

An Avoidable Crisis

The July 2021 Expiration of Syria's Cross-Border Humanitarian Aid Mechanism and Potential Solutions

May 2021

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I. Executive Summary

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2533 (2020), authorizing a single humanitarian aid crossing into Syria (Bab al-Hawa in the northwest) for 12 months, will expire on July 10, 2021. This crossing serves the population in the non-government-controlled northwest area. This paper explains the sources of contention between international stakeholders regarding cross-border humanitarian aid delivery to Syria and provides possible options for reauthorization in July.

Background and Rationale. Seven years after the establishment of the first United Nations cross-border mechanism (CBM) to deliver aid into Syria through UNSC Resolution 2165 (2014), Syria is facing an increasingly dire humanitarian situation as the dwindling of lifesaving supplies is coupled with a pandemic. The U.N. World Food Program (WFP) estimates 60 percent of Syrians are food insecure, with another 1.8 million at risk. Food insecurity, coupled with inflation and dire economic conditions, has pushed the country to the brink of famine. This will be exacerbated soon by the expiration of UNSC Resolution 2533 (2020). Furthermore, sanctions are aggravating the precarious conditions by delaying the delivery of aid and severely limiting the options of goods that can be provided. The international community must act urgently to solve these problems.

All international stakeholders assert their commitment to core humanitarian principles and the improvement of humanitarian operations in Syria. However, the debate about how assistance is implemented is influenced on one side by Russia's concerns about undermining Syria's sovereignty and the diversion of aid by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and on the other side by the skepticism of the United States and European states about the instrumentalization and diversion of aid by the government of Syria (GoS). Even if the CBM is reauthorized in July, clearly Russia does not intend for the system to continue indefinitely. Also, Russia has indicated that it is unlikely to compromise at the UNSC unless the West is prepared to consider concessions as well.

Perspectives on Cross-Border Mechanisms for Assistance. As noted, the discussion around the delivery of humanitarian assistance is shaped by opposing perspectives highlighted in the table below. While the European Union is portrayed in this paper as a unitary stakeholder, there are differences among its member states with respect to humanitarian operations in Syria. The positions of some EU members are more closely tied to the U.S., while others lean closer to the opposing camp.

Considerations	Russia, China, and Syria’s Perspective	The U.S., EU, and U.N.’s Perspective
The Legality of Cross-Border Mechanisms	The CBM was meant to be a temporary and extraordinary measure, and it violates international law on the basis of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991), which requires that aid should be provided (1) with the consent and on the basis of an appeal by the affected country and (2) based on respect for its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity.	The Syrian government has proved incapable or unwilling to fulfill its humanitarian obligation to the Syrian people by ignoring or delaying U.N. aid processes and even endangering aid workers in violation of UNSC Res. 2139 (2014), which requires that all parties involved provide safe and unhindered humanitarian access.
Cross-Line Transfers	The security on the ground has improved since 2014, and transfers of aid across frontlines within Syria is now possible; those can be used to provide necessary aid without violating national sovereignty and are considered a viable alternative to CBMs.	Transfers from government- to non-government-controlled territory (aka cross-line transfers) are inefficient and often blocked by the Syrian government. A 2020 U.N. review concluded that while not totally ineffective, they were insufficient to replace the CBM because the Syrian government’s approval process for deliveries is excessively time-consuming and unreliable.
Sanctions	In the 2020 UNSC sessions on CBM renewal, Russian- and Chinese- proposed drafts and amendments highlighted the unilateral coercive measures (sanctions) as the main factor preventing effective distribution of humanitarian aid in Syria. The absence of discussion on sanctions as an impediment to humanitarian operations was a central motive for both Russia and China to abstain from voting on UNSC Resolution 2533 in July 2020. Both argued to include language criticizing sanctions in the resolution.	The U.S. and EU have committed to exempt humanitarian deliveries from their sanction measures and restate their continuous efforts to remedy the unintended obstacles that the humanitarian compliance community is facing.
Monitoring and Transparency of Aid Distribution	Concerns with the current U.N. humanitarian aid distribution model for Syria include the unequal funding of humanitarian aid for the population in government-controlled territory versus territories not under government control. In addition, Russia is concerned with the lack of U.N. transparency and monitoring of aid delivery, especially inside the opposition-controlled northwest, where the U.N. does not have a presence on the ground. Russia insists that the cross-border system should be modified to ensure U.N. aid does not fall into the hands of HTS and get used as leverage over civilians.	The U.N. justifies the current distribution by arguing that needs in the northwest are more acute and their partners who distribute aid in government-controlled territory find that obtaining specific approvals from the GoS can be costly, time-consuming, and unreliable. The U.S. and EU similarly accuse the GoS of leveraging or manipulating aid.

Policy Recommendations. Despite these differences of opinion, reaching an agreement at the July 2021 UNSC session can be within reach if the sides engage in a meaningful dialogue. If the politicization of humanitarian efforts overwhelms this opportunity, then the international community will have failed the Syrian people. This paper suggests the following steps to ensure the sustainability of humanitarian efforts for Syria's long road to recovery, including:

- A. Monitoring and transparency of aid distribution
- B. Greater flexibility in sanctions exemptions to facilitate humanitarian assistance
- C. Humanitarian collaboration on COVID-19
- D. Investing in early recovery
- E. Collaboration on explosives clearing

II. Background and Rationale

The United Nations Security Council will vote in July on the cross-border mechanism for humanitarian aid to Syria. Despite worsening humanitarian conditions throughout Syria, the renewal of the mechanism is in jeopardy. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of Syrians in need increased by almost 20% to 13.4 million, of which 6 million are in acute need.¹ According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) humanitarian needs overview from March 2021, government-controlled areas in Syria host the largest number of people in need at 8.1 million. Northeast Syria has 1.8 million people in need, and in the northwest, where the last humanitarian aid border crossing is up for renewal, 3.5 million are in need.²

¹ "Syrian Arab Republic 2021 Needs and Response Summary." Relief Web, OCHA, 2021, reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/som_summary_2021.pdf.

² "Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic." Relief Web, OCHA, Mar. 2021, reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/syria_2021_humanitarian_needs_overview.pdf.

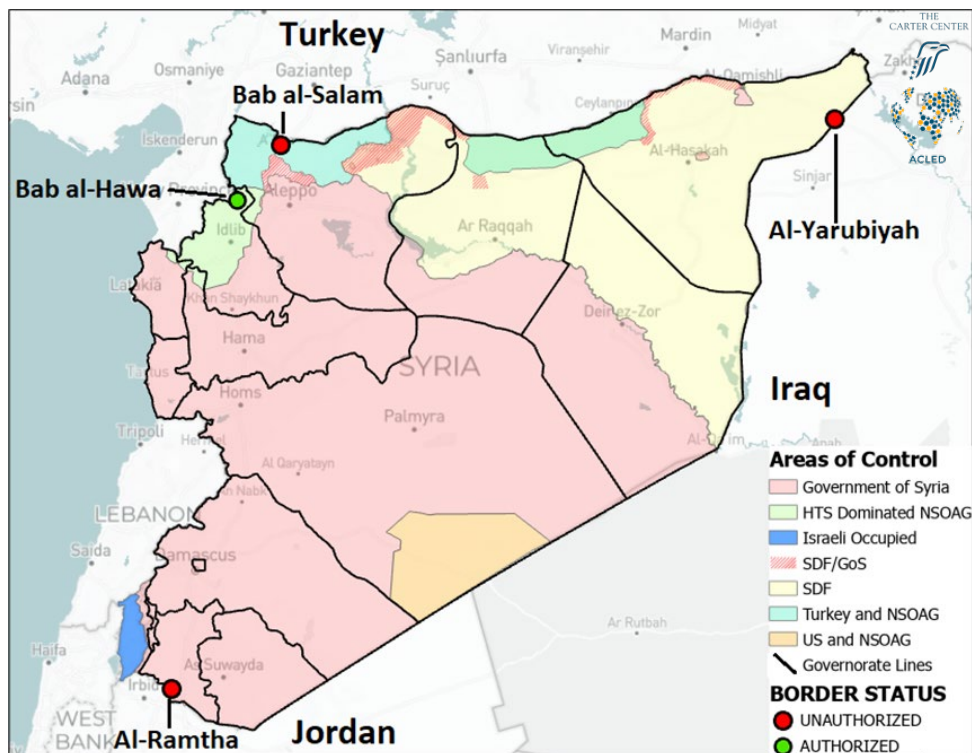


Figure 1. The four original border crossings for the cross-border mechanism (CBM). The one remaining crossing to the Northwest is shown in green; the three crossings that are no longer authorized (in red) are among numerous other unauthorized crossings. Note: NSOAG stands for Non-State Organized Armed Groups. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

UNSC Resolution 2139 (2014) was an extraordinary measure to establish the first approved cross-border mechanism for aid transfer in response to Syria's dire humanitarian conditions, allowing four crossings from Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey. Annex 1 details the evolution of CBM resolutions.

In 2020, Russia and China vetoed multiple draft resolutions, arguing that the time had come to phase out the temporary border-crossings measure in favor of cross-line deliveries from government-controlled territory to northwest and northeast Syria. The UNSC reduced the crossings to two in January 2020 (Resolution 2504) and to just one in July of the same year (Resolution 2253). The Security Council is slated to consider reauthorization of the sole remaining crossing from Turkey into Syria at Bab al-Hawa in July 2021. Russia has indicated that it probably will veto the resolution, arguing that since the CBM's inception, the military situation on the ground has changed, with the government of Syria regaining control of some 70% of the country's territory. Russia further argues that the CBM is an infringement on Syrian sovereignty, whereas the U.S. and the EU insist that CBMs remain essential to humanitarian efforts.

Opposition to the crossing stems from legal and symbolic considerations as well as practical concerns regarding proportionality, transparency, and monitoring of aid distribution. Support

for the crossing is expressed through arguments for effective implementation. Both sides in the debate have accused the other of politicizing humanitarian aid to Syria. However, both sides also have pragmatic and mutually inclusive goals for humanitarian efforts, which could provide the foundation for an agreement.

III. Perspectives on Cross-Border Mechanisms

A. *The Legality of Cross-Border Mechanisms*

Since 2014, Russia, China, and Syria have argued that the cross-border mechanism for humanitarian aid violates international law on the basis of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991), which requires that aid should be provided (1) with the consent and on the basis of an appeal by the affected country and (2) based on respect for its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity. Russia, China, and Syria argue that CBMs do not conform to the guiding principles of the resolution. In addition, Russia maintains that the mechanism was adopted only as a temporary and exceptional measure that should be phased out as security in Syria improves.

In response, the U.S. and EU argue that the Syrian government has proved incapable or unwilling to fulfill its humanitarian responsibility to the Syrian people by ignoring or delaying U.N. aid processes and even by endangering aid workers.³ Further, UNSC Resolution 2139 (2014) “[demands] that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for U.N. humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders, in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches people in need through the most direct routes.”⁴

However, according to the U.S. and EU, the Syrian government continues to block routinely a significant portion of the aid that is routed through Damascus: “In 2019, the government rejected 50 percent of all U.N. requests to access Southern Syria and Eastern Ghouta.”⁵ In a 2020 report on the cross-border mechanism, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) stated that the Syrian government withholds consent and deliberately sabotages humanitarian activities.⁶ CSIS cited GoS targeting of civilian infrastructure since December 2019 near the Bab al-Hawa crossing as evidence of humanitarian blockade being used as a tactic to prepare targeted areas for a military offensive.⁷

³ “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.” UNGA, HRC/34/64, 2017, undocs.org/A/HRC/34/64.

⁴ UNSC Res. S/RES/2139, 22 February 2014, op. para. 6.

⁵ Todman, Will. “Cross-Border Aid, Covid-19, and U.S. Decisions in Syria,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/cross-border-aid-covid-19-and-us-decisions-syria>.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

B. Cross-Line Transfers

Russia and China propose cross-line deliveries as an alternative to the CBM. Such deliveries are done through Damascus and cross the conflict lines within Syria to bring aid to territories not under the government's control. The U.S. and EU argue that cross-line deliveries are inefficient and often are blocked or diverted by the Syrian government. In February 2020, the Secretary-General of the U.N. reviewed alternative modalities to the al-Yarubiyah crossing from Iraqi Kurdistan to Northeast Syria, which was open until January 2020. The review concluded that cross-line transfers, while not totally ineffective, were insufficient to replace the border-crossing mechanism because the Syrian government's approval process for deliveries is excessively time-consuming and unreliable.⁸

Russia asserts that cross-line deliveries are insufficient only because the U.N. undermines the system by refusing to use it. However, evidence is lacking to support this view. Russia also argues that an International Committee of the Red Cross convoy has been delayed from reaching Idlib for months, despite receiving GoS authorization, asserting that this reflects an unwillingness by the West to promote cross-line deliveries.⁹ In March 2020, Moscow facilitated three new internal crossings within Syria in an attempt to channel all aid to the northwest under the control of the GoS. However, the local population did not trust the intent of these internal crossings as they suspected a ploy by the Syrian government to bypass the economic siege and escape international sanctions, and therefore saw it as a potential security threat.¹⁰

C. Sanctions

In the July 2020 UNSC sessions on the renewal of the CBM, the Russian and Chinese drafts and amendments highlighted unilateral coercive measures (sanctions) as the main factor preventing effective humanitarian aid distribution in Syria. Both Russia and China advocated to amend Resolution 2533 (July 2020) to include language criticizing sanctions. When their amendments were rejected, Russia and China abstained in the final vote.

The Russian argument about sanctions was strengthened at the U.N. Human Rights Council in 2020. Alena Souhan, the U.N. Human Rights Council's special rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, determined that the "[U.S.] Caesar Act runs roughshod over human rights, including the Syrian people's rights to housing, health, and an adequate standard of living and development." She added that overcompliance with sanctions presents an obstacle to rebuilding critical medical infrastructure in Syria.¹¹

⁸ "Review of Alternative Modalities for the Border Crossing of Ya'rubiya." *ReliefWeb*, UNSC, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/review-alternative-modalities-border-crossing-ya-rubiyah-report>.

⁹ "Press Briefing by First Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy on 27 January 2021." *Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations*, 27 Jan. 2021, russiaun.ru/en/news/pressbriefing_270121?fbclid=IwAR1dVIS0721hBeDbyNc8T8cxauRQWMtZrv8dsKBQbF4Xe_5gYggbc4Oxxj0.

¹⁰ "Domestic and Border Crossings: Russia's Mean to Stifle Northern Syria." *Enab Baladi*, 2 Apr. 2021, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2021/04/domestic-and-border-crossings-russias-mean-to-stifle-northern-syria/>.

¹¹ "UN Rights Expert Urges United States to Remove Sanctions Hindering Rebuilding in Syria." *UN News*, United Nations, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1081032>.

Interviews with humanitarian aid workers and experts also confirm that sanctions have hindered the implementation of humanitarian programs by restricting access to various goods and services, financial channels, and operational partners.¹² Yet, the U.S. and the EU reject the view that Western sanctions are hindering humanitarian aid delivery, reiterating their commitment to sanctions exemptions and restating their continuous efforts to remedy the unintended obstacles that the humanitarian compliance community is facing.

D. *Distribution*

i. *Transparency and Proportionality*

Russia is concerned that the current U.N. humanitarian aid distribution model for Syria is not proportionate and lacks transparency as well as monitoring. Despite being home to 8.1 million Syrians in need of humanitarian aid, the GoS-controlled part of the country receives less U.N. funding than the northwest and northeast, which host a combined 5.3 million people in need.¹³

Russia asserts that this disparity in U.N. funding discriminates against the populations in government-controlled areas.¹⁴ The U.N. argues that needs in the Northwest are more acute and that their partners who distribute aid in government-controlled territories find that gaining specific approvals from the GoS can be costly, time consuming, and unreliable.¹⁵ However, a report by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Oxfam, while pointing out the bureaucratic obstacles and impediments, including the difficulties of negotiating certain types of program activities and limited opportunities for partnership with Syrian NGOs, concluded that it is possible to meet global humanitarian standards with aid routed through Damascus if international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and international donors improve coordination with the GoS and local NGOs.¹⁶

ii. *Monitoring*

Another Russian concern is the monitoring of aid delivered to the northwest. Russia argues that U.N. structures are not able to control aid deliveries because of their lack of access to northwestern Syria.¹⁷ Additionally, recent studies of local governance in HTS-controlled territories show that, while HTS keeps its administration separate from the committees tasked

¹²The Carter Center, "Navigating Humanitarian Exceptions to Sanctions Against Syria," October 2020, www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/navigating-humanitarian-exceptions-in-syria-oct2020.pdf.

¹³ "Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic." Relief Web, OCHA, Mar. 2021, reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/syria_2021_humanitarian_needs_overview.pdf.

¹⁴ "Press Release on the Cross-Border Mechanism for Humanitarian Aid Delivery into Syria." *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Russian Federation, 2020, www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4232110.

¹⁵ Todman, Will. "Cross-Border Aid, Covid-19, and U.S. Decisions in Syria," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/cross-border-aid-covid-19-and-us-decisions-syria>.

¹⁶ "Joint Agency Briefing Paper." Norwegian Refugee Council and Oxfam, 2020, www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/syria-joint-bp/bp-hard-lessons-syria-access-150720-en.pdf.

¹⁷ "Regions Not under Damascus Control in Most Dire Straits — Senior Russian Diplomat." *TASS*, 2021, tass.com/politics/1271673.

with the distribution of aid, that may just be a largely unsuccessful ploy to ensure donor confidence and does not necessarily prevent undue influence over the aid distribution committees.¹⁸ Some estimates suggest that as much as 40% of aid to the northwest is diverted by HTS and likely used for leverage over the civilian population.¹⁹ Russia insists that the cross-border system should be modified to ensure that aid distribution does not empower a designated terrorist organization.

On the opposite side, the U.S. and the EU level a similar accusation against the Syrian government for leveraging or manipulating aid deliveries.²⁰ However, herein lies an opportunity for cooperation – a joint and temporary Russian-Syrian-U.N. monitoring mechanism, possibly in collaboration with other U.N. member states or regional institutions, could alleviate monitoring concerns. Such collaborations are not unprecedented. In 2018, Russia and France jointly delivered humanitarian aid to Eastern Ghouta, which marked the first joint humanitarian aid operation in Syria between Russia and a Western country.²¹ As the CBM resolution was adopted in 2014 in response to the extraordinary circumstances in Syria, extraordinary monitoring mechanisms could be justified as well to ensure the transparency of the mechanism. The benefits of such a joint monitoring mechanism far outweigh the concerns for any possibility of harm to the credibility of the parties to the agreement.

IV. Policy Recommendations

A. *Monitoring and Transparency of Aid Distribution*

A system of verification for both the cross-line and cross-border aid deliveries will be necessary to ensure the implementation of obligations. In any policy that routes more aid through Damascus, the U.N. could include a requirement that strict standards for timely approval of humanitarian NGOs and transparent deliveries be maintained. Breaches of such requirements must have consequences. Additionally, the U.N. and bilateral donors could provide more transparent reporting on where and how much aid is distributed in Syria. More proportionate and transparent distribution of U.N.-funded aid to all Syrians in need would go a long way toward remedying perceptions of biased humanitarian operations in Syria. The U.N. could consider a partnered study of aid distribution and verification measures in Syria to be undertaken by experts of the United Nations University, a highly credible institution.

The GoS could allow the U.N. and the ICRC, perceived by all sides as a trusted organization, to monitor deliveries, which would be an essential step for improved accountability. Further,

¹⁸ "Mapping Local Governance in Syria — A Baseline Study. *National Agenda for the Future of Syria*, UN ESCWA, 2020" https://nafsprogramme.info/sites/default/files/2020-12/Summary%20of%20Mapping%20Local%20Governance-%20A%20Baseline%20Study%20_0.pdf.

¹⁹ Carter Center interview with envoys accredited to Syria, April 2021.

²⁰ Todman, Will. "Cross-Border Aid, Covid-19, and U.S. Decisions in Syria," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/cross-border-aid-covid-19-and-us-decisions-syria>.

²¹ France 24, "France and Russia to jointly deliver humanitarian aid to Syria," 2018, <https://www.france24.com/en/20180720-france-russia-jointly-deliver-humanitarian-aid-syria-eastern-ghouta-refugees>.

including regional organizations in any joint monitoring mechanism could boost credibility and attract additional funding for humanitarian efforts, such as Gulf Cooperation Council funding.²²

Local systems of transfer and distribution should be empowered, including the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. International donors should consider strengthening existing coordinating bodies and creating alternative supply chains and pooled funding mechanisms for local NGOs operating in government-controlled areas and across conflict lines.²³ Similarly, the GoS could relax approvals for NGOs to engage with the U.N. and expand the list of approved partners.

Effective verification modalities for the CBM deliveries of aid would provide much-needed confidence between the sides in this dispute. The current U.N. monitoring of aid deliveries through the CBM to Syria's northwest offers cluster meetings as a venue for U.N. member states to provide input on the effectiveness of the system or lack thereof.²⁴ Russia has access to these meetings but does not view them as a space for meaningful collaboration, citing concerns over lack of substance and concrete proposals on the table.²⁵ These cluster meetings cannot replace a robust monitoring mechanism.

Experts suggest "the West will need to work with Moscow to exercise pressure on Ankara to use its military presence in Idlib to confront violent extremists and ensure that aid flows do not empower HTS."²⁶ As such, Turkey's participation is essential to any joint monitoring mechanism given its military presence and control in non-government-controlled territories. Moscow has expressed interest in a joint monitoring mechanism or updated U.N. monitoring practices to ensure that aid through the cross-border mechanism does not fall into the hands of HTS.²⁷

Those measures would make possible a positive outcome at the UNSC in July, reauthorizing the CBM for another year.

B. Greater Flexibility in Sanctions Exemptions to Facilitate Humanitarian Assistance

In the July 2020 deliberations on UNSC Resolution 2533 regarding the CBM, China and Russia insisted on including amendments critical of sanctions. They abstained from the final vote when the amendments were rejected.²⁸

The U.S. and EU could consider improved facilitation of humanitarian waivers and expediting licenses for INGOs working throughout Syria as opposed to only areas outside of the GoS's

²² Interview with policy expert, April 2021.

²³ Hall, Natasha. "Lessons Learned from a Decade of Humanitarian Operations in Syria." Center for Strategic and International Studies, 29 Mar. 2021, www.csis.org/analysis/lessons-learned-decade-humanitarian-operations-syria.

²⁴ According to the World Health Organization, "A cluster is a group of agencies that gather to work together towards common objectives within a particular sector of emergency response. The cluster approach, instituted in 2006 as part of the UN Humanitarian Reform process, is an important step on the road to more effective humanitarian coordination."

²⁵ Interview with Russian and humanitarian aid policy experts, April 2021.

²⁶ Barnes-Dacey, Julien. "First Aid: How Russia and the West Can Help Syrians in Idlib." ECFR, 14 Apr. 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/article/first-aid-how-russia-and-the-west-can-help-syrians-in-idlib/>.

²⁷ Interview with policy expert, April 2021.

²⁸ United Nations Security Council, S/2020/698, <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/698>.

control. Exempting Syrian Airlines from sanctions when delivering humanitarian aid in cross-line operations or suspending those sanctions for 180 days would enable humanitarian efforts and lessen the logistical burden for developing the cross-line modality, especially since the conflict lines are safer and easier to cross by air. Also, to help prevent bank de-risking,²⁹ governing institutions should provide clear and specific guidance to banks about appropriate methods of working in the region while not running afoul of sanctions legislation and regulations.

C. Humanitarian Collaboration on COVID-19

As a confidence-building measure, the U.S. and the EU could consider providing COVID-19 testing kits and laboratory materials to support frontline health workers and facilities. They could also consider expanding and expediting COVID-19 vaccine deliveries to all areas of Syria as an essential humanitarian service. COVID-19 vaccination in Syria has been slow and subject to long delays. The World Health Organization, through COVAX, aims to vaccinate 20% of Syria's population by 2022, a modest goal given the virus's spread in the country.

D. Investing in Early Recovery

Greater emphasis on early recovery aid could be another adjustment that would ensure the sustainability of aid to all of Syria through cross-border and cross-line mechanisms. Relative stability in Syria has shifted the population's needs from immediate humanitarian assistance to early recovery projects with more sustainable outcomes, including support for livelihoods and the restoration of basic social services, including for education and health care facilities.

Food insecurity in Syria has reached record levels. The World Food Program estimates that in just over the past year, prices for basic food items increased by 236% and 4.5 million Syrians have become food insecure, bringing the total to 12.4 million Syrians now facing hunger.³⁰ The high cost of fuel and its limited availability have greatly affected pumped irrigation water for agriculture.³¹ This, in addition to the impact of climate change and poor water management, has resulted in a major reduction of crops, further pushing Syrians to the brink of famine. The U.S. and the EU could alleviate the life-threatening food security crisis by providing greater flexibility for early recovery funding affecting the agricultural sectors.

Other areas for greater flexibility in early recovery funding could include the restoration of certain critical infrastructure such as sewage networks.

²⁹ Bank de-risking refers to the choice by financial institutions to close accounts in order to avoid, rather than manage, risks associated with the account.

³⁰ The World Food Program (February 2021), "Twelve million Syrians now in the grip of hunger, worn down by conflict and soaring food prices." <https://www.wfp.org/news/twelve-million-syrians-now-grip-hunger-worn-down-conflict-and-soaring-food-prices>.

³¹ Samir Aita, "The Unintended Consequences of U.S. and European Unilateral Measures on Syria's Economy and its Small and Medium Enterprises," December 2020, The Carter Center, https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/syria-conflict/syria-unintended-consequences-aita-12-20.pdf.

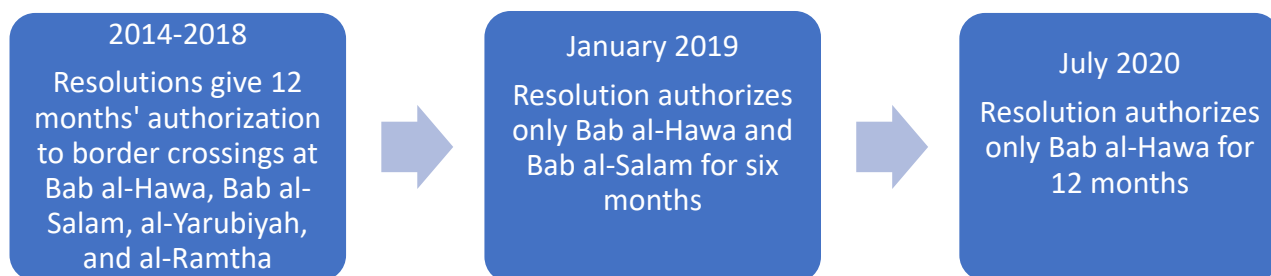
E. Collaboration on Explosives Clearing

Given the impact of explosives clearance on a variety of humanitarian needs as well as on future economic development, it is a necessary project for early recovery and therefore could provide a forum for easier collaboration and confidence-building among Russia, Syria, and the West. Focusing efforts on key infrastructure such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and health care facilities could pave the way for a meaningful collaboration. The sector specialized in humanitarian clearance of explosives is challenged by logistical obstacles for visas, registration, and the importation of equipment.

Syria and Russia could establish a joint center for humanitarian clearance of explosives similar to the Lebanon Mine Action Center, which garnered significant support from the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining.³² Unexploded ordnance threatens all regions of Syria, having killed 91 Syrians in 2020 alone.

³² For more information on LMAC, visit <https://lebmac.org/en/>.

Annex – Timeline of Border Crossings



Early Resolutions 2014 - 2018

22 February 2014 UNSC Resolution 2139 (2014) unanimously adopted

- Predecessor to border crossings; demands that all parties allow delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syria.

14 July 2014 UNSC Resolution 2165 (2014) unanimously adopted

- Authorizes crossings: Bab al-Hawa (Turkish border), Bab al-Salam (Turkish border), al-Yarubiyah (Iraqi border), al-Ramtha (Jordanian border).

2015-2016 Unanimous renewal

- Resolutions identical to UNSC Res. 2165 (2014) adopted: Res. 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), and 2332 (2016).

2017-2018 Resolutions pass

- Resolutions identical to UNSC Res. 2165 (2014) renewed: Res. 2393 (2017) and 2449 (2018)
- China, Bolivia, Russia abstain (first indication of opposition to border crossings).

December 2019 - January 2020

20 December 2019 Two new drafts proposed

- Belgian, German, Kuwaiti draft: Six-month reauthorization of all crossings except al-Ramtha. Vetoed by Russia and China.
- Russian draft: Excludes reauthorization of al Ramtha and al-Yarubiyah. Receives only 5 votes in favor.

10 January 2020 UNSC Resolution 2504 (2020) adopted

- 11 votes in favor. Abstentions: Russia, China, US, UK.
- Reauthorized only Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa for six months.
- Included provision requesting report from U.N. secretary-general on alternatives to al-Yarubiyah crossing.
- Report concluded that cross-line modalities are feasible but inefficient.

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³³ "In Hindsight: Six Days, Five Resolutions, One Border Crossing, August 2020 Monthly Forecast." Security Council Report, United Nations, 2020, www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-08/in-hindsight-six-days-five-resolutions-one-border-crossing.php; "Review of Alternative Modalities for the Border Crossing of Ya'rubiyah." ReliefWeb, UNSC, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/review-alternative-modalities-border-crossing-ya-rubiyah-report>.

June - July 2020

16 June 2020

Initial negotiations

- Germany and Belgium propose to ramp crossings back up in response to COVID-19.
- Reauthorize Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam for 12 months and al-Yarubiyah for six months.
- Russia suggests only reopening Bab al-Hawa for six months and closing Bab al-Salam.
- Germany and Belgium table al-Yarubiyah reopening.

4 July 2020

Belgian and German draft

- 12-month reauthorization of Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam.
- Russia and China oppose due to lack of language on sanctions and cross-line transfers.
- U.S. insists on inclusion of al-Yarubiyah.

6 July 2020

Belgian and German draft

- 12-month reauthorization of Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam.
- Vetoed by Russia and China.

8 July 2020

Russian draft

- Six-month reauthorization of only Bab al-Hawa.
- Included language supporting the efficacy of cross-line transfers and criticizing sanctions.
- Received less than the required number of votes to pass.

10 July 2020

Belgian and German draft

- Six-month reauthorization of Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam.
- Vetoed by Russia and China.

10 July 2020

Russian draft

- 12-month reauthorization of only Bab al-Hawa.
- Included language supporting the efficacy of cross-line transfers and criticizing sanctions.
- Received less than the required number of votes to pass.

11 July 2020

UNSC Resolution 2533 (2020) Adopted

- Drafted by Belgium and Germany.
- 12-month reauthorization of only Bab al-Hawa.
- Did not include language supporting cross-line transfers or criticizing sanctions.
- Resolution adopted. Abstentions: China, Russia, Dominican Republic.

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