

CSAG INFORMATION PAPER:

The Historic State Visit of Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa to the United States

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- 1. Subject: The Historic State Visit of Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa to the United States.**
- 2. Purpose:** This paper assesses the Syrian President's visit to the U.S., focusing on key highlights, immediate impacts on U.S.-Syria relations, and regional dynamics.
- 3. Introduction:** Syrian President Al-Sharaa's recent visit to the U.S. marks a historic turning point in relations between the two nations, the first such visit in over 70 years. This event signals a major diplomatic shift after decades of isolation, sanctions, and strained ties.¹ The visit represents a significant change in U.S. foreign policy, signaling the end of years of distancing. Syria's historical alliances with Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah, as well as its designation as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1979, had long obstructed diplomatic engagement. However, evolving factors have paved the way for more warm relations, including shared counterterrorism goals, U.S. concerns over remaining Russian influence in Syria, Syria's internal divisions, its complex relationship with Israel, its gradual re-engagement with Arab states, and shifts in U.S. foreign policy. These factors, along with humanitarian considerations, have collectively set the stage for this shift.
- 4. Key Po Key Highlights of the Visit:**
 - a. The U.S. allowed Syria to resume operations at its embassy in Washington, D.C.²
 - b. A 180-day waiver of sanctions under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act.³
 - c. Syria formally joined the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.⁴
 - d. Agreement to the integration of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) into the Syrian army.
 - e. Exploring a security arrangement or non-aggression pact with Israel.
 - f. Discussion with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) regarding Syria's reconstruction and engagement with the Syrian-American diaspora and business leaders.⁵
- 5. Assessment:**
 - a. The decision to allow Syria to resume operations at its embassy in Washington, D.C., marks a significant step in restoring diplomatic relations. While this move symbolizes a warming in U.S.-Syria relations, it is still largely symbolic, signaling a shift toward potential cooperation. Full normalization remains unlikely in the short term, but it sets the stage for further engagement.

- b.** The U.S. along with the UN decision to delist Al-Sharaa and his interior minister from the Specially Designated Global Terrorist list, along with the 180-day waiver of sanctions under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, signals a willingness to support Syria's economic recovery. This move marks a departure from the previous sanctions-heavy approach and provides Syria with an opportunity to attract foreign investment and aid. Yet, the scale of Syria's reconstruction, estimated by the World Bank to cost over \$200 billion, highlights the immense challenges ahead. The sanctions waiver, while temporary, could facilitate recovery, but its effectiveness will depend on Syria's commitment to political reforms, human rights improvements, and deeper engagement with the international community.⁶
- c.** Syria's inclusion in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS marks a significant shift in regional security, positioning Syria as a key player in the global fight against extremism. This move enhances regional counterterrorism cooperation, with expectations of increased intelligence sharing and joint military operations.⁷ By prioritizing the fight against ISIS over geopolitical differences, Syria's participation strengthens the global coalition and encourages other regional actors to take a more active role. However, effective collaboration will require careful diplomacy, as regional alliances and tensions, such as Syria's complicated relationships with countries like Israel, must be navigated to ensure cooperation without escalating conflicts.⁸
- d.** The discussions between Al-Sharaa, U.S. President Trump, and the Syrian and Turkish foreign ministers regarding the integration of the SDF into the Syrian Armed Forces signal a potential step toward greater stability. Türkiye's presence in these talks is particularly significant, given its long-standing opposition to the SDF, which it considers a terrorist organization. This inclusion highlights the need to address its concerns while pursuing internal cohesion within Syria. Though, for the integration to succeed, the U.S. must leverage its influence to ensure the SDF is fully integrated, while also guaranteeing the rights and security of the Kurdish population under the Syrian government. By using relationships developed during its long-term support, the U.S. can help ensure that the SDF aligns with Syria's central government, fostering internal and domestic stability along with the protection of minority rights in Syria.⁹
- e.** The complexities of Syrian-Israeli relations present significant challenges to any potential breakthrough in peace talks. Key issues such as the status of the occupied territories, Israel's ongoing military actions in Syria, and its support for the Druze community in southern Syria, further complicate efforts toward reconciliation. These dynamics create substantial barriers to negotiations, and any meaningful progress in Syria-Israel relations will require addressing these sensitive matters. While a breakthrough remains unlikely without a broader resolution of regional tensions, Syria's re-engagement with the U.S. could play a pivotal role in influencing future Syrian-Israeli dialogue, potentially impacting the broader Arab-Israeli peace process.¹⁰
- f.** The meetings with the IMF Chief and the representatives of the American Chamber of Commerce represent key steps in Syria's efforts to restore international economic ties and accelerate recovery.¹¹ Aligned with the easing of sanctions by the U.S., EU, and UK, Syria is positioning itself as a more open economy, with Gulf investments, especially from Saudi Arabia, playing a vital role in accelerating reconstruction.¹² Still, Syria's success will depend on its ability to implement necessary reforms and create a stable environment for investment, with international support from the IMF and Western nations being crucial to its reintegration into the global economy.
- g.** Syria's visits to Moscow and Washington reflect the pragmatism that is becoming the hallmark of Al-Sharaa's leadership: sustaining military ties with Russia while pursuing economic recovery through the West. In Moscow, Syria reaffirmed its commitment to Russian military basing rights,

preserving a presence that could also serve as leverage, particularly given Russia's potential value as a counterweight in any future tensions involving Israel, the U.S.'s closest regional ally. While preserving a presence from the Russian side, Syria also sought to receive direct financial compensation for that presence, receiving \$23 million from Russia.¹³ Nevertheless, Russia's limited economic capacity constrains its ability to support Syria's reconstruction. By contrast, the Washington visit positions Syria to benefit from Western and Gulf investments, sanctions relief, and broader economic opportunities. Syria's success will depend on its ability to balance these relationships while implementing the reforms necessary for long-term stability and recovery.¹⁴

6. Conclusion:

The visit of Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa to the U.S. represents a significant diplomatic shift after more than seven decades of strained relations. While largely symbolic, the reopening of Syria's embassy and the temporary sanctions waiver signal a potential thaw in U.S.-Syria ties. Syria's inclusion in the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition and the discussions around internal reforms reflect a shared interest in regional stability and counterterrorism efforts. However, significant challenges remain, including the integration of the SDF into the national army, objections from Türkiye, and ongoing tensions with Israel. The task of Syria's reconstruction, estimated to cost over \$200 billion, poses another substantial hurdle.

Syria's ability to balance its relationships with the West and Russia, while navigating complex regional dynamics, will be key to its future stability. The success of this diplomatic thaw hinges on Syria's commitment to political reform, human rights, and economic recovery. While the path ahead is uncertain, this visit lays the groundwork for a new chapter in U.S.-Syria relations, offering opportunities for cooperation but requiring careful diplomacy.

¹ Abby Sewell, “Al-Sharaa to Become the First Syrian President to Visit the White House After an Unlikely Rise,” AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/sharaa-syria-washington-visit-trump-0e815749ca602cc64bf88e1a7db41b1b> (accessed November 25, 2025).

² Rania Abu Shamala , “U.S. Lifts All Legal Measures on Syrian Diplomatic Mission, Embassy in Washington: Foreign Minister,” Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-lifts-all-legal-measures-on-syrian-diplomatic-mission-embassy-in-washington-foreign-minister/3740339> (accessed November 25, 2025).

³ Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), “U.S. Suspends Caesar Act Sanctions to Support Economic Reconstruction in Syria,” SANA, <https://sana.sy/en/politics/2277170/> (accessed November 25, 2025).

⁴ Bernd Debusmann Jr and Raffi Berg, “Syria’s President al-Sharaa’s Historic Visit to Washington,” BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgyz6316zwo> (accessed November 25, 2025).

⁵ Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), “President al-Sharaa Discusses Economic Cooperation with US Business Leaders in Washington,” SANA, <https://sana.sy/en/politics/2277178/> (accessed November 25, 2025).

⁶ Ben Hubbard, “Syria’s President al-Sharaa Meets Trump in Washington in Historic Visit,” The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/10/world/middleeast/syria-president-al-shara-trump-washington.html> (accessed November 25, 2025).

⁷ Atoun Jan, “Syria’s Join Global Coalition Marks Turning Point in Regional Cooperation,” North Press Agency, <https://npasyria.com/en/132075/> (accessed November 25, 2025).

⁸ Global Coalition, “Partners,” The Global Coalition, <https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/#middle-east> (accessed November 25, 2025).

⁹ Daily Sabah, “Top Turkish, U.S., Syrian Diplomats Agree on SDF Integration Plan,” Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/top-turkish-us-syrian-diplomats-agree-on-sdf-integration-plan> (accessed November 25, 2025).

¹⁰ Rosaleen Carroll, “Syria’s Sharaa Says No Direct Talks with Israel, Open to U.S. Military Presence,” Al-Monitor, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2025/11/syrias-sharaa-says-no-direct-talks-israel-open-us-military-presence> (accessed November 25, 2025).

¹¹ Asharq Al-Awsat, “IMF Sees Signs of Recovery in Syria, Plans Intensive Engagement,” Asharq Al-Awsat, <https://english.aawsat.com/business/5209833-imf-sees-signs-recovery-syria-plans-intensive-engagement> (accessed November 25, 2025).

¹² Henry Rogers, “Why Is Saudi Arabia Investing in Syria?” New Lines Institute, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/geo-economics/why-is-saudi-arabia-investing-in-syria/> (accessed November 25, 2025).

¹³ Defense Mirror, “Russia Pays Syria \$23M to Retain Its Military Bases,” Defense Mirror, <https://defensemirror.com/news/39005> (accessed November 25, 2025).

¹⁴ ABNA, “Analysis: What’s Behind Al-Sharaa’s Moscow Visit,” ABNA, <https://en.abna24.com/news/1740223/Analysis-What-s-behind-Al-Sharaa-s-Moscow-Visit> (accessed November 25, 2025).