversation on the way forward should begin now, especially given the potential for the new Joe Biden administration to reset Washington's Syria policy. While U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the agreed basis for an ideal political settlement, more pragmatic diplomatic options should be explored in the near term. These options should include a framework for engaging the Syrian government on a more limited set of concrete and verifiable steps, in return for a package of incentives from the United States and European Union, to include targeted reconstruction assistance and sanctions easing or relief. These diplomatic options should rule out explicitly the 2012 Geneva Communiqué's call for a leadership "transition" (reiterated in Resolution 2254), perceived in Damascus as a euphemism for regime change. The aim of these options would be to re-energize Syria diplomacy by offering a phased approach that consolidates Western demands, enables progress on discrete issues, and offers the Syrian government and its backers a clear pathway out of the current crisis.

This analysis proposes elements of such a phased approach. It is based on interviews with U.S., European, Russian, and U.N. officials, analysts at think tanks and universities, and Syrians from across the country's multiple political divides. The first section lays out the background and rationale. The second proposes seven priority negotiating tracks and, for each track, suggests specific confidence-building measures (CBMs) and more difficult, substantive steps to be taken

by the Syrian government. The third section lays out a sequenced, three-phase approach to reconstruction assistance and sanctions easing or relief.

## II. Background and Rationale

In response to the Syrian government’s crackdown on protests in 2011, U.S. and EU policy toward Syria focused on reaching a negotiated political settlement that would remove President Bashar al-Assad and establish a transitional governing body with full executive authority. This “Assad must go” policy was accompanied by a series of measures aimed at isolating the Syrian government, denying it access to financial and military resources, and ultimately providing assistance to both civilian and armed opposition groups in order to build negotiating leverage.

While it was always difficult to imagine that the Syrian leadership would voluntarily relinquish power, the combined support of Russia and Iran — and especially the success of Russia’s military intervention in Syria that began in September 2015 — has greatly diminished the likelihood of a political transition. The Syrian government now controls the most populous and politically significant portions of the country, and, with the exception of portions of northern Syria occupied by Turkey, international support for Syria’s armed opposition has collapsed. The Syrian leadership no longer faces a threat to its hold on power. After earlier downgrading diplomatic relations, several European and regional states have now reopened their embassies in Damascus.

Nevertheless, the conflict is not over. The presence of Turkish and U.S.-led coalition forces in northern and eastern Syria, respectively, continues to deny the government a complete military victory, while Israel now routinely carries out airstrikes against Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah targets inside Syria. In the south, the failure of reconciliation agreements is sparking a renewed insurgency.

Worse, Syria is now gripped by a spiraling economic crisis. This has resulted from a combination of factors, including the impact of nine years of war, government mismanagement and corruption, the collapse of the Lebanese banking sector, and increasingly stringent U.S. and EU sanctions. Scarcity of staples like bread and fuel and a precipitous fall in the value of the Syrian pound are increasing frustration with the government, even among its supporters, and exposing fissures within the elite. All of this is exacerbated by COVID-19, which threatens to overwhelm Syria’s ruined health system. As a consequence, the Syrian government finds itself under unprecedented pressure.

For the Trump administration, this outcome was broadly consistent with the goals of its “maximum pressure” strategy.<sup>1</sup> While this strategy has raised the costs of the war for Russia and Iran, it has not translated into progress on the political track — even with respect to the

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<sup>1</sup> “U.S. Syria Representative Says His Job Is to Make the War a ‘Quagmire’ for Russia,” *Newsweek*, May 13, 2020.

modest goals of the UN-facilitated committee to reform Syria's constitution. Indeed, progress remains highly unlikely so long as Syria's leadership continues to perceive the war in existential terms and enjoy Russian and Iranian support. The United States finds itself on the diplomatic sidelines, committed to maximalist goals — especially with respect to a political transition and the removal from Syria of all Iranian and Iranian-backed forces — that it cannot achieve. Absent a diplomatic process, “maximum pressure” risks precipitating the collapse of the Syrian state without any plan for the aftermath — or assurances that this would suit U.S. interests.

Views within Europe are more mixed. While France in particular has maintained a hard line on Damascus, concerns about renewed instability, the refugee crisis, and broader EU-Russian relations have led some member states to explore whether limited reconstruction funding might change the Syrian government's behavior. For now, however, Europe remains committed to sanctions as part of a larger policy of strategic patience.<sup>2</sup> In May 2020, EU sanctions on Syria were renewed for an additional 12 months.

Russia is concerned primarily with (1) consolidating military gains, (2) balancing tensions among its Syrian and regional interlocutors, and (3) finding sources of revenue inside Syria to offset the mounting (though sustainable) costs of its five-year military investment. Russia would like to see forward movement on the political process, as this could advance all three objectives. However, while the Russian press has recently been more openly critical of the Syrian leadership and government, Moscow still sees no viable alternative to the current leadership and is unlikely to assume the steep security and reputational costs associated with abandoning them at this stage.

The result is diplomatic impasse. Ultimately, a major multilateral agreement will probably be required to address the many complex issues at play in Syria. But that may be too far away to address the current crisis or to prevent events from spiraling out of control in a fashion that makes resolution far more difficult. At the same time, the escalating economic crisis, coupled with rising concern over the current trajectory in Syria, may present an opportunity to test an alternative, more pragmatic approach. This would defer resolution of the most contentious issues while focusing instead on a more limited set of reforms in return for reconstruction assistance and sanctions relief. The aim would be to stabilize the current situation in Syria and build some forward momentum for a larger diplomatic process to end the war.

Such an approach would differ from current UN-led efforts in three respects: It would (1) immediately broaden the scope of consultations on Syria beyond the current focus on constitutional reform, (2) compile, harmonize, and prioritize U.S. and European demands across a number of substantive areas, and (3) present the Syrian government with concrete incentives if progress is made.

There should be no illusions: the barriers to success are many. The Syrian leadership has shown little willingness to compromise in both pre-2011 and more recent negotiations. Some suggest

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<sup>2</sup> Julien Barnes-Dacey, “A Framework for European-Russian Cooperation on Syria,” RIAC, June 17, 2019.

the Syrian leadership is likely to reap the benefits of incentives offered by paying lip service to reforms without substantively implementing them, a concern that can be addressed by the retention of “snapback” sanctions. The Syrian leadership may still believe that time is on its side and that, ultimately, the United States and Europe will be forced to abandon their efforts to isolate Syria. The leadership may also see significant risks in initiating a reform process that could open the door to renewed efforts to oust the regime, or be difficult to control. Given the reliance of many of the leadership’s associates on sanctions-busting, as well as the convenient excuse sanctions offer for the Syrian government’s weaknesses, some suggest the leadership may be comfortable leaving sanctions in place. And while Russia would like to see greater flexibility, its ability to extract political concessions from Damascus is limited.

For U.S. and European policymakers, the Syrian government’s human rights record and its close alignment with geopolitical adversaries Russia and Iran make engagement politically hazardous, especially without evidence that it would lead to meaningful concessions. By comparison, continuing to isolate Syria is commonly perceived as a low-cost, low-risk strategy that avoids rewarding the government for crimes committed over the course of the war. A September 2019 report by the bipartisan U.S. Syria Study Group, for example, recommended that the United States “deny the Assad regime and its backers all avenues for normalization by enforcing the regime’s diplomatic isolation and a rigorous sanctions architecture.”<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the current diplomatic approach is leading nowhere, or worse. While conditions may not yet be in place for productive negotiations, the August 2020 visit by two senior U.S. officials to Damascus to obtain the release of U.S. citizens held in Syria has at least opened the door to explore new avenues for dialogue, possibly on broader issues.

A conversation on the way forward should begin now, especially given the potential for the Biden administration to reset Washington’s Syria policy and look for opportunities to deepen diplomatic cooperation with key European allies. There is already broad agreement among U.S. and EU officials on the steps they want the Syrian government to take, and several are explicitly enumerated in the “Caesar sanctions” passed as part of the 2020 U.S. National Defense Authorization Act. Launching new negotiations, however, requires reaching agreement on whether and how to engage Damascus (i.e., directly or indirectly), and for Western demands to be incorporated into a detailed and plausible sequence of reciprocal political and legal measures, including CBMs and monitoring mechanisms, leading to sanctions relief and reconstruction assistance.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Singh, Dana Stroul, et al., “Final Report and Recommendations of the Syria Study Group,” United States Institute of Peace, September 2019, p. 10.

### III. Priority Negotiating Tracks

To facilitate negotiations, the issues at stake could be organized into several priority tracks, each with clearly defined benchmarks and monitoring mechanisms against which progress could be measured. Here we propose seven such negotiating tracks, not listed in any order of priority. Each includes confidence-building measures that the Syrian government would be required to take in Phase 1 of the negotiations, as well as more difficult substantive steps that would be required in Phase 2. In return, the United States and the EU would take a number of reciprocal steps that are outlined in Section IV of this analysis. After each phase and for each track, monitoring mechanisms would ascertain progress made before reciprocal steps follow. These tracks, as well as the specific steps outlined in each track, are intended to be illustrative and would need to be negotiated in advance, but not necessarily all at the same time, and in detail among the parties to the negotiations.

1. **Political Reform.** UNSCR 2254 calls for an inclusive, Syrian-led political process, to include intra-Syrian negotiations, the drafting of a new constitution, and the organization of free and fair elections supervised by the U.N. The constitutional committee, facilitated by U.N. Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pederson, has been at work since September 2019. While it is unlikely that this committee will resolve Syria's deep divisions, it offers a venue for Syrians to deliberate collectively on the challenges facing the country. Progress amending or drafting a new constitution, or implementing other reforms — such as decentralization consistent with Law 107 — would demonstrate the Syrian government's commitment to creating a more open and inclusive political system.

CBM	Public endorsement of the constitutional committee and steps to promote its success, including dropping terrorism charges against committee members, signing up to the committee work plan, and allowing an inclusive process of public consultation.
Substantive	Timely adoption of the new or amended constitution. The organization of credible local, parliamentary and presidential elections, in which all Syrians, including refugees, are able to participate. Steps to implement Law 107 or otherwise decentralize executive power to the provincial level. Reforming the security sector by engaging in an inclusive, participatory and transparent approach, seeking to restore confidence between the security apparatus and citizens. Inclusion of women at all stages of the political process.

2. Political Prisoners. The U.N. estimates that the Syrian government has detained approximately 100,000 Syrians since the beginning of the uprising in 2011.<sup>4</sup> There are credible reports, including by the U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (IICOI) and international human rights organizations, that this number includes thousands of cases of arbitrary arrest, forced disappearance, and torture in Syrian prisons. Many Syrians also remain held in detention facilities operated by armed insurgent groups. Beginning in 2018, the Syrian government began to update civil registries and inform relatives of the death of family members while in detention. However, there has been no comprehensive accounting of detainees currently in Syrian custody and no independent and impartial investigation into, or accountability for, alleged abuses. Addressing these issues is essential to healing the wounds of war and establishing conditions conducive to refugee return.

CBM	Provision to families of additional information on the identities of Syrian prisoners held in government facilities, family visits, and independent access by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Release of foreign nationals held in Syria and requested by their national authorities.
Substantive	Cessation of arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, and torture. Return of civilian cases to civilian courts, rather than military tribunals. Establishment of an independent, impartial mechanism to investigate and ensure accountability for alleged abuses of detainees.

3. Refugee Return. Of the 6.6 million registered Syrian refugees,<sup>5</sup> the UNHCR estimates that fewer than 250,000 had returned home as of July 2020.<sup>6</sup> While the Syrian government has publicly encouraged refugees to return home, many have been discouraged from doing so by reports that offers of amnesty or the provisions of reconciliation agreements have not been honored, and that returnees have been subjected to arbitrary detention, extortion, and indefinite conscription into military service. Recent legislation and policy changes, including Law Number 10 and Decree 63, have also fueled concerns over refugees' ability to reclaim property inside Syria. Steps by the Syrian government to ensure the safety, security, and property of returning refugees are essential to encouraging refugee returns and restoring stability.

<sup>4</sup> Briefing by Undersecretary General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, U.N. Security Council, Aug. 7, 2019: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13913.doc.htm>

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, Syria Refugee Crisis: <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria>, accessed Jan. 10, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response: [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria\\_durable\\_solutions](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions), accessed July 28, 2020.

CBM	Unimpeded access inside Syria for UNHCR personnel to visit and assess conditions for returnees.
Substantive	Comprehensive implementation of UNHCR’s Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria, including steps to end harassment, discrimination, arbitrary detention, and prosecution of returning refugees. Establishment of a mechanism for a property restitution process; issuance of vital documents; and efficient, accessible, and affordable mechanisms to address property issues.

4. Civilian Protection and Humanitarian Access. Of the estimated 700,000 Syrians killed during the conflict, as many as a third have been civilians. Many of these civilians have died as a consequence of indiscriminate aerial bombardment or shelling of civilian areas by all warring parties, and by apparently deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities and schools. Syrian civilians have also been denied access to needed humanitarian assistance. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that 1.1 million of the 11.7 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance still reside in “hard to reach areas,” most but not all of which are in government-controlled territory.<sup>7</sup> Under international humanitarian law, the Syrian government is obligated to facilitate rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian organizations providing assistance to those affected by war.

CBM	Immediate cessation of targeting of civilian infrastructure, including markets, medical facilities, and schools. Immediate humanitarian access to conflict zones and OCHA-designated “hard to reach areas” in Dar’a, Rif Damascus, Hama, Aleppo, and Idlib provinces.
Substantive	Rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to all Syrians in need throughout Syria.

5. Idlib Cease-fire. Parts of Idlib province remain under the control of armed insurgent groups, including designated terrorist groups. Additionally, the province now hosts as many as 2 million Syrians who have been displaced from elsewhere in the country and are living under conditions of severe deprivation. On March 5, 2020, Russia and Turkey agreed to a cease-fire and other measures to halt further military operations in Idlib. The agreement includes provisions for insurgents to withdraw from the area south of the M4 highway, create a 12 km security corridor along M4, and establish joint Russian-Turkish patrols. Pending a negotiated resolution of the conflict that restores Syrian government control over Idlib and notwithstanding that Turkey has

<sup>7</sup> UN OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: <https://hno-syria.org/#key-figures>, accessed Oct. 4, 2019.

not fulfilled its side of the bargain to ensure the withdrawal of insurgents from areas south of M4, reaffirmation and implementation of these provisions is necessary to de-escalate the situation and avoid further enflaming the humanitarian crisis.

CBM	Cessation of all offensive military operations in Idlib province, consistent with the terms of the March 5 cease-fire agreement.
Substantive	Participation in a multilateral dialogue to address the long-term disposition of Idlib, including demobilization, political reconciliation, economic development, and counterterrorism.

**6. Foreign Actors.** Syria and Iran have been close partners since 1980. In 2012, Iran began providing the Syrian government various forms of financial and military support, including by organizing and deploying pro-government militias inside Syria. This support has been instrumental in the Syrian government's efforts to push back insurgent groups and consolidate state authority. The presence of thousands of Iranian and Iranian-backed forces in Syria, as well as preferential concessions to Iranian individuals and companies, has angered many Syrians. Iran's presence also poses an acute security risk for Israel. The United States has publicly called for the withdrawal from Syria of all Iranian and Iranian-backed forces. While this is unrealistic, especially in the near term, reducing Iranian influence in Syria is a top priority for the United States and will need to be addressed as part of any agreement leading to sanctions relief.

CBM	Removal of all Iranian and Iranian-backed forces to an agreed distance from the Israeli border.
Substantive	Removal from any part of Syrian territory of Iranian-supplied strategic weapons and adoption of a comprehensive roadmap leading to the withdrawal from Syria of Iranian and Iranian-backed forces.

**7. Chemical Weapons.** Multiple independent investigations — including by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact Finding Mission (FFM), the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), and the U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (IICOI) — have confirmed the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria since the outbreak of the war in 2012. In October 2013, the Syrian government acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and declared stockpiles of 1,308 metric tons of chemical agents, including sulfur mustard agent and precursors for the nerve agent sarin. Although these declared stockpiles were subsequently destroyed by the OPCW, chemical weapon attacks have

continued, including repeated attacks employing chlorine as a weapon of war. The United States and the EU are unlikely to entertain sanctions relief (or other measures sought by Damascus) so long as chemical weapons continue to be used and the work of independent international investigations is obstructed.

CBM	Immediate cessation of the use of all chemical agents, including chlorine, as weapons of war.
Substantive	Full compliance with UNSCR 2118 (2013), including granting immediate and unfettered access for OPCW personnel and declaring any and all remaining chemical weapon stockpiles and facilities.

#### IV. Framework for a Potential Three-Phase Approach

To date, the United States and most European governments have opposed offering the Syrian government a limited set of incentives in exchange for Syrian CBMs, instead taking the position that Syria must first accept a comprehensive political settlement as laid out by UNSCR 2254 (2015). The United States, for example, continues to oppose even modest steps such as countries' reopening diplomatic facilities in Damascus, while most European states refuse to provide reconstruction assistance to Syria outside the context of a political settlement.

The alternative outlined here would shift away from this "all for all" approach and toward a "phased approach" in which the United States and European states would offer a "Phase 1" deal of discrete and limited incentives in exchange for measurable progress on CBMs across all seven priority tracks identified above; a follow-up "Phase 2" deal if the Syrian government meets substantive commitments across all seven negotiating tracks; and, finally, a "Phase 3" deal that would represent a comprehensive settlement of all outstanding issues. A monitoring mechanism to be agreed upon in negotiations would ascertain progress at the implementation of each phase.

Broadly, there are three types of incentives that the United States and Europe can offer the Syrian government: (1) diplomatic incentives, (2) official reconstruction assistance, and (3) easing of U.S. and European sanctions. Diplomatic incentives include a range of steps such as reestablishment of diplomatic relations at different levels of representation, potential participation in international forums, and cultural exchange programs. Reconstruction assistance includes expanding existing funding for humanitarian relief to include reconstruction activities, such as rebuilding Syrian civilian infrastructure. Sanctions easing includes steps to unwind some — and eventually all — of the myriad sanctions that the United States, and to a somewhat lesser degree the European Union and states, have imposed on Syria.

Across all three phases, the potential for “snapback” sanctions and removal of other incentives could provide an incentive for continued Syrian implementation of any agreement, and the United States and Europe could retain certain targeted measures in place even after a comprehensive deal is reached. For example, even after implementation of a comprehensive deal, U.S. and European officials may choose to retain targeted sanctions against specific Syrian officials responsible for mass atrocities both as a moral matter and to help address political concerns in Washington and European capitals that any deal with the Syrian government avoid legitimizing the specific individual responsible for those crimes.

U.S. and European sanctions against Syria are technically complex and cover numerous categories of trade and economic activities. (A concise analysis of U.S. and European sanctions on Syria has been published separately and can be found [here](#).) Generally, the EU has broad legal authority to modify its sanctions should policymakers wish to do so. The U.S. executive branch also has broad authority to lift many, though not all, U.S. sanctions. In the case of certain congressionally mandated sanctions, including those imposed under the Caesar Act, the U.S. president would need to issue waivers to lift sanctions. The availability of waivers means that a U.S. president could legally lift all relevant sanctions as part of an agreement with Syria.

*The incentives described below that could be offered as part of a phased approach to Syria are intended to be illustrative. Specific and detailed incentives offered as part of each phase would need to be based on the evolving situation on the ground and negotiated with the Syrian government directly, or through a third country if some Western states do not wish to engage directly with Damascus. However, the illustrative incentives are designed to lay out examples of the type and scope of incentives that could be provided during each phase.*

### Phase 1 Incentives

Diplomatic	The United States would drop its opposition to Arab and European states’ reopening embassies in Syria; select European states would reestablish a full-time diplomatic presence in Damascus at the sub-ambassadorial level.
Reconstruction Assistance	Subject to a stringent monitoring and verification mechanism to ensure that funds are not being misused, European governments would take the lead by providing an agreed-upon sum for specifically identified reconstruction projects in government-controlled territory to rebuild schools, hospitals, roads, water/sewer, and civilian electrical infrastructure. The U.S. Agency for International Development would not fund reconstruction assistance during this phase. Reconstruction assistance would be limited such that specifically sanctioned firms would not be eligible for contracts.

Sanctions Relief	The United States and EU would announce a pause on imposition of new sanctions, with the exception of sanctions targeting individuals specifically involved in human rights abuses and/or corruption; suspend sanctions as required to enable agreed reconstruction assistance; and establish a dedicated financial “white list” channel to enable financial transactions for trade that was not itself subject to sanctions, such as food and medicine, but where payments are currently complicated by the wide-ranging financial sanctions and despite the ineffective humanitarian exceptions. All other targeted and trade/financial sanctions would remain in place.
Timeline/snapback	Reconstruction assistance and sanctions relief would be time-limited for, as an example, 12 or 18 months, and would terminate after a set timeframe absent a broader “Phase 2” agreement.

### Phase 2 Incentives

Diplomatic	Additional European states would reestablish a permanent diplomatic presence in Damascus, including at the ambassadorial level. The United States would open a mission in Damascus, potentially headed at a sub-ambassadorial level. Some cultural/educational exchanges could be arranged.
Reconstruction Assistance	Subject to a stringent monitoring and verification mechanism to ensure that funds are not being misused, Europe would expand funding for a broader set of agreed projects. USAID would continue to refrain from providing reconstruction assistance.
Sanctions Relief	Countries would suspend trade sanctions on exports of Syrian civilian goods (such as phosphates, textiles, handicrafts, etc.) and targeted sanctions on major systemically important institutions, such as the Syrian Central Bank and other banks that would typically be involved in trade-related financial transactions. Targeted sanctions against Syrian ministries involved in the defense and intelligence sectors, senior officials, and prominent enablers who failed to support reforms would remain in place. Sanctions could also remain in place on the Syrian oil production sector to maintain leverage over an important cash generator for the government.
Timeline/snapback	Sanctions would be suspended for a finite period of time, such as 12-18 months, as an incentive to continue negotiations toward a final

	deal, and would be automatically reimposed if a final deal were not reached.
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### Phase 3 Incentives

Diplomatic	Full diplomatic relations would be restored, including reopening the U.S. Embassy in Damascus and the Syrian Embassy in Washington.
Reconstruction Assistance	Any remaining restrictions on reconstruction assistance projects would be terminated, subject to a stringent monitoring and verification mechanism to ensure that funds are not being misused; USAID would be authorized to fund reconstruction projects in Syrian government-held territory.
Sanctions Relief	All economic and financial sanctions would be terminated, and targeted sanctions on most Syrian government entities and officials would be removed. Syria's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism under U.S. law would end. Targeted sanctions could be kept in place on specific Syrian officials involved in atrocities and for corruption/other illicit acts by Syrian government supporters; these sanctions could be maintained under legal authorities not specifically related to Syria, such as the Global Magnitsky sanctions program, which authorizes sanctions against individuals responsible for atrocities.
Timeline/snapback	Most sanctions would be permanently terminated (rather than simply suspended) as part of a comprehensive deal; however, reimposition of sanctions would be a possibility should Syria renege on political commitments.

## V. Conclusion

Rebuilding international cooperation on Syria will be extremely challenging. It will require stepping back from maximalist demands, considering politically difficult concessions, and overcoming (or at least suspending) deep distrust. If agreement can be reached, even only on Phase 1 confidence-building measures, it will still be hard work to monitor and verify implementation. Despite all these challenges, however, there is still far more to gain by using diplomacy than by continuing along the current path. It is time to change course.

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