

# Parallel Zones Project

“The border control strategy”

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## Parallel Zones Project

*By Issam Khoury*

This is a roadmap for resolving disputes in Syria under American guidance, and with the oversight of Syrian figures who believe in the culture of coexistence, freedom, and human justice. It aims to ensure successful implementation of the Geneva I Conference decisions by Syria, without the unnecessary Russian interference seen in the Astana talks.

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## Introduction

The civil war has effectively fragmented the Syrian Arab Republic into several statelets,<sup>1</sup> some of which are divided by militarized crossings, such as the Democratic Autonomous Administration, Peace Spring, Euphrates Shield, Salvation Government, and the Syrian regime territory. Further division arises from "Undocumented Understandings" in areas like Al-Tanf and As-Suwayda.

This multifaceted geopolitical reality has diminished the chances for a settlement based on the Geneva Agreement (1) of 2012,<sup>2</sup> and UN Security Council Resolutions No. 2118 of 2013 and 2254 of 2015. This situation has enabled the Russian Federation to intervene through

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<sup>1</sup> A statelet, is a small independent state, especially one that until recently was part of a larger country.

<sup>2</sup> UN, Geneva, June30, 2012

<https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/press-release/2012/06/final-communique-action-group-syria-geneva-saturday-30-june-2012>



repeated Sochi conferences, including the Syrian Congress of National Dialogue, known as the "Syria peace conference,"<sup>3</sup> and the Sochi meetings,<sup>4</sup> also referred to as the "Syria peace conferences." These events clearly demonstrate the displacement of Syrian autonomy, transferring Syrian decision-making to international and regional overseers.

Given these circumstances, it is imperative to outline a strategic approach to the Syrian crisis, with the aim to fulfill Syrian interests in a manner that aligns with the objectives of major nations. This strategy would ideally center on anti-terrorism efforts, without anticipating a significant surge in military spending by these countries on the Syrian conflict.

## Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan

The Russians and Iranians argue that the US military presence in Syria represents an occupation of Syrian territory. They base this claim on the fact that the Syrian regime, which holds a seat at the United Nations, has not formally requested American assistance in combating terrorism.

However, the American military presence is vital to Syrians opposing the Assad regime, as it safeguards the well-being of over four million Syrians. These individuals could be subjected to mistreatment from the Syrian regime if it retains control over the two regions of "northeastern Syria and the Al-Tanf base." Moreover, this presence is crucial for the Yazidi minority, which has been deprived of its rights and cultural activities in Syria since the establishment of the Syrian state. It is also undoubtedly critical for the Syrian Democratic Forces that have combated terrorism and fear a military confrontation with forces loyal to fervent Turkish nationalists.

The United States, therefore, bases its military presence in Syria on the doctrine of "preemptive self-defense."<sup>5</sup> This doctrine assumes that the American state, being a potential target, is obliged to defend its interests, even if a UN member state does not grant the US

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<sup>3</sup> Sochi conference backs Syria's territorial unity, 'democratic' path, Jan 2018, Reuters  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-sochi/sochi-conference-backs-syrias-territorial-unity-democratic-path-idUSKBN1FJ2L5>

<sup>4</sup> Sochi Meeting: Russia and Turkey Still Divided Over Syria, Warsaw institute, Sept 2021  
<https://warsawinstitute.org/sochi-meeting-russia-turkey-still-divided-syria/>

<sup>5</sup> "Unable or unwilling" doctrine or the "anticipatory self-defense" doctrine.



permission to use its lands. It may even violate the sovereignty of those lands if the member state is "unable or unwilling" to confront a particular group.

The Syrian regime opposes this approach and demands military and financial support to counter terrorism. However, this stance contradicts US law, given that the Syrian government, along with many of its generals and its president, are under sanctions from the US Treasury. As a result, the US government cannot collaborate with this regime and must seek alternatives. Since the US government does not legally hold the power to overthrow the ruling regime in Damascus, it is perceived as an occupying power despite its anti-terrorism intent.

The only legally viable basis for the United States' military presence in Syria, founded on the doctrine of pre-emptive self-defense and covered by Articles 51<sup>6</sup> and Article 50<sup>7</sup> of the United Nations Charter, is the establishment of an internationally recognized Syrian authority. This authority should request military protection or direct and permanent military support from the United States. This action would definitively prevent the Russian Federation from labeling Washington as an occupying power in international forums.

Practically, the Autonomous Administration areas in northeastern Syria are not currently in a position to request this support, as they still maintain ties with the Syrian government. However, if these areas sever their relationship with the Syrian regime and align themselves with the interim government of "The National Coalition for Syrian," it would legally empower the Syrian people to grant the United States a mandate for protection and presence in opposition areas. This is because the Syrian National Coalition is a representative body for the Syrian people, recognized by 114 countries since 2012.

From this point, the coalition forces led by the United States must earnestly strive to establish political, administrative, and economic commonalities that orchestrate a relationship on a partnership, union, or ideally, a unity level between the northeastern Syria's Autonomous Administration areas and the areas administratively affiliated with the

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<sup>6</sup> Article 51

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.

<sup>7</sup> Article 50

If preventive or enforcement measures against any state are taken by the Security Council, any other state, whether a Member of the United Nations or not, which finds itself confronted with special economic problems arising from the carrying out of those measures shall have the right to consult the Security Council with regard to a solution of those problems.



National Alliance for Syrian Revolutionary Forces. Success in this endeavor could achieve multiple goals that serve Turkey, the Syrian people, the United States, and Syria's Arab neighbors. The most notable among these are:

1. Helping to dismantle Kurdish-Turkish conflicts, which would have a positive impact on:
  - The development in the regions of Anatolia and the Syrian island
  - A reduction of terrorism within Turkey
  - Lowering Turkish military spending, which will positively impact the Turkish economy
  - The enhancement of the tourism sector in Turkey
2. Offering a comprehensive solution to the illegal refugee issue by:
  - Ensuring a safe return of refugees to Syrian regions, in line with international conventions
  - Distributing Syrian refugees coming from Turkey across three regions:
    - Euphrates Shield areas<sup>8</sup>
    - Peace Spring areas<sup>9</sup>
    - Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
  - Settling Syrian refugees from Lebanon and Jordan in northern Syria, in coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
  - Opening a large market for Turks inside Syria, without necessitating normalization with the Syrian regime
  - Improving the economy of the Autonomous Administration region and northern Syria as a whole
3. Advancing Arab-Kurdish "Sunni" reconciliations, which would mean:
  - Enhancing military understandings between the Syrian Kurds and Arabs in their fight against terrorism

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<sup>8</sup> End to Euphrates Shield, but Not to U.S.-Turkey Tensions, CFR, March 2017, By: Guest Blogger for Micah Zenko  
<https://www.cfr.org/blog/end-euphrates-shield-not-us-turkey-tensions>

<sup>9</sup> Turkey's Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria: One month on, Umut Uras, Aljazeera, Nov 2019  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/8/turkeys-operation-peace-spring-in-northern-syria-one-month-on>



- Strengthening the partnership between Arab clans and the international coalition
  - Opening the currently closed military crossings between the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, Euphrates Shield, and Peace Spring areas, and converting them into customs crossings
  - Distributing the proceeds from internal resources like oil, cotton, and wheat to the regions of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and the Interim Government, fostering administrative development in both regions
  - Easing civilian movement between the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and the Interim Government areas
  - Returning confiscated properties to their rightful owners
  - Releasing detainees from both sides, through the implementation of a transitional justice program supervised by Syrian human rights associations operating in both regions to ensure impartiality
4. Enhancing the political, social, and cultural life of Syrians in areas outside Assad's authority would:
- Allow for licensing diverse and competing Syrian parties
  - Strengthen civil society oversight mechanisms over political institutions
  - Guarantee freedom of expression
  - Boost the participation of women and youth in political, economic, and social life
5. Fortifying the anti-terrorism project includes:
- Establishing Syrian research centers dedicated to combating terrorism, fostering collaboration between experts from both regions
  - Creating an operations room coordinating its efforts with the international coalition
  - Conducting security and military exercises in both regions to prevent the penetration of terrorist organizations
  - Running psychological rehabilitation courses for individuals deceived by terrorist organizations





6. Reducing the influence of the Syrian regime to push it to accept the Geneva Agreement (1) <sup>10</sup> entails:
- Preparing an administrative body regulating the relationship between The National Coalition for Syria and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria that is acceptable to Washington and both parties, allowing civil society to monitor its operations. This body should provide the following services:
    - Issuing internationally accepted Syrian passports from the joint authority (the Autonomous Administration and the Interim Government), similar to the passports of the Palestinian Authority
    - Drafting an interim constitution regulating the relationship between the two Syrian administrative authorities
    - Developing plans that cultivate partnerships between administrative regions and international investing companies
    - Building administrative partnerships with the Arab and regional environment to serve the stability and security of both regions
    - Preparing a joint negotiating team from both sides to negotiate with the Syrian regime and adopting Geneva as the sole venue for negotiation
    - Handling the files of detained terrorists with the governments from which they hail
    - Organizing education and ensuring recognition of university degrees through coordination with international educational institutions
    - Utilizing expertise to ensure the transformation of departments into an electronic government system
  - Severing the relationship between the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and the Syrian regime, which involves:
    - Closing all security branches of the regime in the Autonomous Administration areas
    - Prohibiting the sale of oil from the Autonomous Administration areas to the regime

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<sup>10</sup> UN, Geneva, June30, 2012

<https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/press-release/2012/06/final-communique-action-group-syria-geneva-saturday-30-june-2012>



- Ensuring strict control over the borders with the Syrian regime and preventing the entry of any military or security personnel from the regime into the Autonomous Administration areas
  - Eliminating all gangs cooperating with the Syrian regime in the Captagon trade<sup>11</sup> within the Autonomous Administration areas
  - Managing the Qamishli airport with local personnel and expelling the Air Force Intelligence personnel from it
7. Creating economic conditions that can foster a socio-economic system capable of integrating into international markets requires:
- Adopting the Social Market Economy system in both regions
  - Facilitating administrative procedures to expedite the opening of investment-managing banks
  - Easing channels of cooperation between local banks and banks in Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan
8. Preparing political and social systems that believe in a culture of peace and social coexistence domestically and regionally involves:
- Intensifying seminars that explain the importance of stability and peace based on economic interests
  - Promoting social reconciliation projects among clans, nationalities, and religions
  - Including curricula that encourage pluralism and social diversity
  - Promoting religious freedoms and guaranteeing freedom of belief
9. Establishing Syrian political and social systems that believe in human values and respect international human rights norms will result in:
- Enhanced economic, social, and cultural development in the opposition areas compared to those under the Syrian regime and the areas controlled by the Salvation Government
  - Superior administrative development (legal, educational, health, services, banking) in the opposition areas compared to those under the Syrian regime and the Salvation Government areas

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<sup>11</sup> Fenethylamine is a prodrug of amphetamine and theophylline and a prodrug to both. It is also spelled phenethylamine and fenethylamine; other names for it are amphetaminoethyltheophylline and amfetyline. The drug was marketed for use as a psychostimulant under the brand names Captagon, Biocapton, and Fitton.



- Broad media freedom in opposition areas
- Diversified investments in opposition areas
- Judicial neutrality from Syrian partisan and religious institutions
- The spread of a reconciliatory discourse with the regional and international environment, focusing on sustainable development, and eliminating racist discourse

During its involvement in Syria, the United States succeeded in mitigating the clash between Turkey and the Syrian Democratic Forces, while also serving as a deterrent against Iranian-Russian incursions into the territories of the Autonomous Administration. Consequently, Washington is perceived by Syrians residing in northeastern Syria as a safeguard, as well as the orchestrator of the anti-terrorism project that shielded their economic, social, and political lives from threats posed by the Islamic State.

Owing to Washington's commitment to the anti-terrorism initiative, it refrained from politically intervening to encourage reconciliation between conflicting parties within the Syrian opposition. Instead, it left this responsibility to the Syrian factions, who in truth were unable to handle this issue due to regional intelligence influences on their decisions. Therefore, the "Parallel Areas" project emerges as a means to resolve Syrian disputes under American supervision and the oversight of Syrian individuals who uphold the culture of coexistence, freedom, and human justice. This would ensure a successful Syrian implementation of the Geneva (1) decisions, steering clear of unproductive Russian interference in the Astana peace talks.<sup>12</sup>

## The "Parallel Zones" Project

The project is a roadmap aimed at resolving disputes among Syrians under American supervision, alongside the guidance of Syrian figures who are dedicated to the culture of coexistence, freedom, and human justice. This approach is designed to ensure a successful Syrian implementation of the Geneva (1) decisions, sidestepping the ineffective Russian interference witnessed during the Astana talks.

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<sup>12</sup> the Astana peace process, AFP, 2018

<https://www.france24.com/en/20180905-syria-astana-peace-process>



## Vision

The project envisions the establishment of a Syrian society that embraces the culture of diversity, citizenship, and justice for its people, and is capable of harmonizing politically and economically with its regional and international environment.

## Objectives

The project has several key goals:

- Strive to implement the Geneva (1) resolution of June 30, 2012
- Work towards unifying the moderate opposition (the Autonomous Administration, the National Coalition), and creating a professional negotiating team from both.
- Fight against terrorism
- Establish a transitional justice system that fosters social and human reconciliation within the divided Syrian communities.
- Draft a constitution that guarantees citizenship and equality for all members of the Syrian population.
- Structure a new security system by reorganizing the security and military institutions and militias, so they function as a tool of the state, rather than vice versa.
- Seek regional and international consensus that assists Syrian politicians in formulating their political decisions to serve Syrian interests.

## Long-term Goal

The overarching objective is to facilitate a democratic Syrian state that ensures comprehensive political, social, economic, and cultural transformation in Syria. This state would uphold the unity of Syrian territories, ensure the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers, and accept the distinction between religion and state. All these measures aim to serve all segments of Syrian society and contribute to international stability.

## Why is the Plan Called "Parallel Zones"?

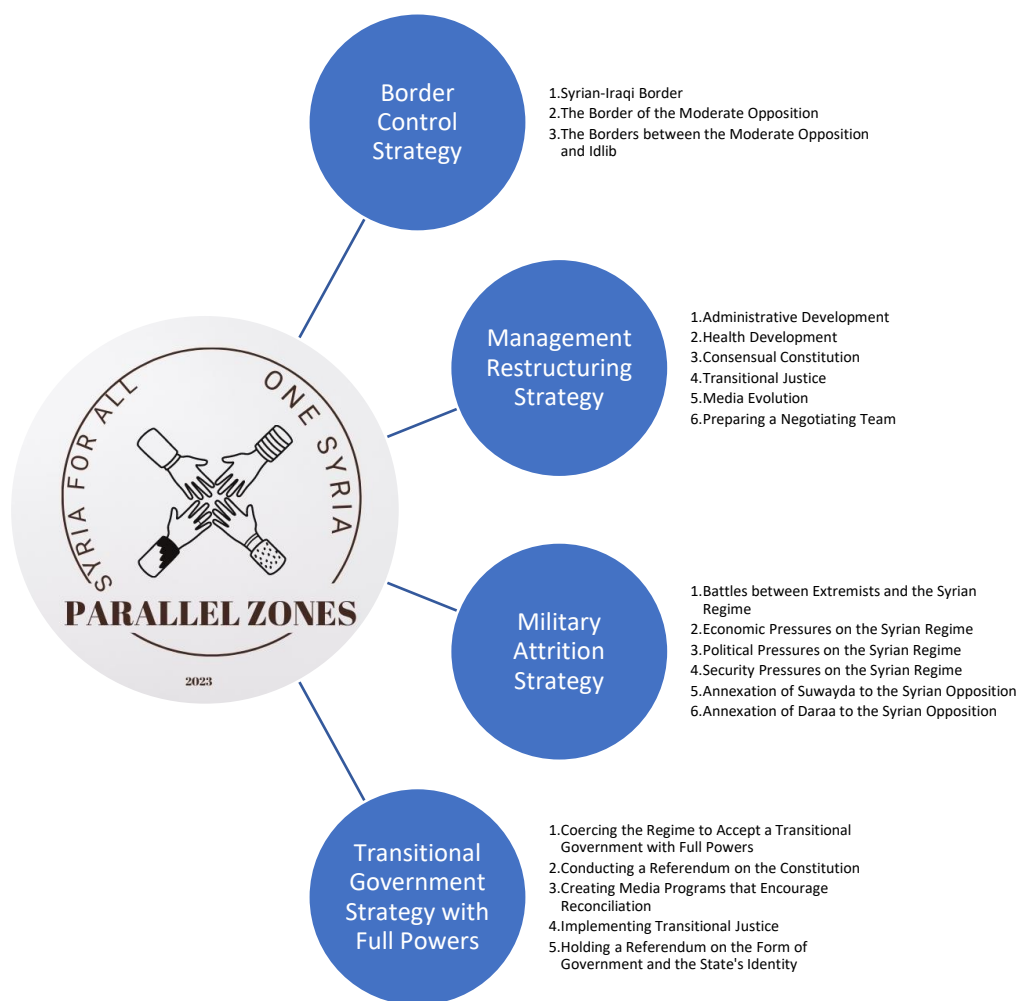
As noted in the introduction, Syria is divided into seven regions, six of which belong to the Syrian opposition. These regions do not align in terms of their military, economic, and even



administrative capacities. This plan suggests the formation of a transitional government with full powers to implement the recommendations of the Geneva Agreement (1).

## The Strategic Plan:

The fragmented reality of the Syrian Arab Republic necessitates the division of this plan into multiple strategies to ensure its implementation in the most appropriate manner.



## Border Control Strategy

Maintaining control over administrative borders is crucial for any country in order to ensure its neighbors' security. Given the Syrian government's inability to do so, the creation of



alternative strategies to achieve this end becomes necessary. This strategy can be divided into the following phases:

## 1. Phase One: Control over the Syrian-Iraqi Border

The Autonomous Administration areas and the Al-Tanf base are under the control of the International Coalition forces, making the transit of radical Islamic terrorists through them rare. However, the region extending from Al-Tanf to Al-Bukamal lacks administrative discipline as it's controlled by units of the Syrian regime army, in partnership with the Fatemiyoun Brigade, Hezbollah, and a number of other Shiite militias. These militias are included in the US terrorist lists, which undermines their trustworthiness and prevents the forces of the International Anti-Terror Coalition from coordinating with them.

The American withdrawal from Iraq at the end of 2021 indicated a lack of US interest in escalating the military presence in Iraq and Syria following the collapse of the Islamic Caliphate. Coupled with the significant American military support to Ukraine, Syria is no longer a priority for American military spending.

**Thus, it's essential to establish military teams in Syria, financed by regional parties, whose primary task is to control the Syrian-Iraqi border, within a minimum depth of approximately 300 km. This would create an area extending from the Jordanian border to the Ain Dewar region, under the supervision of the International Anti-Terrorism Coalition, led by three Syrian teams:**

- **Deir Ezzor Military Council:** It's necessary to increase the representation of members from Arab tribes in this military body, which is administratively affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces, and to restructure it in a manner that gains the approval<sup>13</sup> of the Tribes and Clans Shura Council.<sup>14</sup>
- **The Free Syrian Army:** An increase in the representation of members from Arab tribes is also required in this military body, which operates under the supervision of

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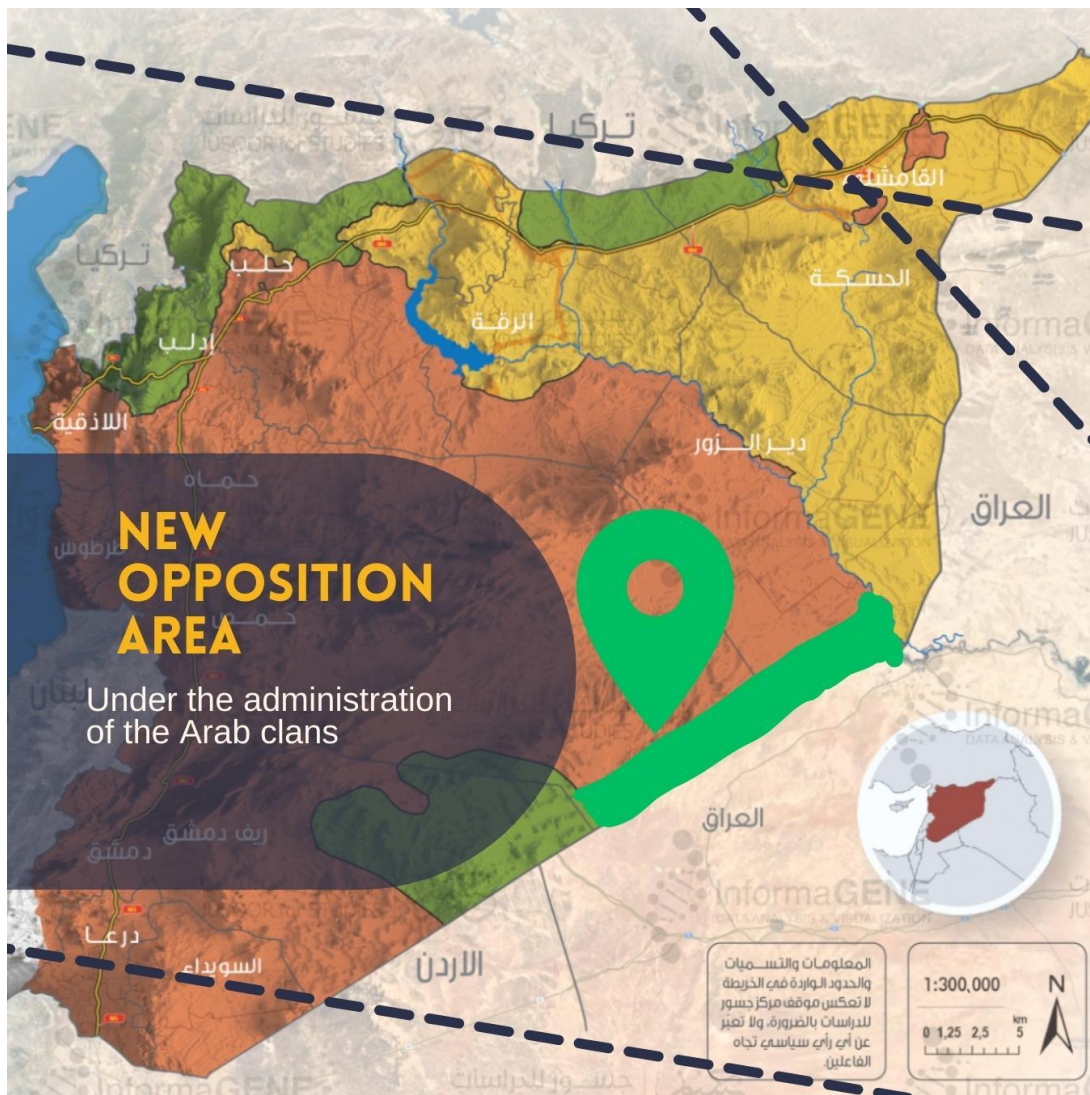
<sup>13</sup>

[https://twitter.com/syr\\_television/status/1606907598808170500?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetemb ed%7Ctwterm%5E1606907598808170500%7Ctwgr%5Ed3e6a31553524d3521abab07b74921a826ff4f6c%7Ctwcon% 5Es1\\_&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.syria.tv%2FD8A7D984D8B9D8B4D8A7D8A6D8B1- D8A7D984D8B3D988D8B1D98AD8A9-D8AAD8ACD8B1D991D985-D982D8A7D8A6D8AF-D985D8ACD984D8B3- D8AFD98AD8B1-D8A7D984D8B2D988D8B1-D8A7D984D8B9D8B3D983D8B1D98A-D988D982D8B3D8AF- D981D98AD8AFD98AD988](https://twitter.com/syr_television/status/1606907598808170500?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetemb ed%7Ctwterm%5E1606907598808170500%7Ctwgr%5Ed3e6a31553524d3521abab07b74921a826ff4f6c%7Ctwcon% 5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.syria.tv%2FD8A7D984D8B9D8B4D8A7D8A6D8B1- D8A7D984D8B3D988D8B1D98AD8A9-D8AAD8ACD8B1D991D985-D982D8A7D8A6D8AF-D985D8ACD984D8B3- D8AFD98AD8B1-D8A7D984D8B2D988D8B1-D8A7D984D8B9D8B3D983D8B1D98A-D988D982D8B3D8AF- D981D98AD8AFD98AD988)

<sup>14</sup> Syrian clans criminalize the commander of the Deir Ezzor Military Council and "SDF", YouTube, Dec 24, 2022 <https://www.syria.tv/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1- %D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%91%D9%85- %D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1- %D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A- %D9%88%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88>

the International Anti-Terrorist Coalition forces in Area 55. More information on this can be found in the article "Area 55: The Untold Story of US Strategy in Syria's Desert Frontier."<sup>15</sup>

- **Syrian Democratic Forces:** Strengthening the connections and collaboration between these forces and the Free Syrian Army is necessary. This could be achieved through conducting joint exercises, under the supervision of the International Anti-Terrorist Coalition.



<sup>15</sup> "Area 55: The Untold Story of US Strategy in Syria's Desert Frontier" by, Issam Khoury, April 13, 2023

[https://www.csios.org/en/post/area-55-the-untold-story-of-us-strategy-in-syria-s-desert-frontier?fbclid=IwAR36VGH5PBDGFcyoeGtwm6jHttX25J9MxaovJbm7mzyylWuRktGYAn6\\_KCk](https://www.csios.org/en/post/area-55-the-untold-story-of-us-strategy-in-syria-s-desert-frontier?fbclid=IwAR36VGH5PBDGFcyoeGtwm6jHttX25J9MxaovJbm7mzyylWuRktGYAn6_KCk)



## Financial Backers for the First Phase

### *Iraq*

The Iraqi government has repeatedly urged the Syrian regime to exert control over its border with Iraq to prevent the infiltration of terrorists from Syria. Currently, as the Syrian state is fragmented, and Shiite militias like the Fatemiyoun and Hezbollah are controlling the areas stretching from the Al-Tanf base towards the Autonomous Administration areas. Thus, it becomes incumbent upon the Iraqi government to cooperate with the international coalition in controlling these borders. This necessitates Iraqi financial support for the Syrian forces coordinating their actions with the Syrian coalition. It also requires a considerable military presence of Iraqi anti-terrorism forces along the Iraqi-Syrian border, along with a comprehensive ban on the transit of Iraqi militias from Iraq to Syria.

### *Arab Gulf States*

The Iranian infiltration into Syria and Iraq has been a threat to Arab national security. Despite recent reconciliation efforts between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran, Arab concerns regarding the territorial expansion of Iranian militias persist. The Lebanese Hezbollah maintains control over Lebanon's sovereign decisions, similar to the Houthi group in Yemen and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's control over the Syrian regime's security services. Hence, an Arab-backed project to control these borders under American supervision would be an excellent option for these countries. While it would not put them in a direct conflict with Tehran, it would undoubtedly limit the influence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Syria.

### *Syrian Regime*

The Syrian regime shows little interest in this matter and will likely portray itself as a combatant against terrorism, implying it won't bear any costs for this project. Therefore, it becomes necessary to seize all assets of this regime in every country worldwide and transfer them to the party responsible for executing this project.

### *Syrian Democratic Council*

The revenues from oil, cotton, and wheat provide substantial financial resources for the Syrian Democratic Forces. These funds will undoubtedly constitute a part of the financial expenditure for managing the first phase of the "Parallel Areas" plan.

## Logistical, Security, and Training Support for the First Phase

### *Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*

Since 2014, Israel has been targeting the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Shiite militias with airstrikes and continues to do so. Consequently, this project will prove beneficial for Israeli national security. However, given the absence of normalization between Syria and





Israel, military intervention could be deemed as an act of aggression by the Syrian army. Therefore, coordinating support with airstrikes through a Jordanian intermediary may be an acceptable option for all Arab nations that have yet to normalize relations with Israel. Notably, Jordanian aviation proved decisive on May 8, 2023, when it bombed a base of Captagon smugglers within Syrian territory.

### *The International Coalition Against Terrorism*

It would be beneficial for the international coalition to decide to increase its expenditure to complete this project. However, if it refuses, it is still committed, as part of the anti-terrorism project, to train Syrians who are fighting against radical extremist groups. This in itself is more than enough, especially since the American presence in those areas will deter any potential assault by the Syrian regime's army or Iranian militias.

## **Obstacles to Implementing the First Phase**

### *The Return of the Syrian Regime to the Arab League*

The reintegration of the Syrian regime into the Arab League <sup>16</sup> has transformed its image from a regime accused of war crimes to a legitimate Syrian Arab state. This has bolstered the regime's confidence, leading it to demand the return of all Syrian lands under its control. It will likely attempt to obstruct the Parallel Zones plan by stoking national strife between the Kurds and the Arabs.

**Therefore, it is crucial to apply international pressure to prevent financial aid from Arab countries from reaching the Syrian regime, as any aid provided will likely be misappropriated, as previously occurred with the United Nations' aid. The anti-normalization bill passed by Congress on May 11, 2023,<sup>17</sup> should be utilized as it represents a legislative pivot that could compel the Syrian regime to reconsider its opposition to the "Parallel Zones" project.**

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<sup>16</sup> Syria's normalization signals a new Middle Eastern order, Brookings, By: Steven Heydemann Wednesday, May 10, 2023

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2023/05/10/syrias-normalization-signals-a-new-middle-eastern-order/>

<sup>17</sup> Congress introduces Assad Anti-Normalisation Act following Arab League's Syria decision, the national news, Ellie Sennett, May 11, 2023

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/us-news/2023/05/11/congress-introduces-assad-anti-normalisation-act-following-arab-leagues-syria-decision/>



### *Shiite Militias between Iraq and Syria*

The Syrian army is too feeble to undertake any military operation that could threaten the "Parallel Zones" project. However, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, which controls the Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq, could pressure the Syrian army to launch military operations in collaboration with the Shiite militias. This could be effectively confronted by the international coalition forces. The real threat is that these military operations may persist as part of a long-term attrition policy, necessitating continuous financial expenditure from Washington, which is clearly not desired.

**Hence, it is imperative that the countries and administrations previously mentioned participate in the expenses of these operations.**

## **Duration of the First Phase**

This phase hinges on military force, so the operations will not exceed four months. The real challenge in this phase lies in fostering reconciliation. Here, the role of civil society and the Syrian-American team dedicated to enhancing communication channels between the "Sunni" Arab clans and the Syrian Democratic Forces becomes crucial. The presence of the Syrian Free Army will be highly beneficial in this persuasion process. Consequently, we anticipate this phase to last for a full year, inclusive of:

- Media programs preparing the Syrian populace for the impending change.
- Seminars with leaders of the Tribal Shura Council.
- Interviews with representatives of the "Sunni" Arab clans from Iraq.
- Arab cooperation supervised by the Arab League.

## **Budget for the First Phase**

A financial study on expenditures must be conducted in coordination with American security agencies and study centers. Invitations should be extended to:

- Military advisors from the Syrian Democratic Forces.
- Military advisors from the International Anti-Terrorism Coalition.
- Advisors from the Pentagon.
- Ambassadors from the Gulf countries.
- A representative of the Iraqi government.



## 2. Phase Two: Setting the Boundaries of the Moderate Opposition

The central issue between the politicians of the Autonomous Administration region of northeastern Syria, and the Euphrates Shield and Peace Spring areas, pertains to Turkey's conflict with the PKK, as elucidated by the former US envoy for the Syrian file, James Jeffrey, to Rudaw TV on March 14, 2023.<sup>18</sup>

Washington holds significant sway over the politicians of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. However, it is incapable of bridging the historical chasm between the Kurds and the Turks, so it has limited itself to military cooperation with the Syrian Democratic Forces in managing the anti-terrorism portfolio. Simultaneously, it has refrained from removing the PKK from the US terrorist lists.

Moreover, Washington holds considerable influence over Turkey, owing to their partnership in NATO. Therefore, it is anticipated that Washington will exert pressure on Turkey to foster an understanding between the National Coalition for Syrian and the politicians of the Syrian Democratic Council.

Indeed, Turkey is in urgent need of a solution to the Syrian refugee problem. The Turkish presidential elections in May 2023 demonstrated the Turkish people's high demand for the return of Syrian refugees from Turkey to Syria. This project necessitates significant financial resources, especially since the northern regions of Syria are not equipped to accommodate large influxes of people from Turkey.

Furthermore, the Turkish economy is ill-equipped to contribute to this project, particularly in the wake of the severe earthquake that hit Turkey in April 2023. Consequently, the Erdogan government may need to display more flexibility towards the politicians of the Autonomous Administration, especially if they are not members of the PKK.

They might permit a politician from the Syrian Interim Government of the National Coalition for Syrian to negotiate with the Autonomous Administration government for the benefit of

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<sup>18</sup> Former US envoy blames PKK for failure of intra-Kurdish talks, Karwan Faidhi Dri , Mar 14, 2023  
<https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/14032023>



Syrian refugees. Of course, this necessitates the presence of a Syrian-American intermediary who supports this approach.

This role could be undertaken by the politicians of the "Syrian-American Consultative Meeting" team,<sup>19</sup> who successfully acted as intermediaries between Syrian-American organizations with strong connections with the Syrian Coalition for the National Coalition for Syrian (which is close to Ankara) and representatives of the Syrian Democratic Council in Washington on March 12, 2023.

For this project to be successful, the following steps should be taken:

1. **Disconnecting the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria's relationship with the Syrian regime's areas**, as per Article 6 of "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan."
2. **Conducting joint exercises between the National Army and the SDF, supervised by the International Anti-Terrorism Coalition**, based on Article 5 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan."
3. **Enabling economic partnerships between the areas of the Autonomous Administration east of the Euphrates and the Turkish government**, based on Clause 1 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan."
4. **Encouraging political cooperation between the National Coalition for Opposition Forces and the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC)**, based on Article 6 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan," with the aim of forming a unified negotiating team before the Syrian regime to enforce the Geneva Agreement (1), advocating a comprehensive transitional government.
5. **Ceasing the use of provocative expressions among the Kurds, Turks, and Arabs**, based on items 3-8 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan."
6. **Developing institutional structures in both regions to accommodate the needs of the social market**, in line with Article 7 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan."
7. **Facilitating "Syrian-Turkish-American" cooperation to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey and Lebanon**, based on Clause 2 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan."

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<sup>19</sup> Syrians- Americans hosted by the SDC, CESD, May 12, 2023  
<https://www.cesdworld.org/2023/05/18/syrians-americans-hosted-by-the-aanes/>



8. **Working towards achieving social development that nurtures Syrian political parties capable of steering the country towards a better future**, based on items 4-9 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan."

9.

## **Sponsors for the Second Phase**

- European Union
- High Commissioner for Refugees
- United States of America
- The Syrian expatriate community
- The World Bank

Legally, none of the five parties will commit any financial expenditure, unless a unified executive authority emerges that brings together the National Coalition for Opposition Forces and the Syrian Democratic Council. This authority must be representative of the Syrian people. Hence, it was necessary to initiate the "parallel areas" plan titled "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan."

Indeed, without the presence of the United States, northern Syria cannot attain stability. The United States is the only intermediary capable of fostering understanding between Turkey and the Syrian Democratic Council.

## **Obstacles to the Implementation of the Second Phase**

### ***Turkish Intransigence Towards the Kurds***

The Turkish government categorizes the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party as the Syrian branch of the PKK, hence views the Syrian Democratic Forces as a military extension of the PKK forces situated in the Qandil Mountains, posing a potential threat to Turkish national security. The US government also labels the PKK as a terrorist organization.

The Syrian Democratic Council asserts that the Syrian Democratic Forces are not politically associated with the PKK. However, some of its members greatly respect PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, and the SDC does not deny the role of the fighters from the Qandil Mountains in combating al-Qaeda terrorists, viewing these fighters as potential support in case Turkey decides to occupy territories under the Autonomous Administration.



Hence, the most feasible approach to enhancing the relationship between Turkey and the Syrian Kurds is to establish a memorandum of understanding. This document would obligate both parties, under the auspices of the American guarantor, to pursue political reconciliation. This initiative would align with items 1-3 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan," leading to an economic resurgence based on security and stability, and a project combating terrorism, which complies with Article 5. It would also guarantee the safe return of Syrian refugees based on Item 2.

### *Desire for Government Centralization by Arab Nationalists*

Numerous Syrian Arab nationalists oppose any administrative modification that would split Syria and perceive the Autonomous Administration project as a separatist endeavor akin to the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Consequently, they adhere to the notion of centralized governance that has been prevalent since the inception of the Syrian state.

The Arab nationalists base their argument on the following elements:

- The Kurds are not the majority in the Autonomous Administration region of northeastern Syria, yet they exert dominance over decision-making in that region.
- The Kurds have a separatist inclination evident in their literature, and they advocate for self-determination, which could entail annexing parts of Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran to form a new state, leading to the disintegration of Syria.
- The Kurds are a minority in Syria, but they enjoy American support, which has enabled them to curtail the influence of Arab tribes, Syrians, and Assyrians.
- The Democratic Union Party, which holds sway over the political and military landscape in the Autonomous Administration areas, is the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party; hence, it is a Turkish party, not a Syrian one.
- Arab nationalists reject the removal of the "Arab" label from the Syrian Republic, asserting that Syria is part of the Arab League.

Therefore, it is crucial to earnestly pursue Arab-Kurdish reconciliation, based on Article 3 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan." This effort must coincide with commitments ensuring the unity of all Syrian territories under a single government, which would facilitate a political transition through a national unity government safeguarding all rights. This concept will be further elaborated in the second phase of the "Parallel Zones" plan.



### ***New Turkish Relations with the Syrian Regime***

The Turkish-Syrian negotiation offered an opportunity to portray the Syrian regime's army as an ally of the Turkish army in the event of a military campaign to eradicate the PKK fighters. The predicament lies in the fact that both the Syrian regime and the Turkish government consider the Syrian Democratic Forces an extension of the PKK fighters.

Thus, it is necessary to fortify Kurdish-Arab reconciliation, aligning with item 3 of the "Revoking the Label of Occupation for the United States in Syria for the Success of the Plan." Simultaneously, efforts should be made to bolster Turkish economic interests in the northern regions of Syria, facilitating Kurdish-Turkish reconciliation, as outlined in item 1 of the plan.

## **Duration of the Second Phase**

The success of the first phase of the "Parallel Areas" project will motivate both the Kurdish and Turkish sides to strive for political reconciliation. However, this reconciliation may not be fully successful, implying that the Peace Spring area might have an easier relationship with the Autonomous Administration of northeastern Syria than other regions, followed by the Euphrates Shield area at a later Phase. The second phase is expected to accomplish its reconciliation tasks within the term of President Joe Biden, no later than 2024. Moreover, the re-election of President Erdogan for another term in Turkey would likely be a catalyst, as his administration seems more open to reconciliation with the Kurds compared to the active Turkish nationalists in the opposition.

## **Budget for the Second Phase**

It would be appropriate to convene a conference involving multiple countries, along with representatives of the second phase's sponsors, members of Syrian civil society, businesses engaged in constructing prefabricated houses, and business leaders. The conference would ideally be sponsored by the United States, the largest financial supporter of Syrian refugees, and Germany could be a suitable venue, given its status as the most significant European host of Syrian refugees.



### **3. Phase Three: The Borders of the Euphrates Shield Area and Idlib**

The Salvation Government controls the Idlib governorate, where radical groups listed on the U.S. terrorist lists are active. This renders Washington unable to execute any reconciliations between this government and the moderate opposition areas of the "National Coalition for Syrian".

The Turkish government includes the Al-Nusra Organization on its terrorist lists. However, this organization does not instigate terrorist operations against the Turkish military force in Idlib. This is due to the force's responsibility for conducting joint military patrols with the Russian army to ensure the resolution of conflicts between the regime's army forces and the Salvation Government's militias.

From this perspective, we understand that the Salvation Government relies on the Turks for the stability of their regions, unless they choose to open fronts against the Syrian regime. Based on this premise, it would be beneficial for the Syrian Interim Government, via a Turkish mediator, to conclude an agreement with the representatives of the Salvation Government. This agreement would determine:

4. The establishment of military crossings to prevent the passage of fighters from the Salvation Government areas towards the Euphrates Shield areas.
5. Permission for civilians from both sides to pass through.
6. A policy of non-persecution of military defectors from both sides.
7. The exchange of goods and products without any customs duties.

### **Obstacles to the Implementation of the Third Phase**

#### ***Extremist Groups***

Despite its pledge of allegiance to Al-Qaeda, the rhetoric of Al-Nusra Organization is limited to Syria, making it appear less extreme to the international community. The Salvation Government also allows the display of the Syrian opposition's flag throughout the regions of Idlib. Thus, we can categorize the opposition groups for the third phase into two main types:





### **Al-Ingmaseen "Indulgences"**

These are the groups that have received jihad training and are encouraged to sacrifice themselves. Despite being small, this category can inflict heavy casualties on its enemies in battles, as they are prepared to use explosive belts.

### **Al-Muhajroon "Immigrants"**

These are the radical Muslim groups that have responded to the global jihad movement to support oppressed Sunnis in Syria. The most prominent among them are the Guardians of Religion group, the Turkistan army, and other Chechen and Caucasian mujahideen. These groups have not been able to fully integrate into Idlib society, so they would not accept a moderate opposition project.

These groups constitute a small percentage of the society in Idlib. The best option for these groups is to incite them to clash with the Syrian regime, especially since they came to support the Muslim groups being oppressed by the Syrian regime.

**Therefore, it is necessary for Turkey and Russia to allow battles between the extremists and the Syrian regime. These clashes will undoubtedly be in the interest of the Syrian people, who reject extremism and advocate for moderation. Of course, these battles will cause many splits within the Al-Nusra Organization, which will inevitably support the Guardians of Religion group in these battles.**

### ***Russian Federation***

The Russian Federation may refuse to support the Turks in this direction to avoid increasing its military expenditures in Syria, especially as it is engaged in battles in Ukraine.

From this perspective, Turkish diplomacy must play a significant role in convincing Moscow of the plan. This means making it clear to Moscow that most of the Al-Ingmaseen are of Caucasian origin, implying that they are prepared to return to Russia if the International Anti-Terrorism Coalition decides to attack them in Idlib. Therefore, it is better for the Kremlin to eliminate them in Syria. Notably, Russia is not obligated to bear the costs of aerial bombardment in Idlib; this is the task of the Hezbollah fighters and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards stationed at the Idlib border.

Undoubtedly, this plan will result in substantial losses among the Shiites loyal to Iran inside Syria, which is in Israel's interest and benefits the Russians, whose influence in Damascus has decreased due to the recent growth of Iranian influence.



## Duration of the Third Phase

Understanding the borders between the Salvation Government and the Euphrates Shield through a Turkish mediator is an easy task that can be achieved within two months of negotiations. However, the Phase of battles with the regime is open-ended because it will exhaust both warring parties and will propel the "parallel zones" plan to move toward the second Phase in which the Syrian regime is forced to accept the Geneva agreement (1), as we will explain in the strategy for the second Phase of the plan.

## Odds of Failure

Every plan carries the potential for both failure and success. Therefore, it's crucial to develop alternatives for each plan:

### *Possibility of First Phase Failure*

The international coalition led by Washington may refuse to extend its influence along the Syrian-Iraqi border, particularly if donors fail to cover the cost of military deployment there. This situation could lead to continued Iranian incursion into Syria, an escalating state of security chaos in the Deir Ezzor regions, and an increase in Captagon entering Iraqi territory.

This runs contrary to Washington's obligations in the files (combating Captagon and terrorism) and cannot be justified unless Washington obtains an enticing deal from the Islamic Republic of Iran. This deal would need to be based on three factors:

- **Stopping the Iranian nuclear program:** Tehran may agree to this.
- **Ceasing cooperation with Russia:** Tehran will likely not agree to this.
- **Stopping the sale of arms to Russia, and to terrorist countries and organizations:** Tehran will also likely not agree to this.
- **Ceasing cooperation with China:** Tehran will certainly reject this.

The Biden administration will not risk negotiations with Tehran if it does not sense a firm commitment to these four clauses, especially as the Democratic Party faces heated elections and the Republicans are extremely stringent towards anything related to Tehran.

Therefore, the Syrian opposition should strive with all its might to appeal to the U.S. administration, convincing them of this plan's importance for U.S. national security. Given



the clear alliance of Russians and Iranians against the international community supporting Ukraine's sovereignty, this is of the utmost importance.

The Syrian opposition must also reach out to the Israeli lobby, which is entirely concerned with halting Iranian expansion in Syria. This lobby has high-pressure channels in Washington that the Syrian opposition lacks.

### ***Moving to the Second Phase Without Implementing the First Phase***

Trust between the Turks and the Kurds is highly complex, and this issue can only be resolved by reassuring the Turks that Arabs and Kurds are genuinely reconciling. This could be achieved by providing some leadership positions in the Autonomous Administration areas to Arab clans.

The Americans could potentially manage this, which would motivate Turkey to seriously engage in this plan. But if Turkey refrains, then Washington and the international community must inform Turkey that their national security interest lies in cooperation with Washington, not Russia.

The Russians have not given Turkey any facilities in Syria. On the contrary, they have obtained facilities from Turkey that allowed them to reach the M4 and M5 international highways. Russian support also contributed to the withdrawal of the Turkish-backed opposition from the city of Aleppo.

If Turkey persists in rejecting the initiative, the Syrian opposition must relocate its headquarters from Istanbul to a neutral city and work independently from the Turkish mediator through direct cooperation with the Autonomous Administration under Washington's guidance.

This situation will inevitably lead the opposition to lose direct contact with the national army. Still, this army will also lose its legitimacy, turning it into an unruly militia that might be included in terrorism lists, especially considering the numerous violations it has committed against Syrian civilians in these areas.

### ***Failure to Implement the First and Second Phases***

Failing to implement either of the previous steps means that Syria's future will remain divided into five separate identities. This was the rationale behind our proposal of a federalism project in five regions in our policy paper titled "Federalism between realism

and minorities in Syria,"<sup>20</sup> published by the Czech-Slovak Institute for Oriental Studies in November 2022.

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<sup>20</sup> Policy paper "Federalism between realism and minorities in Syria", By: Issam Khoury, 10, 27, 2022, CSIORS  
[https://www.csiors.org/en/\\_files/ugd/66053a\\_1949eaf413ca416a99c2d4ea11d4b15b.pdf](https://www.csiors.org/en/_files/ugd/66053a_1949eaf413ca416a99c2d4ea11d4b15b.pdf)