

# An Avoidable Crisis

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## **An Avoidable Crisis**

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

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**The Carter Center  
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## I. Executive Summary

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

*Background and Rationale.* Seven years after the establishment of the first United Nations

cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism (UNSC Resolution 1970 (2011) and UNSC Resolution 2166 (2014)), the United Nations Security Council has not renewed the mechanism since its expiration on July 10, 2020. The United Nations Security Council has not renewed the mechanism since its expiration on July 10, 2020.

## Considerations Russia, China, and Syria's Perspective

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

- A. Monitoring and transparency of aid distribution
- B.

Figure 1

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

### III. Perspectives on CrossBorder Mechanisms

#### A. The Legality of CrossBorder Mechanisms

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## B. Cross-Line Transfers

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

Russia asserts that cross-line deliveries are insufficient only because the U.N. undermines the system by refusing to use it. However, evidence is lacking to support this view. Russia also argues that an International Committee of the Red Cross convoy has been delayed from reaching Idlib for months, despite receiving GoS authorization, asserting that this reflects an unwillingness by the West to promote cross-line deliveries.<sup>9</sup> In March 2020, Moscow facilitated three new internal crossings within Syria.

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

## D. Distribution

### i. Transparency and Proportionality

As a result, the current U.S. humanitarian aid effort is disproportionate and lacks transparency as well as monitoring. Despite being home to 8.1 million Syrians in need of aid, the U.S. provides only \$1.1 billion in humanitarian aid, which is a small fraction of the total aid available. The U.S. also lacks transparency in its aid distribution, with no public information on the amount of aid provided to various groups or regions. This lack of transparency makes it difficult to monitor the effectiveness of the aid and to ensure that it is reaching those in need. The U.S. also lacks proportionality in its aid distribution, with a focus on certain groups and regions while neglecting others. This is particularly concerning given the widespread nature of the humanitarian crisis in Syria.







## E. Collaboration on Explosives Clearance

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

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

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



## June - July 2020

16 June 2020

### Initial negotiations

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

### Belgian and German draft

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