



THE DOSSIER

A Crisis of Conscience: Aid Diversion in Syria and the Impact on the International Aid System

By Nidal Betare and Sasha Ghosh-Siminoff, PDC Inc., Lead researcher: Munzer al Awad

Executive Summary

In 2021, an estimated 60% of Syria's population was food insecure. As of December, the U.N. determined that 14 million people in Syria are in need — a 27% increase since December 2020. Of these 14 million, 12 million are in [“acute need.”](#) Since 2011, the international community has [poured \\$40 billion](#) into Syria, of which at least [\\$23 billion](#) went through the U.N.'s multi-pronged aid and assistance program. In 2021, the top three donors were the United States (45.5%), Germany (25.5%), and the European Commission (8.2%). From 2012 to 2022, the World Food Program received 27.4% of all aid dollars, and it has been the largest single recipient of U.N. funding for the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria. In 2021, the World Food Program reported transferring 541,325 metric tons of food aid, supporting 6,864,565 total beneficiaries.

Humanitarian aid to Syria is delivered in several ways: a private system that goes through neighboring countries, through the U.N. Security Council Resolution 2585-mandated border crossing at Bab al-Hawa on the border with Turkey, or via direct aid provision through agreements with the Syrian government and the U.N.'s direct support program. Some aid has been delivered to areas outside of the Syrian government's control via a mechanism known as “cross-line” aid delivery. This method relies on the Syrian government allowing the U.N. or other humanitarian aid groups to move the aid in convoys through military front lines and into opposition-held territory.

On July 10, the U.N. Security Council will vote on whether to renew the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism for Syria — the only way in which aid can be delivered and not diverted by the corrupt

Syrian government to benefit from. This report outlines the ways in which the Syrian government has been stealing and benefiting from U.N. humanitarian aid and provides recommendations on how to change this dynamic. Over half of all aid dollars into Syria flow via the U.N. Understanding how it implements programs, spends money, delivers aid, and ensures accountability and transparency of programs should be a top priority for government donors. Additionally, it is important to understand whether the U.N. aid program in Syria is undercutting the very sanctions designed to hold the government accountable for its crimes against the Syrian people. This report concludes that aid diversion is rampant throughout government-controlled portions of Syria, and as a [major deliverer of U.N. aid](#), the case of Syrian Arab Red Crescent in particular shows this systematic diversion.

Major Policy Implications for Aid in Syria

- Aid cannot be provided to the whole of Syria solely via U.N. aid operations based in Damascus. U.N. Security Council-mandated cross-border aid via Turkey to Idlib Province must continue, or millions will risk quickly losing access to life-sustaining aid.
- A lack of cross-border aid mechanisms into opposition-held Northwest Syria could result in a severe aid shortage, forcing hundreds of thousands of refugees into Turkey. This in turn could divert refugee flows into Europe.
- A lack of cross-border aid mechanisms will create more legal, logistical, and political hurdles for humanitarian international NGOs in Syria.



- Corruption in the U.N. aid program creates questions about U.N. neutrality in conflict settings such as Syria, where a recognized state actor is fighting non-state actors. Here the U.N.'s rigid adherence to state sovereignty makes aid programs vulnerable to manipulation and misuse by malign state actors. Without a guarantee that aid is being provided via a transparent and impartial mechanism, trust in the neutrality of international aid provision will erode, setting a dangerous precedent for other conflict spaces.

Major Report Takeaways

- The Syrian Arab Red Crescent plays a major role in diverting U.N. aid in Syria.
- Syrian intelligence and military services are embedded in all levels of the aid process, diverting aid to their respective networks.
- The Syrian government is using U.N. aid to support its soldiers, security forces, allied militias, and political and business supporters.
- There is more ability to create transparency and accountability for cross-border than cross-line aid due to rampant aid diversion by Damascus.
- Lack of oversight and accountability in aid provision inside government-controlled Syria has created a micro economy based on diverting aid and selling it for profit at all levels. The current U.N. aid modality has created a class of businesspeople who profit from humanitarian aid in Syria.
- While sanctions on the Syrian government were designed to isolate bad actors from the global economy and punish them for atrocities, U.N. aid has given them an economic lifeline and helped them support the government's war effort.
- The Syrian government and its allies can divert U.N. aid with support from political allies and businesspeople in Lebanon.

Major Policy Recommendations

- The U.S. government, EU Commission, and large EU donor countries should fully review policies with the U.N. and how aid dollars are being used in Syria. This should include a full forensic audit by an external party akin to the type of investigation that

the Office of the Inspector General for USAID would conduct into allegations of waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption. U.N. counterparts should understand they are in fact implementing partners who are legally and financially responsible and accountable to their donors for the money they spend.

- The U.S. government, along with EU governments, must impose sanctions on the board members and decision-making staff at the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, who play a direct role in the mass diversion of humanitarian aid.

- Donor countries should demand the U.N. route more aid through the available cross-border mechanism.

- If donor countries cannot conduct independent monitoring of U.N. programs in-country to ensure systematic aid diversion is not occurring, there should be a mechanism to decide whether an aid program should be suspended or have its funding reduced until proper remediation occurs.

- The U.S. government, EU Commission, and large EU donor countries need to inspect U.N. operations in Lebanon, especially procurement, to determine how the Syrian government's network there is diverting aid and aid money. Any Lebanese state actors implicated should be sanctioned. A determination needs to be made whether Lebanon can remain a U.N. aid hub for Syria or if operations should be moved.

- If the U.N. cannot or will not make substantive changes to its aid program in Syria, donor governments should reduce funding and use their own directly funded aid programs instead.

- If the July vote on cross-border aid fails and the U.N.-mandated mechanism collapses, the U.S., the EU, and major donors should seek several multilateral agreements with Turkey, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the government of Iraq to facilitate standalone aid mechanisms into northwestern and northeastern Syria, rather than normalization with the Syrian government. This should galvanize the international community to drastically reduce U.N. funding in Syria and focus on standalone aid programs that almost all major international donor governments already have in place.



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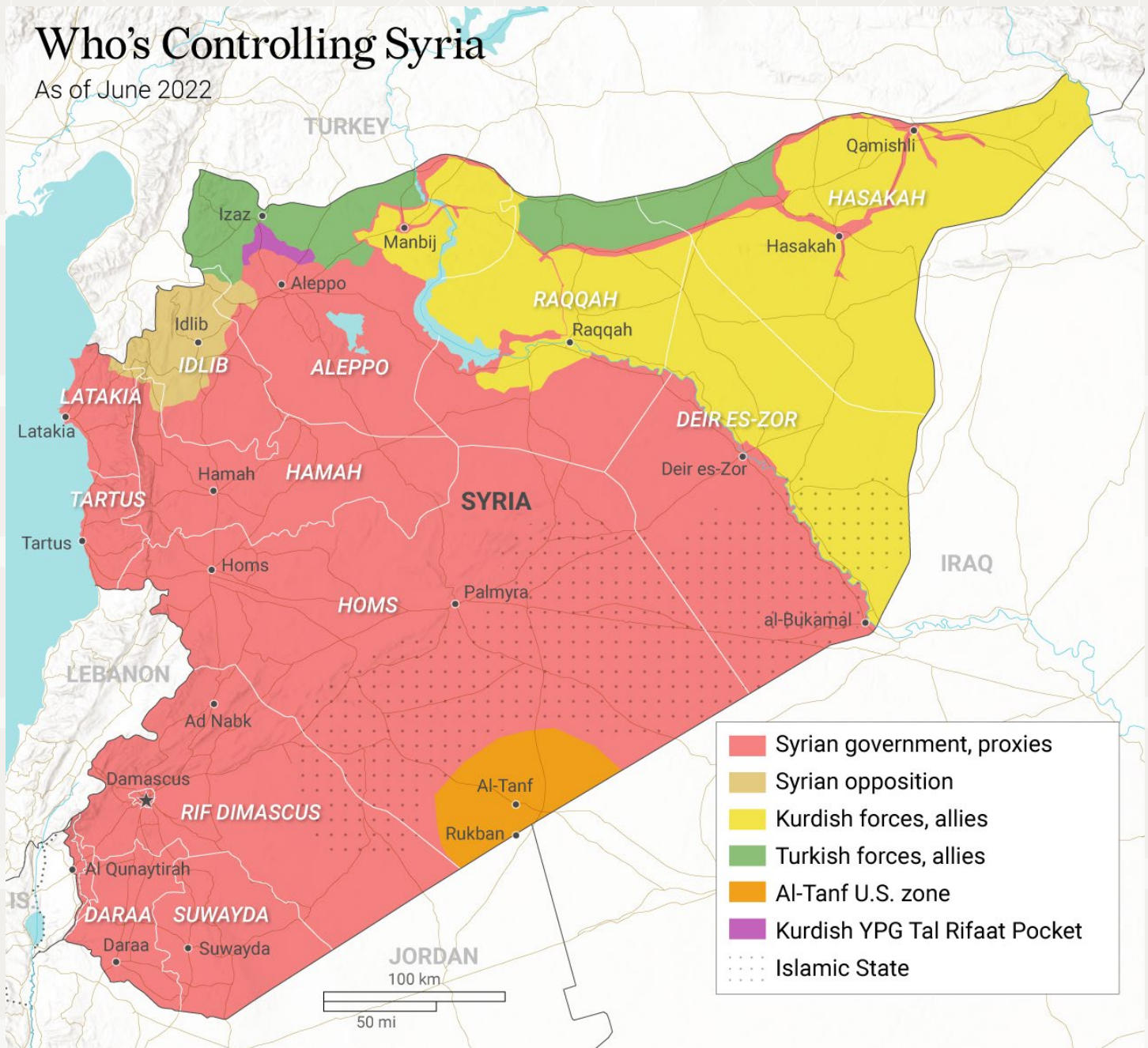
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COVER PHOTO: A truck carrying aid packages from the World Food Program drives through the town of Hazano in the countryside of Syria's Idlib province in May 2022. (Omar Haj Kadour /AFP via Getty Images)

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Our mission is to provoke principled and transformative leadership based on peace and security, global communities, character, stewardship, and development.

Our purpose is to shape U.S. foreign policy based on a deep understanding of regional geopolitics and the value systems of those regions.



Source: People Demand Change

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1. Introduction

This research provides a detailed snapshot of how humanitarian aid is provided to Syrian government-controlled areas, what happens to the aid once it arrives in the country, and how it is systematically diverted and stolen. Because the United Nations is one of the largest humanitarian aid providers in Syria, People Demand Change

(PDC) focused on understanding its aid distribution mechanism and the work of one of its primary implementing partners, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). It is estimated that SARC moves [60-80%](#) of all aid arriving to government-controlled territory.

Numerous reports and articles over the last decade have discussed the high level of aid diversion in government-controlled territory. This has raised two major questions. First, is aid diversion so high within



the regime-controlled territories that it is unclear whether most of the assistance is actually reaching the targeted beneficiaries for free? Second, has the U.N. been able to maintain a neutral aid program to show major international donors that aid is not being diverted in ways that benefit regime-associated entities and individuals currently under international sanctions and/or under investigation for crimes against humanity? These questions give rise to a third: If the current U.N. Security Council-approved cross-border aid mechanism providing aid to areas of Syria outside the government's control is discontinued, what are the prospects for aid reaching these areas if cross-line aid via Damascus is the only option?

These three questions should form the basis by which the international community, including top aid donors, decides how to proceed on the U.N. Security Council vote.

2. Politics, War, and SARC's Transformation

Given this report's focus on SARC, it is important to see how the aid organization's operations have changed. The history of SARC before and after the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011 shows the drastic shift in how it operated and shows how the Syrian government used SARC's mission to serve its own purpose in a quest for survival during the past decade of conflict.

[SARC](#) was chartered in 1942 and recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva (ICRC) in 1946. According to its official website, SARC is "an independent humanitarian organization of public utility... and enjoys financial and administrative independence." The website also states that "SARC is committed to Geneva Conventions and the seven basic principles of the International Movement of Red Cross and Red Crescent."

A former senior employee at SARC said that between 2003 and the Syrian revolution in 2011, SARC was responsible for managing a number of major refugee aid programs that stemmed from the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The number of volunteers that joined SARC during this period surged, which lent credibility to SARC both domestically and internationally. Former SARC staff members confirmed that from 2003 to

2011, while SARC's upper management was still connected to Syrian intelligence services and military, other Western international NGOs were able to operate out of Damascus and coordinate with SARC with minimal interference.

According to three former SARC first aid volunteers, in 2011, identification cards for SARC staff were confiscated to make it harder for any staff to cross checkpoints during aid missions. This created distrust between SARC's emergency response teams and its senior management. A former employee at SARC HQ said that a security officer started to come every morning to SARC's headquarters to see the general manager and retrieve a daily report. Another former employee remembers being interrogated by SARC management about his political opinion of the Syrian uprising, which resulted in his leaving Syria after receiving threats from SARC employees loyal to the regime.

Another former senior SARC employee added that SARC management also started to request reports from certain volunteers across the country concerning the political orientation of the employees and volunteers. A former SARC team leader recalls this enormous pressure that led some team leaders, volunteers, and employees to leave. In some governorates, mainly in Rif Damascus, a few volunteers began promoting the idea of "defecting" from SARC to establish a new organization affiliated with the revolution. However, this idea was difficult to implement for many logistical reasons related to the ICRC's international regulations.

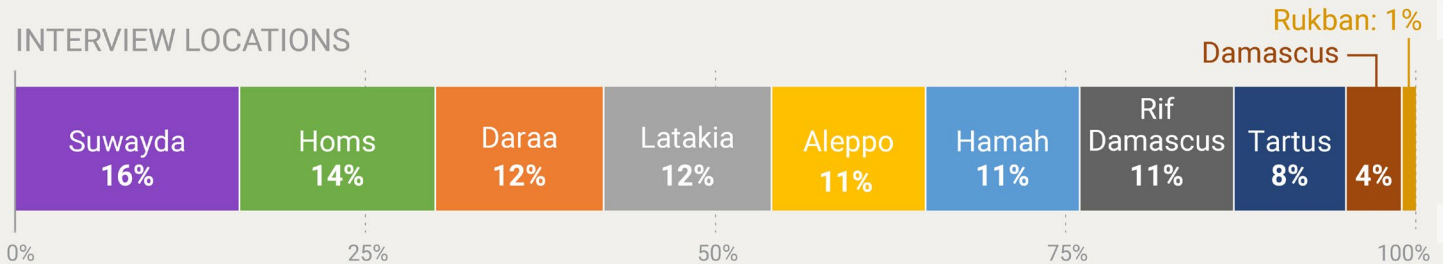
Since 2011, SARC staff have described SARC more as a "security branch" than as an aid organization. By 2016, the Syrian government and security services succeeded in transforming SARC into an entity only loyal to President Bashar al-Assad (the organization's honorary president) and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. PDC Interviewers were told that numerous SARC employees who tried to uphold medical and humanitarian neutrality in the field were subsequently deliberately targeted, detained, and [killed](#) by government security forces. It is well documented that throughout the Syrian conflict, the Assad regime initiated violence that destroyed any ability for individuals or organizations to effectively implement



Locations of the PDC's Interview Respondent Pool

People Demand Change (PDC) conducted more than 100 interviews for this report. The respondent pool included staff of local civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, local merchants and business owners, United Nations employees, Syrian soldiers, and others.

INTERVIEW LOCATIONS



Source: People Demand Change

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[medical](#) and [humanitarian](#) aid in a neutral manner including SARC teams located across the country. For those expats still working with SARC through the ICRC and International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, it was made clear to them that if they did not comply with government instruction, their visas would be canceled, and they would be deported.

3. Methodology

PDC used a mixed methods approach for its data collection, building and deploying a number of tools targeting varied groups involved in the aid distribution process. PDC conducted in-depth interviews and surveys with subjects in these categories:

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and local NGOs engaged in humanitarian aid distribution and programming
- Local merchants and business owners engaged in selling humanitarian aid
- Current and former staff from SARC
- Staff from the various U.N. agencies operating in regime-controlled areas of Syria
- Syrian government soldiers and military with knowledge of the aid distribution and/or diversion process

f. Smugglers participating in the aid distribution and/or diversion process

In total, PDC engaged: 47 CSO and local NGO staff members, 42 local merchants and businesspeople, seven senior and mid-level SARC staff members, five Syria-based current and former U.N. staff members (U.N. Development Program, U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees, UNICEF, and the World Food Program, or WFP), two soldiers/military members from Syrian government forces, and one smuggler.

PDC's respondent pool spanned nine out of 14 governorates, including: Aleppo, Damascus, Daraa, Hamah, Homs, Latakia, Rif Damascus, Tartus, and Suwayda. Additionally, PDC conducted interviews in the Rukban/Al-Tanf region in Homs Governorate.

Additionally, PDC's field teams and sources took approximately 6 GB worth of video and photographic evidence, showing the scope and scale of the sale of humanitarian aid across much of government-controlled Syria. Video and photographic evidence was taken in the following governorates: Aleppo, Damascus, Daraa, Hamah, Homs, Latakia, Rif Damascus, and Suwayda.

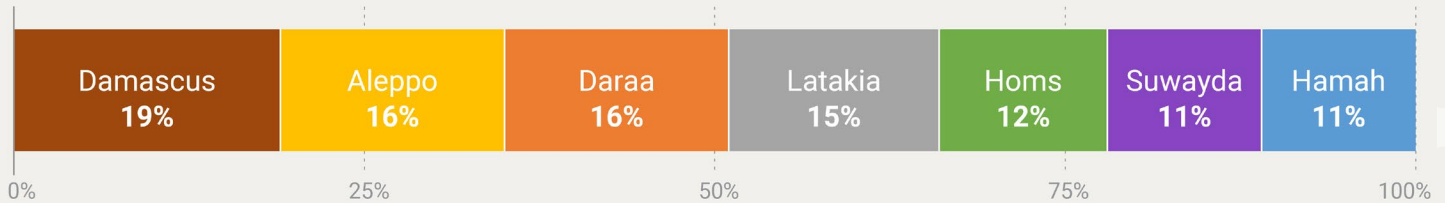
Due to the sensitive nature of this research, all names and identifying information of every respondent have been anonymized in this report.



Locations of PDC's Video and Photographic Evidence of Aid Diversion

PDC field teams captured more than 6 GB of video and photographic evidence showing the level of aid diversion across Syria.

WHERE EVIDENCE WAS GATHERED



Source: People Demand Change

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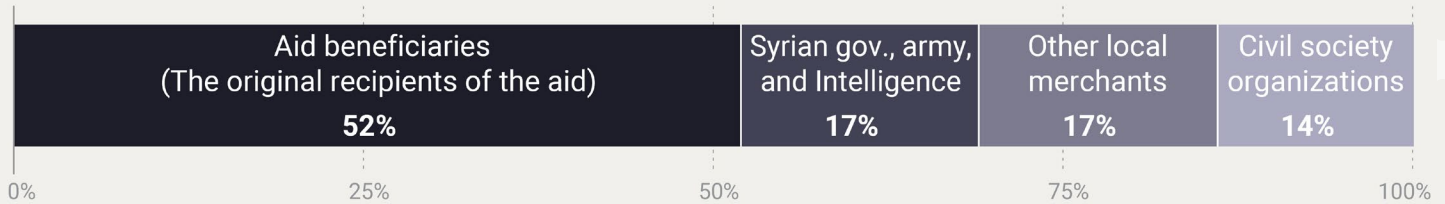
4. Key Findings

The report's key findings provide a clear overview of the day-to-day realities of aid distribution/diversion on the ground:

1. Eighty-five percent of CSO/NGO respondents confirmed that Syrian government security services interfere in the humanitarian aid distribution and provision process. A SARC staff member told interviewers, "We coordinate with all the security branches, especially the political and military branches, also with the heads of checkpoints in the region, and they have influence and can get everything they want from us, and we cannot say no." A senior SARC staff member said, "The intelligence [in Syria] own the humanitarian aid system, they do not need to steal from it."
2. The consensus by senior staff in SARC places aid diversion at 40-60%. In certain cases, around 80-90% of all cash assistance was diverted. The main actors involved in diverting aid are the intelligence apparatus, the Syrian government army, businessmen, and political elites close to the Assad family, senior SARC members who steal and sell aid, and local NGOs and CSOs receiving aid who also then steal and sell the aid.
3. It is important to draw a distinction between SARC senior management (especially the board members) and SARC volunteers, who have paid a high price for doing their humanitarian duty. Some were arrested years ago and disappeared from the regime's prisons; others were killed by the regime's forces while they were on duty. The intelligence is embedded in SARC's administrative body to such an extent that, according to one former employee at SARC, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent had serious discussions about freezing SARC's membership and the ICRC had discussed halting partnerships with SARC.
4. Aid diversion is endemic at all levels of the distribution process. From the point that the U.N. procures its aid in Lebanon to the point that it arrives to the potential intended beneficiary, every layer of bureaucracy; logistics; and primary, secondary, and tertiary aid distributors ultimately participate in the willful diversion of a portion of the aid. When PDC interviewed merchants and businessmen about who they bought aid from to resell in the marketplace, it was clear that aid could be bought at all levels. The Syria crisis over the last decade has produced a class of profiteers in Syria and neighboring countries who are taking advantage of humanitarian aid. One SARC senior staff member said, "We give food rations to the soldiers who accompany us as we move the aid, and to the soldiers at the checkpoints we pass by, also the security personnel who work in the security detachments come to the centers



From Whom Do Merchants/Businessmen Buy Diverted Aid in Syria?



Source: People Demand Change

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of the Red Crescent [to register and take aid], and frankly, we cannot refuse to give them what they ask for because in the end they will take it by force, and in the end they will take revenge on us [if we do not comply]. They take everything they want: tents, food rations, kitchen kits, blankets. Anything they want.”

5. The intelligence services and army are the biggest beneficiaries of the aid diversion. Intelligence has the biggest leverage over the aid system and controls where and how CSOs and local NGOs can work and controls the black-market sale of the aid with business elites. As a result, some respondents mentioned that even the army must send its soldiers to register as official “beneficiaries” with SARC to secure aid, designed to supplement their low salaries. There are other instances where aid distribution centers only serve the army, as witnessed in the Latakia governorate. A SARC team leader noted, “The administration in the Red Crescent is affiliated [with] the security authorities and works under their supervision, it feels that SARC itself is a security branch. The aid goes to the families of the regime’s dead soldiers first, then to the families of the Regime’s wounded soldiers, and finally, the civilians are given last. We coordinate with the security branches and officers of varying ranks between captain and colonel.” Another said that in certain SARC centers in the Latakia governorate, civilians get no benefits whatsoever.
6. The Syrian government built the humanitarian aid system to supply the needs of the army, militias, and security services, ranging from food to tents and clothes. A leader in the NGO community reported that in Syrian government-controlled areas, “We were ordered many times to send food, tents, clothes, and other supplies to the Syrian Army soldiers on the front lines. I can tell you that there are battles funded by the U.N. humanitarian aid system in Syria.”
7. The Syrian government uses monitoring and evaluation firms to justify its aid diversion. These monitoring and evaluation firms prepare inaccurate and false reports to hide what they are actually doing with the aid. A former international NGO staffer in Syria said, “I was forced by the Palestine security branch to oversee lists of fake beneficiaries and needs assessments created to justify the aid stolen by the government. I was threatened that my family would be arrested if I do not adhere to what I am told to do.” Another senior international NGO employee said, “The monitoring and evaluation firms in the Syrian government-controlled areas are owned by Bashar al-Assad and his wife Asma al-Assad. Asma meets with her partners in her office in the presidential palace to agree on the contracts and the distribution of the profit.” PDC could not independently verify this; however, this story was repeated in another interview with a former U.N. staffer.
8. Current and former U.N. and SARC staff provided PDC with numerous examples of the Syrian government’s deliberate attempts to stack the U.N. Syria office with employees and staff sympathetic to the regime and its system of purposeful aid diversion. The government has canceled the visa and work permits of uncooperative expatriate U.N.



staff. These workers have since been replaced by expats approved by the Syrian government and for countries more friendly with the Syrian regime. A former U.N. employee noted that “... getting a job interview with the U.N. and passing their tests does not mean one would be successful in getting the job; the U.N. in Syria does not get to decide who works there, the Syrian government ultimately decides who works.”

9. Many U.N. agencies in Syria are forced to employ the sons and daughters of senior intelligence officers. A current local U.N. employee explained that there is a class of employees in the U.N. in Syria who are an extension of the Syrian government and its intelligence. A SARC employee confirmed this dynamic, explaining that some U.N. agencies in Syria were turned into de facto offices where the government can implement its policies through the sons and daughters of senior intelligence and military officers.

5. Implications for International Assistance in Syria

While it is crucial for humanitarian aid to continue to reach all Syrians, the level of aid diversion in government-controlled territory, especially that provided by the U.N. – raises the question of whether finding an alternative method should be considered. As one U.N. staffer explained, “It’s not that the U.N. aid system in Syria is being corrupted from the outside, it’s that the system from A to Z has been so fully hollowed out by the government of Syria since the beginning of the conflict that the natural order of things through this program is by its very nature corrupt, at all levels.”

Another former international NGO employee said: “Asma and Bashar al-Assad have turned humanitarian aid in Syria into a profitable industry. Asma al-Assad has used her knowledge and experience in managing the [Syria Trust for Development](#) to build a systematically corrupt humanitarian aid system in Syria.” For this reason, all major international U.N. Syria program donors must consider how much free aid is arriving to the intended beneficiaries in areas under Syrian government control. While it is inevitable for a certain amount of aid diversion to take place in a conflict space, aid diversion in Syria can be as high as 60%, although exact figures remain unknown.

Aid needs to be provided through a neutral, fair, and transparent mechanism, with minimal political and military interference. Without this guarantee, trust in the neutrality of international aid mechanisms will erode. This would set a dangerous precedent for other conflict spaces; parties that have traditionally been seen as neutral – and therefore able to access all areas of a conflict space – could be deemed partisan, normalizing the concept of “total war” in large portions of the world where there are ongoing conflicts.

The physical, photographic, and interview evidence that PDC has collected shows that the amount of humanitarian aid being diverted is large enough to allow for thriving resale markets in every regime-controlled governorate, with most major municipalities having at least one. Given the complex nature of the Syrian conflict, any changes to the current humanitarian aid mechanisms established for Syria requires careful consideration and broad international consensus to ensure aid goes to those in desperate need instead of the Syrian government or those accused of crimes against humanity and under targeted international sanctions.

6. Cross-line and Cross-border aid modalities

The purpose of [U.N. Security Council Resolution 2585](#) is to help create and maintain an additional access point to provide humanitarian aid into northwestern Syria, where over 3 million Syrians are dependent on this aid to meet their basic needs. Without this cross-border lifeline, the situation in northwestern Syria would go from a chronic but stable humanitarian crisis to an immediate and acute one with another potential disastrous refugee crisis. Thus, it is crucial that the current cross-border mechanism into northwestern Syria remains intact for the foreseeable future.

Given the findings of this report, a cross-line-only humanitarian aid mechanism would make the situation worse. Currently, the Syrian government manages humanitarian aid that is supposed to go to the Rukban camp/Al-Tanf area. The camp’s population was 70,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) at its peak but is now down to [10,000](#), with no support and little international oversight for the past seven years. According to civil society activists in Rukban,



A displaced Syrian woman receives a box of food from a local charity organization before the 'Iftar' meal during Ramadan in April 2022. The camp for displaced people is on the outskirts of the town of Dana, in northern Idlib province. (Aaref Watad / AFP via Getty Images)

humanitarian aid from the U.N. and SARC has not been provided in almost two years.

Originally, humanitarian aid was supposed to arrive on a consistent basis per an agreement between the U.N. and the Syrian government. However, the Syrian government has used humanitarian aid to negotiate instead with the IDPs to leave what is called the "55km" area, where the U.S. Army has had a presence since 2016 as part of the counter-ISIS campaign. The regime, in coordination with SARC and the U.N, created a location for IDPs to go to outside of Rukban called Al-Waha, and receive aid. However, the regime has said they can only receive aid if they agree to undergo a security check and return to regime-controlled areas, thus putting conditions on the IDPs' receipt of

humanitarian aid. This process can take months in some cases, and many of the IDPs are taken to Homs City for resettlement in government-run shelters.

SARC is reported to have participated in bringing double the aid needed for the IDPs in Al-Waha to give to regime army members and other regime affiliates close to the 55km area. While SARC and the U.N. stopped sending convoys to Rukban in mid-2019, aid corruption continues through SARC brokers, army checkpoints, and the Al-Badiya military intelligence branch. According to a current SARC employee, "SARC would bring loads of aid to the GoS [Government of Syria] army, who later take the aid via trucks to smugglers who then take the aid to Rukban camp and sell it to the IDPs. The money then gets



distributed between the Al-Badiya military intelligence branch, SARC brokers, and the head of the army brigade around the 55km area. This mode of diverting and selling aid and general extortion are common practices in the GoS [government of Syria]- controlled territories.” This story was verified by a merchant in the Rukban IDPs camp.

Thus, using cross-line aid as the only means of providing large-scale humanitarian assistance to areas outside of regime control is fundamentally unworkable. Should the U.N. Security Council fail to renew the current cross-border aid mechanism in July, donor governments should scale back funding to U.N. aid efforts in Syria and shift to multilateral agreements with neighboring countries to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of large-scale aid.

7. Practical Measures

1. The biggest leverage the U.S. and EU have is the large amount of humanitarian and development aid provided directly through standalone aid programs and via funding to the U.N. Syria aid program. The way in which humanitarian aid enters government-controlled Syria ensures the continuation of willful aid diversion so that large portions of the Syrian population in need of assistance are not receiving that assistance. The transparency and accountability mechanisms which most donor countries require of their own implementing partners do not exist or cannot provide meaningful accounting through the U.N. aid system in Syria in its current configuration.

One practical measure would be for the U.S. and the EU to build two trilateral agreements – one with Turkey and one with Iraq – to make an inverted cross-line aid mechanism whereby U.S.- and EU-run humanitarian aid programs operating in regime-controlled territory will go through northwest and northeast Syria before arriving in areas under government control. Under such conditions, Damascus will have less ability to leverage and manipulate the international aid system, as aid will be entering government-controlled territories from three points, not just one.

It is crucial that the prime funders of humanitarian aid in Syria set the terms of engagement for how

that aid enters the country and the conditions under which distribution occurs. The Syrian government is not economically strong enough to prevent aid from entering territory under its control by other means. Moreover, the U.S. and the EU do not need to solely rely on the U.N. to provide humanitarian aid to this portion of Syria when they have the capacity to provide aid directly.

2. The other opportunity to create more accountability and transparency for the U.N. aid program in Syria would be for the U.N. to stop receiving preferential treatment from international aid donors on the types of accountability and oversight mechanisms it must adhere to. (Every NGO, including international organizations, working with such donor funding is forced to comply with those accountability and oversight measures.) If the U.N. is receiving money from U.S. government institutions, then the U.N. is an implementing partner and should be treated as such – meaning all the rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and third-party monitoring standards that apply to other implementing partners in Syria must apply to the U.N. And the U.N. should be held accountable for any waste, fraud, and abuse of funds under its program’s watch. Robust and continuous third-party monitoring of U.N.-provided humanitarian aid on the ground must occur, and if proper third-party monitoring of such programs cannot occur without interference, a discussion should be made about whether continuing to fund that program makes sense.
3. A significant portion of the U.N. aid entering regime-controlled territory is procured in Lebanon. That country is notorious for being a place where the Syrian government has numerous shell companies and businessmen who work to [launder money](#) and provide supplies to the regime in such a way as to avoid international sanctions. Some of these same sanctioned individuals have been provided Lebanese citizenship in order to allow them to support the regime’s aid diversion. The U.N.’s procurement of aid in Lebanon for Syria creates an immediate opportunity for waste, fraud, and abuse within the humanitarian aid system. To help reduce such abuses, the U.S. and EU could make their continued funding of U.N. aid to Syria conditional on the U.N. procuring 75% of all aid for Syria outside of Lebanon.



Guarding against corruption and the diversion of aid from the U.N. has implications both within and beyond Syria's borders. Taking steps to improve the security and transparency of aid mechanisms will help ensure that populations in dire need of aid – in all parts of Syria – will receive what they need without having to buy it from someone profiting from aid diversion or not having access to it at all. Moreover, transparent aid delivery free from government or military interference in Syria will set a good precedent for future conflicts

in other areas. If the U.N. is seen as an untrustworthy source of aid, the organization's integrity could face challenges and leave the door open for the denial of aid in other humanitarian crises. If the U.N. Security Council votes against renewing the current cross-border aid mechanism at Bab al-Hawa, donor governments should scale back funding to U.N. aid efforts in Syria and seek out multilateral agreements neighboring countries to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of large-scale aid to all areas in need.



Nidal Betare is a Syrian-Palestinian writer. He holds a master's degree in political sociology and is managing director for People Demand Change (PDC). He previously worked for the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Danish Red Cross. He also worked as a freelance researcher with NPR and McClatchy in Syria and Lebanon.



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Mr. Ghosh-Siminoff has a Masters degree of Middle East Studies at the University of Exeter, UK. and has conducted fieldwork in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank. He's provided expertise on Syria and Iraq to various international institutions and governments, including the U.S., Canada, the UK, Germany, and various think tanks.

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