



[Prospect of Removing Sanctions on Post-Assad Syria](#)

Following decades of oppression and brutality at the hands of the Assad government in Syria, the deposing of the regime has sparked new hope and a sense of optimism in the country. While many are buoyant about the possible outlook of the future, there are still key obstacles that must be adequately addressed. One of the main issues is the need for sanction relief. Analysts and experts have tried to outline the importance of this in order for Syria's delicate and nascent political transition to succeed. To allow for this to happen, Syria's caretaker government will have to act swiftly to repair the country's devastated economy. As many commentators have noted, Syrians will need to feel that their economic conditions are improving if the transitional government is to ultimately be viewed as legitimate and worthy of support. Otherwise, in the absence of this, a failure to address economic hardships will likely destabilize an already fragile transition.

Syria has a litany of sanctions that were imposed on the country dating back over 40 years as a means of initiating punitive measures against the dictatorial Assad regime. This has, unsurprisingly, placed a great deal of strain on the Syrian civilian population and economic conditions in the country. It is estimated that more than 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line, with over half of the population suffering from food insecurity. Additionally, at least 16.5 million Syrians require humanitarian aid in order to meet their basic needs, not to mention the fact that after 14 years of conflict, much of the country's infrastructure is in ruins and public facilities like schools, roads, electrical grids, and hospitals are severely damaged.

As such, removing some of the sanctions on human essentials and the banking sector would give Syria and its citizens a chance to recover. Economic conditions will not be given the opportunity to significantly improve until funding and trade are made more accessible and thus, countries should lift sanctions that get in the way of basic human rights. More specifically, it would be beneficial to the Syrian people if sanctions were lifted on global financial systems, energy access, and trade of essential goods. The easing of sanctions against Syria could also open new trade routes, and reconstruction efforts in the country would certainly attract substantial and useful investments. The purpose of the sanctions was to punish the oppressive Assad regime for its plethora of war crimes and human rights violations, and now that the former government has been overthrown, Syrians deserve that the sanctions be removed too. Earlier this week, the European Union (EU) did lift several sanctions on Syria in the hopes that it will promote an inclusive political transition that can lead to economic recovery and stability, and others should follow suit. Through the lifting of sanctions, the EU and the United States in particular could demonstrate their desire to see a successful transition in Syria.

Efforts and attention should also be dedicated to addressing the remaining human rights abuses taking place now that the repressive Assad regime has been toppled. This is most evident in northeast Syria, where the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – a Kurdish-led coalition of U.S.-backed groups – have continued to engage in serious rights violations. Human rights advocates have pointed to the abuse of minorities by the Kurds in areas under their control, as it is estimated that the SDF holds approximately 56,000 men, women, and children in detention centers, nearly all of whom are arbitrarily and indefinitely detained. Many of these in captivity are tortured and kept under inhumane conditions, while thousands more have been forcibly disappeared. Agnès Callamard, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, has stated that the SDF “have committed the war crimes of torture,

cruel treatment, and murder,” and that the United States has played a role in enabling these abuses by propping up these militia groups. By continuing to support them in any capacity, the U.S. bears culpability for these humanitarian atrocities. The SDF controls about a third of Syrian territory including vital areas in the northeast of the country, and Turkey views the group as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which it has designated as a terrorist entity. A thorough Amnesty International [report](#) released last year found that torture is being carried out systematically in detention facilities run by the SDF.

In the end, without the economic relief that the removal of sanctions provides, the chances of the current caretaker government successfully implementing a sustainable political transition in Syria are considerably reduced. On top of this, the lifting of sanctions would not only ease economic hardship among the country's population, it also greatly increases the likelihood of a more stable and thriving Syria – which bodes well for regional security.