

## **LSE IDEAS Conflict and Civiness Syria Research Group: A Summary of Publications and Research Relevant to the Post-Earthquake Context**

**22 Feb. 2023**

The high level of destruction and subsequent needs in the wake of the catastrophic earthquake that hit Southern Turkey and Syria on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February brought to surface several important questions relating to Syria related polices. These include questions relating to early recovery in both government controlled areas and North West Syria, the politics of reconstruction, sanctions, and the role of the private sector and civil society.

The LSE IDEAS based Syria research group have produced several policy papers over the years, previously under the *Conflict Research Programme* and now as part of the *Conflict and Civiness Research Group* and the *Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform* ([PeaceRep](#)). These policy papers speak to many aspects being discussed in the post-earthquake context and offer answers to important questions that are being posed on all levels.

Whilst we currently are redrafting our future research agenda to be more suitable for the post-earthquake era, we have compiled this digest of some of our most relevant policy papers that offer insight into questions on the political, economic and social response and implications of the earthquake. In this digest, we signpost the reader towards relevant sections of each publication and provide an understanding of its linkage to the current context.

In several of these papers, such as '*Building Resilience in Syria: Assessing Fragilities and Strengthening Positive Coping Mechanisms*', we provide detailed recommendations on how to navigate the delicate red lines and what measures could be taken to tackle corruption and politicisation of aid. These recommendations are very relevant to the current context.

Equally, our papers on sanctions go beyond debates on whether or not the sanctions should be lifted, but rather looks into how sanctions could be used as a tool to reconstruct the economy within the framework of a broader political solution.

In most of these papers, particularly '*Towards a more effective EU Conditionality for Syria*', we stress the importance of using conditionality at multiple levels to realise several aims including overcoming the obstacles of delivering aid in GoS controlled areas. Importantly, the appendix of this paper summarises and discusses the pros and cons of current channels used for distribution of aid in government controlled areas. Full papers and reports are readily accessible online.

### **Reports and Policy Memos**

#### **[Building Resilience in Syria: Assessing Fragilities and Strengthening Positive Coping Mechanisms](#)**

As many donors question whether there is now more of a need to consider early recovery in Syria after the earthquake, this report is particularly relevant. The report not only analyses the economic, social, security and ecological dimensions of fragility, but also explores the practical obstacles facing the delivery of principled aid in each part of Syria, detailed in Section 6. This includes navigating the delicate political dynamics and system of corruption in each region including GoS controlled areas and NW Syria.

In section 7, the report develops a framework for a theory of change to strengthen resilience in Syria. It presents comprehensive recommendations for operational and programmatic area-

based activities to support and transform resilience capacities. In section 7.5, recommendations are presented to tackle the obstacles identified in section 6.

The report stresses the need to explore new interpretations and operationalisation of the political red lines so that their main aim is met without hampering humanitarian and resilience-building responses. Rather than staying at top political level, the report suggests operationalising the red lines substantively at a lower level. This could be done through, for example, ensuring that the conditionality of the funding, particularly good governance and human rights compliance, are communicated to the authorities. This should be stressed at a project level and throughout the implementation in addition to improving the three areas of monitoring and evaluation, procurement policies and conflict sensitivity. It also emphasises the importance of distinguishing between core regime institutions and non-core regime institutions in GoS controlled areas.

In section 8, the report presents area-based programmed focused recommendation that factor in the findings of the contextual and fragilities' analysis for each area.

### [Understanding the impact of sanctions on the political dynamics in Syria](#)

The debate about sanctions and its impact was reenergised after the earthquake. Rather than passing a blanket judgment on the impact of all sanctions during various periods, this report adopts a systematic multi-actor methodology. This is to analyse the impact of sanctions on Syria during three different main phases since 2011.

It shows that while some sanctions made life more difficult for the regime and its cronies on different fronts, they failed in their main aim to change the regime or its behaviour. In contrast, sanctions have directly contributed to greater reliance of the Syrian regime on Russia and Iran, and less political leverage for Western countries. They have also led to the establishment and strengthening of a network of warlords and 'cronies' with a vested interest in regime survival and a criminalised economy. Sanctions also contributed to the deterioration in the formal economy.

The report argues that it is not possible to reverse these effects by a blanket lifting of all sanctions, because released resources could be channelled into the conflict economy. Instead, the report suggests that western policy on sanctions should be part of a broader strategy for addressing the conflict in Syria. A key part of this should be transforming a conflict economy into a productive economy. It proposes that conditionality for lifting sanctions should be multi-level rather than top down. This would be aimed at benefitting independent business, civil society, and ordinary people, who represent the main hope for a more peaceful Syria.

It also suggests specific sanctions relief and exemptions to undo the harm to the health and education sectors, as well as the food and energy sectors and proposes the establish of a monitoring system to make sure that continued sanctions, for instance in the banking sector or against members of the regime, do not harm ordinary Syrians.

### [Documentation of Human Rights Violations and Transitional Justice in Syria: Gaps and Ways to Address them](#)

The earthquake deepened an existing HLP crisis in Syria. Our research mapped all the forms of documentation for human rights violations in Syria and identified several gaps in this documentation including neglect of more victim focused documentation. This includes

documenting violations for reparative and restorative justice purposes and neglects some of the most pressing aspects of transitional justice for many Syrians such as HLP-related compensation and restitution.

It recommends Syrian civil society should address reparative and restorative justice gaps in its ongoing efforts to investigate and document human rights violations in Syria, including those concerning HLP related compensation and restitution processes. They should strive to harness the contributions of women's groups and emerging synergies with victims' groups.

### [Towards a more effective EU Conditionality for Syria](#)

While this paper examines in particular the EU conditionality for Syria, its findings and recommendations are by and large applicable to most Western donors.

The paper assesses the changes in EU conditionality since 2011 - when the EU changed its positive incentivising conditionality, resulting in rewarding compliance in governance reform with increased financial assistance, with a negative sanctioning conditionality. Then in 2016 it combined this approach with a vague positive incentivising conditionality by promising support for reconstruction once 'a credible' political transition was firmly under way. The paper analyses why this conditionality did not work. It proposes in Section 5 a new meso-level positive incentivising conditionality that aims at concrete achievable steps aiming at achieving tangible improvements to the lives of ordinary people and with clear indicators and oversight mechanisms. Continued support should be conditioned by improvements to human rights, governance and democracy indicators and programme implementation should be monitored with strong oversight mechanisms.

The paper presents two examples built on the idea of offering EU support via trust funds to certain non-governmental sectors in return for legal changes that govern these sectors. Further, the paper proposes designing new **trust funds** to civil society and SMEs. These trust funds should have clear and strict conditionality and rules. The beneficiaries of the fund would be a) Syrian CSOs that are vetted through a clear system which would rule out those who took part in violence and corruption and b) medium, small and micro-businesses whose revival could be a vital avenue for countering violence and supporting the development of the legitimate economy and economic recovery. It would empower ordinary people, take them out of the violence and aid cycle and substantially reduce their need to be part of a patron-client network.

The paper has a very useful appendix that summarises the main existing channels for western support to Syria and the pros and cons of each channel.

### [COVID-19 in Syria: Policy Options](#)

This policy paper looks into the obstacles and solutions to provide support, as well as intervention mechanisms in times of humanitarian emergency. As the earthquake is a humanitarian emergency, several aspects of this paper are relevant to the current context.

The paper identifies international funding mechanisms as one of the main challenges when it comes to channelling support to all regions in Syria. It proposes that during emergencies there is a need to establish parallel, more flexible, funding channels to facilitate financial transactions and support.

It also suggests that international support for Syria requires several changes in its policies towards the government-controlled areas for humanitarian purposes. This is to ensure that support reaches people in need and none of the individuals and entities on the sanctions list are going to benefit, in any way, from such support. International aid which is provided in a humanitarian spirit by the international community should also be expected to be matched with humanitarian steps from the Syrian government such as adhering to nation-wide ceasefire, releasing all political prisoners and detainees, allowing strict monitoring of aid distribution, and lifting all security measures that prevent civil society from acting efficiently.

### [Progress in the Wrong Direction: The 2018 Local Council Elections in Syria](#)

Section 5.2 on this report, titled *'The Political Economy of the Local Elections and the Era of Reconstructions'* is particularly relevant in answering questions on the rebuilding of destroyed areas in GoS controlled areas. The section reflects on the heavy focus during the 2018 elections on decentralisation, both in the media and in the national rhetoric, and the link made by officials between the local elections, decentralisation and reconstruction of a new Syria.

Law 107 gave the local councils authority over some aspects of the economy and construction investments. The elected councils should have a strong role in any reconstruction phase, with regard to both planning and implementation. It was important therefore for the regime to ensure that members of these councils are strong supporters. This explains the observed interest of some of the Holding companies and businessmen in funding candidates that are loyal to them.

Similarly, Law 10 issued in April 2018 allows for the introduction of new regulatory areas based on the suggestion of the Minister of Local Administration and Environment. It also gives the executive office within the administrative unit wide reaching powers in planning and implementation. It is also advantageous to the government to apply the law so that to give the impression that it is part of Syria's decentralisation, giving a more positive outward image of the country in the hope of convincing regional and western governments to invest in a Syria.

The paper concludes that a genuine democratic process of change in Syria requires, among other things, a structural change in the political economy. This would allow the dismantling of the relationship between power and money, that opens up for all the possibility of equal and fair participation and benefiting from the process of development and reconstruction. Through this citizens can exercise their supervisory and monitoring role in a manner protected by law.

### [The Interactions between State Budget and Political Budget in Syria](#)

The policy memo demonstrates how the Syrian regime has utilised the state budget to reallocate resources in favour of warlords and crony capitalists. It has also utilised the state budget as a bargaining tool at two levels: between the regime and the populace, and within the regime's elite circles.

During the conflict, the regime-populace bargain in Syria has been substantially altered. There has been a substantial reduction in subsidies and a surge in fees and indirect taxes without any improvement in political freedom and rights. At the same time, cronies have had an increasing share of the state budget. They have monopolised the supply of basic goods within government-controlled areas by using their shadow companies outside Syria to overcome the impact of

sanctions while importing some of these goods to Syria. Due to their excessive margins of profit, payments to these companies dominate public spending.

In return, the regime has expected these cronies to play a vital role in sustaining its authority by supporting military activities and opening new financial channels with external markets.

The more the Syrian authority reallocates resources to benefit its political budget, the less it can establish a social contract with its citizens. This results in the regime's shift from a 'carrot and stick' ruling system to one that relies mostly on 'sticks' in its dealings with the majority of the Syrian population, leaving them without political rights or economic benefits.

## **Blogposts and Articles**

### [Syria: Donor Conditionality, Sanctions and the Question of Justice](#)

This article by Dr. Omar Dahi illustrates that effectiveness of peace conditionality in Syria is limited by the absence of negotiated peace accords between relative equals. The conflict has empowered warlords and the well connected, amidst staggering levels of death, destruction and displacement. It suggests broader political initiatives that prioritise the aspirations of Syrians to achieve lasting peace. It also discusses how broad-based economic sanctions have had negative effects on Syria, worsening the situation for ordinary Syrians and empowering the cronies and warlords. The article concludes that long-term solutions that promote justice, accountability, equality, and representation for all Syrians are necessary to revive Syrian society and empower it to determine its own path forward.

### [How Economic Sanctions Negatively Affect the Health Sector in Syria: A Case Study of the Pharmaceutical Industry](#)

By taking the pharmaceutical sector as an example, this article highlights how some vital sectors such as the medical sector have been affected by sanctions despite not being targeted directly. For example, sanctions have led to Syrian parties not being able to upgrade vital manufacturing equipment. Foreign licenses granted to Syrian pharmaceutical companies have been revoked. Multinational companies have been unable to work with Syrian companies. The prices of raw materials have increased due to the rising costs of shipping and insurance charges. This has meant having to pay shipping companies in advance, which can result in significant losses when exporting companies fail to transport the goods as agreed.

### [The Risk of De-risking: The Impact of Counterproductive Financial Measures on the Humanitarian Response to the Syrian crisis](#)

This article builds on the results of extensive research in relation to the impact of bank de-risking on the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis and how intensifying regulatory measures led to a counter-productive regime. For example, it shows how aid providers were under pressure to conform to regulations before responding to crises in certain areas. Almost a third of all funds destined for Syria was held in an almost permanent limbo because of blockages in the correspondent banking system. It also shows how de-risking hinders rapid response, such in the

case of an earthquake. This is because of the reporting problems and the need to rapidly move money.

It also illustrates how risk increases closer to beneficiaries along the humanitarian supply chain, leaving smaller NGOs that are closer to the affected areas more vulnerable to de-risking procedures and therefore more financially drained.

### [From the Social Market Economy to the National Partnership: The Conflict Elite and Public-Private Partnerships in a post-war Syria](#)

The article discusses the emergence of 'authoritarian peace' It demonstrates how the policies of the 2000's laid the groundwork for a sliver of the **reconstruction approach** that is manifest in Syria today. The liberalisation and privatisation in the 2000s created new elements within the business class and provided new opportunities for them to accumulate wealth. Prior to the conflict, the established holding companies were swallowing up major government contracts. This led to the creation of a new public-private partnership law to facilitate and legalise the procurement.

The conflict has created the conflict elites, and the sanctions have increased their importance for the regime. This elite has functioned as intermediaries and facilitators to ensure that goods can be brought to regime controlled areas. The National Partnership was promulgated in 2016 and with it came the end of the pre-conflict Social Market Economy. For the conflict elite, National Partnership is a way to connect with existing capital networks and to shift from the role of intermediation to deeper roles in the economy. The article concludes that the National Partnership is reflective both of contemporary processes of state formation and the social transformations wrought by the conflict.

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