

THREE SCENARIOS FOR THE IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON SYRIA

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Three Scenarios for the Impact of the War in Ukraine on Syria

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Summary

Russia's war against Ukraine could broadly take one of the following three trajectories: 1) End of the conflict through a political settlement, or full withdrawal of Russian troops, 2) Prolonged war within Ukraine or 3) Spiralling hybrid war between NATO and Russia outside of Ukraine. Although the third option should not be excluded, as of April 2022, the second one is the most likely while the first option is the least likely in the coming six months to a year.

Syria is the only place where US and Russian forces exist in the same country. The attempts to isolate Syria from Ukraine politically and economically is difficult but is considered possible; military compartmentalization is desired by both US and Russia, but not guaranteed. Based on interviews with 21 experts and officials, different scenarios for Syria in the next six to twelve months were discussed. The most likely is a freeze in the security domain, stalemate in the political domain, and deterioration in the economic domain. This is likely to last as long as the war stays within Ukraine. In the case of an escalation to a NATO-Russia confrontation, the security and political status quo in Syria is expected to dissolve.

The primary, most certain effects of the Ukrainian crisis on Syria are the humanitarian and economic impacts. Global commodity and energy prices are spiking, with limited donor capacity to fill the increasing humanitarian needs gap in Syria. Russia's ability to sustain economic assistance to the Syrian government will be affected and some of the Arab Gulf countries might try to mitigate the crisis. US secondary sanctions will control any normalisation between Assad and his neighbours.

Major military players in Syria (US, Turkey, Russia) will be keen to avoid escalations as long as the war stays within Ukraine. Russian withdrawal from Syria is not expected, but changes in its forces' structure and activities might create a vacuum for Iran and ISIS to fill. Any increase of NATO military activities in the East-Mediterranean and its connection to the Black Sea will be a source of possible NATO-Russian tensions, and that could embroil Syria.

The introduction of significant inclusive political reforms in Syria in the current circumstances was excluded by the interviewees. The political process in Geneva is likely to stall. Its meetings might take place but without substantive progress. Should a larger NATO-Russia confrontation take place, a collapse of UN-led efforts is likely.

Ukraine	Syria	Security domain	Political domain	Economic domain	Potential
End of conflict	Scenario 1	Freeze	Progress	Stabilization	Unlikely
Prolonged conflict	Scenario 2	Freeze	Stalemate	Deterioration	Most likely
Spillover	Scenario 3	Deterioration	Collapse	Deterioration	Likely

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1. Introduction

The war in Ukraine has brought more uncertainties to the precarious economic, political, and security situation in Syria. A Russian-Western face off has been taking place in Syria since 2015, extending the confrontation that began in Ukraine in 2014. Since the dramatic events of February 2022, the choices of all local and foreign players in Syria will likely be shaped by new configurations according to Ukraine. Interactions between the war trajectory in Ukraine and the behaviour of external and local players in Syria will define its security, economic, humanitarian, and political dynamics. The intersection between Russia's war in Ukraine and Syria could prove to be detrimental to Syria's foreign military presence, humanitarian and developmental programming and other peace-building efforts, as well as threatening the lives of Syrians themselves.

This paper presents three trajectories for war in Ukraine that will asymmetrically affect Syria's political, economic, and military domains. Three dynamic scenarios for Syria in the next six to twelve months appear as a result. This analysis is based on 21 interviews with experts and officials from Europe (8), US (8), UK (1), Turkey (3), and Russia (1) in the period from March 18 to April 11, 2022. The input of the experts and officials depended on their areas of expertise, and was incorporated into the overall analysis by the author. The presentation of the scenarios and their underlying assumptions focus on the logic and the circumstantial presence of key events, and how their effects could be interpreted in new situations. Elaboration on the reasoning behind these scenarios as well as their likelihood is designed to help policy makers, analysts, and program planners adapt to a rapidly changing environment. The situation in Ukraine is unpredictable, and possible extreme scenarios could lead to dramatic changes in Syria. Although unlikely for the time being, all players inside Syria should be mentally and logistically prepared for the worst.

2. Three trajectories for Ukraine

Russia's war against Ukraine began with an intention to achieve victory within days. That proved to be a massive miscalculation on Russia's part that could result in an open-ended Western-Russian confrontation. It is difficult to anticipate the course of the conflict in Ukraine, as it could take different directions: termination of the conflict through a political settlement or forced withdrawal of Russian troops, prolonged conflict within Ukraine that become frozen over time, or a spillover beyond Ukraine into a NATO-Russia hybrid confrontation. Some of these trajectories are more likely than others at this stage, but it is important to keep in mind that the course of war in Ukraine can change over time to more escalation or de-escalation. Consequently, the impact on Syria would also change.

The war will have its toll on both the West, Russia as well as the rest of the world. It is difficult at this stage to gauge the exact effect on each player, but the following mechanisms in box 1 could illustrate how the impact of Ukraine will be channeled to Syria.

Box 1: Connection between Ukraine and Syria

The impact of different trajectories in Ukraine on Syria is likely to take place through the following interconnected dynamics:

1. **Global economic consequences:** increase in prices for commodity, fertilisers, energy, and its impact on Syria's ability to secure its food and heating needs; and inputs for agriculture and industry. Important to note that Syria was already struggling economically before the war on Ukraine.
2. **Key players' attention to Syria:** political, financial, and military attention to Syria might be affected differently by the key players:
 - **EU:** levels of financial support to the humanitarian needs in Syria, support to the political process.
 - **Russia:** Military presence, support for the Syrian government on Idlib, and activities against ISIS. Pressures on Syrian government to progress on the political process. Russia's ability to continue economic support to the Syrian government.
 - **Turkey:** Protection of Idlib, attacks in North East, providing maritime and air access for Russian forces into Syria.
 - **Syrian government:** Engagement in political process, attacks on Idlib, efforts to normalise with Arab states.
 - **Iran:** Military and economic expansion.
 - **Israel:** Levels of operations against Pro-Iran proxies in Syria.
3. **Local players' choices:**
 - **ISIS:** Levels of expansion and attacks.
 - **SDF and Autonomous Administration of the North East of Syria (AANES):** Level of activities like attacks on Turkish controlled areas or holding elections in the North East.
 - **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS):** Levels of expansion and attacks on other opposition forces or government controlled areas.

2.1. First trajectory: End of conflict—Unlikely

The first trajectory would be the end of the conflict either through a political settlement or a total Russian withdrawal from Ukraine which allows for a formal end of the confrontations. One way to end the conflict is a West-Russian political agreement to be reached in a few months, or within years after multiple failed attempts to bring stability through a decisive military victory. Another way is a total Russian withdrawal from Ukraine after facing catastrophic military failures on the short or medium term, or suffering unbearable military cost and economic losses due to sanctions and the collapse of the economy on the long term.

Taking place sooner or later, an end of the conflict would allow for a partial or full lifting of sanctions, a slowdown of refugee movements out of Ukraine, a gradual return of refugees and displaced persons, reduced western armament of Ukraine, and restoration of energy and basic commodity supplies, reducing prices accordingly. In such a scenario, the maintenance of previous humanitarian funding levels for Syria could be possible, military confrontation could be avoided, and cooperation between the West and Russia on economic and political reconstruction

of Syria would be imagined though still challenging, as de-escalation in Ukraine could be transferred to Syria.

2.2. Second trajectory: Prolonged conflict —Most likely

A prolonged conflict within Ukraine would include periods of escalating violence followed by fluctuations of low level insurgencies and frozen fronts in various areas. Western sanctions would remain in place and even tighten. Russia would be acutely affected but the West would also be not unscathed though likely the effects may be felt less in the mid or longer term due to increasing economic decoupling.¹ Military support to Ukraine would continue, more refugees would flee the country, and their prospects of return would be gloomier. This trajectory could take years before a formal end of the conflict is reached, if ever. However, a quick recession in hostilities after the Donbas battle might limit the conflict to the East of Ukraine, and allow for refugees and IDPs to return to the safer areas in the West. Economic activities and export of commodities might resume within few months assuming Ukraine is still in control of the ports in the south-west like Odessa and Chernomorsk. In case hostilities remain all over Ukraine, commodity prices would continue to be high, and major disruptions of supply chains in addition to increasing energy prices will likely drive inflationary waves across the globe before reliable alternatives are found.

2.3. Third trajectory: Spillover beyond Ukraine—Likely

A spillover effect of the conflict to a wider, hybrid confrontation between NATO and Russia could happen if one of the parties perceived an action by the other side as either a declaration of war or an act of open hostility. Russia already considers Western sanctions as an 'act of war.' In response to what Russia perceives as NATO aggression, it could target the western military supply lines within Ukraine or its logistical hubs along the Ukrainian-Polish border. These Russian actions against NATO facilities, in addition to the suspected or confirmed use of chemical weapons, or the use of tactical nuclear weapons inside Ukraine could be a trigger for a wider confrontation with NATO. Resorts to cyber-attacks on critical infrastructures, increased NATO presence in the East-Mediterranean or Turkey's tilt towards the NATO against Russia could also have serious implications for Syria and the Middle East. Embarking on this trajectory will make it harder for the conflict to end. Worth mentioning is that the economic pressure on Russia will be increased as more sanctions are expected to be introduced.

Due to the entrenchment of positions on all sides and the difficulty to undo the damage to Ukraine and West-Russia relations, the possibility of the first scenario was not foreseen as of April 2022. Although all parties are working to avoid the third trajectory, unintended escalation might prove unavoidable. However, the continuation of the war within Ukraine was the most likely option for all experts in April 2022, given the difficulty to reconcile the differences on the future of the country. The three potential trajectories in Ukraine show that political, financial, and security compartmentalization between Ukraine and Syria is difficult. However, the impact on

¹ The longer the sanctions continue, the tougher it will be for Russia due to a parallel decoupling of the EU from Russian energy and a greater difficulty of Russia to re-orient flows eastwards.

Syria could be manifested in three different scenarios. Box 2 below illustrates the three domains before the discussion on the three scenarios for Syria in the next section.

Box 2: Domains of effects of Ukraine on Syria

Within the spectrum of trajectories in Ukraine, numerous developments in the security, economic/humanitarian, and political domains in Syria become possible. For the sake of simplicity, without compromising the complexity of the situation, the options for each domain are as follows:

1. Security domain:

Freeze: stability of current low levels of killings across different front lines; no major military operations between armies in Idlib, Turkish controlled areas, or in North East.

Deterioration: major open confrontation between Russia-US in North East, Russia/regime/Iran-Turkey in North West, Regime/Iran-SDF in North East, or SDF-Turkey in North East.

2. Political domain:

Progress: substantial development in Constitutional Committee meetings in Geneva and on a process that ends with a tangible inclusive political environment.

Stalemate: no progress, but no end to the process.

Collapse: termination of UN efforts, to be replaced (or not) by other nationally driven processes sponsored by Moscow, Tehran, and/or Damascus.

3. Economic/humanitarian domain:

Progress: decreasing humanitarian needs gap and progress in other economic indicators like growth, inflation, employment, and poverty; likely result of increased allocation of aid, including early recovery and reconstruction aid, introduction of political and economic reforms, partial lifting of sanctions, return to normal economic dynamics.

Deterioration: increasing humanitarian needs gap, collapse of major economic indicators

3. Three scenarios for Syria

The trajectories for Ukraine combined with the three domains as outlined above would produce the following three scenarios for Syria:

3.1. First scenario: Freeze in security domain, progress on political domain and improvement on economic domain—Unlikely

Assuming a termination of the conflict in Ukraine is reached between Russia and the West that includes military de-escalation, the gradual or partial lifting of sanctions, and the gradual

rebuilding of trust, some progress on Syria might be possible.² All experts considered this scenario unlikely on the short term as of April 2022. The freeze in the security domain is the most achievable component as it is desired by all major players (Russia, Turkey, US) at this stage of the war. However, progress on the political domain requires cooperation from Damascus and Tehran, and that is beyond the influence of both the West and Russia, assuming the latter two can agree. Making progress on the economic/humanitarian sides would also be a lengthy process, given the widening needs gap, the scale of physical destruction of infrastructure, and the lack of a conducive business environment attracting Syrian and foreign investment.³

3.2. Second scenario: Freeze in security domain, stalemate in political domain, deterioration in economic/humanitarian domain—Most likely

Assuming the war will be contained within Ukraine, it is likely that the absence of major security confrontations in Syria will remain. The determinant factor for any player to preserve or challenge the status quo is how satisfactory and costly the outcome will be. The satisfied players are the US, Russia, HTS and the SDF. US and Russian troops do not wish to see a clash, which will prove very costly for both. Therefore, they are likely to keep a low profile and maintain the existing de-confliction mechanism to avoid any unintended confrontations. Any major confrontation that HTS starts with Government forces is likely to be costly, and will risk the status quo. Unless Turkey decided to support the HTS in any attacks or advances, the latter is likely to respect the status quo. SDF is also less likely to initiate large attacks on Turkey, to avoid a costly destabilisation of a shaky status quo.

Turkey's diplomatic and economic importance to Russia is rising, and that deters Russia from challenging Turkey in Idlib. Turkey has blocked the Russian military naval and air connections to Syria since 23 April. Which is expected to slow but not to stop Russia's supplies to its forces in Syria.⁴ Turkey is unsatisfied with what it perceives as increased PYD/PKK presence in both Syria and Iraq. Ankara is currently attacking PYD leaders in North East of Syria, in an attempt to destabilise the SDF. Furthermore, if the AANES takes further political steps like organising elections in the Northeast of Syria, Turkish hostilities toward the SDF-controlled areas are likely to increase. A new Turkish ground operation in the North East requires consent from Russia, but that will risk provoking the US. A risk that Ankara might take as its leverage on both Russia and NATO is increasing due to its positions on Ukraine.

Although the Russian army will not leave Syria, its structure might be affected as long as the war in Ukraine is ongoing. The rotation of troops, transfer of commanders, and change in air assets might affect the Russian activities to counter ISIS, conduct joint-patrols with Turkey, and military policing in some areas. The distraction of Russia might affect these stabilising efforts in Syria, which could leave a vacuum for both Iran and ISIS. These two players are unsatisfied by the status quo; therefore, they are the strongest potential spoilers. However, pro-Iran militias' attacks

² A political settlement requires the agreement of both Ukrainians and the West, as the latter is expected to provide security guarantees, lift sanctions, and help codify the agreement at the UN Security Council. Without which any agreement is impossible.

³ Samy Akil and Karam Shaar, 8 February 2022, "[The politics of early recovery aid in Syria. Is it actually reconstruction aid?](#)" The Atlantic Council. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

⁴ Kirill Semenov, April 2022, "[How Russia losing its Black Sea flagship Moskva could reverberate in Syria](#)," Al-Monitor. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

on US forces, Turkish controlled areas or the SDF are likely to invite a response. US, Israel, and potentially Turkey could attack pro-Iranian militias.^{5,6}

Similarly, ISIS is likely to exploit the security vacuum resulting from the Russian distraction, and the reduction in activities of the US forces on the short term.⁷ However, the US will be determined to combat ISIS if the latter increased its presence to a threatening point. As the war in Ukraine drags on, multiple small pockets of confrontations across the country are likely to emerge as a result of the distraction of major powers, with locals' expansions to fill the vacuum.⁸

The political domain is likely to be as stagnant as the security domain. The seventh UN-led Constitutional Committee meeting was held in Geneva in March 2022, ended with no progress. Another round is planned for the end of May 2022. However, experts do not expect this round to produce meaningful outcomes either. Russia prioritises Ukraine and it will be harder to put any pressure on a Syrian Government that feels victorious militarily. Additionally, Syria is becoming more crucial to Russia's international diplomatic efforts in recognising the Donbas republics, voting for Russia in the UN General Assembly, and supporting the Russian narrative on the war at large. While in this scenario Iran is distancing itself from Moscow to protect the progress made on the JCPOA, it is getting closer to Damascus to confirm its commitment to Syria.⁹ The West, Russia, the Arabs, and Israelis fear increasing Iranian influence to fill the space left by Russia. An acceleration of Arab normalisation with Assad is proposed by some Arab countries like the UAE and Jordan as a balancing act to a potential increase in Iran's clout.¹⁰ Still, sanctions and lack of reforms will likely hamper the translation of political openness to economic gains.

The secondary sanctions imposed by the US on Syria, and the amount of humanitarian aid donated by the EU will control the speed of any normalisation with Syria. As the economic situation is expected to worsen, there is an opportunity for small trade reforms for easing economic isolation in terms of more aid and early recovery project. Still, Assad's diplomatic support to Russia in Ukraine will likely reduce the appetite of the West to support Syria with more aid.¹¹ The longer the war drags on, the less financial assistance to world crises like Afghanistan, Yemen, Tigray, and others, including Syria will be available.

Humanitarian needs in Syria are already overwhelming, and the pledged funding barely covered half of it in 2021.¹² An increase in food (e.g. wheat, cereals, cooking oil, and other basic substances) and energy prices will widen the humanitarian needs gap all over Syria, and the shortage of inputs to agriculture (e.g. fertilisers, energy, water) and industrial activities will likely

⁵ Suleiman Al-Khalidi, 22 April 2022, «[Israel intensifying air war in Syria against Iranian encroachment](#)», Reuters. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

⁶ Reuters, 7 April 2022, «[Four U.S. personnel injured in Syria attack -officials](#)», Accessed on 24 April 2022.

⁷ Taim M Al-Hajj, 15 March 2022, «[The Insurgency of ISIS in Syria](#)», Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

⁸ Patrick Haenni, and Arthur Quesnay, 5 April 2022, «[Coming up through the cracks : the Islamic State's resurgence in Syria and Iraq](#)», CADMUS, Middle East Direction, European University Institute. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

⁹ Syria Update Digests, COAR, 28 March 2022, «[Iranian Foreign Minister to Damascus, Welcoming Arab Normalisation or Reminding of Tehran Influence?](#)» Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹⁰ 18 March 2022, «[Assad Visits U.A.E. in Latest Sign of Re-engagement](#)», New York Times. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹¹ Reports on recruitment of Syrians to fight in Ukraine are not confirmed. No track of transfers or arrivals of Syrians to either side of the war in Ukraine is confirmed as of the time of writing. However, the rumors that Syrians from government controlled areas are going to support Russia's military efforts constitute a source of anger to the West. For more please see: RM-Team, April 2022, «[Syrian Mercenaries in Ukraine](#)». Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹² UNOCHA, February 2022, «[2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic](#)». Accessed on 24 April 2022.

prolong it.¹³ Remittances transferred to Syrians by their families constitute a considerable source of income to millions. Any decrease in their size will affect the overall resilience of Syrians negatively.¹⁴

Before the war in Ukraine, more than 60% of Syrians were expected to be food insecure in 2022, with their humanitarian needs hardly half covered by the donor community.¹⁵ The spike of global commodity and energy prices along with a triple pressure on donor countries' budgets will be enormous.¹⁶ The Syrian donor conference in Brussels held in May 2022 has attracted pledges for more than 6 billion Euros, a billion more than 2021. Usually the real contributions are less than the promised which reflect the fact that the amount covers less than half of the overall needs. Yet the doubling of prices will mean that less than a quarter of the needs will be covered. The Russian economic support to the Syrian government is also likely to be affected. The exports of wheat to Syria depends on shipments from Russian ports through the Black Sea and credit lines from Russian banks.¹⁷ With war in Ukraine reducing the movement of ships and increasing insurance costs, and sanctions affecting trading relations with Russia and its financial system, Syrian contracts to buy Russian wheat might not be upheld.¹⁸

The Syrian government as well as the authorities in the North (The Salvation Government, Interim Government, AANES) are introducing austerity measures and attempting to find alternatives to the missing goods.¹⁹ However, in a crisis of global scale, weak entities and poor countries will struggle to adapt. The outcome will be famine, extreme poverty, mass unemployment, and destabilisation all over Syria. Both Russia and the West realise the gravity of the humanitarian crisis. The West will try to renew the Cross Border Mechanism (CBM) through the UNSCR 2585 in July 2022 and put contingency planning in place should Russia veto it.

Russia perceives the humanitarian situation in Syria as precarious, thinking that renewing the 2585 might be a way to mitigate the risk. Russia also has a vested interest in maintaining its leverage on Syria at the UNSC through this resolution. Another reason for Russia to support the CBM is that it gives a chance to ask for more funds for early recovery in Syria's government-controlled areas. Russia's final decision will likely be made shortly before the renewal date in June-July 2022 and will pertain to the atmosphere between Russia and the West then. Regardless of the CBM outcome, the situation will not improve without a significant increase in aid in the short term, the employment of strategies to reduce aid-dependency in the medium to long term, in addition to an improvement in self-recovery capabilities, and the development of the overall business environment in Syria.

¹³ Joseph Daher, 28 March 2022, ["The Hellish Cycle Continues for Syria: The Economic Impacts of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine,"](#) War Time and Post Conflict in Syria, European University Institute. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹⁴ Ferid Belhaj, 7 March 2022, ["Compounded stress: The impact of the war in Ukraine on the Middle East and North Africa,"](#) World Bank Blogs. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹⁵ UNOCHA, February 2022, ["2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic,"](#) Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹⁶ FAO, 25 March 2022, ["The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the current conflict,"](#) Information Note, Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹⁷ Kinda Makiesh, March 2017, ["Syria signs 3 million ton wheat contract with Russia,"](#) Reuters. Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹⁸ Syria Update Digests, COAR, 10 January 2022, ["Syria's Wheat Crisis Foreshadows Famine,"](#). Accessed on 24 April 2022.

¹⁹ OXFAM, 15 March 2022, ["Before we feared dying of war, now we fear dying of hunger": Ukraine crisis propelling hunger in Syria,"](#) Accessed on 24 April 2022.

Experts considered the second scenario as the most likely for Syria. However, they did not exclude the third scenario, especially if the war in Ukraine moves beyond its borders. In such scenario, Syria is likely to be negatively affected in all domains.

3.3. Third scenario: Deterioration in security domain, collapse in political domain, deterioration in economic domain—Likely

If the war in Ukraine spills beyond its borders in traditional or non-traditional (cyber and information) forms, security dynamics in Syria could deteriorate. Threat perceptions of the major players will vary, and in the absence of clear understanding of intentions an escalation might take place despite the presence of deconfliction mechanisms. In Syria, any sign that the US and Turkey are trying to isolate the North from the rest of the country as perceived by Russia will

likely be interpreted as an act of hostility. Attacks on US forces could be justified as the liberation of Syria and reclaiming its territorial integrity. A US response to Russian hostilities is likely, and the outcome of any confrontation is difficult to predict. If the US decided to double down and protect its positions in Syria, the status quo might be preserved, but if the US decided to leave Syria to avoid a wider confrontation with Russia, Russian/regime control could be extended to the North East and put the Turkish presence on the edge. However, experts emphasised that they do not expect such a scenario to occur.

The domino effect of the war spreading out of Ukraine might change Turkey's current balancing position. Although unlikely at the moment, attacks on Idlib will trigger a massive refugee movement towards Turkey and the EU. That might serve Russia through destabilising Turkey and distracting and weakening the EU's resolve against Russia in Ukraine. That scenario was deemed unlikely at the moment.

Near Syria, any NATO maritime activities close to the Russian base in Tartus and its ships in the area could be perceived as a sign of hostility. There are no existing deconfliction mechanisms between Russia and the US's Sixth Fleet or NATO's presence in the East-Mediterranean. Russia's position on Turkey will also depend on the Turkish contribution to any NATO (or its member states') movements in the East-Mediterranean or attempts to block the Russian access to the Black Sea. It is also worth noting that Turkey is worried about taking over the south of Ukraine by Russia, which poses big challenges to the Turkish national security. Since the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine has been always perceived as a buffer state between Turkey and Russia, as well as an important member of the Black Sea security and legal arrangements. The Turkish balance of power against Russia will be upset to the latter's favour if Russia dominated Ukraine and controlled the northern shores of the Black Sea. This could motivate Turkey to change its position towards NATO.

A total Russian military withdrawal out of Syria is deemed unlikely under this scenario given the importance of the base in Tartus for its superpower projection in the East-Med and to secure the access to the Black Sea. The rotation of Russian troops and relocation of military equipment in relation to the war in Ukraine is likely to continue, however. With hostilities between Russia and the West getting out of control, interest in maintaining the political process under the UN auspices will disappear. Damascus, with the support of Moscow, could declare the death of the Geneva process. This scenario will quash dimming hopes for any western support in

reconstruction or the lifting of sanctions on Russia and Syria. Further economic and humanitarian collapse is to be expected in Syria.

4. Conclusion

Dynamics in Ukraine and Syria have been interlinked since 2015 and will likely continue to be in the future. Three of the major players are involved directly or indirectly in Ukraine, and in Syria. The EU has stakes in both Ukraine and in Syria, despite the differences in prioritisation. Syrian organizations as well as foreign International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) should watch for potential spillover effects from Ukraine to Syria and be ready for contingency measures. This exercise took place several weeks after the beginning of the war on Ukraine, and its main purpose was to provide a framework for thought on the subject and point out to the potential directions for dynamics in Syria. The broadness of scenarios for Syria reflects the prevailing uncertainty at this stage of the war in Ukraine. Experts expected more clarity on the situation by summer 2022. Another round of assessment could be warranted at this time.