LSE Middle East Centre

WATER SECURITY IN SYRIA



Greg Shapland

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About the Author

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Abstract

Syria, agriculturally productive in years of good rainfall, is prone to drought. Its water security is also vulnerable to the use of the Euphrates and its tributaries by Türkiye. Groundwater, a contingency reserve in dry years, is being exploited in an unsustainable manner. Climate change – with which Syria is poorly equipped to deal – will make Syria's water security even more precarious. Moreover, the civil war caused extensive damage to its water infrastructure. With many wastewater treatment plants no longer working, pollution of water reserves has become a major problem. Finding sufficient funding to restore and develop the country's water infrastructure will be difficult. And even when this is fully accomplished, Syria would still be at risk of descending into a state of 'water bankruptcy'. For that outcome to be avoided, the country would need to make changes to its present food security policy, a move that would enable a considerable reduction in the volume of water consumed by irrigated agriculture. As a corollary, Syria would have to import more food, something that would bring with it different challenges.

Figure 1: Map of Syria



Introduction

This report forms part of my examination of water security in the MENA region as part of the project 'The Political Economy of Water in the MENA Region: a Cross-Regional Assessment'.[1] As a research visit to Syria was not possible, the report is based wholly on published literature and media reporting. There are, however, major information gaps. Geographical coverage in the available sources is patchy, with some areas off-limits to researchers in the post-2011 period.

The Challenge of Water Security in Today's Syria

The present government in Damascus must confront numerous challenges if it is to ensure Syria's water security.[2] Some of these stem from the country's geographical situa-

[1] 'The Political Economy of Water in the MENA Region: A Cross-Regional Assessment'. More information available at: https://www.lse.ac.uk/middleeastcentre/research/other-projects/political-economy-of-water-in-mena (accessed 25 September 2026). The project was funded by UK Research and Innovation (to which the author is very grateful) and conducted on secondment to the FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office).

[2] This paper uses the definition of water security adopted by the United Nations: 'The capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of and acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.' 'Global Water & the Global Water Agenda: a UN-Water Analytical Brief', *United Nations University, Institute of Water, Environment and Health* (2013). Available at: https://repository.unescap.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b8398596-67a7-47e6-9cbb-ae8e543a6a49/content (accessed 25 September 2026).

tion (physical, climatic and political), others from the impact of the civil war. At least as important, however, is the need to tackle the legacy of policies designed to ensure food security but which have led to the excessive use of water in agriculture. This situation could be corrected by achieving a healthier balance between food production at home and the import of food from elsewhere. Such a correction would involve the adoption of policies differing substantially from those of the Assad regime: a transformation going beyond post-conflict reconstruction would be required.

Climate and Hydrology

Apart from its coastal strip (which has a Mediterranean climate), Syria's climate varies from semi-arid to arid. Latakia and Tartus on the Mediterranean coast have, on average, over 700 mm of rain per year; Deir ez-Zor in the East has 113 mm.[3] There has always been a great deal of variation from year to year: in 1988, the wettest year in Syria's recorded history, the country received 485 mm of rain (averaged over the whole country); the following year was the driest ever, with the equivalent figure being 188 mm.[4]

Unirrigated ('rainfed') agriculture, dominated by cereals, is possible in much of the country; the West and Northeast are the most productive areas. Elsewhere, as the quantity and reliability of rainfall decline, rainfed agriculture becomes riskier and only some less thirsty crops such as barley can be grown without irrigation.[5]

Syria has suffered from recurrent droughts, with around 64 percent of the country highly or moderately vulnerable and Hassakeh Governorate in the northeastern 'corner' of the country particularly susceptible.[6] The 2025 drought was, according to BBC reporting, the worst for 36 years – with serious knock-on effects for Syria's food security.[7] Rainfall in 2026 has been much higher, permitting the production of an 'exceptional' crop of 2.75 million tonnes of wheat.[8]

The Impact of Climate Change

Climate change is already making itself felt in Syria. According to one academic study, 'Overall, Syria is becoming warmer and drier, with increasing persistence of droughts and

[3] WorldData.info, 'The Climate in Syria', n.d. Available at: https://www.worlddata.info/asia/syria/climate.php (accessed 25 September 2026).

[4] Extreme Weather Watch (website), 'Syria Weather Records'. Available at: https://www.extremeweatherwatch.com/countries/syria (accessed 25 September 2026). Average annual rainfall for the whole country during the period 1991-2020 was 318 mm.

[5] Yasser Ramazan, 'Agro-Ecological Zones of Syria (1981–2026)', 28 January 2026. Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/agro-ecological-zones-syria-19812026-yasser-ramazan-sdt9c/ (accessed 25 September 2026).

[6] ACSAD (Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands), 'Drought Vulnerability in the Arab Region, Case Study - Drought in Syria Ten Years of Scarce Water (2000 – 2010)', (2011), Table 1. Available at: https://www.unisdr.org/files/23905_droughtsyriasmall.pdf (accessed 25 September 2026).

[7] Samantha Granville, 'Syria's Worst Drought in Decades Pushes Millions to the Brink', *BBC News*, 17 September 2025. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c70x500lkdno (accessed 25 September 2026).

[8] 'Syria Achieves Wheat Self-Sufficiency after Record Harvest', *North Press Agency*, 3 September 2026. Available at: https://npasyria.com/en/141033/ (accessed 25 September 2026).

shifts in seasonality.'[9] Syria will have less (and even less reliable) rainfall, at the same time as higher temperatures bring higher evapotranspiration. For the same tonnage of any given crop, more water will be required – although less will be available.

As regards the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, lower and more erratic snowfall and rainfall over the Turkish mountains, a product of climate change, are projected to result in a reduced volume of water to be shared among the riparian states. In drought years, Türkiye is likely to meet its own needs first, leaving less for Syria (and Iraq). The experience of recent years (see below, 'Rivers') tends to support such a conclusion.

Because of higher temperatures in the Turkish mountains, the winter snow-cap will melt earlier in the spring than it used to do. Higher seasonal flows may arrive in Syria down the Euphrates and Tigris before they are wanted, in terms of irrigating crops. However, these are highly engineered rivers – within the framework of its Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), Türkiye has built 14 dams on the Euphrates and eight on the Tigris. How Türkiye manages the water in the two rivers may therefore have a greater impact than natural flow patterns.

Syria is poorly equipped to deal with climate impacts, whether direct or indirect. It ranks 168th (out of 187 countries) on the ND-GAIN index, which measures a country's vulnerability to climate change in combination with its readiness to improve its resilience.[10]

The Main Sources of Syria's Water

Rivers

The Euphrates and its tributaries are Syria's most important source of surface water. The Tigris is of a similar order of magnitude to the Euphrates in terms of flow, but its marginal position relative to Syria's national territory means that it is (for Syria) far less significant. Both rivers serve as sources of water for irrigation. In addition, a pipeline from Lake Tabqa (formerly Lake Assad) on the Euphrates is Aleppo's primary source of drinking water, supplying the city with 80,000 cubic metres a year.[11]

The flow of the Euphrates turns turbines in the Tabqa,[12] Tishreen and Mansoura (formerly Baath) Dams that once generated almost a quarter of Syria's electricity.[13] Because of the various effects of the civil war, they now contribute far less: a report by a British consulting firm, published in June 2026, put this contribution at only around 3.8%.[14] In

[9] Omar Alsenjar and Hakan Aksu, 'Spatiotemporal Analysis of Temperature and Precipitation in Syria', *Pure and Applied Geophysics* 183 (2026), pp. 2547–2589. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00024-026-03948-7 (accessed 25 September 2026).

[10] The latest ND-GAIN rankings are for 2023. ND-GAIN (website), 'Country Index'. Available at: https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/ (accessed 25 September 2026).

[11] Dursun Yildiz, 'Who Controls Syria's Dams on the Euphrates River: an Overview', *HPA Center*, 20 December 2024. Available at: https://www.hpacenter.org/en/article/1944/who_controls_%C2%A0syria%E2%80%99s_dams_on_the_euphrates_river:_an_overview (accessed 25 September 2026).

[12] The Tabqa Dam is sometimes referred to as the Euphrates Dam.

[13] In 1990, between 23 and 24% of Syria's electricity was generated by hydropower: see World Bank, 'Electricity production from hydroelectric sources (% of total) -Syrian Arab Republic'. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.HYRO.ZS?locations=SY (accessed 29 September 2026).

[14] Norton Rose Fulbright LLP – Syria Power Sector Guide 2026, June 2026. Available at: https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/en/knowledge/publications/9a5a8e97/syria-power-sector-guide-2026#section2

2022, only four of the eight turbines at the Tabqa hydropower plant (the country's largest) were working due to low water levels.[15] With the re-establishment of central government control over the dam, engineers have begun repairs to restore its generating capacity.[16] It is not clear how long it will take to get power generation back to pre-civil war levels.

Türkiye is the source of most of the flow of the Euphrates and Tigris, with spring snowmelt supplying the bulk of the water. According to M. Nouar Shamout and Glada Lahn, the country contributes 89% of the flow of the Euphrates in Syria.[17] High though this figure is, it may actually understate Türkiye's contribution: much of the water in the three main tributaries (Sajur, Balikh and Khabour) which join the Syrian Euphrates come from surface or underground flow from Türkiye that feeds the rivers in Syria. Snowfall and rainfall in the Turkish mountains are therefore a key determinant of water availability in Syria. Another key determinant is the volume of water which Türkiye takes from the river for irrigation and the other ways in which Türkiye manages its 14 dams on the river – especially in drought years.[18]

In 1987, Syria and Türkiye signed a protocol that committed the latter to release 500 cusecs (cubic metres per second) down the Euphrates, averaged over a year.[19] According to Syrian and Iraqi sources, actual releases have fallen well short of this volume. In September 2025, Abu Zaid, Syria's Deputy Minister of Energy, told the media, 'The Turkish side has not complied during years of drought with releasing Syria and Iraq's share of the Euphrates River.'[20] He did not say how much water Türkiye had actually released in the years concerned. However, the Green Iraq Initiative (a civil society organisation) declared at the end of August 2025 that Türkiye's releases down both the Euphrates and Tigris during July and August were no more than 120 cusecs.[21]

(accessed 29 September 2026).

[15] Aurora Sottimano and Nabil Samman, 'Syria Has a Water Crisis and It's Not Going Away', *Atlantic Council MENA Source*, 24 February 2022. Available at: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/syria-has-a-water-crisis-and-its-not-going-away/ (accessed 29 September 2026).

[16] Levant 24 (news website), 'Electricity and Water Return at Liberation of Tabqa Dam', *Levant 24*, 20 January 2026. Available at: https://levant24.com/news/2026/01/electricity-and-water-return-at-liberation-of-tabqa-dam/ (accessed 29 September 2026).

[17] M. Nouar Shamout & Glada Lahn, The Euphrates in Crisis: Channels of Cooperation for a Threatened River', *Chatham House Research Paper* (2015), p. 11. Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20150413Euphrates_0.pdf (accessed 29 September 2026).

[18] On Turkish use of the Euphrates and Tigris, see Greg Shapland, 'Water Security in Iraq', *LSE Middle East Centre* (2023). Available at: https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/119442/ (accessed 29 September 2026).

[19] The protocol states that, '[d]uring the filling period of the Atatürk Dam Reservoir and until the final allocation of the waters of the Euphrates among the riparian countries, the Turkish Side undertakes to release a yearly average of more than 500 cubic meters a second at the Turkish/Syrian border and in cases where the monthly flow falls below the level of 500 cubic meters, the Turkish side agrees to make up the difference during the following month.' Extracted from 'Water: A source of conflict of coopeariton (sic) in the Middle East?', *Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/DISPOLITIKA/WaterASourceofConflictofCoopintheMiddleEast.pdf#:~:text=Water%20issues%20were%20included%20in,water%20a%20second%20to%20Syria (accessed 29 September 2026).

[20] 'Syria Accuses Turkey of Withholding Euphrates Water Share', *+963*, 1 September 2025. Available at: https://963media.com/en/01/09/2025/syria-accuses-turkey-of-withholding-euphrates-water-share/ (accessed 29 September 2026). The Ministry of Energy has been responsible for water since March 2025.

[21] 'Turkiye's Water Release to Iraq Falls 70% Short of Pledge', *Shafaq News*, 31 August 2025. Available

In early June 2026, Syria experienced the opposite problem. Following snowmelt and weeks of heavy rainfall in Türkiye, unusually large flows of water suddenly arrived in Syria down the Euphrates, causing extensive flooding with damage to crops and property. While the Syrian authorities termed the resultant flooding an 'act of God', they asserted that the Turkish warnings of the surge came too late. According to one media source, however, nothing was done when those warnings were received, although reservoir levels in Syria could have been lowered in anticipation of the increased inflow.[22]

It is unclear why this was not done. There may have been a breakdown of communication between the Turkish water authorities and their counterparts in Syria. It is also possible that there was a lack of coordination between the central water authorities in Damascus and the operators of the Tabqa Dam.

Türkiye's use of the Euphrates has also affected the quality of the water in Syria in two ways. First, water draining from irrigated fields in Türkiye is contaminated with agricultural chemicals. And second, lower flows mean higher concentrations (reduced dilution) of pollutants. While no figures appear to be publicly available, media reporting suggests that pollution levels are high. For example, pollution (together with low water levels) is reported to have greatly reduced fish catches in Lake Assad.[23]

A formal consultation mechanism on the Euphrates and Tigris, grouping Türkiye, Syria and Iraq, has existed since the early 1980s. However, this mechanism, the Joint Technical Committee, failed to bring the three countries to agreement, and has not met since 1993. Since then, various 'Track 2' initiatives have sought to establish common ground among the three countries but have been no more successful in producing tangible results.

There was somewhat more bilateral movement between Syria and Türkiye in the first decade of this century. In 2002, following meetings to discuss water-related socio-economic development activities, the two countries signed an 'Implementation Document'. In this document, they committed themselves to implementing common research and activities projects, as well as training programs. However, this agreement did not address the questions of volumetric allocations, contaminated return flows from irrigation or the relationship over the Tigris and Euphrates with Iraq.[24]

In 2009, Syria and Türkiye signed four water-related agreements. (Forty-six other agreements were signed at the same time.) These agreements concerned Turkish assistance with the remediation of water quality and the efficient use of water resources in Syria, as

at: https://shafaq.com/en/society/Turkiye-s-water-release-to-Iraq-falls-70-short-of-pledge (accessed 30 September 2026).

[22] 'The Euphrates Floods: A Political Crime, not a Natural Disaster', *The Syrian Observer*, 5 June 2026. Available at: https://syrianobserver.com/syrian-actors/the-euphrates-floods-a-political-crime-not-a-natural-disaster.html (accessed 30 September 2026).

[23] Delil Souleiman, 'Syria Fishermen Despair at Water Loss, River Pollution', *Al-Monitor*, 27 July 2023. Available at: https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/07/syria-fishermen-despair-water-loss-river-pollution (accessed 30 September 2026).

[24] Marwa Daoudy, 'Asymmetric Power: Negotiating Water in the Euphrates and Tigris', *International Negotiation* 14/2 (2009): 361–91, p. 13. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1163/157180609X432860 (accessed 30 September 2026).

well as the construction by Syria of a pumping station to withdraw water from the Tigris and a joint dam on the Orontes (al-Asi), to be known as the Friendship Dam.[25] Loss of government control in Northeast Syria during the civil war halted construction of the Tigris pumping station,[26] while the Friendship Dam project came to an end with the end of the friendship between Damascus and Ankara, following the outbreak of the uprising in Syria. Construction had not progressed beyond the laying of the foundation stone.[27]

The Orontes is a much smaller river than the Euphrates and Tigris. It is nevertheless important to Syria's water budget and may provide as much as 13.6 percent of the country's water resources.[28] It supplies irrigation water for farms in the Orontes valley, as well as industries in Homs and Hama.

In terms of relationships with other states in the basin, Syria's position on the Orontes is much stronger than on the Euphrates and Tigris. This is partly because, although the Orontes rises in Lebanon, most of its flow is added in Syria. Moreover, Syria is very much the dominant partner in its relationship with Lebanon. Bilateral agreements signed in 1994, 1997 and 2002 set out the volume of water – 80 million cubic metres per year (mcm/yr) – which Lebanon may take from the Orontes.[29] In fact, Lebanon uses much less than this, about 21 mcm/yr.[30] This may in part be due to the fact that, in Lebanon, the river is mostly flowing through a gorge, making the topography unfavourable for irrigated agriculture.[31] According to one expert, speaking in 2026, Lebanon does not make any consumptive use of the waters of the Orontes and only uses the river for fish farming.[32]

Syria has not been prepared to sign a similar volumetric agreement with its downstream

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[25] 'Joint Statement of the First Meeting of the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council Between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Republic of Turkey, Damascus', *Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 22–23 December 2009. Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye---suriye-ydsik-1_-toplantisi-ortak-bildirisi_-22-23-aralik_-sam.en.mfa (accessed 30 September 2026).

[26] Yildiz, 'Hydropolitics'.

[27] Hannah Haemmerli, Christian Bréthaut & Fatine Ezbakhe, 'Exploring Friendship in Hydropolitics: The Case of the Friendship Dam on the Asi/Orontes River', *Environmental Policy and Governance* 34/1 (2024): pp. 93–107. Available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/eet.2058

[28] Ahmet Conker & Hussam Hussein, 'Hydropolitics and Issue-Linkage along the Orontes River Basin: An Analysis of the Lebanon–Syria and Syria–Turkey Hydropolitical Relations', *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 20 (2020): pp. 103–21. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10784-019-09462-7 (accessed 30 September 2026).

[29] Georges F. Comair et al., 'Transboundary Cooperation in International Basins: Clarification and Experiences from the Orontes River Basin Agreement: Part 1', *Environmental Science & Policy* 31, (2013): pp. 133–40. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2013.01.006 (accessed 30 September 2026).

[30] 'Inventory of Shared Water Resources in Western Asia', *UN-ESCWA and BGR* (*United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe*), *Beirut* (2013), p. 234. Available at: https://waterinventory.org/sites/waterinventory.org/files/chapters/Chapter-07-Orontes-River-Basin-web_1.pdf (accessed 30 September 2026). Note that the figure quoted dates from 2001.

[31] 'Transboundary River Basin Overview – Asi-Orontes', *FAO* (*Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations*) (2009). Available at: https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/f3629776-73ca-4768-9cba-9b90446c62c7/content (accessed 30 September 2026).

[32] Zahra Hamadeh, Lebanese Red Cross, speaking (in Arabic) during Panel 3: Water transboundary issues between Lebanon, Syria, Türkiye and Iraq, ARI conference, 'Crossroads of Crisis: Conflict, Climate and the Environment in the MENA Region', Istanbul, 30 June/31 July 2026. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ls8M4pDYyEk&list=PLAOwViNvJfVc&index=3&t=123s (accessed 5 July 2026).

neighbour Türkiye over the use of the river. This is ostensibly because of Syria's refusal to recognise Turkish sovereignty over the province of Alexandretta, which Türkiye annexed in the late 1930s and now terms Hatay.

In the basin of the Yarmouk River, the main tributary of the River Jordan, Syria is upstream of both Jordan and Israel. Eighty percent of the basin lies within Syria, which has constructed 32 small dams on its tributaries, despite a 1987 agreement with Jordan limiting to 26 the number of dams which Syria can build.[33] Syria's use of Yarmouk basin water (including groundwater feeding the surface flows) has already reduced the flow of the river. Following the end of the civil war, reconstruction and the expansion of agriculture in the basin are likely to increase Syrian consumption of the Yarmouk's water and so further cut the flows into Jordan and Israel.

Whether Syria will accept any restrictions on its use of the Yarmouk to protect the interests of its downstream neighbours remains to be seen. Jordan and Syria have at least now begun exploratory exchanges about the 1987 agreement. These may lead in time to its revision. However, some practical problems such as the lack of reliable data need to be addressed and this could make for a protracted process.

Meanwhile, some cooperation between Syria and Jordan seems to have developed since the fall of the Assads: the Deputy Minister of Energy, speaking to the media in September 2025, 'highlighted joint Syrian-Jordanian efforts to develop the Yarmouk River basin in Daraa province to increase water inflows. He said current efforts focus on two tracks: urgent repairs of damaged pumping stations and pipelines, and medium-term solutions such as installing solar-powered systems to operate water facilities.'[34]

The Barada river, which provides water to Damascus and the Ghouta oasis which surrounds the city, rises wholly within Syria. The groundwater which supplies the Barada has been over-exploited for many decades and the river now flows for only seven or eight weeks a year (and then only feebly).[35]

Groundwater

There are not many recent studies on the state of Syria's reserves of groundwater. Such studies as there are suggest that, while most of its aquifers are recharged by rainfall, abstractions (i.e., withdrawals) of water have been taking place over many years at a greater rate than that of recharge. This is largely the result, it appears, of farmers drawing on groundwater to make up for rainfall that is too low, in many years, to sustain their crops.[36]

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[33] The purpose of the 1987 agreement was to establish the basis for the construction of a joint Jordanian-Syrian dam – the Unity (*Wehdeh*) Dam – on the Yarmouk. Mark Zeitoun, Chadi Abdallah, Muna Dajani, Sa'eb Khresat, Heather Elaydi & Amani Alfarra, 'The Yarmouk Tributary to the Jordan River I: Agreements Impeding Equitable Transboundary Water Arrangements', *Water Alternatives* 12/3 (2019): pp. 1064–94. Available at: https://www.water-alternatives.org/index.php/alldoc/articles/vol12/v12issue3/555-a12-3-11/file (accessed 30 September 2026).

[34] 'Syria Accuses Turkey of Withholding Euphrates Water Share'.

[35] UN-ESCWA and BGR, 'Inventory', p. 452.

[36] Alper Baba, Ruwad AL. Karem & Hamidreza Yazdani, 'Groundwater Resources and Quality in Syria', *Groundwater for Sustainable Development* 14 (2021). Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352801X21000746 (accessed 30 September 2026).

Over-pumping and a growing number of illegal wells have caused water-tables to fall. In the pre-civil war period, regulations designed to curb such practices were introduced but 'never really implemented'.[37] In the country's present circumstances, the imposition of such measures would be even more difficult. Without them, however, Syria's groundwater reserves will become progressively depleted.

Three of Syria's largest aquifer systems are shared with other countries – with Lebanon in the case of the aquifer lying beneath the Anti-Lebanon range and with Türkiye and Iraq respectively in the case of two aquifers underlying the Jazira region between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. There are no cross-border agreements governing the use of these aquifers, which face severe depletion and water quality deterioration driven by unregulated extraction, population pressure and agricultural expansion.[38] The main natural recharge of the Jazira aquifer shared by Syria and Türkiye takes place on the Turkish side of the border, where rainfall is higher and the geology more favourable.[39] This makes Syrian users potentially vulnerable to increased abstractions in Türkiye.

Water Consumption Has Long Exceeded Renewal

Following the installation of the Baath Party regime in 1963, Syria sought to achieve self-sufficiency in certain strategic crops by expanding agricultural production. (One of the main reasons for the adoption of this policy was the fear that Western states might use food as a weapon against Syria.[40]) The Eighth Five Year Plan (1996–2000) replaced the goal of self-sufficiency with a policy of food security, that is, 'producing goods of relative advantage and exporting surpluses to provide foreign exchange to cover the import of other goods that are not produced locally or where the domestic production does not satisfy the need.'[41]

This policy shift, despite accepting the need to import food, did nothing to reduce the use of water in agriculture. In fact, the area of land under irrigation more than doubled between 1985 and 2010 – from 625,000 to 1.6 million hectares, an estimated 30% of all cultivated land.[42] (By 2020/21, the area of irrigable land had fallen to 1.44 million hectares.[43]) According to Alper Baba, Ruwad AL. Karem and Hamidreza Yazdani, 'About 87% of all water in Syria is mainly used for irrigation, with almost 60% of this water taken from groundwater resources.'[44]

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[37] Joseph Daher, 'Water Scarcity, Mismanagement and Pollution in Syria', *Research Project Report Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria*, Issue 2022/10 - 27 June 2022, EUI. Available at: https://cadmus.eui.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/31547c6e-494c-5887-a063-cbf14da11cf7/content (accessed 30 September 2026).

[38] Mahdi Zaidan, 'Water Resources and the Syrian Civil War', *K4DD* (*Knowledge for Development and Diplomacy*), March 2026 (unpublished).

[39] Baba, Karem & Yazdani, 'Groundwater Resources and Quality in Syria'.

[40] Raymond Hinnebusch, 'The Ba'th's Agrarian Revolution (1963–2000)' in: Raymond Hinnebusch, Atieh El Hindi, Mounzer Khaddam & Myriam Ababsa, Syria Studies: Agriculture and Reform in Syria 3/1 (2011): p. 4. Available at: https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/syria/article/view/716/620 (accessed 1 October 2026).

[41] Atieh El Hindi, 'Syria's Agricultural Sector: Situation, Role, Challenges and Prospects', in: Hinnebusch et al, *Syria Studies: Agriculture and Reform in Syria* 3/1 (2011): p. 46.

[42] Daher, 'Water Scarcity'.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Baba, Karem & Yazdani, 'Groundwater Resources and Quality in Syria'.

Despite this heavy consumption of water, the country's agricultural production has declined by 50 percent over the last decade.[45] (The causes include civil war damage, fuel shortages, power outages, the lack of maintenance of pumps, the unaffordability of seed and fertiliser and the absence of government support.) As a result of this decline, Syria has had to expend scarce foreign exchange reserves importing large quantities of staple crops such as wheat.

Population growth – whether through the return of refugees or natural increase – will make for higher demand for water. (How many refugees will return to Syria and how soon is very difficult to predict but one projection suggests that there will be almost 38 million people living in the country by 2050 – around 16 million more than in 2011.[46]) This demand will be partly attributable to direct consumption (drinking, hygiene etc) but mainly to the need for more food. If the latter (or at least some of it) is to be produced by Syria's farmers, much larger volumes of water will have to be applied to the country's fields. This may be mitigated by the introduction of more efficient methods of irrigation, the productivity of water in agriculture being currently poor, mainly because of an over-reliance on surface methods such as basin and furrow techniques.[47] But in reality, much of the additional water required will arrive as 'virtual water' – that is, embedded in imported food.[48]

The Impact of the Civil War

A report published in December 2024 noted that the fighting had led to 'the destruction of irrigation canals, pumping stations, and storage facilities.'[49] In September 2025, Abu Zaid, Syria's Deputy Minister of Energy, said that 'more than 60% of Syria's water infrastructure has been damaged during the conflict, leaving entire systems out of service in several towns and villages. Main transmission and distribution networks have also suffered severe damage, restricting access to clean drinking water.'[50]

A further challenge stems from the near collapse of wastewater (sewage) treatment, a consequence of the civil war,[51] which has caused the contamination of groundwater. (Even

[45] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 'After 14 Years of Decline: Syria Launches New Plan to Revitalize its Agriculture Sector', *Al-Estiklal* (2025). Available at: https://alestiklal.net/en/article/after-14-years-of-decline-syria-launches-new-plan-to-revitalize-its-agriculture-sector (accessed 1 October 2026). The bumper harvest this year, resulting as it did from exceptionally high rainfall, may not be repeated for some years.

[46] Figure for 2050 from PopulationPyramid.net. Available at: https://www.populationpyramid.net/syrian-arab-republic/2050/ (accessed 1 October 2026). Figure for 2011 from countryeconomy.com, available at: https://countryeconomy.com/demography/population/syria?year=2011 (accessed 1 October 2026).

[47] Fanack Water, 'Water Challenges in Syria', *Syria Water Report*, 22 March 2019. Available at: https://water.fanack.com/syria/water-challenges/ (accessed 1 October 2026).

[48] On virtual water, see: Tony Allan, *The Middle East Water Question: Hydropolitics and the Global Economy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

[49] Yildiz, 'Who Controls Syria's Dams'.

[50] 'Syria Accuses Turkey of Withholding Euphrates Water Share'.

[51] According to the World Bank, 'around 70% of wastewater treatment plants were severely damaged' during the conflict: 'Syria: World Bank Approves US$225 Million Financing to Restore Water and Health Services', *World Bank Press Release*, 23 April 2026. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2026/04/23/syria-world-bank-approves-us-225-million-financing-to-restore-water-and-health-services (accessed 6 October 2026).

before the beginning of the conflict, wastewater treatment was underdeveloped.[52]) In some areas, groundwater has been further polluted by the residues from chemical weapons, although this phenomenon has not yet been thoroughly investigated.[53] Pollution and unlicensed water vending by tanker operators have led to the spread of a number of diseases, including leishmaniasis in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor and typhoid fever around Damascus.[54] In the Northeast, oil leaking into streams has caused pollution.[55] It seems unlikely that much has been done so far to tackle these problems, although the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) has had a programme addressing water and other problems in Syria since 2022.[56]

Even where infrastructure has not been damaged by the fighting, equipment theft, sabotage and lack of maintenance have contributed to the general degrading of water systems.[57] This unhappy situation is not only the direct result of the conflict but also of a shortage of funds and the inability to import spare parts. The loss of technical staff has had a deleterious effect too: according to one study, some utilities lost 40 percent of such staff.[58]

The damage to Syria's water sector consequent upon the civil war has exposed much of the population to unsafe water supplies. According to the World Bank, 'More than half of the population do not have adequate access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services'.[59] IDPs (internally displaced persons) are at particular risk, with seven out of 10 people in camps in Northern Syria lacking access to safe sources of water.[60] Another source notes a lack of potable water among vulnerable communities in Northwest Syria.[61] IDPs and others living in temporary accommodation are also especially at risk from flooding, such as that which followed the unusually heavy rainfall this spring.[62]

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[52] Daher, 'Water Scarcity'.

[53] Baba, Karem & Yazdani, 'Groundwater Resources and Quality in Syria'.

[54] Fanack Water, 'Water Quality in Syria'. Leishmaniasis is not a water-borne disease but is spread by sandflies, for which stagnant water and untreated wastewater provide good breeding grounds: US Government Center for Disease Control. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/leishmaniasis/about/index.html (accessed 6 October 2026).

[55] Daher, 'Water Scarcity'.

[56] ICRC, 'ICRC in Syria: A Year in Review, 2024', *ICRC website* (2024). Available at: Syria_Operational_Facts_and_Figures_2024 En Web.pdf (accessed 6 October 2026).

[57] Yildiz, 'Who Controls Syria's Dams'.

[58] Daher, 'Water Scarcity'.

[59] 'Syria: World Bank Approves US$225 Million Financing', World Bank (2026).

[60] Daher, 'Water Scarcity'.

[61] Omar Atik, et al., 'Potable Water under Pressure: Effects of the Syrian Crisis and Recent Drought on Northwest Syria', *Journal of Water Resource and Protection* 17 (2025), pp. 1–13. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4236/jwarp.2025.171001 (accessed 6 October 2026).

[62] OCHA, 'Flash Update No. 2, Flooding in North and East Syria', *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, 8 April 2026. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-flash-update-no-2-flooding-north-and-east-syria-8-april-2026-enar (accessed 6 October 2026).

Water Security in Syria in the Post-Assad Era

The (Incomplete) Re-Establishment of Control over Water Sources and Facilities

The Syrian government does not have control over all parts of its national territory. Israeli forces occupy the Golan Heights and part of southern Syria, including areas of the Yarmouk basin. It seems unlikely that Israel is interfering with the flow of the Yarmouk or its tributaries, as to do so would deprive Jordan of water without adding to Israel's supply. (Israel's 1994 treaty with Jordan covers the sharing of water in the basins of the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers.) Moreover, Israel, now well provided with water from its six seawater desalination plants, does not need additional water from the Yarmouk basin. Nonetheless, the Israeli presence in the basin naturally impedes Syrian access to at least some water installations there.[63]

In the North, Turkish forces occupy areas of Syrian territory that include the Allouk pumping station, which supplies water to the city of Hassakeh and surrounding areas. Türkiye has been accused of using its control of the Allouk station as a means of putting pressure on Syria's Kurds. Hassakeh received water in May 2026 after an interruption lasting a year, although it is not clear whether this was supplied from the Allouk station or from an alternative supply line from the Euphrates.[64]

Of greater importance at the national level, the central government has regained control over major water installations such as the Tabqa Dam,[65] a necessary condition for the restoration of a functioning water sector. The achievement of that goal is nevertheless hampered by fragmented governance. Responsibility for water-related matters (such as environment, emergency responses to flooding and reconstruction) is divided among several different ministries with different mandates. This inevitably makes for sub-optimal policy formulation and implementation.

Improved Relations with Türkiye May Help

The present healthy trajectory in bilateral relations between Damascus and Ankara may, in time, make for a more sympathetic Turkish attitude to Syria's water needs. So far, though, nothing in the public domain indicates that there been any change in Turkish attitudes with respect to the rivers which it shares with Syria. During his press conference with his Turkish counterpart in April, Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani referred to 'expanding cooperation in energy, trade, and infrastructure' but did not make any explicit

[63] Neda Zawahri, 'The Political Economy of Water Insecurity in Jordan' in: Natasha Hall (ed.), *The Thirst for Power: Overcoming the Politics of Water in the Middle East* (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2025). Available at: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2025-03/250307_Hall_Thirst_Power.pdf?VersionId=ZKPz1EeBeRCiVui5einmNpQY7C5Ebp84 (accessed 6 October 2026).

[64] 'Water Returns to Hasaka after Years-Long Cutoff', *ANHA Hawar News Agency*, 13 May 2026. Available at: https://hawarnews.com/en/water-returns-to-hasaka-after-years-long-cutoff (accessed 6 October 2026).

[65] 'Syrian Army Regains Control of Euphrates Dam, Restores Water and Power', *SANA*, 18 January 2026. Available at: https://sana.sy/en/syria/2291039/ (accessed 6 October 2026).

mention of water.[66] Moreover, Türkiye's National Water Plan, announced in March 2026, does not appear to take any account of the needs of the downstream users, Syria and Iraq.[67]

Internal Measures that Syria Could Take

There is much that could be done within Syria to improve the country's water security. The rehabilitation of the existing infrastructure (for example, water distribution networks) is an obvious place to start. As well as improving the delivery of water to users, this should reduce the volume of non-revenue water (NRW) or at least that proportion of NRW which is attributable to leakage. (Some part of the total volume of NRW will be attributable to theft through illegal connections or non-payment of bills but there do not seem to be any publicly available figures as to how much.) Modernising as well as rehabilitating irrigation systems would enable better use to be made of available water supplies.

Treating wastewater to a re-usable standard offers great potential. Realising this potential would involve constructing new wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) as well as rehabilitating damaged facilities. The treated wastewater produced by these facilities could be used to irrigate fields in the vicinity of Syrian cities (the source of most wastewater), thus easing the pressure on groundwater reserves. A Syrian government study, issued in 2011, noted that the country's 26 WWTPs produced around 300 mcm/yr of treated wastewater per year, potentially meeting three percent of national water needs. At that time, however, only eight mcm of this wastewater was used for irrigation.[68]

Water harvesting is another method, so far under-developed, of making more water available for use. One academic study concluded that collecting rainwater on roofs in urban areas could yield 35 mcm/yr. In addition, water harvesting in rural areas could provide water for the irrigation of fruit trees.[69]

Other countries in the MENA region are looking to desalination of seawater as a way of increasing the supply of water. Before 2011, Syria made very little use of desalination. The total capacity was a mere three mcm/yr, the equivalent of 0.01 percent of the national water budget, with desalinated water only used by industry.[70]

As a source of water to meet a large part of Syria's needs, desalination does not appear

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[66] 'Al-Shaibani: New era of strategic partnership with Türkiye begins', *SANA*, 9 April 2026. Available at: https://sana.sy/en/politics/2309357/ (accessed 6 October 2026).

[67] 'New Water Plan puts Conservation, Efficiency at Center of Türkiye's Policy Shift', *Türkiye Today*, 23 March 2026. Available at: https://www.turkiyetoday.com/lifestyle/new-water-plan-puts-conservation-efficiency-at-center-of-turkiyes-policy-shift-3216736?s=1 (accessed 6 October 2026).

[68] Fanack Water, 'Water Resources in Syria', *Syria Water Report*, 30 March 2025, citing Ministry of Housing and Construction, 'Wastewater Treatment Plants Performance Report' (2011). Available at: https://water.fanack.com/syria/water-resources/#_ftn3 (accessed 6 October 2026).

[69] Khaldoun A. Mourad & Ronny Berndtsson, 'Potential Water Saving from Rainwater Harvesting in Syria', *Vatten* 67 (2011): pp. 113–17. Available at: https://portal.research.lu.se/en/publications/potential-water-saving-from-rainwater-harvesting-in-syria/ (accessed 6 October 2026).

[70] Fanack Water, 'Water Resources in Syria'.

promising. The areas which need more water are a long way from the coast[71] and on the other side of the coastal mountains: conveying the water would add to the already high cost of desalinated water per cubic metre. Moreover, while Syria does have domestic sources of energy, it does not have them in abundance like the GCC countries or Algeria (although solar power might be substituted for oil and gas, as is happening elsewhere in the region). Finally, there is the capital cost which, for a large plant, can run to hundreds of millions of US dollars.

Despite these constraints, in February 2026 ACWA (a private Saudi desalination company) and the Syrian Ministry of Energy signed an agreement to assess the possibility of developing desalination and water conveyance projects in Syria. The studies envisaged by the agreement will evaluate seawater desalination projects with an aggregate capacity of up to approximately 1.2 mcm per day, together with associated water conveyance infrastructure.[72] This seems like an ambitious target but may be achievable if phased over several years, as appears to be the intention.

Desalination of brackish groundwater in inland areas might be a more attractive option. As brackish groundwater contains less dissolved salt than seawater, the cost per cubic metre for desalination is lower. Furthermore Syria's reserves of brackish water are closer to the places in greatest need of more water, thus reducing the cost of conveyance to consumers.

Such measures would be valuable but not adequate alone to ensure Syria's water security: transformation of the water sector rather than just the restoration and development of its infrastructure is required. This objective can only be achieved if the government abandons the policy of food security based principally on domestic production, which it inherited from the Assad regime. Such a change would greatly reduce the volume of water used to irrigate crops like wheat that are readily available on the world market. This would in turn mean that less groundwater would be required and so help the country to avoid reaching an irreversible state of 'water bankruptcy'.[73]

This is, however, more easily said than done. One obstacle is inertia: making changes to established policies would be challenging for a government still struggling to restore stability after a lengthy civil war. There is also a need to protect farming livelihoods and rural communities. (Agriculture accounts for just over 16 percent of jobs[74] but the figure would be much higher if associated activities such as food processing and transport were to be

[71] For example, Damascus is over 250 km by road from the coastal city of Tartous.

[72] 'Acwa–WTCO Consortium Signs Joint Development Agreement with the Ministry of Energy of the Syrian Arab Republic for Water Desalination and Water Transmission Projects', *Acwa Media Center*, 8 February 2026. Available at: https://acwapower.com/en/media-center/latest-news/acwa-wtco-consortium-signs-joint-development-agreement-with-the-ministry-of-energy-of-the-syrian-arab-republic-water-desalination-and-water-transmission-projects/ (accessed 8 October 20206).

[73] Kaveh Madani, 'Water Bankruptcy: The Formal Definition', *Water Resources Management* 40/78 (2026). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11269-025-04484-0 (accessed 8 October 20206).

[74] 'Employment in agriculture (% of total employment) (modeled ILO estimate) - Syrian Arab Republic', World Bank (2025). Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS (accessed 8 October 2026).

included.) The main obstacle is, however, financial: despite impressive recent growth,[75] the Syrian economy remains weak.[76] For the foreseeable future, the country's exports are unlikely to generate sufficient foreign exchange to enable it to purchase, at a greatly increased level, food grown elsewhere. Nevertheless, the government could take the decision to relinquish its present food security policy in favour of higher food imports while moving towards that objective in a realistically phased manner.

The Ministry of Agriculture's National Agriculture Strategy 2026–2030, with its emphasis on rebuilding the sector to increase output, suggests that the government does not yet recognise the imperative to curb the use of water in irrigation.[77] While 'the sustainable use of water and land resources' appears to feature in the Strategy (which is apparently not in the public domain), it is hard to know whether or not this represents more than a general desideratum.[78]

An International Community more Willing to Engage

The ousting of the Assad regime has facilitated the re-engagement of the international community in the reconstruction of the country. The fact that the World Bank has put Syria into the lowest income per person bracket may make some donors more prepared to provide funding.[79] Moreover, a major barrier to private investment in Syria was lifted when, in August 2026, the US government removed Syria from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.[80]

Even before the US took this significant step, governments and aid organisations had been making moves of their own to support Syria's recovery. In 2025, Saudi Arabia and Qatar facilitated the clearance of Syria's arrears to the World Bank's International Development Association.[81] In September 2025, the Saudi aid agency KSRelief announced $1.4 billion of

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[75] 'IMF: Syria's Economy Could Grow by More Than 10% in 2026', *Enab Baladi*, 5 August 2026. Available at: https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2026/08/imf-syrias-economy-could-grow-by-more-than-10-in-2026/ (accessed 8 October 2026).

[76] Syria's trade balance recorded a deficit of $7.4 bn in December 2025. 'Syria Total Exports: 1960 – 2026', *CEIC*, June 2026. Available at: https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/syria/total-exports (accessed 8 October 2026).

[77] The Strategy was launched in February 2026. 'MoA, FCDO and FAO Commit to Transforming the Agri-Food System of Syria', *FAO* (*Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations*), 16 February 2026. Available at: https://www.fao.org/syria/news/details/moa--fcdo-and-fao-commit-to-transforming-the-agri-food-system-of-syria/en (accessed 8 October 2026).

[78] 'Farming Under Pressure - Challenges Facing Farmers in Syria', *ReliefWeb*, 15 June 2026. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/farming-under-pressure-challenges-facing-farmers-syria (accessed 8 October 2026).

[79] 'World Bank Places Syria Among Lowest-Income Economies for FY2026', *Al-Hal*, 1 July 2026. Available at: https://syrianobserver.com/society/world-bank-places-syria-among-lowest-income-economies-for-fy2026.html (accessed 8 October 2026).

[80] Tom Bateman & Helen Livingstone, 'US Removes Syria from List of State Sponsors of Terrorism', *BBC News*, 26 August 2026. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c33knmyloy5o (accessed 8 October 2026).

[81] Akihiko Nishio, 'A Global Force for Good: Gulf Cooperation Council's Leadership in Development Finance', *World Bank Perspectives: MENA, Afghanistan, and Pakistan*, 28 October 2025. Available at: https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/arabvoices/a-global-force-for-good--gulf-cooperation-council-s-leadership-i (accessed 8 October 2026).

funding for several hundred projects in Syria, including some relating to water.[82] In March 2026, the Aga Khan Development Network signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Energy, valued at €100 million, 'to improve water services and promote sustainable resource management across several Syrian regions, with a primary focus on the city of Salamiyah and its surrounding countryside in Hama Governorate.'[83] The same year, the World Bank approved $150 million for the rehabilitation of water-treatment and transmission in some conflict-affected areas,[84] while the Green Climate Fund authorised $27.7 million in funding for a project aimed at addressing water scarcity risks in areas hit hardest by climate change.[85]

Investors as well as donors have begun putting money into Syria, with Turkish, Saudi, Qatari, Emirati and US companies appearing to be the biggest investors. Energy, telecoms, transport and real estate have so far received a lot more investment than the water sector – presumably because the financial returns are much greater. Nevertheless, the use of public-private partnerships (PPPs), with a guaranteed return for investors from the agreed purchase of a minimum volume of water by the government, could prove attractive to private investors. The construction of new WWTPs and desalination plants could be carried out using such mechanisms. (Morocco has been financing its desalination plants in this way.)[86] By contrast, the installation of more efficient irrigation systems – also necessary but less appealing to private investors because of the low price of water charged to farmers – might have to be left to the public sector using funding from donors.

[82] Nicholas Lyall, 'How Gulf Engagement Could Shape Syria's Reconstruction', *Gulf International Forum*, 13 January 2026. Available at: https://gulfif.org/how-gulf-engagement-could-shape-syrias-reconstruction/ (accessed 8 October 2026).

[83] 'Ministry of Energy and Aga Khan Development Network sign €100M Water Infrastructure MoU', SANA, 26 March 2026. Available at: https://sana.sy/en/economic/2305569/ (accessed 8 October 2026).

[84] 'Syria: World Bank Approves US$225 Million Financing', *Al-Hal*, 1 July 2026. Available at: https://syrianobserver.com/society/world-bank-places-syria-among-lowest-income-economies-for-fy2026.html (accessed 8 October 2026). The $225 million divides into $75 million for healthcare and $150 million for water.

[85] 'Syria Secures First National Green Climate Fund Project to Tackle Water Scarcity', *Arab News*, 4 July 2026. Available at: https://www.arabnews.com/node/2649611/amp (accessed 8 October 2026).

[86] See, for example, 'CaixaBank and COFIDES Finance Acciona in the Construction of a Desalination Plant in Morocco', *CaixaBank*, 17 June 2024. Available at: https://www.caixabank.com/en/headlines/news/caixabank-and-cofides-finance-acciona-in-the-construction-of-a-desalination-plant-in-morocco (accessed 8 October 2026).

Conclusions

Post-Assad Syria faces numerous challenges: though water is just one, it is serious. Climate change and population growth will make the challenge of achieving water security considerably more severe.

Much of Syria's water supply comes from the Euphrates and its tributaries, the flow of which depends on decisions made by Turkish dam operators. Although Syrian-Turkish relations have improved greatly since the end of the Assad regime, this does not seem to have influenced Türkiye's management of the Euphrates. (It is tempting to recommend that outside governments such as that of the UK might seek to mediate between Türkiye and Syria but the Turkish government's unambiguous rejection of external intervention in this area suggests that it is likely to be a wasted endeavour.[87]) In other river basins that Syria shares with its neighbours, its position is much stronger and its supply of water from these rivers is not at risk.

The civil war caused widespread damage to Syria's water infrastructure. Rehabilitating this infrastructure (and modernising it) will be a heavy financial burden for a country whose economy is in as parlous a state as Syria's. While donors and investors are beginning to help Syria rebuild its water sector, there is scope to do much more. For those countries and organisations with an interest in Syria's stability (which would be positively affected by the provision of adequate supplies of water of acceptable quality), the mobilisation of the necessary funds should prove to be a worthwhile endeavour.

To ensure its long-term water security, however, Syria will itself have to go further. Specifically, the government needs to protect its sources of water – and particularly its reserves of groundwater – by reducing the quantity of water devoted to irrigation. The adoption of more efficient practices would contribute to this goal but will not by itself be nearly enough. Rather, the authorities will have to curtail the cultivation of crops that could be bought on the world market. Such a measure could only be introduced gradually, given the current inability of the country's economy to generate sufficient foreign exchange to pay for increased food imports. It is, however, unavoidable, if Syria is to avert the descent into an irreversible state of water bankruptcy.

[87] According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, '... transboundary water issues should be addressed only among the riparian countries without interventions by the third parties.' 'Türkiye's Policy on Water Issues', *Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (2022). Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_s-policy-on-water-issues.en.mfa (accessed 8 October 2026).

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Cover Image
The Tabqa Dam, Syria's largest dam, on the Euphrates River in Raqqa Governorate in 2017. Source: Aamaq News Agency via AP

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