Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Programme Document

Syria – Strategic Framework (2014-2015)

Stabilisation Programme – phase 2 for 2015-2016

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Programme overview

Programme details	
Department	Department for Middle East and North Africa
File number	2015 - 30338
Country	Syria
Date	23 September 2015
Implementation period	1 October 2015 – 31 August 2016

Strategic objective
To promote stability and a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Syria to enable progress towards achieving sustainable peace and an inclusive society.

Budget	Million DKK
Thematic Pillar 1: Political solution and conflict mitigation	8
Thematic Pillar 2: Stabilisation and service delivery (incl. unallocated funds)	67.5
Thematic Pillar 3: Civil society, transitional justice and human rights	20
Other (unallocated funds for M&E, review, TA, etc.)	4.5
Total	**100**

Source of funding	Million DKK
Peace and Stabilisation Fund (DAC)	80
Danish Arab Partnership Programme	20

Contents

Abbreviations

ACU	Assistance Coordination Unit
AJACS	Access to Justice and Community Security
ASI	Adam Smith International (implementing partner)
CA	Creative Associates (implementing partner)
CIJA	Commission for International Justice and Accountability
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
DAPP	Danish Arab Partnership Programme
FSA	Free Syrian Army
FSP	Free Syria Police
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (implementing partner)
ICHL	International Criminal Humanitarian Law
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICSP	Integrated Community Security Programme
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant[1]
JAN	Jabhat al-Nusra
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (implementing partner)
LCC	Local Coordination Committees
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Mid-Term Review (of the Syria Strategic Framework and Transition Programme)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PSF	Peace and Stabilisation Fund
SfCG	Search for Common Ground
SOC	Syrian Opposition Coalition[2]
SRTF	Syria Recovery Trust Fund
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TDA	The Day After (implementing partner)
UN	United Nations
UNDPA	United Nations Department of Political Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training And Research
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOSAT	United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme
WFP	World Food Programme

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[1] Please note that in this document, ISIL is used throughout to refer to the Islamic State also known as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and *Daesh* (Arabic transliteration of the Islamic State).

[2] Other terms for the SOC include the National Coalition (NC) and Etilaf. In this document the term SOC is used throughout.

1 Preface

In May 2014, the Danish Parliament approved the strategic framework for a transition programme for Syria, which supported activities totalling 113.2 million DKK, with a further 100 million DKK planned for use in 2015. The overall objective of the first phase of the programme was to support moderate opposition actors and help promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict while ensuring an improved delivery of services to people living in opposition-held territory.

The Syria Transition Programme document for 2014 specified three areas of thematic funding to support the programme's overall objective. Denmark was one of first international donors working for Syria that developed a cohesive framework for programming.

In March 2015, the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Syria Strategic Framework and Transition Programme 2014-2015 was completed. The MTR recommended that an update be completed of the Syria Transition Programme in order for 2015-16 funding to be allocated in a coherent and effective manner. A programme update team was assembled in May 2015 comprising two MFA/Danida representatives and an external consultant who conducted a desk-based review as well as a visit to Istanbul and Gaziantep.

The programme update team completed their assessment and proposed a strategic realignment of the Danish Syria programme to focus less on transition and more on stabilisation initiatives. The three original thematic areas of intervention of the Syria Transition Programme 2014 remain largely relevant and have been adapted with only minor changes to form the core components of phase two of the "Syria Stabilisation Programme", updated for context and objectives from the previous "Syria Transition Programme".

Phase two of the Danish Syria Programme sets out a modified **strategic objective:** "To promote stability and a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Syria to enable progress towards achieving sustainable peace and an inclusive society."

The programme's three thematic areas and their respective thematic objectives are:

Thematic objective 1: Political solution and coordination of track I and track II initiatives - to improve the conditions for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Thematic objective 2: Stabilisation and service delivery - to improve the population's access to basic services and community security, empower moderate actors and foster community resilience to extremist actors.

Thematic objective 3: Civil society, transitional justice and human rights - to strengthen the role of civil society to act as a force for democratic change and inclusive peace, to support transitional justice and to promote respect for human rights.

The Danish Syria Stabilisation Programme (hereafter referred to as the "Programme") builds on the 2014 programme, placing a greater emphasis on stabilisation measures amidst ongoing conflict, with the intention of more directly focusing on activities that can address the consequences of the conflict's protracted and divisive nature. Many activities proposed for 2015-16 funding are a continuation of measures already begun under 2014-15 funding (see Annex 1 and Annex 2).

The new Programme is expected to run until 31 August 2016 and will then be replaced by a three-year joint Iraq Syria programme for 2016-2018. The development of this programme will begin in the autumn of 2015 with a view to finalizing the programme in mid-2016. The expanded multi-year programme is expected to build on the results achieved of the Syria and

Iraq stabilisation programmes for 2015 and will explore the possibility of working within the same thematic areas of intervention.

2 Introduction

The conflict in Syria, now in its fifth year, has had devastating consequences for the country's infrastructure and the civilian population inside Syria. The protracted fighting has resulted in a massive humanitarian crisis and has displaced over 11 million people from their homes. Despite recent opposition gains in the South and areas in the North, the conflict is likely to continue and contribute to growing sectarian division and greater regional tension. As such, the violence in Syria will continue to pose a threat to regional stability, to international security and to Danish security interests.

Denmark is committed to playing an active role in managing and contributing to solving global security challenges in identified areas of interest. Denmark has since the outbreak of the conflict provided substantial humanitarian assistance inside Syria and to the neighbouring countries, but humanitarian assistance is insufficient on its own to alleviate all human suffering and does not address the root-courses of the conflict. As such, it remains critical to use other instruments that can contribute to the stability of Syria as circumstances allow while providing support to moderate actors that can play an important role in the development of a more democratic and inclusive Syria.

The strategic objective of the Danish programme in Syria is: "To promote stability and a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Syria to enable progress towards achieving sustainable peace and an inclusive society."

To promote this objective, Denmark launched a one-year transition programme for Syria in 2014. This programme has now been updated with a revised phase 2, placing greater emphasis on stabilisation measures within Syria. The updated Programme for 2015 has a budget of DKK 100 million and continues to consist of three "thematic areas of intervention": 1) Political solution and conflict mitigation; 2) Stabilisation and service delivery in the opposition-controlled areas; and 3) Human rights and civil society. Funding will be provided through the Peace and Stabilization Fund (DKK 80 million) and the Danish Arab Partnership Programme (DKK 20 million).

The Programme has been designed on the basis of a comprehensive approach and should be seen as complementary to the Danish diplomatic efforts, and the Danish response to the humanitarian crisis. Building on the first phase of activities in 2014, the Programme will prioritise close partnerships with the Syrian opposition coalition where possible, Syrian civil society organizations and international partners and will be implemented with a high degree of flexibility in order to take advantage of emerging opportunities and ensure that interventions remain relevant in the unpredictable and rapidly changing situation within Syria.

It is important to be realistic about expected results in the short-term – not least given the short duration of the transition programme. The current conflict and ongoing fighting in Syria prevents long-term development engagements. Instead, the engagements in the programme should to a large extent be regarded as short-term stabilisation and early recovery efforts that are first and foremost meant to stabilise the situation and thereby create the basis for a longer-term development engagement at a later stage, which will only be possible on a significant scale once a political solution to the conflict has been achieved.

The programme will be implemented in a highly volatile, fast-changing and complex environment, which will entail considerable risks and setbacks. It is important to recognise that there is a considerable risk that the efforts will not lead to sustainable results. However,

balancing risks and opportunities – under the current circumstances – the risks involved in attempting to stabilise Syria are outweighed by the potential positive impact an engagement can have in terms of providing human security, improving the of protection civilians as well as contributing to regional peace and international security.

3 Context analysis: Stabilisation amidst ongoing conflict

The Syria conflict is now in its fifth year. It is estimated that over 230,000 people have lost their lives[3] in the conflict so far, and over 11 million are thought to have been displaced internally or across neighbouring borders by the conflict. The humanitarian crisis afflicting Syrians is severe and shows no sign of abating. The chance of achieving a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the near future seems small. Ongoing marginalisation of the moderate armed opposition and increasing sectarianism present significant risks to Danish programming for stabilisation and transition in the coming year.
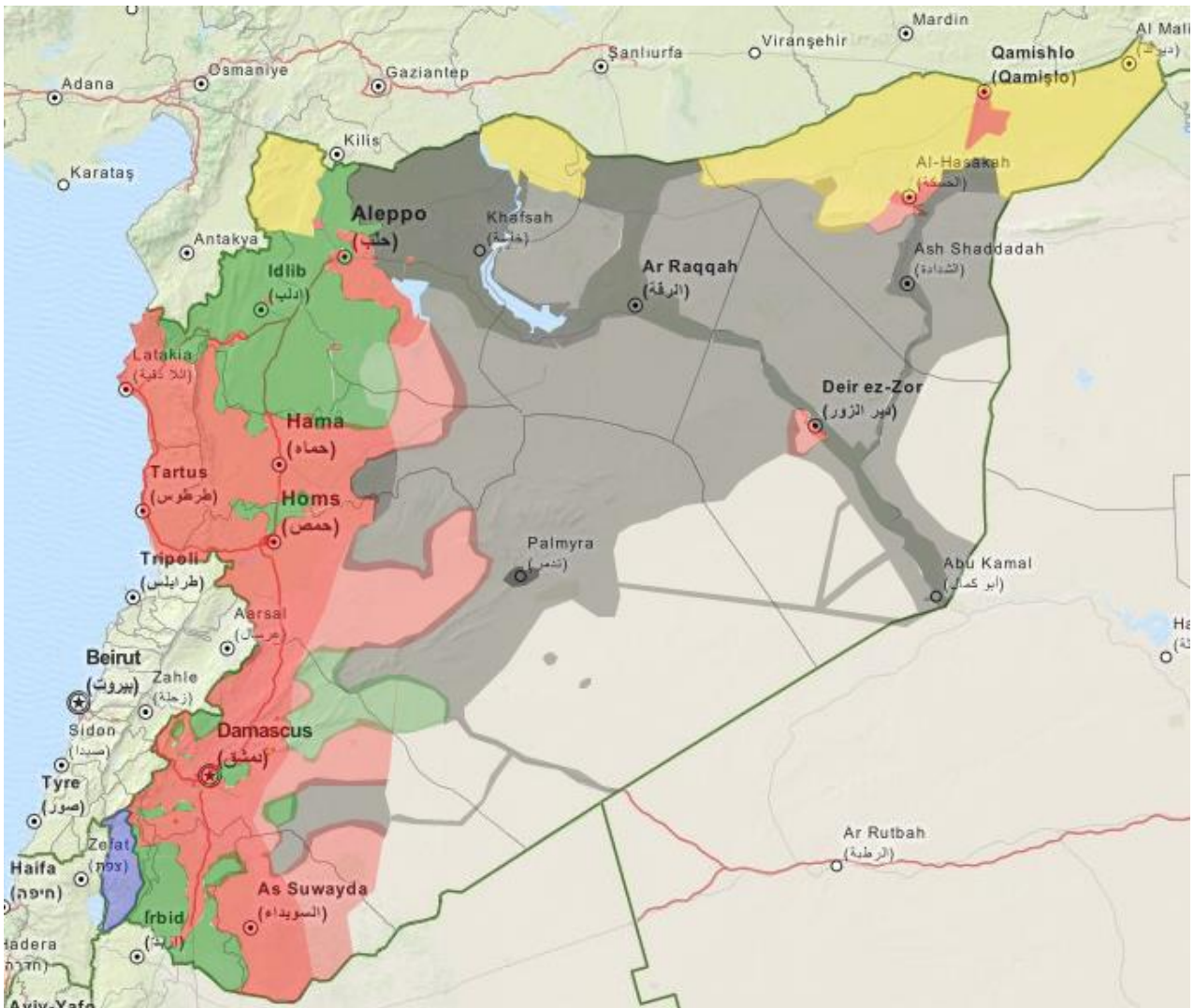
With a political solution to the conflict remaining unforeseeable in the short term, Danish priorities focus on working with the most flexible and appropriate activities that can support credible alternatives to extremism, ameliorate community-level resilience against the predations of conflict, and that continue to introduce and build on local stability in opposition-controlled areas. Supporting stabilisation amidst ongoing conflict provides the most appropriate and effective means for Danish programming to prepare the conditions for a future and meaningful political transition. This support will also indirectly address the broader issue of migration and displacement by working to make it more attractive for Syrians to remain with their families and contribute to the stability of their communities inside Syria as well as the broader region.

Power in Syria in mid-2015 is divided between four principle actors, although in reality these four groups are highly fragmented. The map below shows these four groups: the Syrian regime loyal to Bashir al-Assad (red), the Syrian opposition (green), ISIL (black), and the Kurdish groups (yellow). Up until 2013 the conflict was largely characterised by the Regime vs. Opposition conflict, with Kurdish groups maintaining a pragmatic neutrality. However, the rise of the terrorist group ISIL has challenged this dynamic, as the group has launched offensives against all three other actors, albeit with varying degrees of intensity.

This four-colour conceptualisation hides greater levels of nuance and complexity. The Syrian opposition is not a cohesive opposition block, and contains a spectrum of armed groups ranging from secular-moderates, to extremist groups that are scarcely more moderate then ISIL (including Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda affiliate group operating in Syria). Meanwhile, the Syrian regime's limited powerbase of Sunni loyalists and religious minorities (notably the Alawites and Druze) has started to influence their military capability. They are now almost completely reliant on foreign proxy forces, such as Hezbullah, Iran, Russia, and various regional Shia militia groups.

The rise of ISIL has had a significant impact on the dynamics of the conflict, and has until now largely worked in favour of the regime's interest. ISIL has strengthened the regime's attempts to build a narrative that describes the situation in Syria as a struggle between the secular government and Islamic extremists; while the regime's willingness to make tactical agreements with ISIL has enabled it to maximise its military pressure on the armed opposition. To date the only group in Syria which has proven itself effective at countering ISIL has been the Kurdish YPG, whose ground forces played a central role in the liberation of Kobane in January 2015.

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3 Syrian Observatory on Human Rights, May 2015

🟥 🟥 Regime Controlled (high/low)		🟨 🟨 Kurdish Controlled (high/low)
🟩 🟩 Opposition control (high/low)		⬛ ⬜ ISIL Controlled (high/low)

Source: @deSyracuse Maps, using data from the Syrian Observatory on Human Rights. Accurate as of 1st June 2015

3.1 Prospects for a political solution

The changing military dynamics inside Syria could require a rapid reappraisal of the political situation. This could bring with it new opportunity for a political settlement. However, the lack of common ground between the Syrian and regional actors continues to make this unlikely in the short-term.

Efforts to find a political solution have been taking place throughout the course conflict and have primarily been coordinated by the United Nations. In June 2012, key global and regional partners met in Geneva to participate in an UN-led process to discuss how to bring about an end to the conflict in Syria. The process resulted in the Geneva communiqué and a six-point peace plan, which included an immediate cessation of armed violence and the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers.

Convening actual negotiations was a long and drawn out process and resulted in the Geneva-II talks, which were convened on January 22, 2014. For the first time since June 2012, officials

from the regime and the Syrian Opposition Coalition met. However, the talks concluded in February 2014 without any agreement or significant progress having been made.

Despite the fact that the conflict has continued for several years, and that a political solution still seems distant, there has only been modest diplomatic progress to protect civilians and promote unfettered humanitarian access. On 27 September 2013, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2118, which demanded the destruction or removal of Syria's chemical stockpile by mid-2014. The mission has been led by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Diplomatic efforts at the end of 2014 started to focus on building on local-level ceasefires, as a few local truces has possibly shown some positive effects in different parts of the country, notably Homs and Damascus. This idea was seized upon by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, who put forward a 'freeze-zone' initiative in Aleppo in late 2014, a step that aspired to establish a ceasefire in the city in order to allow humanitarian aid to be delivered. However, the regime has proven unwilling in practice to honour any possible deal, which has also been criticised by opposition groups for allowing the regime to regroup its forces. Research into other local ceasefires would seem to vindicate their concerns[4].

The broader UN-led political process has also become stalled, although there have been attempts by several countries to initiate separate tracks, including meetings that have been hosted by Egypt and Russia. In July 2015, the UN decided to establish four working groups in order to advance discussions on ways in which the Geneva Communiqué can be implemented with a view to creating a transitional government. Few expect that the establishment of these working groups will quickly translate into renewed negotiations and the achievement of a political solution in the near future.

3.2 The situation in the opposition-controlled Syria

After over four years of conflict, there is an imminent and mounting need for recovery and stabilisation support in Syria in addition to the ongoing delivery of humanitarian assistance. In recent months the opposition has started liberating new territory from the regime, and has struggled to adapt to the governance demands that this entails (e.g. Idlib city). The governance structures which are emerging in these newly liberated areas are presently being contested by the same political forces, which have divided the opposition since the start of the conflict. It is not clear yet whether the moderates or extremists groupings within the opposition will emerge as the dominant and controlling factions.

Efforts are being made to set up local, interim governance structures and to deliver basic services to the people. And whilst some local councils have proven effective at delivering basic services, none have been able to effectively link up to provincial and national (SIG) structures. This has meant that what local results have been achieved, have not translated into any national level outcome that could influence wider conflict dynamics.

In addition to these local governance structures, a plethora of civil society organisation has emerged in liberated areas, particularly in the north of Syria. A recent mapping by the civil society centre Baytna revealed over 130 organisations operating in Idlib, Latakia and Aleppo, which includes activist groups, media groups, and professional associations. This emerging civil space has proved a promising area for international engagement, and has been impressive given the repression of civil space under the Assad-regime for many decades.

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4 http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/CSHS/pdfs/Home-Grown-Peace-in-Syria-report-final.pdf

However, these emerging structures are being challenged by extremist actors, who seek to exploit the current lack of security, governance and justice to impose their vision of a future Syria. The radical groups are not only involved militarily, but are also increasing efforts to help provide security and justice[5]. Whilst these groups have recently struggled to impose their Islamist version of governance in liberated areas (see 3.1 Emerging Conflict Dynamics), local populations patience with moderate structures will eventually prove limited unless they can demonstrate more effectiveness in meeting Syrian citizens' basic needs.

A moderate opposition can act as a viable alternative to extremism, the latter of which is presently viewed as the most effective method for toppling the Assad regime. As ISIL is able to capitalise on the continuation of the Syrian conflict, the strengthening of moderate opposition groups can be influential in combating its narrative. Similarly, the regime is able to benefit from the presence of ISIL in particular by pointing to its brutal extremism as proof of its ongoing narrative that the Syrian conflict is a solely a bi-polar conflict between the government and extremists.

Through the Programme, establishing partnerships with the Syrian opposition coalition, civil society organisations and international partners can contribute in stabilising the country and fostering the Syrian communities' resilience to extremism. A promising example is in the south of Syria where the Southern Front has been able to establish a relatively credible local governance structure. However, international support should be aimed at assisting the Southern Front in building an efficient governance system and supporting its fighters to be able to compete with extremists[6].

The situation on the ground in the opposition-held territories is characterised by shifting influences by a series of different armed groups and brigades. By and large the majority of the moderate and Islamist groups have to date been tolerant or supportive of civilian governance and civil society, including policing institutions, and some extremist groups have even proven themselves remarkably tolerant of civil society activities. They cooperate with, or support, governance and judicial actors and use them as a vehicle for influence.

4 Scenarios

In the absence of a political solution, it is likely that the conflict in Syria will continue for the duration of the next phase of the Programme. The scenario analysis has been designed to allow improved decision-making related to the next phase by allowing consideration of outcomes and their implications for Danish engagement and stabilisation efforts. Given the highly dynamic situation in Syria, the scenarios are all marked by a high degree of uncertainty. The scenario analysis does not attempt to provide a thorough analysis of all the different factors that could influence developments in the country, but rather seeks to identify those factors that are most likely to directly affect the ability of the Programme to deliver its intended results.

By mid-2015 the Syrian civil war appears to be marked by changing contextual circumstances which require a fresh look at dynamics and scenarios. What started in 2011 as a pro-democracy uprising in Deraa, fragmented over the ensuring three years into a complex conflict characterised by a broad ideological spectrum of opposition groups fighting a more cohesive regime of Bashir al-Assad. However, over the first half of 2015 this situation has shown signs of changing (see section 3.1), which has brought with it a range of new opportunities, challenges and risks.

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5 http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/JN%20Final.pdf
6 http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/06/29/islamic-state-s-strategy-lasting-and-expanding/ib5x