

What Are the Implications of Dissolving the “General Secretariat for Political Affairs” in Syria?



The decision to dissolve the General Secretariat for Political Affairs in Syria has dominated both the media and political scenes, less than 14 months after its establishment, as the body tasked with overseeing the management of political activities and events inside the country, participating in drafting and shaping general policies and plans related to political affairs, and repurposing the assets of the Baath Party, the parties of the National Progressive Front, and their affiliated dissolved organizations and committees, following the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad’s rule.

The entity established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2025 expanded and filled the vacuum left by the Baath Party. From the moment of its creation, it remained the subject of ongoing controversy, as combining the management of domestic political affairs with subordination to the Foreign Ministry appeared organizationally and legally unusual. Its role also extended to requesting coordination for or supervision over events unrelated to its functional nature, reinforcing fears of reproducing the “one-party” model and the potential narrowing or closure of public space and political life that could accompany it.

The Foreign Ministry did not confirm to NoonPost whether the decision was authentic or not, despite the circulation of the news by more than one media outlet citing sources within the ministry, without providing details about the fate of the “Secretariat” or the assets of the Baath Party, raising questions about the next phase and the implications of the decision for public space, the course of

political and union work, and the future of the dissolved Baath Party’s assets.

Roots of Its Formation in Idlib

The roots of the “Secretariat” go back to the “Political Affairs Administration in the Liberated Areas,” which served as a political platform for Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, with limited activity and a faint, modest media presence at the time. Among the few activities publicly announced was its cooperation in 2021 with Idlib University to nominate 74 male and female students to continue postgraduate studies (master’s and doctorate) at Antakya University.

The first statement issued by the “Political Affairs Administration” after launching its social media accounts, in May 2022, condemned the Tadamon massacre (days after it was revealed at the time) and affirmed the legitimacy of the revolution. Its activity then gradually increased through statements and political positions, including a “advice” statement addressed to Hamas, calling on it to review its policy and reposition itself after announcing the resumption of relations with the ousted regime; condolences over humanitarian and security incidents (the Istanbul bombing, the Afghanistan earthquake); rejection of normalization or reconciliation with Assad; in addition to attending limited educational and community events.

In an article by researcher and writer Hossam Jazmati, it was stated that the “Political Affairs Administration” emerged as a vague, marginal body that for a long time remained directly linked to “Abu Mohammad al-Jolani,” President al-Sharaa, as a special external channel without having an official place within Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. None of its staff were known except Zaid al-Attar, the pseudonym of Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani, who tasked some young aides with arranging the accommodation and transport of foreign guests—journalists, researchers, and others—whom he accompanied or sent to the area.

Meanwhile, the spokesperson for the “Political Affairs Administration” was Obaida al-Arnaout, who currently serves as director of the Political Affairs Directorate in the city of Homs.

In June 2024, a change occurred in the “Political Affairs Administration,” as it was transformed into the “General Directorate for Political Affairs” within the arrangements of the Salvation Government operating in Idlib, and its establishment was announced as a new administrative body directly subordinate to the Prime Minister’s Office. It assumed tasks including “enhancing political and intellectual awareness among government cadres regarding the dimensions of the Syrian revolution, responding to crises, emergencies, public opinion issues and street concerns, and reviving and defending the humanitarian and rights-related causes linked to the revolution.”

During those years, the relationship between unions and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham was neither normal nor stable, as it prevented the establishment of a general federation of unions and professional associations in northern Syria in June 2020, while the Salvation Government tried to push toward forming unions but interfered in their work.

“Expansion at the Expense of Civil and Political Space”

The name change did not make a fundamental difference, as the name “Political Affairs Administration” remained the common and adopted one. Its peak activity came during the “Deterrence of Aggression” battle, when it undertook sending internal messages to reassure social components that they would not be targeted on a religious, ethnic, or sectarian basis, as well as external messages, including one to Russia urging it not to tie its interests to the survival of Bashar al-Assad’s regime, and one to Iraq reassuring Baghdad that the transformations underway in Syria posed no threat to its security or stability.

Ten days after the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad’s regime, the “Political Affairs Administration” established eight representative offices in Damascus and its countryside, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Idlib, Latakia and Tartus, Daraa, Quneitra and Suwayda, and Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, and Hasakah.

In March 2025, the Foreign Ministry established the “General Secretariat” as a new department within its structure, with an independent budget within the ministry’s general budget and subject to oversight by the competent supervisory bodies. Its creation was described as coming “based on the requirements of political work and the demands of the supreme national interest, in pursuit of the highest standards of organization, within the process of developing and modernizing the structure of work and political efficiency in the new phase, and strengthening the role of official institutions.”

Unlike the “Political Affairs Administration,” whose administrative divisions were unclear and whose identifiers did not mention some offices such as the “Office of Sect Affairs,” the “Secretariat” expanded to include six offices: sect affairs, youth, union cooperation, women’s affairs, events, and community development, and it took over Baath Party buildings as its headquarters.

Criticism began to pursue it from the moment it was established, starting with the absence of a clear legal basis for its creation, alongside its connection to the Foreign Ministry and the resulting problems related to overlapping powers and an unclear structure. It was also criticized for expanding into public space under the banner of “organization,” restricting any political or community activity to coordination with it, and the accompanying restrictions on community activities and events, extending to interference in the work of unions and federations,

including appointing a temporary council for the central Syrian Bar Association and the Union of Arab Writers.

On May 7, the organization “Madaniya” said in a statement that the practices of the General Secretariat for Political Affairs indicated an expansion in its role and influence within the public sphere, including civil society, dialogues, and events, reflecting a worrying trend toward restricting it and shrinking civil and political space.

It said that ambiguity surrounding its role had led to overlapping powers and multiple reference authorities, leaving civil society organizations facing complex procedures to obtain approvals. It noted that the “Secretariat’s” provincial offices had come to possess the authority to approve civil society activities without clear standards or transparent procedures.

For his part, Mohammad Yasser Kahhala, who serves as director of the “Secretariat,” had previously denied that it supervised the work of institutions, saying that it “helps institutions in their work,” and that among its tasks are raising awareness and spreading culture alongside managing the political situation in the country.

Reviving Political Life

The website of the newspaper “Al-Quds Al-Arabi” reported that Minister al-Shaibani had issued a decision dissolving the General Secretariat for Political Affairs and transferring its staff to the Foreign Ministry and other government institutions, as part of restructuring the administrative framework and making use of its personnel to fill diplomatic and administrative vacancies, especially after diplomats were transferred to work in foreign missions. Employees of the “Secretariat” had reportedly been informed since mid-March that its work was ending, despite the absence of any official announcement so far.

The website “Al-Araby Al-Jadeed” also reported that the dissolution decision was issued on May 6 due to confusion surrounding the nature of its work and the lack of coherence among its branches in the provinces, with a tendency to transfer union and civil society organization files to an independent body currently being formed, in addition to moving most of its staff to the Foreign Ministry and other ministries. Meanwhile, the platform “Syria Now” reported that the dissolution of the “Secretariat” would take place gradually over the coming months, with its cadres integrated into the Foreign Ministry.

Political analyst Darwish Khalifa believes that merely proposing this step restores a measure of hope to Syrian political society, as a potential indication of the current authority’s openness to reviving political life on modern national foundations. Syria today needs to move from a state of social confrontation

based on sectarian and ethnic divisions to a space of political competition based on programs, visions, and strategies.

Khalifa told NoonPost that the Syrian state cannot emerge from its state of fragility and lack of long-term visions except through practical national political projects that begin by defining the form and function of the state and extend to restructuring its institutions and shaping its relationship with society.

He believes that the continuation of the political directorates formed in the provinces after the fall of the Baath regime had obstructed the transition toward modern mechanisms of political work based on the true representation of society through free elections, starting with unions and national organizations and ending with parliament and the presidency. A sound political life, he argues, cannot be built in the presence of entities viewed as extensions of the ruling-party model, even if the slogans and tools differ.

Khalifa points out that the psychological factor remains strongly present among a broad segment of Syrians, who view with suspicion and concern any experience that evokes in its structure or behavior the models of the Baath Party and the authorities of the former regime, for fear of reproducing authoritarianism in new forms. Hence, there is an urgent need to reassure Syrians that the country is moving toward a participatory state in which all its citizens have a real role in shaping its political future and formulating its new national contract.

For his part, Judge Hussein Hamada considered the dissolution of the “General Secretariat” a positive decision, and perhaps the beginning of a new phase that opens the way to building a pluralistic state based on parties, civil society, and the logic of constitutional institutions. He expressed hope that this step would be a prelude to a broader path that strengthens the idea of the state rather than the group, institutions rather than control, and pluralism rather than political monopoly.

Positive Impact.. “Organization, Not Guardianship”

The “Secretariat” was established in an unstable environment and during a fragile transitional phase that Syria has been experiencing after decades of Baath Party domination over power and society, before the “Victory Conference” in January 2025 announced the dissolution of the Baath Party and the parties of the National Progressive Front, along with their affiliated organizations, institutions, and committees, while banning their reconstitution under any other name, alongside the presence of military and political forces with separatist and divisive projects or tendencies.

Researcher and professor of public law Ahmad Qorbi told NoonPost that the “General Secretariat” had a positive impact in organizing civil society, amid the

presence of civil fronts or activities linked to the remnants of the ousted regime, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), or Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, considering that regulating these spaces required an institution working to organize public space and direct it along national lines.

At the same time, Qorbi points out that the “Secretariat” and its branches in the provinces witnessed a degree of overreach into public space, especially in technical and humanitarian activities in which it began to intervene.

For his part, the head of the Arab Writers Union in Syria, academic Ahmad Jassem al-Hussein, says that the “General Secretariat for Political Affairs” played a positive role, especially in strengthening civil peace, and stood out during the Syrian state’s battle with the Syrian Democratic Forces by reassuring Kurds in Damascus. It also played a role in containing security tensions in Sqaylabiyah and in a number of Syrian cities, where its branches helped create a state of calm through mediation, dialogue, and discussion.

Drawing on his experience heading the Arab Writers Union, al-Hussein explained to NoonPost that the “Secretariat” was helpful and not a barrier, and did not interfere in the union’s work. The matter was limited to discussions on national, social, and intellectual issues, without any imposition or coercion, alongside dialogues aimed at finding solutions to daily issues related to the union or others. He noted that the “Secretariat” helped restore some of the union’s rights linked to government bodies, including matters related to buildings and others.

According to his understanding, holding gatherings, evenings, and various events involved notifying the “General Secretariat” to ensure follow-up in case of any emergency, amid continuing tensions and the presence of parties with divergent orientations. He considered that there was a need for some body, whether “Political Affairs” or another, not to play a guardianship role but rather a dialogic, organizational, and coordinating one, serving as a safety valve among different parties in a society emerging from conflict.

Al-Hussein continues that public space, in any country including Europe, is not left without monitoring and regulation, especially in countries emerging from conflict, due to the need to avoid widening the social rift. Therefore, public space in such contexts requires a degree of control and organization, particularly in the absence of complete legislation and amid overlap between legal and security considerations.

He points to his experience in the Netherlands, where public space is regulated through law, instructions, and the police, confirming that there is no public space without regulation. He believes that after years, with political work stabilized and violence receding, laws can fully assume this task, but the Syrian scene remains

contested and charged with debates and problems.

What Comes After the Dissolution of the “Secretariat”?

Although the decision to dissolve the “General Secretariat” has not been officially confirmed, and despite the lack of clear identifiers for it and the limitation of its media presence to what is carried by SANA or provincial accounts about meetings and activities, the controversy surrounding it is directly tied to the post-dissolution phase, whether in terms of rearranging roles within the political and administrative sphere or in relation to the file of Baath Party assets.

After the fall of the Assad regime, arrangements were announced concerning the handover of machinery, vehicles, and weapons to the Interior Ministry, and placing properties and funds under the supervision of the Finance Ministry. Some of its headquarters were later turned into reconciliation centers and weapons handover points, and more broadly into headquarters for the “General Secretariat for Political Affairs.”

Researcher Ahmad Qorbi believes that if the “Secretariat” is dissolved and replaced, as is being circulated, by a new body independent of the Foreign Ministry and linked to the Presidency while retaining its tasks, this will not greatly change the impact of the decision on public space, as it will remain governed by the same nature of powers despite the change in the authority to which it reports.

If, however, the “Secretariat” is dissolved and its tasks are linked to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, this would be a positive option and a key demand, because it would allow a broader margin for organizing public space. He noted that Law No. 93 of 1958 grants the ministry and its directorates broad discretionary powers in supervising and intervening in the work of associations and organizations, according to Qorbi.

He added to NoonPost that this type of regulation remains necessary given the continued presence of some civil fronts linked to remnants of the former regime, the Syrian Democratic Forces, or Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, which requires clear frameworks to prevent the exploitation of public space. At the same time, he stressed the need for the Ministry of Social Affairs to issue internal regulations defining the mechanisms of civil society work in a way that ensures its organization without restricting it.

For his part, Mohammad Munir al-Faqir, a politician and organization official in the “New Syria” movement, considered that abolishing the General Secretariat for Political Affairs is tied to three considerations: the imminent birth of parliament, the approaching announcement of a new party close to Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani, and the maturation of a draft parties law expected to

be pushed through by deputies close to the authorities in the anticipated parliament.

As for the assets of the dissolved Baath Party that had been managed by the General Secretariat for Political Affairs, researcher specializing in political economy and local administration Ayman al-Dassouqi believes they must first be assessed and their ownership transferred to the Syrian state after addressing existing grievances.

Al-Dassouqi added to NoonPost that more than one option could later be adopted for managing them, whether through the sovereign fund or by converting their headquarters into government institutions, noting his preference for directing part of the revenues from investing these properties into a fund to support victims and provide reparations.

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