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Analytical Report

Forecasting the Syrian scene in 2023

By: Research team at Jusoor Center for Studies



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Contents

Preamble:	4
First: the political scene in 2023	5
1. The Constitutional Committee talks:.....	5
2. Normalization relations with the Syrian regime:	6
3. The " Intra-Kurdish talks":.....	7
4. The PYD-Syrian regime negotiations:.....	8
Second: the military scene in 2023	9
Third: the economic landscape in 2023	10
1.The Syrian pound in 2023:.....	10
2. Foreign trade:.....	11
3. Early recovery projects:.....	12
4. Economic Sanctions:.....	13
5. Living conditions:.....	14
Fourth: Policies and positions of international actors in 2023	15
1. The United States:.....	15
2. Europe:.....	16
3. Russia:.....	16
4. Türkiye:.....	17
5. Iran:.....	18
6. Israel:.....	19
Conclusion:	20

Preamble:

A relative calm has prevailed in the Syrian territories in terms of developments on the ground and politics since the beginning of 2020; as no countrywide large-scale military operations occurred. This comes at a time when the main obstacles that prevent the achievement of final understandings are still there, such as the state of uncertainty about the future of Idlib, which is controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The continuation of the Kurdish self-administration project, which caused wide differences between the United States and Türkiye, is also considered one of the above-mentioned obstacles.

Since mid-2022, the Syrian file has seen a political stalemate; because of Russia's decision to suspend the constitutional committee's discussions, which halted the already faltering political process.

On the other hand, however, efforts to normalize relations with the Syrian regime re-emerged at the end of 2022, but on a larger scale, after top Turkish military and intelligence officials met with their counterparts from the Syrian regime under the Russian auspices. Once again, this sparked talk about the future of the normalization process.

Economically, Syria begins 2023 with a new collapse in living conditions, with the great devaluation of the local currency (SYP) in 2022, as well as the loss of fuel from the market. This is to be added to the high prices of goods and services; let alone losing many of them, and the inability of the government to perform its tasks in many regions.

This report, released by Jusoor Center for Studies, attempts to draw the general picture of the various issues that the Syrian file will witness during 2023, with the aim of identifying potential trends for this file, which is a source of great interest for officials, decision-makers, and national and international public opinion.

First: the political scene in 2023

1. The Constitutional Committee talks:

Since its launch at the end of 2019, the parties to the Syrian Constitutional Committee have held eight rounds, the latest of which was in mid-2022.

These talks have not achieved any significant results; due to the absence of a methodology that can lead to make an agreement on a final version of the constitutional principles. For instance, it took 6 rounds to agree on an agenda to discuss constitutional principles, while the previous rounds were nothing more than a waste of time. Even the rounds, agreed upon to discuss constitutional principles, were nothing more than non-binding brainstorming ones.

The work of the committee has been suspended since June 2022, after the Syrian regime delegation refused to attend the ninth round of talks scheduled for July 2022; where the delegation stipulated the fulfilment of requests from Russia about the logistical procedures related to the entry of Russian diplomats to Geneva in order to resume the talks.

Therefore, it is not expected that any round of talks will take place in 2023, because the great dispute between Russia and the West does not indicate a decline in the intensity of the conflict between them, which, in turn, is considered one of the most important reasons for blocking the course. On the other hand, Western countries may become more cautious about this track, especially since Türkiye, which has a great ability to interfere in it along with Russia and Iran, has entered into talks to normalize relations with the regime. This may affect the fate and direction of the political process.

2. Normalization relations with the Syrian regime:

The process of normalizing relations with the regime began at the end of 2018; when some Arab countries such as the UAE, Bahrain and Jordan restored diplomatic relations with the regime, as these states re-opened their embassies in Syria, without being able to restore economic relations despite taking some executive steps; as Western sanctions hindered all efforts to achieve a breakthrough in this regard.

The United States, for example, rejected a Jordanian proposal to extend an electricity network and to revive gas flow from the "Arab Natural Gas" line, through Syria. The American rejection came as a result of the regime's non-compliance or responsiveness to the conditions related to the removal of Iranian militias from southern Syria and to the serious engagement in the political process under Resolution 2254.(2015)

However, there was an unprecedented development in the issue of normalizing relations with the regime after the meeting that brought together the defense ministers and intelligence chiefs of Türkiye and the regime, under the Russian auspices, at the end of 2022. This indicated that there is a mutual desire for rapprochement and cooperation between the two parties, although each adheres to its own vision and conditions.

In any case, it is expected that the efforts to normalize relations between the Arab countries and the regime during 2023 will encounter further difficulties for many reasons, most notably: Iran's tendencies to increase its influence within the regime's institutions, especially the military establishment, which would thwart any hopes placed by Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the UAE that the regime would respond to their demands in terms of reducing Iran's influence in exchange for normalization with these states.

It is also expected that the United States will intensify the sanctions imposed within the framework of the "Caesar Act", in light of proposing several projects to the US Congress in order to establish a new executive mechanism for implementing it in a way that achieves greater effectiveness. This would push many countries to refrain from achieving any progress in rapprochement and cooperation with the regime politically, economically, and in security affairs, because a law as such has an aspect that has had a great potential for affecting countries which seek to normalize relations and cooperate with the regime.

This applies to Türkiye, which does not seem ready to improve the level of relations, not only because of the expected US sanctions, but also because there are large contentious files between Ankara and the regime that are very difficult to be resolved. The regime demands that Türkiye stop supporting the opposition and withdraw its forces from Syria; and Türkiye refuses to respond to such demands, because it weakens its influence and its ability to protect its policies and interests in Syria.

3. The " Intra-Kurdish talks":

The intra-Kurdish talks are still stalled since the last round that was held between the two sides in 2020 under American auspices; as all efforts failed to form the "Kurdish political reference" that was agreed upon in the Dohuk Agreement (2014). Such a reference was supposed to serve as a platform for negotiations between the two parties represented by the national unity parties headed by the Democratic Union Party on the one hand, and the Kurdish National Council parties on the other.

Obviously, despite the American political dynamism and activism in the SDF-held areas since the end of 2022, as the rate of visits has significantly increased, taking into account the recent ones made by American officials to the east of the Euphrates, in addition to the other one that was made by the US State Department Special Envoy to Syria, Nicholas Granger, who is, according to his position, directly responsible for the course of the intra-Kurdish talks, no focus was placed on the issue of resuming negotiations between the two parties.

There are no indications for the resumption of such talks, unless the United States moves seriously to expand the representation of the Syrian opposition. This may prompt the revival of this path in 2023.

This necessarily requires high consensus and coordination between Türkiye and the Kurdistan region of Iraq on the one hand, and the United States on the other. However, the continuation of the rapprochement efforts between Türkiye and the Syrian regime may hinder this, unless the US takes actual steps to ensure that the dialogue leads to undermining the influence of the PKK in Syria.

4. The PYD-Syrian regime negotiations:

The regime and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) have been conducting continuous negotiations and contacts since 2012, which have contributed to economic and security cooperation, and to a lesser extent military cooperation between them. This is represented in the establishment of security squares in al-Hasakah and Aleppo, managing the Rmeilan oil fields and establishing understandings over fuel, and other issues.

However, this cooperation between the two parties was negatively affected and declined since the United States continued support for the Kurdish Protection Units (YPG), which is the PYD's Syrian armed wing, in the framework of the fight against ISIS in 2014. As a result, negotiations between the two parties focused on a number of issues such as the relationship with the United States, the fate of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Autonomous Administration, the rights of the Kurds in the future of the country, the Turkish military intervention, and others.

Russia and Iran have continuously utilized Türkiye's military operations against the SDF or threatening to launch ones in any negotiations between the regime and the PYD to pressure the latter to make concessions. It seems that the start of Türkiye's rapprochement with the regime under the Russian auspices at the end of 2022 will affect the outcome of the negotiations between the two parties.

As long as expectations indicate the difficulty of achieving this path, i.e. a breakthrough in 2023, the negotiations between the regime and the Union Party may not lead to tangible results that would change the map of control and the relationship between the two parties. However, a change in the Ain al-Arab region at the level of security and services providing may be excluded from the above-mentioned equation, without implying new security areas controlled by the regime in these regions.

Second: the military scene in 2023

Syria begins 2023 with a lull that has been for nearly 3 years, which is the longest period of ceasefire the country has witnessed since the outbreak of the conflict between the Syrian regime and the armed opposition factions.

The truce between the regime and the opposition in the north of the country is not expected to collapse in 2023. This is because of Russia's preoccupation with the conflict in Ukraine and Türkiye's unwillingness for any escalation with the regime that would affect Ankara's national security and internal priorities.

It does not seem that HTS will move forward in carrying out more operations beyond the contact lines that separate the group-held areas and the regime's ones during 2023, dissimilar to the campaign that was carried out by HTS at the end of 2022. This does not mean that it will not launch some attacks from time to time. However, its focus will significantly be on expanding its security influence in the areas north of Aleppo that are under the control of the Syrian National Army (SNA).

It is unlikely that Türkiye will launch any ground operation in Syria against the SDF before the Turkish presidential elections; because the United States rejected such an action and because such a move might affect the local economy of Türkiye. However, during the second half of 2023, any ground movement in this regard is not unlikely.

In general, it is obvious that Türkiye will tend to increase the quality and scope of its security operations in Syria, whether through drones or special forces and intelligence activity.

In southern Syria, the United States and Jordan do not seem to be inclined to push the truce that was reached in 2018 to collapse. This, however, does not mean increasing the possibility of escalation that would give local armed groups more influence and capacity, in addition to increasing Israeli operations against Iranian militias.

By the end of 2022, the number of joint Russian and Turkish patrols in the east of the Euphrates has reached (189), as they had 119 ones in Ain al-Ara, 62 in Ad-Darbasiyah, and 8 in al-Malikiyah.

That is, the joint patrolling will be as usual, with no change in the rate or number of their schedule in 2023. However, increased Turkish-Russian security coordination, which would be annexed by coordination with the regime, may lead to a change in the rate or quality of targeting operations that affect PKK and SDF cadres.

On the other hand, 2023 is not expected to witness a new field escalation between the US forces and Iranian militias, despite the faltering negotiations to reach a new nuclear deal.

Third: the economic landscape in 2023

1.The Syrian pound in 2023:

The Syrian pound lost much of its value by the end of 2022; as it reached above SYP 7100 against the US-dollar. In this regard, the exchange rate is expected to maintain a level close to SYP 6500 per the US dollar in the first quarter of 2023. The SYP may somehow improve with the beginning of spring and summer 2023; for reasons related to the decline in the demand for fuel and the expectation of an increase in the number of visits that could be made by Syrians living abroad to their country. Furthermore, the continuation of early recovery projects in various Syrian regions might lead to an increase in the foreign currencies amounts.

Regarding pressure on the currency, it is noted that production is still weak and not enough for the export, with the exception of some untreated agricultural crops, which are considered of low value. Moreover, the general budget in the regime-controlled areas, which was approved in 2022, imposes an increase in salaries and monetary masses poured into the market, i.e. more supply of the Syrian pound.

Dealing in the Syrian pound in northern Syria will remain at a minimum. Despite the decline in the Turkish lira, everyone will continue to conclude medium and large deals in US dollars, with small transactions denominated in dollars, even if the trading broker is the Syrian pound.

In general, the problem with the Syrian pound always remains that it is not immune in resistance, as the Central Bank, which officially manages the exchange rate, has no influence on this matter; especially since it lacks the tools of monetary influence, and it often uses its own security officers to convince major dealers in the markets of a specific decision, which makes the Syrian currency unable to withstand shocks. This leads to the scenario of closing the SYP at levels exceeding 8,000 pounds per one US dollar at the end of 2023. This, in fact, is supported by the continued high export bill and the rise in global inflation.

On the other hand, however, the chances of the exchange rate stabilizing appear high at levels close to SYP 6,500 in the first quarter of 2023, with its slight improvement due to the remittances that will come in March and April; and then its decline at the end of August.

2. Foreign trade:

The level of Syrian trade with the world has declined since 2013, and then improved in 2017; as foreign trade dealings were estimated at about \$5 billion, and in 2022 they are expected to be around \$4 billion.¹

The level of foreign trade may increase in 2023, but in relatively small amounts and quantities. The Arab countries are the most potential partners for increasing cooperation, especially Jordan and some Gulf states, as the regime seeks to deliver Syrian goods to these countries, most notably agricultural commodities, including medicinal herbs and livestock. The regime imports almost everything, and its relations with China come at the top of trade relations. Iran and Russia come next. As for Arab states, the UAE is expected to maintain the lead in partners, as the regime imports electronics and other commodities from the UAE.

The opposition-held areas maintain a good relationship with Türkiye, which is expected to remain the main partner despite the expected political changes. Iraq also comes as a major trading partner for the areas of northeastern Syria that are controlled by the Autonomous Administration

That is, the economic partnership in Syria will be in favour of China, Türkiye, the UAE and Lebanon, and to a lesser extent in favour of Iran, Russia and Jordan.

In general, 2022 witnessed an increase in the number of Iranian investments in Syria, which were not actual investments rather than a kind of controlling the regime's government and private institutions. This means that such investments were only transfers of ownership, an aspect that is expected to continue in 2023, as Iran is working on penetrating more into various Syrian economic sectors.

¹ Khaled Al-Terkawi, Foreign Trade of the Syrian Regime, Jusoor Center for Studies, 2022/7/27 [Link](#)

3. Early recovery projects:

The Brussels Conference was held in its sixth edition in May 2022. It concluded with a pledge of nearly 7 billion US dollars, an amount allocated for both 2022 and 2023. The conference put early recovery projects on top of its priorities and supported them. It seems that Russia is still negotiating with Western countries on the continuation of the cross-border humanitarian aid flow into northern Syria in exchange for providing support for regime areas. This is expected to continue in 2023.

In June/July 2022, the regime formed what is known as the Early Recovery Committee, which is mainly responsible for planning and coordinating such projects. The committee had set an amount of \$1.1 billion as a budget that should be obtained in less than a year. It also began organizing its work and holding meetings with local and international institutions operating in its regions to collect such a set amount.

In the northeastern regions of Syria, early recovery projects seemed to be larger than others, as it is noted that more attention is being paid to the communications, the medical, and the agricultural² sectors. Accordingly, these regions were given multiple advantages from Western countries. In northwestern Syria, housing and livelihood projects have begun to attract attention from international and local institutions. Dozens of projects have been implemented to maintain roads, extend water networks, and improve sanitation services. In 2023, it is expected that interest in these projects will continue to increase, and that various Syrian regions will receive more technical and financial support for the implementation of early recovery projects as well.

² Khaled Al-Terkawi, Early Recovery and Ways to Support Those Affected in Syria, Jusoor Center for Studies, 4/27/2022, [Link](#).

4. Economic Sanctions:

The regime still claims that sanctions are its main problem in addressing the international community, as it blames them for the poor humanitarian situation, from which Syria is suffering. However, lifting these sanctions will not mean much from an economic point of viewpoint, while the regime actually wants these sanctions to be lifted as an entry point to promote itself and consequently to be recognized by others. As a result, the regime intends to negotiate with Western countries refugees return and start the stage of reconstruction. The regime, as such considers that lifting sanctions an official declaration of its victory.

In fact, the sanctions in their current form cannot actually affect the overall economics, whether positively or negatively. A good format of this is the northeastern and northwestern regions of Syria, which have been excluded from the sanctions. Despite this fact, however; the economic situation in these regions has nothing to do with development and realizing significant economic achievements.

For Western countries, sanctions are the least that can be used. And in light of the conflict with Russia, they will keep it under tough sanctions in addition to any party aligned with Moscow. The Syrian regime realizes that the sanctions will not be lifted soon unless it makes concessions that Damascus may not have the ability to provide in the foreseeable future. This means that sanctions will continue targeting the Syrian regime in 2023; and they may be tightened for the purpose of putting pressure on Russia, Iran and China , and not only on the regime.

As for the areas of the Autonomous Administration and the opposition ones, it is not expected that tangible shifts will take place in these areas; especially since negotiations with Türkiye and the Russian position, can hinder these concessions.

5. Living conditions:

The productive sector is the main dynamo of the economy; and in light of the disruption of industry and construction, it is not expected that any improvement will occur in the Syrian living conditions. In this regard, internal trade and the services provided are at their lowest degree required for survival. Moreover, the salaries and pensions given by the government are incapable to stimulate markets due to their weak effectiveness.

The regime's government budget -despite its hugeness declared- is still ineffective; because of the failure to implement the projects undertaken by it on the one hand, and because it is unable to provide government support to the security and military sectors as a major priority on the other hand. In the health sector, for example, it is noted that military hospitals and military healthcare centers receive allocations from the Ministry of Health.

The increase in inflation rates, which is due to internal and external reasons, will continue to rise in 2023, which weakens the ability of families to collect their needs. The deterioration of the living conditions will be driven by the rise in the prices of goods and services in terms of spending, and in terms of resources as well, due to insufficient income. The remittances of Syrians abroad, and humanitarian aid are still the main resource for most Syrian families. The resource dependent on security and military actions will also remain an important part in the lives of most young people, who are not expected to find financial alternatives in the foreseeable future.

As for immigration, it will remain the concern of Syrians inside. However, the regional and international circumstances will not be conducive to that. However, only the wealthy and some members of the middle class are expected to be able to emigrate; as Egypt and some Eastern European countries may be the main destination for them. Jordan will constitute to be a place for Syrian merchants' business for the coming months. However, the Jordanian security concerns may restrict that and keep it to minimum.

In general, it seems that poverty will dominate the seen in 2023; and illegal trade will be the aspiration of a wide number of young people, including the Captagon, human trafficking, antiquities smuggling, etc. As a result, crime rates will spike, there would be high divorce rates, and a decrease in education rates among Syrian children in most regions.

Fourth: Policies and positions of international actors in 2023

1. The United States:

As Joe Biden took office in early 2021, the US administration avoided appointing a special envoy for the Syrian file. Later on, however; Brett McGurk was appointed as the National Security Council coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa. This meant that dealing with the Syrian file came as part of a broader strategy that includes the entire Middle East region; especially when the Biden administration's strategy included negotiating Iran to revive the nuclear agreement as part of its strategy, which indicated that it was implicitly ready to make concessions in Syria in order to make the file succeed, as the Obama administration did.

The Biden administration loosened its implementation of the "Caesar Act" that was passed by the Trump administration. According to that law sanctions were imposed on the regime. It seems that this laxity encouraged both Jordan and the UAE to communicate with the regime and discuss the possibility of establishing energy-related projects.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the escalation of tension between Russia and the United States, the latter returned to showing relative seriousness towards the Syrian regime. US once again opposed attempts to normalize relations with the regime, as it issued the Captagon law in late 2022, which clearly names Bashar al-Assad as the person in charge of sponsoring, manufacturing and trading drugs.

Meanwhile, in 2023, the United States is expected to show a tougher position towards the regime, whether by renewing sanction lists against it or taking practical activities to fight the regime's production and promotion of drugs or working on taking action against it within the framework of accountability.

It is also likely that America will increase coordination with its allies in the region, namely Jordan and Israel, to weaken Iran's influence in Syria, especially with the absence of any indications of reaching a new nuclear agreement with Tehran, and with Netanyahu's accession to power in Israel again. The theater of operations that will witness a possible escalation is supposed to include the area between the Badia and the countryside of al-Hasakah, Deir ez-Zor, As-Suwayda, and Daraa. It is not unlikely either that the US forces will resort in this regard to strengthening the local armed groups in southern Syria, whether in Daraa or As-Suwayda.

2. Europe:

The European Union maintained its policy in Syria, which is based on imposing sanctions on the Syrian regime and providing funding to support the future of Syria within the framework of the Brussels Conference. In this regard, the EU extended the sanctions it had already imposed until June 2023, and updated the list of those covered by the sanctions 3 times during 2022, to include 70 bodies and 289 people to whom travel bans and asset freezes apply.

It is noted that the sanctions targeted Russia's interests in Syria as well, including individuals directly linked to Moscow, and security companies working to recruit and mercenaries from Syria and ship them to fight in Ukraine.

It is expected, 2023 will witness further European tightening of sanctions against the regime, whether those imposed for the regime's use of violence against the population or as part of additional restrictive measures to prevent the continuing threat posed by the proliferation and use of chemical weapons.

On the other hand, it is likely that European countries, particularly France, Britain and Germany, will move in coordination with the United States to reconsider the role of the Syrian opposition and its representation in the political process, especially after Russia obstructed the discussions of the Constitutional Committee, due to the conflict with the West over Ukraine.

3. Russia:

Russia reduced its military effort in Syria during 2022 to the maximum, because it focuses on the Ukrainian war. At the same time, Moscow did not give up on its grip over Syria, it rather tried to use such an influence in strengthening its position in the conflict with the United States and the West, as the former put pressure on the regime to stop attending the sessions of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva. Moreover, Russia categorically opposed any ground military operation to be launched by Türkiye against the SDF. Putin, in fact, pushed strongly for launching a mechanism of understanding between the regime and Türkiye to lessen the latter's security fears.

It is likely that Russia will continue to obstruct any solution in Syria during the 2023; because Moscow does not want to formulate a solution in Syria, at a time when it is under military and economic pressures that may force the Kremlin to make concessions it does not want to.

Furthermore, Moscow will be probably inclined to increase its military deploying points in Syria, especially in the northeastern regions of the country, with the aim of putting pressure on the American influence there, and for strengthening its rapprochement with Türkiye, which focuses on combating terrorism in this region, and has common intersects with Russia on some principles, such as the unity of the Syrian territories and the rejection of separatist projects.

It is likely that Russia will continue to reduce its commitment to pressure Iran and push it to reduce its influence in Syria, particularly in the north-east of the country. As a result of the great rapprochement between the two parties, which clearly transpired when Iran provided drones to Russian forces during the Ukrainian war. Moreover; that may create the conditions for increasing this rapprochement is the absence of any prospects for reaching a nuclear agreement between Iran and the West.

Russia is also expected to maintain its role as a mediator in the settlement agreement in southern Syria, so that it can avoid the reactions of both Israel and Jordan to the spread of Iranian militias and drug smuggling gangs linked to the regime in the region, in addition to the consequent collapse of the calm and the escalation of confrontations again.

4. Türkiye:

Since 2012, Türkiye has been calling for establishing a safe zone on its southern border with Syria for various reasons on top security concerns, which has intensified the continuation of the conflict Syria.

It is expected that Türkiye will seek, during 2023, to complete the establishment of this zone, on which it has been working on since the launch of Euphrates Shield operation in 2016, whose aim was to undermine the Kurdish Autonomous Administration project, and to facilitate the return of more Syrian refugees. Such a plan would ease popular tension inside Türkiye, which is heading to decisive elections in mid-2023.

Türkiye will probably not mind coordinating with the various actors in Syria, whether local or international, to reach this goal, and the focus will be mainly on the areas adjacent to the Euphrates Shield operations area, in addition to northeastern Syria.

As such, it is assumed that Türkiye 's steps towards rapprochement with the Syrian regime, which it started at the end of 2022, will continue even after the Turkish elections in mid-2023.

However, Türkiye 's focus in Syria is not limited to security issues. It includes political matters as well. Türkiye is involved in international efforts to find a political solution to the Syrian issue. Although; along with Russia and Iran, it is involved as guarantor of the course of negotiations within the framework of the Constitutional Committee between the opposition and the regime, Türkiye will not hesitate to support any move to activate the political process in another framework in 2023.

Security-wise as well, Türkiye may make more efforts to consolidate positions and coordinate its steps in Syria with the Gulf states and Israel, in order to confront or weaken Iran's influence. This could give Ankara more room to move in the Syrian file, as Tehran, for example, does not seem enthusiastic to the rapprochement between Türkiye and the regime; and because of the spread of Iranian militias in northern Syria who obstructs any efforts to establish a safe and stable zone.

5. Iran:

During 2022, Iran worked diligently on increasing its military capabilities in Syria. It focused on developing the missile systems that it produces and stores in Syria, by sending precision guided missile systems to Syria, in addition to providing the regime with an air defense system that avails a cover for militias and military units loyal to them in Syria, against Israeli or American air strikes. These strikes restricted Iranian activities inside Syrian territories, especially when Russia sometimes turns a blind eyes to these strikes and does not prevent them.

Accordingly, it is expected that Iran will move during 2023 to supplement the efforts to build an air defense system within Syria, whether by introducing systems to the Syrian territories, or by resorting to further infiltration into the military units of the regime forces with the aim of using Syrian air defense systems, benefiting from Russia's expected reduction of its commitment regarding putting pressure on Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran could work on restructuring its proxy militias, and link them more closely with military units affiliated with the regime. This, in turn, would make the process of separating Iran's influence from the regime's forces an almost mission impossible.

Politically, Tehran will focus on obstructing any track it is not a party to, especially Türkiye 's rapprochement with the regime, or any efforts to advance a political solution. It will also make sure to abide by the agreement to expand the amount of credit available for the regime from 2 to 3 million barrels of oil per month, or at least ensure the continuity of the supply line, and link it to more administrative, economic and military agreements.

6. Israel:

Israel's main goal in Syria is to reduce Iran's influence and weaken its military capabilities in Syria. For this purpose, Tel Aviv relied during the past years on the "battle between wars" strategy, by carrying out air strikes. For greater effectiveness, Israel opened coordination channels with Russia and the United States at the same time.

During 2023, Israel will likely focus on dealing with three main challenges in Syria, namely: the growing influence of Iranian militias in the south, Iran building an air defense system that can be used against Israeli aircraft, growing coordination between Russia and Iran in the aftermath of the Ukrainian war, and the American and Western states' escalation against Iran, which may reflect negatively on Russia's tolerance of Israeli military activity in Syria.

In order to face the challenges, Israel will resort to more coordination with Jordan and the United States in southern Syria, in a way that contributes to providing support and giving Tel Aviv more room to carry out qualitative operations on a larger scale against Iran. Therefore, the rate and quality of Israeli air strikes against Iranian military targets in Syria is likely to increase during 2023, with logistical and technical facilitation from the United States.

Conclusion:

- After the Syrian file has received less attention in diplomacy and politics in 2022; as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, it seems that 2023 will witness greater activity on the part of Western countries. This, however, would not end the frozen state that the file has been going through since 2020.
- Western countries, namely the United States and Europe, may move to restructure the Syrian opposition, and create conditions during 2023 for alternatives in the event that Russia continues to obstruct the path of constitutional reform.
- 2023 is expected to witness further tightening of the sanctions imposed on the Syrian regime, with more economic and political obstacles before countries seeking to normalize relations with the regime.
- The freeze is also expected to include the military situation, as nothing indicates that the calm and the cease-fire would collapse either between the regime and the opposition or between the opposition and the SDF. Moreover, there are still many obstacles that prevent Türkiye from launching a new military operation in Syria, whether before or after the elections. Nevertheless, it has become clear that Ankara will continue its approach that started at the end of 2022 in launching qualitative operations, against the PKK and SDF especially through drones.
- Militarily, as well, Israel, in coordination with the United States will increase the quality and scope of air strikes against Iranian militias and regime forces. This is to prevent Iran from establishing an air defense system and to undermine Iran's influence and military activity in the south of Syria.
- On the other hand, it does not seem that the economic crisis in Syria is heading for any solution or a decrease in its severity. Although Iran may increase the volume of oil supplies to the regime, the tools that the latter resort to do not help in entering any path to recovery. Nevertheless, the exchange rate of the Syrian pound may stabilize at 6,500 per US-dollar, with the continued complete deficit in the purchasing power of the population, as the prices of goods and services will go up further.



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