Memorandum To The Head Of State Regarding Special Session Of The UN Secretary Council

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Memorandum

To: Head of State
From: Permanent Representative to the United Nations
Subject: Request for a Special Session of the United Nations Security Council on Syria and International Counterterrorism
Date: July 2026

This memorandum recommends supporting an urgent Security Council session focused on civilian protection and stabilization in Syria, followed by a coordinated review of international counterterrorism policy. The original memorandum correctly identifies humanitarian need, chemical-weapons concerns, international law, and the danger of relying only on military instruments. Its statistics and institutional terminology are outdated, however, and the body is called the United Nations Security Council, not the “UN Secretary Council.” (United Nations in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2026; United Nations Security Council, 2026).

Purpose of the Requested Session

The proposed session should produce practical commitments rather than another general expression of concern. It should address protection of civilians, humanitarian access, displacement, recovery of basic services, accountability for serious violations, chemical-weapons obligations, and the security risks created by fragmented authority. The Council should also consider how counterterrorism measures interact with humanitarian law and long-term stabilization. These subjects are connected: communities deprived of safety, education, livelihoods, and legitimate institutions are more vulnerable to armed-group recruitment, while indiscriminate security measures can deepen grievances. The meeting should therefore combine emergency action with a framework for sustained recovery and lawful prevention. The session should define decisions, deadlines, and reporting responsibilities.

Updated Situation in Syria

The United Nations' March 2026 Common Country Analysis describes Syria after fourteen years of conflict and recent developments in 2025 as moving from humanitarian response toward recovery, reconstruction, and longer-term development, while emphasizing that risks remain severe. UN briefings in early 2026 reported renewed clashes in Aleppo, Hasakeh, and Raqqa, large-scale displacement, interrupted electricity and water, constrained food supply chains, and suspended schooling in many locations. A July 2026 Security Council briefing again described fragile conditions in the south. The situation is therefore neither the same as the height of the civil war nor a completed post-conflict transition. Policy must respond to both continuing insecurity and the urgent need to rebuild institutions and public services.

Civilian Protection

The first priority should be protection of civilians under international humanitarian law. All parties must distinguish civilians and civilian objects from military objectives, take feasible precautions, and avoid disproportionate attacks. Hospitals, schools, water systems, aid workers, and displacement sites require particular attention because damage to essential infrastructure multiplies harm beyond the immediate strike. The Council should demand transparent investigation of credible allegations regardless of the responsible actor. Civilian protection cannot be reduced to condemnation after casualties occur. It requires operational deconfliction, early warning, safe evacuation where genuinely voluntary, unexploded-ordnance clearance, and support for local organizations that understand community risks. Protection must also include access to justice and remedies for survivors.

Humanitarian Access and Basic Services

Humanitarian assistance must reach people according to need rather than political alignment. The Council should support predictable access for food, medicine, shelter, fuel, and winter assistance while strengthening Syrian civilian institutions capable of delivering services impartially. Temporary convoys save lives, but repeated emergency delivery cannot substitute indefinitely for functioning water, electricity, health, and education systems. Donors should coordinate recovery financing with safeguards against diversion, discrimination, and corruption. Sanctions and counterterrorism rules should include workable humanitarian exemptions so that banks and suppliers do not refuse lawful transactions through excessive caution. Monitoring should measure actual household access, not only the number of trucks or projects announced.

Displacement, Refugees, and Return

Millions of Syrians have experienced internal or cross-border displacement during the conflict. Return should be voluntary, safe, informed, and dignified, not driven by premature withdrawal of assistance or pressure from host governments. People need reliable information about security, housing, property rights, documentation, schools, health care, and livelihoods. The Council should support mechanisms for missing persons, civil records, property claims, and family reunification. Host countries also require sustained international support because refugee protection has regional costs. Durable solutions may include return, local integration, or resettlement depending on individual circumstances. A numerical return target should never replace protection standards or the choices of displaced families.

Chemical Weapons and Disarmament

Any use of chemical weapons is prohibited and must be investigated through competent international mechanisms. Security Council resolution 2118 established obligations concerning Syria’s chemical-weapons program, and UN briefings in January 2026 reported continued engagement between the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and Syrian authorities, alongside the need for safe access to insecure sites. The Council should require full declarations, preservation of evidence, access for inspectors, and cooperation on unresolved questions. Military action justified as deterrence must still comply with the UN Charter and international law. Accountability should be based on verified evidence rather than selective political attribution, because credibility is essential to preventing future use.

International Law and the Use of Force

Member states should be reminded that concern about atrocities does not eliminate legal constraints on force. The UN Charter prohibits the threat or use of force except in self-defense or with Security Council authorization, subject to established legal requirements. Governments frequently disagree about how these rules apply to specific operations, but unilateral escalation can worsen civilian harm and weaken collective security. The memorandum should therefore urge states to disclose their legal basis, objectives, precautions, and plans for preventing escalation. Diplomacy is not passivity. It is the process through which lawful pressure, monitoring, sanctions, mediation, and protection arrangements can be combined without turning Syrian territory into an arena for competing external wars.

The Council’s Political Role

The Security Council cannot resolve Syria through humanitarian statements alone. It must reduce veto-driven paralysis, support inclusive political processes, and coordinate with regional actors whose security decisions affect the country. Trust-building, identified by the UN’s 2026 analysis as a cross-cutting priority, requires credible local participation rather than agreements negotiated only among external powers. Women, displaced communities, minorities, civil society, and local authorities should have meaningful channels into recovery planning. The Council should establish measurable benchmarks for civilian protection, access, governance, and accountability and request regular reporting. Consensus may be difficult, but limited agreements on practical protection can still reduce harm while broader political questions remain contested.

Counterterrorism after the Territorial Defeat of Major Caliphates

The original memorandum reflects a 2018 debate about shifting U.S. strategy from terrorism toward great-power competition. That tension remains relevant, but counterterrorism has changed. Armed groups adapt through local insurgency, online recruitment, financing networks, prison populations, and exploitation of ungoverned or poorly governed spaces. Military pressure may disrupt imminent threats, yet it rarely addresses the political and social conditions that allow organizations to regenerate. The Security Council should encourage strategies that integrate intelligence, policing, border cooperation, financial controls, community prevention, rehabilitation where appropriate, and protection of human rights. Counterterrorism should be treated as sustained risk management rather than a single global “war” with a clear endpoint.

Soft Power and Prevention

Diplomacy, development, education, accountable governance, and credible public communication are security tools rather than charitable additions to military power. Cutting civilian assistance while increasing kinetic capability can produce short-term reach and long-term vulnerability. Local institutions need capacity to deliver justice, resolve disputes, and provide opportunity, because abusive or absent governance can become a recruitment asset for violent groups. Prevention programs should be evaluated rigorously and should not label entire religious, ethnic, or political communities as suspect. The most useful partnerships are locally legitimate, transparent, and designed around specific risk factors. Soft power is effective when conduct supports the values a government claims, not merely when messaging is polished.

Human Rights Safeguards

Counterterrorism measures can themselves become drivers of insecurity when they involve torture, collective punishment, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, or discriminatory surveillance. Such practices violate rights, produce unreliable intelligence, and damage cooperation with communities. The Council should insist that sanctions listings include notice, evidence review, and meaningful procedures for delisting. Detention facilities holding alleged fighters and family members require lawful status determinations, humane conditions, and solutions consistent with child protection. Repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration policies should be based on individual evidence rather than guilt by association. Security and rights are mutually reinforcing when institutions are accountable and remedies exist for abuse.

Burden Sharing and Partnerships

The United States and other capable states should remain engaged, but burden sharing should not mean transferring responsibility to governments lacking resources or accountability. Effective partnerships define roles according to comparative capacity: intelligence sharing, financial investigation, peacebuilding, refugee support, justice assistance, or reconstruction. Regional organizations and neighboring countries possess essential knowledge and interests, while UN bodies provide legal authority, coordination, and technical expertise. Funding should be predictable enough for multi-year programs rather than dependent on crisis headlines. Partners should also report civilian-harm mitigation and program outcomes. Shared responsibility works when standards are common and oversight follows resources, not when powerful states outsource controversial operations.

Recommended Decisions

The head of state should direct the delegation to support an emergency Security Council briefing and a negotiated presidential statement or resolution containing five elements. First, demand civilian protection and sustained humanitarian access. Second, request a time-bound UN plan for recovery of water, electricity, health, education, and documentation systems. Third, reaffirm cooperation with the OPCW and preservation of evidence. Fourth, require counterterrorism measures to comply with international humanitarian and human-rights law. Fifth, establish quarterly reporting on displacement, returns, detainees, civilian harm, and service restoration. The delegation should consult regional states and Syrian civil society before tabling language so that the proposal reflects operational needs rather than diplomatic symbolism.

Conclusion

Syria remains a serious test of international peace and security, but the appropriate response in 2026 differs from a memorandum written at the height of earlier fighting. The country faces fragile security alongside a difficult transition from emergency relief toward recovery. A special Security Council session should connect civilian protection, humanitarian access, chemical-weapons compliance, displacement, service restoration, and political trust-building. Counterterrorism policy should combine lawful security action with prevention, diplomacy, and institutional legitimacy. The recommended approach avoids both disengagement and open-ended militarization. It asks member states to use the Council as intended: to coordinate collective action, constrain escalation, and protect people whose lives are shaped by decisions made far beyond their communities.

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