

# Lessons from Resilience: Post-War Recovery Strategies for Syria Inspired by ‘Vietnam's Doi Moi Reforms’

Mohamed Buheji<sup>1</sup> & Aamir Hasan<sup>2</sup>

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1. Founder- International Institute of Inspiration Economy, Bahrain.  
Email: buhejim@gmail.com
  2. Advocate, India. Email: aamirhasan\_1@yahoo.co.in.

## Abstract

This paper mainly focuses on Vietnam's post-war recovery and its potential lessons for Syria, which has been deeply affected by civil war with a dictatorship regime. With over 50% of Syria experiencing the consequences of the conflict, the country has widespread destruction of lives, mass displacements, and significant losses in human capital and economic stability. Therefore, Vietnam's military, land, food, and economic reforms provide a framework for analysis after the Vietnam War. By comparing these reforms against Syria's post-Assad Family trajectory, the research highlights the challenges and opportunities for Syria in its recovery process. The literature review explores post-war recovery dynamics, emphasising the importance of political stability and community cohesion. Vietnam's "Doi Moi" economic reforms are catalysed to show the role of such national initiative in the transformation of the country from one of the poorest economies to middle-income status, showcasing the role of good governance in recovery. The paper makes a contrast for Syria, where social defragmentation and economic recovery plans are needed. The study emphasises that Syria can learn from Vietnam's emphasis on community participation, governance, and social welfare programs, which are crucial in rebuilding trust and social cohesion. The authors outline the selection criteria and analyse relevant resources regarding civil wars in both countries. Through comparative analysis, they identify key areas where Syria can adopt Vietnam's successful strategies, focusing on governance, economic liberalisation, and community resilience. Ultimately, the paper argues that the commitment of all stakeholders is vital to overcome the profound challenges facing Syria and to achieve lasting peace and stability. The findings suggest that with careful planning and inclusive governance, Syria can harness the potential for recovery akin to Vietnam's experience post-conflict.

**Keywords:** *Post-War Recovery, Vietnam War, Syria Revolution, Doi Moi Reforms, Economic Recovery, Good Governance, Social Cohesion, Resilience and Recovery Initiatives.*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, conflicts within the state have been a phenomenon in most of the Middle East countries. Internal conflicts threaten the holistic development of all countries. Patterson (2015) mentioned that in the past 50 years, more than 50 percent of countries have seen internal conflicts.

The consequences of civil war are huge destruction of lives, massive displacements, loss of human capital and turbulent economic and political situation. The paper focuses on the military, land, food and economic reforms of Vietnam, traumatised by war and what lessons Syria can learn from this experience. The paper elucidates a research framework on the possible post-war recovery of Syria by analysing the post-war recovery of Vietnam and comparing it with the post-Assad regime in Syria. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2024)

Ehteshami et al. (2020) note that conflicts often stem from complex political, social, and economic grievances and pose considerable threats to the holistic development of the states. Over the past fifty years, more than half of the world's countries have experienced internal strife, as highlighted by Patterson (2015). The destructive aftermath of civil wars is profound, resulting in loss of life, massive displacements, devastating economic impacts, and political instability.

This paper explores the contrasting trajectories of post-war recovery in Vietnam and Syria, focusing mainly on lessons the latter can learn as it seeks to rebuild after years of conflict. Vietnam emerged from the Vietnam War, which lasted from 1955 to 1975, profoundly traumatised yet resilient. Through a combination of military, economic, land, and food reforms, Vietnam transformed its war-torn economy into a rapidly growing middle-income nation following the implementation of the "Doi Moi" reforms in 1986. These reforms restored economic stability and reinforced social cohesion and community resilience.

In contrast, Syria is currently in a state of disarray following a brutal civil war that began in 2011 as part of the broader Arab Spring movement. The resulting chaos has led to societal fragmentation along ethnic and sectarian lines, challenging efforts toward national healing and reconstruction. As the Assad regime's grip on power diminishes, the need for a comprehensive recovery strategy becomes ever more critical. Understanding successful recovery mechanisms, such as those employed by Vietnam, may provide valuable insights for Syrian leaders and policymakers.

This paper aims to establish a comparative framework that analyses the post-war recoveries of Vietnam and Syria, thereby elucidating strategic reforms and governance models that can catalyse Syria's recovery. It will assess the political, social, and economic reforms that can engender stability, inclusion, and resilience in Syrian society. By reflecting on Vietnam's experience, this study aims to contribute to the discourse on rebuilding war-torn societies, emphasising the importance of governance and community involvement in fostering a cohesive national identity. In doing so, it will highlight the potential paths that Syria can take to overcome its current challenges and build a prosperous future for its citizens.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Post-War Hopes and Recovery**

Post-civil war refers to ending violence, signing peace treaties, demilitarisation, returning refugees, and restoring state functions, Brown et al. (2011). The countries that have been in civil war would not be able to achieve the peace process without political stability, Almkhtar (2020).

Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2024) showed how the recovery of a country coming from genocide like Rwanda could depend on multiple factors but would start first with political recovery efforts. An unstable political environment reduces investment opportunities, delays the return of displaced persons, and can often lead to new crises (Hisari, 2020). The huge disagreements within the communities often lead to civil war, and this disagreement often prevails even when the war ends (Goscha, 2016).

### **2.2 The 'Doi Moi' Economy Scheme of Vietnam After the War**

In 1975, when the twenty-year war ended in Vietnam, the economy of Vietnam was one of the poorest in the world. The production was inefficient; there was a gap in demand and

supply with the rising inflation rate. The GDP was \$18.1 billion in 1984. During the post-war reconstruction period, it was one of the few countries in modern times where the economy plunged to its lowest because of economic sanctions imposed by the USA, lack of a business-friendly environment, military operation with Cambodia and several other reasons. With the introduction of the “Doi Moi” set of political and economic reforms, Vietnam became a middle-income economy from one of the poorest economies in one generation. World Bank Group. (2024).

The Vietnamese ‘Doi Moi’ scheme, which means renovation or innovation, was a set of economic reforms introduced by the communist party in 1986, after the Vietnam War, to create a socialist economy. The reforms included increasing food production, supporting a mixed economy, reforming the bureaucracy, and improving the resilience capabilities of both organisations and communities. Buheji (2018) refers to this as the hidden power of the economy's resilience.

## **2.3 Importance of Good Governance in the Transition towards Stable and Developing Syria**

### **2.3.1 Introduction to Governance**

There has been a paradigm shift from government to governance, and the benefit of good governance lies in facing political, social, and economic challenges. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific categorises good governance indicators such as participation, rule of law, and civil liberties. Syria needs this type of participation where freedom of expression, besides the legal framework protecting human and minority rights, is highly emphasised. The government would be connected with the legal system and abide by how disputes are settled and how it uses its power. This would make Syria again a country known for the rule of law and for using non-violent methods to settle disputes. Good governance includes peaceful ways to support the interests of all the stakeholders by reaching a broad consensus. Karimi (2000)

The 14 years of civil war led to the fall of the Bashar al Assad government, and the total of fifty-plus years made the Syrians face tough times until a stable government was formed in Syria, which could give Syrians a decent, dignified life whole of opportunities. Around 16.7 million people require humanitarian needs. The infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, has been badly damaged. The new government must ensure good governance, and the freedom and rights of the citizens, as well as minorities, should be protected.

### **2.3.2 Challenges for the New Government**

The state, including the military, police and administration, has collapsed, trust among the different sects and tribes has been lost, and there is a threat of external attack, including Israeli invasion. To get better at these challenges, the formation of a transformational body should have both the military as well as civilian persons who were instrumental in toppling the government of Assad. This transformational body should restructure the military and build international relations in the Future of Syria after the fall of Assad and the formation of a caretaker government. The caretaker government should work on rebuilding Syria and providing basic and essential services such as health, education, food, water, and shelter to the Syrian citizens. The caretaker government should focus on reducing unemployment and infrastructure projects such as building roads and bridges. The members of the transformational body must have experience in administration and military operations. The members should be

honest and law-abiding, work in a team and include people from all sects and social groups of Syria—the New Arab. (2024).

#### **2.4 Comparing the ‘Historical Context’ of Vietnam vs. Syria**

The Vietnam War, ranging from 1955 to 1975, was a meshed network of political, economic, and social dynamics that also saw the active participation of superpowers such as the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The Vietnam War was a boiling pot of severe struggle, extreme sacrifices and persisting consequences. Vietnam was a French colony for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Patriotic feelings among the Vietnamese gave rise to anti-French movements in Vietnam. Vietnam was divided into communist-dominated North Vietnam, led by Ho Chi Minh, and non-communist-dominated South Vietnam, led by Ngo Dinh Diem, after the First Indo-China War in 1954, which was followed by the Second Indo-China War, popularly known as the Vietnam War. The war caused colossal destruction, and the flourishing panorama of Vietnam was devastated by poisonous chemicals such as Agent Orange.

The Arab Spring was instrumental in the recently concluded conflict in Syria based on opposition to the Basher government in 2011. It all started as a small anti-Basher regime protest in the southwestern city of Deraa, Syria; however, it turned out to ouster the Basher government as the Basher regime used massive force against those who were actively involved in the protest. The protest made the Bashar government use violence. However, as the protests increased, the Cold War between the USA, Russia and Iran led to the Cold War.

#### **2.5 Comparing the ‘Destruction of the War’ in Vietnam vs. Syria**

The Vietnam War, which lasted from the late 1950s until 1975, resulted in significant destruction and loss of life. After the war, Vietnam faced immense challenges, including poverty, infrastructure damage, and international isolation. The country adopted a socialist economy based on centralised planning until the 1986 reforms known as "Đổi Mới," which transitioned to a market-oriented economy while maintaining a strong political regime.

The Syrian Civil War began in 2011 as a peaceful protest against the Assad regime and erupted into a protracted conflict involving multiple factions and foreign interventions. The war has led to massive destruction of infrastructure, significant loss of life, and displacement of millions, both internally and as refugees abroad.

#### **2.6 Comparing the ‘Recovery Strategies’ of Vietnam (the achievements) vs Syria (the potential)**

The introduction of “Đổi Mới” policies focused on economic liberalisation, market reforms, and foreign investment. This transformed Vietnam from a highly centralised economy to a more market-oriented one, leading to substantial economic growth. The Vietnamese government emphasised reconciliation and national unity, promoting a narrative that encouraged healing and rebuilding rather than focusing on divisions from the war. Vietnam gradually re-established diplomatic relations with several countries, including the United States, and became a member of international organisations, facilitating economic assistance and investment. Over the years, because of its policies, Vietnam built trust and attracted significant investment toward rebuilding critical infrastructure and facilitating economic growth and development.

Unlike Vietnam's swift economic reforms after the war, Syria faces severe economic challenges exacerbated by rampant inflation, unemployment, and the destruction of infrastructure. Recovery requires a comprehensive economic strategy and reconstruction.

Ongoing sectarian and ethnic divisions pose significant challenges to social cohesion in Syria. The Assad regime has fostered mistrust among communities, complicating reconciliation efforts. Besides, Syria is still facing significant international sanctions and diplomatic isolation, limiting its access to foreign investment and reconstruction aid. Unlike Vietnam, Syria may need to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics to gain international support.

While the flow of return has started from the Syrians in exile, millions remain displaced, and the humanitarian crisis remains dire. Addressing immediate needs is crucial before embarking on longer-term recovery efforts.

### **2.7 Comparing the ‘Political Context’ of Vietnam (the achievements) vs. Syria (the potential)**

The centralised government of Vietnam maintained its political control while implementing economic reforms. The legitimacy of the Communist Party helped consolidate national unity, facilitating recovery efforts.

In Syria, after the demolition of the Assad family regime, a legitimate, inclusive political process for national reconciliation and rebuilding is still in its early stages.

### **2.8 Comparing the ‘Economic Factors’ of Vietnam (the achievements) vs. Syria (the potential)**

The timely adoption of market-oriented reforms allowed for rapid economic growth. Vietnam capitalised on globalisation, trade agreements, and foreign investments, effectively integrating into the global economy. Recovery was aided by the normalisation of relations with Western nations and international support, which bolstered Vietnam's economy and global standing.

In Syria, the economic recovery is highly expected to be linked to relief from sanctions. Syria has significant reconstruction needs, yet the potential for economic reform would be related to political instability that would build investors' confidence. Despite the success of the revolution, the extent of the overcoming of the Syrian wounds of civil conflict and entrenched positions among external actors still limits the potential for productive international engagement, making coordinated recovery efforts challenging.

### **2.9 Comparing the ‘Social Cohesion’ of Vietnam (the achievements) vs Syria (the potential)**

The focus on reconciliation and healing helped Vietnam rebuild a cohesive society. National narratives promoted unity, minimising divisions. In Syria, fragmentation based on sect, ethnic identity, and loyalties complicates today's efforts for social cohesion. Sustainable recovery will require the Syrian government's concerted efforts to build trust among diverse groups.

Vietnam's resilient community fabric was built through a combination of strategic government policies, grassroots initiatives, cultural values, and social engagement, particularly after the Vietnam War. The ‘Đổi Mới Reforms’ introduced in 1986, these economic reforms transitioned Vietnam from a centrally planned economy to a socialist-oriented market

economy. This led to significant economic growth and improved living standards, which helped communities rebuild and thrive together. Investments in infrastructure facilitated connectivity and access to markets, which encouraged community interactions and economic collaboration. Buheji (2020)

Local governments in Syria need to be empowered to make decisions that reflect the needs of their communities, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens similar to the Vietnamese situation. Community-based organisations should be given the role of mobilising resources and fostering communal ties.

Similar to Vietnamese culture, Syrians use the strength of family units and community solidarity to set the foundation for collective resilience during challenging times. The collective experience of war should be used to foster a shared identity and commitment to rebuilding the nation, further strengthening community bonds.

Besides introducing social welfare programs similar to Vietnam, Syrians should ensure access to education, healthcare, and social services, creating safety nets that help vulnerable populations. Programs should also be established to reintegrate war veterans into society, help heal the wounds of conflict, and promote social cohesion as these individuals contribute to community rebuilding efforts. This should be combined with initiatives that promote civic responsibility and awareness, encouraging collective action and engagement in local issues.

### **2.10 Resilience through Adversity**

Vietnam followed collective coping strategies where the communities developed resilience through cooperation and mutual support, sharing resources and information to overcome challenges collectively. The community came together through initiatives aimed at disaster risk reduction and recovery, fostering a culture of preparedness, and strengthening community resilience in the face of natural disasters or economic shocks. Buheji (2020)

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The methodology starts with selection criteria, analysis, and interpretation of the resources related to civil wars in Vietnam and Syria. The search uses the terms “Vietnam war,” “post-war reforms in Vietnam,” “Syria war,” “Arab Spring,” “Syria post-Assad,” and similar keywords.

The methodology outlines the steps to conduct a comparative review of Vietnam's and Syria's post-war recovery processes, focusing on their respective reforms, governance structures, and social cohesion initiatives. Key research questions were identified: what lessons can Syria learn from Vietnam's post-war recovery? How do governance structures influence recovery in both contexts? What role does social cohesion play in successful post-war recovery?

Economic policies and reforms in Vietnam (e.g., Doi Moi) were identified. Then, the governance and political stability were used in Vietnam, followed by the social cohesion and community empowerment initiatives.

Synthesize findings were used to analyse the effective recovery strategies and their applicability to Syria. The impact of governance on social cohesion and economic recovery. Areas where Syria may leverage Vietnam's success stories or learn from its challenges were identified. This methodology provides a systematic approach to comparing the recovery efforts of Vietnam and Syria, aiming to yield valuable insights for post-conflict recovery strategies.

## 4.0 APPLICATION & ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Post-War Reforms in Vietnam and Syria

After more than 30 years and 20 years of separation, South and North Vietnam were unified on July 2nd 1976 and were renamed the socialist republic of Vietnam. Saigon was christened as Ho Chi Minh City. Private property and a free market economy were abolished, causing production to decrease and, consequently, increasing poverty. In December 1978, Vietnam attacked Cambodia; China reacted by attacking Vietnam in February 1979, demanding the withdrawal of Vietnam from Cambodia. However, a cease-fire was reached within a month. In 1986, Vietnam adopted the Doi Moi policy, allowing private property and a free market economy. History Hustle (2017).

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, captured Damascus on December 8th, 2024, ending the 54-year-old rule of the Assad family. The newly formed government will prioritise state building and development of state institutions. The inclusive government must enhance economic recovery with the influx of refugees and citizens displaced internally.

**Table 1: Summary of Reforms Done by Vietnamese that Syrians Can Learn from**

Type of Reform	Vietnam	Syria
<b>1-Security Reforms</b>	Many soldiers, civil servants, and capitalists were sent to the re-education camp, where no criminal charges were framed against them, and once satisfied with the rehabilitation, the re-education would stop. (Alpha History)	The Syrian soldiers under the government of Hayat Tahrir al-sham (HTS) have been given general amnesty to avoid internal armed conflict. The history of military coups in Syria that have thrown civilian presidents suggests the formation of a Ministry of Defense to prevent the chances of overthrowing the government. The new government is suggesting compulsory military services to limited professionals for a limited period of time. The fighters from different countries who joined the fight against the Assad family regime have been rewarded to join the army and have been given Syrian citizenship along with their families, Usher (2024). Ahmed al-Sharaa has assured the Christian minorities that they will be given full rights. Al Jazeera (2024, December 31.)
<b>2-Economic Reforms</b>	The war on Vietnam due to massive bombing by America had a devastating effect on the industries, infrastructure and agriculture of Vietnam.  There was large-scale poverty and unemployment. The reforms included converting private companies into state-owned companies, nationalising industries, and converting private farms into collective farming. (Alpha History)	The fourteen years of civil war in Syria have caused the economy to contract by 85 per cent, resulting in hyperinflation. According to experts, it could take ten years to return to the state of the economy in 2011 without any political instability.  A United Nations report says that 90 per cent of Syria's population lives below the poverty line. According to Bassel Abdul Aziz, the interim economy minister of Syria, competition would be a free market system. Imports would be made easier. The New Arab. (2024).
<b>3-Social Reform</b>	Vietnam's rapid economic development since the 1980s (Đổi Mới reforms) has improved living standards and increased social mobility, fostering a sense of community and belonging.  Despite its ethnic diversity, Vietnam maintains a strong national identity rooted	Syria is home to a mosaic of ethnic and religious groups, and if unity can be fostered, there is the potential for rich cultural exchanges and cooperation.  Despite the ongoing conflict, Syrians have a strong historical connection to their land and heritage,

	<p>in shared history, language, and cultural values, promoting social cohesion among its various ethnic groups.</p> <p>The government actively promotes community-based programs and initiatives that encourage citizen participation in local decision-making, enhancing trust in institutions and between individuals.</p> <p>Improvements in education and healthcare access have reinforced social safety nets, contributing to a more cohesive society where families and communities can thrive.</p> <p>The collective experiences of overcoming wars and economic challenges have fostered a resilient social fabric, with a shared commitment to national development and stability.</p>	<p>which can serve as a foundation for rebuilding social cohesion in the future.</p> <p>As the situation stabilises, there are opportunities for reconciliation, and reconstruction efforts focused on inclusivity and collaboration involving various community groups and leaders.</p> <p>External interventions and assistance can help bridge divides and promote social cohesion through development programs, dialogue, and peacebuilding initiatives.</p> <p>The large youth population in Syria has the potential to drive change and innovation, fostering social cohesion through shared goals of peace, stability, and economic opportunity.</p>
<p><b>4-Land Reforms</b></p>	<p>Land reform was the priority as the landlords exploited the small peasants. The USA gave some peasants land, so they did not welcome the land reforms. (Alpha History)</p>	<p>The Assad regime, since 2011, has been taking properties of the Syrians through various laws, such as Law Number 10 of 2018, which authorizes the government to make new areas designated as cities and forcefully displace the Syrians.</p> <p>The most affected by such laws are the Kurdish and Palestinian refugees. According to UNRWA, there are around 552,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria. Only married Palestinians are allowed to own the apartment. About 80 per cent of the buildings have been destroyed in Yarmouk camp, a Palestinian camp in Damascus.</p> <p>The newly formed government should work with international and independent organisations to preserve documents related to citizens' property.</p> <p>Construction companies and contractors should not violate the property rights of Syrian citizens. Impunity Watch (2010). The new government should focus on improving the irrigation system, and farmers should be given quality seeds and sophisticated farming tools. Adil (2024).</p>
<p><b>5-Food Reform</b></p>	<p>The war had a negative impact on Vietnam's food situation. Due to the traditional harvesting method, around one-third of the rice was lost.</p> <p>There was a shortage of seeds and fertilisers, and weather like floods also played havoc. However, since the 1990s, the food situation in Vietnam has improved (Alpha History).</p>	<p>According to the World Food Program, due to the current war, there could be further displacement of 1.5 million Syrians. Due to the war, the fertile northeastern region of Syria has been affected; due to the disruptive supply chain, the farmers cannot bring their goods to the market.</p> <p>Abundant funds should be made available to agencies such as the World Food Program to make food available to the Syrians. The international community should reconsider the sanctions imposed on Syria for the free flow of goods in Syria. To overcome water shortage, irrigation facilities should be improved. Adil (2024).</p>



## 5.0 DISCUSSION

The war in Vietnam has taught several lessons, and the newly elected Syrian government under Mohamad Jolani must learn to limit the use of military power on civilians. To avoid ethnic conflict, the Syrian government must be focused on developing a strong democratic and socialist constitution and policies with a focus on transparent leadership.

The paper attempts to explain how a slight agitation in the southwest city of Deraa, Syria, led to fourteen years of civil war, which eventually ended with the ouster of the Assad regime. Poor governance was one of the main reasons for the outbreak of the civil war. Syria performed relatively low in indicators such as voter turnout, free and fair elections, rule of law, and civil liberties during the regime of Bashar Assad. The Arab Spring acted as a catalyst for the unfolding of the civil war in Syria.

The paper explains Vietnam's post-war military, economic, land, and food reforms. It compares them with possible post-war reforms in Syria and what lessons Syria can learn from Vietnam. The paper highlights the Doi Moi set of economic reforms, which helped Vietnam become a middle-income economy from one of the poorest economies in the world.

The paper also compares the governance systems of Vietnam and Syria and outlines what lessons Syria can learn from Vietnam. It emphasises Syria's road to recovery after the fall of the Assad regime and the challenges that lie ahead for the new government. The paper also investigates the participation of the foreign states in the Syrian civil war and how crucial the timing of the ouster of the Assad regime was as the Syrian allies, such as Russia, were busy fighting with Ukraine, and Iran was busy fighting with Israel.

The researchers believe that post-war recovery is a time-consuming process that requires the collective effort of public and private stakeholders to address the need for food and resource scarcity, rebuild the infrastructure, and actively involve citizens. It can take years; if sincere efforts are not made, it may not return to the pre-war level.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

While both Vietnam and Syria experienced profound trauma and upheaval, the pathways toward recovery diverged significantly due to differences in political context, economic strategies, social cohesion, and international relations. Vietnam's recovery is a model of how economic reform and national unity can lead to rapid recovery. At the same time, Syria's post-conflict potential remains clouded by complex societal divisions and geopolitical challenges. For Syria to realise its recovery potential, substantial efforts will be necessary to build an inclusive political framework, foster social cohesion, and engage positively with the international community.

Vietnam's post-war recovery and building a resilient community fabric were accomplished through different approaches that combined government action, community involvement, cultural values, and social learning. These elements contributed to a strong sense of identity and solidarity, allowing communities to emerge resiliently from the shadows of conflict. While Vietnam has achieved significant social cohesion through economic development, cultural unity, and active community engagement, Syria has the potential to develop social cohesion through its diverse society and shared heritage. To realise its potential in fostering social cohesion, Syria's path forward will require focused efforts on dialogue, rebuilding relationships, and promoting inclusive governance.

The authors acknowledge the study's limitations in relevance to the differences in context (historical, cultural, and geopolitical) between Vietnam and Syria. Besides, there are limitations in the availability and reliability of data for Syria compared to more established data sources for Vietnam.

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