

Syria: Country Focus



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Country of Origin Information Report

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither the EUAA, nor any person acting on its behalf, may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 11 March 2025. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).





Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
ERW	Explosive remnants of war
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh
MOA	Military Operations Administration
NDF	National Defence Forces
NLF	National Liberation Front
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SOHR	Syrian Observatory of Human Rights
SSG	Syrian Salvation Government
TWI	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs





Term	Definition
USDOD	United States Department of Defense
UXO	Unexploded ordnance
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units





Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of applications for international protection, and in particular for use in updating EUAA's country guidance on Syria.

The report covers the period of November 2024 – February 2025, and should be read in conjunction the EUAA COI reports: [Syria - Country Focus \(October 2024\)](#) and [Syria - Security situation \(October 2024\)](#).

Methodology

This report was jointly drafted by EUAA and ACCORD and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries, as mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2023)¹ and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2023).²

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by EUAA based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI specialist network on Syria and from policy experts in EU+ countries within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Syria. The ToR also build on previous EUAA COI reports on Syria covering the same topics. The Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex 2: Terms of Reference](#) of this report.

Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 25 February 2025. Some limited additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 11 March 2025.

Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were

¹ EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, February 2023, [url](#)

² EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, February 2023, [url](#)



implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 11 March 2025. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

Sources

In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include: COI reports by governments; information from civil society, advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations, and NGOs; international and NGO human rights reports; reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations; Syrian and regionally-based media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Syria. All information from these sources was consulted within time constraints.

Sources on security incidents

For data on violent incidents, publicly available curated datasets from the organisation [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#) have been used. ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on crisis and conflict in Africa, south and south-east Asia and Middle East and provides datasets on conflict incidents. It collects data on violent incidents in Syria, coding each incident with the time and place, type of violent incident, the parties involved and the number of fatalities. The information is collected in a database that is openly accessible, searchable and kept continuously up to date. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as traditional media reports, but also from reports by international institutions and non-governmental organisations, targeted new media platforms, and data provided by local partners of ACLED.³ On Syria, ACLED incorporates data from a number of partners, including the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), Airwars, the Carter Center, Liveuamap, Syria Direct, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the London School of Economics' Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, the International Security and Development Center and Clingendael Institute.⁴

ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- **Battles:** violent clashes between at least two armed groups. Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein. Sub-events of battles are armed clashes, government regaining territory and non-state actor overtaking territory.
- **Violence against civilians:** violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. It includes violent attacks on unarmed civilians such as sexual violence, attacks, abduction/forced disappearance.
- **Explosions/remote violence:** events where an explosion, bomb or other explosive device was used to engage in conflict. They include one-sided violent events in

³ ACLED, Methodology, April 2019, [url](#); ACLED, FAQs: ACLED Sourcing Methodology, March 2023, [url](#)

⁴ ACLED, Syria Partner Network, April 2019, [url](#); ACLED, ACLED Integrates New Partner Data on the War in Syria, 5 April 2019, [url](#)



which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the targets to engage or defend themselves and their location. They include air/drone strikes, suicide bombs, shelling/artillery/missile attacks, remote explosives/landmines/IEDs, grenades, chemical weapons.

- **Riots:** are a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include violent demonstration, mob violence.
- **Protests:** public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. It includes peaceful protests, protests with intervention, excessive force against protesters.
- **Strategic developments:** information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states. It includes agreements, changes to group/activity, non-violent transfers of territory, arrests.⁵

For the purpose of providing information for the assessment of serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict (Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive), only the following type of events have been included in the analysis: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians.

Additionally, ACLED codes actors involved in security incidents as follows: Actor1 is the 'named actor involved in the event' and Actor2 is the 'named actor involved in the event, while "[i]n most cases, an event requires two actors, noted in columns 'ACTOR1' and 'ACTOR2'". However, event types 'Explosions/Remote violence', 'Riots', 'Protests', and 'Strategic developments' can include 'one-sided events'.⁶ The ACLED coding of Actor1 and Actor2 does not necessarily indicate that one is the aggressor (e.g Actor1) and the other one (e.g Actor2) the target or victim.⁷ When focusing on the involvement of specific actors within certain regions, the drafters based their analysis on all those incidents, where ACLED coded the relevant actor either as 'Actor1' or as 'Actor2'. This approach aims to illustrate the general level of involvement of the respective actors in the conflict without distinguishing between Actor1 and Actor2, as these categories, according to ACLED's methodology, do not indicate any differentiation in terms of content/semantics.

Characteristics and potential limits for COI use of ACLED data are:

- Data primarily come from secondary sources such as media reports. Lack of or underreporting might critically affect the depiction and the assessment of the situation on the ground.
- Geographical precision is variable: the provincial capital will represent the region if no further precisions are available and may be over-represented.

⁵ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 7 October 2024, [url](#), pp. 10-20

⁶ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 7 October 2024, [url](#), p. 22

⁷ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 7 October 2024, [url](#), p. 4





Security incidents numbers and associated graphs/maps at country and governorate level are based on a publicly available ACLED dataset for Middle East.⁸ Whenever other sources on security incidents were available over the reference period, ACLED's data have been corroborated/contrasted with other data.

Sources on civilian casualties

The main source on civilian fatalities in Syria used in this report is the Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR). The [Syrian Network of Human Rights \(SNHR\)](#) is a non-profit human rights organisation founded in 2011 which works on documenting human rights violations in Syria. SNHR relies on a network of volunteers in each governorate to compile lists of civilian fatalities and verify victims' identities by photo or video and by speaking with family members, witnesses, and hospitals. SNHR reports fatalities by gender, age, perpetrator, governorate, and other classifications. It only records civilian fatalities – with the exception of the death toll among victims who died due to torture, which includes armed combatants and civilians.⁹ Where available, information from other sources documenting civilian casualties in the Syrian conflict (Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the Syrian Human Rights Committee, Action on Armed Violence, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Uppsala Conflict Data Program) has been included.

Additionally, data on civilian deaths collected by the [Uppsala Conflict Data Program \(UCDP\)](#) has been also included. UCDP is a 'data collection project for civil war'.¹⁰ UCDP provided EUAA with a Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) covering the reference period of the report. UCDP's methodology is explained on its website as well as its GED Codebook.¹¹ The unit of analysis of UCDP is the 'event'¹² which is defined as '[a]n incident where armed force was used by an organised actor against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least 1 direct death at a specific location and a specific date'.¹³ This leads, among other things, to 'seemingly low estimates' because 'a number of factors can preclude a potential conflict event from inclusion in the UCDP GED', for example, unclear actors or uncertainty about whether fatalities occurred.¹⁴ UCDP provides three estimates for fatalities for each event – a low estimate, a best estimate, and a high estimate. In addition, UCDP provides an estimate of the number of civilian deaths.¹⁵ According to UCDP, 'it is quite likely that there are more fatalities than given in the best estimate, but it is very unlikely that there are fewer'.¹⁶

The stricter definition of an event of UCDP excludes violent incidents that are recorded by ACLED. This includes ACLED's option to assign violent events to 'unidentified armed groups'. The difference in definitions is one explanatory factor to why the number of events recorded

⁸ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

⁹ For detailed information on SNHR's methodology see [url](#); SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 1,734 Civilians in Syria in 2020, Including 99 in December, 1 January 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰ UCDP, About UCDP, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹ UCDP, UCDP Methodology, n.d., [url](#); UCDP, UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset Codebook (Version 21.1), 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹² UCDP, UCDP Methodology, n.d., [url](#)

¹³ UCDP, UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset Codebook (Version 21.1), 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁴ UCDP, UCDP Methodology, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵ UCDP, UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset Codebook (Version 21.1), 2021, [url](#), pp. 5, 11, 24

¹⁶ UCDP, UCDP Methodology, n.d., [url](#)





by ACLED can be significantly higher than events recorded by UCDP.¹⁷ In this report, UCDP data have been used to contrast ACLED data and to provide figures on civilian deaths. To reflect the security dynamic in Syria, where the actor behind many security incidents is unknown, EUAA not only includes events that meet all UCDP's set criteria (codified as 'clear' events in the UCDP dataset), but also include events codified as 'unclear' and 'not applicable'.

¹⁷ ACLED, Comparing Conflict Data, Similarities and Differences Across Conflict Datasets, August 2019, [url](#), pp. 5–7



Map

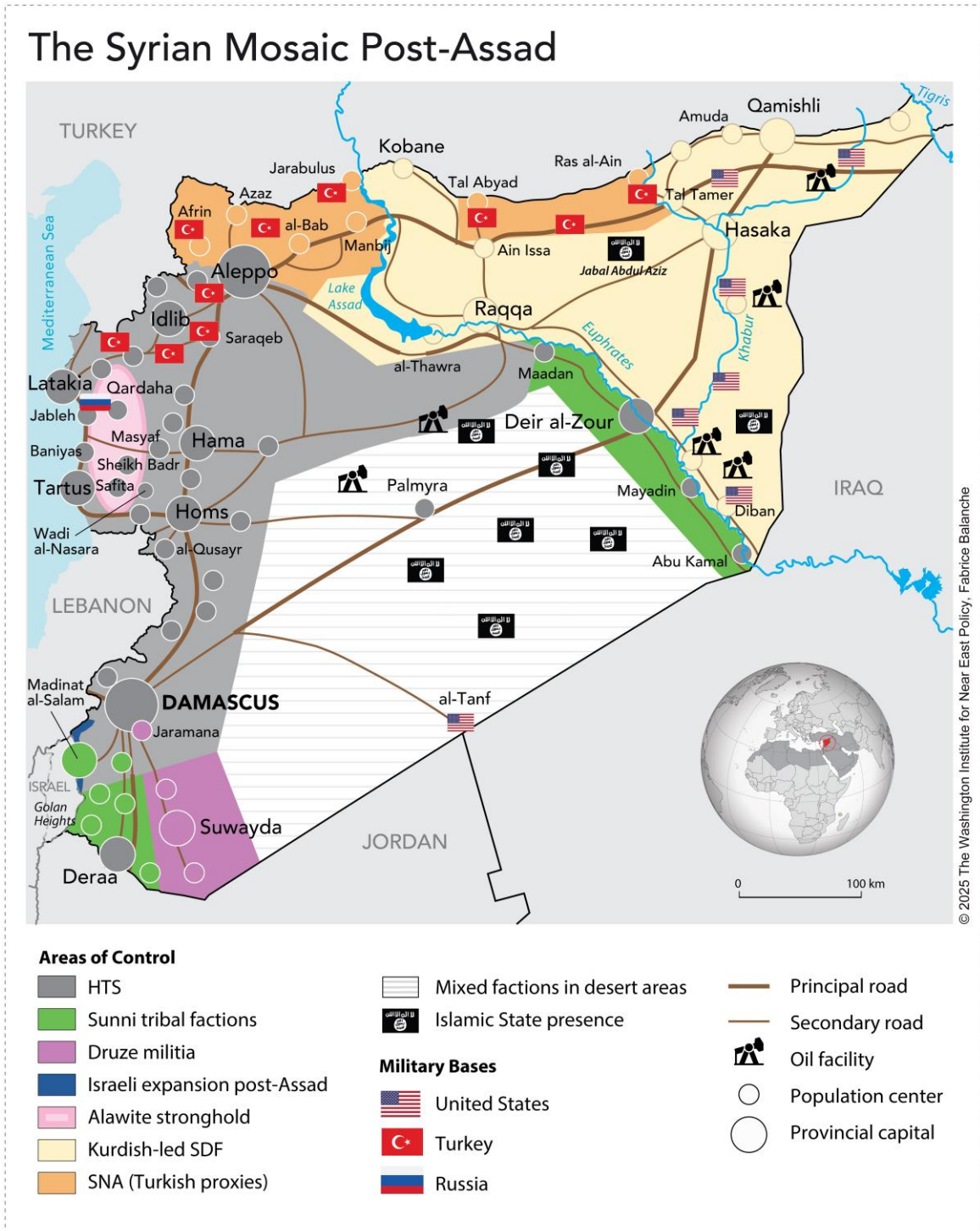


Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations¹⁸

¹⁸ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic, Map No. 4204 Rev. 4, August 2022, [url](#)



1. Political and human rights developments



Map 2: The Syrian Mosaic Post-Assad, © The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Fabrice Balanche¹⁹



1.1. Overview of conflicts

On 27 November 2024, forces opposed to the rule of Bashar Al-Assad, led by the armed group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), launched an offensive²⁰ starting from the northwestern province of Idlib.²¹ The HTS, which is designated as a terrorist organisation by the UN, the EU, the US and the UK,²² advanced on government-held cities²³ and within days had taken control of the north of the country,²⁴ including Aleppo,²⁵ and was heading towards Hama and Homs.²⁶ On 8 December 2024, they reached Damascus and assumed control of the capital as President Assad left the country on the same day.²⁷ Subsequently, HTS effectively took control as the ruling party and established an interim government.²⁸ HTS leader Ahmad Al-Sharaa, who had previously gone by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani,²⁹ started acting as the de-facto leader of Syria in early December³⁰ and was appointed transitional president of Syria on 29 January 2025.³¹ The independent non-profit-organisation International Crisis Group³² reported on 30 January 2025 that the situation in Damascus remained mostly secure. In regions outside the capital, however, the new leadership in Damascus faces significant challenges as the country emerges from civil war.³³ Establishing law and order remains a major challenge³⁴ and priority³⁵ for the transitional administration, which, three months after taking power, is still grappling with increasing retaliatory violence and armed group activity.³⁶

Etana, an independent organisation³⁷ focused on reporting on the ground in Syria,³⁸ notes, as of 3 February 2025, that in northern Syria, indications of increasing lawlessness and violence are becoming more evident across a region extending from Homs to Latakia on the coast and further east to Aleppo, with almost daily reports of killings and militant activity in recent weeks. The security situation in this area is a centre of instability driven by revenge killings and communal violence. The area is home to several Alawite and mixed sectarian communities.³⁹ The International Crisis Group reports that in central and western Syria 'less disciplined armed

¹⁹ Balanche, F., Rebuilding Syria May Require Federalism, TWI, 28 February 2025, [url](#)

²⁰ Al Jazeera, What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?, 8 December 2024, [url](#)

²¹ Al Jazeera, Bashar al-Assad releases first statement since he fled Syria, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

²² BBC News, Ahmed al-Sharaa named Syria's transitional president, 31 January 2025, [url](#)

²³ Al Jazeera, Bashar al-Assad releases first statement since he fled Syria, 16 December 2024, [url](#); KAS, Syriens große Chance [Syria's big chance], 10 December 2024, [url](#)

²⁴ KAS, Syriens große Chance [Syria's big chance], 10 December 2024, [url](#), p. 1

²⁵ BBC News, Russian strikes hit Aleppo as rebels take control, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

²⁶ KAS, Syriens große Chance [Syria's big chance], 10 December 2024, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷ Al Jazeera, Bashar al-Assad releases first statement since he fled Syria, 16 December 2024, [url](#); France24, Assad-era minister turns himself in to new Syria authorities: statement, 4 February 2025, [url](#)

²⁸ Al Jazeera, Syria's Ahmed al-Sharaa named president for transitional period, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁹ BBC News, Assad says he didn't intend to leave Syria, statement claims, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁰ Guardian (The), Rebel leader Ahmed al-Sharaa made transitional president of Syria, 29 January 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

³¹ Guardian (The), Rebel leader Ahmed al-Sharaa made transitional president of Syria, 29 January 2025, [url](#); BBC News, Ahmed al-Sharaa named Syria's transitional president, 31 January 2025, [url](#)

³² International Crisis Group, We are the International Crisis Group, 14 November 2012, [url](#)

³³ International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁴ Etana, Syria Update #12: 20 December, 20 December 2025, [url](#)

³⁵ MEE, Syria's leader Ahmed al-Sharaa is now officially interim president, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁶ Etana, Syria Update #17: 8 February 2025, 8 February 2025, [url](#)

³⁷ Etana, About us, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸ MEI, ETANA Syria, n.d., [url](#)

³⁹ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)



factions and unaffiliated gunmen' have begun taking advantage of weaknesses in HTS policing to engage in looting and instil fear. These groups loot and seek revenge on persons viewed as being associated with the Assad government. They have targeted members of minority groups, Alawites in particular.⁴⁰ Sectarian-based murders have peaked in the provinces of Homs, Hama, and Latakia.⁴¹ On the other hand, former and now unemployed members of the army of the ousted regime are reportedly unwilling to lay down their arms for reasons of self-protection and pose a security threat.⁴² According to Etana 'some of the violence is likely being fomented by formerly regime-backed gangs [...] suspected of being behind a slew of attacks'.⁴³ As of 20 February, security forces continued to face increased threats as they tried to stabilise the country, including kidnappings, sectarian violence and threats from remnants of Assad's forces.⁴⁴ In early March, coordinated attacks by pro-Assad groups on security forces, particularly in the coastal areas, led to a significant escalation which resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties, mostly from the Alawite community.⁴⁵ For more information see section [4.1.2](#).

In the north of the country, various factions are struggling for influence and control.⁴⁶ Clashes between Turkish-backed militias operating under the umbrella of the Syrian National Army (SNA)⁴⁷ and the US-backed⁴⁸ Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued during the reporting period. When the HTS-led opposition forces captured Aleppo in late November, the SNA simultaneously launched an offensive in the province⁴⁹ targeting the territories controlled by the SDF,⁵⁰ causing the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians.⁵¹ The SDF was driven out of several towns⁵² in Aleppo's countryside and the SNA captured the strategically important cities of Manbij⁵³ and Tal Rifat⁵⁴. The clashes between the SDF and the SNA escalated⁵⁵ at the end of December 2024⁵⁶ near the Tishreen Dam on the Euphrates River in the countryside of Manbij, eastern Aleppo, a vital source of water and electricity for SDF-controlled areas.⁵⁷ Türkiye, which considers the SDF to be closely linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK),⁵⁸ has continued air and drone strikes in northern Syria, hitting SDF

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴¹ SOHR, 91 attacks in 2025 | 190 people killed in retaliatory actions and assassinations in different areas across Syria, 26 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴² International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴³ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Security Council Report, February 2025 Monthly Forecast, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Security Council Report, February 2025 Monthly Forecast, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Iddon, P., Why fighting is raging in north Syria between the Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF, The New Arab, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Levy, I., Supporting the SDF in Post-Assad Syria, TWI, 13 December 2024, [url](#), pp.1, 3

⁵¹ Iddon, P., Why fighting is raging in north Syria between the Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF, The New Arab, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵² International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵³ New Arab (The), Clashes erupt near Syria's Tishrin Dam as Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF battle for control, 26 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Security Council Report, February 2025 Monthly Forecast, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Security Council Report, February 2025 Monthly Forecast, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁶ New Arab (The), Clashes erupt near Syria's Tishrin Dam as Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF battle for control, 26 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁷ Security Council Report, February 2025 Monthly Forecast, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Security Council Report, January 2025 Monthly Forecast, 30 December 2024, [url](#)





targets⁵⁹ as well as civilians⁶⁰ and critical civilian infrastructure⁶¹ during the reporting period. As of 28 February 2025, clashes between the SDF and the SNA were still ongoing.⁶² In addition to the conflict with the SNA and Türkiye, the SDF also faces a long-running conflict with tribal militias in Deir Ez-Zor as well as attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).⁶³ In March 2025, SDF leaders signed an agreement to integrate their armed forces and civilian institutions into the new Syrian government. The deal mandates a full cessation of hostilities and requires the SDF to relinquish control of border posts, the airport, and key oil and gas fields.⁶⁴ The practical implementation of this agreement could not be monitored within the scope of this report.

ISIL appears to have largely withdrawn from⁶⁵ the vast central desert region of Badia,⁶⁶ the former rear base of ISIL-operations in Syria.⁶⁷ However, according to a report by the UN Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security, published in January 2025, 'the Syrian Badia region continued to serve as a centre for external operational planning of Da'esh [ISIL] and remained a critical region for its activities'.⁶⁸ ISIL has turned its focus to the northeast in recent months, challenging the US-backed SDF, following setbacks in central Syria since the summer, heavy Assad forces operations and US airstrikes against ISIL in September and October.⁶⁹ As of 20 February, Etana reported ISIL attacks against the SDF.⁷⁰

The situation in southern Syria was volatile during the reporting period.⁷¹ Shortly after it was known that Al-Assad had been ousted, the Israeli military moved into the UN-patrolled buffer zone⁷² in the Golan Heights border highlands,⁷³ an area it had been breaching since at least early November⁷⁴ and beyond into Syrian territory,⁷⁵ into areas of southern Quneitra and south-west Dar'a.⁷⁶ Also, Israel carried out hundreds of airstrikes in early December aimed at

⁵⁹ New York Times (The), With Syria in Flux, Turkish Forces Attack U.S.-Backed Forces, 8 December 2024, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶¹ BBC News, Turkish strikes in Syria cut water to one million people, 19 November 2024, [url](#); ANHA, Turkish attacks plunge 100 villages into darkness, 13 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶² Etana, Syria Update #20: 2 March 2025, 28 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶³ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴ BBC News, Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces, 11 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Spiegel International, Searching for Islamic State in Syria, 12 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁶ Lister, C., The growing threat of ISIS in Syria's Badia, MEI, 17 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁸ UNSG, Twentieth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2025/72, 31 January 2025, [url](#), para. 6

⁶⁹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency, Special Edition, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷¹ Kurdistan 24, Israel Strikes Military Targets in Southern Syria Amid Calls for Demilitarization, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷² Washington Post (The), Israel is building outposts in Syria, raising local fears of occupation, 2 February 2025, [url](#);

Al Jazeera, Satellite images show Israel building military bases in Syria buffer zone, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷³ NPR, In Syria's Golan Heights buffer zone, residents fear Israel is making a land grab, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁴ CNN, UN sounds alarm at Israel's 'severe violations' at key buffer zone with Syria, 14 November 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Washington Post (The), Israel is building outposts in Syria, raising local fears of occupation, 2 February 2025, [url](#);

Al Jazeera, Satellite images show Israel building military bases in Syria buffer zone, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#)





destroying weapon sites across Syria,⁷⁷ more than half of which took place in Dar'a, Damascus, Rural Damascus and Latakia governorates.⁷⁸ As of 20 February 2025 Israeli incursions into and beyond the buffer zone were ongoing.⁷⁹

1.2. Political developments

1.2.1. Fall of the Assad government

On 27 November 2024, the militant Islamist group HTS, led by Ahmad Al-Sharaa,⁸⁰ led a large-scale offensive⁸¹ in northwestern Syria.⁸² Until then, the HTS's influence had been limited to parts of the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib.⁸³ The initial assault aimed at separating the opposition-controlled 'Greater Idlib pocket' from the majority of Aleppo governorate controlled by pro-GoS forces. The operation involved a coalition of rebel factions, which included amongst others the Turkish-backed SNA.⁸⁴ From the east, the Kurdish-led SDF deployed their fighters to territories in areas west of the Euphrates river in the governorate of Deir Ez-Zor that had previously been under the control of the Syrian army.⁸⁵ By 1 December, HTS and its allied factions had captured Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city, followed by the seizure of Hama on 5 December and Homs, the third-largest city, on 7 December.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, rebel forces from southern Syria advanced into Dar'a, achieving control of over 90 % of the governorate as government forces withdrew.⁸⁷ In Sweida, Druze factions assumed control.⁸⁸ Factions from the South formed the Southern Operations Room to support the uprising and were the first to enter Damascus,⁸⁹ though they withdrew to Dar'a upon HTS' arrival in the capital.⁹⁰ On 8 December 2024, the rebels declared victory in the capital. Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad fled the country that day, seeking refuge in Russia, where he was granted asylum.⁹¹

⁷⁷ Washington Post (The), Israel expands airstrikes across Syria amid widening power vacuum, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸ ACLED, Syria: Israeli airstrikes reach an all-time high after Assad regime falls, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁰ Standard (Der), Situation in Syrien: Was wir bisher wissen [Situation in Syrian: What we know so far], 8 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹ BBC News, What just happened in Syria and who's in charge?, 9 December 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?, 8 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸² BBC News, What just happened in Syria and who's in charge?, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸³ BBC News, What just happened in Syria and who's in charge?, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴ Al Jazeera, What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?, 8 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Rudaw, Syrian rebels announce capturing southern city of Daraa, 7 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁶ BBC News, What just happened in Syria and who's in charge?, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁷ SOHR, After local factions advanced to Daraa Al-Balad I Regime forces nearly lose all control over the province, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, How al-Assad's regime fell: Key moments in the fall of Syria's 'tyrant', 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Guardian (The), Who are the main actors in the fall of the regime in Syria?, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁰ France24, South Syria fighters reluctant to give up weapons: spokesman, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

⁹¹ Tagesschau, Wie Assad gestürzt wurde - und was das bedeutet [How Assad was overthrown - and what that means], 8 December 2024, [url](#)



The opposition faced minimal resistance throughout their campaign, as Syrian army forces abandoned their positions,⁹² allowing rebels to enter the capital with little resistance.⁹³ Contributing factors to the fast downfall of the previous Syrian government included war fatigue, corruption, a neglected army and weakened allies.⁹⁴ The collapse of the Syrian army sparked widespread demonstrations in the rural areas surrounding Damascus, with civilians dismantling Assad's symbols and targeting military sites.⁹⁵

Despite its long-standing alliance with Assad, Russia was unable to counter the rapid advance of opposition forces, while Iran's involvement was similarly ineffective. Although Russian warplanes initially launched strikes against the militants⁹⁶ as well as against civilians, including some who were celebrating the oppositions' advances,⁹⁷ Moscow's military support diminished as the rebels' swift progression outpaced its response.⁹⁸

1.2.2. Governance under the Transitional Administration

(a) Political transition

Following the fall of Bashar Al-Assad's government on 8 December 2024, a transitional administration was created. Former Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Jalali formally transferred power to Mohammed al-Bashir, the newly appointed transitional prime minister,⁹⁹ in order to ensure the continuation of state functions, as explained by Al-Jalali, including the payment of public-sector salaries.¹⁰⁰

Al-Sharaa stated that the organisation of national elections could take up to five years due to the necessity of reconstructing the electoral infrastructure. He further asserted that Syria would be structured as 'a republic with a parliament and an executive government.'¹⁰¹

On 29 December, Ahmad al-Sharaa outlined a multi-year roadmap involving the drafting of a new constitution within three years and subsequent elections, alongside plans for a National Dialogue Conference to promote reconciliation and inclusivity. As part of the transition process, Al-Sharaa emphasised the importance of preserving national unity, rejecting federalism.¹⁰² Initial negotiations were held with the SDF and Kurdish National Council (KNC) to involve Kurdish factions in the political process.¹⁰³ But the National Dialogue Conference, initially planned for early January was later postponed to establish a broader preparatory committee representing all segments of Syrian society.¹⁰⁴ It eventually took place on 25

⁹² France24, Why the Assad regime collapsed in Syria – and why so fast, 8 December 2024, [url](#)

⁹³ France24, Why the Assad regime collapsed in Syria – and why so fast, 8 December 2024, [url](#); Tagesschau, Wie Assad gestürzt wurde - und was das bedeutet [How Assad was overthrown - and what that means], 8 December 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁴ France24, Why the Assad regime collapsed in Syria – and why so fast, 8 December 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Al Jazeera, How al-Assad's regime fell: Key moments in the fall of Syria's 'tyrant', 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Reuters, How Assad's government in Syria fell, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁷ SNHR, 149 Civilians Killed, Including 35 Children and 16 Women, in Northern Syria Since November 27, 2024, Up Until December 3, 2024, 4 December 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Reuters, How Assad's government in Syria fell, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Al Jazeera, Syria's new rulers must not repeat the past mistakes of Lebanon and Iraq, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ Syrian Observer (The), Al-Jalali: Employees' Salaries Secured by the Central Bank, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ France24, Syria's interim president says organising elections could take up to five years, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁰² L24, Al-Sharaa Outlines Vision for Syria's Future, 29 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰³ Rudaw, Syrian government to engage SDF, ENKS in national dialogue conference, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Al Mayadeen, Syrian Christians cannot afford to keep turning the other cheek, 23 January 2025, [url](#)



February 2025, preceded by preparatory workshops at a local level.¹⁰⁵ It convened in Damascus with around 600 participants, with its closing statement emphasising Syria's territorial integrity, condemning Israeli incursions, and calling for a withdrawal. It further set out the adoption of a temporary constitutional declaration, the formation of an interim legislative council, and the preparation of a draft permanent constitution focused on human rights and freedom. The closing statement further mentioned the importance of women's participation, peaceful coexistence, and the establishment of ongoing national dialogue mechanisms.¹⁰⁶ The conference, however, faced criticism for being hastily organised and insufficiently representative.¹⁰⁷

At the end of January, the transitional administration declared the annulment of Syria's 2012 constitution and the disbandment of the former government's parliament, military, and security agencies. Al-Sharaa stated that he would establish an interim legislative council to assist in governance until the adoption of a new constitution.¹⁰⁸

(b) Government formation

Following the assumption of power in Damascus, the HTS established a caretaker government primarily composed of officials from the former Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) in Idlib, which Al-Sharaa described as a temporary measure to maintain stability and restore essential services.¹⁰⁹ Initially, ministers from the SSG assumed national ministerial posts,¹¹⁰ with some officials and civil servants from the former government remaining in their positions to ensure continuity.¹¹¹

On 10 December 2024, Mohammed Al-Bashir, an engineer from Idlib governorate and former leader of the SSG in northwestern Syria, which was created with HTS, was appointed as interim prime minister. His tenure and that of the interim government was set to end on 1 March 2025,¹¹² but as of late January 2025 there was no date for elections to be held in Syria.¹¹³ Meanwhile, Ahmad Al-Sharaa, leader of HTS, emerged as Syria's de facto leader.¹¹⁴ On 29 January 2025, Al-Sharaa was named president for the transitional period.¹¹⁵

On 21 December, the interim government appointed Asaad Hassan Al-Shibani as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Murhaf Abu Qasra as Minister of Defense, both of whom were known allies of Al-Sharaa.¹¹⁶ Other appointments included Mohamed Abdel Rahman as Minister of Interior, Mohammed Yaqoub Al-Omar as Minister of Information, Mohamed Taha Al-Ahmad as Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, Nazir Mohammed Al-Qadri as Minister of Education, and Shadi

¹⁰⁵ Enab Baladi, With 18 points... National Dialogue Conference concludes its work, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #16, Syria situation crisis, 27 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁷ Reuters, Syria to hold dialogue conference amid criticism over inclusivity, 24 February 2025, [url](#); Etana Syria, BLOG: Syrian National Dialogue Conference falls short of expectations, 3 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ BBC News, Ahmed al-Sharaa named Syria's transitional president, 31 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, Key Decision Loom as Syria Enters a New Era, 14 January 2025, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ Al Jazeera, What to know about Syria's new caretaker government, 15 December 2024, [url](#)

¹¹¹ CRS, Syria: Regime Change, Transition, and U.S. Policy, 13 December 2024, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹² MEE, Mohammed al-Bashir: Who is Syria's new interim prime minister?, 10 December 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syrian fighters name Mohammed al-Bashir as caretaker prime minister, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

¹¹³ Al Jazeera, President al-Sharaa and no more Baath party: What else has Syria announced?, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Al Arabiya, Syria's new elections and draft constitution: Al-Sharaa outlines timeline, 29 December 2024, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ Al Jazeera, President al-Sharaa and no more Baath party: What else has Syria announced?, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Al Jazeera, Syrian authorities appoint HTS figures as foreign, defence ministers, 21 December 2024, [url](#)



Mohammed Al-Waisi as Minister of Justice, all of whom had previously held positions within the Salvation Government. Additionally, Fadi Al-Qassem, Mohamed Abdel Rahman Muslim, Hossam Hussein, and Basil Abdul Aziz took up their respective roles as Minister of Development, Minister of Local Administration and Services, Minister of Endowments, and Minister of Economy.¹¹⁷ Anas Khattab (also known by his nom de guerre Abu Ahmad Hudood), a previous leader of the Nusra Front, was appointed head of the General Intelligence Service. The appointment of Maher Al-Sharaa as Minister of Health sparked controversy, as he is the brother of Al-Sharaa. The new administration also included one woman, Aisha Al-Debs, as Director of the Women's Affairs Office.¹¹⁸

In January, the transitional administration conducted its first major cabinet reshuffle, replacing Mohammad Abdul Rahman with Ali Kidda as Minister of Interior. Kidda was reportedly a close associate of Al-Sharaa.¹¹⁹

According to BBC News, there was no transparent mechanism for selecting individuals for ministerial positions, and it remained unclear whether these appointments were made through consultation or solely by Al-Sharaa. This uncertainty fuelled discussions about potentially expanding the government to include members of the opposition abroad and domestic experts.¹²⁰

(c) Military reforms

Prior to their entry into Damascus on December 8, the HTS pledged to maintain Syria's institutional framework, later declaring a general amnesty for Syrian army soldiers.¹²¹ The transitional government consequently initiated a settlement process (for more information see section 1.3.1), which facilitated the reintegration of large numbers of former government and military personnel, including high-ranking officials, some of whom were involved in significant wartime abuses, such as Fadi Saqr. Next to the voluntary settlement procedures taking place, the Military Operations Administration (MOA), the umbrella command centre¹²² of the new HTS-led transitional administration, tracked down individuals evading settlement.¹²³ As part of these campaigns previous officers were arrested, while others were released after it was established that they had not participated in abuses. According to Etana, concerns arose over a lack of process, as reports suggest executions of low-level militiamen, which authorities are framing as isolated acts of community revenge.¹²⁴ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a UK-based monitoring organisation, reported in mid-January that 8 000 individuals struck reconciliation deals at the MOA centers in Sallamiyah, Hama within a few days. The number of officers and members of the previous government's forces in prisons such as Adra,

¹¹⁷ Al Jazeera, [تشيكلية الوزراء في حكومة تصريف الأعمال السورية بعد خلع الأسد](#) [The lineup of ministers in the Syrian caretaker government after the ouster of Assad], 25 December 2024, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ BBC News, [أنس خطاب، من مُدرج على قائمة العقوبات إلى رئيس لجهاز الاستخبارات في سوريا](#) [Anas Khattab, from Sanctions Listed to Head of Intelligence in Syria], 24 December 2024, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Syrian Observer (The), [Syria Appoints Ali Kidda as Minister of Interior in a Significant Reshuffle](#), 20 January 2025, [url](#)

¹²⁰ BBC News, [أنس خطاب، من مُدرج على قائمة العقوبات إلى رئيس لجهاز الاستخبارات في سوريا](#) [Anas Khattab, from Sanctions Listed to Head of Intelligence in Syria], 24 December 2024, [url](#)

¹²¹ Al Jazeera, [Syria's new rulers must not repeat the past mistakes of Lebanon and Iraq](#), 16 December 2024, [url](#)

¹²² Waters, G., [Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria](#), MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

¹²³ Etana Syria, [Syria Update #13: 10 January, 9 January 2025](#), [url](#)

¹²⁴ Etana Syria, [Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025](#), [url](#)



Hama, and Harim increased to over 9 000, including 2 000 who were returned from Iraq. Most were arrested after being caught in raids or checkpoints.¹²⁵

The transitional government further abolished conscription,¹²⁶ except in situations such as national emergencies.¹²⁷ According to Samir Saleh, member of the military command in Damascus countryside, the Syrian army is going to be an army of volunteers in which the population will be encouraged to participate, with the aim to secure the country's borders.¹²⁸ Previous defectors, such as officers from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) will be given a special status within the structure of the Ministry of Defense, depending on their expertise.¹²⁹ On December 29, a list of 49 new military commanders was published, including members of HTS, defected officers from the Syrian army, and at least six non-Syrians, with the seven highest-ranking positions reportedly filled by HTS members.¹³⁰

Finally, the transitional government committed to integrating all rebel factions into the Ministry of Defense.¹³¹ Between January and February 2025, the interim ministries of Defense and Interior undertook efforts to unify all armed factions into a single military and police force. The Ministry of Defence reported that over 70 factions across six regions had agreed to integrate, and a Supreme Committee was established to regulate military assets, including personnel, bases, and weaponry. On 29 January, the interim government formally announced the dissolution of all opposition parties and military groups, though the extent to which this applied to the SDF remained unclear. The SDF initially resisted integration, particularly after its proposal to join as a semi-autonomous entity was rejected by the Defence Ministry, which accused it of delaying negotiations,¹³² but in early March it was announced that the SDF signed a deal to integrate their armed forces and civilian institutions into the new Syrian government.¹³³ By mid-February, the transitional administration had successfully integrated around 100 armed factions, including the U.S.-backed Syrian Free Army, into a new Syrian military and Ministry of Defense. However, some factions, such as the one of Ahmad al-Awda in southern Syria and various Druze military groups, remained resistant.¹³⁴ The armed factions of Sweida governorate remained fully intact, with two new military bodies emerging in January.¹³⁵

(d) Public sector reforms

In the early stages of the transition, the new administration intended to keep and reactivate key state institutions in order to maintain basic services. As a result, many important state

¹²⁵ SOHR, Hama | 8,000 people settle security situations in centres of Military Operations Administration in Sallamiyah in ten days, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

¹²⁶ New Arab (The), Why Al-Sharaa's scrapping of conscription for Syrians matters, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

¹²⁷ New Arab (The), Why Al-Sharaa's scrapping of conscription for Syrians matters, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Memri TV, Military Command Member In Damascus Countryside: We Are Ending Mandatory Military Conscription – The New Syrian Army Will Be An Army Of Volunteers, 11 January 2025, [url](#)

¹²⁹ Asharq Al-Awsat, Syrian Defense Ministry to Restructure Army with Volunteer Force, 14 January 2025, [url](#)

¹³⁰ France24, 'Foreign jihadists' in Syria leader's pick for army officers: monitor, experts, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

¹³¹ Guardian (The), Syrian HTS leader says rebel factions that overthrew Assad will be 'disbanded', 17 December 2024, [url](#)

¹³² New Arab (The), Forging a united front: The challenges of building Syria's new army, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

¹³³ BBC News, Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces, 11 March 2025, [url](#)

¹³⁴ Zelin, A.Y., The Status of Syria's Transition After Two Months, TWI, 12 February 2025, [url](#)

¹³⁵ Syria Direct, Can Suwayda's factions enforce security and stop the spread of weapons?, 6 February 2025, [url](#)



institutions continued to function.¹³⁶ During the reporting period the new administration initiated some institutional reforms. Upon assuming control, the transitional administration reinstated public sector employees previously dismissed for their involvement in the Syrian revolution¹³⁷ while simultaneously dismissing hundreds of employees from a single directorate as part of a restructuring effort with the declared aim of downsizing institutions and removing ineffective personnel.¹³⁸ While the transitional administration is stating economic reasons for the dismissals, some former employees accuse the new administration of basing their dismissals on sectarian and political grounds.¹³⁹ Qatar announced its intention to help fund a 400 % increase in public sector wages, which had been pledged by the interim government. The foreign funding was not yet confirmed at the time of writing.¹⁴⁰

In order to remove members of the bar association who had been appointed by the Baath Party, the transitional administration replaced the council of Syria's Central Bar Association with members of the Free Bar Association from Idlib.¹⁴¹ Khitam Haddad, Deputy Minister of Justice since 2023, retained her position and announced at the beginning of January that criminal and civil cases would resume under the transitional authorities, but that crimes committed during the previous regime would not yet be addressed. Some lawyers criticised the transitional authorities' unelected Bar Association council as authoritarian, while Assad-era legal structures, including the terrorism law, remained intact.¹⁴²

Further steps by the new administration included the transfer of control over border crossings with Türkiye — such as Bab Al-Salama, Al-Rai, and Jarablus — to the transitional administration, as well as the integration of educational institutions like the University of Aleppo under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Damascus.¹⁴³ Finally, NGOs were required by the Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs to go through a process of re-registration, which according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) has impeded the restoration of numerous health and protection facilities, limiting their ability to sustain the provision of medical and social services.¹⁴⁴

(e) Economic reforms and sanctions

The transitional administration started to initiate economic reforms, with HTS announcing its intention to implement a free-market system.¹⁴⁵ Institutional reforms included the layoffs of state employees to downsize state institutions, with plans to dismiss a third of all public sector employees – including so called 'ghost employees' – and to move to a free-market economy.¹⁴⁶ Maysaa Sabrine was appointed governor of the Central Bank, and transitional Finance Minister Mohammed Abazeed introduced plans to restructure government ministries

¹³⁶ Al Jazeera, What to know about Syria's new caretaker government, 15 December 2024, [url](#); Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (The), A Post-Assad Syria: Navigating the Transition Ahead, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

¹³⁷ Enab Baladi, Syria's new administration reinstates dismissed workers to their jobs, 23 December 2024, [url](#)

¹³⁸ ARK News, Protests in Daraa Over Dismissal of 700 Health Directorate Employees, 9 January 2025, [url](#)

¹³⁹ Le Monde, En Syrie, climat de purge dans le secteur public, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ Reuters, Exclusive: Qatar plans to help boost Syrian government salaries, sources say, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Le Monde, In Syria, lawyers worry about the new regime's stranglehold on the bar, 20 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴² BBC News, Calls for justice and accountability in Syria grow after Assad's fall, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴³ Syria TV, Syrian Interim Government: No Contact with New Damascus Government, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ UNFPA, Situation Report #1 Humanitarian Needs in Syria, 15 January 2025, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, Rebuilding Syria's economy: Can stability return after war?, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Reuters, Syria's new Islamist rulers to roll back state with privatizations, public sector layoffs, 31 January 2025, [url](#)



for improved efficiency and accountability, though specific modernisation measures remained unclear. Abazeed also proposed an overhaul of the tax system. To mitigate potential shortages in goods, the government reopened the Nasib border crossing with Jordan, a key trade route, and directed the state-owned Syrian Petroleum Company to resume operations. Meanwhile, Türkiye signalled its willingness to invest in Syria's economy.¹⁴⁷

In early January, the United States issued a six-month sanctions exemption, effective until 7 July, to facilitate humanitarian aid following Assad's departure. The exemption allowed specific transactions with governing institutions at all levels, including hospitals, schools, and utilities, as well as entities affiliated with HTS across Syria. While the sanctions themselves were to remain in place, the exemption permitted activities related to the sale, supply, and storage of energy, including petroleum and electricity, and enabled personal remittances and certain energy-related transactions aimed at supporting economic recovery.¹⁴⁸ On 24 February, the EU Council decided to lift various restrictive measures, including those affecting the energy and transport sectors. It also excluded four banks and Syrian Arab Airlines from the list subject to asset freezes and permitted the Syrian Central Bank access to financial resources. Furthermore, exceptions were made to allow banking relations between Syrian banks and financial institutions within member states. The existing humanitarian exemption was extended indefinitely, and a new exception was introduced for personal use concerning the export ban on luxury goods to Syria.¹⁴⁹

(f) Political transition in accordance with UN Resolution 2254

Ahmad Al-Sharaa has criticised international organisations, particularly the United Nations, for their perceived ineffectiveness in addressing Syria's humanitarian crises. He highlighted the UN's failure to secure the release of detainees and facilitate the return of refugees over the past 14 years.¹⁵⁰ Emphasising the need for domestic solutions, Al-Sharaa called for updates to UN Resolution 2254, originally adopted in December 2015 to guide Syria's political transition, arguing that its framework was no longer fully applicable to the situation since the fall of Bashar Al-Assad.¹⁵¹ In an interview with Al Arabiya, Al-Sharaa reiterated his criticism of the UN and advocated for an alternative transition process. He proposed delaying elections for up to four years to allow for the development of a revised political framework. During a meeting with UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, he rejected the rigid adherence to what he called outdated resolutions and outlined his vision for a transition process that reflects Syria's current realities.¹⁵² Despite his criticisms, Al-Sharaa affirmed that Syria is prepared to accept the deployment of UN forces within the United Nations-established buffer zone along the Israeli border.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Al Jazeera, Rebuilding Syria's economy: Can stability return after war?, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ Reuters, US allows transactions with governing institutions in Syria despite sanctions, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ European Council, Syria: EU suspends restrictive measures on key economic sectors, 24 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Levant24, Al-Sharaa Outlines Vision for Syria's Future, 29 December 2024, [url](#); Guardian (The), The UN wants to influence a pluralist Syria – but will the country listen?, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ Enab Baladi, "2254"..Uncertain presence in Syria's future, 4 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁵² Guardian (The), The UN wants to influence a pluralist Syria – but will the country listen?, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁵³ Reuters, Syria's de facto leader says country ready to welcome UN forces in buffer zone with Israel, 16 January 2025, [url](#)



On 6 February, the transitional administration prolonged the UN's authorisation to deliver humanitarian aid via the Bab al-Hawa crossing for an extra six months, until 7 August.¹⁵⁴

1.3. Treatment of certain profiles and groups of the population

1.3.1. Persons affiliated with the government of Bashar Al-Assad

Upon its takeover of power, the transitional administration did not pursue a sweeping de-Baathification process akin to Iraq's post-war policies and the offices of the Baath Party were not systematically targeted. In December, the Baath Party leadership suspended activities.¹⁵⁵ At the end of January, it was announced that the party had been dissolved.¹⁵⁶

From the outset, the new authorities announced that soldiers who had been recruited under compulsory service were safe, and it was forbidden to assault them. On 9 December, the MOA issued a general amnesty for all military personnel conscripted under compulsory service.¹⁵⁷ The new administration subsequently established so-called 'reconciliation centres' to provide temporary civilian identity cards to former members of the police, military, intelligence services, and pro-Assad militias who surrender their weapons.¹⁵⁸ These reconciliation centres oversee the process by which former regime affiliates surrender their weapons and register their personal information in exchange for temporary identification cards. These cards grant limited legal protection and safe passage, but the process lacks transparency, follows inconsistent criteria, and is influenced by security agencies, with many applicants facing complex bureaucratic hurdles.¹⁵⁹ In late December, the BBC reported significant participation, with hundreds of individuals queuing at a reconciliation centre in Damascus.¹⁶⁰

In January and February, local media and organisations following the events in Syria reported that the new administration granted amnesty to some high level figures associated with the Assad government, such as Fadi Saqr, previous leader of the National Defence Forces.¹⁶¹ The MOA was further said to have granted reconciliation to collaborators of Maher Al-Assad, such as businessmen who sponsored his activities,¹⁶² as well as Major General Talal Makhlof,

¹⁵⁴ Security Council Report, Syria: Briefing and Consultations, 11 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ Al Jazeera, Syria's new rulers must not repeat the past mistakes of Lebanon and Iraq, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ Al Jazeera, President al-Sharaa and no more Baath party: What else has Syria announced?, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ Enab Baladi, إدارة العمليات تصدر عفواً عن المجندين [The Operations Administration issues amnesty for conscripts], 9 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ BBC News, Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons, 29 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ ISPI, Coming to Terms with the past in Syria: The First, Fragile, Steps of "Transitional Justice", 7 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ BBC News, Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons, 29 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ New Arab (The), Fury in Syria as reconciled 'war criminal' from Assad regime visits site of Tadamon massacre, 8 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁶² SOHR, Military Operations Administration keeps imprisoning over 9,000 combatants and reconcile figures of corruption of former regime, 13 January 2025, [url](#)



leader in the Assad government's Republican Guard.¹⁶³ Concurrently, the collapse of Bashar Al-Assad's government prompted numerous senior officials and associates of the ruling family to flee to Lebanon. However, Lebanese authorities expelled Syrian officers and soldiers who had entered illegally, returning them to Syria, where they were detained by the new administration.¹⁶⁴

By the end of December, the transitional administration intensified efforts to apprehend individuals associated with the ousted government.¹⁶⁵ Authorities claimed their arrest campaigns target only individuals who committed crimes on behalf of the Assad regime.¹⁶⁶ Campaigns in Deir Ez-Zor, Aleppo, and Tartous focused on confiscating illegal weapons and apprehending suspects involved in illegal activities.¹⁶⁷ Nearly 300 individuals were detained in one week alone across Damascus, Latakia, Tartous, Homs, Hama, and Deir Ez-Zor, including former regime informants, pro-Iranian fighters, and lower-ranking military officers. According to SOHR, some detainees accused of having provided intelligence to the Assad government were reportedly executed immediately after their arrest.¹⁶⁸ On 10 January, SOHR reported that fighters associated with the transitional administration publicly executed Mazen Kneneh, a local official accused of serving as an informant for the ousted president Assad.¹⁶⁹ In February, further extrajudicial killings of former affiliates of militias supportive of Bashar Al-Assad were reported, such as the assassination of four members of the Meido family, who were part of a local militia, which had fought alongside the previous government. According to SOHR, extrajudicial and revenge killings resulted in the deaths of 287 individuals between the start of 2025 and middle of February 2025.¹⁷⁰

Operations continued throughout January, with members of the general security administration inspecting houses, looking for weapons and individuals who had not reconciled with the transitional administration.¹⁷¹ Extensive military and security operations across key regions, such as the coastal cities, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, and Damascus involved raids, weapons searches, and the further detention of hundreds of individuals.¹⁷² The operations focused on former military fighters and ex-government personnel and resulted in significant amounts of weapons and ammunition seized. The arrested individuals were transported to Homs Central Prison, Hama Central Prison, and Adra Prison in the Rural Damascus area. Additionally, videos posted online showed detainees, apprehended during these operations, enduring physical and verbal mistreatment, including assaults and humiliating treatment.¹⁷³ According to the Syria Justice and Accountability Center, these security operations resulted in various human rights violations, including the reported death of detainees in custody and the

¹⁶³ Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, Human Rights Violations in Syria, December 2024 – January 2025, 22 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Reuters, Lebanon returns 70 officers and soldiers to Syria, security official says, 28 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ New York Times (The), Syria's New Government Steps Up Pursuit of Assad Loyalists, 28 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ Enab Baladi, Syria: Ongoing security campaigns against former regime elements, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Asharq Al-Awsat, Syria: Nearly 300 Arrested in Crackdown on Assad Loyalists, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ Al Arabiya, Syria monitor says alleged al-Assad loyalist 'executed' in public, 10 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ New Arab (The), Syria: String of extrajudicial killings targets ex-regime affiliates, 17 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ SOHR, Ongoing security campaigns | General security administration launches new arrest campaign in Qatna residences, 28 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁷² Enab Baladi, How effective are security campaigns against remnants of Assad's regime?, 22 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁷³ SNHR, Legal Regulations and Judicial Process Must be Properly Implemented in All Detentions Carried Out as Part of Security Operations, 4 February 2025, [url](#)



arrest of relatives of wanted individuals, affecting both former Assad government affiliates and unrelated civilians.¹⁷⁴ By mid-January, the SOHR reported that over 9 000 combatants and officers remained detained, amid allegations of torture and restricted communication with families.¹⁷⁵ Information by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) match the allegations of torture, as reported by families who had bodies of family members returned after their detention by the General Security Directorate.¹⁷⁶ Concurrently, SOHR reported that 275 detainees from the Central Homs Prison were released following a determination of their innocence in war crimes committed against the Syrian population.¹⁷⁷ In January 2025, the transitional administration freed around 641 individuals, mainly from the governorates of Homs, Hama, and Latakia, who had been held in detention for durations spanning a few days to a month, with the majority being released in small groups from Homs Central Prison.¹⁷⁸

At the beginning of February, the Ministry of Information imposed a prohibition on conducting interviews with or disseminating statements attributed to individuals affiliated with the former government.¹⁷⁹

Since the takeover by the transitional administration, remnant pro-Assad groups have conducted small-scale, targeted hit-and-run attacks against its security forces across Syria.¹⁸⁰ These attacks have prompted the authorities to launch operations to capture the culprits which at times resulted in civilian casualties.¹⁸¹ In early March, coordinated attacks by pro-Assad groups on security forces, particularly in the coastal areas, led to a significant escalation which resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties, mostly from the Alawite community.¹⁸² For more information see section [4.1.2](#).

Next to the transitional administration's operations, incidents of suspected revenge acts, including killings, kidnappings, and arson, by unidentified groups have been documented, though their scale remains unclear. At the end of December, three Alawite judges in Masyaf, responsible for property disputes, were killed, an act condemned by the transitional administration.¹⁸³ In January, SOHR reported the execution of 15 people, including officers of

¹⁷⁴ Syria Justice and Accountability Center, Two Months After Assad's Fall, Assad-Like Violations Are Still Being Committed in Syria, 13 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ SOHR, Military Operations Administration keeps imprisoning over 9,000 combatants and reconcile figures of corruption of former regime, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ SNHR, SNHR Condemns Torture, Death of Three Detainees at the Hands of the Transitional Government's General Security Directorate, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ SOHR, Ongoing security campaigns | General security administration launches new arrest campaign in Qatna residences, 28 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ SNHR, At least 229 Arbitrary Detentions Documented in January 2025, 4 February, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷⁹ Enab Baladi, Syrian Ministry of Information prohibits interviews with figures of previous regime, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Update #21, 8 March 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ Etana Syria, Syria Update #21, 8 March 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁸² International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁸³ BBC News, Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons, 29 December 2024, [url](#)



the former government, by unidentified gunmen in Homs governorate. Furthermore, 53 people were arrested and brought to unknown locations.¹⁸⁴

1.3.2. Alawites

Following its assumption of power, HTS emphasised its commitment to integrating Alawites into Syria's governance and engaged in discussions with local Alawite representatives. HTS officials reiterated that accountability for crimes committed under the Assad government would be pursued through the formal judicial system.¹⁸⁵ Despite these assurances, Alawites remain largely excluded from the new political and military structures, with no plan for integrating discharged soldiers into the new army due to lingering wartime divisions. Public distrust toward former regime officers and officials further hinders their reintegration. Economic insecurity is a major challenge, with mass public-sector layoffs particularly affecting Alawites, including former security officers and their families, many of whom have also lost state-provided housing.¹⁸⁶

Significant concerns persist regarding the treatment of Alawite communities, particularly in regions such as Homs, Hama, and the coastal governorates. In the city of Homs, men in military uniforms established checkpoints at the entrances to Alawite-majority neighbourhoods, heightening fears among residents. Reports indicate that young men, including former soldiers and conscripts who had surrendered their weapons, were detained. Men at one checkpoint allegedly engaged in sectarian profiling before the checkpoint was dismantled following complaints. Shihadi Mayhoub, a former lawmaker, said he documented over 600 arrests in the Zahra district (Homs governorate) by January 2025 and more than 1 380 across Homs city, with the majority of detainees reported to be civilians and conscripts, alongside retired military officers. The SOHR estimated that at least 1 800 individuals, predominantly Alawites, had been detained in Homs city and its governorate. Furthermore, violence targeting Alawites increased nationwide, with 150 killings reported, particularly in Homs and Hama.¹⁸⁷

Meanwhile, unidentified extremist factions exacerbated fears by circulating calls for violence against Alawites, including videos advocating indiscriminate attacks. Targeted killings of Alawites linked to the former government were reported in coastal regions, while armed groups wearing military uniforms resembling those of HTS or other opposition factions raided over 20 Alawite villages in rural Hama, causing displacement, theft, and fatalities.¹⁸⁸

Reports of harassment, abductions, and killings of Alawites increased after Assad's fall, with social media content, albeit unverified, accusing HTS fighters of the violence. A former Syrian soldier reported being detained and beaten at an HTS checkpoint near Khirbet al-Ma'zah, Tartous governorate, while traveling to seek amnesty, claiming he was specifically targeted for his Alawite background and subjected to five hours of physical abuse before being released.

¹⁸⁴ SOHR, Primary death toll | 15 people including officers of former regime killed in Fahil massacre, 25 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ Balanche, F., Alawites Under Threat in Syria?, TWI, 31 December 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ France24, Fear grips Alawites in Syria's Homs as Assad 'remnants' targeted, 10 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ Shahin, K., The Challenges Facing Syria's Alawites, New Lines Magazine, 13 January 2025, [url](#)





The UN worked to verify such claims in an effort to prevent further sectarian escalation, while SOHR estimated 150 Alawite killings within a month by unnamed perpetrators.¹⁸⁹

Zahra, a neighbourhood in Homs with a significant Alawite population, saw increased insecurity, with residents adhering to an informal curfew due to the presence of HTS forces. The HTS implemented security measures in the area, including checkpoints and house-to-house raids targeting individuals it identified as remnants of the former government. Reports from residents described forced evacuations, profiling based on identification documents, and instances of violence, arrests, physical assaults and gunfire.¹⁹⁰

At the end of January, SOHR reported several instances of groups of gunmen, some of whom claimed to be affiliated with the MOA, attacking and killing civilians for political and sectarian reasons.¹⁹¹ Particularly, communities in the Homs countryside with predominantly Alawite and Shiite populations experienced a sharp escalation in abuses, criminal acts, and extrajudicial killings of civilians.¹⁹² Gunmen shot and killed civilians in a village in the north west of Hama governorate, which is primarily inhabited by Alawites.¹⁹³ According to the authorities, among those killed in the attack were former officers and soldiers.¹⁹⁴

At the beginning of February, further attacks against Alawites were reported. The new authorities launched investigations into unlawful killings, while concurrently announcing security operations against loyalists of the previous government. Interim President Ahmad Al-Sharaa emphasised the need to maintain civil peace, warning of the dangers of deepening sectarian divisions.¹⁹⁵

Expert on Syrian security issues Gregory Waters highlighted considerable variation in conditions across former government strongholds such as Tartous, Latakia, Homs, and Hama. While instances of sectarian intimidation and harassment by security forces were reported, some Alawites in these regions described interactions with authorities as polite and respectful. According to Waters, documented violations appeared to stem more from unprofessional conduct during arrests than from explicit sectarian targeting, with many of the committed crimes being attributed to gangs and civilians with no affiliation to the transitional administration. He further noted that human rights violations were sometimes taking place in the context of volatile security situation or a security vacuum as well as in response to specific incidents, such as when former government militia fighters launched an ambush against security forces in the rural areas of Tartous at the end of December. The forces consequently started an operation – including home raids, the erecting of checkpoints and shoot-outs, against villages suspected of hosting the fighters, such as Khirbet Maazah, which was home to numerous former government militia fighters and a high-ranking prison official accused of

¹⁸⁹ France24, 'Syrian above all': The Alawite community refuses to pay for Assad's crimes, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ MEE, HTS raids and forced disappearances fuel fear in Syria's Alawi heartlands, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ SOHR, 91 attacks in 2025 | 190 people killed in retaliatory actions and assassinations in different areas across Syria, 26 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Worrying escalation | 46 civilians killed by gunmen participating in security operations in Homs countryside in a week, 28 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Security chaos | Gunmen execute a massacre in a village in Hama countryside, 31 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹² SOHR, Worrying escalation | 46 civilians killed by gunmen participating in security operations in Homs countryside in a week, 28 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹³ SOHR, Security chaos | Gunmen execute a massacre in a village in Hama countryside, 31 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ New Arab (The), 15 people killed in 'sectarian' massacre in Alawi village in Syria, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ France24, Syria's Alawites mourn their dead after revenge attacks, 5 February 2025, [url](#)





involvement in the killing of hundreds of detainees. Waters considers that numerous crimes were perpetrated by gangs and civilians unaffiliated with the new administration, while certain lower-ranking soldiers and local leaders took part in sectarian-motivated intimidation and abductions of Alawite civilians.¹⁹⁶

In early March, clashes between pro-Assad groups and security forces in Latakia, Tartous and Hama governorate, led to hundreds of civilians being killed, most of whom were Alawites.¹⁹⁷ This included summary executions carried out by forces linked to the caretaker government.¹⁹⁸ For more information see section [4.1.2](#).

1.3.3. Kurds

With regards to the Kurdish community, upon taking control, Al-Sharaa held an initial meeting with a senior SDF delegation to establish the basis for future discussions. His remarks implied that the transitional administration did not align with the Turkish-backed SNA's anti-SDF approach. Nevertheless, Mohammed A. Salih, a scholar specialising in Kurdish and regional issues, described his remarks as unclear and unsupportive of Kurdish goals. Following the rapid capture of Aleppo by the HTS-led offensive in late November, SNA forces forced thousands of Kurdish civilians to flee west of the Euphrates River. In Aleppo, the Kurds primarily interacted with HTS, which has exhibited moderation and openness to dialogue. In contrast, the SNA consistently engaged in conflict with the SDF in Manbij.¹⁹⁹ The continuous existence of the SDF was stated by organisers of the National Dialogue Conference as the reason for the exclusion of the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration and its related bodies from the conference.²⁰⁰

Housing and property violations continued throughout January as displaced Kurdish residents attempted to return to Afrin, a Kurdish-majority region in the Aleppo countryside, and its surrounding areas. SNA factions reportedly forced them to pay up to 10 000 USD to reclaim their homes. Concurrently SNA factions detained at least 10 Kurds in Afrin in January, with ransom demands for release rising above 1 000 USD per person.²⁰¹ By mid-February, there had been minimal change for the Kurds in Afrin despite the deployment of Damascus' security forces in the city on February 7. Abuses by various factions in Afrin reportedly continued. Returning residents discovered that their homes were occupied by fighters or civilians, who demanded substantial sums of money for their departure, despite the previous residents having received formal assurances from the transitional administration to return.²⁰² Towards the end of February Al-Sharaa visited Afrin and convened with local Kurdish representatives who conveyed their grievances; in response, he committed to substituting the factions in the city with official security forces and addressing the abuses directed at the Kurdish community.²⁰³

¹⁹⁶ Waters G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#); HRW, Syria: End Coastal Killing Spree, Protect Civilians, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ New Arab (The), What Kurds fear and hope for in the 'new Syria', 6 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ France24, Syria conference lays out post-Assad priorities, but Kurds not invited, 25 February 2025, [url](#)

²⁰¹ Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, Human Rights Violations in Syria, December 2024 – January 2025, 22 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁰² Syria Direct, Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?, 12 February 2025, [url](#)

²⁰³ Etana Syria, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#)



1.3.4. Other religious and ethnic minorities

The new Syrian leadership has pledged to uphold minority rights and promote national unity amid concerns of marginalisation under Islamist rule.²⁰⁴

As part of efforts to reassure minority communities, Ahmad Al-Sharaa met with Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt on 22 December.²⁰⁵ He later convened with Christian leaders, including Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican clerics, following a series of attacks targeting religious minorities.²⁰⁶ This engagement took place after protests triggered by the 23 December burning of a Christmas tree by foreign fighters affiliated with HTS²⁰⁷ in a predominantly Christian town in Hama, alongside additional reports of harassment.²⁰⁸ Following the attack on the Christmas tree, the transitional government apprehended the foreign fighters it identified as responsible for what it characterised as an isolated incident. Furthermore, government offices were closed for the Christmas holiday and the following day, 23 December.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, France24 reported that while Christmas celebrations took place in Damascus, Christian residents kept a low profile, with some refraining from purchasing alcohol due to fear and uncertainty.²¹⁰

Reports indicate a rise in targeted incidents against Christian communities, including an attack by unidentified gunmen on a Greek Orthodox church in Hama on 18 December and increased tensions in Christian areas of Damascus due to threatening actions, such as jihadist songs broadcasted in public and a menacing message displayed on an armoured vehicle.²¹¹

Human rights organisations have documented various restrictions on religious freedoms. Richard Ghazal, executive director of In Defense of Christians, highlighted measures such as alcohol bans, and the presence of Islamic State flags in areas near Damascus. Similarly, Nadine Maenza from the Washington-based International Religious Freedom Secretariat documented at least a dozen eyewitness accounts of attacks against religious and ethnic minorities in the Shehba region, near Aleppo, in late December. However, Rafif Jouejati, a scholar at the Middle East Institute, suggested that these incidents should be viewed as isolated cases rather than evidence of a broader pattern of systematic intolerance.²¹²

In Damascus' Al-Qassaa district, armed individuals distributed flyers imposing restrictions on women's attire, smoking, and social interactions. HTS deployed patrols in response, attributing the incidents to unidentified individuals and denying endorsement. However, concerns remain over the frequency of such actions.²¹³

²⁰⁴ New Arab (The), Syria govt plans 'expanded' committee to prepare national dialogue, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ Reuters, Syria's de facto ruler reassures minorities, meets Lebanese Druze leader, 22 December 2024, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ VOA, What future awaits Syria's Christian minority?, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ Memri, Reports Claim Perpetrators Who Burned Christmas Tree In Hama, Syria, Are Uzbek Jihadi Fighters; Syrian Jihadi Cleric: Raising The Cross Should Be Forbidden, 24 December 2025, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ VOA, What future awaits Syria's Christian minority?, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ Al-Monitor, Christians in Syria hopeful but wary of Sharaa's intentions, February 2025, [url](#)

²¹⁰ France24, Christmas in post-Assad Syria tainted by fears for minority's future, 24 December 2024, [url](#)

²¹¹ Reuters, Syria's Christians fearful of new Islamist leaders as Christmas approaches, 23 December 2024, [url](#)

²¹² VOA, What future awaits Syria's Christian minority?, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

²¹³ Syriac Press, Rising "Individual Acts" threaten Christians in Syria, 18 January 2025, [url](#)



The new administration underscored its commitment to inclusivity through the promise of the National Dialogue Conference, which aimed to engage various communities, including Christians, Kurds, artists, and intellectuals, in shaping Syria's future.²¹⁴ When the National Dialogue Conference took place, it failed to alleviate concerns regarding inclusivity. Of the seven individuals appointed to the preparatory committee, only one was from a religious minority, Syrian Christian activist Hind Kabawat, while the others were Sunni Muslims, with some having close ties to Sharaa or HTS. Kurdish-led authorities from the northeast were entirely omitted from the conference. Some Christians stated that they are withholding judgment until a new constitution is drafted and general elections take place. The transitional government lacks Christian representation and is primarily composed of ministers who previously served in the Idlib government.²¹⁵

Further scepticism has persisted, particularly following the unilateral reform of the national curriculum.²¹⁶ The new education minister, Nazir Mohammad Al-Qadri, assured that both Islam and Christianity would remain part of the school curriculum as subjects of study.²¹⁷ However in early January, the transitional administration's education ministry announced curriculum changes that reflect a more Islamic perspective while eliminating references to the Assad era. Proposed changes include the removal of evolution and the Big Bang theory from science lessons, the omission of pre-Islamic deities and their statues from history courses, and a diminished emphasis on Queen Zenobia of Palmyra. Civil society activists have expressed concerns that these changes indicate a disregard for diverse perspectives and could undermine the administration's stated commitment to inclusivity.²¹⁸ The ministry, however, denied these interpretations of the changes, emphasising that the only changes made pertained 'to the removal of symbols of the previous regime and its glorification, and the adoption of images of the new Syrian flag (the flag of the revolution) instead of the previous flag, on all school books'. The minister explained that the adjustments included correcting 'incorrect' information that the previous government relied on in explaining some Quranic verses, adopting what is found in exegesis books for all educational stages.²¹⁹

1.3.5. Women

For detailed information on women in Syria, see section 13. Women of the [EUAA COI report Syria: Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#).

(a) General overview of violations against women

According to a SNHR, at least 29 064 women have been killed in Syria between March 2011 and November 2024, and 11 268 women were held in detention or forcibly disappeared when the report was released.²²⁰ In the period of 1 January to 27 December 2024, the Office of the

²¹⁴ BBC News, New Syrian government's school curriculum changes spark concern, 2 January 2025, [url](#)

²¹⁵ Al-Monitor, Christians in Syria hopeful but wary of Sharaa's intentions, February 2025, [url](#)

²¹⁶ BBC News, New Syrian government's school curriculum changes spark concern, 2 January 2025, [url](#)

²¹⁷ Reuters, Syrian girls' right to schooling unrestricted, new education minister says, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

²¹⁸ BBC News, New Syrian government's school curriculum changes spark concern, 2 January 2025, [url](#)

²¹⁹ Enab Baladi, Syria's Education Ministry clarifies curriculum amendment decision, 2 January 2025, [url](#)

²²⁰ SNHR, On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: SNHR's 13th Annual Report on Violations Against Females in Syria, 25 November 2024, [url](#)



High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented conflict-related incidents having killed 92 women across Syria.²²¹ Reports of killing of women by armed actors continued in the reference period²²² and women also continued to be victims of other violations including deaths by unexploded ordnance²²³ and killings by unknown perpetrators.²²⁴ In February 2025, SOHR reported on an increased number of kidnapping cases of women and girls.²²⁵

The crisis in Syria has had a disproportionate impact on women leading to risks of violence, negative coping mechanisms, limited access to services,²²⁶ an increased vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV),²²⁷ discrimination, and limited access to medical care and legal redress.²²⁸ Women and girls were disadvantaged when accessing humanitarian aid²²⁹ and disproportionately affected by food insecurity.²³⁰

(b) Legislative developments and policies affecting women

Sources indicate that there is no clarity yet on the situation of women in Syria under the HTS authorities at the time of drafting of this report.²³¹ New foreign minister Assaad al-Shibani claimed that the authorities would ‘fully support’ women’s rights²³² and Ahmed al-Sharaa’s promised to continue women’s education.²³³ As of 1 January 2025, three women have been

²²¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 6

²²² IPS, What Does the End of Assad’s Regime Mean for Syria and the Middle East?, 19 December 2024, [url](#); SHRC, Monthly Report on Human Rights Victims for November 2024, 1 December 2024, [url](#); SNHR, 236 Civilian Deaths, Including 32 Children and 18 Women, as well as One Woman’s Death due to Torture, Documented in Syria in January 2025, 21 Civilians Were Killed by SDF, 1 February 2025, [url](#), p. 6

²²³ SOHR, Old ordnance | Woman and two children kil*led in different areas of Syria, 2 February 2025, [url](#); SNHR, 236 Civilian Deaths, Including 32 Children and 18 Women, as well as One Woman’s Death due to Torture, Documented in Syria in January 2025, 21 Civilians Were Killed by SDF, 1 February 2025, [url](#), p. 3

²²⁴ SOHR, In less than seven days | Ten people, including three women, killed in different areas in Syria, 5 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, In ten days | 14 individuals, including four women, killed in different areas in Syria, 10 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New crimes | Woman di*es affected by wounds she sustained in Idlib and another woman kil*led in Deir Ezzor, 4 February 2025, [url](#); AP (The), Another car bomb in a northern Syria city kills at least 19, mostly women, 3 February 2025, [url](#); SHRC, Terrorist Bombing in Eastern Rural Aleppo Targets Female Workers, 4 February 2025, [url](#)

²²⁵ SOHR, Security vacuum | Kidnapping of women and girls escalate dramatically in February, 16 February 2025, [url](#)

²²⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 14

²²⁷ Health Cluster and WHO, Whole of Syrian Arab Republic: Public Health Situation Analysis, 14 October 2024, [url](#), p. 5; PAX, War and Water Security Challenges along the Orontes River in Syria, Thirst for Peace, November 2024, [url](#), p. 47

²²⁸ PAX, War and Water Security Challenges along the Orontes River in Syria, Thirst for Peace, November 2024, [url](#), p. 47

²²⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), pp. 14, 37

²³⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 37

²³¹ Guardian (The), ‘We’ve proved we can do anything’: the Syrian women who want a say in running the country, 5 January 2025, [url](#); Tagesschau, Syrische Regierung vergibt Posten an Frauen, 31 December 2024, [url](#); OHCHR, Syria: Experts advocate for sovereignty, democratic reconstruction and respect for human rights, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

²³² New Arab, Syria official’s comments on women spark uproar, 29 December 2024, [url](#)

²³³ Telegraph (The), Syrian rebel leader says women’s education will continue – but refuses to be drawn on alcohol, 19 December 2024, [url](#)



appointed to official positions under the new government in Syria.²³⁴ The first woman to be appointed was Aisha al-Dibs as the head of the Women's Affairs Office.²³⁵ On 30 December 2024, the new authorities appointed the first female governor of the Syrian central bank, Maysaa Sabrine, previously working as the bank's deputy governor.²³⁶ On 31 December 2024, Muhsina al-Mahithawi, from the Druze minority, was appointed as the first female governor for the province of Sweida.²³⁷

At the national level, the governance approach of the transitional administration remains unclear, particularly regarding women's rights and representation. Obaida Arnout, a government spokesperson, suggested that women's inherent characteristics make them unsuitable for certain roles in governance, while Aisha al-Dibs, the newly appointed Minister for Women, voiced opposition to working with civil society organisations that disagree with her views. Al-Dibs further attributed rising divorce rates to a previous government program and pledged to avoid similar initiatives.²³⁸

Policies targeting women's public engagement have extended to plans for gender segregation on public and private buses in Damascus. In January, the General Company for Internal Transport, 'Zajal Transport,' announced that gender-segregated transportation would be implemented in the capital within days, following earlier trials in Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, and Homs.²³⁹

Concerning the work of female judges, Obaida Arnout stated that this needs to be studied 'by experts',²⁴⁰ leaving the situation of female judges unclear.²⁴¹ In January 2025, it was reported that Shadi al-Waisi, the Minister of Justice in the current administration, was seen in two videos overseeing the execution of two women sentenced for 'corruption and prostitution' in the Idlib area²⁴² in 2015.²⁴³ In Homs, visual signs promoting gender segregation appeared on buses.²⁴⁴ In Damascus, posters displaying 'conditions of the Shariah-compliant hijab' were seen in public spaces.²⁴⁵ According to Al-Dibs, however, the government will not impose any dress code on Syrian women.²⁴⁶ In an interview from 25 December 2024, Ahmed al-Sharaa stated

²³⁴ New Arab, New Syrian gov't taps Druze woman as governor of southern province, 1 January 2025, [url](#)
Tagesschau, Syrische Regierung vergibt Posten an Frauen, 31 December 2024, [url](#)

²³⁵ New Arab, Who is Maysaa Sabrine, the first woman to head Syria's central bank?, 31 December 2024, [url](#)

²³⁶ Al Jazeera, Maysaa Sabrine becomes first woman to lead Syria's central bank, 30 December 2024, [url](#); Reuters, Syria appoints Maysaa Sabrine as first woman to lead central bank, official says, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

²³⁷ New Arab, New Syrian gov't taps Druze woman as governor of southern province, 1 January 2025, [url](#)
Tagesschau, Syrische Regierung vergibt Posten an Frauen, 31 December 2024, [url](#)

²³⁸ Guardian (The), 'We've proved we can do anything': the Syrian women who want a say in running the country, 5 January 2025, [url](#)

²³⁹ Watan, Damascus to Enforce Gender Segregation on Public and Private Buses, 11 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ RFE/RL, Syrian Islamist Rulers Shun The Taliban Governance Model, 25 December 2024, [url](#)

²⁴¹ New Arab, 'What I achieved will be destroyed overnight': Syrian women judges face uncertain future under new leadership, 2 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁴² NBC News, He oversaw the public executions of two women. Now he's Syria's new justice minister, 19 January 2025, [url](#); Verify-sy, Did the current Minister of Justice appear in a video documenting the execution of a woman in the Idlib countryside?, 4 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁴³ NBC News, He oversaw the public executions of two women. Now he's Syria's new justice minister, 19 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ Etana, Syria Update #14: 17 January, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ New Arab, Why Syrian women's political participation is crucial in building the new Syria, 11 February 2025, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, Syria's gov't pledges greater women's inclusion in social and political spheres, 31 January 2025, [url](#)





that ‘Christian women would not be forced to observe the veil’ while not mentioning the Muslim women.²⁴⁷

(c) Women without male support (female-headed household/single/widowed)

The conflict in Syria has led to a demographic change leading to a bigger number of female heads of households²⁴⁸ and women entering the workforce.²⁴⁹ The number of female-headed households has additionally increased because of displacement.²⁵⁰ According to an analysis of the World Health Organization (WHO) dated October 2024, in the whole of Syria, ‘almost every third family is headed by a woman.’²⁵¹ Female-headed households belong to vulnerable groups who were disproportionately affected by the conflict²⁵² and whose basic needs such as healthcare, food, and education were not met.²⁵³ Women faced harassment and discrimination at the workplace, especially women without husbands, including widows.²⁵⁴ Female unemployment rate in Syria reached 62.2 % in 2024, according to the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics.²⁵⁵ Children of women heads of households were at an increased risk of statelessness due to inability to register their births.²⁵⁶ Divorced women and widows were at a risk of forced marriages.²⁵⁷ Difficulties when reclaiming properties were reported concerning widows,²⁵⁸ returning women from Lebanon (more than half of such households were female-headed),²⁵⁹ and displaced women in north-eastern Syria.²⁶⁰ Divorced women in north-western Syria faced societal stigma, social exclusion, and lack of support.²⁶¹

As of January 2025, some 40 000 people were held in the al-Hol camp in north-eastern Syria, reportedly mostly women and children, family members of ISIL members, including thousands of foreign nationals.²⁶² The conditions of the camps have been described as ‘inhumane’²⁶³ and ‘life-threatening’.²⁶⁴ On 27 January, the US government ordered to pause ‘foreign

²⁴⁷ RFE/RL, Syrian Islamist Rulers Shun The Taliban Governance Model, 25 December 2024, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ Atlantic Council, What will minority and women’s rights look like in the new Syria?, 20 December 2024, [url](#); UNCOI, Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴⁹ Atlantic Council, What will minority and women’s rights look like in the new Syria?, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ UNFPA in Arab States, Regional Quarterly Report on the Syria Crisis / Q4 2024, 26 January 2025, [url](#), p. 13

²⁵¹ Health Cluster and WHO, Whole of Syrian Arab Republic: Public Health Situation Analysis, 14 October 2024, [url](#), p. 5

²⁵² UNDP, The Impact of the Conflict in Syria, 20 February 2025, [url](#), p. 33

²⁵³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 14

²⁵⁴ PAX, War and Water Security Challenges along the Orontes River in Syria, Thirst for Peace, November 2024, [url](#), p. 46

²⁵⁵ UNDP, The Impact of the Conflict in Syria, 20 February 2025, [url](#), p. 32

²⁵⁶ HRW, World Report 2025 - Syria, 16 January 2025, [url](#); UN, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 3

²⁵⁷ Health Cluster and WHO, Whole of Syrian Arab Republic: Public Health Situation Analysis, 14 October 2024, [url](#), p. 12

²⁵⁸ Health Cluster and WHO, Whole of Syrian Arab Republic: Public Health Situation Analysis, 14 October 2024, [url](#), p. 12

²⁵⁹ Bahar Organization, New Displacement from Lebanon Post September 2024, 21 October 2024, [url](#), p. 17

²⁶⁰ STJ, “My Entire Life Savings Vanished Overnight”: Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations in “Peace Spring” Strip, October 2024, [url](#), p. 26

²⁶¹ GPC, Youth Report; Protection barriers and risks; North-West Syria; Nov 2024, 19 November 2024, [url](#), pp. 4, 10

²⁶² HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Detainees Face Uncertain Future, 7 February 2025, [url](#); Reuters, Syria’s al-Hol camp readies first return of Syrian detainees, director says, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁶³ Mercator, What’s to be done with ISIS children in Syria?, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Detainees Face Uncertain Future, 7 February 2025, [url](#)





development assistance',²⁶⁵ which was followed by issuing a temporary waiver concerning 'life-saving humanitarian assistance' the next day.²⁶⁶ Sources reported that the freeze on humanitarian aid has further worsened the living conditions in the al-Hol camp.²⁶⁷

(d) Sexual and gender-based violence

SNHR's annual report released in November 2024 recorded 11 553 cases of sexual violence against women since March 2011.²⁶⁸ The main perpetrators of sexual violence documented by the SNHR were identified as the former Syrian regime (8 024 incidents) and ISIL (3 487 incidents), while HTS was found responsible for two incidents.²⁶⁹ OHCHR reported a rise in 'all types of sexual violence and other gender-based violence' in Syria during the conflict.²⁷⁰ Abuses against women were underreported,²⁷¹ including because of societal stigma and fear.²⁷² Conflict in Syria has led to increased cases of early and forced marriages, including as a coping mechanism.²⁷³ A study by the international organisation PAX indicated that shifting gender roles had contributed to a rise in domestic and gender-based violence..²⁷⁴

In January 2025, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that women and girls in Syria faced 'pervasive forms' of SGBV in both public and private life, due to institutionalised gender inequality and patriarchy. The situation has been characterised by a lack of support services, safe spaces, and legal protection.²⁷⁵ According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), out of some 8.5 million people requiring GBV assistance in Syria, 93 % are women and girls. They faced a variety of abuses including 'intimate partner violence, domestic violence, economic and emotional violence as well as sexual violence, including rape and sexual harassment.'²⁷⁶ As of January 2025, in north-western Syria, 67 safe spaces for women and girls providing SGBV services were functional. In Idlib, health care facilities including a maternity hospital were significantly damaged at the end of 2024.²⁷⁷ Women and girls in Aleppo faced 'significant difficulties' when accessing services

²⁶⁵ HRW, US: Order Halting Foreign Aid Work Puts Lives at Risk, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Detainees Face Uncertain Future, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ AP (The), Trump's aid freeze shocks a Syria camp holding families linked to the Islamic State group, 4 February 2025, [url](#); HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Detainees Face Uncertain Future, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ SNHR, On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: SNHR's 13th Annual Report on Violations Against Females in Syria, 25 November 2024, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ SNHR, On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: SNHR's 13th Annual Report on Violations Against Females in Syria, 25 November 2024, [url](#), p. 14

²⁷⁰ UNCOI, Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls, 12 June 2023, [url](#), p. 5

²⁷¹ STJ, Silenced and Defamed: Women's Organizations in North-Western Syria Under Many Layers of Oppression, 12 January 2024, [url](#)

²⁷² SNHR, On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: SNHR's 13th Annual Report on Violations Against Females in Syria, 25 November 2024, [url](#), p. 24

²⁷³ UNFPA in Arab States, Regional Quarterly Report on the Syria Crisis/Q4 2024, 26 January 2025, [url](#), p. 3

²⁷⁴ PAX, War and Water Security Challenges along the Orontes River in Syria, Thirst for Peace, November 2024, [url](#), p. 46

²⁷⁵ UNFPA in Arab States, Regional Quarterly Report on the Syria Crisis/Q4 2024, 26 January 2025, [url](#), pp. 3, 4

²⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 22

²⁷⁷ UNFPA in Arab States, Situation Report #1 Humanitarian needs in Syria, 19 January 2025, [url](#), pp. 3-4





for victims of the SGBV, including those concerning transportation and a lack of female staff.²⁷⁸ Risk of SGBV was reportedly higher for women in IDP camps²⁷⁹ and in the shelters.²⁸⁰

1.3.6. Children

For detailed information on children in Syria, see section 1.4. Children of the [EUAA COI report Syria: Country Focus \(October 2023\)](#).

(a) Impact of violence on children

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), some 25 500 violations against children were recorded during the 13 years of the conflict, including killing and maiming of children and child recruitment.²⁸¹ SNHR stated that 30 293 children were killed in the period of March 2011-10 November 2024, and as of 20 November 2024, 5 298 children were arrested, detained, or forcibly disappeared.²⁸² In the period from 1 January to 27 December 2024, OHCHR documented incidents killing 212 children across Syria.²⁸³ Following the change of regime, reports on killing of children by armed actors persisted.²⁸⁴ Children also continued to be harmed by unexploded ordnance that killed or injured at least 116 in December²⁸⁵ and 136 in the period of 1 January to 17 February.²⁸⁶ In January 2025, UNOCHA warned that 'grave violations against children remain a major concern, including the risk of being killed, injured, recruited, and used in hostilities.'²⁸⁷

As of December 2024, an estimated 7.5 million children in Syria were in need of humanitarian assistance²⁸⁸ and around 6.4 million in need of psychological help.²⁸⁹ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported that food insecurity and malnutrition among

²⁷⁸ UNFPA, Situation Report #1 Humanitarian needs in Syria, 15 January 2025, [url](#), p. 3

²⁷⁹ PAX, War and Water Security Challenges along the Orontes River in Syria, Thirst for Peace, November 2024, [url](#) p. 47; UNFPA in Arab States, Situation Report #1 Humanitarian needs in Syria, 19 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁰ UNFPA, Syrian Arab Republic, Updated 10 January 2025, [url](#); UNFPA, Situation Report #1 Humanitarian needs in Syria, 15 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 22

²⁸¹ UNICEF, Paving the road to a hopeful and inclusive future in Syria, free from violence and hardship, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁸² SNHR, On World Children's Day: SNHR's 13th Annual Report on Violations Against Children in Syria, 20 November 2024, [url](#), pp. 5, 8

²⁸³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 6

²⁸⁴ SNHR, 236 Civilian Deaths, Including 32 Children and 18 Women, as well as One Woman's Death due to Torture, Documented in Syria in January 2025, 21 Civilians Were Killed by SDF, 1 February 2025, [url](#), pp. 2, 6, 7; SHRC, Monthly Report on Human Rights Victims for November 2024, 1 December 2024, [url](#); SNHR, 149 Civilians Killed, Including 35 Children and 16 Women, in Northern Syria Since November 27, 2024, Up Until December 3, 2024, 4 December 2024, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁵ SNHR, 149 Civilians Killed, Including 35 Children and 16 Women, in Northern Syria Since November 27, 2024, Up Until December 3, 2024, 4 December 2024, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁶ SOHR, Old ordnance | Four sibling children killed and wounded by explosion in Deir Ezzor countryside, 17 February 2025, [url](#)

²⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 21

²⁸⁸ France24, More than half of Syrian children out of school: Save the Children to AFP, 30 December 2024, [url](#); UNICEF, Paving the road to a hopeful and inclusive future in Syria, free from violence and hardship, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ France24, More than half of Syrian children out of school: Save the Children to AFP, 30 December 2024, [url](#)





children increased health risks.²⁹⁰ Some 506 000 children younger than five years old in Idlib and Aleppo were suffering from acute malnutrition and over 609 000 from stunting.²⁹¹ The WHO found that in some governorates, stunting has reached ‘alarmingly high levels’.²⁹² UNOCHA reported that hospitals were overcrowded and that psychological distress among children was widespread.²⁹³

(b) Negative coping mechanisms

According to UNOCHA, child labour and child marriage remained ‘widely accepted’ coping mechanisms for Syrian families and their scope remains underreported. Children in street situations were exposed to exploitation and were ‘in contact with the law for petty and grave crimes’.²⁹⁴

An UNOCHA report released in January 2025 indicated that the economic crisis in Syria has further increased risks of GBV among vulnerable population, including among adolescent girls, as well as risks of child labour, child marriage, and sexual exploitation.²⁹⁵

A report by the international NGO Welthungerhilfe about the Aleppo and Idlib governorates assessing the protection needs, based on data collected in August 2024, found that instances of sexual violence against children, particularly adolescent girls, occurred in various settings including at home, at school, at workplace, and in IDP camps. The report found that child marriages remained ‘prevalent’ both in IDP camps and host communities, the main reasons being primarily poverty in Aleppo and customs and traditions in Idlib.²⁹⁶

According to the USDOS, under the Assad government, there were shelters for orphaned children.²⁹⁷ There were 1.2 million orphans estimated in Syria, and according to a governmental decree, children were assumed ‘Muslim unless proven otherwise’ and they could be adopted only ‘if the couple and the child share the same religion.’²⁹⁸ A report by the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), a network of NGOs, international organisations and UN agencies, released in December 2024 found that children were particularly affected by a lack of civil documentation.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁰ UNDP, The Impact of the Conflict in Syria, 20 February 2025, [url](#), p. 31

²⁹¹ IPS, Syrian Displaced Children Go Hungry, Stunting Their Growth, 23 October 2024, [url](#)

²⁹² Health Cluster and WHO, Whole of Syrian Arab Republic: Public Health Situation Analysis, 14 October 2024, [url](#), p. 9

²⁹³ IPS, What Does the End of Assad’s Regime Mean for Syria and the Middle East?, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

²⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview (February 2024) [EN/AR], 3 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 26, 64

²⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 7

²⁹⁶ Welthungerhilfe, Multisectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) Aleppo and Idlib Governorates Northwest Syria (NWS), September 2024, 5 November 2024, [url](#), pp. 55-56

²⁹⁷ USDOS, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Syria, 24 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁹⁸ USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 18

²⁹⁹ GPC, Escalation of Hostilities. Flash Report #2; December 4, 2024, 4 December 2024, [url](#), p. 3



(c) Forced recruitment by armed groups

In a report published on 20 November 2024, SNHR stated that 2 395 children were forcibly conscripted in Syria in the period of March 2011-10 November 2024.³⁰⁰ In June 2024, the United Nations Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict signed an action plan to 'to end and prevent the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children' with the SNA and aligned factions.³⁰¹ Additionally, a road map to implement a 2019 action plan between the UN, SDF, and the administrations in northern and eastern Syria, prohibiting recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, was adopted.³⁰² Nevertheless, instances of recruitment of children continued to be reported, including by SDF³⁰³ and by a Kurdish youth movement in the north-eastern Syria.³⁰⁴ At the end of November 2024, SNHR documented operations by the former regime aimed at conscripting young men and boys with a goal of deploying them to northern Syria.³⁰⁵

(d) Access to education

As of January 2025, there were some 2.4 million children out of school in Syria and an additional million at a risk of dropping out.³⁰⁶ Since the end of November 2024, schooling for around 230 000 children was interrupted in northeast Syria due to ongoing conflict.³⁰⁷ Out of school children were at increased risk of child labour and child marriage,³⁰⁸ as well as trafficking and recruitment.³⁰⁹ A report by UNOCHA of January 2025 states that over 5 200 schools are damaged and lack equipment. While the education is free, some families have prioritised negative coping mechanism affecting children's school attendance.³¹⁰ In December 2024, the UN reported that while schools have reopened across Syria, 'volatile security situation' affected school attendance in some areas.³¹¹ Access to schools was hindered by unexploded remnants of war.³¹² Some schools have become shelters for newly displaced people after the offensive that defeated the president Bashar al-Assad on 8 December

³⁰⁰ SNHR, On World Children's Day: SNHR's 13th Annual Report on Violations Against Children in Syria, 20 November 2024, [url](#), p. 15

³⁰¹ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, The opposition Syrian National Army, including Ahrar al-Sham and Army of Islam, and their aligned legions and factions, Sign Action Plan to End and Prevent the Recruitment and Use and Killing and Maiming of Children, 3 June 2024, [url](#)

³⁰² UNSG, Children and armed conflict Report of the Secretary-General, 3 June 2024, [url](#)

³⁰³ HRW, World Report 2025 - Syria, 16 January 2025, [url](#); SHRC, SDF militia increases kidnapping and recruiting children in areas under its control in NE Syria, 3 September 2024, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ Al-Mustafa, Muhsen, ACCORD and Balanche, Fabrice, Syria: Humanitarian situation; Questions related to military service, especially in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA); Documentation of the COI Webinar with Fabrice Balanche und Muhsen Al-Mustafa on 24 October 2024, 19 December 2024, [url](#), p. 22; HRW, Northeast Syria: Military Recruitment of Children Persists, 2 October 2024, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ SNHR, SNHR Condemns the Syrian Regime Over Arresting Hundreds of Individuals, Including Children, for Military Conscripting and Deploying Them to the Frontlines in Northern Syria, 5 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ UNICEF, Paving the road to a hopeful and inclusive future in Syria, free from violence and hardship, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁰⁷ UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report (Year End) - 01 January to 31 December 2024, 3 March 2025, [url](#), p. 2

³⁰⁸ UNDP, The Impact of the Conflict in Syria, 20 February 2025, [url](#), p. 35; UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 30

³⁰⁹ UNICEF, Peace must prevail for Syria's children, 18 December 2024, [url](#)

³¹⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities - January to March 2025, 28 January 2025, [url](#), p. 30

³¹¹ UN News, UN support continues in Syria and Lebanon, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

³¹² UNICEF, Peace must prevail for Syria's children, 18 December 2024, [url](#)



2024.³¹³ Approximately 68 000 children in Aleppo and other governorates were unable to attend school, as many schools were being used as collective shelters for displaced persons.³¹⁴

According to International Crisis Group, 'interim officials rushed through changes to the Islamic education curriculum.'³¹⁵ In January 2025, sources indicated that the authorities introduced changes in the school curriculum without involving the society in the process, replacing references to the Assad regime with religious texts in some instances.³¹⁶

1.3.7. LGBTIQ persons

For detailed information on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTIQ) persons in Syria, see section 14. LGBTIQ persons of the [EUAA COI report Syria: Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#).

(a) Legislative framework

According to the article 520 of the 1949 Penal Code, 'Unnatural Sexual Intercourse' is a crime punishable for up to three years in prison and it is applicable to men as well as women.³¹⁷ At the time of drafting this report, sources indicate that it is not yet clear what the position of the new authorities on same-sex relations is.³¹⁸ In a meeting with journalists in December 2024, Mohamed Khaled from the HTS' political office indicated that the treatment of LGBTIQ persons is one of the topics that will be discussed by the new government.³¹⁹ BBC News reported that the new authorities 'have been implicated in violence and persecution against gay people'³²⁰ and ILGA indicated that 'consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be criminalized' in 2025.³²¹

(b) Treatment by state authorities, family and society

Sources have documented abuses against LGBTIQ individuals during the Syrian conflict by state³²² and non-state actors.³²³ Additionally, according to Freedom House, persons suspected

³¹³ France24, More than half of Syrian children out of school: Save the Children to AFP, 30 Dec 2024, [url](#)

³¹⁴ UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report (Year End) - 01 January to 31 December 2024, 3 March 2025, [url](#), p. 2

³¹⁵ International Crisis Group, Key Decisions Loom as Syria Enters a New Era, 14 January 2025, [url](#)

³¹⁶ BBC News, New Syrian government's school curriculum changes spark concern, 2 January 2025, [url](#); DW, Syria: Nationalist education dropped, but what comes next?, 18 January 2025, [url](#); New Arab, How Syria's post-Assad curriculum reforms reveal political and educational tensions, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

³¹⁷ GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), p. 14; Human Dignity Trust, Syria, last updated 7 January 2025, [url](#)

³¹⁸ Human Dignity Trust, Syria, last updated 7 January 2025, [url](#); Metro, 'I was tortured in Syria for being gay — now I'm terrified what the future will bring', updated 10 January 2025, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Modern Diplomacy, Syria's new government priorities: address LGBT, alcohol and women's dress code, 24 December 2024, [url](#); TO BHMA International Edition, Syria's Rebel Leaders Have Control of the Country. Now What?, 24 December 2024, [url](#)

³²⁰ BBC News, 'I was raped by Assad's thugs - but I'm no longer afraid to show my face', 23 December 2024, [url](#)

³²¹ ILGA, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

³²² BBC News, 'I was raped by Assad's thugs - but I'm no longer afraid to show my face', 23 December 2024, [url](#); GEM (Guardians of Equality Movement), We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), pp. 17-20

³²³ GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), pp. 17-20





of same-sex relations ‘are at risk of execution in areas held by extremist groups.’³²⁴ Sources indicate that homophobia is prevalent in Syrian society,³²⁵ including from family members, religious groups, and society at large.³²⁶

In 2024, a Syrian transgender woman was deported from Türkiye to north-western Syria and killed by Turkish-backed armed groups in collaboration with her family.³²⁷ In February 2025, sources reported on attacks targeting transgender individuals in Syria.³²⁸ Videos circulating online were reportedly showing a campaign by the Syrian authorities targeting transgender individuals for arrests.³²⁹ According to ‘an anonymous security source in the Damascus government’ interviewed by the Jerusalem Post, the goal of the operation was to ‘send a message to these people that they should not appear freely in the area and stop their activities in front of the people.’³³⁰ According to an article by the Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM), the first Syrian LGBTIQ organisation,³³¹ since December 2025, armed groups linked to the new authorities as well as non-state actors were implicated in serious violations against LGBTIQ individuals including ‘entrapment through dating apps, home raids, abductions, arbitrary arrests, torture, humiliation, threats of physical violence and disfigurement, as well as other dangerous practices such as forced filming and public shaming.’³³² GEM also indicated that ‘society has become a major source of violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals’, while the authorities have not shown support for them.³³³

³²⁴ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Syria, 2024, [url](#)

³²⁵ GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), p. 21; Metro, ‘I was tortured in Syria for being gay — now I’m terrified what the future will bring’, updated 10 January 2025, [url](#); MSN, As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains The Most Reliable Consensus, 22 February 2025, [url](#)

³²⁶ GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), p. 21

³²⁷ GEM, HIV: discrimination prevents LGBTQ Syrians from accessing treatment, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

³²⁸ ILGA, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Jerusalem Post (The), Syrian security forces beat, insult transgender woman after series of anti-LGBT arrests, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

³²⁹ MSN, As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains The Most Reliable Consensus, 22 February 2025, [url](#); MSN, Syria: Syrian Authorities Launch Arrest Campaign Targeting Transgender Individuals, 6 February 2025, [url](#)

³³⁰ Jerusalem Post (The), Syrian security forces beat, insult transgender woman after series of anti-LGBT arrests, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

³³¹ GEM, Who We Are?, n.d., [url](#); Now Lebanon, The West and the Syrians: prioritizing policy and asylum freezes over humanitarian and civil society efforts, 26 December 2024, [url](#)

³³² GEM, Urgent Statement on The Campaign of Violations of Torture and Arrest, Against Sexual and Gender Minorities in Syria, 11 February 2025, [url](#)

³³³ GEM, Statement on the Fall of the Assad Regime and The Syrian LGBTQIA+ Post-Assad Regime, 6 January 2025, [url](#)





2. Armed actors

2.1.1. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and allied groups

HTS was the largest component of the operation 'Deterrence of Aggression'³³⁴ with an estimated 30 000 fighters.³³⁵ A Syrian economist gave a lower figure of 10 000 for the number of HTS fighters.³³⁶ HTS was reportedly divided into six brigades, special forces and an elite force known as the 'Red Bands'.³³⁷ The International Crisis Group assessed HTS forces to be stretched thin following their offensive to overthrow the government, being in urgent need of more personnel and resources.³³⁸ A notable allied faction joining the offensive was the Türkiye-backed National Liberation Front (NLF), a component of the SNA.³³⁹ For more information on the SNA, see section [2.1.2](#). Jaish Al-Izza, an opposition group present in northern Hama and parts of Latakia, with 2 000 to 5 000 fighters according to 2019 estimates, also reportedly joined the push into government territory.³⁴⁰ The pan-Arab daily Al-Quds Al-Arabi estimated the overall size of HTS and its allied factions to be about 43 000, with more than half of those troops maintaining their presence in their original areas of operation after pushing the government troops out, especially in northern Hama countryside, southern Idlib countryside, and western and southern Aleppo countryside.³⁴¹

HTS and its allied factions, who had previously coordinated in Idlib under the Fateh Al-Mubin Operations room, formed the Military Operations Administration (MOA)³⁴² in light of operation Deterrence of Aggression.³⁴³ It is made up of high-ranking members of the SSG that previously operated in Idlib.³⁴⁴ Following the overthrow of Bashar Al-Assad, troops comprising the MOA became the primary military force on the ground.³⁴⁵ On 24 December 2024, the MOA announced the dissolution of all military factions and their integration under the Ministry of Defence.³⁴⁶ HTS itself announced that it would lead by example, dissolve as an armed group and integrate into the armed forces.³⁴⁷ Among the first steps of establishing a new army was to

³³⁴ Al Jazeera, Who are Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and the Syrian groups that took Aleppo?, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

³³⁵ Al Jazeera, Who are Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and the Syrian groups that took Aleppo?, 2 December 2024, [url](#);

International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

³³⁶ Al-Estiklal, SDF's Dilemma: Autonomy or Integration in a New Syria?, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

³³⁷ Al-Quds Al-Arabi, سبعة جيوش وجماعة: تحديات الشرع في بناء الجيش السوري [Seven armies and a group: the challenges for Al-Shara in building a Syrian army], 11 January 2025, [url](#)

³³⁸ International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

³³⁹ MEE, The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?, 7 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ Al Jazeera, Who are Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and the Syrian groups that took Aleppo?, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁴¹ Al-Quds Al-Arabi, سبعة جيوش وجماعة: تحديات الشرع في بناء الجيش السوري [Seven armies and a group: the challenges for Al-Shara in building a Syrian army], 11 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁴² Some sources also refer to this entity as the Department of Military Operations (DMO), see Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#); Lister, C., Syria Weekly: Jan 14-21, 2025, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁴³ Al Jazeera, إدارة العمليات العسكرية.. قادت عملية ردع العدوان التي أسقطت بشار الأسد [The Military Operations Administration – leaders of the Deterrence of Aggression that overthrew Bashar Al-Asad], 31 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁴⁴ Enab Baladi, Damascus – SDF negotiations await the "deal", 30 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁴⁵ Enab Baladi, Factionalism threatens unification of Syrian army, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁴⁶ Enab Baladi, Military Operations Administration announces dissolving of opposition factions in Syria, 24 December 2024, [url](#); Shafaq News, Syrian factions to integrate into Ministry of Defense under new deal, 24 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁴⁷ AFP, Syria ex-rebel military chief says to dissolve armed wing, 18 December 2024, [url](#)



promote some leaders of the individual factions as well as some defected officers into certain military ranks.³⁴⁸ Among those promoted were purportedly several foreign Islamist fighters of Albanian, Tajik and Uyghur origin.³⁴⁹ Following the ouster of Bashar Al-Assad, most soldiers as well as policemen either fled or were suspended.³⁵⁰ HTS has relied on its General Security units formerly active under its administration in Idlib as well as units under the MOA to support and supplement local police forces.³⁵¹ Furthermore, recruitment centres were opened in provinces formerly under Assad's control to rebuild the police force.³⁵²

As of January 2025, the HTS-led coalition was in control of most areas previously held by the Assad government until early December 2024,³⁵³ amounting to just over 60% of Syrian territory.³⁵⁴ During its December offensive, the HTS further took control of the city of Deir Ez-Zor previously held by the SDF.³⁵⁵ At the end of January 2025, the MOA seized a strategically important area near Zamla oil field south of Raqqa in the Syrian desert, a deployment that was assessed to aim at containing ISIL activity while also putting pressure on SDF troops stationed on the southwestern bank of Lake Assad.³⁵⁶ In the country's south, the MOA as of mid-January was still in talks with the former Fifth Corps and specifically its Eighth Brigade regarding their dissolution (see section [2.1.3](#)), but managed to deploy its own troops in Jadal, Mseika, Mismiyeh and Lajat.³⁵⁷ In Afrin city in northern Aleppo governorate, troops from the Syrian Transitional Administration at the beginning of February 2025 arrived to take over control from the SNA.³⁵⁸

Since the fall of Assad, HTS has relied on its own units and close allies to secure governorates predominantly populated by minorities. Thus, unlike in other areas such as Homs, the SNA has been largely absent from coastal areas with Alawite populations³⁵⁹ where support for Assad has reportedly been strong.³⁶⁰ Etana noted that Idlib's security landscape in particular had considerably changed following Assad's fall, with much of the military presence relocated to key strategic areas in Aleppo, Homs, Damascus, Latakia and Tartous.³⁶¹

During operation 'Deterrence of Aggression', HTS reportedly took over weapon depots and armoured vehicles from the Syrian Arab Army.³⁶² Following Al-Assad's ouster, hundreds of Israeli airstrikes reportedly resulted in the destruction of the country's military stocks and defence

³⁴⁸ Enab Baladi, Factionalism threatens unification of Syrian army, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁴⁹ RFE/RL, Foreign Fighters Promoted In Syria's New Army Have Their Governments Concerned, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ France24, Syria's new HTS-led regime reinforces police force with the help of its fighters, 19 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁵¹ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁵² Rudaw, Syria's new government recruits more policemen amid security challenges, 25 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁵³ Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to January 2025

³⁵⁴ Sharifa, A., Will Syria's myriad militias unite under one national army?, Al Majalla, 4 February 2025, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ DW, Fighting in Syrian Kurdish-held areas: What you need to know, 13 December 2024, [url](#); Rudaw, Syrian rebels claim control of oil-rich Deir ez-Zor from SDF, 11 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁵⁶ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, January 23, 2025, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁵⁷ Etana, Syria Update #14: 17 January, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁵⁸ Kurdistan 24, Uncertain Future in Rojava: Syrian Public Security Forces Assume Control of Afrin, 6 February 2025, [url](#)

³⁵⁹ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ Al Jazeera, مقتل قيادي عسكري باشباكات مع "فلول النظام" بالانذقية [Military leader killed in clashes with "regime remnants" in Latakia], 7 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁶¹ Etana, Syria Update #14: 17 January, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁶² Al Jazeera, Dozens killed as armed groups attack Syrian military in northern Aleppo, 28 November 2024, [url](#)

infrastructure, as well as most of its missile systems and tanks.³⁶³ The newly appointed interim Defence Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra in an interview recounted how HTS had established its own military industry in Idlib, building drones for reconnaissance, drones armed with explosives and suicide drones as well as manufacturing armoured vehicles. They further developed their own artillery systems.³⁶⁴

During its offensive, HTS reportedly made efforts to avoid harming the civilian population.³⁶⁵ Furthermore, some areas that were previously held by the SDF were taken over based on agreements.³⁶⁶ Even so, six students were killed by rockets fired by the rebels which landed on a student dormitory in Aleppo city.³⁶⁷ Following its takeover of power, there were several reports of abuse being committed by HTS forces during security operations in Alawite areas, such as individuals killed in raids³⁶⁸ and detainees being held incommunicado.³⁶⁹ Especially foreign fighter groups under the MOA as well as the HTS elite forces ‘Red Bands’ were accused of committing violations during raids such as harassment and intimidation and in a few instances killings.³⁷⁰

2.1.2. Syrian National Army (SNA)

For information on the structure, factions and command of the Turkish-backed SNA, see section 1.4.2 of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

Statements regarding the troop size of the SNA vary, with Middle East Eye (MEE) estimating a range between 30 000 and 80 000,³⁷¹ while the Turkish Foreign Minister puts them at over 80 000.³⁷² According to MEE, the SNA played a ‘decisive role’ in the HTS-led rebel offensive, for example when fighters from the SNA faction Levant Front (Jabhat Al-Shamiya) advanced 200 km south from their areas of control in A’zaz in northern Aleppo countryside.³⁷³

The National Liberation Front (NLF), the result of a 2018 merger of 11 rebel groups,³⁷⁴ in turn merged with the SNA in 2019 and consists of various armed groups, such as Faylaq al-Sham, Ahrar al-Sham, the Free Idlib Army and Harakat Nour Al-Din Al-Zenki, mostly fighting under the Free Syrian Army label.³⁷⁵ The NLF altogether was estimated to comprise about 25 000

³⁶³ Etana, Syria Update #10: 12 December, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁶⁴ Al Majalla, Syria defence chief Murhaf Abu Qasra on the plan to oust Assad, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁶⁵ Le Monde, Syria: Turkey wants to extend its buffer zone by pushing back Kurdish forces, 12 December 2024, [url](#); VOA, Rights groups cautious about Islamist rebels’ pledges to protect Syrian minorities, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ Enab Baladi, Thousands return to Afrin after Assad regime’s fall, 28 January 2025, [url](#); Le Monde, Syria: Turkey wants to extend its buffer zone by pushing back Kurdish forces, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁶⁷ SOHR, Dramatic escalation | Six students killed and wounded in rocket fire by rebels on university student dormitory in Aleppo city, 29 November 2024, [url](#)

³⁶⁸ National (The), HTS forces kill two people in former regime loyalist areas of Syria, 5 January 2025, [url](#), SOHR, Security vacuum | Alawite sheikh and his wife killed in Al-Salamiyah countryside and goldsmith killed in Deir Ezzor countryside, 9 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁶⁹ MEE, HTS raids and forced disappearances fuel fear in Syria’s Alawi heartlands, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁷⁰ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁷¹ MEE, The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?, 7 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁷² Asharq News, وزير الخارجية التركي لـ"الشرق": تصرفات إسرائيل في سوريا خطيرة وغير مقبولة [Turkish foreign minister to Asharq: The actions of Israel in Syria are dangerous and unacceptable], 27 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁷³ MEE, The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?, 7 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁷⁴ Sharifa, A., Will Syria’s myriad militias unite under one national army?, Al Majalla, 4 February 2025, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ MEE, The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?, 7 December 2024, [url](#)

fighters.³⁷⁶ Of those, Ahrar Al-Sham, a group that as of 2015 estimates had about 15 000 fighters, was mostly active in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.³⁷⁷ As of mid-January 2025, the NLF was largely in charge of securing control in Idlib.³⁷⁸

On 30 November 2024, shortly after HTS and allied SNA factions had made significant territorial gains in Aleppo countryside and eastern Idlib, the SNA announced the launch of operation 'Dawn of Freedom', capturing areas around Al-Bab east of Aleppo city.³⁷⁹ The stated aim of the operation was to liberate the area from Assad troops and Iranian militias.³⁸⁰ The MOA reportedly sent reinforcements to support the SNA in their operations against the SDF in eastern Aleppo.³⁸¹

Meanwhile, tensions between the SNA and the MOA were reported following a demand made by the latter for the SNA factions to disband and surrender their arms, with some factions rejecting and others voicing acceptance of the order.³⁸² Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan at the end of January 2025 called on the SNA to integrate into the forces of the new Transitional Administration.³⁸³ On 29 January 2025, the Transitional Administration announced the dissolution of former rebel groups, among which the SNA.³⁸⁴ However, several sources indicated that this dissolution had not yet been fully implemented³⁸⁵ as some SNA groups appeared to have been integrated in name only,³⁸⁶ continuing to fight the SDF along the Euphrates river³⁸⁷ and operating as SNA in northwest Syria where they were only gradually handing over tasks to the MOA.³⁸⁸ Some SNA faction leaders reportedly showed reluctance to integrate into the Ministry of Defence, fearing they might be held accountable for past human rights abuses or losing their political clout.³⁸⁹

The advances by the SNA in the north of the country reportedly caused fear among the Kurdish population,³⁹⁰ with an estimated 120 000 people fleeing from areas in northern Aleppo captured by the SNA at the start of December.³⁹¹ The SNA reportedly employed

³⁷⁶ Sharifa, A., Will Syria's myriad militias unite under one national army?, Al Majalla, 4 February 2025, [url](#)

³⁷⁷ Al Jazeera, Who are Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and the Syrian groups that took Aleppo?, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ Etana, Syria Update #14: 17 January, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁷⁹ NPA, SNA announces launch of "Dawn of Freedom" offensive in Aleppo, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

³⁸⁰ L24, SNA Launches 'Dawn of Freedom' Operation, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

³⁸¹ Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁸² NPA, Tensions rise in Syria's Manbij amid calls to disband armed factions, 28 January 2025, [url](#), Le Monde,

Syria's new government negotiates the disbanding of armed groups, 26 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁸³ Arabi21, الجيش الوطني السوري "للانضمام إلى الإدارة الجديدة بدمشق" [Türkiye directs SNA factions to join new administration in Damascus], 28 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁸⁴ Aldoughli, R., Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power, New Lines Magazine, 25 February 2025, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 6, 2025, 6 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2

³⁸⁵ Aldoughli, R., Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power, New Lines Magazine, 25 February 2025, [url](#); National (The), Steep uphill battle: The many challenges in building Syria's new army, 21 February 2025, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 6, 2025, 6 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2

³⁸⁶ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 27, 2025, 27 February 2025, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 6, 2025, 6 February 2025, [url](#)

³⁸⁷ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 6, 2025, 6 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2

³⁸⁸ National (The), Steep uphill battle: The many challenges in building Syria's new army, 21 February 2025, [url](#)

³⁸⁹ Aldoughli, R., Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power, New Lines Magazine, 25 February 2025, [url](#)

³⁹⁰ MEE, The Syrian National Army: Rebels, thugs or Turkish proxies?, 7 December 2024, [url](#)

³⁹¹ Syria Direct, Afrin's displaced torn between another exile and danger in northern Aleppo, 4 December 2024, [url](#)



indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas.³⁹² Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on an SNA drone strike that hit a Kurdish Red Crescent ambulance transporting a wounded civilian near Tishreen Dam on 18 January. The organisation further mentioned attacks carried out by the SNA with support from Türkiye on protesters gathering near the dam, leading to deaths and injuries according to the SDF.³⁹³

2.1.3. Other armed groups

(a) Dar'a factions

After the launch of operation 'Deterrence of Aggression' in northern Syria at the end of November 2024, armed opposition factions in Dar'a, Quneitra and Sweida formed the Southern Operations Room, which expelled the former government from these areas and marched on the capital.³⁹⁴ The Eighth Brigade under Ahmad Al-Awda, which had previously been part of the Russia-sponsored Fifth Corps of the SAA,³⁹⁵ notably joined the HTS-led offensive and marched on Damascus from the south, reaching the capital even before HTS fighters from the north.³⁹⁶ Following several meetings between factions from Dar'a and the MOA, in mid-December a convoy belonging to the latter arrived in Dar'a and reportedly took over police forces, customs and the Nassib border crossing with Jordan.³⁹⁷ Local armed factions were still acting as the de facto security forces in many areas in the south, and AP journalists visiting the western countryside of Dar'a in January 2025 reported not to have seen any visible presence of HTS forces there.³⁹⁸

At the beginning of January 2025, a spokesperson for the Southern Operations Room stated that the armed factions commanded by Al-Awda would hold on to their weapons despite the decision of the Transitional Administration to dissolve all factions, while being open to being integrated as a military body under the Ministry of Defence.³⁹⁹ While Al-Awda has not publicly challenged Al-Sharaa, he has maintained a distance from the Islamist rebel groups in the past and according to some reports wants to maintain autonomy in the south.⁴⁰⁰ The former Eighth Brigade is estimated to comprise about 800 fighters deployed in Busra Al-Sham, Al-Hirak, Khirbet Ghazaleh and in areas bordering Sweida governorate.⁴⁰¹ Further smaller, well organised and heavily armed factions were active in western Dar'a and as of the beginning of February 2025 in negotiations with the Syrian Transitional Administration.⁴⁰² In mid-February 2025, talks were being held between the Transitional Administration and the southern factions to form a 'Southern Division', also incorporating Al-Awda's groups.⁴⁰³ This division

³⁹² RIC, Explainer: Turkish and SNA offensive on Manbij, 7 December 2024, [url](#); SNHR, Four civilians injured in a ground SNA attack in N. Aleppo, November 24, 2024, 26 November 2024, [url](#)

³⁹³ HRW, Northeast Syria: Apparent War Crime by Türkiye-Backed Forces, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ Enab Baladi, Factionalism threatens unification of Syrian army, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁹⁵ Enab Baladi, Factionalism threatens unification of Syrian army, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁹⁶ RFE/RL, Who Is Ahmed Al-Awda, The Man Who Could Be A Threat To Syria's New Rulers?, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ Enab Baladi, Factionalism threatens unification of Syrian army, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ AP, Syria's southern rebels loom large as the country's new rulers try to form a national army, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

³⁹⁹ AFP, South Syria fighters reluctant to give up weapons: spokesman, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ RFE/RL, Who Is Ahmed Al-Awda, The Man Who Could Be A Threat To Syria's New Rulers?, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ Sharifa, A., Will Syria's myriad militias unite under one national army?, Al Majalla, 4 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰² Sharifa, A., Will Syria's myriad militias unite under one national army?, Al Majalla, 4 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰³ Etana, Syria Update #18: 15 February 2025, 14 February 2025, [url](#)





within the new army, comprising opposition groups from Dar'a and Quneitra, was established on 17 February.⁴⁰⁴ Etana assessed the subsequent agreement to establish the Southern Division to be a temporary fix to alleviate tensions between the two negotiating parties.⁴⁰⁵ As of 21 February 2025, the Southern Division was still in talks with local commanders, including of the Eighth Brigade, about the makeup of the Southern Division and its tasks, while sources within the Eighth Brigade signalled steps being taken to facilitate a merger with the armed forces.⁴⁰⁶

(b) Syrian Free Army

The small US-supported rebel faction at Al-Tanf near the Iraqi border remained deployed there, reportedly waiting for developments on the US political scene before deciding on a merger with the MOA.⁴⁰⁷ At the end of January 2025, the group's commander reportedly attended a meeting with Al-Sharaa to discuss merging into the security forces.⁴⁰⁸ According to Aaron Zelin, expert on Syrian armed groups, the group had joined the Defence Ministry by mid-February 2025.⁴⁰⁹ With the fall of the Assad government, the faction expanded its areas of operation, reaching 40 kilometres west and northwest to Palmyra,⁴¹⁰ filling the security vacuum left by the retreating Assad army.⁴¹¹

(c) Sweida factions

The Men of Dignity (Rijal Al-Karama) and the Mountain Brigade (Liwa Al-Jabal) are among the most prominent armed factions in Sweida.⁴¹² The latter group, led by local strongman Chekib Azzam,⁴¹³ reportedly comprised about 7 000 fighters.⁴¹⁴ As the military operation against the former Syrian government was ongoing in the north, local factions in Sweida, including Men of Dignity, Mountain Brigade and Sheikh Al-Karama, decided to form a joint operations room to push out the former government forces, which was achieved on 8 December 2024.⁴¹⁵ Initially, these Druze factions showed reluctance to surrender their arms to the country's new leadership,⁴¹⁶ arguing that they were needed to secure the community's safety before a

⁴⁰⁴ Etana, EXPLAINER: Political & Military Dynamics in Suwayda Province, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵ Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶ Syria Direct, Why the delay in merging Daraa's factions into a new Syrian army?, 21 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Quds Al-Arabi, سبعة جيوش وجماعة: تحديات الشرع في بناء الجيش السوري [Seven armies and a group: the challenges for Al-Shara in building a Syrian army], 11 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸ FDD's Long War Journal, US-backed Syrian Free Army continues to patrol Tanf area in southern Syria, 10 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ Zelin, A.Y, The Status of Syria's Transition After Two Months, TWI, 12 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴¹⁰ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress October 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024, 19 February 2025, [url](#), p. 4

⁴¹¹ FDD's Long War Journal, US-backed Syrian Free Army continues to patrol Tanf area in southern Syria, 10 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴¹² Enab Baladi, Factionalism threatens unification of Syrian army, 17 January 2025, [url](#); Al-Quds Al-Arabi, سبعة جيوش السوري [Seven armies and a group: the challenges for Al-Shara in building a Syrian army], 11 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴¹³ Asharq News, دروز السويداء ينتظرون تشكيل جيش سوري موحد قبل تسليم أسلحتهم [Druze of Sweida wait for the establishment of a unified Syrian army before surrendering their weapons], 12 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴¹⁴ Rudaw, Syria's Druze refuse to lay down arms amid uncertain future, 4 January 2025, [url](#); France24, Syrian Druze brigade reluctant to give up their arms in uncertain times, 24 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ Syria Direct, Suwayda's movement endures post-Assad, 31 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴¹⁶ Rudaw, Syria's Druze refuse to lay down arms amid uncertain future, 4 January 2025, [url](#); France24, Syrian Druze brigade reluctant to give up their arms in uncertain times, 24 December 2024, [url](#)



permanent government has been formed.⁴¹⁷ On New Year's Eve, Druze factions in Sweida city reportedly even blocked the advance of HTS forces into the town.⁴¹⁸ In January 2025, the Men of Dignity and the Mountain Brigade announced that they were ready to join a new Syrian army, provided that it would not be based on sectarian principles.⁴¹⁹ Druze spiritual authority Sheikh Al-Hijri⁴²⁰ even linked the surrender of arms to the drafting of a new constitution,⁴²¹ assurances of political representation and protection from external threats such as ISIL.⁴²² All but one of Sweida's armed factions invited to attend Al-Sharaa's 'victory conference' in Damascus at the end of January 2025 chose not to attend.⁴²³ On 24 February 2025, a new military formation announced its inception, calling itself Sweida Military Council.⁴²⁴ According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), it comprised fighters previously aligned with the Assad government, but Sheikh Al-Hijri rejected this formation as 'separatists' who do not represent the Druze community.⁴²⁵ Questions were raised about the plans of this group, as its interest seemingly coincides with Israel's interest to demilitarise southern Syria under the guise of protecting the Druze community there.⁴²⁶

(d) Assad-aligned militias

Since the takeover by the transitional administration, remnant pro-Assad groups have conducted small-scale, targeted hit-and-run attacks against its forces across Syria.⁴²⁷ At the beginning of February 2025, a former commander of the Republican Guard announced the formation of a group named the Coastal Shield Brigade in the mountains of Latakia, threatening attacks on forces of the Transitional Administration in retaliation for alleged attacks on members of the Alawite community.⁴²⁸ A video published on 23 February signalled the inception of another new armed group loyal to the former government, calling itself the Special Units Company and aligning itself with the Coastal Shield Brigade.⁴²⁹ In early March, a new armed group called Military Council for the Liberation of Syria and led by former military officers of the Assad regime claimed responsibility for large scale attacks against General

⁴¹⁷ Cradle (The), Violent clashes continue in north Syria as Damascus seeks to disarm US-backed Kurds, 20 January 2025, [url](#); Syria TV, عشائر عربية في السويداء تعلن دعمها الإدارية الجديدة واستعدادها لتسليم أسلحتها [Arab tribes in Sweida announce their support for the new administration and their readiness to surrender their arms], 26 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴¹⁸ AP, Syria's southern rebels loom large as the country's new rulers try to form a national army, 23 January 2025, [url](#); Rudaw, Syria's Druze refuse to lay down arms amid uncertain future, 4 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴¹⁹ New Arab (The), Hope and uncertainty for the Druze community in Syria, 14 January 2025, [url](#); Asharq News, دروز السويداء ينتظرون تشكيل جيش سوري موحد قبل تسليم أسلحتهم [Druze of Sweida wait for the establishment of a unified Syrian army before surrendering their weapons], 12 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴²⁰ Welat TV, Military Operations Room Official in Suwayda to "Welat TV": Disarming Hinges on Achieving Our Legitimate Demands, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴²¹ Al-Quds Al-Arabi, سبعة جيوش وجماعة: تحديات الشرح في بناء الجيش السوري [Seven armies and a group: the challenges for Al-Shara in building a Syrian army], 11 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴²² Aldoughli, R., Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power, New Lines Magazine, 25 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴²³ Etana, EXPLAINER: Political & Military Dynamics in Suwayda Province, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ New Arab (The), Suweida Military Council - what does it want and who is behind it?, 28 February 2025, [url](#); Cradle (The), Syrian Druze form military council 'distinct' from HTS-led Syrian army, 24 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴²⁵ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴²⁶ New Arab (The), Suweida Military Council - what does it want and who is behind it?, 28 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴²⁷ Etana Syria, Syria Update #21, 8 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴²⁸ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 6, 2025, 6 February 2025, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Transitional justice in Syria: Steps to diffuse tension, 19 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴²⁹ Lister, C., Syria Weekly: Feb 18-25, 2025, 25 February 2025, [url](#)

Security forces in Latakia governorate.⁴³⁰ It further announced as its objective the ‘full liberation of Syrian territory from all occupying and terrorist forces’.⁴³¹

These insurgent groups have been linked to the clashes with the government’s security forces which took place in early March, particularly in the coastal areas (see section 4.1.2). However, ISW assessed that it is unlikely that a single, cohesive insurgent organisation has emerged to coordinate and execute the majority of targeted attacks against government forces.⁴³²

2.1.4. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The SDF according to its commander Mazloum Abdi comprise about 100 000 members.⁴³³ They are a military alliance in which the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) has an prominent component. Alongside the YPG there are regional military councils such as the Deir Ez-Zor Military Council, Manbij Council, and Raqqa Council, whose primary task is to protect their own areas.⁴³⁴ For more information on the structure of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), see section 1.4.3 of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

As HTS-led factions captured Aleppo in late November 2024, the SNA launched a simultaneous operation in Aleppo province, leading to clashes with the SDF west of the Euphrates River.⁴³⁵ Meanwhile, the SDF took the withdrawal of Syrian government forces and their pro-Iran allies as an opportunity to expand its territories in Deir Ez-Zor.⁴³⁶ Facing military pressure from Turkish-backed forces and forces allied with the new authorities in Damascus, the SDF withdrew from several towns on the Euphrates in Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor governorates. According to an SDF spokesperson, the aim was to preserve Kurdish areas further east and prevent an SNA breakthrough at the Tishreen Dam.⁴³⁷ This resulted in the loss of control of several cities to the SNA, such as Manbij and Tall Rifaat.⁴³⁸ Apart from direct clashes, the SDF also launched drone attacks on SNA positions,⁴³⁹ described as a newly emerging capability.⁴⁴⁰

During the reference period, the SDF were faced with defections from Arab SDF members.⁴⁴¹ A conscript from a base in the Al-Shaddadi area cited by Syria TV reported that the SDF had halted the discharge of military service recruits as about 80 recruits had fled the base, while a

⁴³⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Update #21, 8 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴³¹ Etana Syria, Syria Update #21, 8 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴³² ISW and CT, Iran Update, 7 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴³³ Enab Baladi, Damascus – SDF negotiations await the “deal”, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ Enab Baladi, What is SDF’s military structure and why does it insist on a “one block” demand?, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴³⁵ Iddon, P., Why fighting is raging in north Syria between the Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF, The New Arab, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴³⁶ Rudaw, Syrian rebels claim control of oil-rich Deir ez-Zor from SDF, 11 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴³⁷ National (The), US-backed SDF ‘withdraws from parts of eastern Syria’, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ Enab Baladi, Battles of Tishrin Dam: A pressure tool in negotiations with SDF, 20 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴³⁹ Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); Iddon, P., Kurdish Drones Are Fending Off Turkish-Backed Militia Attacks In Syria, Forbes, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁰ Iddon, P., Kurdish Drones Are Fending Off Turkish-Backed Militia Attacks In Syria, Forbes, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴¹ Al-Ahmed, S., Will Damascus-SDF negotiations lead to agreement or escalation?, MEI, 24 January 2025, [url](#); Syria TV, قسد توقف تسريح مجنديها بسبب استمرار حالات الفرار والانشقاق [SDF halt discharge of recruits due to continued cases of flight and defection], 16 January 2025, [url](#); Syria Direct, Protests and SDF defections: Discontent simmers in eastern Deir e-Zor, 13 December 2024, [url](#)



source close to the SDF stated that the desertion rate of military service conscripts following the ouster of Bashar Al-Assad had reached more than 90% in some areas of southern Hasaka governorate and rural Deir Ez-Zor.⁴⁴² Furthermore, several commanders from the Deir Ez-Zor Military Council defected and crossed the Euphrates to flee to areas under the control of the MOA.⁴⁴³ Several sources reported of clashes between tribal militias and SDF in Deir Ez-Zor governorate,⁴⁴⁴ with tribal fighters driving the SDF out of several locations along the Euphrates river in eastern Deir Ez-Zor.⁴⁴⁵

Mazloum Abdi in January 2025 stated that one of their main demands was a decentralised administration, allowing the SDF to integrate into the Defence Ministry as a unified military bloc. However, interim defence minister Murhaf Abu Qasra rejected this proposal.⁴⁴⁶ As of the end of January 2025, the negotiations between the SDF and the Transitional Administration seemed to be stalled,⁴⁴⁷ one reason being the uncertain stance of the new US administration.⁴⁴⁸ The one day National Dialogue conference organised by the Transitional Administration on 25 February,⁴⁴⁹ while assembling 600 people from across Syria did not extend invitations to SDF figures.⁴⁵⁰ Moreover, Türkiye reportedly disrupted negotiations between the Ministry of Defence and the SDF, insisting on a complete dismantling of the SDF and rejecting attempts at compromise, such as a proposed relocation of PKK-affiliated fighters to Iraq or Iran.⁴⁵¹ In March 2025, however, SDF leaders signed a deal with the government to integrate their armed forces and civilian institutions into the new Syrian government. The agreement mandates a complete cessation of hostilities and requires the SDF to cede control of border posts, the airport, and key oil and gas fields. It also acknowledges the Kurdish minority as an integral part of Syria and ensures their political representation and participation.⁴⁵² The agreement emerged amid increasing uncertainty over the U.S. role in the region⁴⁵³ and diplomatic efforts by several Western countries advocating for the SDF's integration into the new Syrian state⁴⁵⁴, with experts suggesting the SDF likely recognized its

⁴⁴² Syria TV, [\[SDF halt discharge of recruits due to continued cases of flight and defection\]](#), 16 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴³ Syria Direct, [Protests and SDF defections: Discontent simmers in eastern Deir e-Zor](#), 13 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁴ Etana, [Syria Update #16: 3 February](#), 1 February 2025, [url](#); Enab Baladi, [دِير الزور.. ضحايا باشتباكات بين قوات العشائر](#) [Deir Ez-Zor: casualties resulting from clashes between tribal forces and SDF], 21 January 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), [مقاتلو العشائر يسيطرون على مواقع لقوات "قسد" شرق دير الزور](#) [Tribal fighters take control of SDF positions in eastern Deir Ez-Zor], 20 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ New Arab (The), [مقاتلو العشائر يسيطرون على مواقع لقوات "قسد" شرق دير الزور](#) [Tribal fighters take control of SDF positions in eastern Deir Ez-Zor], 20 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ Reuters, [Syrian defence minister rejects Kurdish proposal for its own military bloc](#), 19 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁷ Enab Baladi, [Damascus – SDF negotiations await the “deal”](#), 30 January 2025, [url](#); Al-Ahmed, S., [Will Damascus-SDF negotiations lead to agreement or escalation?](#), MEI, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁸ Al-Ahmed, S., [Will Damascus-SDF negotiations lead to agreement or escalation?](#), MEI, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁹ Al Jazeera, [Key takeaways from Syria's National Dialogue conference](#), 26 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ AP, [Syria's national dialogue conference held as the battered country seeks to rebuild](#), 25 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵¹ Aldoughli, R., [Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power](#), New Lines Magazine, 25 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵² BBC News, [Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces](#), 11 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ New York Times (The), [Syrian Government Signs Breakthrough Deal With Kurdish-Led Forces](#), 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ MEE, [Landmark SDF deal hailed as positive step for Syria and Kurds](#), 11 March 2025, [url](#)





weakening negotiating position.⁴⁵⁵ The practical implementation of this agreement could not be monitored within the scope of this report.

2.1.5. ISIL

As the former government was overthrown in early December 2024, ISIL reportedly utilised the power vacuum to attack former government forces⁴⁵⁶, expanding its presence in Homs and Hama governorates into areas of the Syrian desert vacated by Assad's forces.⁴⁵⁷ The UN Secretary-General reported that the Syrian desert region was still a 'centre for external operational planning' for ISIL and remained crucial for its operations.⁴⁵⁸ According to a Kurdish officer, ISIL managed to seize large amounts of weapons left by former government troops.⁴⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the US expanded its airstrikes on ISIL camps and operatives, likely weakening the group.⁴⁶⁰ The US Defense Intelligence Agency reported for the time period October to December 2024, that ISIL 'had shown no significant improvement in operational capabilities or attack sophistication' in Syria, the group's capabilities having reportedly been diminished due to targeted strikes and the capture or killing of many ISIL leaders.⁴⁶¹

During the reference period, ISIL operations were mainly recorded in SDF-held areas,⁴⁶² with SOHR documenting 17 ISIL operations for the month of January 2025.⁴⁶³ The group's operations involved ISIL cells attacking SDF patrols⁴⁶⁴ and checkpoints,⁴⁶⁵ with some of these attacks involving IEDs,⁴⁶⁶ hand grenades⁴⁶⁷ and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG).⁴⁶⁸ On 11 January 2025, the intelligence agency of the Transitional Administration⁴⁶⁹ stated that a

⁴⁵⁵ New York Times (The). Syrian Government Signs Breakthrough Deal With Kurdish-Led Forces, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁶ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ Waters, G., *ISIL Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency*, Special Edition, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁸ UNSG, Twentieth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2025/72, 31 January 2025, [url](#), para.6

⁴⁵⁹ Reuters, Exclusive: Syrian Kurdish forces oppose handing jihadist jails to Islamist rulers, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ Waters, G., *ISIL Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency*, Special Edition, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress October 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024, 19 February 2025, [url](#), p. 11

⁴⁶² Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS resurgence | Member of ISIS cell killed and another injured in two separate attacks in Al-Hasakah countryside, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁶³ SOHR, IED attack | ISIS members attack military vehicle of Self-Defence in Deir Ezzor countryside, 2 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ SOHR, IED attack | ISIS members attack military vehicle of Self-Defence in Deir Ezzor countryside, 2 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS resurgence | Members of ISIS clash with members of "Asayish" in Al-Hasakah, 26 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁵ SOHR, Al-Hasakah | Member of Asayish Forces killed in ISIS attack on security checkpoint, 29 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Sneak attack | ISIS cells clash with Internal Security Forces in Al-Hasakah, 20 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁶ SOHR, IED attack | ISIS members attack military vehicle of Self-Defence in Deir Ezzor countryside, 2 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, IED attack | ISIS kills member of 25th Division and injures four others in Syrian desert, 21 November 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁷ SOHR, ISIS resurgence | Members of ISIS clash with members of "Asayish" in Al-Hasakah, 26 January 2025, [url](#); Lister, C., *Syria Weekly: Dec 30 2024 -Jan 7, 2025*, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁸ Lister, C., *Syria Weekly: Dec 30 2024 -Jan 7, 2025*, 7 January 2025, [url](#); ANHA, 2 fighters martyred in ISIS attacks in Deir ez-Zor, 27 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁹ Al Jazeera, Syrian intelligence says it thwarted ISIL attempt to blow up Shia shrine, 11 January 2025, [url](#)





bombing planned by ISIL at the Shia Sayyida Zaynab shrine near Damascus had been foiled.⁴⁷⁰

According to assessments made by British intelligence, the weakening of the SDF might lead to ISIL seizing an opportunity to facilitate the escape of about 9 000 ISIL members in SDF custody, while the group already had about 2 000 active members staging a resurgence on the ground.⁴⁷¹ The SDF reported to have about 10 000 ISIL fighters in their custody, further stating that, since the fall of Assad's government, ISIL had already attempted two attacks on prisons in order to free its members.⁴⁷²

Christoph Reuter, journalist for the German news magazine Der Spiegel, in mid-February filed a report on ISIL activities in areas under control of the Transitional Administration, after having traversed the Syrian desert. Statements received from soldiers stationed in the area as well as some remaining locals indicated that they perceived no ISIL activity, rather there were signs that former government soldiers as well as criminals had used ISIL disguises when perpetrating attacks against rival groups as well as civilians. A local journalist mentioned that many ISIL operatives have crossed the Euphrates into SDF-held territories.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ Al Jazeera, Syrian intelligence says it thwarted ISIL attempt to blow up Shia shrine, 11 January 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #14: 17 January, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁷¹ Guardian (The), IS fighters in Syria could break free amid Trump aid cut, terrorism expert warns, 28 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁷² Reuters, Exclusive: Syrian Kurdish forces oppose handing jihadist jails to Islamist rulers, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ Reuter, C., The Phantom Terrorists - Searching for Islamic State in Syria, Der Spiegel, 12 February 2025, [url](#)



3. International involvement

3.1.1. Türkiye

Türkiye was known to be the most important⁴⁷⁴ and ‘most steadfast’ external supporter of the Syrian opposition during the years of conflict that led up to the fall of the Bashar Al-Assad government.⁴⁷⁵ The Turkish government has maintained long-standing ties with HTS,⁴⁷⁶ the main armed opposition group.⁴⁷⁷ However, unlike with the SNA that is funded, trained and equipped by Türkiye,⁴⁷⁸ no patron-client relationship existed between Türkiye and HTS.⁴⁷⁹ For more information regarding Türkiye’s involvement in Syria prior to November 2024, see section 1.3.2. of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

The exact role of Türkiye in the operation that led to the downfall of Assad has been unclear.⁴⁸⁰ While Turkish authorities denied any involvement in the operation,⁴⁸¹ observers suggested that the Turkish government, though unlikely to have been involved in the planning and timing of the operation,⁴⁸² must have approved the campaign⁴⁸³ at least tacitly, given that the opposition forces likely could not have consolidated their armed capabilities and prepared the operation without Ankara becoming aware.⁴⁸⁴ At the same time, Steven A. Cook, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations (USA), noted that Ankara intended the operation to be of limited scope as it primarily pursued the aim of negotiating a normalisation of relations with Damascus. According to this source, it was only after the collapse of Assad’s forces that Türkiye revised its policy, embracing the victorious HTS and claiming that Türkiye had long planned to end Assad’s rule.⁴⁸⁵

Following the fall of Assad, Türkiye declared its support for the new Syrian Transitional Administration.⁴⁸⁶ The demise of Assad’s rule and the decline of Russian and Iranian influence

⁴⁷⁴ Barkey, H.J., What Role Is Turkey Playing in Syria’s Civil War?, CFR, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁵ Dalay, G., Turkey has emerged as a winner in Syria but must now use its influence to help build peace, Chatham House, 13 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ Al Jazeera, Türkiye threatens military action against Kurdish forces in Syria, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁷ Suleymanov, R., Rebel Gains in Syria Put Russia on the Back Foot, Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ VOA, Future uncertain for Syria’s Kurds amid potential Turkish offensive, 18 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁹ Coşkun, A., Türkiye Has a Wish List in Syria. It Should Tread Lightly. [Commentary], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁰ Suleymanov, R., Rebel Gains in Syria Put Russia on the Back Foot, Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, 6 December 2024, [url](#); Özkizilcik, Ö., What does Turkey gain from the rebel offensive in Syria?, Atlantic Council, 5 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸¹ Coşkun, A., Türkiye Has a Wish List in Syria. It Should Tread Lightly. [Commentary], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 December 2024, [url](#); Shahbazov, F., What Turkey Hopes to Gain From the HTS Offensive in Syria, Stimson Center, 5 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸² Barkey, H.J., What Role Is Turkey Playing in Syria’s Civil War?, CFR, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸³ Cook, S.A., Turkey Hasn’t Won Anything Yet in Syria, FP, 13 January 2025, [url](#); Coşkun, A., Türkiye Has a Wish List in Syria. It Should Tread Lightly. [Commentary], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 December 2024, [url](#); Özkizilcik, Ö., What does Turkey gain from the rebel offensive in Syria?, Atlantic Council, 5 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ Coşkun, A., Türkiye Has a Wish List in Syria. It Should Tread Lightly. [Commentary], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁵ Cook, S.A., Turkey Hasn’t Won Anything Yet in Syria, FP, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ Al Jazeera, Analysis: Türkiye’s road ahead in a post-Assad Syria, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

was reported to have been perceived by Türkiye as an opportunity to advance its strategic interests and acquire an edge over Iran for regional domination.⁴⁸⁷

The presence of the People's Protection Units (YPG), a force affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and a core component of the US-supported SDF, remained a primary concern within Türkiye's security strategy⁴⁸⁸ which has been aiming for a stable state that did not pose a threat.⁴⁸⁹ Indeed, simultaneously with the launch of the Syrian opposition's military campaign against the Assad government on 27 November 2024, Turkish-backed armed factions in northern Syria resumed their fight against Kurdish forces.⁴⁹⁰ Turkish forces conducted artillery bombardments and airstrikes against SDF positions in areas of Aleppo,⁴⁹¹ Raqqa⁴⁹² and Hasaka⁴⁹³ while repeated Turkish strikes reportedly targeted civilians,⁴⁹⁴ villages⁴⁹⁵ and infrastructure⁴⁹⁶ in these regions. At the end of February, PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan urged the organisation to disarm and dissolve, prompting the militant group to declare an immediate ceasefire. Despite this call, Türkiye continued operations against SDF in Syria⁴⁹⁷, albeit at lower levels.⁴⁹⁸ The PKK ceasefire does not seem to extend to SDF.⁴⁹⁹ YPG on its part 'has said Ocalan's message does not apply to them'.⁵⁰⁰

For information on activities of Turkish-backed armed factions, see section [4.2](#) of this report.

Another critical issue of concern for Türkiye has been Israel's involvement on Syrian territory,⁵⁰¹ including its escalating airstrikes against Syrian military installations⁵⁰² and its seizure of the buffer zone that used to separate the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights from Syria.⁵⁰³ However, it was held that Türkiye had no interest in a military conflict with Israel. Thus, the Turkish authorities have reportedly made initial steps to set up a deconfliction mechanism with the Israeli armed forces. The Middle East Eye (MEE) also pointed to regular engagements

⁴⁸⁷ Coşkun, A., Türkiye Has a Wish List in Syria. It Should Tread Lightly. [Commentary], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, Analysis: Türkiye's road ahead in a post-Assad Syria, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁹ MEE, Turkey doesn't seek conflict with Israel in Syria. Here's why, 11 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁰ Al Jazeera, Türkiye threatens military action against Kurdish forces in Syria, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹¹ SOHR, Amid Turkish artillery fire and clashes on different frontlines | SDF foil attack and shoot down kamikaze drone in Aleppo countryside, 23 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #18: 15 February 2025, 14 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹² Etana, Syria Update #18: 15 February 2025, 14 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹³ Etana, Syria Update #18: 15 February 2025, 14 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ See, for example, Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New attack | Nearly 25 civilians injured and killed under Turkish shelling near Teshrin Dam, 22 January 2025, [url](#); NPA, Turkish drone strikes kill 3 journalists, injure 8 in northern Syria, 19 February 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ SOHR, Artillery fire | Turkish forces bombard villages in rural Al-Hasakah and SDF attack Turkish base, 9 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ SOHR, Attacking infrastructure | Turkish forces shell a town and electricity station in Al-Raqqa, 12 February 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ Reuters, Turkey continues operations on PKK in Iraq, Syria despite Ocalan call, 6 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ ISW and CT, Iran Update, 3 March 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ ISW and CT, Iran Update, 3 March 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Reuters, Turkey continues operations on PKK in Iraq, Syria despite Ocalan call, 6 March 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Al Jazeera, Analysis: Türkiye's road ahead in a post-Assad Syria, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁰² Badi, E., and Al-Jabassini, A., Turkey's Syria and Libya strategies add up to a Mediterranean power play, Atlantic Council, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁰³ Coşkun, A., Türkiye Has a Wish List in Syria. It Should Tread Lightly. [Commentary], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

between the two countries' intelligence agencies and to sources indicating that the Turkish government encouraged HTS leaders to advocate calm with Israel.⁵⁰⁴

3.1.2. Russia

For information regarding Russia's involvement in Syria prior to November 2024, see section 1.3.3. of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

When the government of Bashar Al-Assad was toppled, Russia, with its primary focus on the Ukraine war, had limited resources at its disposal for Syria.⁵⁰⁵ As a result, Russia was unable to offer substantial military support to the Assad government apart from some airstrikes.⁵⁰⁶

Following the fall of Assad's government, which reportedly came unexpectedly for Russia, Moscow engaged in actions that were described as 'largely reactive'.⁵⁰⁷ While granting asylum to the former president, Russia shifted to a more balanced,⁵⁰⁸ albeit cautious, stance towards the country's new rulers.⁵⁰⁹ Ahmad Al-Sharaa, the leader of the transitional administration, for his part emphasised that he did not want Russia to exit from Syria in a way that undermined Russia-Syria relations,⁵¹⁰ describing them as 'strategic'⁵¹¹. Agreements were reached to guarantee the safety of Russian diplomatic staff and to reduce Russian military personnel.⁵¹² Later in December 2024, Russia reportedly withdrew its forces from all positions in the country's interior, including Qamishli⁵¹³ and the frontlines in northern Syria,⁵¹⁴ as well as from sites in the Alawite Mountains.⁵¹⁵

As of early 2025, Russia still operated two military bases in Syria, namely Hmeimim Airport⁵¹⁶ and the Tartous Port in western Syria.⁵¹⁷ These bases had not been damaged during the advance of the opposition factions.⁵¹⁸ The new Syrian Transitional Administration provided guarantees to avoid any harm to these bases,⁵¹⁹ its leader Al-Sharaa initially stating that he

⁵⁰⁴ MEE, Turkey doesn't seek conflict with Israel in Syria. Here's why, 11 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁵ AP, Turkey and Russia engage in delicate maneuvers over Syria after Assad's downfall, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ Shahbazov, F., What Turkey Hopes to Gain From the HTS Offensive in Syria, Stimson Center, 5 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁷ Melkonian, S., The Syria Fiasco As Seen From Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, 24 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁸ Enab Baladi, Has Russia's and Iran's role in new Syria come to an end?, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁹ BBC News, Syrians hope for a future without Russia, but it may not be easy, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵¹⁰ Enab Baladi, Has Russia's and Iran's role in new Syria come to an end?, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵¹¹ BBC News, Syrians hope for a future without Russia, but it may not be easy, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵¹² Melkonian, S., The Syria Fiasco As Seen From Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, 24 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵¹³ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 23, 2024, 23 December 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁵¹⁴ Reuters, Exclusive: Russia pulling back but not out of Syria, sources say, 15 December 2024, [url](#); New Arab (The), Russia to seek 'long-term and strategic ties' with post-Assad Syria, 26 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵¹⁵ Reuters, Exclusive: Russia pulling back but not out of Syria, sources say, 15 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵¹⁶ Moscow Times (The), Russian Air Base in Syria Attacked by Drones – Reports, 18 February 2025, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Has Russia's and Iran's role in new Syria come to an end?, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵¹⁷ Meduza, Russia removes military equipment from Syria's Tartus, its only naval base in the Mediterranean, 28 January 2025, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Has Russia's and Iran's role in new Syria come to an end?, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵¹⁸ Melkonian, S., The Syria Fiasco As Seen From Moscow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, 24 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵¹⁹ Enab Baladi, Has Russia's and Iran's role in new Syria come to an end?, 7 January 2025, [url](#)



would not rule out permitting the Russians to remain.⁵²⁰ As of late January 2025, the transitional authorities have not forced a full exit of Russian forces from Syria.⁵²¹

However, around mid-December 2024, there were media reports of satellite images suggesting that Russia was preparing to withdraw large amounts of military gear and personnel from Syria.⁵²² Since mid-December 2024, Russian Antonov AN-124 cargo planes and Ilyushin IL-76 aircraft have made regular flights from Hmeimim to al-Khadim, a base in Libya.⁵²³ Moreover, in late January 2025, Russian cargo have begun to transport military equipment out of the port of Tartous.⁵²⁴

3.1.3. Iran and pro-Iranian militias

Since the killing of high-ranking members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Israeli strikes in Damascus in 2023 and 2024⁵²⁵ and the elimination of Hezbollah's top leadership and the bulk of its infrastructure in Israel's invasion and aerial strikes in Lebanon, the influence of Iran and its Lebanese Hezbollah allies in Syria has waned significantly.⁵²⁶ For more information regarding the involvement of Iran and pro-Iranian militias in Syria prior to November 2024, see section 1.3.1. of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

Iran, like Russia, was reportedly caught off-guard by the advance of armed opposition forces that led to the collapse of Assad's rule.⁵²⁷ Initially, Iran expressed firm support for Assad's forces and government.⁵²⁸ Dozens of Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) crossed into Syria near Deir Ez-Zor's Al-Bukamal in early December 2024 to reinforce beleaguered SAA troops at the frontlines in northern Syria.⁵²⁹ Iran-backed forces eventually gave up control of the strategic Qa'im border crossing in Al-Bukamal, with IRGC and Iran-backed Iraqi fighters pulling out of the Deir Ez-Zor before Kurdish forces captured the crossing.⁵³⁰ Most members of the Fatemiyoun and Zainebiyoun Brigades, pro-Iranian Syria-based militias created to defend the Assad government, were reported to have abandoned their positions and fled. Some members were possibly evacuated to Iran along with IRGC personnel, while others may have crossed into Iraq or moved to Lebanon, alongside fleeing Lebanese Hezbollah.⁵³¹ Thousands

⁵²⁰ BBC News, Syrians hope for a future without Russia, but it may not be easy, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵²¹ AP, Russian government delegation makes first official visit to Syria since Assad's fall, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵²² CNN, Russian military has begun large-scale withdrawal from Syria, US and Western officials say, 16 December 2024, [url](#); Reuters, Exclusive: Russia pulling back but not out of Syria, sources say, 15 December 2024, [url](#); NBC News, Images appear to show Russia dismantling military equipment in Syria, 14 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵²³ CNN, Spike in Russian flights from Syria to Libyan desert base as Moscow eyes new Mediterranean hub, 31 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵²⁴ Meduza, Russia removes military equipment from Syria's Tartus, its only naval base in the Mediterranean, 28 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵²⁵ Grajewski, N., Why Did Iran Allow Bashar al-Assad's Downfall?, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵²⁶ Shahbazov, F., What Turkey Hopes to Gain From the HTS Offensive in Syria, Stimson Center, 5 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵²⁷ Al Jazeera, Analysis: Russia, Iran strengthen alliance after Syria setback, 18 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵²⁸ NBC News, Iran throws its support behind Assad as rebels expand their shock offensive in Syria, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵²⁹ Reuters, Pro-Iranian militias enter Syria from Iraq to aid beleaguered Syrian army, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵³⁰ Grajewski, N., Why Did Iran Allow Bashar al-Assad's Downfall?, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵³¹ VOA, What happened to Iranian proxies in Syria?, 13 December 2024, [url](#)





of Iranian troops and Iran-backed militia fighters were reported to have fled Syria after Assad's downfall,⁵³² with the US Department of Defense (USDOD) concluding that Iran had withdrawn all its forces from the country within ten days.⁵³³ On 14 December 2024, HTS leader Al-Sharaa declared the end of Iran's presence in Syria.⁵³⁴

Sources noted that the demise of Assad's rule represented a significant loss for Iran,⁵³⁵ which saw its ability to maintain military and logistical supply lines to Hezbollah in Lebanon and other groups of its so-called 'Axis of Resistance' significantly compromised.⁵³⁶

3.1.4. US-led coalition

For information regarding the involvement of the US-led coalition forces in Syria prior to November 2024, see section 1.3.4. of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

Soon after the downfall of the Assad government, the US administration of former President Joe Biden held initial meetings with the country de facto leader, Ahmad Al-Sharaa,⁵³⁷ and the newly appointed Syrian de facto foreign minister, Asaad Al-Shibani.⁵³⁸ As a result of these talks, the bounty on Al-Sharaa was removed⁵³⁹ but not his designation as a terrorist.⁵⁴⁰

According to the US Department of Defense, as of December 2024, there were around 2 000 US troops in the country.⁵⁴¹ The US administration of former President Joe Biden maintained that the US would continue its deployment in northeastern Syria, where they act in support of the SDF as part of a mission to defeat ISIL.⁵⁴² As the United States viewed a possible ISIL resurgence as a challenge to US interests in Syria, US forces conducted multiple strikes on 8 December 2024 as a signal of continuing determination to prevent such a resurgence.⁵⁴³ Further individual strikes by the US-led coalition on ISIL targets continued well into the second half of December 2024.⁵⁴⁴

In December 2024 and January 2025, there were also multiple reports of forces of the US-led Global Coalition transporting troops or military and other equipment to reinforce their military

⁵³² WSJ, Iran Pulls Most Forces From Syria, in Blow to Tehran's Regional Ambitions, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵³³ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress October 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024, 19 February 2025, [url](#), p. 16

⁵³⁴ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 17, 2024, 17 December 2024, [url](#), p. 9

⁵³⁵ Enab Baladi, Has Russia's and Iran's role in new Syria come to an end?, 7 January 2025, [url](#); INSS, A New Era in Syria: Winners, Losers, and Implications for Israel, 12 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵³⁶ Abbas, S.A., The Fall of Syria and Iran's Strategy of Relying on Allies, Manara Magazine, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵³⁷ INSS, A New Era in Syria: Winners, Losers, and Implications for Israel, 12 January 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, What is behind US strategy of keeping troops in post-Assad Syria?, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ Al Jazeera, What is behind US strategy of keeping troops in post-Assad Syria?, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵³⁹ INSS, A New Era in Syria: Winners, Losers, and Implications for Israel, 12 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ NPR, Turkey expected to play a major role in Syria following fall of the Assad regime, 27 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁴¹ USDOD, DOD Announces 2,000 Troops in Syria, Department Prepared for Government Shutdown, 19 December 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, US says it has 2,000 troops in Syria, not 900 as previously declared, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁴² Al Jazeera, What is behind US strategy of keeping troops in post-Assad Syria?, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁴³ USIP, Assad is Gone – But the Fight for Syria May Have Just Begun, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁴ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress October 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024, 19 February 2025, [url](#), pp. 12-13





bases in Hasaka (including those in Qasrik,⁵⁴⁵ Al-Shaddadi,⁵⁴⁶ Kharab Al-Jeir,⁵⁴⁷ Tal Baydar⁵⁴⁸), Raqqa,⁵⁴⁹ and Deir Ez-Zor (Koniko Gas Field and Al-Omar Oil Field)⁵⁵⁰ and as part of their efforts to strengthen existing bases and to set up a new base in the Ain Al-Arab area (Aleppo governorate).⁵⁵¹ Moreover, the US-led Global Coalition and the SDF conducted joint military exercises at the Koniko Gas Field base (Deir Ez-Zor) and Qasrik base⁵⁵² and intensified military patrols in Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa.⁵⁵³

However, current President Donald Trump and government officials close to him have since voiced their interest in pulling US forces out of Syria, with two US defence officials quoted as saying by NBC News in early February 2025 that the Pentagon had started to design plans for a complete withdraw of US troops from Syria.⁵⁵⁴

3.1.5. Israel

For information regarding Israel's involvement in Syria prior to November 2024, see section 1.3.5. of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

Israel, while celebrating the fall of Assad as a 'historic' turn of events⁵⁵⁵ that removed a keystone of Iran's arc of proxy and allied militias that enabled it to threaten Israel, has shown scepticism towards the insurgents who ousted Assad⁵⁵⁶ whose ranks included jihadi fighters.⁵⁵⁷ By early March 2025, Israeli defence minister went as far as referring to the transitional administration as a 'terrorist regime of radical Islam'.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁴⁵ SOHR, Ground reinforcements | "International Coalition" brings military equipment to base in Al-Hasakah, 18 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New reinforcement | US forces continue to reinforce their bases in Al-Hasakah countryside and Ain Al-Arab, 4 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁶ SOHR, Ground reinforcements | "International Coalition" brings military equipment to base in Al-Hasakah, 18 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Boosting military bases | Three cargo planes lands in Coalition base in Al-Shaddadi, 16 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New reinforcement | US forces continue to reinforce their bases in Al-Hasakah countryside and Ain Al-Arab, 4 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁷ SOHR, Carrying advanced weapons | US cargo plane lands in Kharab Al-Jeir base in Al-Hasakah, 19 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Boosting military bases | Three cargo planes lands in Coalition base in Al-Shaddadi, 16 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New reinforcement | International Coalition bring in military supplies to Al-Hasakah countryside, 19 December 2024, [url](#); SOHR, New reinforcements | US cargo plane lands in "Kharab Al-Jeir" base in Ramilan in Al-Hasakah, 14 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁸ SOHR, New reinforcement | US forces continue to reinforce their bases in Al-Hasakah countryside and Ain Al-Arab, 4 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁹ SOHR, New reinforcements | "International Coalition" Forces bring military equipment to bases in Syria, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁰ SOHR, New reinforcements | "International Coalition" Forces bring military materials to Deir Ezzor and bases in Al-Hasakah, 22 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ SOHR, Preparations for establishing new base | US forces bring in cement blocks to Ain Al-Arab (Kobani), 2 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁵² SOHR, To raise combat readiness | "International Coalition" and "SDF" conduct military exercises in Deir Ezzor, 15 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁵³ SOHR, Deir Ezzor | US patrol roams in villages on eastern countryside, 23 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁴ NBC News, Defense Department drafting plans to withdraw all U.S. troops from Syria after recent Trump comments, 5 February 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁵ AP, Analysis: Collapse of Syria's Assad is a blow to Iran's 'Axis of Resistance', 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁶ USIP, What Assad's Fall Means for Israel and Its Regional Relations, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁷ AP, Analysis: Collapse of Syria's Assad is a blow to Iran's 'Axis of Resistance', 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁸ AP, Israel's military is told to prepare to defend a Druze community outside Syria's capital, 1 March 2025, [url](#)



Following the fall of the Assad government, Syria witnessed an escalation of Israeli airstrikes that targeted numerous facilities, destroying radar systems, missile sites, and aircraft.⁵⁵⁹ Simultaneously, Israeli ground forces seized control of the demilitarised buffer zone between the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights and Syria⁵⁶⁰ and conducted ground incursions on southern Syrian territory beyond the buffer zone (mainly in Quneitra,⁵⁶¹ but also in Dar'a), seizing villages⁵⁶² and strategic positions and carrying out efforts to disarm local residents.⁵⁶³ Meanwhile, Israeli forces continued to launch air strikes on former SAA sites in southern Syria,⁵⁶⁴ near Damascus city⁵⁶⁵ and on the coast⁵⁶⁶. While the Israeli government initially emphasised the temporary nature of the seizure of the buffer zone,⁵⁶⁷ in late January 2025, Defence Minister Israel Katz declared that the Israeli forces would remain in that zone 'indefinitely'.⁵⁶⁸ In late February, members of the Israeli government announced that Israel would not allow the transitional administration to establish control over Syria's south, demanding its full demilitarisation.⁵⁶⁹

Initially, Israel appeared to avoid targeting HTS,⁵⁷⁰ but a mid-January 2025 drone strike killed two HTS fighters in Quneitra.⁵⁷¹ However, as of early March 2025, 'no major clashes' have been reported between Israeli forces and Syria's new security forces.⁵⁷²

For further information on Israel's involvement in Syria since November 2024, see section [4.4](#) of this report.

⁵⁵⁹ Badi, E., and Al-Jabassini, A., Turkey's Syria and Libya strategies add up to a Mediterranean power play, Atlantic Council, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁰ AP, As Israel advances on a Syrian buffer zone, it sees peril and opportunity, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁶¹ Badi, E., and Al-Jabassini, A., Turkey's Syria and Libya strategies add up to a Mediterranean power play, Atlantic Council, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁶² AA, Occupying Israeli forces open fire on Syrians protesting seizure of 2 villages in Daraa province, 21 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁶³ International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁶⁴ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Guardian (The), Israel strikes targets in southern Syria after demanding demilitarization, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Guardian (The), Israel strikes targets in southern Syria after demanding demilitarization, 26 February 2025, [url](#); New York Times (The), Talks on Syria's Future Fall Short of Promises, Participants Say, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ New York Times (The), Israel Strikes Syria Again as Tensions Rise, 4 March 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel launches air attacks near Syria's Tartous, 3 March 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁷ USIP, What Assad's Fall Means for Israel and Its Regional Relations, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁸ Security Council Report, Syria: Briefing and Consultations, 11 February 2025, [url](#)

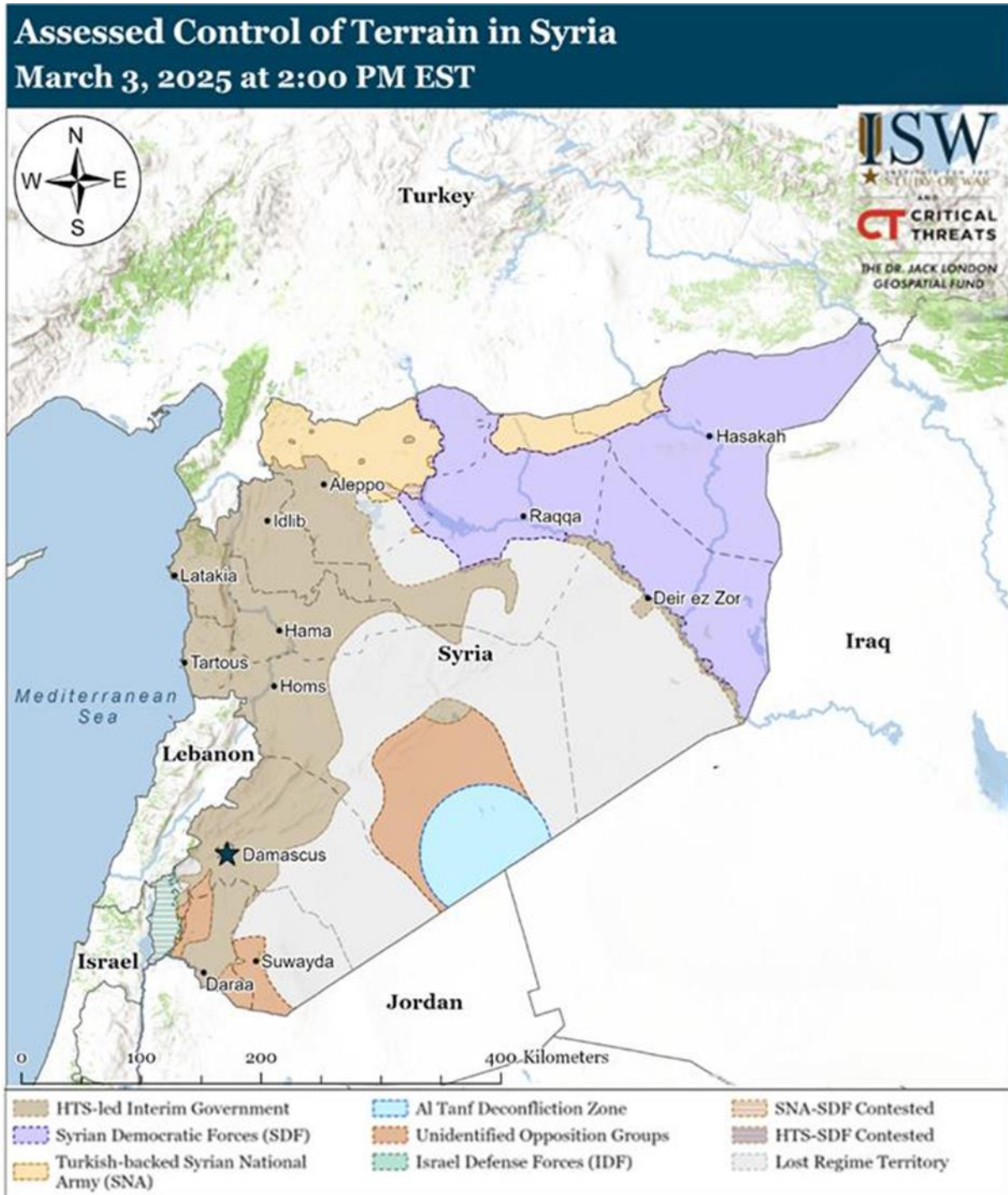
⁵⁶⁹ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), p. 6; Al-Monitor, Jordan's king hosts Sharaa amid Israeli escalation in Syria, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁰ MEE, Turkey doesn't seek conflict with Israel in Syria. Here's why, 11 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁷¹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁷² AP, Israel's military is told to prepare to defend a Druze community outside Syria's capital, 1 March 2025, [url](#)

4. Recent security trends



Map 3: Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria, © Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project, 3 March 2025⁵⁷³

⁵⁷³ ISW and CT, Iran Update, 3 March 2025, [url](#)

4.1. Areas under the control of the Transitional Administration

On 27 November 2024, HTS and allied Türkiye-backed factions started a lightning military offensive in northwestern Syria that eventually led to the collapse of Assad's rule. This operation followed a marked intensification of attacks by troops of the Assad government⁵⁷⁴ and Russian forces, with ACLED recording 684 aerial and artillery strikes across in opposition-held territories in northern Syria between 1 October and 26 November. These strikes reportedly caused at least 39 deaths among militants and civilians.⁵⁷⁵

Concurrently with the HTS-led offensive launched on 27 November, assassinations, Israeli strikes, ISIL attacks, and indiscriminate gunfire in the areas formerly controlled by the Assad government led to multiple deaths of civilians.⁵⁷⁶ Aerial strikes by pro-Assad forces, including by Russian aircraft, killed dozens of civilians in Idlib city between 27 November and 2 December 2024,⁵⁷⁷ including 22 civilians in a series of strikes that hit a market and five residential areas on 1 December,⁵⁷⁸ as well as in strikes targeting a hospital in Aleppo city (1 December)⁵⁷⁹ and areas in Aleppo's western countryside (between 27 and 30 November).⁵⁸⁰ Meanwhile, four students were killed when a HTS rocket hit their Aleppo dormitory (29 November 2024).⁵⁸¹ By 12 December 2024, more than 1.1 million people had been newly displaced due to the escalation in hostilities since the beginning of the offensive.⁵⁸²

As of February and early March 2025, the territories controlled by the Military Operations Administration (MOA), the umbrella command centre⁵⁸³ of the new HTS-led transitional administration, encompassed most of western, central and southern Syria as well as the western Euphrates bank in Deir Ez-Zor. These areas included the cities of Damascus, Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, Homs, as well as the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartous.⁵⁸⁴ Sources noted that the control of the new authorities remained fragmented in certain areas.⁵⁸⁵ While their

⁵⁷⁴ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ ACLED, Syria: HTS-led rebel forces capture over 200 locations, while Syrian and Russian airstrikes increase, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁶ SOHR, Regime-controlled areas in November 2024 | 381 fatalities in acts of violence and regime forces collapse and losing Aleppo and Idlib provinces top the events, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁷ SOHR, By previous Russian aerial shelling | Two children die affected by wounds they sustained, 17 December 2024, [url](#); SOHR, Military escalation | Russian fighter jets escalate their attacks on Aleppo and Idlib cities, 2 December 2024, [url](#); Reuters, At least 25 killed as Russian, Syrian jets intensify bombing of Syrian rebel territory, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

SOHR, Death toll update | 71 civilians killed and injured under Russian airstrikes on centre in Idlib, 1 December 2024, [url](#);

⁵⁷⁸ OHCHR, Syria: Tragic escalation in hostilities, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁹ SOHR, Two massacres by Russian forces | 49 people killed including 17 members of the regime under airstrikes, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁰ SOHR, "Putin-Erdogan" area collapses in November 2024 | 351 fatalities in acts of violence and over 200 airstrikes by fighter jets, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁸¹ OHCHR, Syria: Tragic escalation in hostilities, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁸² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 5 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 12 December 2024), 12 December 2024, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁸³ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁴ ISW and CTP, Interactive Map: Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria [Map], last updated 3 March 2025, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to February 2025.

⁵⁸⁵ Balanche, F., Rebuilding Syria May Require Federalism, TWI, 28 February 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)



control in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Hama was reportedly effective,⁵⁸⁶ in areas of Homs, rural Hama and southern Syria (Dar'a and Sweida governorates)⁵⁸⁷ the MOA forces are overstretched and competing with other autonomous armed factions.⁵⁸⁸ The coastal areas of Latakia and Tartous have been prone to attacks on security forces⁵⁸⁹ and sectarian violence⁵⁹⁰ in the aftermath of Assad's fall (for more information see section [4.1.2](#)).

According to ACLED data, the districts most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reporting period were the districts of Ain Al Arab/Kobane (401 incidents) and Jebel Saman (307 incidents) (both Aleppo governorate) and Deir Ez-Zor district (258 incidents) of Deir Ez-Zor governorate.⁵⁹¹ Meanwhile, among all governorates, the fewest security incidents were recorded in Tartous (40 incidents).⁵⁹² In the coastal areas, the highest number of security incidents was recorded in the district of Latakia (47 incidents).⁵⁹³ The highest number of security incidents in southern Syria was recorded in the districts of Dar'a (75 incidents), Izra (66) and Quneitra (57 incidents).⁵⁹⁴

4.1.1. Criminality, lawlessness and sectarian violence

Insecurity and volatility of the security situation due to criminality and lawlessness were reported to be prevalent in various regions.⁵⁹⁵ The coastal areas have been affected by incidents of assault, targeted attacks⁵⁹⁶ and killings of civilians,⁵⁹⁷ attacks at checkpoints, robberies, looting and kidnapping.⁵⁹⁸ Instances of killings by unidentified men/armed groups,⁵⁹⁹ kidnappings and looting were similarly reported in Rural Damascus.⁶⁰⁰ Deadly attacks on civilians were further recorded in Idlib,⁶⁰¹ Hama, and Yarmouk camp in Damascus.⁶⁰² According to Civil Peace Group in Syria, a civil society organisation, Homs city witnessed 64 kidnappings between 9 December 2024 and mid-February 2025, including at least 13 civilians. These kidnappings gradually increased over December 2024, peaking on 27

⁵⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁷ Balanche, F., Rebuilding Syria May Require Federalism, TWI, 28 February 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁸ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ ACLED, Regional Overview Middle East – February 2025, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁰ AP, Syria's worst violence in months reopens wounds of the civil war, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁹¹ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁵⁹² ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁵⁹³ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁵⁹⁴ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁵⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (As of 12 February 2025), 12 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2; Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁹⁶ Enab Baladi, Syria: Ongoing security campaigns against former regime elements, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁷ SOHR, Security chaos | Gunmen murder two civilians in Idlib and Latakia, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (As of 12 February 2025), 12 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁵⁹⁹ SOHR, Retaliatory actions | Three persons eliminated in different areas across Syria in hours, 18 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Two separate incidents | Three young men killed in Douma in Rif Dimashq, 17 January 2025, [url](#);

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁰¹ SOHR, Security chaos | Gunmen murder two civilians in Idlib and Latakia, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁰² SOHR, Retaliatory actions | Three persons eliminated in different areas across Syria in hours, 18 January 2025, [url](#)





December until they declined to zero in January before surging again. 19 of these abductees were killed.⁶⁰³

As Gregory Waters assessed, most of these crimes were committed by civilians and gangs not linked to the transitional administration, although some local commanders and rank-and-file soldiers have been involved in kidnappings of Alawite civilians on sectarian grounds.⁶⁰⁴ Areas such as Damascus, Latakia and Tartous further remained prone to sectarian tensions amid an absence of formalised security mechanisms.⁶⁰⁵

According to the SOHR, in January 2025, assassinations and retaliatory attacks, including on sectarian and politically grounds, increased significantly in the areas controlled by the transitional administration, with the highest rates recorded in Homs (91 fatalities, including 59 sectarian killings), Hama (46 fatalities, including 28 sectarian killings) and Latakia (15 fatalities, including 13 sectarian killings).⁶⁰⁶ In January, ACLED recorded that over 176 civilians, including some former fighters of the Assad government, had been killed by unidentified gunmen.⁶⁰⁷

In Homs city and the rural areas of Homs and Hama, security forces have reportedly been overstretched and relied on minimally trained recruits, allowing unrest to persist since Assad's fall.⁶⁰⁸ In Homs and some parts of Hama, cases of local sectarian retribution by Sunnis against Alawites have been reported to be a serious issue.⁶⁰⁹ There was a proliferation of unverified reports of punitive raids, disappearances and murders on social media, allegedly showing HTS fighters beating⁶¹⁰ or inciting violence against Alawites.⁶¹¹ As Gregory Waters noted, the more serious attacks against Assad remnants tended to occur in rural areas characterised by high concentrations of former '*shabiha*'⁶¹² (armed gangs that supported Assad)⁶¹³ and limited presence of security forces.⁶¹⁴ However, such targeting of former Assad loyalism has also been reported in Damascus.⁶¹⁵ In some of these cases, which continued to February 2025,⁶¹⁶ the perpetrators remained unidentified.⁶¹⁷

⁶⁰³ Civil Peace Group in Syria [Instagram], posted on: 18 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁴ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁵ Al Jazeera, Analysis: Turkiye's road ahead in a post-Assad Syria, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁶ SOHR, 91 attacks in 2025 | 190 people killed in retaliatory actions and assassinations in different areas across Syria, 26 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁷ ACLED, Regional Overview Middle East – February 2025, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁸ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁹ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶¹⁰ France24, 'Syrian above all': The Alawite community refuses to pay for Assad's crimes, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶¹¹ Al Jazeera, Iran says Syria's future unclear after foreign minister hits back, 25 December 2024, [url](#); France24,

'Syrian above all': The Alawite community refuses to pay for Assad's crimes, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶¹² Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶¹³ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶¹⁴ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶¹⁵ Al Jazeera, Iran says Syria's future unclear after foreign minister hits back, 25 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶¹⁶ New Arab (The), Syria: String of extrajudicial killings targets ex-regime affiliates, 17 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶¹⁷ New Arab (The), Syria: String of extrajudicial killings targets ex-regime affiliates, 17 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New assassination | Former commander of Iranian militias and former member of Military Intelligence killed by unidentified gunmen in Deir Ezzor, 22 December 2025, [url](#)





4.1.2. Coastal areas

Alleged remnants of the Assad government conducted deadly ambushes against the security forces of the new transitional administration,⁶¹⁸ including in Tartous governorate in what was noted as the first direct challenge to the power of the new rulers⁶¹⁹ on 24 December 2024 (leaving 14 police dead)⁶²⁰ and in Latakia city on 5 January 2025 (killing at least two members of the security forces).⁶²¹ Tartous, Latakia and parts of Rural Damascus and Homs, all assessed by ACLED to be areas where the transitional administration has ‘not gained a decisive victory’ as of early February 2025, witnessed the emergence of new militias opposed to the transitional administration.⁶²² These groups, which may arise as Assad-affiliated fighters merge into armed gangs and minorities form self-defence groups,⁶²³ attacked police and military forces to destabilise the new administration.⁶²⁴ Such attacks and clashes were reported well into February 2025 in Homs, the coastal region⁶²⁵ (including near Hmeimim base in Latakia), eastern Dar’a, and Rural Damascus.⁶²⁶

Following clashes in southern rural Tartous, the MOA launched a security campaign in late December 2024, searching for local remnants of the Assad government.⁶²⁷ This three-day operation saw the deployment of special forces known as the ‘Red Bands’ in the suspect villages (Khirbet Maazah, Yahmour and Zarqat) and witnessed shootouts, home raids, and checkpoints being set up. Several civilians were wounded in clashes.⁶²⁸ Since then, further sweeping security campaigns have been launched against remnants of the former Assad government in various governorates, including Latakia,⁶²⁹ Deir Ez-Zor,⁶³⁰ Dar’a,⁶³¹ Homs,⁶³² Hama, Aleppo and Damascus, resulting in hundreds of arrests.⁶³³ As of mid-January 2025, HTS was reportedly ‘confronting small pockets of locally organized fighter cells in areas under its control’, deploying tanks, attack helicopters and drones against pro-Assad groups.⁶³⁴ In late

⁶¹⁸ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁶¹⁹ BBC News, Assad loyalists kill 14 in clash with Syria's new ruling forces – authorities, 27 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶²⁰ Al Jazeera, Syria says 14 policemen killed in ambush by forces loyal to al-Assad, 26 December 2024, [url](#); BBC News, Assad loyalists kill 14 in clash with Syria's new ruling forces – authorities, 27 December 2024, [url](#);

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁶²¹ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, January 6, 2025, 6 January 2025 [url](#), pp. 1-2; Al Jazeera, مقتل قيادي عسكري باشتباكات مع "بقول النظام" باللاذقية [Military leader killed in clashes with "regime remnants" in Latakia], 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶²² ACLED, Regional Overview Middle East – February 2025, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶²³ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁶²⁴ ACLED, Regional Overview Middle East – February 2025, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶²⁵ New Arab (The), 15 people killed in 'sectarian' massacre in Alawi village in Syria, 1 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶²⁶ Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶²⁷ Enab Baladi, Syria: Ongoing security campaigns against former regime elements, 30 December 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria says 14 policemen killed in ambush by forces loyal to al-Assad, 26 December 2024, [url](#); MEMO, Syria launches operation to pursue ‘remnants of Assad's militias’, 27 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ Waters, G., Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, MEI, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶²⁹ Enab Baladi, Syria: Ongoing security campaigns against former regime elements, 30 December 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syrian authorities crack down on ‘remnants’ of Bashar al-Assad’s rule, 28 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶³⁰ Enab Baladi, Syria: Ongoing security campaigns against former regime elements, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶³¹ SOHR, Targeting regime affiliates and drug and arms dealers | General security service launches new security campaign in Daraa countryside, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶³² SOHR, Targeting head of general intelligence service | General security forces prepare to launch new security campaign in Homs, 14 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶³³ Enab Baladi, How effective are security campaigns against remnants of Assad’s regime?, 22 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶³⁴ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, January 14, 2025, 14 January 2025, [url](#), p. 1



January, fighters affiliated to the new administration reportedly carried out 35 summary executions, killing mostly Assad-era officers.⁶³⁵

In early March, a significant escalation in hostilities was reported in Latakia, Tartous⁶³⁶ and to a lesser extent in Homs, and Hama governorates.⁶³⁷ Following a series of attacks by pro-Assad remnants on general security forces in Baniyas, Tartous and Jableh, Latakia⁶³⁸ which led to more than 100 members of security forces and 15 civilians killed in the latter,⁶³⁹ government security forces and affiliated armed actors 'apparently operating outside of Damascus control' initiated a general mobilisation and launched retaliatory attacks against insurgents and civilians.⁶⁴⁰ Reports indicate summary executions along sectarian lines by unidentified perpetrators, members of the caretaker authorities' security forces, and elements linked to the former government.⁶⁴¹

According to SOHR, 1 454 individuals were killed in the clashes, including 973 civilians.⁶⁴² Most of the civilians killed were reportedly members of the Alawite community particularly from Latakia and Tartous governorates.⁶⁴³ According to SOHR there were 545 civilians killed in Latakia, 262 in Tartous, 156 in Hama and 10 in Homs.⁶⁴⁴ SNHR documented 803 individuals killed between 6-10 March. At least 211 civilians were killed by pro-Assad armed groups, while at least 420 civilians and disarmed combatants were killed by security forces and affiliated armed groups. The highest number of civilians and disarmed combatants was recorded in Latakia (185) and Tartous (183) governorates, with smaller numbers in Hama (29) and Homs (3). The violence involved extrajudicial killings, field executions, and systematic mass killings driven by revenge and sectarian motives.⁶⁴⁵

The OHCHR has documented 111 civilian deaths as of 11 March, but verification is ongoing, and the actual toll is believed to be significantly higher.⁶⁴⁶

⁶³⁵ Arab Weekly (The), Summary executions in Syria as chaos, score-settling overtake new rulers, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶³⁶ AP, Syria's worst violence in months reopens wounds of the civil war, 10 March 2025, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Update, 7 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶³⁷ UNOCHA, Joint Statement by UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Adam Abdelmoula, and Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, Ramanathan Balakrishnan, on the recent hostilities in Syria, 8 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶³⁸ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶³⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Update #21, 8 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴¹ OHCHR, Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas, 11 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴² SOHR, Genocide in Syrian coastline and Latakia mountains 72 hours on | Military and security forces commit nearly 40 massacres, killing 973 civilians, 9 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴³ AP, Syria's worst violence in months reopens wounds of the civil war, 10 March 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁴ SOHR, Genocide in Syrian coastline and Latakia mountains 72 hours on | Military and security forces commit nearly 40 massacres, killing 973 civilians, 9 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁵ SNHR, Preliminary Report on the Violations that Took Place in the Wake of the Attacks Carried Out by Non-State Armed Groups Linked to the Assad Regime, Mostly in the Governorates of Latakia, Tartus, and Hama, 11 March 2025, [url](#), pp. 5-10

⁶⁴⁶ OHCHR, Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas, 11 March 2025, [url](#)



Thousands of people were reportedly displaced in the coastal areas⁶⁴⁷ with an estimated 16 000 having crossed into Lebanon due to the hostilities.⁶⁴⁸ On 10 March, the transitional administration announced the end of the military operation in the coastal areas.⁶⁴⁹ President Al-Shaara issued a decision to form an independent national committee to investigate the events⁶⁵⁰ and authorities reportedly begun prosecuting individuals accused of committing crimes during the insurgent activity in western Syria between 6 and 10 March.⁶⁵¹

4.1.3. ISIL insurgency

In Homs and Hama governorates, ISIL expanded its presence as the lines of Assad's forces collapsed and security forces retreated to the main cities.⁶⁵² Exploiting this power vacuum,⁶⁵³ the group has seized large weapons stockpiles from Assad's bases in the Syrian desert⁶⁵⁴ and its cells entered or attempted to enter several towns in eastern Homs towns. In Hama, returning formerly displaced 'Bedouins', some of whose community formed the core of local ISIL supporters in east Hama in the past, reportedly robbed and looted Ismaili and Alawite villages in the Salamiyah countryside. At the same time, the departure of Assad's army and Russian forces from central Syria has enabled the US-led Global Coalition to strike ISIL camps without hindrance. Amongst others, US forces on 8 December 2025 hit more than 75 ISIL camps that were reported to have played a key role in the group's recruitment and training.⁶⁵⁵

4.1.4. Afrin area

The Afrin area, previously occupied by the SNA until control was transferred to the transitional administration in early February 2025,⁶⁵⁶ witnessed during the reference period numerous instances of civilians being subjected to killing,⁶⁵⁷ kidnapping,⁶⁵⁸ beating,⁶⁵⁹ threats⁶⁶⁰ and

⁶⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Joint Statement by UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Adam Abdelmoula, and Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, Ramanathan Balakrishnan, on the recent hostilities in Syria, 8 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁸ ECHO, ECHO Daily Flash, 11 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁹ AP, Syria announces the end of a military operation against Assad-linked gunmen in a coastal region, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ France24, Syria opens probe into killings targeting Alawite minority group, 9 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵¹ ISW and CT, Iran Update, 11 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵² Waters, G., ISIL Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency, Special Edition, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵³ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁵⁴ ISW and CTP, The Islamic State's Global Long Game and Resurgence in Syria Poses an Evolved Threat to the West, 9 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁵ Waters, G., ISIL Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency, Special Edition, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁶ FDD, Syrian government forces enter Afrin, signaling a change in control, 6 February 2025, [url](#); BasNews, Syrian Forces Take Control of Afrin From Turkish-Backed SNA, 6 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁷ SOHR, Six gunshots | Members of "Al-Sultan Murad" kills a civilian after exiting a mosque in Afrin, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁸ Rudaw, 87 people 'kidnapped' in Afrin since start of 2025: local watchdog, 8 February 2025, [url](#); ANHA, Turkish occupation mercenaries continue to commit crimes in Afrin, 17 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing violations | Turkish-backed factions kidnap six women and arrest five young men in north Aleppo countryside, 11 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing violations in Afrin | "National Army" factions continue kidnaps, arbitrary arrests and looting of civilian properties, 28 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁹ SOHR, Ongoing violations in Afrin | Turkish-backed factions brutally beat civilians, loot civilian properties and fell fruit-bearing trees, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁰ SOHR, Ongoing violations | Turkish-backed "Suleiman Shah" Faction storms houses in Afrin and impose extra royalties, 14 January 2025, [url](#)



intimidation,⁶⁶¹ as well as armed robbery/looting⁶⁶² by members of militias, including SNA-affiliated factions such as the Sultan Murad Division,⁶⁶³ the Al-Hamzat Division,⁶⁶⁴ and the Suleiman Shah faction.⁶⁶⁵ Rudaw quoted the human rights monitor Violations Documentation Center (VDC) as saying that 87 people had reportedly been kidnapped between 1 January and 8 February 2025.⁶⁶⁶ At least one child was killed during gunfights involving theft and robbery.⁶⁶⁷

4.1.5. Southern Syria

The security situation in southern Syria has been characterised by a high degree of complexity as it lacked cohesive military structures.⁶⁶⁸ While the transitional administration has made some efforts to collect illegal weapons in a region which has seen a large proliferation of arms,⁶⁶⁹ armed factions in Dar'a and Sweida in particular have shown little interest to disarm and integrate into the structures of the new unified national army without assurances of protection against external attacks (e.g., from ISIL) and political representation.⁶⁷⁰ Even though local factions leaders in February 2025 agreed to form a 'Southern Division' as part of the new Syrian army, it was expected that factional and regional disunity would continue to exist in the new division.⁶⁷¹ The situation in this region has been further complicated by Israeli military interventions since the fall of Assad, including hundreds of aerial strikes on military targets (e.g., a strike on weapons storages at Sweida military airport, targeted drone strikes in Dar'a, and along the border between Syria and Lebanon) and the seizure of new territory in the Golan Heights.⁶⁷²

For further information on Israel's involvement in southern Syria since November 2024, see section [4.4.](#) of this report.

⁶⁶¹ SOHR, Ongoing violations in Afrin | Turkish-backed factions brutally beat civilians, loot civilian properties and fell fruit-bearing trees, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁶² ANHA, Turkish occupation mercenaries continue to commit crimes in Afrin, 17 February 2025, [url](#); Rudaw, Armed thieves rob elderly man as crime increases in Afrin: Monitor, 14 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing violations in Afrin | Turkish-backed factions brutally beat civilians, loot civilian properties and fell fruit-bearing trees, 23 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing violations in Afrin | "National Army" factions continue kidnaps, arbitrary arrests and looting of civilian properties, 28 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁶³ SOHR, Six gunshots | Members of "Al-Sultan Murad" kills a civilian after exiting a mosque in Efrin, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁴ SOHR, Ongoing violations in Afrin | Turkish-backed factions brutally beat civilians, loot civilian properties and fell fruit-bearing trees, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁵ SOHR, Ongoing violations | Turkish-backed "Suleiman Shah" Faction storms houses in Efrin and impose extra royalties, 14 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁶ Rudaw, 87 people 'kidnapped' in Afrin since start of 2025: local watchdog, 8 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁷ SOHR, Stray bullet | Girl killed during clashes between "Mohamed Al-Fateh" Faction and thieves in Efrin, 15 November 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ Aldoughli, A., Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power, New Lines Magazine, 25 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁹ SOHR, Targeting regime affiliates and drug and arms dealers | General security service launches new security campaign in Daraa countryside, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁰ Aldoughli, A., Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power, New Lines Magazine, 25 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁷¹ Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁷² Aldoughli, A., Syria's New Rulers Are Working To Unify Military Power, New Lines Magazine, 25 February 2025, [url](#)



4.2. Areas under the control of the Syrian National Army (SNA)

For information regarding security trends in the areas controlled by Turkish-backed forces prior to November 2024, see sections 2.2., 2.7., 2.8. of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

As of February and early March 2025, the Turkish-backed militias (i.e the Syrian National Army - SNA) controlled northern and eastern rural Aleppo, including the area between A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus (operation Euphrates Shield area). The SNA also controlled a stretch of territory further east⁶⁷³ that is known as the operation Peace Spring area, roughly delimited by the Tall Abyad area (Raqqqa) in the west and Ras Al-Ain (Hasaka) in the east, with some SNA presence mapped as far east as Tall al-Amir (Hasaka).⁶⁷⁴ Meanwhile, control of northwestern Aleppo's Afrin area, previously occupied by SNA factions since 2018, was transferred to the transitional administration as its security forces entered Afrin city in early February 2025.⁶⁷⁵

(a) Operation Dawn of Freedom and Euphrates shield areas

Amid the Syrian armed opposition's military offensive,⁶⁷⁶ the SNA on 30 November 2024 launched its own concurrent Operation Dawn of Freedom⁶⁷⁷ in northern and eastern rural Aleppo.⁶⁷⁸ Its immediate aim was to push the SDF troops east of the Euphrates River.⁶⁷⁹ The SNA took several towns in northern Aleppo⁶⁸⁰ and conquered the city of Tall Rifaat,⁶⁸¹ areas located south of A'zaz and Al-Bab, as well as the city of Manbij and its surroundings. Meanwhile, mapping resources disagreed on whether Aleppo city and its eastern surroundings were under HTS control⁶⁸² or partly controlled by the SNA.⁶⁸³

⁶⁷³ ISW and CTP, Interactive Map: Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria [Map], last updated 3 March 2025, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to February 2025.

⁶⁷⁴ Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to February 2025.

⁶⁷⁵ FDD, Syrian government forces enter Afrin, signaling a change in control, 6 February 2025, [url](#); BasNews, Syrian Forces Take Control of Afrin From Turkish-Backed SNA, 6 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁶ Barkey, H.J., What Role Is Turkey Playing in Syria's Civil War?, CFR, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁷ ACLED, Regional Overview Middle East November 2024, 6 December 2024, [url](#); Levant 24, SNA Launches 'Dawn of Freedom' Operation, 30 November 2024, [url](#); NPA, SNA announces launch of "Dawn of Freedom" offensive in Aleppo, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁸ L24, SNA Launches 'Dawn of Freedom' Operation, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁹ Barkey, H.J., What Role Is Turkey Playing in Syria's Civil War?, CFR, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁰ Salih, M.A., Post-Assad Syria: Challenges, Opportunities, and the US Role in Shaping its Future, FPRI, 14 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁸¹ Syria Report (The), HTS Takes Over Aleppo While Making Advances Towards Hama (Open access), 4 December 2024, [url](#);

NPA, SNA announces full control over Tel Rifaat town in Aleppo, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁸² ISW and CTP, Interactive Map: Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria [Map], last updated 3 March 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁸³ Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to February 2025.



After capturing the city of Tall Rifaat (northern Aleppo)⁶⁸⁴ and then seizing Manbij⁶⁸⁵ following a US-brokered temporary ceasefire that allowed for a withdrawal of the SDF from the city,⁶⁸⁶ the SNA advanced towards the Kurdish-majority border city of Kobane⁶⁸⁷ on the eastern Euphrates riverbank.⁶⁸⁸ On 24 December 2024, the SDF announced a counteroffensive aiming to retake territory lost to the SNA⁶⁸⁹ as it made some territorial gains in eastern rural Aleppo.⁶⁹⁰

Heavy clashes between the SNA and the SDF were reported in January and February 2025 at the frontlines around the strategic Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak Bridge on the Euphrates River,⁶⁹¹ in villages in rural Manbij⁶⁹² and around the city of Kobane.⁶⁹³ The violent clashes using medium and heavy weapons, among which rocket-propelled grenades, in the area around the dam, lead to 116 fighters and 20 civilians killed within 15 days. Clashes around the Tishreen Dam and in Manbij countryside continued throughout January 2025.⁶⁹⁴ Besides combatants, dozens of civilians were killed or injured during exchanges of artillery and rocket fire between Turkish/Türkiye-backed forces and SDF/Kurdish forces.⁶⁹⁵

The area around Manbij city witnessed continued violence in the months following the fall of Assad.⁶⁹⁶ As of late December 2024, amid clashes following SDF attempts to retake Manbij

⁶⁸⁴ Shafaq News, Türkiye-aligned factions seize Tel Rifaat in Syria's Aleppo, 2 December 2024, [url](#); NPA, SNA announces full control over Tel Rifaat town in Aleppo, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁵ Reuters, Rebels take Syrian city from U.S.-backed group after U.S.-Turkey deal, source says, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶ SOHR, More than eight years of SDF control of Manbij | US-mediated agreement leads to withdrawal of SDF from Manbij city for the benefit of Turkish-backed factions, 11 December 2024, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, US: Manbij Ceasefire Extended, 18 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁸⁸ Iddon, P., Why fighting is raging in north Syria between the Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF, The New Arab, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁹⁰ SOHR, Military escalation | “SDF” advances and takes control over four villages in Manbij as Turkish-backed factions shell Kobani villages, 23 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹¹ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), p. 5; SOHR, Amid Turkish artillery fire and clashes on different frontlines | SDF foil attack and shoot down kamikaze drone in Aleppo countryside, 23 February 2025, [url](#); Guardian (The), ‘We are part of Syria’: Kurdish-led SDF fights for place in post-Assad future, 21 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (As of 12 February 2025), 12 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2; Iddon, P., Why fighting is raging in north Syria between the Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF, The New Arab, 21 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, After a delegation of Red Crescent left | Clashes renew near Sad Teshrin (Dam) in Manbij countryside, 7 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Following two simultaneous attacks | Fierce clashes erupt between Turkish-backed factions and SDF on two frontlines in eastern Aleppo, 23 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹² SOHR, Military escalation | Clashes renew between “SDF” and “National Army” in Sad Teshrin, 3 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Military escalation | SDF infiltrates and shells positions in Manbij countryside, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹³ Iddon, P., Why fighting is raging in north Syria between the Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF, The New Arab, 21 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Military escalation | “SDF” and Turkish forces exchange shelling in Aleppo countryside, 1 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, In ten days of battles | 110 civilians and combatants killed and injured in eastern Aleppo countryside, 21 December 2024, [url](#)

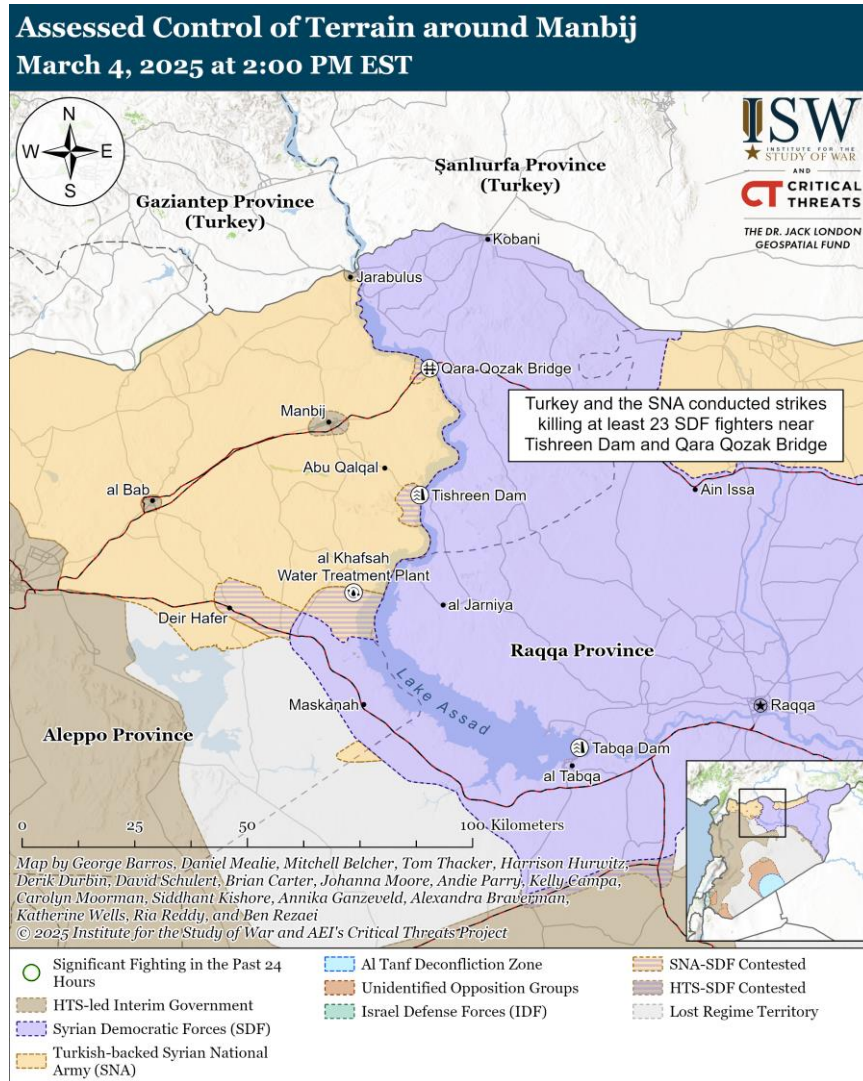
⁶⁹⁴ Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #13: 10 January, 9 January 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁵ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#); SOHR, Week of escalation | 54 civilians and combatants killed and injured in confrontations between Turkish-backed factions and SDF and Kurdish Forces, 25 November 2024, [url](#); New Arab (The), Five killed in fighting around Syria's Tishreen dam as Germany calls for Russian withdrawal, 17 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, “Euphrates Shield” areas | Eight civilians killed and injured under shelling by Manbij Military Council, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁶ VOA, Another car bomb in a northern Syria city kills at least 19, mostly women, 3 February 2025, [url](#)



city, the security situation was described as ‘very tense’ and lacking clarity.⁶⁹⁷ Between late December/early January 2025 and early February 2025, the Manbij area was struck by seven car bombings.⁶⁹⁸ These included two unclaimed car bomb explosions reported on 1 February (causing four civilian deaths)⁶⁹⁹ and 3 February (hitting a vehicle transporting women agricultural workers and resulting in at least 19 civilian deaths).⁷⁰⁰



Map 4: Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij, © Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project, 4 March 2025⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁷ Al Jazeera, Syria says 14 policemen killed in ambush by forces loyal to al-Assad, 26 December 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁸ VOA, Another car bomb in a northern Syria city kills at least 19, mostly women, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ SNHR, 222 Civilian Deaths, Including 17 Children and 37 Women, as well as Nine Deaths due to Torture, Recorded in February 2025 in Syria, 1 March 2025, [url](#), p. 11; UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (As of 12 February 2025), 12 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁰⁰ SNHR, 222 Civilian Deaths, Including 17 Children and 37 Women, as well as Nine Deaths due to Torture, Recorded in February 2025 in Syria, 1 March 2025, [url](#), p. 12; Reuters, Car bomb kills 20 in northern Syria, deadliest since Assad toppled, 3 February 2025, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (As of 12 February 2025), 12 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁰¹ ISW and CT, Iran Update, 4 March 2025, [url](#)





Amid what SOHR refers to as ‘escalating security chaos’ in areas controlled by Türkiye and its proxy groups,⁷⁰² further civilians were killed by unidentified gunmen in Manbij city⁷⁰³ and its countryside,⁷⁰⁴ as well as in eastern Aleppo’s Jarablus countryside.⁷⁰⁵ In late December 2024 and early January 2025, there were also several explosions of booby-trapped motorbikes in northern and eastern Aleppo (including one in Tall Rifaat and two in Manbij city), some of which caused civilian casualties.⁷⁰⁶ SNA factions were also reported to have subjected civilians to kidnapping, beating, and looting in the Al-Bab countryside (eastern Aleppo).⁷⁰⁷

According to ACLED data, the areas under the control of SNA/disputed in Aleppo governorate which were the most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reporting period were Ain Al Arab/Kobane (401 incidents) and Manbij districts (212 incidents), amounting to around 49 % of the total number of security incidents recorded in Aleppo governorate.⁷⁰⁸

(b) Operation Peace Spring area

Localities in northern Syria that are part of the Operation Peace Spring area, including in western Raqqa⁷⁰⁹ (e.g., the Ain Issa and Tall Abyad areas)⁷¹⁰ and Hasaka (Ras Al-Ain)⁷¹¹ witnessed heavy clashes between the Turkish forces/SNA and the SDF, involving the use of heavy weaponry,⁷¹² rocket fire,⁷¹³ drone warfare,⁷¹⁴ and infiltrations,⁷¹⁵ as well as Turkish forces and Türkiye-backed SNA factions bombarding villages.⁷¹⁶

Civilian casualties in the Operation Peace Spring area included two women who were shot dead by Military Police (Sulouk area in the Raqqa countryside), a girl injured by a shell fired by Turkish forces (western rural Tall Abyad in northern Raqqa)⁷¹⁷ and the killing and wounding of

⁷⁰² SOHR, Horrific crime | Family of five executed by unidentified gunmen in village in Manbij countryside, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁰³ SOHR, Security chaos | Two civilians shot dead in Manbij and its countryside, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁴ SOHR, Security chaos | Child killed and two injured in an armed attack in Manbij countryside, 24 December 2024, [url](#); SOHR, Horrific crime | Family of five executed by unidentified gunmen in village in Manbij countryside, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁵ SOHR, Horrific crime | Family of five executed by unidentified gunmen in village in Manbij countryside, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁶ SOHR, Fourth time in a week | Motorbike explodes in areas of Turkish-backed factions in Aleppo, 1 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁷ SOHR, Surprise raid | Turkish-backed factions kidnap seven young men and assault elderly people in eastern Aleppo, 15 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁸ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁷⁰⁹ Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), p. 5

⁷¹⁰ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), p. 5

⁷¹¹ SOHR, Injuring three Turkish soldiers | SDF attack Turkish base in Ras Al-Ain countryside, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷¹² SOHR, Military escalation | Fierce clashes between SDF and Turkish-backed factions leave four militiamen injured in Al-Hasakah countryside, 29 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷¹³ SOHR, Injuring three Turkish soldiers | SDF attack Turkish base in Ras Al-Ain countryside, 21 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷¹⁴ SOHR, Amid bombardment on Al-Hasakah and Al-Raqqa countryside | Drone attack leaves Turkish soldier dead and another injured in Ras Al-Ain, 9 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷¹⁵ SOHR, Infiltration operation | SDF sneak into positions of Turkish-backed factions in Tel Abyad countryside, injuring three militiamen, 28 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷¹⁶ SOHR, Amid bombardment on Al-Hasakah and Al-Raqqa countryside | Drone attack leaves Turkish soldier dead and another injured in Ras Al-Ain, 9 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Infiltration operation | SDF sneak into positions of Turkish-backed factions in Tel Abyad countryside, injuring three militiamen, 28 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷¹⁷ SOHR, “Peace Spring” area | Two women shot dead by the Military Police, 15 January 2025, [url](#)





seven civilians in an explosion at a military headquarters in the Ras Al-Ain countryside following an infiltration by SDF special forces.⁷¹⁸ The Ras Al-Ain area also experienced growing ‘security chaos’, including thefts, robberies, and infighting between armed factions⁷¹⁹ linked to militiamen intending to leave the Operation Peace Spring area⁷²⁰ (such relocations into SDF territory have been facilitated by SDF).⁷²¹ Turkish-backed Military Police and militias conducted security campaigns targeting individuals attempting to leave the area.⁷²² Several members of Turkish-backed militias have been killed in this context.⁷²³

According to ACLED data, the areas under the control of SNA/disputed in Raqqa and Hasaka governorates which were the most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reporting period were Raqqa’s Tall Abyad (193 incidents), and Hasaka’s Ras Al Ain (111) districts, amounting to around 51 % and 27 % of all security incidents recorded in Raqqa and Hasaka governorates, respectively.⁷²⁴

4.3. Areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

For information regarding security trends in the Kurdish-controlled areas prior to November 2024, see sections 2.2., 2.7., 2.8. and 2.9. of the [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation \(October 2024\)](#).

The SDF control a large swath of territory in northeastern Syria that accounts for almost one-third of the country’s overall area.⁷²⁵ These territories comprised about 70 percent of Syria’s oil and gas fields.⁷²⁶ As of February and March 2025, the territories controlled, occupied, or seized by the SDF encompassed most of Hasaka, approximately half of Raqqa (including Raqqa city), and the portions of Deir Ez-Zor and Aleppo that are located east of the Euphrates River, as well as a narrow salient on Aleppo’s western Euphrates bank,⁷²⁷ situated south of Lake Assad and near the Tishreen Dam.⁷²⁸ According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and the Critical Threats Project (CTP) some small areas west of the Euphrates, located south of

⁷¹⁸ SOHR, Infiltration operation | Special forces of “SDF” kill and injure 12 members of Turkish-backed factions and seven civilians, 25 November 2024, [url](#)

⁷¹⁹ SOHR, Wishing to return to their areas | Number of people arrested in the searching campaign by Military Police has risen to 20 people, 17 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Second attack in hours | Turkish-backed militiaman shot dead in “Peace Spring” area, 3 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷²⁰ SOHR, Wishing to return to their areas | Number of people arrested in the searching campaign by Military Police has risen to 20 people, 17 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷²¹ SOHR, Turkish intelligence assigns task of pursuing militiamen seeking to return to their areas to “Al-Rahman Corps” in Ras Al-Ain in northern Al-Hasakah, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷²² SOHR, Wishing to return to their areas | Number of people arrested in the searching campaign by Military Police has risen to 20 people, 17 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Turkish intelligence assigns task of pursuing militiamen seeking to return to their areas to “Al-Rahman Corps” in Ras Al-Ain in northern Al-Hasakah, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷²³ SOHR, Turkish intelligence assigns task of pursuing militiamen seeking to return to their areas to “Al-Rahman Corps” in Ras Al-Ain in northern Al-Hasakah, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷²⁴ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁷²⁵ Al Jazeera, What is behind US strategy of keeping troops in post-Assad Syria?, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷²⁶ Al Jazeera, What is behind US strategy of keeping troops in post-Assad Syria?, 6 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷²⁷ ISW and CTP, Interactive Map: Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria [Map], last updated 3 March 2025, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#). Set filters to January 2025.

⁷²⁸ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, January 7, 2025, 7 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2



Al-Bab and Manbij, were contested between the SDF and the SNA.⁷²⁹ At least in the immediate aftermath of the takeover of Aleppo city by the armed opposition, the SDF remained in control of the city's two Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsoud.⁷³⁰

On 6 December 2024, the former Assad government withdrew from Deir Ez-Zor city and its environs and the SDF advanced into these areas, seeking to fill this vacuum.⁷³¹ As Assad's troops started to hand over territory to the SDF,⁷³² the SNA, launching its own Operation Dawn of Freedom⁷³³ in northern and eastern rural Aleppo,⁷³⁴ expelled the Kurdish forces from key points on the western bank,⁷³⁵ seizing Tall Rifaat⁷³⁶ and the strategic city of Manbij on 10 December 2024.⁷³⁷ However, the SDF made some territorial gains in eastern rural Aleppo in late December 2024⁷³⁸ and by January 2025 was again sending units deep into former Assad areas in Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa and Aleppo.⁷³⁹

As of late February 2025, Turkish forces/the SNA and the SDF continued to engage in heavy fighting in northern Syria near the Qara Qozak Bridge and the Tishreen Dam,⁷⁴⁰ with ISW and CTP suggesting that Türkiye was possibly attempting to cut the SDF's supply lines to the dam, located on the eastern Euphrates bank in Aleppo governorate.⁷⁴¹ For more information on the clashes in northern Syria, see section 4.2 of this report. Moreover, during the reference period, Türkiye has been shelling SDF sites throughout northeastern Syria.⁷⁴² As of January 2025, it was noted that the SDF, weakened by its loss of territory and retreat east of the Euphrates,⁷⁴³ was facing an existential threat⁷⁴⁴ as it fought to safeguard its autonomous territory.⁷⁴⁵ At the same time, the reference period saw forces of the US-led Global Coalition intensifying military

⁷²⁹ ISW and CTP, Interactive Map: Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria [Map], last updated 3 March 2025, [url](#)

⁷³⁰ Syria Report (The), HTS Takes Over Aleppo While Making Advances Towards Hama (Open access), 4 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷³¹ MEE, Assad forces withdraw in Daraa and Deir Ezzor as Syrian rebels advance on Homs, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷³² Özkızılcık, Ö., What does Turkey gain from the rebel offensive in Syria?, Atlantic Council, 5 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷³³ ACLED, Regional Overview Middle East November 2024, 6 December 2024, [url](#); Levant 24, SNA Launches

'Dawn of Freedom' Operation, 30 November 2024, [url](#); NPA, SNA announces launch of "Dawn of Freedom"

offensive in Aleppo, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

⁷³⁴ L24, SNA Launches 'Dawn of Freedom' Operation, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

⁷³⁵ INSS, A New Era in Syria: Winners, Losers, and Implications for Israel, 12 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷³⁶ Syria Report (The), HTS Takes Over Aleppo While Making Advances Towards Hama (Open access), 4 December 2024, [url](#);

NPA, SNA announces full control over Tel Rifaat town in Aleppo, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷³⁷ Etana, Syria Update #9: 10 December 2024, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷³⁸ SOHR, Military escalation | "SDF" advances and takes control over four villages in Manbij as Turkish-backed factions shell Kobani villages, 23 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷³⁹ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency, Special Edition, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁰ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), p. 5; SOHR, Amid Turkish artillery fire and clashes on different frontlines | SDF foil attack and shoot down kamikaze drone in Aleppo countryside, 23 February 2025, [url](#); Guardian (The), 'We are part of Syria': Kurdish-led SDF fights for place in post-Assad future, 21 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic

Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (As of 12 February 2025), 12 February 2025, [url](#), p. 2; ISW and CTP, Iran

Update, January 6, 2025, 6 January 2025, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁴¹ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, January 7, 2025, 7 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁴² ISW and CTP, Iran Update, January 6, 2025, 6 January 2025, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁴³ Coşkun, A., Türkiye Has a Wish List in Syria. It Should Tread Lightly. [Commentary], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁴ Ciddi, S., Turkey Is Preparing to Invade Syria, Then Israel?, FDD, 8 January 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #10: 12 December, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁵ Ciddi, S., Turkey Is Preparing to Invade Syria, Then Israel?, FDD, 8 January 2025, [url](#)



patrols⁷⁴⁶ and bringing in military equipment to reinforce its bases.⁷⁴⁷ For more information on the reinforcement of coalition bases in the region, see section [3.1.4](#) of this report.

While the conflict between the SDF and the SNA remained central in northeastern Syria,⁷⁴⁸ SDF has been facing dissent from some Arab tribal factions in Deir E-Zor⁷⁴⁹ and these long-standing conflicts also continued during the reference period.⁷⁵⁰ Armed men linked to Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hafel,⁷⁵¹ a tribal leader known for mobilising tribes in Deir Ez-Zor against the SDF,⁷⁵² attacked security headquarters and patrolling SDF troops. In January 2025, several civilians were injured as the SDF shot at young men in the aftermath of a series of such attacks,⁷⁵³ while dozens of suspected Assad loyalists, National Defence Forces (NDF) militiamen and Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hafel supporters were arrested in a sweeping security campaign in the Deir Ez-Zor countryside.⁷⁵⁴

SDF-controlled areas witnessed civilians being killed or injured in a variety of incidents, including assassinations,⁷⁵⁵ tribal⁷⁵⁶ and family disputes,⁷⁵⁷ multiple attacks by Turkish forces,⁷⁵⁸ SDF members shooting at protesters,⁷⁵⁹ and (alleged) ISIL attacks.⁷⁶⁰ Dozens of civilians were killed or injured in multiple Turkish drone strikes allegedly launched against civilian targets in the vicinity of the Tishreen Dam (eastern Aleppo).⁷⁶¹

⁷⁴⁶ SOHR, Deir Ezzor | US patrol roams in villages on eastern countryside, 23 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁷ SOHR, Boosting military bases | Three cargo planes lands in Coalition base in Al-Shaddadi, 16 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New reinforcements | “International Coalition” Forces bring military materials to Deir Ezzor and bases in Al-Hasakah, 22 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁸ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁹ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress October 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024, 19 February 2025, [url](#), p. 26

⁷⁵⁰ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁵¹ SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Civilians injured in gunfire by SDF near Suwaydan crossing in eastern countryside, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁵² Al-Modon, Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hafel's Recent Appearance in Damascus Sparks Speculation About Tribal Movement's Ties to the Syrian Regime, The Syrian Observer, 13 February 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁵³ SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Civilians injured in gunfire by SDF near Suwaydan crossing in eastern countryside, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁴ SOHR, Large-scale security campaign | Tens of regime affiliates and gunmen affiliate with “Al-Hafal” arrested in Deir Ezzor countryside, 23 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁵ SOHR, Ongoing security chaos | Civilian killed in eastern Deir Ezzor, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁶ SOHR, Including two women | Tribal infighting erupt in western Al-Raqqah, leaving three persons dead, 20 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁷ SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Civilian killed in family disputes and clashes in SDF-held areas, 21 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Deir Ezzor | Civilian killed in infighting between cousins in eastern countryside, 4 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁸ See, for example: SOHR, Ongoing military escalation | Turkish drone attacks village in Al-Qamishly countryside, 20 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Military escalation | Three children injured and a civilian convoy attacked, 17 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New attack | Three civilians killed and injured by Turkish drone in Al-Hasakah, 12 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Military escalation | Woman and her daughter killed under direct shelling on houses of civilians in Ain Al-Arab (Kobani), 22 December 2024, [url](#); SOHR, Dramatic escalation | 52 people killed in attacks by Turkish drones in NE Syria since early December, 13 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁹ Etana, Syria Update #10: 12 December, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁰ SOHR, SDF-held areas in November 2024 | 43 fatalities in acts of violence...nearly ten infightings and murder crimes...deteriorating security situation, 4 December 2024, [url](#); NPA, Unknown gunmen kill 2 civilians in Deir ez-Zor, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁶¹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#); SOHR, New attack | Nearly 25 civilians injured and killed under Turkish shelling near Teshrin Dam, 22 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Three civilians die affected by their injuries, bringing the number of deaths due to Turkish airstrikes on



ISIL cells conducted attacks on SDF positions and military patrols in northeastern Syria, causing a number of casualties among SDF troops.⁷⁶² SOHR recorded 27 ISIL operations in November 2024 (including 22 in Deir Ez-Zor and 3 in Hasaka) and a further 13 ISIL operations during the first three weeks of January 2025 in the SDF-controlled areas (10 in Deir Ez-Zor and 3 in Hasaka). ISIL attacks resulted in a number of deaths or injuries among civilians⁷⁶³ and members of Kurdish security forces.⁷⁶⁴ In early February 2025, following large-scale aerial operations against ISIL across Syria in December 2024, the US-led coalition and the SDF launched a new campaign against the group in southern areas of Hasaka, killing two ISIL operatives.⁷⁶⁵

According to ACLED data, the areas under the control of SDF/disputed most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reference period were Deir Ez-Zor (258 incidents) and Hasaka districts (229 incidents), amounting to around 56 % and 57 % of all security incidents recorded in Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorate, respectively.⁷⁶⁶

In March 2025, SDF leaders signed an agreement to integrate their armed forces and civilian institutions into the new Syrian government. The deal mandates a full cessation of hostilities and requires the SDF to relinquish control of border posts, the airport, and key oil and gas fields.⁷⁶⁷

4.4. Impact of the Israel-Hamas war on the security in Syria

Immediately following the fall of the Assad government, Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes across Syria,⁷⁶⁸ aimed at preventing the new HTS-led authorities from accessing the former Assad government's arsenal.⁷⁶⁹ This campaign came after Israel targeted multiple airstrikes on

Teshreen dam to six, including woman, 19 January 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), Five killed in fighting around Syria's Tishreen dam as Germany calls for Russian withdrawal, 17 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Five civilians killed and nearly 40 others injured in Turkish airstrikes near Teshreen dam, 16 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Military escalation | Five civilians including a woman killed in Turkish airstrike targeting public convoy near Teshrin Dam, 8 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁶² Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, IED attack | ISIS members attack military vehicle of Self-Defence in Deir Ezzor countryside, 2 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁶³ SOHR, ISIS in November 2024 | Ongoing escalation with 27 attacks in SDF-controlled areas and nearly 20 combatants killed in attacks in Syrian desert, 29 November 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁴ Etana, Syria Update #19: 22 February 2025, 20 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New attack | ISIS members open fire on SDF military vehicle in Deir Ezzor countryside, injuring several fighters, 12 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, New attack | Two members of "Al-Asayish" injures by ISIS cells in Al-Hasakah, 22 December 2024, [url](#); SOHR, Al-Raqqah | Member of "Al-Asayish" killed and others injured in an attack by ISIS cells on checkpoint of Internal Security Forces, 17 December 2024, [url](#); SOHR, New attack | ISIS cells kill member of "SDF" in Deir Ezzor, 17 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁶⁶ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁷⁶⁷ BBC News, Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces, 11 March 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁸ Etana, Syria Update #10: 12 December, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁹ ACLED, Syria: Israeli airstrikes reach an all-time high after Assad regime falls, 19 December 2024, [url](#)



sites of Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias in November 2024⁷⁷⁰ that according to SOHR resulted in the deaths of 16 civilians.⁷⁷¹

The December 2024 airstrikes mainly targeted airbases linked to the former Assad forces and their contents, including aircraft, military signal stations and radar systems, scientific research facilities and weapons and ammunitions warehouses. Between the fall of Assad and 18 December 2024, SOHR documented 498 airstrikes launched by Israeli aircraft in various governorates (mostly affecting Damascus, Dar'a, Latakia, and Rural Damascus).⁷⁷² These airstrikes resulted in the destruction of the country's military stocks and defence infrastructure, as well as most of its missile systems and tanks.⁷⁷³ The Israeli armed forces were quoted as saying that during the very first wave of bombardments that occurred within a 48-hour timespan and hit about 320 targets, some 80 % of the Syria's military capabilities had been destroyed,⁷⁷⁴ although this figure has not been verified independently.⁷⁷⁵ The aerial campaign reportedly resulted in dozens of deaths.⁷⁷⁶

Responding to the demise of Assad's rule, Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that his country no longer recognised the Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement of 1974.⁷⁷⁷ Israel's armed forces subsequently occupied the UN-patrolled⁷⁷⁸ demilitarised zone⁷⁷⁹ between the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and Syrian-controlled areas of Quneitra governorate.⁷⁸⁰ Moreover, they further entered Syrian territory beyond the demilitarised zone⁷⁸¹ (mainly into Quneitra,⁷⁸² but also into Dar'a), seizing villages⁷⁸³ and strategic positions.⁷⁸⁴

As of 19 December 2024, ACLED noted that Israeli forces were controlling eight villages in the governorates of Quneitra, Dar'a, and Rural Damascus.⁷⁸⁵ They warned villagers to 'stay home',⁷⁸⁶ created outposts and raided some homes claiming to search for weapons and

⁷⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#); SOHR, Iran's presence in Syria in November 2024 | Nearly 180 fatalities in aerial and ground attacks...evacuation of positions, withdrawals and redeployments in different positions across Syria, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷¹ SOHR, Iran's presence in Syria in November 2024 | Nearly 180 fatalities in aerial and ground attacks...evacuation of positions, withdrawals and redeployments in different positions across Syria, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷² SOHR, Since fall of Al-Assad's regime | Nearly 500 Israeli airstrikes destroy the remaining weapons of army of future Syria, 18 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷³ Etana, Syria Update #10: 12 December, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁴ Le Monde, Syrian military's arsenal destroyed by Israeli bombardments, 16 December 2024, [url](#); BBC News, Syria in maps: Who controls the country now Assad has gone?, 13 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁵ BBC News, Syria in maps: Who controls the country now Assad has gone?, 13 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ Al Jazeera, Israel has declared war on the promise of a strong, democratic Syria, 15 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁷ Etana, Syria Update #9: 10 December 2024, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁸ New Arab (The), Syrians protest Israeli occupation in southwestern Quneitra governorate, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁹ Etana, Syria Update #11: 17 December, 17 December 2024, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁸⁰ Etana, Syria Update #11: 17 December, 17 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸¹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁸² Badi, E., and Al-Jabassini, A., Turkey's Syria and Libya strategies add up to a Mediterranean power play, Atlantic Council, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁸³ AA, Occupying Israeli forces open fire on Syrians protesting seizure of 2 villages in Daraa province, 21 December 2024, [url](#)

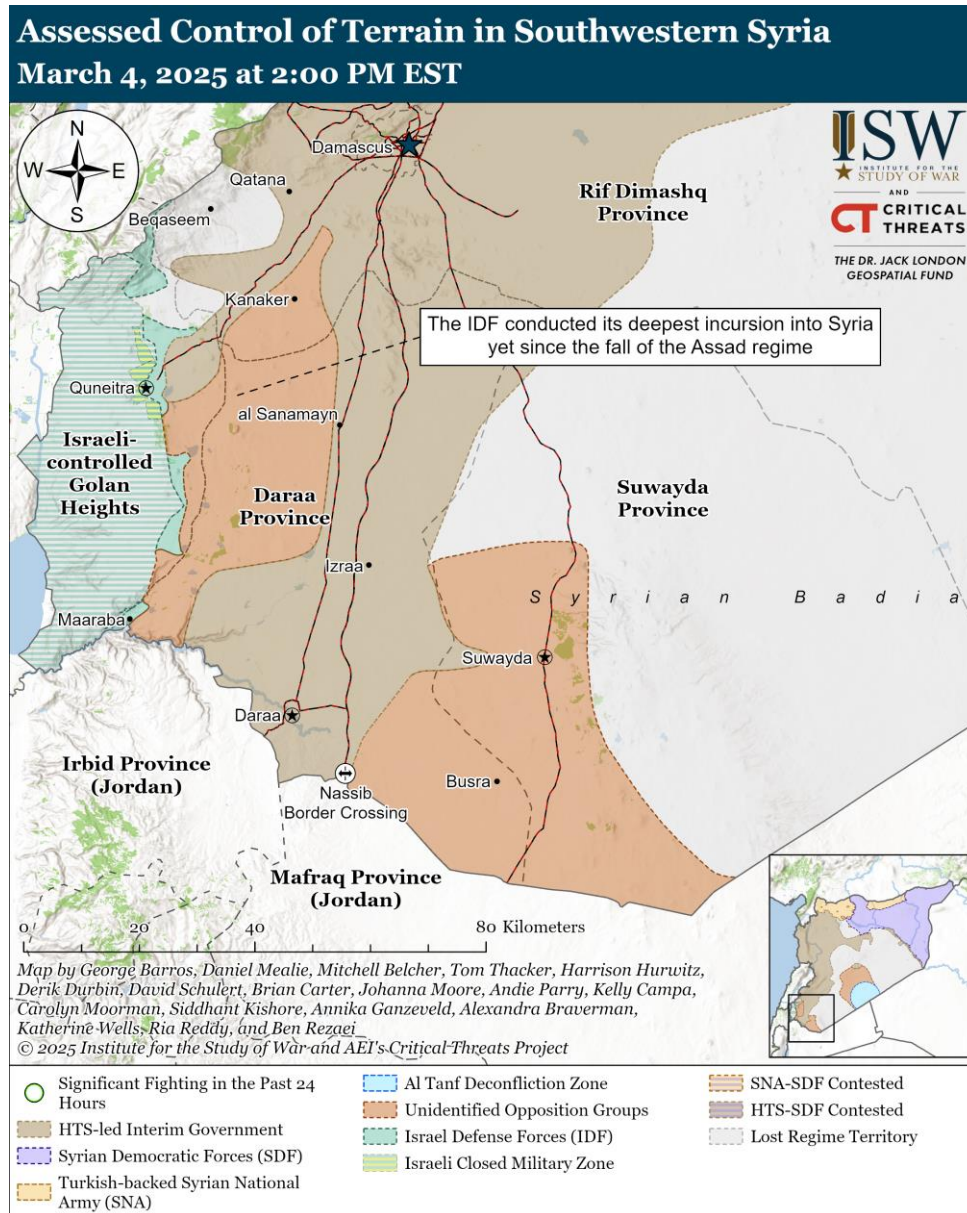
⁷⁸⁴ International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁵ ACLED, Syria: Israeli airstrikes reach an all-time high after Assad regime falls, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁶ Al Jazeera, Israel grabs land in Syria's Golan Heights, warns villagers to stay home, 8 December 2024, [url](#)



Hezbollah members.⁷⁸⁷ Between 19 December 2024 and 1 February 2025, satellite imagery showed that Israel was constructing six military sites in the buffer zone and another site outside it within Syrian territory.⁷⁸⁸



Map 5: Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria, © Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project, 4 March 2025⁷⁸⁹

As Al Jazeera reported, Israeli forces expelled hundreds of residents from their villages and towns.⁷⁹⁰ Local residents were quoted as saying that Israeli forces had demolished homes⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁷ New Arab (The), Israeli forces raid Syrian city in Quneitra and Daraa amid further incursions, 22 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, Satellite images show Israel building military bases in Syria buffer zone, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁹ ISW and CT, Iran Update, 4 March 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁰ Al Jazeera, Israel has declared war on the promise of a strong, democratic Syria, 15 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁹¹ New Arab (The), Syrians protest Israeli occupation in southwestern Quneitra governorate, 27 January 2025, [url](#)



and there were reports of some farmers being prevented from going to their fields.⁷⁹² On at least two occasions, Israeli soldiers reportedly opened fire on protesters,⁷⁹³ including during a 20 December 2024 protest in the village of Maariya (Dar'a governorate) decrying Israeli military activities in the area, when Israeli forces were reported to have shot and injured a Syrian protester.⁷⁹⁴

Meanwhile, Israeli forces continued to launch air strikes on former SAA sites in southern Syria,⁷⁹⁵ near Damascus city,⁷⁹⁶ and on the coast.⁷⁹⁷ While, according to sources, Israel was initially avoiding attacks on HTS targets,⁷⁹⁸ at least one Israeli drone attack in mid-January 2025 killed two HTS fighters as it targeted a convoy of the new transitional administration in Quneitra⁷⁹⁹ that had been sent de-escalate local clashes in a village.⁸⁰⁰ Further Israeli airstrikes were reported in late February and early March on military facilities and other targets in Homs, Tartous, Latakia, and Rural Damascus governorates. Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers continued near-daily operations in Quneitra and southwest Dar'a, conducting patrols, raiding farms, and blocking local routes.⁸⁰¹

Syrian authorities have reportedly refrained from military retaliation to Israeli attacks.⁸⁰² According to reports, there have been 'no major clashes' between Israeli forces and Syria's new security forces as of early March 2025.⁸⁰³

4.5. Impact of violence on the civilian population

4.5.1. Security incidents

According to ACLED data, 3 941 security incidents occurred in Syria between 1 November 2024 and 28 February 2025: 1 035 of these were coded as battles, 2 048 as explosions/remote violence, and 858 as violence against civilians. Most security incidents recorded by ACLED during this period took place in the governorates of Aleppo (1 254), Deir Ez-Zor (463), Hasaka (407), Raqqqa (375), and Idlib (325). The lowest security incidents figures

⁷⁹² New Arab (The), Syrians protest Israeli occupation in southwestern Quneitra governorate, 27 January 2025, [url](#); AP, Syrian villagers near the Golan Heights say Israeli forces are banning them from their fields, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁹³ New Arab (The), Syrians protest Israeli occupation in southwestern Quneitra governorate, 27 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁴ AFP, Israel army says troops shot Syrian protester in leg, 20 December 2024; Al Jazeera, Israeli forces fire at Syrian protesters in Deraa, wounding one, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁵ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Guardian (The), Israel strikes targets in southern Syria after demanding demilitarization, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁶ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, February 26, 2025, 26 February 2025, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Guardian (The), Israel strikes targets in southern Syria after demanding demilitarization, 26 February 2025, [url](#); New York Times (The), Talks on Syria's Future Fall Short of Promises, Participants Say, 26 February 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁷ New York Times (The), Israel Strikes Syria Again as Tensions Rise, 4 March 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel launches air attacks near Syria's Tartous, 3 March 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁸ MEE, Turkey doesn't seek conflict with Israel in Syria. Here's why, 11 January 2025, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria: November 2024 – February 2025, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, Promoting a Stable, Peaceful Transition in Syria, 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁰¹ Etana Syria, Syria Update #21, 8 March 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁰² Etana Syria, Syria Update #21, 8 March 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁰³ AP, Israel's military is told to prepare to defend a Druze community outside Syria's capital, 1 March 2025, [url](#)



were recorded in Tartous (40), Damascus (42), Quneitra (57), Sweida (58) and Latakia (103) governorates.⁸⁰⁴

Idlib governorate witnessed a peak of 257 security incidents in November 2024 before numbers dramatically declined over the following months (38 in December, 17 in January and 13 in February). In Aleppo governorate, incidents similarly peaked in November 2024 (420 incidents) before numbers declined to around 300 in December and January, followed by a further decline. In Hasaka and Raqqa, security incidents rose to a peak in January (168 and 125 incidents, respectively) before declining in February.⁸⁰⁵

Between the immediate aftermath of the fall of Assad (9 December 2024) and 28 February 2025, the number of security incidents recorded by ACLED has increased significantly in some governorates such as Rural Damascus (89 % of all security incidents recorded during the reference period), Tartous (86 %), Latakia (85 %), Hasaka (81 %), Raqqa (79 %) and Homs (61 %). Conversely, there has been a significant decrease observed in the governorates of Idlib (13 % of all security incidents recorded during the reference period) and Hama (16 %).⁸⁰⁶

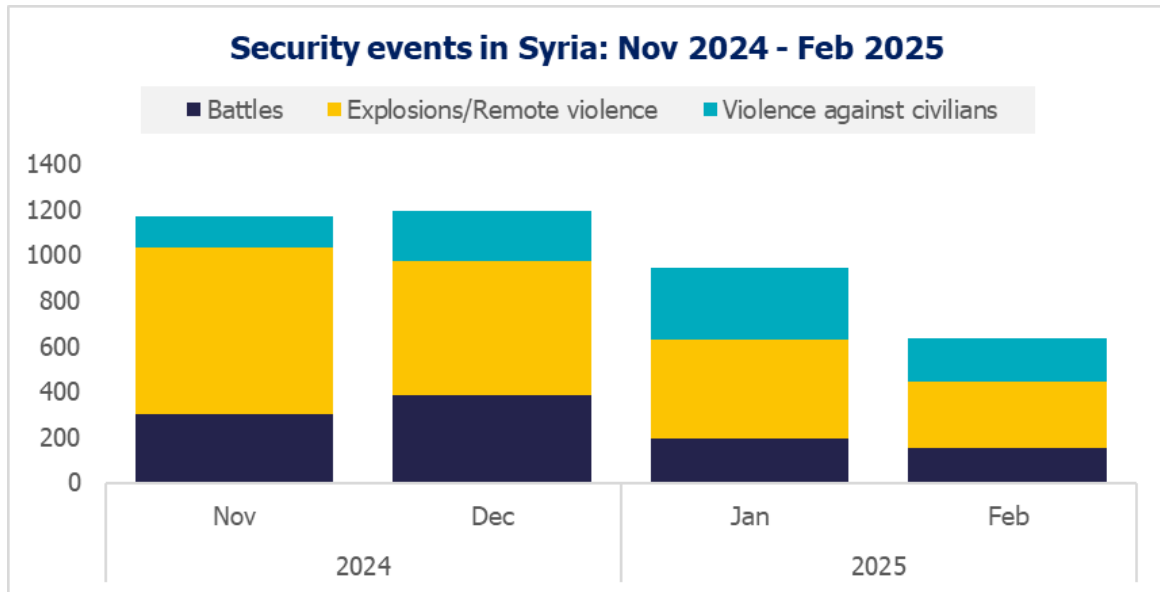


Figure 1. Evolution of ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 November 2024 and 28 February 2025⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁸⁰⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁸⁰⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁸⁰⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

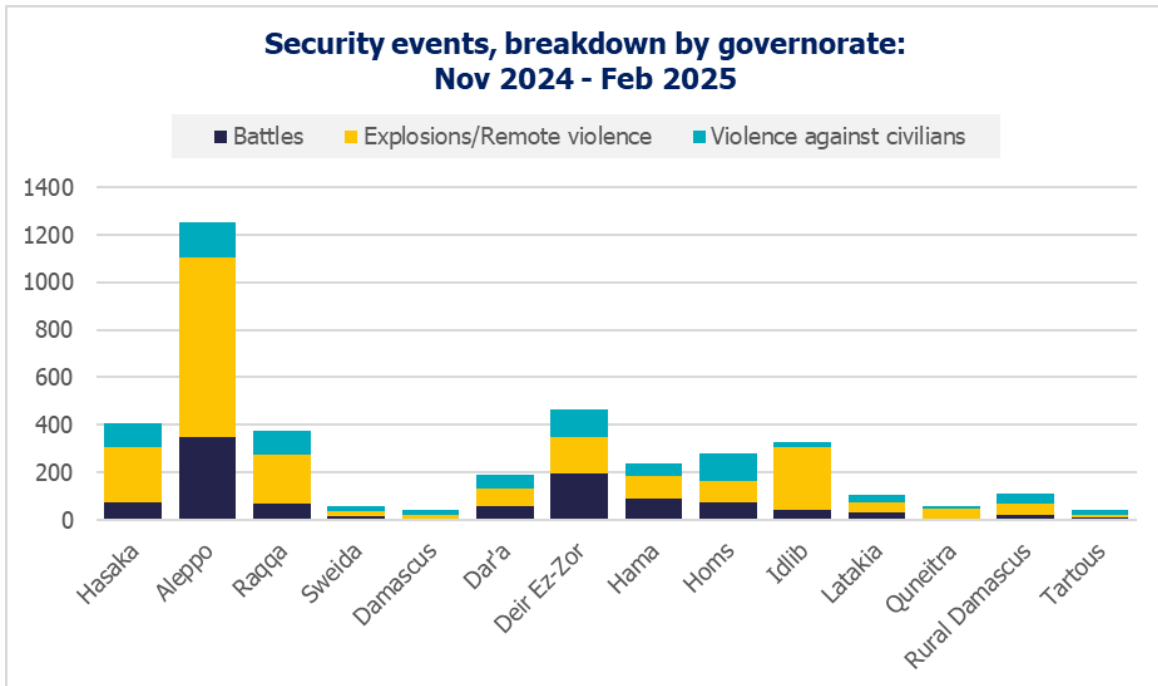


Figure 2. ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ on governorate level between 1 November 2024 and 28 February 2025⁸⁰⁸

A significant concentration of security incidents during the reference period was observed in specific districts within some governorates. In Aleppo governorate, approximately 73 % of recorded incidents occurred in Jebel Saman, Ain Al Arab/Kobane, and Menbij districts. In Hasaka governorate, 83 % of security incidents were concentrated in Hasaka and Ras Al Ain districts. Around 56 % of incidents in Deir Ez-Zor governorate took place in Deir Ez-Zor district, while Tall Abyad in Raqqa governorate accounted for 51 % of recorded incidents. Additionally, 41 % of security incidents in Hama governorate occurred in Hama district, and 40 % of security incidents in Homs governorate were reported in Homs district.⁸⁰⁹

UCDP recorded 949 security events leading to fatalities during the reference period. The highest number of events was recorded in the governorates of Aleppo (241), Homs (131), Hama (109) and Deir Ez-Zor (93). The lowest number of security events were recorded in Quneitra (5), Damascus (18) and Tartous (19) governorates. For 21 of the events recorded by UCDP the exact location within a governorate was not specified. A high number of security events leading to fatalities recorded by UCDP (39 % of all security incidents) were events in which the parties responsible could not be identified.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁸⁰⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ EUAA analysis based on UCDP data. UCDP, data covering from 1 November 2024 to 28 February 2025 provided by courtesy of UCDP in an email, 7 March 2025.

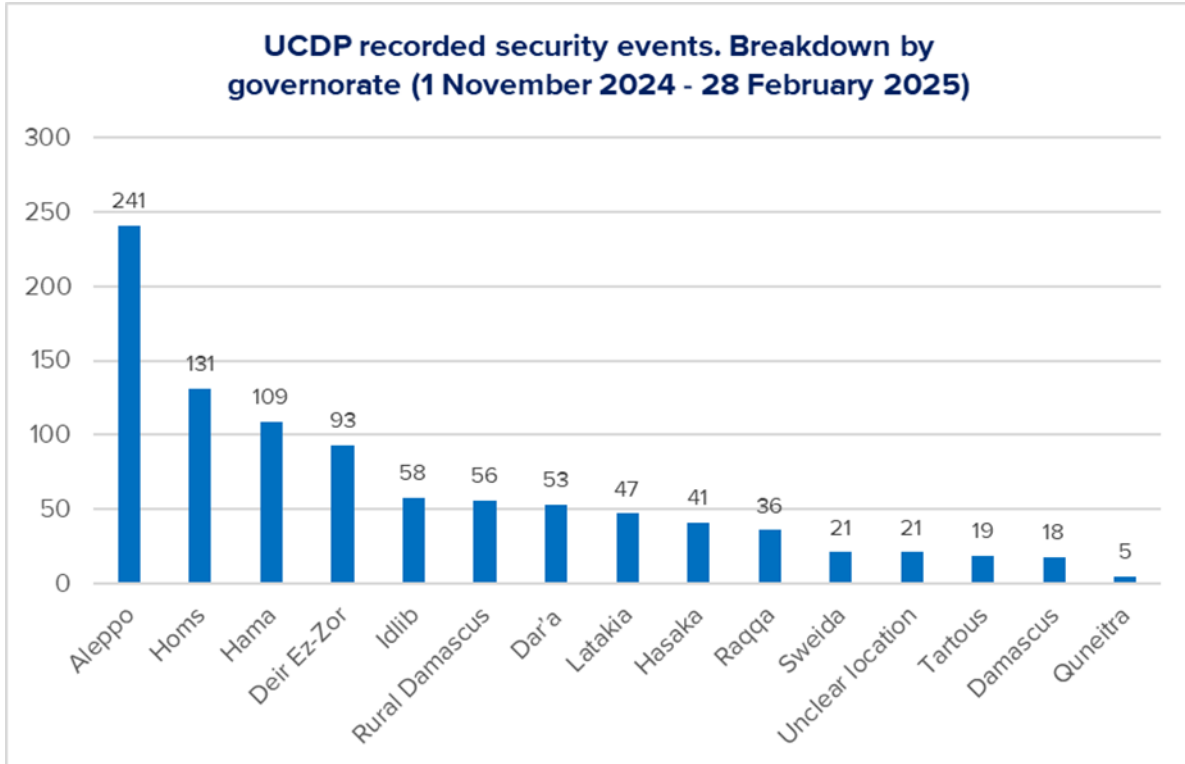


Figure 3. UCDP security events leading to fatalities at governorate level between 1 November 2024 and 28 February 2025⁸¹¹

4.5.2. Tactics and weapons used

During the course of the large-scale military offensive (“Operation Deterrence of Aggression”) that was launched in November 2024 by HTS⁸¹² and several HTS-led armed opposition groups and was supported by Türkiye-backed factions,⁸¹³ opposition forces carried out attacks using medium and heavy weaponry,⁸¹⁴ as well as drones developed by the HTS’s own drone unit.⁸¹⁵ Multiple ground-based strikes⁸¹⁶ by HTS left four civilians dead in Aleppo city.⁸¹⁷

On the other hand, forces of the Assad government and affiliated militia carried out large-scale ground-based rocket and artillery strikes and airstrikes,⁸¹⁸ while Russian forces resumed airstrikes, causing dozens of civilian deaths, including in Idlib city and western rural Aleppo’s Al-Atareb and Darat Izza towns.⁸¹⁹ Assad’s forces, known for their random use of drones

⁸¹¹ EUAA analysis based on UCDP data. UCDP, data covering from 1 November 2024 to 28 February 2025 provided by courtesy of UCDP in an email, 7 March 2025.

⁸¹² SOHR, “Putin-Erdogan” area collapses in November 2024 | 351 fatalities in acts of violence and over 200 airstrikes by fighter jets, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹³ Al Jazeera, What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?, 8 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁴ Al Jazeera, Dozens killed as armed groups attack Syrian military in northern Aleppo, 28 November 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁵ Guardian (The), Syrian rebels reveal year-long plot that brought down Assad regime, 13 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁶ OHCHR, Syria: Tragic escalation in hostilities, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁷ OHCHR, Syria: Tragic escalation in hostilities, 3 December 2024, [url](#); SOHR, “Putin-Erdogan” area collapses in November 2024 | 351 fatalities in acts of violence and over 200 airstrikes by fighter jets, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁸ SOHR, “Putin-Erdogan” area collapses in November 2024 | 351 fatalities in acts of violence and over 200 airstrikes by fighter jets, 1 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁹ SOHR, “Putin-Erdogan” area collapses in November 2024 | 351 fatalities in acts of violence and over 200 airstrikes by fighter jets, 1 December 2024, [url](#)



mainly targeting civilians,⁸²⁰ had already escalated their suicide drone attacks against opposition-held areas in southern Idlib and western Aleppo in November 2024.⁸²¹ According to UN figures, multiple aerial strikes by pro-Assad forces in Idlib city killed 22 civilians on 1 December 2024 as they struck a local market and five of the city's residential areas.⁸²² According to SOHR, Iran-backed militias in Syria and Iraq conducted seven attacks on three bases of the US-led Global Coalition on Syrian territory in November 2024 (Koniko gas field, Al-Tanf garrison, and Al-Shaddadi).⁸²³ For more information, see section [4.1](#) of this report.

Meanwhile, airstrikes conducted by the US-led Global coalition and Israeli forces the same month resulted in the deaths of dozens of Iran-backed militiamen, while also killing some Lebanese Hezbollah fighters and unidentified individuals. Attacks targeting Iran-backed militias in Deir Ez-Zor in November 2024 further involved unidentified aircraft and drone usage. According to SOHR, airstrikes launched by Israeli forces in November 2024 left 16 civilians dead.⁸²⁴ For more information, see sections [3.1.4.](#), [3.1.5.](#), [4.3.](#) and [4.4](#) of this report.

Following the ouster of Assad in December 2024, HTS operations targeting loyalists of the former government saw the deployment of tanks, attack helicopters,⁸²⁵ drones⁸²⁶ and long-range rockets⁸²⁷ and took the form of raids⁸²⁸ and combing operations. Meanwhile, the cities on the coast witnessed assaults and targeted attacks by remnants of the former Assad government.⁸²⁹ Likely former pro-Assad gangs (*shabiha*) were suspected of carrying out ambushes against HTS-led security forces.⁸³⁰ Attacks targeting the HTS/MOA involved the use of explosives⁸³¹ and small firearms.⁸³² Unknown armed men reportedly dressed in military fatigues and impersonating security forces in one instance committed over a dozen killings in Fahl (Homs) in retaliation for the new transitional administration's violent crackdown on *shabiha*.⁸³³ For more information, see section [4.1](#) of this report.

Turkish-backed SNA factions and SDF units continued to engage in armed confrontations and attacks using remote violence.⁸³⁴ The Turkish armed forces launched multiple air and drone attacks against SDF troops in the countryside of Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasaka, including in eastern rural Aleppo's Tishreen Dam area. These aerial attacks were carried out alongside

⁸²⁰ Enab Baladi, Increasing interest in drones in northern Syria, 26 November 2024, [url](#)

⁸²¹ Lister, C., Syria Weekly: Regime suicide drone use in NW Syria: Nov 3-9, 2024, 11 November 2024, [url](#)

⁸²² OHCHR, Syria: Tragic escalation in hostilities, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸²³ SOHR, Iran's presence in Syria in November 2024 | Nearly 180 fatalities in aerial and ground attacks...evacuation of positions, withdrawals and redeployments in different positions across Syria, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸²⁴ SOHR, Iran's presence in Syria in November 2024 | Nearly 180 fatalities in aerial and ground attacks...evacuation of positions, withdrawals and redeployments in different positions across Syria, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸²⁵ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, January 14, 2025, 14 January 2025, [url](#), p. 1

⁸²⁶ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, January 14, 2025, 14 January 2025, [url](#), p. 1; ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 27, 2024, 27 December 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁸²⁷ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 27, 2024, 27 December 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁸²⁸ Enab Baladi, How effective are security campaigns against remnants of Assad's regime?, 22 January 2025, [url](#)

⁸²⁹ Enab Baladi, Syria: Ongoing security campaigns against former regime elements, 30 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸³⁰ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁸³¹ Al Jazeera, مقتل قيادي عسكري باشنباكات مع "فلول النظام" باللاذقية [Military leader killed in clashes with "regime remnants" in Latakia], 7 January 2025, [url](#)

⁸³² ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 21, 2024, 21 December 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁸³³ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁸³⁴ ACLED, Syria: Which groups have been fighting each other and where?, 11 December 2024, [url](#)



artillery attacks on SDF positions by ground-based SNA fighters.⁸³⁵ Turkish artillery shelling,⁸³⁶ drone strikes⁸³⁷ and airstrikes⁸³⁸ reportedly left dozens of civilians dead,⁸³⁹ including in attacks targeting protesters who had gathered near the Tishreen Dam. As part of the ongoing skirmishes in the Tishreen Dam area, the SDF in turn carried out ambushes,⁸⁴⁰ artillery strikes⁸⁴¹ and drone strikes.⁸⁴² There were reports of dozens of casualties both among the SNA⁸⁴³ and Kurdish forces.⁸⁴⁴ The Manbij area further witnessed a series of unclaimed car bombings,⁸⁴⁵ which in total left over a dozen civilians dead.⁸⁴⁶ For more information, see sections [4.2](#) and [4.3](#) of this report.

Following the fall of Assad, Israeli airstrikes saw a significant escalation, reaching nearly 500 attacks by 18 December 2024, according to SOHR records. Launched across multiple governorates,⁸⁴⁷ these strikes targeted military assets⁸⁴⁸ and caused a number of civilian deaths.⁸⁴⁹ After Assad's fall, Israel deployed tanks and bulldozers in its ground incursions into parts of Quneitra and Dar'a, while Israeli airstrikes targeted an HTS-led convoy, killing a town mayor.⁸⁵⁰ Meanwhile, US airstrikes on 8 December 2024 hit over 75 ISIL targets⁸⁵¹ and aerial

⁸³⁵ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁸³⁶ SOHR, Military escalation | Ten civilians killed under Turkish ground shelling on Manbij, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸³⁷ Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Turkey Escalates Drone Operations in Rojava, Targets Critical Infrastructure, 11 January 2025, [url](#)

⁸³⁸ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#)

⁸³⁹ Etana, Syria Update #16: 3 February, 1 February 2025, [url](#); Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Turkey Escalates Drone Operations in Rojava, Targets Critical Infrastructure, 11 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Military escalation | Ten civilians killed under Turkish ground shelling on Manbij, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁰ Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁴¹ ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 21, 2024, 21 December 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁴² Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 24, 2024, 24 December 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁴³ Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Leaving 11 militiamen dead and wounded | Clashes erupt between SDF and "National Army" factions in Manbij and frontline of Teshreen dam, 30 December 2024, [url](#); NPA, [قسد تعلن مقتل 17 مسلحاً موالياً لتركيا في محيط سد تشرين](#) [SDF announces the killing of 17 pro-Turkish militants in the vicinity of Tishreen Dam], 28 December 2024, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 24, 2024, 24 December 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁴⁴ SOHR, Leaving 11 militiamen dead and wounded | Clashes erupt between SDF and "National Army" factions in Manbij and frontline of Teshreen dam, 30 December 2024, [url](#); ISW and CTP, Iran Update, December 24, 2024, 24 December 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁴⁵ UN News, Deadly attacks in eastern Aleppo highlight Syria's vulnerability, 4 February 2025, [url](#); MEE, Syria: Manbij car bomb attack suspends SDF-Damascus talks, 4 February 2025, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁴⁶ MEE, Syria: Manbij car bomb attack suspends SDF-Damascus talks, 4 February 2025, [url](#); DW, Syria car bomb explosion kills at least 20, 3 February 2025, [url](#); UN News, Deadly attacks in eastern Aleppo highlight Syria's vulnerability, 4 February 2025, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁴⁷ SOHR, Since fall of Al-Assad's regime | Nearly 500 Israeli airstrikes destroy the remaining weapons of army of future Syria, 18 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁸ SOHR, Since fall of Al-Assad's regime | Nearly 500 Israeli airstrikes destroy the remaining weapons of army of future Syria, 18 December 2024, [url](#); UN News, Syria: UN chief calls for urgent de-escalation by Israeli forces, withdrawal from Golan buffer zone, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁹ AP, Syria's de facto leader says it could take up to 4 years to hold elections, 29 December 2024, [url](#); SOHR, Since fall of Al-Assad's regime | Nearly 500 Israeli airstrikes destroy the remaining weapons of army of future Syria, 18 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁰ Etana, Syria Update #15: 28 January, 24 January 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁵¹ USCENTCOM, U.S. Central Command conducts dozens of airstrikes to eliminate ISIS camps in central Syria, 8 December 2024, [url](#)



strikes by the Global Coalition continued into early 2025.⁸⁵² For more information on Israeli operations during the reference period, see section [4.4](#) of this report.

At communal level, exchanges of gunfire were reported between tribal groups in Al-Bukamal city (early November 2024), resulting in injuries among several tribesmen. Further armed clashes were reported between Lebanese Hezbollah/Lebanese tribesmen and local villagers in the countryside of Al-Qusayr city⁸⁵³ in southwestern Homs,⁸⁵⁴ resulting in several deaths among villagers.⁸⁵⁵

4.5.3. Civilian fatalities

Between November 2024 and February 2025, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) recorded a total of 1 032 civilian fatalities (including 165 children and 110 women). 71 civilians were killed in November 2024, followed by 503 in December 2024, 236 in January 2025, and 222 in February 2025. During this four-month period, most civilian fatalities were recorded in Aleppo (374), Hama (150) and Idlib (132).⁸⁵⁶

The number of civilian fatalities recorded by the SNHR during this four-month period surpassed the total number recorded during the first ten months of 2024 (690 deaths) and amounted to 395 % of the number of civilian deaths recorded during the four-month period immediately preceding the reference period of this report (261 fatalities). The main parties responsible were unidentified parties, including landmines of unidentified sources and gunfire/bombings/killings by unidentified parties (causing 543 civilian fatalities between November 2024 and February 2025), (former) Assad government forces (causing 243 civilian fatalities between November 2024 and January 2025, including 223 in December), the SDF (causing 145 fatalities between November 2024 and February 2025, including 108 in December), and the SNA (causing 15 fatalities across the four-month period).⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵² SOHR, Second attack in 2025 | Strikes by Coalition drone leave three people dead and wounded in Idlib countryside, 15 January 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁵³ SOHR, Iran's presence in Syria in November 2024 | Nearly 180 fatalities in aerial and ground attacks...evacuation of positions, withdrawals and redeployments in different positions across Syria, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁴ SOHR, Mostly civilians | 12 killed and nine injured by Israeli airstrikes on Al-Qaseer near borders between Syria and Lebanon, 1 November 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁵ SOHR, Iran's presence in Syria in November 2024 | Nearly 180 fatalities in aerial and ground attacks...evacuation of positions, withdrawals and redeployments in different positions across Syria, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁶ SNHR, 222 Civilian Deaths, Including 17 Children and 37 Women, as well as Nine Deaths due to Torture, Recorded in February 2025 in Syria, 1 March 2025, [url](#), pp. 8-9; SNHR, 236 Civilian Deaths, Including 32 Children and 18 Women, as well as One Woman's Death due to Torture, Documented in Syria in January 2025, 21 Civilians Were Killed by SDF, 1 February 2025, [url](#), pp. 6-7; SNHR, 1,264 Civilian Deaths, Including 242 Children and 118 Women, as well as 86 Deaths due to Torture, Documented in Syria in 2024, 2 January 2025, [url](#), pp. 8-9; SNHR, 71 Civilian Deaths, Documented in Syria in November 2024, Including of 20 Children and Six Women, With Three Dying due to Torture, 1 December 2024, [url](#), pp. 6-7

⁸⁵⁷ EUAA analysis based on: SNHR, 222 Civilian Deaths, Including 17 Children and 37 Women, as well as Nine Deaths due to Torture, Recorded in February 2025 in Syria, 1 March 2025, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 236 Civilian Deaths, Including 32 Children and 18 Women, as well as One Woman's Death due to Torture, Documented in Syria in January 2025, 21 Civilians Were Killed by SDF, 1 February 2025, [url](#), p. 6; SNHR, 1,264 Civilian Deaths, Including 242 Children and 118 Women, as well as 86 Deaths due to Torture, Documented in Syria in 2024, 2 January 2025, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 71 Civilian Deaths, Documented in Syria in November 2024, Including of 20 Children and Six Women, With Three Dying due to Torture, 1 December 2024, [url](#), p. 6



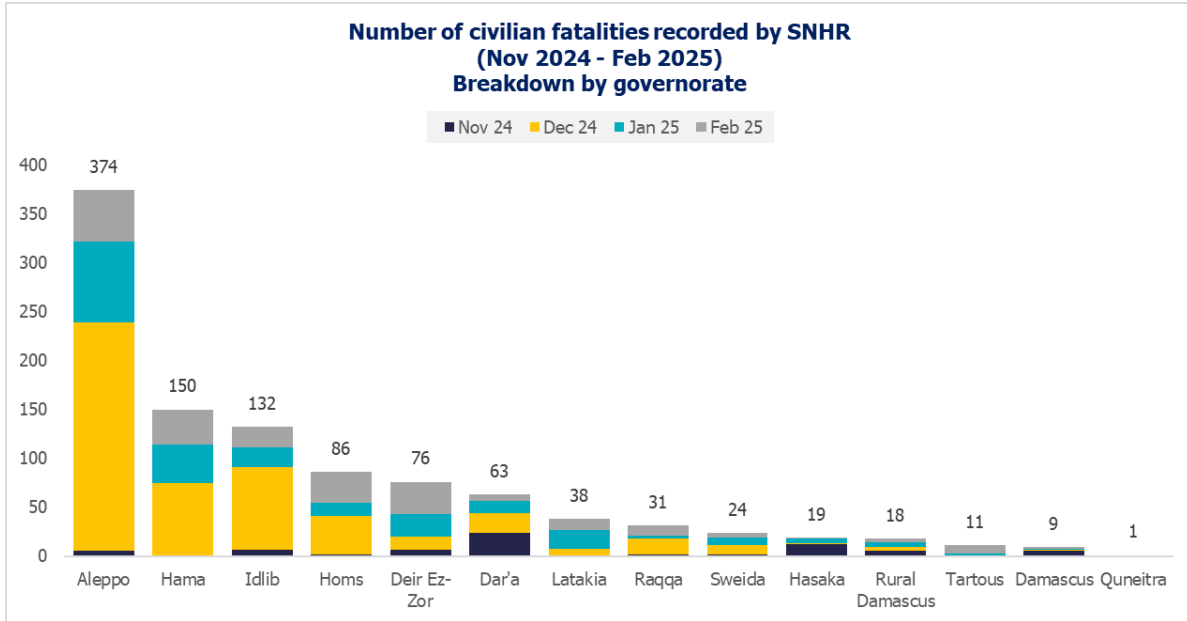


Figure 4. Number of civilian fatalities recorded by SNHR (November 2024-February 2025). Breakdown by governorate⁸⁵⁸

For the same period, UCDP recorded 949 security events leading to 3 350 fatalities in Syria, out of which 1 237 were civilian fatalities. The largest number of civilian fatalities were recorded in Homs (269), Aleppo (256), and Hama governorates (200). The lowest numbers of security events were recorded in Quneitra (5), Tartous (18), and Damascus (19) governorates.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁸ EUAA analysis based on: SNHR, 236 Civilian Deaths, Including 32 Children and 18 Women, as well as One Woman’s Death due to Torture, Documented in Syria in January 2025, 21 Civilians Were Killed by SDF, 1 February 2025, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, 1,264 Civilian Deaths, Including 242 Children and 118 Women, as well as 86 Deaths due to Torture, Documented in Syria in 2024, 2 January 2025, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 71 Civilian Deaths, Documented in Syria in November 2024, Including of 20 Children and Six Women, With Three Dying due to Torture, 1 December 2024, [url](#), p. 7

⁸⁵⁹ EUAA analysis based on UCDP data. UCDP, data covering from 1 November 2024 to 28 February 2025 provided by courtesy of UCDP in an email, 7 March 2025.

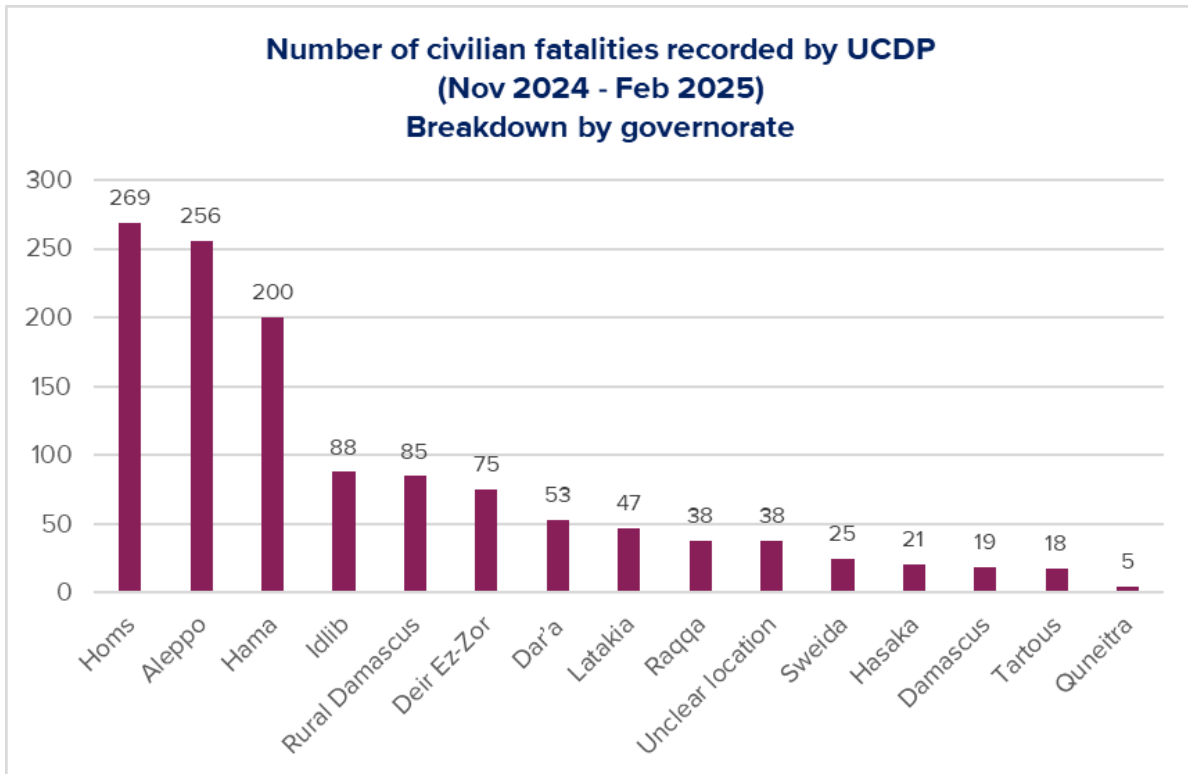


Figure 5. Number of civilian fatalities recorded by UCDP (1 November 2024 – 28 February 2025). Breakdown by governorate⁸⁶⁰

4.5.4. Conflict related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

During the escalation of hostilities that began in northwestern Syria on 27 November 2024, OHCHR noted that attacks by both HTS and pro-Assad forces caused destruction and damage to healthcare facilities, educational institutions, food markets and other civilian structures such as houses, shops and a mosque, including in Idlib city.⁸⁶¹ Clashes reported in Idlib governorate on 1 and 2 December 2024 affected four schools, two IDP camps, a water station,⁸⁶² several healthcare facilities⁸⁶³ and residential areas.⁸⁶⁴

After the fall of the Assad government, ongoing hostilities, including in southern Syria as well as Homs, Tartous and Latakia governorates, continued to cause damage to residential houses, healthcare facilities, bridges,⁸⁶⁵ markets, businesses⁸⁶⁶/shops, and other civilian

⁸⁶⁰ EUAA analysis based on UCDP data. UCDP, data covering from 1 November 2024 to 28 February 2025 provided by courtesy of UCDP in an email, 7 March 2025.

⁸⁶¹ OHCHR, Syria: Tragic escalation in hostilities, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁶² UNOCHA, North-west Syria: Escalation of Hostilities - Flash Update No. 2, 2 December 2024, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁸⁶³ UNOCHA, North-west Syria: Escalation of Hostilities - Flash Update No. 2, 2 December 2024, [url](#), p. 2; Guardian (The), Airstrikes hit hospitals in Syria's Idlib region as insurgents fight Assad forces, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁴ Guardian (The), Airstrikes hit hospitals in Syria's Idlib region as insurgents fight Assad forces, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 6 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 16 December 2024), 16 December 2024, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁸⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 3

infrastructure.⁸⁶⁷ Damage inflicted to the Tishreen Dam on 10 December 2024 left the facility non-operational as of late January 2025, depriving some 413 000 people around Manbij and Kobane of water and electricity, according to UNOCHA.⁸⁶⁸ There were also reports of destruction of civilian properties in Quneitra governorate,⁸⁶⁹ while water stations were damaged by hostilities in Aleppo,⁸⁷⁰ Raqqqa, Hasaka, Deir Ez-Zor.⁸⁷¹

Unexploded remnants of war continued to have a deadly impact on civilians.⁸⁷² Areas most at risk include former front lines and areas that witnessed intense hostilities, while ongoing fighting in parts of northeastern Syria has added further layers of contamination. The UN noted that deaths and injuries by contamination with explosive remnants were being reported on a weekly⁸⁷³/near-daily basis across the country, pointing to more than 430 reported deaths and injuries between December 2024 and mid-February 2025.⁸⁷⁴ Based on its monitoring work, the HALO Trust, a UK-based NGO specialised in the disposal of unexploded ordnance, estimated that between 8 December 2024 and 2 March 2025, 640 persons had been killed or injured by landmines and other explosive remnants. However, the source pointed out that this was likely an underestimate given that Syria lacked a central record of accidents occurring across the country.⁸⁷⁵ Meanwhile, statistics from the Syrian Civil Defence consulted by Enab Baladi held that 40 people had been killed by war remnants between the launch of ‘Operation Deterrence of Aggression’ and 19 January 2025, while another 65 civilians had been injured.⁸⁷⁶

SOHR reported that explosions of remnants of war (which based on its definition include old landmines and unexploded bombs, IEDs, shells, grenades, and projectiles)⁸⁷⁷ had caused 143 deaths and 172 injuries among civilians between 1 January and 7 February 2025. Broken down by area of control, 106 of these 143 civilian deaths (74 %) occurred in regions controlled by the new transitional administration, while areas controlled by the SDF and by SNA factions accounted for 10 (7 %) and 27 deaths (19 %), respectively.⁸⁷⁸ While SOHR has published no such data on December 2024, it recorded nine civilian deaths and 23 civilian injuries from unexploded war remnants during November 2024. Seven of these nine fatalities were

⁸⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 12 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 21 January 2025), 22 January 2025, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁸⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), pp. 3, 7

⁸⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 8 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 23 December 2024), 23 December 2024, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁸⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 10 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 7 January 2025), 7 January 2025, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁷¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 12 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 21 January 2025), 22 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁷² UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #7 – Syria situation crisis, 27 December 2024, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁷³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 12 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 21 January 2025), 22 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁷⁴ UN News, Syria: Mine casualties persist as UN partners scale up clearance operations, 17 February 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁵ HALO Trust (The), Syria, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁷⁶ Enab Baladi, War remnants kill 40 Syrians in less than two months, 20 January 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁷ SOHR, War ordnance casualties in November 2024 | 32 civilians killed and injured in explosions of war ordnance across Syria, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁸ SOHR, Old ordnance | Five civilians killed and two others injured in western Manbij countryside, 7 February 2025, [url](#)



recorded in areas that were under the control of the Assad government at the time, while the remaining two were recorded in HTS-held areas.⁸⁷⁹

As UNOCHA reported at the end of January 2025, since November 2024, a total of 136 minefields and points of mine presence have been newly identified across Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, Deir Ez-Zor, and Latakia.⁸⁸⁰

4.5.5. Displacement and return

The number of individuals newly displaced by conflict since 27 November 2024 saw an initial large wave that peaked at 1.1 million people on 12 December.⁸⁸¹ These initial displacements, driven by fear of the escalating armed conflict,⁸⁸² were mainly recorded in Hama and Aleppo,⁸⁸³ including in Aleppo city, western Aleppo⁸⁸⁴ and notably Tall Rifaat⁸⁸⁵ and Manbij,⁸⁸⁶ following the takeover of the two cities by Türkiye-backed armed factions.⁸⁸⁷

UN sources subsequently estimated the number of newly displaced since late November 2024 who remained in displacement at 859 460 as of 18 December 2024,⁸⁸⁸ around 627 000 on 10 January 2025,⁸⁸⁹ and 650 000 as of 5 February 2025.⁸⁹⁰ In early 2025, UNOCHA noted additional waves of conflict-related displacements from the Manbij area, with up to 15 000 displacements in mid-January 2025,⁸⁹¹ followed by more than 25 000 later the same month.⁸⁹² Sources estimated the number of people who had fled the SNA offensive in northern Syria in early December 2024 at between 100 000⁸⁹³ and 120 000.⁸⁹⁴

⁸⁷⁹ SOHR, War ordnance casualties in November 2024 | 32 civilians killed and injured in explosions of war ordnance across Syria, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁸¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 10 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 7 January 2025), 7 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁸² ACAPS, Syria: Humanitarian impact overview (October–December 2024), 6 January 2025, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁸³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 10 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 7 January 2025), 7 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁸⁴ TNH, Russian jets pound Idlib after Syrian rebels' Aleppo gains, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁵ Al Jazeera, Returning home to Tal Rifaat, Syrians find ruins and rubble, 10 February 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁶ SOHR, Military escalation | Ten civilians killed under Turkish ground shelling on Manbij, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁷ Al Jazeera, Returning home to Tal Rifaat, Syrians find ruins and rubble, 10 February 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Military escalation | Ten civilians killed under Turkish ground shelling on Manbij, 9 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁸ UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Internal displacement within Syria as of 18 December 2024, 23 December 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 11 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 13 January 2025), 14 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁹⁰ UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #13 - Syria situation crisis, 7 February 2025, [url](#), p. 3

⁸⁹¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 12 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 21 January 2025), 22 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

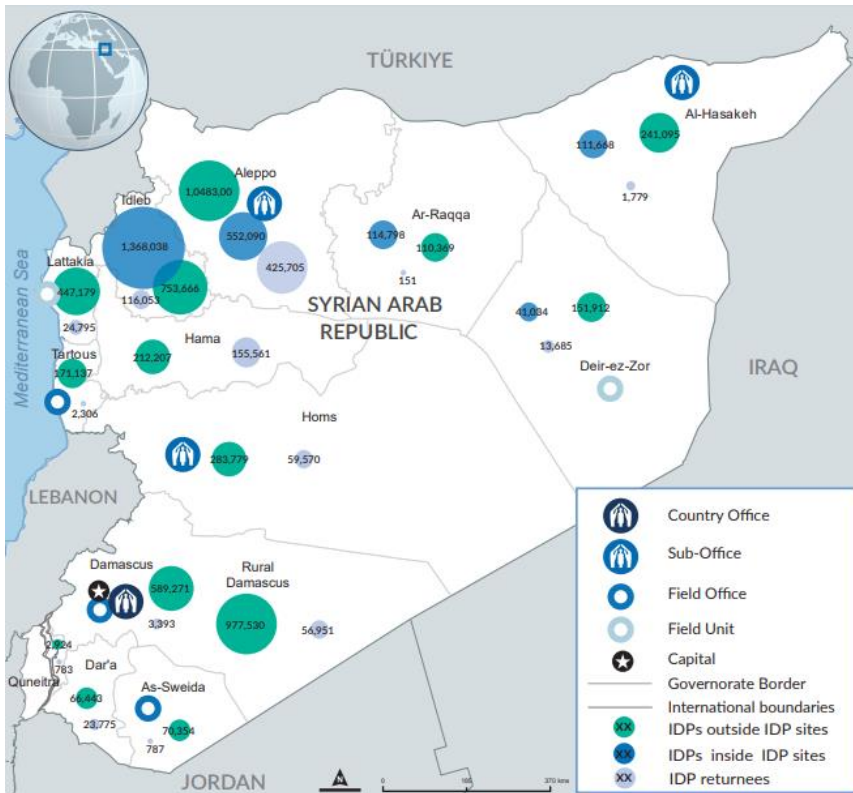
⁸⁹² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁹³ Le Monde, In northeastern Syria, 'the war is not over', 16 January 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁴ Syria Direct, Afrin's displaced torn between another exile and danger in northern Aleppo, 4 December 2024, [url](#)



Following the downfall of Assad, returning IDPs moved to reach areas previously controlled by the former government, including in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus.⁸⁹⁵ UN sources estimated that the number of newly displaced people returning to their home bases had increased to more than 522 000 by 10 January 2025.⁸⁹⁶ At the same time, return movements from IDP camps remained ‘steady but minimal’, with the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster quoted as saying in late January 2025 that around 57 000 people had departed from camps since 3 December 2024. These returnees were mainly comprised of individual families or men returning to reunite with their families or assess the condition of their homes.⁸⁹⁷



Map 6: Overview of IDPs and IDP returnees by governorate⁸⁹⁸

According to UNHCR estimations, by 26 February 2025, an estimated 885 294 IDPs had returned, while about 7.4 million remained internally displaced. The governorates that saw the largest share of IDP returns were Aleppo with 425 705 IDP returns, followed by Hama with 155 561 and Idlib with 116 053 IDP returns.⁸⁹⁹

As UNOCHA noted, reported concerns influencing IDPs’ return decisions included destruction of property, inadequate infrastructure, insecurity, as well as access to civil documentation and judicial services, including documents regarding housing, land, and property rights (not all civil

⁸⁹⁵ ACAPS, Syria: Humanitarian impact overview (October–December 2024), 6 January 2025, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 11 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 13 January 2025), 14 January 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 3

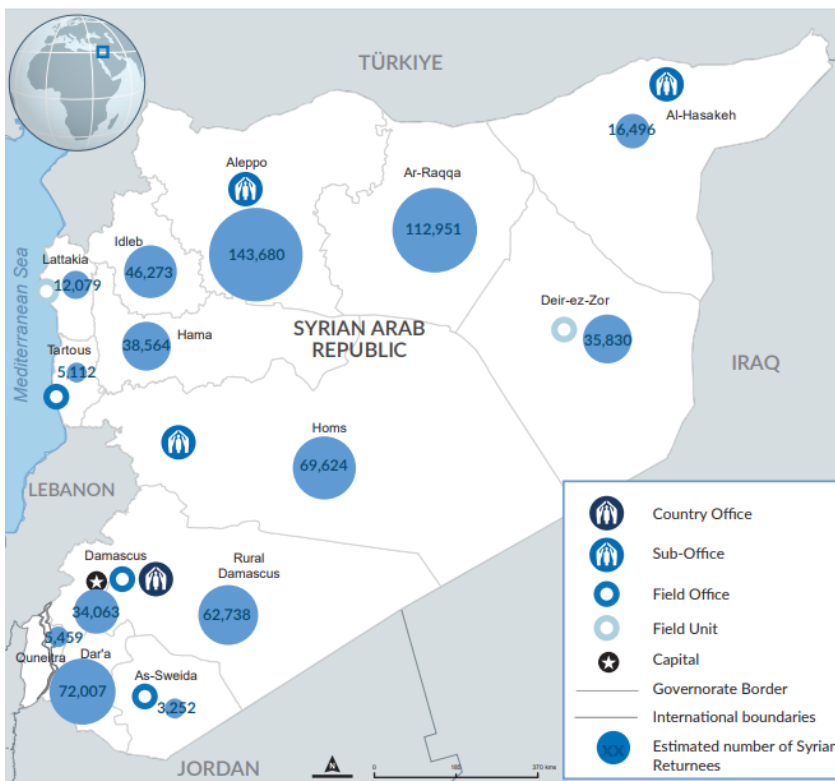
⁸⁹⁸ UNHCR, Syria governorates IDPs and IDP returnees overview, 2 March 2025, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁹ UNHCR, Syria governorates IDPs and IDP returnees overview, 2 March 2025, [url](#)

registries and courts were operational as of the end of January 2025).⁹⁰⁰ Another critical concern that has been raised was contamination with unexploded war remnants.⁹⁰¹

4.5.6. Returns from abroad

According to UNHCR estimates, between 8 December 2024 and late February 2025, some 297 292 Syrians returned to Syria from abroad. Of these refugees, 53 % returned from Lebanon, 25 % from Türkiye and 14 % from Jordan.⁹⁰² Voluntary returns from Türkiye, amounting to 35 114 as of 30 December 2024 according to Turkish government figures,⁹⁰³ mainly involved Syrians returning alone, including persons seeking to assess the situation in Syria prior to reuniting with their families.⁹⁰⁴



Map 7: Overview of returns by governorate⁹⁰⁵

UNHCR indicated that, from the beginning of 2024 until late February 2025, the governorates where returnees from abroad mainly returned were Aleppo (with an estimated 143 680

⁹⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 4

⁹⁰¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 13 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 29 January 2025), 30 January 2025, [url](#), p. 4; Enab Baladi, War remnants kill 40 Syrians in less than two months, 20 January 2025, [url](#)

⁹⁰² UNHCR, Syria governorates of return overview- 27 February 2025, 27 February 2025, [url](#)

⁹⁰³ UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #8 - Syria situation crisis, 2 January 2025, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁰⁴ UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #11 - Syria situation crisis, 23 January 2025, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁰⁵ UNHCR, Syria governorates of return overview- 27 February 2025, 27 February 2025, [url](#)



returnees) and Raqqa (112 951 returnees), followed by Dar'a (72 007), Homs (69 624), Rural Damascus (62 738) and Idlib (46 273).⁹⁰⁶

It is not clear if all the returns are permanent. According to a Refugees International report, many Syrians return to inspect their land, evaluate security and economic conditions following the Assad regime's collapse, or reunite with family. For others, returning is a necessity rather than a choice, as deteriorating conditions in host countries - marked by economic hardship, rising living costs, and limited opportunities - have made life increasingly unsustainable.⁹⁰⁷

Information on the treatment of returnees from abroad could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

⁹⁰⁶ UNHCR, Syria governorates of return overview- 27 February 2025, 27 February 2025, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁷ Refugees International, Foreign Affairs: Syria's Biggest Problem: How to Resettle Millions of Refugees and Displaced People, 11 February 2025, [url](#)





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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The research should focus on the period between November 2024 – February 2025. Limited relevant information covering March 2025 to be added where available.

Political and human rights developments

- Overview of current conflicts
- Political developments
- Governance under the Transitional Administration
- Treatment of certain profiles and groups of the population
 - Persons affiliated with the government of Bashar Al-Assad
 - Alawites
 - Kurds
 - Other ethno-religious minorities
 - Women
 - Children
 - LGBTIQ persons

Armed actors

- Brief description and capacity
- Presence and areas of control/influence of the different actors
- Conduct during the reference period (tactics, weapons used, potential involvement in human rights violations)

International involvement

Recent security trends

- Security trends by area of control
- Impact of the security situation on civilian population
 - Security incidents
 - Type of weapons and tactics used





- Civilian casualties
- Conflict related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
- Conflict-induced displacement and return
- Returns from abroad





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