



Syria: Security situation

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Country of Origin Information Report

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The following departments and organisations have reviewed respective parts of this report

- Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Country of Origin Information Department
- Belgium, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), Centre for Documentation and Research (Cedoca)
- The Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin (COI) unit
- Slovakia, Migration Office, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation

All parts of this report have been reviewed by at least one reviewer.

It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of the EUAA.





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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2019\)](#). 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 17 August 2022. 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
AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AOAV	Action on Armed Violence
COAR	Center for Operational Analysis and Research
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
GoS	Government of Syria
HAD	Hurras al-Din
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh
NDF	National Defence Forces
NLF	National Liberation Front
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces





Term	Definition
SHRC	Syrian Human Rights Committee
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SOHR	Syrian Observatory of Human Rights
STJ	Syrians for Truth & Justice
UNCOI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USDOD	United States Department of Defense
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WINEP	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units



Introduction

The purpose of this security situation report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in updating EUAA's country guidance development on Syria.

In order to support the assessment of the application of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive on a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict, the security situation report examines the nature of armed conflicts taking place in the territory, the nature of the violence and presence of armed actors in different areas, and the impact on civilians, for example in terms of casualties/fatalities and conflict-linked displacement.

The report covers the period of April 2021 – July 2022, and it is an update of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#). A limited update of sections addressing the justice system in government-held areas and areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, previously covered in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#), is also included.

Methodology

This report was jointly drafted by national COI departments in EU+ countries¹ 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 (2019)² and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).³

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 Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex II](#) of this report.

Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 25 July 2022. Some limited additional information was added during

¹ All EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

² EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

³ EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)



the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 17 August 2022.

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 almost all of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 17 August 2022. 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 and social media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Syria. All information from these sources was consulted within time constraints and within the research constraints posed by Syria's challenging information-gathering environment.

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.⁴ Where available, information from other sources documenting civilian casualties in the Syrian conflict (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Syrian Human Rights Committee, The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) has been included.

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

⁴ 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

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 media reports, but also from reports by international institutions and non-governmental organisations and data provided by local partners of ACLED.⁵

Security incidents numbers and associated graphs/maps at country and governorate level are based on a publicly available ACLED curated dataset for Middle East (updated until 12 August 2022).⁶ Additional sources have been researched to the extent possible to corroborate the ACLED findings.

Further information on ACLED's methodology and the dataset used for this report is available in 1.6.2 [Security incidents](#).

Structure and use of the report

The report is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on presenting an overview of the armed conflicts in Syria, current political developments and information on the main parties to the conflict. It goes on to describe the security trends in different parts of Syria between April 2021 and July 2022, with a focus on the nature of the violence and impact on civilians.

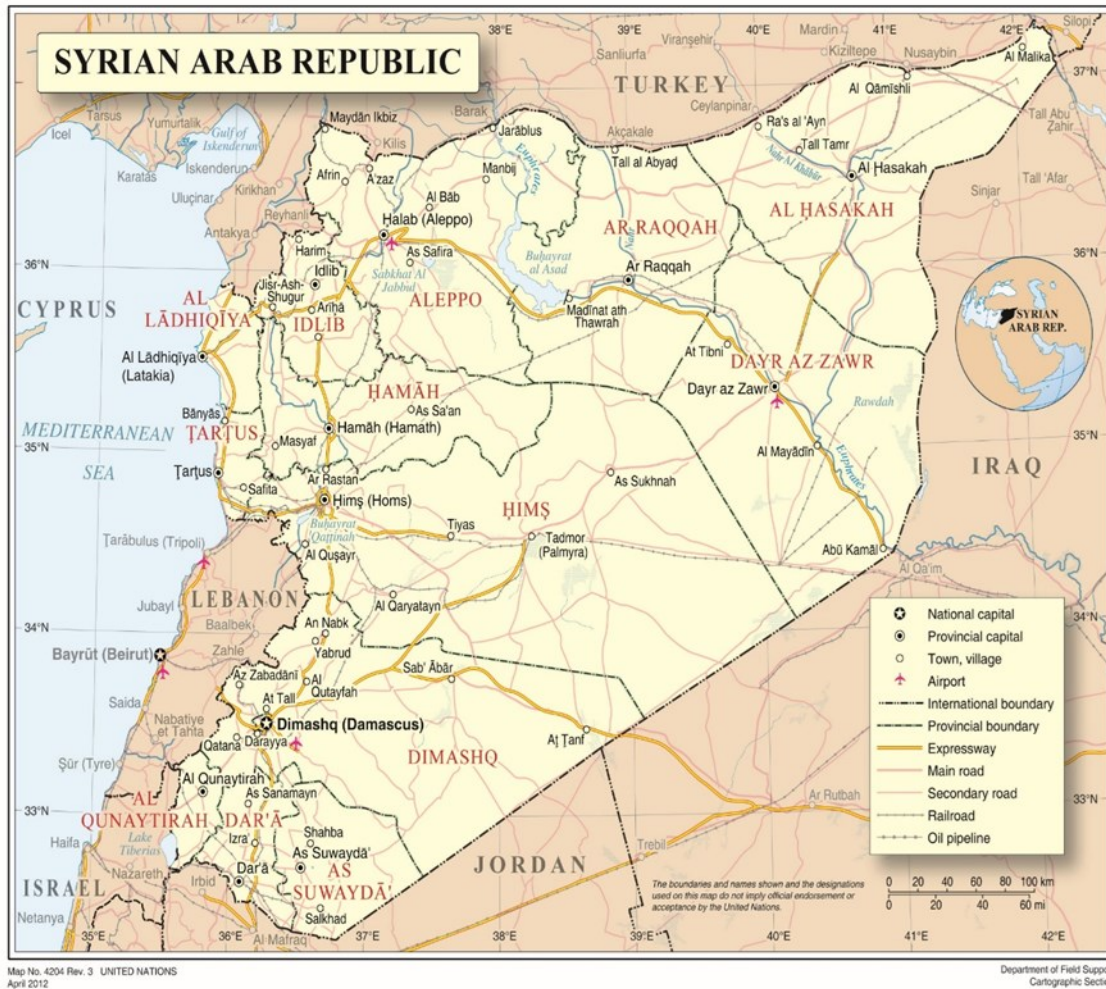
The second part provides a governorate-level description of the security situation. Each governorate chapter includes a map, brief description of the governorate, background conflict dynamics and armed actors present in the area, recent security trends, including information on civilian fatalities, security incidents and trends, armed confrontations (etc.), displacement and return, and civilian infrastructure impacted.

⁵ ACLED, Methodology, April 2019, [url](#); ACLED, FAQ ACLED Sourcing Methodology, February 2020, [url](#)

⁶ For more details on ACLED's reporting see Section [1.6.2](#), ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



Map of the Syrian Arab Republic



Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations⁷

⁷ Syria, Map No. 4204 Rev. 3, April 2012, United Nations, [url](#)

1. General description of the security situation

1.1. Overview of conflicts

The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (referred to in this report as the UNCOI) noted, in February 2022, that five foreign military forces - including Iran, Israel, Russia, Turkey and the United States of America -, 'as well as non-State armed groups and UN-designated terrorist groups' continued to be active in Syria.⁸

Syria continued to be involved in international armed conflicts, including against the US-led coalition to fight Daesh/ISIL (the so-called Global Coalition, currently comprising 85 members)⁹, as well as against Turkey and Israel, both of which continued to occupy parts of Syrian territory.¹⁰ Moreover, Syria – together with its allies Russia and Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah¹¹ and other Shia militia – continued to be involved in several non-international armed conflicts, including against armed groups opposing the Government of Syria (GoS) such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Ahrar al-Sham, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Syrian National Army (SNA), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group, and others. Non-international armed conflicts on Syrian territory further included ongoing infighting between various non-State armed groups, as well as Turkey's attacks on Kurdish militias and ISIL and Israel's attacks on Hezbollah.¹²

Further information on the conflict background in Syria is available in section 1.1 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

1.2. Political developments

Presidential elections were held on 26 May 2021. Of 51 potential candidates, President Assad and two more men were eventually registered to run: a former cabinet minister and the leader of an opposition party 'tolerated' by the GoS. These two other candidates obtained 1.5 % and 3.3 % of the valid votes, respectively, while the incumbent president received the remaining more than 95 % votes.¹³ The elections were not monitored by the United Nations.¹⁴ The New Arab, a London-based news outlet focusing on the MENA region, reported that the country's

⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 4

⁹ Global Coalition (The), Mission, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰ RULAC, International armed conflicts in Syria, 24 May 2022, [url](#)

¹¹ CFR, What is Hezbollah?, 25 May 2022, [url](#)

¹² RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Syria, 24 May 2022, [url](#)

¹³ UK, House of Commons Library, Syria: 2021 presidential election and future prospects, 9 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 11

¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 12



leadership had invited observers from ‘friendly and brotherly’ countries such as Russia, Iran, China, and Belarus.¹⁵ Ahead of the elections, President Assad reportedly pardoned persons convicted of smuggling, drug abuse and foreign currency trading, and released some of the prisoners.¹⁶ Likewise, the president released a number of persons held in detention for expressing some form of criticism on social media. While Reuters reported on the release of several hundreds of persons, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) noted that 81 persons were released under the amnesty. Opponents and political detainees were reportedly not included in the amnesty decree and neither pardoned nor released.¹⁷ Further information on the presidential elections is available in section 1.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

The UN Security Council Resolution 2254, adopted in December 2015, calls for creating a constitutional committee that would draft a new constitution and organise UN supervised elections.¹⁸ A sixth session of the constitutional committee’s drafting group took place in October 2021, where draft constitutional texts on four titles were presented. However, no consensus on further steps could be reached between representatives of the GoS and the opposition,¹⁹ an outcome that the UN Special Envoy for Syria called ‘a disappointment’.²⁰ A seventh meeting in March 2022 ended with ‘no substantial progress’, according to a report by Al Jazeera.²¹ At the constitutional committee’s eight meeting in June 2022, draft constitutional texts and revisions were discussed. In a concluding statement, the UN Special Envoy observed the continued inability of the parties included to reach an agreement.²² A ninth meeting, scheduled for the end of July 2022, was cancelled after the GoS delegation stated that it would only participate if Russia’s demand for a change of venue were met. A representative of Russia had previously requested a move to a ‘more neutral’ place than Geneva.²³

Further information on the constitutional committee is available in section 1.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#). According to some analysts, doubts over confidence-building measures, the format’s failure to represent all key stakeholders²⁴, and a disproportionate focus on the Constitution at the expense of other issues such as, for example, the creation of a transitional government, were some of the underlying causes for

¹⁵ New Arab (The), Belarusian observers arrive to monitor ‘fake’ Syrian presidential elections amid voter intimidation, 23 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 13

¹⁷ SNHR, The Syrian Regime has Released 81 Individuals Under Amnesty Decree No. 13 of May 2021 and Arrested Nearly 176 Since its Issuance, 15 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 9, 17; Reuters, Syria releases hundreds of social media critics ahead of election, 11 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸ Syria Study Group, Final Report and Recommendations, USIP, 24 September 2019, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, Briefing to the Security Council on Syria, 27 October 2021, [url](#), paras. 3, 6

²⁰ UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, Briefing to the Security Council on Syria, 27 October 2021, [url](#), para. 8

²¹ Al Jazeera, Syria constitutional talks fail again in Geneva, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

²² UN OSES, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Mr. Geir O. Pedersen statement at the conclusion of the eighth session of the small body of the Syrian constitutional committee, 3 June 2022, [url](#)

²³ Syria Direct, Syrian Constitutional Committee at an impasse following cancellation of its ninth session, 26 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁴ COAR, 18th Round of ‘Astana Talks’ Fizzles as Guarantors Lose Momentum, 20 June 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria constitutional talks fail again in Geneva, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

the ongoing lack of progress.²⁵ Qatar, Russia and Turkey reportedly launched a new trilateral consultation process in March 2021, after a meeting of the countries' foreign ministers in Doha, noting that this format was not meant to interfere with the Astana process²⁶, where representatives of the GoS, the opposition and the so-called guarantor states (Russia, Iran and Turkey) meet for peace talks. The latest meeting in Astana took place in June 2022, however, with no substantive progress.²⁷

Some states in the region reportedly made some efforts to re-establish diplomatic, security and economic ties with the GoS²⁸, with President Assad visiting the UAE in March 2022²⁹ and Jordan deciding to resume ties with the GoS.³⁰ For some countries, however, a political solution to the conflict and the safe return of refugees reportedly remained preconditions for Syria's re-admission into the League of Arab States.³¹ Moreover, the Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR) observed that the GoS's alliance with Russia might negatively impact further regional rapprochement after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.³² Despite initial reports on thousands of Syrians being recruited by Russia to fight in Ukraine³³, as of June 2022, a large-scale presence of Syrian fighters in the country was not observed by US officials.³⁴ In July 2022, the EU imposed several restrictive measures against six Syrian nationals and one company involved in the recruitment of Syrian mercenaries to fight on the side of the Russian forces against Ukraine.³⁵

On 12 July 2022, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2642 extending the mandate to deliver humanitarian aid via the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing for six months, with a possible further six-month extension depending on a separate resolution.³⁶ The previous one-year mandate had expired on 10 July 2022, and an extension for another 12 months had been vetoed by Russia.³⁷

²⁵ Enab Baladi, Constitution or political transition; what do Syrians need?, 18 May 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria constitutional talks fail again in Geneva, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

²⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 15

²⁷ COAR, 18th Round of 'Astana Talks' Fizzles as Guarantors Lose Momentum, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 8

²⁹ COAR, Iranian Foreign Minister to Damascus, Welcoming Arab Normalisation or Reminding of Tehran Influence?, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁰ Alajlouni, L., Jordan is pushing for rapprochement with Syria. But is it to reinforce artificial stability in the region?, Atlantic Council, 19 October 2021, [url](#)

³¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 8

³² COAR, Crisis in Ukraine: Impacts for Syria, 10 March 2022, [url](#)

³³ SOHR, SOHR: Over 40,000 Syrians reportedly register to fight for Russia in Ukraine, 15 March 2022, [url](#); AP, Explainer: Will Russia bring Syrian fighters to Ukraine?, 11 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁴ Al-Monitor, Russia remains committed to Syria's Assad despite Ukraine war, Pentagon says, 8 June 2022, [url](#)

³⁵ EU, Official Journal of the European Union, Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1274 of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁶ ECHO, Syria: Statement by High Representative Borrell and Commissioner Lenarčič on the renewal of cross border humanitarian deliveries, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁷ UN, Security Council Renews Cross-Border Aid Operations into Syria's North-West for Six Months, Adopting Resolution 2642 (2022) as 'Compromise' amid Divisions, 12 July 2022, [url](#)



1.3. International involvement

1.3.1. Russia

As of February 2022, Russia had by its own account about 63 000 military personnel deployed to Syria, according to an AFP report.³⁸ Experts quoted by Enab Baladi, a Syrian independent news site, noted that this number might include not only fighting forces, but also personnel with non-combat missions, experts and consultants, and forces and militia ‘unofficially’ linked with the Russian government.³⁹ Moreover, Russia controlled an airbase at Hmeymim, near Latakia, established in 2015, and a naval base at the port of Tartous. The latter had already been used by the Soviet Navy in the 1980s but has since then been expanded and upgraded.⁴⁰ Both military bases have reportedly been leased by the GoS to Russia⁴¹ for a period of 49 years.⁴² As of the beginning of 2022, Russian forces had 114 military, security, and operational points in Syria.⁴³

In September 2021, Russia brokered an agreement between the GoS and local opposition forces, ending a 10-week siege of the Dar’a Al-Balad area of Dar’a city by pro-GoS forces, during which tens of thousands of civilians were displaced and others killed or injured.⁴⁴ For more information see also section [1.5.1](#) and [2.12.3](#) of this report.

Since the beginning of Russia’s war against Ukraine in February 2022, there had been media reports on the withdrawal of Russian military personnel from some of their positions in Syria (including the Syrian desert, and areas around Aleppo, Idlib and at borders with Turkey and Israel)⁴⁵ and their regrouping at the Russian-controlled Hmeymim airbase and other airports. Reports suggested they might be redeployed to Russia or Ukraine.⁴⁶ Some vacated positions were reportedly turned over to Iran-backed militia.⁴⁷

1.3.2. Iran

As of the beginning of 2022, Iranian forces had 333 military, security, and operational points in Syria, including 186 sites of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), 80 sites of Hezbollah, an Iran-backed, Lebanese armed group⁴⁸, and 67 sites that were shared by both

³⁸ AFP, Russia’s growing ties to Syria amid military backing, 28 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁹ Enab Baladi, The truth about 60,000 Russian troops in Syria, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Kjellen, J. and Lund, A., From Tartous to Tobruk: The Return of Russian Sea Power in the Eastern Mediterranean, FOI, 11 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

⁴¹ According to an AFP report, Tartous has been leased to the Russian company Stroytransgaz. The same company reportedly received a 50-year concession to extract phosphate in the Palmyra region. AFP, Russia’s growing ties to Syria amid military backing, 28 February 2022.

⁴² Kjellen, J. and Lund, A., From Tartous to Tobruk: The Return of Russian Sea Power in the Eastern Mediterranean, FOI, 11 February 2022, [url](#), p. 83.

⁴³ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 20, 23

⁴⁵ MEMO, Rumoured Russian scale-back from Syria prompts regional alarm, 30 May 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine, Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Russia reduces forces in Aleppo, transfers some to Hmeimim, 22 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine, Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸ CFR, What is Hezbollah?, 25 May 2022, [url](#)

forces. Of all foreign forces in Syria, the number of Iranian sites has increased the most in 2021, according to Jusoor for Studies.⁴⁹

Iranian IRGC militias located in Hasaka governorate have reportedly increased and strengthened their military presence in the governorate's southeast in early 2022.⁵⁰ Similarly, Iran has reportedly increased its influence in Deir Ez-Zor governorate by providing services to the local population, helping to improve their living conditions and by recruiting local Syrian men into Iran-linked militia groups. Some of these militia groups reportedly consisted of foreign fighters including Iranians, Afghans and Pakistanis.⁵¹ Attacks on US-military bases in north-eastern Syria in 2021 and early 2022 were reportedly often attributed to forces loyal to Iran operating in the region.⁵²

Moreover, Iran has increased its military presence in Syria's southern governorates, including Dar'a, Sweida and Quneitra governorates. According to Jusoor for Studies, the number of outposts held by Iran, Iran-aligned forces and the Lebanese Hezbollah in these areas has more than doubled from 40 military and security outposts in August 2018 to 88 by August 2021.⁵³

Further information on Iranian involvement in Syria is available in section 1.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

1.3.3. Turkey

As of the beginning of 2022, Turkish forces had 122 military, security and operational points in Syria, especially along the Syrian-Turkish border in the country's north and north-west.⁵⁴ Turkish forces and Turkish-backed opposition groups reportedly continued to attack SDF-positions in northern Syria during the reference period, including through shelling and arial bombardment.⁵⁵ Turkey's military operations in northern Syria reportedly aimed at creating a 'buffer zone' along the Turkish-Syrian border (see also section 1.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and section 1.5.2 [Areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups](#) of this report). Perceiving the Kurdish-dominated YPG (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, People's Defense Units), the SDF and the PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, Democratic Union Party) as linked to the PKK (Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê, Kurdistan Workers' Party) in Turkey⁵⁶,

⁴⁹ Jusoor for Studies is 'an independent institution specializing in information management and conducting studies and research related to the Syrian political and social affairs in particular and the Middle East region in general'.

Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Hassan, M. and Al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹ Washington Post (The), Iran is putting down roots in eastern Syria, outcompeting Assad's regime in signing up fighters, 28 January 2022, [url](#)

⁵² Hassan, M. and Al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵³ Jusoor for Studies, Mapping the Iranian Military's Footprint in Southern Syria from August 2018 to August 2021, 20 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syria Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶ YPG and PYD reportedly received substantial support from the PKK in the first years of the Syrian civil war and until today continue to be strategically dominated by the organisation. See Netjes, R. and van Veen, E., Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist. The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, Clingendael CRU Report, April 2021, [url](#), p. 1



Turkey justified its cross-border operations as ‘self-defence’⁵⁷, claiming that operations to free ‘borders from the threat of terrorism’ did ‘not target the territorial integrity and sovereignty’ of its neighbours, while Syria noted that it considered any Turkish military incursions into the country ‘war crimes and crimes against humanity’.⁵⁸ Areas in northern Syria under Turkish control were reportedly put under the administration of governors of Turkish cities beyond the border, while the Syrian pound was replaced with Turkish currency.⁵⁹ Moreover, sources have reported that Turkey increased water shortages and risks of drought in Kurdish-led areas of Syria by cutting water supplies⁶⁰ at least 24 times in 2020 alone.⁶¹ Turkish authorities have denied these claims.⁶² For more information see also section 1.5.2 Areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

1.3.4. US-led Coalition against ISIL

At the beginning of 2022, the US-led coalition forces had 28 military, security and operational points in Syria, the majority of them in North-eastern Syria⁶³, which constituted a slight decrease compared to the same period a year earlier, when the coalition had 33 sites.⁶⁴ As of 2022, the USA had about 900 troops based in Syria, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Military Balance 2022⁶⁵ including between 100 and 200 soldiers at the Tanf base (see also section [1.5.5 Tanf](#) of this report).⁶⁶

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), US-forces carried out air strikes in northern Syria, targeted at individual members of Al-Qaida and ISIL in the second half of 2021.⁶⁷ The then leader of ISIL, Abu Ibrahim Al-Quraishi, was killed during a helicopter raid by US special forces in Idlib province in February 2022.⁶⁸ In May 2022, Syrian media reported on the return of US forces to some of the military bases from which they had withdrawn in 2019, including the 17th Division base in the north of Raqqa, Tabqa airport to the south of Raqqa, and possibly also the Kharab Ishk base southeast of Kobane [Ain Al Arab]. The report suggested this return might be linked to Turkey’s

⁵⁷ Çevik, S., Turkey’s Military Operations in Syria and Iraq, SWP Comment No. 37 May 2022, 30 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

⁵⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), paras. 21, 22

⁵⁹ Çevik, S., Turkey’s Military Operations in Syria and Iraq, SWP Comment No. 37 May 2022, 30 May 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁰ Al-Monitor, Turkey’s war of attrition against Syria’s Kurds, 17 November 2021, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syrian Kurds warn of ‘disastrous’ water shortages, accuse Turkey as military offensive looms, 12 June 2022, [url](#); DW, Syria: Are water supplies being weaponized by Turkey?, 24 January 2021, [url](#); BTI, Syria, 2022 Country Report, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁶¹ BTI, Syria, 2022 Country Report, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁶² New Arab (The), Syrian Kurds warn of ‘disastrous’ water shortages, accuse Turkey as military offensive looms, 12 June 2022, [url](#); DW, Syria: Are water supplies being weaponized by Turkey?, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶³ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Map Of The Military Bases And Posts Of Foreign Forces In Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Adar, S. et al., The War in Ukraine and Its Impact on Syria, SWP Comment No. 32 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁶ WINEP, D., The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria, WINEP, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

⁶⁸ Al Jazeera, ISIL leader detained in Syria: US-led coalition, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

announcement of a new military operation in Syria.⁶⁹ No further information confirming the actual return of US forces to these areas was found.

1.3.5. Israel

In 2021, Israel reportedly carried out 28 large-scale military strikes in Syria, that affected 57 sites in 11 governorates, most of them in Damascus and Rural Damascus (24 sites) and the southern governorates of Quneitra, Dar'a and Sweida (14 sites). 84.2 % of these attacks were targeting IRGC and Hezbollah forces, 1.8 % were targeting only Hezbollah and 14 % were targeting GoS forces. The attacks were reportedly focused on sites hosting military equipment, arms depots, and surveillance systems.⁷⁰ The port of Latakia was targeted in two airstrikes in the second half of 2021⁷¹, while an attack on Damascus International Airport in June 2022, allegedly to stop the shipment of arms to Hezbollah, led to a temporary halt of commercial flights as the runway and several buildings were damaged.⁷²

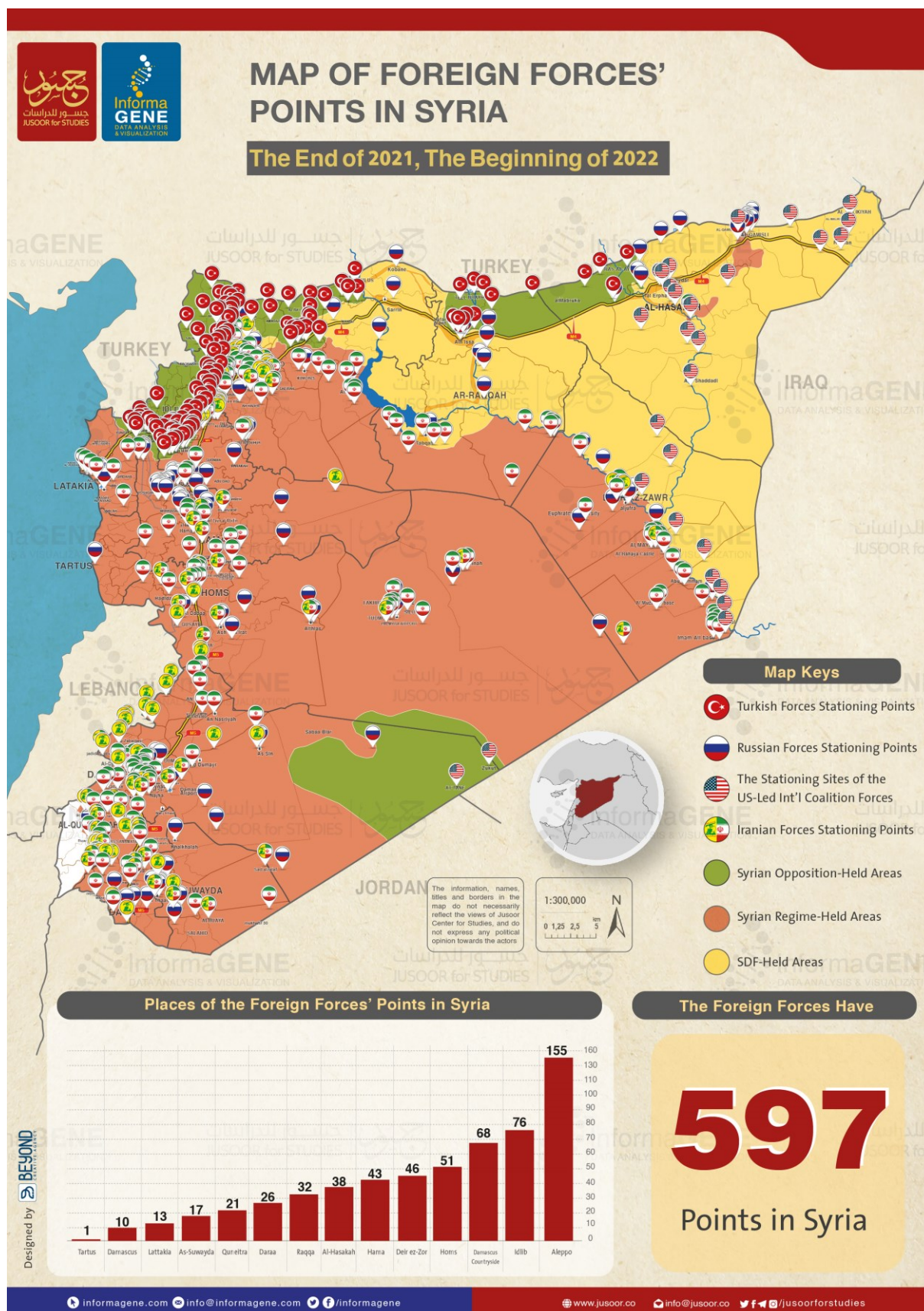
For an overview of the number and location of military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria as documented by Jusoor for Studies in January 2022, see Map 2 below:

⁶⁹ Syria Direct, Military and civilian sources: US forces redeploy to former positions in northeastern Syria, 31 May 2022, [url](#)

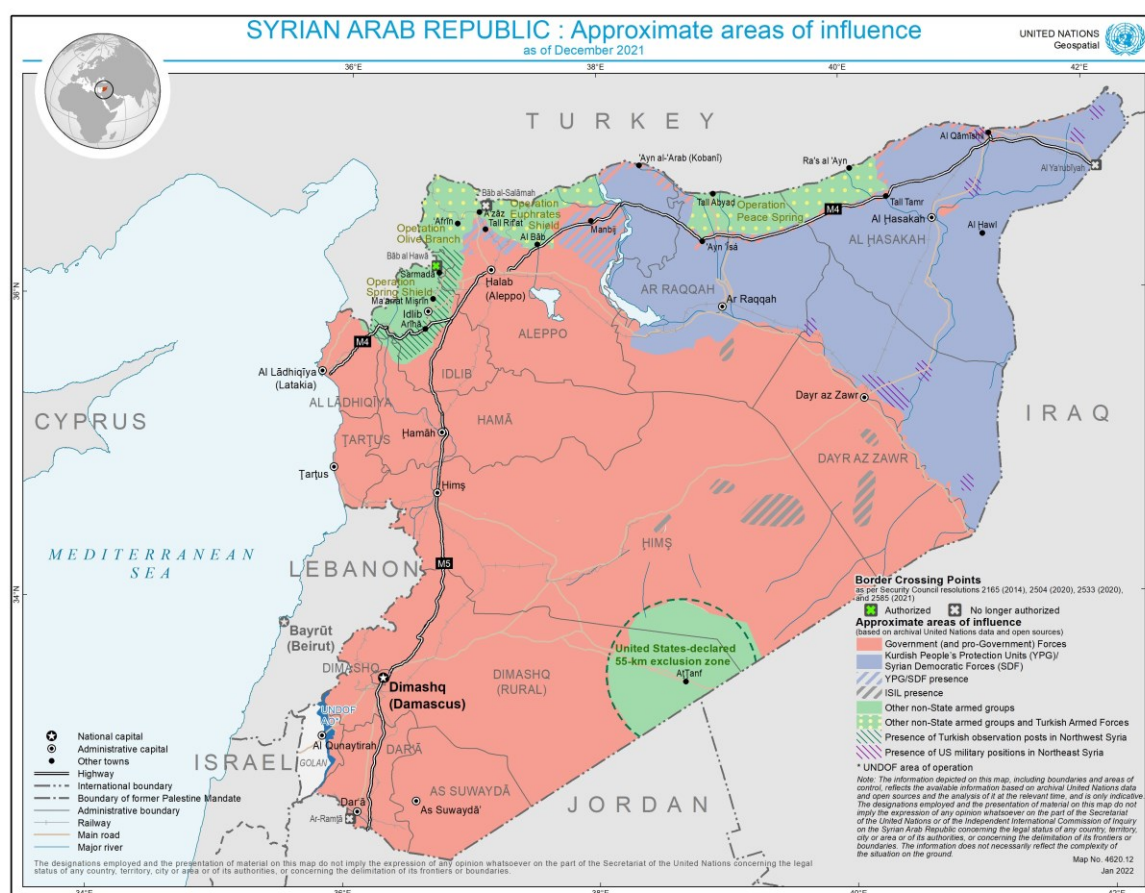
⁷⁰ Jusoor for Studies, The Israeli Strikes in Syria during 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

⁷² AP, Israel strike crippling Syria's main airport hikes tensions, 14 June 2022, [url](#)

Map 2: Military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria. © Jusoor for Studies⁷³

1.4. Armed actors



Map 3: Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, © UN Geospatial⁷⁴

1.4.1. Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The Syrian Armed Forces consist of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) (which includes the Republican Guard), the Naval Forces, Air Forces, Air Defence Forces and National Defence Forces (which include pro-government militia and auxiliary forces). During the reporting period, the SAA was supported by a number of militia forces, the Russian armed forces, the Lebanese Hezbollah, Iranian backed Shia militias as well as Iran's IRGC.⁷⁵

President Bashar al-Assad is the Supreme Commander of the Army and Armed Forces, with the Minister of Defence, the Head of the National Security Bureau and the Minister of Interior directly linked to him. All appointments and promotions of commanders, chiefs, directors and

⁷³ Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' points in Syria, The end of 2021, the beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁴ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁵ US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, Military and Security, last updated 2 August 2022, [url](#)

officers of all armed forces units are being carried out or approved by President Bashar al-Assad personally.⁷⁶

Major General Muhammad Al-Hajj Ali, a defector and high-ranking career soldier in the Syrian army until 2021, explained in a report for Harpoon Center for Contemporary Studies that as of August 2021, there remained a maximum of 150 000 fighters in the SAA, most of whom were deployed at checkpoints and to guard their commanders. 95 % of military personnel professionally employed by the SAA belong to the Alawite sect (with conscripts coming from all sects), with discrimination based on sectarian affiliation as well as corruption being described as 'deeply' entrenched in all divisions.⁷⁷

In contrast to the situation before 2011, SAA leaders allegedly lack control over their divisions. Army divisions are said to be controlled by the government's intelligence services⁷⁸ and to be under the authority of Iranian and Russian influence.⁷⁹ The army is no longer considered a cohesive force, but rather a coalition of regular forces and allied militias,⁸⁰ such the National Defence Forces (NDF⁸¹)⁸² or Palestinian militias (the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) and Liwa al-Quds).⁸³ Militias affiliated to Russia and Iran were reported as controlling most of GoS-held regions in April 2021 and a growing number of men were choosing to join militias rather than the SAA.⁸⁴ Private security companies are also extending their influence.⁸⁵

The Fourth Division (formerly Defence Companies), led by the president's brother, Maher al-Assad, and supported by Iran, had developed into a parallel army that deployed its forces throughout Syria with the aim of protecting Damascus and the GoS from attacks. In an analysis published by the Middle East Institute (MEI) the Fourth Division was described as 'superior' to the SAA, 'morally, financially, and militarily'. The Division consists of four brigades (38, 40, 41 and 42) with regiments number 555, 666 and 54 as well as a number of specialized factions and brigades affiliated with it. It is estimated to comprise 16 000 fighters and to own 500 tanks, as well as armoured vehicles. The Fourth Division reportedly includes a 600-men strong suicide battalion, which has until now not been used, as well as a Chemistry Battalion. Over 95 % of officers in the Fourth Division are Alawites.⁸⁶

⁷⁶ OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Chain of Command in the Syrian Military: Formal and Informal Tracks, 9 November 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁷ Al-Hajj Ali, M. and Ibrahim, K., Restructuring the army in the new Syria, 16 August 2021, [url](#), p. 25, 28

⁷⁸ Al-Hajj Ali, M. and Ibrahim, K., Restructuring the army in the new Syria, 16 August 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁷⁹ OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Chain of Command in the Syrian Military: Formal and Informal Tracks, 9 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1; Al-Hajj Ali, M. and Ibrahim, K., Restructuring the army in the new Syria, 16 August 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁸⁰ Caravenserai, Hollowed out Syrian army unable to act independently from Russia, Iran, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

⁸¹ The NDF was created by the Syrian government at the beginning of the civil war to incorporate local pro-government militias into an effective source of manpower. According to Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, a Syria researcher at Swansea University (UK), 'many of the NDF were originally from popular committees or intelligence bodies' (VOA, Who Are Syria's National Defense Forces?, 26 August 2022, [url](#))

⁸² Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸³ ORSAM, Pro-Regime Palestinian Militias in Syria, 2 August 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴ Caravenserai, Hollowed out Syrian army unable to act independently from Russia, Iran, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Al-Mashareq, Private security firms proliferate in Syria as regime's military falters, 5 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶ Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

During the reporting period, GoS forces continued to arbitrarily detain people, with detention leading to torture, ill-treatment, and in some instances to death of detainees.⁸⁷

Further information on the Syrian Arab Army is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

(a) Developments regarding the Syrian government justice system

A detailed description of the judiciary and penal system in areas controlled by the Syrian government can be found in section 2.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

According to an analysis by the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC), there have been little systematic or structural changes to the justice system in areas controlled by the GoS in recent years. Institutions of justice persistently fell ‘far short’ of meeting international standards of impartiality and independence, especially in the running of the ‘exceptional courts’.⁸⁸ The justice system was described by judges as being under the control of the Ba’ath Party, the President and the security services.⁸⁹ While it goes against the Syrian constitution to interfere with the civil judiciary, prosecutors and judges were in practice required to belong to the ruling party⁹⁰, with 90 % of judges being Ba’ath Party members.⁹¹ The entire judicial system was said to be highly politicised⁹², with people who are perceived to belong to the opposition, mainly Sunni Arabs and Kurds, facing likely discrimination by the state.⁹³ As one analysis reported, ‘[t]he power of the security services overrides any separation of powers’.⁹⁴

Corruption and bribery were assessed by ILAC to continue diminishing the independence of the judiciary.⁹⁵ More than half of the 533 respondents of interviews carried out by the Syrian Association for Citizens’ Dignity (SACD), an association formed by a group of displaced people from Syria, in September and October 2020 considered that existing corruption and a lack of independence impeded a fair access to the judicial system.⁹⁶ The Global Protection Cluster and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) confirmed in June 2022 that ‘an insufficiently transparent, accountable and reliable justice system is causing additional obstacles for civilians to access their rights’.⁹⁷ Lawyers had to pay money to court employees to ensure the smooth processing of a case. The amount required for bribes depended on the amount paid by the opposing counsel.⁹⁸ It was uncommon to hold officials accountable for

⁸⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 22; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁸ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁹ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 17

⁹⁰ Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F1

⁹¹ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 18

⁹² BTI, Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹³ Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F4

⁹⁴ BTI, Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁵ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 18

⁹⁶ SACD, Normalisation of Horror, Security and Living Conditions in Assad-held Syria, 2020, [url](#), p. 39

⁹⁷ Global Protection Cluster and UNHCR, Protection Analysis Update, June 2022, 24 June 2022, [url](#), p.12

⁹⁸ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 20



corruption. According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), officials were only held to account, if it was in the government's interest to do so.⁹⁹

Also in the 'exceptional courts', the Counter-Terrorism Court and the Military Field Courts, which are part of a parallel system of, operating outside the regular court structure, bribery was rife.¹⁰⁰ Many of the trials held in the Counter-Terrorism Court were allegedly rushed, did not follow legal procedures and had no possibility of appeal.¹⁰¹ Civilians were tried by military officers in field courts, as well as in conventional military courts, with judges being subordinate to the military.¹⁰² ILAC reported that Syrian laws and judicial procedures could not be implemented effectively due to interference from the executive. Civilians who were tried before 'exceptional courts', were deprived of the protection by Syrian's procedural and substantive law.¹⁰³

In areas which had not been continuously under GoS control, such as Aleppo, Dar'a, Sweida and East Ghouta, efforts had been made to reinstall official state justice structures, but justice continued to remain largely absent.¹⁰⁴ The UNCOI noted the continued seizure of property through public auctions in areas retaken by GoS forces, with the majority of affected owners being displaced persons. In September 2021, the Ministry of Justice adopted a circular, which makes security clearances of both the representative and the represented, a pre-condition for power-of-attorney arrangements, which further inhibits the possibility of having a third-party act on behalf of an absent or missing Syrian with regards to their property. During the same month, Presidential Decree No. 237, facilitating expropriation in parts of Qaboun and Harasta in northern Damascus, was established.¹⁰⁵

On 28 March 2022, the GoS passed an anti-torture law (Law No. 16 of 2022). It criminalises torture with a penalty of minimum of three years' imprisonment and imposes the death penalty in the case of rape or death. The law prohibits authority from ordering torture and makes evidence gathered through torture invalid.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, Article No. 16 of Law No. 14 of 1969 remains in force, which stipulates that 'it is prohibited to prosecute any of the employees of the State Security Department for crimes they commit while carrying out the specific tasks entrusted to them or in the course of carrying out them unless pursuant to a prosecution order issued by the director'. It is furthermore not possible to apply the law retroactively.¹⁰⁷ The anti-torture law's effectiveness and intention was amongst others questioned by Amnesty International,¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch¹⁰⁹ and Syrians on social media^{110, 111}.

⁹⁹ BTI, Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰⁰ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 20-21

¹⁰¹ BTI, Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰² Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F2

¹⁰³ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 45

¹⁰⁴ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 45-49

¹⁰⁶ HRW, Torture in Syrian Prisons is Not a Joke, 1 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ Enab Baladi, No more "coffee cups" in Syrian security basements due to newly anti-torture law, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ AI, Syria: New anti-torture law "whitewashes" decades of human rights violations, 31 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ HRW, Torture in Syrian Prisons is Not a Joke, 1 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ Enab Baladi, No more "coffee cups" in Syrian security basements due to newly anti-torture law, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹ Additional information about the Anti-Torture Law can be found here: STJ, Syria: Anti-Torture Law Issued 35 Years After the Convention against Torture Went Effective, 12 July 2022, [url](#)

In mid-April 2022, the GoS issued Law No. 20 of 2022, which amended the existing cybercrime law of 2012. According to the new law, online criticism of the constitution and president or state could lead to imprisonment of up to 15 years and penalties of up to 15 million Syrian Pounds.¹¹² A prison sentence of between three to five years will apply to people publishing “fake news” which “undermines the prestige of the state” or “prejudices national unity”.¹¹³ Beginning of June it was reported that 11 people were arrested in Aleppo for ‘spreading “fake news” on social media’.¹¹⁴

On 30 April 2022, President Bashar al-Assad issued a general amnesty for terrorism crimes, with hundreds of Syrians released from detention.¹¹⁵ No formal list of names was published, which, according to Le Monde, made it difficult to assess its scope.¹¹⁶ According to SNHR, 476 people were released under the amnesty decree by May 2022.¹¹⁷

At the same time, the death penalty continued to be applied. In October 2021, the GoS executed 24 people for allegedly starting wildfires.¹¹⁸ A review committee was reinstated in April 2022. The committee has the power to review death penalties imposed by the Syrian criminal courts, but not those of the special courts.¹¹⁹ Official mechanisms aimed at safeguarding women’s rights were reported to not be functional and the law was reported to discriminate against LGBT+ people and criminalise same-sex relations.¹²⁰

1.4.2. The Syrian National Army

The Syrian National Army (SNA) is the second largest opposition coalition in Syria (after Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham) and is composed of multiple Free Syrian Army factions, with many of the factions functioning as distinct units and engaging in armed infighting.¹²¹ SNA was supported by Turkey and was active within the Turkish-controlled areas in northern Syria,¹²² namely northern Aleppo governorate as well as areas of Raqqa and Hasaka governorates¹²³, with Turkey paying the SNA’s salaries and coordinating SNA’s major offensives.¹²⁴ According to Al-Sharq Strategic Research the number of SNA fighters has increased to 80 000 since its merger with the National Front for Liberation from Idlib (Arabic: الجبهة الوطنية للتحرير, Al-Jabhat al-Wataniya lil-Tahrir).¹²⁵

¹¹² New Arab (The), Syria cybercrime law could see minor online criticism result in 15 year jail terms, 22 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹³ MEMO, Syrians to be imprisoned for up to 15 years for minor criticism of regime, under new cybercrime law, 24 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ New Arab (The), Syrian regime arrests citizens under new cybercrime law, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ COAR, ‘Terrorism’ Amnesty Is Wartime Syria’s Most Sweeping, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Le Monde, In Syria, an unprecedented amnesty revives the trauma of families of prisoners and missing persons, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ SNHR, The Syrian Regime Has Released 476 People Under Amnesty Decree 7/2022 and Is Still Detaining Some 132,000 of Those Arrested Since March 2011, 16 May 2022, [url](#), p.1

¹¹⁸ Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F3

¹¹⁹ STJ, Syria: The President Enforces Death Sentences through a Formal Pardon Committee, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰ Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F4

¹²¹ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹²² Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹²³ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹²⁴ Hauch L., Syria’s eastern factions unite in the Liberation and Construction Movement, MEI, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁵ Al-Sharq Strategic Research, The Past, Present, and Future of the Syrian National Army, 31 August 2021, [url](#)



In June 2021, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), an independent, nongovernmental organization, working on documenting human rights violations in Syria, published findings that former ISIL members had gained positions in various factions of the SNA, including as first and second-level leaders and security officials.¹²⁶

The SNA lacked the unified central command of a conventional army.¹²⁷ In order to consolidate the divided factions of the SNA, efforts were made to merge factions into bigger formations. A variety of mergers were conducted throughout 2021.¹²⁸ By January 2022 a single formation, called the Azm Operations Room, incorporated most of the major SNA groups.¹²⁹ As of 1 March 2022, the Azm Operations Room consisted of Division 13 (incorporating the Sultan Muhammad Faith Brigade, Semerkand Brigade and Al-Wakkas Brigade), the Second Division, the Third Legion (incorporating the Sultan Malek Shah Brigades, Liwa 51, Jaish al-Islam, Liwa al-Salam, Al-Jabha al-Shamiya and Faylaq al-Majid), Suqur al-Shamal, the Thaeroun Front for Liberation (incorporating the First Division, Levant Revolutionaries, Sham Legion North Sector, Muntasir Billah, Sultan Murad, Suleiman Shah Brigade, Al-Mutasim Brigade, Hamza Division and Special Forces Division) and the Liberation and Construction Movement (incorporating Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Suqur al-Sham, Al-Sharqiya Army and the 20th Division).¹³⁰ The Liberation and Construction Movement (LCM) was formed in Raqqa and according to a MEI article chose to become a coalition in its own right. It claimed to command 7 000 fighters across northern Aleppo, Afrin and in a corridor between Ras al-Ayn and Tall Abyad.¹³¹

Despite the regrouping, violent clashes continued in April 2022 between different factions of the SNA in Aleppo governorate.¹³²

According to Syria Direct, an independent Syrian online news source, the main SNA faction involved in infighting between January and middle of May 2022 was the Hamza Division (11 incidents), followed by al-Jabha al-Shamiya and Ahrar al-Sham (five incidents each), Ahrar al-Sharqiya (four incidents) and Thaeroun for Liberation, Failaq al-Sham and the Military Police (three incidents each).¹³³

In June 2022 it was reported that the SNA prepared for a new Turkish operation announced by Turkey against the (Kurdish-led) SDF in Tal Rifaat and Manbij, Aleppo governorate.¹³⁴ SNA artillery strikes against the SDF were reported in al-Jat, Menji and al-Halwanji in northern Aleppo.¹³⁵

¹²⁶ STJ, Ongoing Violations Without Accountability, 28 June 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹²⁷ Al-Sharq Strategic Research, The Past, Present, and Future of the Syrian National Army, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸ The details of the various mergers conducted can be found in Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-16

¹²⁹ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

¹³⁰ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹³¹ Hauch L., Syria's eastern factions unite in the Liberation and Construction Movement, MEI, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

¹³² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³³ Syria Direct, Chronic infighting and uncontrolled weapons turn civilian lives into a nightmare in Turkish-backed opposition areas of northern Syria, 24 May 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴ Al Jazeera, Turkish-backed Syrian forces expect military operation soon, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

During the reporting period, abuses by the SNA continued against civilians, including arbitrary detention, abduction, torture and other ill-treatment.¹³⁶

For further information, please see sections [2.2 Aleppo governorate](#), [2.8 Raqqa governorate](#) and [2.7 Hasaka governorate](#) of this report.

Further information on the SNA is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#).

1.4.3. Syrian Democratic Forces

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are an armed force led by the People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG). It is militarily and financially supported by the US to fight ISIL in northeast Syria.¹³⁷ The SDF is a mixed force, with Arab, Kurds and fighters of other minorities within its ranks.¹³⁸ In comparison, the YPG, which leads the SDF, features Kurdish fighters from Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, and is linked to the PKK.¹³⁹

The SDF's control stretches across the governorates of Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka and Raqqa.¹⁴⁰ Particularly in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka and Raqqa, the SDF controls areas purely inhabited by Arabs.¹⁴¹ According to Clingendael, approximately 70 % of the population under SDF control are Syrian Arabs.¹⁴²

No up-to-date numbers of soldiers enrolled with the YPG and SDF respectively could be found.

Throughout the second half of 2021, the SDF – together with the US-led Coalition against ISIL – frequently carried out counter-terrorism operations against ISIL, mainly in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, and occasionally in Hasaka and Raqqa governorates.¹⁴³ In March 2022, the international coalition and the SDF conducted military exercises with heavy weapons, including Bradley tanks and anti-armour weapons, in areas of Deir Ez-Zor countryside. The SDF continued to fight ISIL cells in rural Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorate.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 82-88; AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22 – Syria, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 353; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹³⁷ Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹³⁸ Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 44

¹³⁹ Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁴⁰ Balanche, F., How to Preserve the Autonomy of Northeast Syria, WINEP, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 31

¹⁴² Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁴³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 98

¹⁴⁴ Syrian Observer (The), U.S. Maneuvers with SDF in Eastern Syria with Heavy Weapons, 28 March 2022, [url](#)



During the reporting period, the SDF engaged in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention of civilians.¹⁴⁵

(a) Developments regarding the justice system in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES)

A description of the judiciary and penal system in the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria can be found in section 3.1.4 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

In Northeast Syria, two justice systems continue to operate next to each other, the justice system of the GoS and that of the AANES, which is not recognised by the GoS.¹⁴⁶ As the AANES lacks a recognised property register and a civil register, courts under its jurisdiction cannot establish the sales and transfer of property or register parenthood, divorce, or marriage.¹⁴⁷

The AANES justice system is based on the ‘Social Contract’, a document which lays out the essential aspects of coexistence, as agreed on by the people.¹⁴⁸ In June 2021, authorities of the AANES announced the formation of a committee to reformulate the Social Contract.¹⁴⁹ In May 2022, the Social Contract Drafting Committee held its second meeting, as part of which it read the contract to the public and participants were able to share their opinions and suggestions.¹⁵⁰

Within the AANES system, local laws (nearly 70 of them) are applied next to Syrian criminal and civil law. This has led to confusions on which law to apply.¹⁵¹ In addition, as a result of the social law principle applied in the region, it is possible for judges to completely ignore the written law and use social justice principles (i.e., social conventions) instead.¹⁵²

The social justice system under the AANES was described as having a great number of different and distinct institutions, with their work varying significantly¹⁵³, particularly between the different regions under AANES control.¹⁵⁴ Key councils were missing in certain governorates, such as in Deir Ez-Zor, and were described as ineffective in other areas.¹⁵⁵

Before a case (mainly civil cases) can be brought to court, it must pass through a Peace and Consensus Committee (PCC), which is a non-judicial body existing in every neighbourhood

¹⁴⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 102-106; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁴⁶ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 168

¹⁴⁷ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 128

¹⁴⁸ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 115

¹⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, Charter of Autonomous Administration: Infringement of society components’ rights?, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ ANF News, Northern and Eastern Syria Social Contract Drafting Committee holds second meeting in Amûdê, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 118

¹⁵² ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 120

¹⁵³ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 125

¹⁵⁴ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 164

¹⁵⁵ OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 137

across the AANES and which is made up of three to five people of the area, who have no particular training or qualification.¹⁵⁶ It was reported that also within the court system, practitioners were either trained in a different legal system or completely untrained in law.¹⁵⁷ Of 326 judges appointed in AANES, 30 % had a high school diploma, 5 % were holders of bachelor's degrees in disciplines other than law and 65 % were lawyers, half of whom were new graduates.¹⁵⁸ 64 % of the appointed judges were Kurds, 33 % Arabs and 3 % of different ethnicity, such as Assyrians, Turkmen and Circassians. Of the 'People's Defence' court, 100 % of judges were Kurds.¹⁵⁹

The court system was reported by ILAC as suffering from a 'fundamental lack of independence from the executive'.¹⁶⁰ Lawyers in the AANES reported interference by the PYD, YPG and/or PKK in the administration of justice, particularly if courts are perceived to interfere with security or military interests.¹⁶¹ According to the OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, PKK cadres dominated social justice institutions and supervised them with regards to finances, security and administration. They were further reported as intervening in legal cases, bypassing judges and legal mechanisms.¹⁶² Gaps in the legal system, which undermine due procedures and the right to a fair trial, were said to remain, especially in cases of political character.¹⁶³ The rule that every security practice had to inform the Prosecution Commission prior to an arrest was not followed in practice. The security forces and the anti-crime bureau 'kidnapped people and interrogated [them] for an indeterminate period of time', without being held accountable.¹⁶⁴ As reported by an attorney in the AANES, SDF security services (Asayish) arrested civilians without presenting a warrant, without an order from the public prosecutor and without informing them of their right to be represented by a lawyer. Defendants did not have lawyers present during interrogations or in court. Arbitrary detention of political opponents took place during the reporting period, such as the imprisonment of four members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria in July 2021.¹⁶⁵

Capital punishment is outlawed in the AANES.¹⁶⁶ Torture, which led to death, was reported to continue to take place in SDF detention facilities.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁶ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 132-133

¹⁵⁷ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 125

¹⁵⁸ OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 137-138

¹⁵⁹ OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 138

¹⁶⁰ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 172

¹⁶¹ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 123-124

¹⁶² OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 138

¹⁶³ Enab Baladi, Detainees in northeastern Syria: Autonomous Administration breaking their own legal code, 21 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 157-158

¹⁶⁵ Enab Baladi, Detainees in northeastern Syria: Autonomous Administration breaking their own legal code, 21 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 118

¹⁶⁷ MEE, Syria: Families in northeast say sons tortured to death in SDF prisons, 8 July 2021, [url](#); STJ, Northeastern Syria: Detainees Tortured and Maltreated, 18 January 2022, [url](#); Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria: Investigate deaths of detainees in SDF prisons, 9 March 2022, [url](#)



The general situation with regards to repatriating ISIL detainees or putting them on trial remained unresolved during the reporting period.¹⁶⁸ An ‘extraordinary court’, the ‘people’s defence’ court, tries crimes considered as terrorism. It does not allow the right to a defence and the applicable counter-terrorism law has not been made public.¹⁶⁹

At the end of March 2021, representatives of 18 Arab, Assyrian, Kurdish, Syriac and Yazidi tribes in northeast Syria agreed to reaffirm a tribal judicial system, called *Madbata*, to resolve inter-clan disputes, robberies, lootings and actions of revenge in the Jazira region of Hasaka governorate.¹⁷⁰ In March 2022 it was reported that also the people of eastern Deir Ez-Zor turned to tribal settlements as a result of a lack of judicial alternatives that were accepted by the population.¹⁷¹

1.4.4. Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham

Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham or the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant (HTS) is a Sunni Islamist group under the leadership of Abu-Muhammad Al-Jawlani. It is based in north-western Syria and opposes the GoS of President Bashar Al-Assad. Its predecessor, Jabhat al-Nusra was linked to al-Qaida. HTS continues to be listed as a terrorist organization by the governments of Australia, Canada, the US and the UK, among others.¹⁷² The group sought its removal from the lists of terrorist organizations and built its function more like a government than a non-state actor, while continuing to ‘glamorize terrorism abroad’, espouse ‘extremist views’ and crack down on opponents.¹⁷³

During the reporting period, HTS was the dominant armed actor in the province of Idlib, part of Aleppo’s western countryside, the Syrian coast’s mountains, and the al-Ghab Plain in north-western Hama.¹⁷⁴ According to the UN Security Council, HTS retained around 10 000 fighters¹⁷⁵, whom the organization largely recruited within Syria.¹⁷⁶ Since the Turkish Operation Spring Shield¹⁷⁷ in 2020, northern Idlib had become a Turkish protectorate.¹⁷⁸ HTS did not attack Turkish forces and Turkey used a soft power approach towards HTS.¹⁷⁹ Russia, in

¹⁶⁸ ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 170-171

¹⁶⁹ OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 32

¹⁷⁰ Al-Monitor, Tribes in east Syria resort to their own judiciary over lack of trust in official courts, 4 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Enab Baladi, Amid judiciary absence, “Tribal Justice” reigns in Deir Ezzor, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷² Australia, Australian National Security, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Zelin, Aaron, From Global Jihad to Local Regime: HTS Builds Different Forms of Legitimacy, 6 August 2021, [url](#); Zelin, Aaron, The Age of Political Jihadism, A Study of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham dismantling “jihadist” groups to win international recognition, 20 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2022/547, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44

¹⁷⁶ Australia, Australian National Security, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ Operation Spring Shield was a military operation conducted by the Turkish forces against the Syrian army and its allies in Idlib governorate in March 2020 (see: Al-Monitor, Turkey launches Operation Spring Shield against Syrian forces, 1 March 2020, [url](#))

¹⁷⁸ Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷⁹ Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 4

contrast, reserved its right to strike HTS on the basis that it was an UN-designated terrorist group.¹⁸⁰

HTS divided its areas of influence into sectors, each of which is headed by a military commander, called an ‘emir’, with Al-Jawlani being the general emir of the organization. These sectors include Idlib, Hama, Aleppo, the coast and the border. HTS consists of its general army, Jabhat al-Nusra, the Red Bands ‘Islamist commando’ (which carries out special operations), and a public security agency, with security officials and detectives working in a civilian capacity. According to the MENA Research and Studies Centre, HTS worked with booby-trapped vehicles, suicide bombers and self-made ‘Elephant’ missiles. It manufactures mortar cannons and ammunition and possesses more than 160 tanks and armoured vehicles.¹⁸¹ HTS is active in recruiting new fighters.¹⁸²

The Chechen Jund Al-Sham (Soldiers of the Levant)¹⁸³ evacuated its military positions after HTS put pressure on the group to either join HTS’s ranks or to leave the country.¹⁸⁴ Other foreign groups, which were loyal to HTS and worked under its supervision, such as Ansar al-Tawhid, the Turkestan Islamic Party, Ajnad al-Kavkaz and Uzbek groups did not dissolve.¹⁸⁵ The move to request Jund Al-Sham to join forces or leave the country was described by the opposition news outlet Enab Baladi and Senior Fellow at Georgetown University, Nagwan Soliman, as being part of HTS’s aim to rebrand its organization¹⁸⁶, as well as a step to implement Turkey’s wish¹⁸⁷ and to eliminate rivals.¹⁸⁸ At the same time, HTS moved to expanding its engagements with tribes in Idlib.¹⁸⁹ In October 2021, fighting erupted between HTS and Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah in western Idlib and the northern Latakia countryside.¹⁹⁰

During the reporting period, HTS continued extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention of civilians.¹⁹¹

Further information on HTS is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#).

¹⁸⁰ Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁸¹ MENA Research and Studies Center, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, 16 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸² Al-Monitor, Syrian government steps up attack against Islamist enclave, 19 January 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, “HTS” brings in new blood to its ranks, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸³ Doukaev, A., Chechnya’s Veteran Fighters Have Their Backs to the Wall, Jamestown Foundation (The), 2 August 2021 [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ Al-Monitor, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham kicks Chechen jihadis out of Idlib, 15 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ Al-Monitor, Jihadist group in Idlib vows to keep foreign fighters in Syria, 15 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham dismantling “jihadist” groups to win international recognition, 20 July 2021, [url](#); Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The New Jihadists and the Taliban Model, 20 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ COAR, HTS Cracks Down on Rival Groups as Northwest Pressure Builds, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ Al-Monitor, Jihadist group in Idlib vows to keep foreign fighters in Syria, 15 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ Zelin, Aaron, Hanging on in Idlib: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham’s Expanding Tribal Engagement, 11 June 2021, [url](#);

Carnegie Middle East Center, Why Kabul has an Echo in Idlib, 17 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ COAR, HTS Cracks Down on Rival Groups as Northwest Pressure Builds, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 16



1.4.5. Other anti-government armed groups in the Idlib area

During the reporting period, Idlib hosted dozens of mainly Islamic armed groups, of which HTS is dominant, with others in the area being¹⁹² Ansar al-Islam, Ansar al-Tawhid, Ansar al-Din, Ajnad al-Kavkaz, the Turkistan Islamic Movement¹⁹³, Katibat al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (KTJ) and Imam Bukhari Jamaat, which is mainly made up of Uzbek fighters.¹⁹⁴

The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), mainly operated in Idlib and comprised between 1 000 and 2 000 fighters. The group allied with HTS when carrying out terrorist operations and held armed training sessions.¹⁹⁵

While KTJ joined HTS, Imam Bukhari Jammāt acted independently. Al-Monitor reported that the Uzbek jihadis were deployed mainly in the mountainous regions of north-western Syria. While Imam Bukhari Jammāt has been designated a terrorist organization by the US since 2018¹⁹⁶, KTJ, which is estimated to have between 500 and 1 200 fighters¹⁹⁷, joined the list on March 7, 2022. KTJ has further been added to the UN Security Council sanctions list.¹⁹⁸

HTS actively took steps against rival groups in Idlib (see section [1.4.4](#)), including Hurras al-Din, Sham al-Islam and the Kurdish jihadi group Ansar al-Islam, by arresting their leaders and members.¹⁹⁹ The umbrella group of al-Qaida-inspired factions, Hurras al-Din (HAD), allegedly dissolved itself, but its factions remained in the region. Similarly, Jund Al-Sham, which disintegrated upon HTS' request has not been eliminated.²⁰⁰ According to the UN Security Council, HAD was at its 'weakest point', counting between 1 000 and 3 000 fighters, with many having relocated to the south, around Dar'a and Sweida, having lost many of its leaders in Idlib. HAD merely retained a 'residual presence' in Idlib.²⁰¹

The National Liberation Front (NLF), which is affiliated to the Turkish backed SNA (formerly Free Syrian Army)²⁰² continued to be militarily active in Idlib as late as June 2022.²⁰³

¹⁹² Serwer D., *Divided Syria: An examination of stabilization efforts and prospects for state continuity*, MEI, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹³ Al-Monitor, Turkey's blind eye to jihadis worsens its predicaments in Syria, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ Al-Monitor, Uzbek fighters complicate makeover campaign by jihadi group in Idlib, 19 August 2021, [url](https://www.al-monitor.com/uk/regions/middle-east/2021/08/uzbek-fighters-complicate-makeover-campaign-by-jihadi-group-in-idlib/)

¹⁹⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2022/547, 15 July 2022, url, para. 45

¹⁹⁶ Al-Monitor, Uzbek fighters complicate makeover campaign by jihadi group in Idlib, 19 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ STJ, Who is Katibat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad?, 20 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁹⁸ USDOS, Terrorist Designation of Katibat al Tawhid wal Jihad, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Al-Monitor, Jihadi group steps up arrests of rivals, former jihadi allies in Idlib, 9 February 2022, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ Al-Monitor, Turkey's blind eye to jihadis worsens its predicaments in Syria, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁰¹ UN Security Council, Twenty-ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2022/83, 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 38

²⁰² Al-Monitor, Political, military wings of Islamist movement clash in Idlib, 11 May 2021, [url](https://www.al-monitor.com/...)

²⁰³ SOHR, Military escalation | Regime ground forces shell National Liberation Front positions killing one member and injuring four others, 9 June 2022, [url](#)



See also section [2.1 Idlib governorate](#). Further information on anti-GoS armed groups in the Idlib area is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

1.4.6. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS, IS or Daesh)

ISIL in Syria has its centre in the desert south of the Euphrates, called al-Badia²⁰⁴, where ISIL militants are brought together and trained prior to being dispatched to Syria or Iraq.²⁰⁵ US-led Coalition officials and ISIL experts interviewed by the European University Institute (EUI) estimated that, as of February 2022, ISIL had around 1 000 active fighters in Syria and Iraq combined and was supported by 5 000 to 10 000 non-combatants.²⁰⁶ The UN Security Council estimated its strength at between 6 000 and 10 000 fighters across Syria and Iraq, with the group's operational leaders being mainly based in Syria.²⁰⁷

ISIL continued to exert its influence on the local population in eastern Deir Ez-Zor, which is described as an ISIL stronghold. In south-eastern Deir Ez-Zor (in the triangle of cities of al-Zir, Dhiban and al-Buseyrah) ISIL demanded and received protection money from traders. Targeted killings remained frequent in the area and ISIL put pressure on civilians' lifestyle choices by subjecting them to threats. It further appointed a sharia judge, who intervened in cases of theft or debt. In north-eastern Deir Ez-Zor, ISIL regularly targeted or killed AANES representatives, leading to an administrative vacuum. ISIL is said to have embedded itself within the local shepherd communities.²⁰⁸ In the city of Sweida, ISIL started imposing flying checkpoints at night, while in the city of Tayyana all officials are assumed to having pledged allegiance to ISIL.²⁰⁹ From the end of 2021, ISIL militants from north-eastern Syria started to infiltrate Deir Ez-Zor's National Defence Forces and at least one ISIL cell penetrated the southern Homs countryside.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁵ Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8

²⁰⁶ Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 5

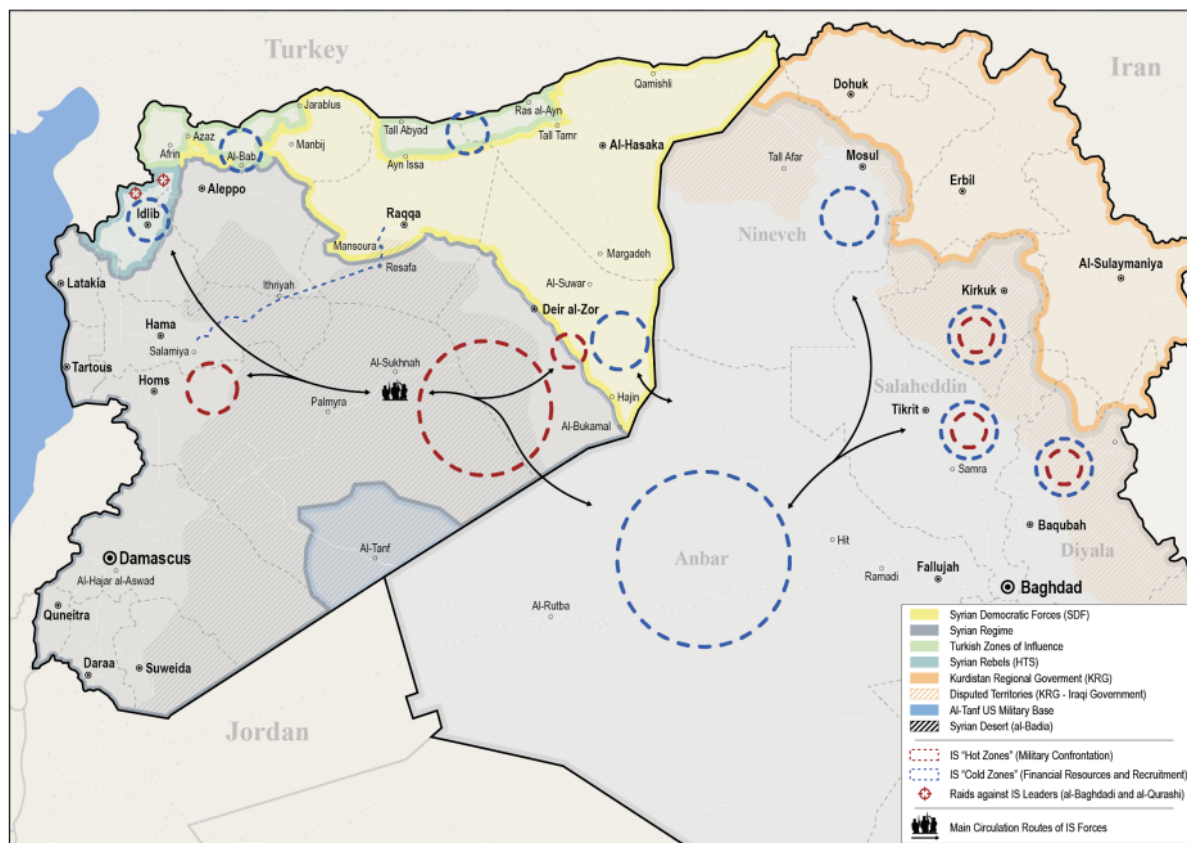
²⁰⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2022/547, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 41

²⁰⁸ Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 5

²⁰⁹ Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6

²¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13





Following increased attacks by ISIL in central Syria in 2020, the GoS, supported by Russia and Iranian forces, launched four major offensives against ISIL in the first half of 2021: the first in western Deir Ez-Zor in January 2021, the second in east Homs in mid-April, the third in southern Raqqa in mid-May and the fourth in late spring in eastern Hama.²¹⁸ The operations led to a decrease in ISIL attacks from April 2021 until the end of the year.²¹⁹

Receiving reliable data of ISIL attacks is complicated by the fact that the organization is known to underreport its attacks in the Syrian central desert, as analysed by Gregory Waters and Charlie Winter, associate fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT).²²¹

The US Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, which has as its aim to militarily defeat ISIL, reported that during the second quarter of 2021, ISIL used Syria's central desert to launch attacks at GoS forces. ISIL further 'retained a strong presence' in the al-Hol camp in north-eastern Syria.²²² In the third quarter of 2021 it was reported that ISIL claimed fewer attacks compared to the previous quarter but continued low-level insurgency. ISIL

²²² USODOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress April 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#)

seemed to consolidate in the desert and prepare for increased activity. The group at the same time continued recruitment and indoctrination at the al-Hol camp²²³, which holds approximately 57 000 displaced people, mainly women and children. A further 10 000 ISIL fighters are detained in SDF facilities.²²⁴

In January 2022, ISIL conducted its biggest military operation in Syria since the fall of Baghouz in March 2019. The group attacked al-Sina'a prison, located in the city of Hasaka and controlled by the SDF and the US-led Coalition²²⁵, and took control of two adjacent neighbourhoods for five days.²²⁶ According to an analysis published by EUI, the operation demonstrated ISIL's continuous centralised structure and its capability of mobilising forces.²²⁷ For the US Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve the attack demonstrated ISIL's continuous ability to launch complex attacks.²²⁸

In February 2022 ISIL's leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi, killed himself following a US raid in Idlib governorate. In March 2022 his successor, Abu Hasan al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi, was announced.²²⁹

In early April 2022, ISIL escalated its attacks against GoS forces and allied militias in the Syrian desert, known as Badia. The attacks targeted big military convoys, military barracks and oil fields. ISIL fighters used a variety of weapons, including medium- and short-range missiles, heavy machine guns, mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), Grad rockets and mortars. The new tactics inflicted a heavy loss on GoS forces. Attacks were also launched in Deir Ez-Zor, Homs and Raqqah governorates, focusing on oil fields run by companies close to the GoS.²³⁰ Throughout the first quarter of 2022, ISIL operated mainly in Badia and across northern and eastern provinces of Syria, while top ISIL leaders 'likely remained in the western Idlib governorate'. In northeastern and southern Syria, ISIL worked on extending their influence among the Sunni Arab population. The group further retained a 'smaller, but still active presence in the northern Raqqah and Hasakah governorates'.²³¹

Further information on ISIL is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

²²³ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress July 1, 2021– September 30, 2021, 3 November 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴ US, CRS (United States Congressional Research Service), The Islamic State, 10 May 2022, [url](#)

²²⁵ Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁶ Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

²²⁷ Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁸ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 3

²²⁹ France 24, Islamic State names new leader, confirms death of predecessor, 10 March 2022, [url](#)

²³⁰ Al-Monitor, Islamic State escalates attacks in Syrian desert, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

²³¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 21

1.5. Recent security trends and armed confrontations during the reference period

1.5.1. Areas under the control of the Government of Syria (GoS)

As of the beginning of 2022, the GoS had control over 63.38 % of the state's territory, including central and southern Syria, the governorates along the Mediterranean coast, and parts of eastern Syria and Aleppo. The GoS also controlled Syria's most important cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, or Hama. GoS control over Dar'a governorate increased after a military operation, while it remained 'fragile' in Sweida, with the GoS' focus on strengthening its security services and state institutions in the region, as reported by Jusoor for Studies.²³² According to iMMAP, an international NPO, 66 % of the Syrian population were living in GoS-controlled areas as of November 2021, including 10.4 million residents and 3.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).²³³

From June 2021, the GoS besieged a neighbourhood of Dar'a city, Dar'a al-Balad, for 75 days, where intense fighting took place and over 38 000 residents were temporarily displaced.²³⁴ After shelling and a ground offensive conducted by pro-GoS forces,²³⁵ including the Fourth Division²³⁶, an agreement was reached on 8 September and the GoS ended the siege.²³⁷ As part of their attack on Dar'a al-Balad, the pro-GoS forces used improvised rocket-assisted munition and other rocket munitions in tightly populated areas, resulting in loss of civilian lives and denying residents access to food and health care.²³⁸ The UNCOI is investigating whether these attacks amount to war crimes.²³⁹

Violent incidents, including retaliatory killings with victims on both sides and targeted killings of persons refusing to 'reconcile with the government' continued in November and December 2021 across Dar'a countryside.²⁴⁰ Similarly, targeted killings, IED attacks, exchanges of fire, clashes and abductions were reported from Dar'a, Quneitra and Sweida governorates in the first half of 2022²⁴¹, involving GoS forces and pro-GoS militia groups, former members of

²³² Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control in Syria end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, 24 December 2021, [url](#)

²³³ iMMAP, The Current Status of Social Support in Syria, January 2022, [url](#), p. 17

²³⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

²³⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 23-31; New Arab (The), Syrian Insight: What do the regime and Russia want from Daraa province?, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

²³⁶ Reuters, Syrian army steps up offensive on rebel redoubt in southwestern city, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

²³⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 32; France 24, Syrian army enters opposition bastion under Russian-negotiated truce, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

²³⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 35

²³⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 35

²⁴⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 33-34

²⁴¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 6



armed opposition groups, ISIL fighters and other unidentified actors.²⁴² Violent incidents including killings and assassination attempts in Dar'a governorate were also reported in the context of drug trade and other criminal activities, as well as previous, political and personal conflicts.²⁴³

Violent incidents in April and May 2022, including killings of GoS-affiliated individuals, were also reported from Rural Damascus governorate. Reportedly, the perpetrators of these attacks remained unknown except for two incidents for which ISIL claimed responsibility.²⁴⁴ The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported on attacks on military checkpoints in Rural Damascus in June²⁴⁵ and July²⁴⁶ 2022 and on the killings of alleged collaborators with GoS forces,²⁴⁷ among other violent incidents. SOHR reportedly has registered 78 murders in GoS-controlled areas since early 2022.²⁴⁸

Hostilities, clashes and mutual shelling of pro-GoS and opposition forces along the frontlines in the north-west of Syria (Idlib and western Aleppo governorates) continued throughout the reference period, causing the death of civilians and displacement.²⁴⁹ In June 2021, the SAA was reportedly shelling the southern parts of north-western Idlib. The forces then changed location to the Badia desert to fight ISIL, together with the Russian air force.²⁵⁰ Shellings by GoS forces of areas in Idlib continued from July, killing civilians.²⁵¹ Between July and December 2021, the UNCOI documented an increase in air strikes and shelling by pro-GoS forces in Idlib. During July and August in particular, intense shelling was conducted south of the M4 highway.²⁵² Air strikes by pro-GoS forces further targeted Operation Euphrates Shield areas in the north of the country.²⁵³

²⁴² UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 26

²⁴³ COAR, Dar'a Killings Highlight Unseen Local Toll of Syria's Drug Trade, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ Arab Weekly (The), Violence surges in countryside surrounding Damascus, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ SOHR, Anti-regime attack | Gunmen open fire on regime checkpoint in Qudsaya, Rif Dimashq, while regime forces amass troops and block the area's entrances, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ SOHR, Security chaos | Gunmen with weapons with silencers attack Military Security checkpoint killing two and injuring others in Rif Dimashq, 30 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ SOHR, Rampant security chaos | Collaborator with regime's security services killed after being kidnapped for ten days south of Damascus, 27 July 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Dispute over people smuggling | Collaborator with regime security branches shot dead in Rif Dimashq, 7 August 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ SOHR, 78th crime in regime-held areas in 2022 | Young man stabbed to death in fights among young men in Yabroud city in western Qalamoun, 10 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ Al-Monitor, Idlib sees new escalation between Syrian government, opposition forces, 22 June 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 46; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | April through June 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁵⁰ Asharq Al-Awsat, Syria Regime Reroutes Forces from Idlib to Badia Desert in Clampdown on ISIS, 18 June 2021, [url](#)

²⁵¹ France 24, Syria army shells rebel bastion, killing seven: monitor, 22 July 2021, [url](#)

²⁵² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

²⁵³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

1.5.2. Areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups

The areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups are two discontinuous areas along the Syrian-Turkish border encompassing most of northern Aleppo and segments of the northern governorates of Raqqqa and Hasaka.²⁵⁴ Turkey has organised these armed groups under the umbrella of Syrian National Army (SNA).²⁵⁵ Between 2016 and 2020, Turkey conducted four major military operations in northern Syria. In the course of Operation ‘Euphrates Shield’, Turkish-backed forces seized control over 2 055 square kilometres of northern Aleppo governorate in August 2016. With Operation ‘Olive Branch’, Turkey captured Afrin district in January 2018. Through Operation ‘Peace Spring’ Turkey expanded the areas under its control east of the Euphrates River in late 2019. A subsequent operation called ‘Spring Shield’ was conducted in north-western Idlib governorate in February 2020, which further consolidated Turkish control over the northern areas of Syria. According to a July 2022 article by Hamidreza Azizi, fellow researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Turkey and Turkish-backed forces hold about 10 % of Syria’s territory as a result of these operations.²⁵⁶

For April and May 2021, the UN Secretary-General reported on ‘low-level mutual shelling’ and sporadic fighting between pro-GoS forces and non-state armed opposition groups along the front lines near Al-Bab in northern Aleppo governorate, but also on an intensification of mutual shelling and fighting along the contact lines in Afrin, A’zaz, and Tal Rifaat, including reports of civilian casualties.²⁵⁷ For the period between April and June 2021, the Carter Center, a nongovernmental organization focused on human rights and conflict prevention and solution, reported frequent shelling and skirmishes at the frontlines between Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas, with a clear increase in incidents at the end of June 2021 and with most of the conflict events taking place in Raqqqa Governorate (30 of 47 incidents). Tensions reportedly escalated after a rocket hit Al-Shifa Hospital in Afrin on 12 June 2021.²⁵⁸

Between July and September 2021, fighting between Turkish forces/Turkish-backed armed groups and various Kurdish armed groups reportedly increased, including shelling, clashes, and airstrikes, with a rise in conflict events reported for Manbij region, Tall Abyad and Dardara.²⁵⁹ Moreover, at the end of September 2021, Russia was reported to have conducted airstrikes on territory held by Turkish-backed forces in Afrin.²⁶⁰ For the fourth quarter of 2021, the Carter Center reported that the conflict had slightly decreased, ‘with much of the activity’ taking place in Tal Tamr, Ras Al-Ain, Afrin, A’zaz, and Ain Issa, and with more than 95 % of the documented airstrikes and shelling activity reportedly stemming from the Turkish side.²⁶¹

²⁵⁴ PHR, Destruction, Obstruction, and Inaction - The Makings of a Health Crisis in Northern Syria, December 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | April through June 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁵⁵ COAR, Northern Corridor: Needs Oriented Strategic Area Profile, October 2019, [url](#), p. 9

²⁵⁶ Azizi, H., How Iran sees Turkey’s plan for a new military operation in Syria, MEI, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 4

²⁵⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | April through June 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁵⁹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

²⁶⁰ Al-Monitor, Russia bombs Turkey’s allies in Syria ahead of Putin-Erdogan summit, 28 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁶¹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 28 March 2021, [url](#), p. 7



In its report covering the period from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, the UNCOI mentioned that, although the overall security situation had improved in northern Aleppo and the Ras Al-Ain and Tall Abyad areas compared to the ‘immediate aftermath of Operation Peace Spring and Operation Olive Branch’, people were still living ‘amid fear of shelling and improvised explosive devices’. Northern Aleppo saw several incidents of bombardment and vehicle-borne IEDs while the area between Ras Al-Ain and Tall Abyad reportedly witnessed a period of relative calm. Civilians in this ‘highly volatile region’ were reported to be confronted with ‘several conflicts, involving both pro-government and Turkish forces as well as non-State armed groups’, including SNA and SDF forces.²⁶²

The Carter Center recorded an increase in conflict incidents between Kurdish and Turkish-backed armed groups for the period between January and March 2022 compared to the previous quarter.²⁶³ For April and May 2022, the UN Secretary-General reported on significantly increasing hostilities in northern Syria, ‘including but not limited to’ Tal Rifaat in northern Aleppo, Manbij, Ain Issa and Tal Tamr.²⁶⁴ In June 2022, the London-based digital news organisation Middle East Eye reported that HTS militants had seized control over a number of villages in the southern Afrin area that were previously held by Turkish-backed armed groups.²⁶⁵

In July 2022, Calvin Wilder, analyst at the Washington D.C.-based think tank Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, described the front lines between areas under Turkish-backed forces and SDF-held territories as ‘largely static’ since October 2019, and as complicated to maintain and oftentimes marked by violence.²⁶⁶ Along the frontline, ‘tit-for-tat strikes’ by Turkish-affiliated armed groups and the SDF continued to occur, resulting in the deaths of both soldiers and civilians. According to Wilder, the situation was particularly ‘tense’ in Tal Rifaat, an isolated area under SDF control west of the Euphrates, and along the frontline near Manbij and the SDF’s main territories in the east of the Euphrates, where artillery shelling and drone attacks were regularly witnessed.²⁶⁷

According to various news reports published in July 2022, Turkey was planning another military operation in northern Syria. The operation is reported to be aiming at clearing a 30-

²⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 74

²⁶³ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics | January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 8

²⁶⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 1 (in Key points)

²⁶⁵ MEE, Syria's rebel divisions laid bare as HTS takes Afrin villages from Turkish-backed groups, 23 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

kilometer-deep ‘security zone’ of Kurdish armed groups.²⁶⁸ As of early July, the cities of Manbij and Tal Rifaat were named as the main targets of the potential offensive.²⁶⁹

Internal fighting between SNA factions reportedly exacerbated the overall instability in areas held by Turkish-backed armed groups. These internal conflicts were described as being far greater than those witnessed within the Kurdish-backed forces or the HTS and were considered ‘a severe problem for the political leadership and residents within Turkish-held areas’.²⁷⁰ According to an April 2022 news article, SNA infighting occurred almost daily and mainly in the cities of Jarablus, al-Bab, Afrin, Ras Al-Ain und A’zaz. As these clashes often took place amidst residential areas, residents were reported to be negatively affected and sometimes even injured²⁷¹ or killed.²⁷²

As reported by UNOCHA in its Humanitarian Needs Overview, most of the 309 IED attacks recorded in the first months of 2021 happened in areas controlled by ‘armed groups in Turkish operations areas of Aleppo Governorate’, particularly in residential areas and markets.²⁷³

1.5.3. Kurdish-controlled areas in north-east Syria

According to a UN map (see Map 3) depicting estimated areas of influence as of January 2022, areas under control of Kurdish forces - including the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - comprise Hasaka governorate (except for the Turkish-controlled so-called Operation Peace Spring area, see also section 1.5.2 of this report) as well as parts of Aleppo, Raqqqa and Deir Ez-Zor governorates in north-eastern Syria. Moreover, Manbij and its surrounding area, the area around Tal Rifaat and strips of land along the border with Turkey are under joint control of GoS and pro-GoS forces and Kurdish forces, while some parts of Syria’s international border zone with Turkey are controlled by Turkish forces and affiliated non-state armed groups.²⁷⁴

Clashes between the GoS-aligned NDF and Kurdish security forces in Qamishli city in the period from 20 to 25 April 2021 ended with Kurdish forces taking control over Tayy neighbourhood, an area of the city that has an Arab majority. Fighting erupted following the arrest of an NDF leader and member of the Arab Tayy tribe by Kurdish security forces. At least 10 NDF fighters and 3 Kurdish security forces were reportedly killed in the fighting.²⁷⁵ According to a UN report of June 2021, the clashes between GoS forces and Kurdish security forces in Qamishli city led to the temporary displacement of up to 20 000 people and killed 14 civilians, including 3 children. Fighting lasted for several days and also affected UN

²⁶⁸ MEMO, Kurdish SDF calls on Russia, Iran to prevent planned Turkish military operation, 17 July 2022, [url](#); VOA, US Officials Speak Out Against Turkish Plans for Northern Syria, 13 July 2022, [url](#); Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 July 2022, [url](#); Azizi, H., How Iran sees Turkey’s plan for a new military operation in Syria, MEI, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²⁷¹ Al-Monitor, Factional infighting escalates in northern Syria, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁷² New Arab (The), Two civilians shot in inter-rebel fighting in northern Syria, 8 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁷³ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

²⁷⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22

²⁷⁵ COAR, Qamishli Clashes Bring Arab-Kurd Tensions to the Surface, 26 April 2021, [url](#)



humanitarian aid transports, which were prevented from entering the city until a ceasefire was agreed.²⁷⁶

In March 2022, GoS forces began blocking the delivery of flour, fuel and medicines to Kurdish-majority and Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods in Aleppo, allegedly to prevent smuggling and the delivery of supplies to four unlicensed bakeries. In an apparently retaliatory move, Kurdish security forces blocked bakeries in GoS-controlled areas in Qamishli and Hasaka in early April 2022, and reportedly briefly took control of the GoS-controlled city centre of Qamishli.²⁷⁷

In June 2022, villages around Manbij were reportedly attacked with heavy weapons by Turkish forces and associated groups, while SDF and GoS forces reinforced their positions in the area and sought support from local Arab tribes in anticipation of a large-scale military operation announced by Turkey.²⁷⁸ For the same reason, SDF declared a state of emergency in July 2022.²⁷⁹

Clashes and mutual shelling between Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups on the one side and Kurdish armed groups on the other side continued with varying intensity throughout the reference period. Periods of increased tensions were reported in the Ain Issa and Tall Abyad areas in Raqqqa governorate in June 2021²⁸⁰, in the Manbij area in Aleppo governorate, in Dardara in Hasaka governorate, and in Tall Abyad in the period from July to September 2021²⁸¹, and across northern Syria in the first quarter of 2022. Of 233 conflict events recorded by the Carter Center in the period from January to March that year, 46 were clashes between groups, while 186 were shelling and aerial bombardment by Turkish armed forces and their allies targeting SDF positions.²⁸² SNA and SDF were reportedly frequently involved in mutual shelling and skirmishes along the line of control near Ain Issa in Raqqqa and Tal Tamr in Hasaka governorates²⁸³, which at times resulted in civilian casualties.²⁸⁴

An SDF commander was killed by a Turkish drone strike near Qamishli in Hasaka governorate in August 2021.²⁸⁵ In the same month, a Turkish soldier and two Turkish-backed fighters were reportedly killed in Ras Al-Ain countryside by an explosive device of suspected SDF origin.

²⁷⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 13; WFP, WFP Syria Situation Report #4, April 2021, 24 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁷ New Arab (The), Aleppo: Syrian regime continues siege of Kurdish neighbourhoods as SDF retaliates in Qamishli, 19 April 2022, [url](#); COAR, SDF Imposes Siege on Government of Syria Enclaves in Response to Siege of Sheikh Maqsoud, 18 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ Al-Monitor, Syrian Kurds, Arabs join forces to defend Manbij ahead of Turkish military operation, 24 June 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I April through June 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁸¹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

²⁸² Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics I January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²⁸³ Hoffman, M. and Makovsky, A., Northern Syria Security Dynamics and the Refugee Crisis, CAP, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ STJ, Ain Issa: A Father, His Three Children, Killed in an Artillery Attack by the Elite Army, 8 September 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

Airstrikes by Turkish forces targeting Kurdish forces in northern Syria reportedly continued throughout the month.²⁸⁶

ISIL continued to carry out attacks during 2021 and the first six months of 2022 across Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorates and the SDF continued to carry out counter-operations in the region east of the Euphrates.²⁸⁷ While most of the SDF and the US-led Coalition's counter-terrorism operations took place in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, some were conducted also in Hasaka and Raqqqa governorates.²⁸⁸ On 20 January 2022, ISIL attacked al-Sina prison in the city of Hasaka in an attempt to free imprisoned former members of the group. The attack and ensuing siege of the prison and of two nearby neighbourhoods by SDF forces lasted for several days and caused scores of casualties, including civilians.²⁸⁹ Around 45 000 civilians from the nearby neighbourhoods were displaced. However, by April 2022 most of them had been able to return.²⁹⁰

1.5.4. Areas in north-west Syria under anti-GoS armed groups control

Please also see section 1.5.2 of this report for an overview on the situation in north-western areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups, and section 1.5.4 of the [EUAA COI Report – Syria: Security situation \(2021\)](#) for information on developments in north-western areas prior to April 2021.

The areas of north-west Syria under control of anti-GoS armed groups include the northern parts of Idlib governorate, parts of western Aleppo governorate as well as small parts of Latakia and Hama governorates. The main towns are Idlib city, Jisr Al-Shoghour and Ariha.²⁹¹

The opposition-held areas of north-west Syria are administered by the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), which is affiliated with HTS.²⁹² Over the course of several years, HTS had cracked down on Hurras al-Din (HAD) and ISIL cells and in summer 2021 started to pressure 'smaller jihadi outfits to merge into HTS or disband and/or depart Idlib altogether'.²⁹³ As of September 2021, HTS was the 'the unchallenged, de facto governor' of areas controlled by

²⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 9; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 12; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

²⁸⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 98

²⁸⁹ Haenni, P. and Quesnay, A., Coming Up Through the Cracks: The Islamic State's Resurgence in Syria and Iraq, EUI, Policy Brief Issue 2022/16, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

²⁹⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 17

²⁹¹ Based on reading of the following maps: Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics I January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Balanche, F., Idlib May Become the Next Gaza Strip, WINEP, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹² US, CRS, Syria and U.S. Policy, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁹³ Lister, C., The Fight for Supremacy in Northwest Syria and the Implications for Global Jihad, September 2021, CTC, Vol. 14, Issue 7, [url](#), p. 48



the opposition in north-western Syria, and as such controlled the ‘most populous region of Syria outside of regime control’.²⁹⁴

According to a February 2022 report, despite the ceasefire agreement of March 2020 between Russia and Turkey to prevent a GoS offensive, the north-western area was affected by some of the most intense aerial bombardment by GoS and Russian forces in Syria.²⁹⁵ After a lull in violence following the ceasefire, hostilities intensified in the first six months of 2021.²⁹⁶ Over the year 2021, airstrikes by GoS and Russian forces struck sites with civilian presence, including hospitals, markets, schools, IDP settlements, and farms in the north-western parts of the country.²⁹⁷

In April and May 2021, ‘mutual artillery shelling and clashes between pro-GoS forces and non-State armed groups’ occurred on a daily basis in the Idlib de-escalation area.²⁹⁸ However, the level of violence was reported to have remained relatively low. In late April and early May shelling increased, following an attack by HTS on GoS positions. HTS also continued to target rival groups during April and May.²⁹⁹ HTS reportedly killed and arrested HAD members in April³⁰⁰, while rural Idlib was affected by air strikes.³⁰¹ In June and July 2021, air strikes and shelling increased in north-west Syria, including in Jabal Al-Zawiyah region in southern Idlib.³⁰² SNHR documented ‘a sudden military escalation by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces’ in early June 2021 around Jabal Al-Zawiyah area which resulted in ‘civilian casualties and significant material damage to vital facilities’.³⁰³ In June and July, more than 20 civilian fatalities were documented by the UN in areas held by anti-GoS groups in north-west Syria. Airstrikes on military sites, including HTS sites, were carried out mostly south of the M4 highway, also damaging civilian infrastructure. Over 20 000 people were displaced in June 2021 due to the conflict in the north-west, resulting in the largest displacement in the area since the March 2020 ceasefire.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁴ Lister, C., The Fight for Supremacy in Northwest Syria and the Implications for Global Jihad, September 2021, CTC, Vol. 14, Issue 7, [url](#), p. 45

²⁹⁵ Hall, N., Rescuing Aid in Syria, CSIS, February 2022, [url](#), p. 17

²⁹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

²⁹⁷ USDOS, 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²⁹⁸ Please see section 2.1.2 of the [url](#) for further information regarding the establishment of de-escalation areas.

²⁹⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 3

³⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, April 2021, [url](#)

³⁰¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 3; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2021, [url](#)

³⁰² UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 1 in ‘Key points’; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, July 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, June 2021, [url](#)

³⁰³ SNHR, Russian and Syrian Regime Forces Committed Violations That Constitute War Crimes During Unlawful Attacks on and Around the Jabal al Zaweya Area, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

In August and September 2021, violence further intensified in the Idlib de-escalation area.³⁰⁵ Airstrikes and shelling resulted in the killing and wounding of civilians, including women and children. Civilian infrastructure was damaged almost daily by intensifying air strikes, mostly south of the M4 highway.³⁰⁶ In early September the outskirts of an IDP camp in Ma'arrat Misrin were affected by air strikes.³⁰⁷ The escalation of Russian airstrikes in Turkish-held territory in Aleppo governorate in September 2021 led to concerns over a possible new military offensive to secure the strategic M4 highway in Idlib Governorate. This and attacks against refugee camps in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates resulted in the displacement of civilians in the north-west.³⁰⁸

In October 2021, HTS attacked two of rival groups, Junud Al-Sham and Jund Allah, in Latakia governorate, leading to Junud Al-Sham agreeing to withdraw from confrontation areas.³⁰⁹ In October and November 2021, shelling and clashes between armed opposition groups and GoS forces continued³¹⁰, including south of the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate.³¹¹ Attacks in the north-west of the country also impacted humanitarian operations, as there were hostilities close to warehouses of the United Nations and their partners, and to delivery routes and distribution points.³¹²

Between July and December 2021, more than 80 % of conflict-related activities in Idlib were pro-GoS shelling and aerial bombardment in predominantly southern Idlib.³¹³ In late December 2021 violence escalated, when pro-GoS forces attacked residential areas.³¹⁴ Shelling and clashes between armed opposition groups and GoS forces continued across contact lines in the north-west in December 2021 and January 2022. In early January 2022, an air strike affected the Arshani water pumping station, and until 20 January 2022 access to water in Idlib city remained below previous levels.³¹⁵

³⁰⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/890, 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 3; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, September 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/890, 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 3

³⁰⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/890, 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 3

³⁰⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰⁹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I October-December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 5

³¹⁰ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, November 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#)

³¹¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 4

³¹² UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 5

³¹³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I October-December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 3

³¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

³¹⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/135, 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 4



In February and March 2022, shelling and clashes between armed opposition groups and GoS forces continued across contact lines in the north-west. However, in comparison with the end of 2021, ‘the pace of such strikes decreased.’³¹⁶ In February 2022, a US special forces raid in Atma town in Idlib governorate resulted in the killing of several civilians and ISIL fighters and raised concerns that Idlib might still be an ISIL hideout.³¹⁷

According to a report by the Carter Center, conflict activity decreased from 992 events recorded in the previous quarter to 934 in the first quarter of 2022. Over 80 % of the activity in the north-west region took place in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.³¹⁸ In late April 2022, the tempo of air strikes increased again³¹⁹, and in May 2022 Russian forces continued to carry out air-strikes in Idlib governorate.³²⁰ In the first half of July 2022, HTS and the Turkish-backed armed groups intensified attacks of GoS posts on the southern and eastern fronts. The opposition forces launched the campaign in response to increasing land and air attacks by GoS and Russian forces in the countryside of Idlib earlier in July.³²¹

As of June 2022, more than 2.8 million people in the north-west remained internally displaced. According to the UN Secretary General, ‘continued attacks on the civilian population in the north-west exposed them to serious violations of international humanitarian law’.³²²

1.5.5. Tanf

Tanf Garrison is a US-controlled military base established in 2016 and is located in close proximity to Syria’s borders with Jordan and Iraq. It is surrounded by a 55-kilometer deconfliction zone, based on a 2016 understanding between the USA and Russia. About 300 members of the Syrian opposition group Maghawir Al-Thawra (MaT), reportedly former military officers, were estimated to be spread around the deconfliction zone and collaborating with the coalition forces on operations against ISIL. MaT was reportedly also occasionally involved in preventing ISIL drug smuggling operations in the border region and in providing security for aid deliveries to the Rukban refugee camp located near the Tanf base³²³, which hosted an estimated 7 000 to 10 000 Syrian IDPs.³²⁴ However, according to an article by Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor of April 2022, Rukban has not received any humanitarian aid since 2019, when GoS forces began blocking the entry of any supplies into the camp in an attempt to push the camp’s residents to return to areas under GoS-control. With Jordan’s borders

³¹⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 4

³¹⁷ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

³¹⁸ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics I January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

³¹⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 4

³²⁰ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

³²¹ Al-Monitor, Syrian government, Russia escalate attacks in Idlib amid looming Turkish operation, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

³²² UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 4

³²³ WINEP, D., The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria, WINEP, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

³²⁴ Al-Monitor, Desperate residents flee Syrian refugee camp as supplies run out, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020, and coalition forces reportedly not providing humanitarian assistance³²⁵, the camp's residents had relied on smugglers to bring in and sell basic goods, according to media reports. A crackdown on smugglers in May 2022 interrupted this supply line and brought residents 'to the brink of famine'³²⁶ until a food convoy by Jordanian traders was allowed to enter the camp in June 2022.³²⁷

A drone attack on Tanf was reported in October 2021³²⁸, while MaT positions around Tanf were reportedly attacked in airstrikes in June 2022. According to media reports, the latter attack was carried out by Russian forces who allegedly issued a warning ahead.³²⁹

Further information on Tanf is available in section 1.5.5 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

1.6. Impact of violence on the civilian population

1.6.1. Tactics and weapons used

(a) General

According to Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)³³⁰, the extent of explosive violence in the country continued to fall in 2021. Syria, however, was the second-worst impacted country worldwide for the second year in a row in this regard. From 2015 to 2019, Syria had been the worst impacted country. The data for 2021 showed a 33 % decrease in civilian casualties (from 3 013 in 2020 to 2 016 in 2021). Idlib and Aleppo remained the worst impacted regions. Compared to 2020, however, the number of casualties in both regions decreased. In Aleppo, the number fell from 1 287 civilian casualties from explosive weapons in 2020 to 714 in 2021, and in Idlib from 998 in 2020 to 671 in 2021. The perpetrators of attacks frequently remained unknown, but according to AOAV, the GoS's use of explosive weapons resulted in at least 659 civilian casualties. Russian explosive violence resulted in 132 civilian casualties and Turkey was responsible for at least 118 civilian casualties resulting from explosive violence.³³¹ Please also see section [1.6.3](#) of this report for further information on civilian casualties.

According to Airwars³³² in 2021, Russia and the GoS did not make a concerted effort to seize Idlib governorate. However, at least 22 and up to 280 civilians in total were allegedly killed by

³²⁵ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria: 8,000 IDPs in Rukban camp need urgent humanitarian intervention, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

³²⁶ MEE, Rare food convoy to camp on Syria-Jordan border signals shift in Amman policy, 19 June 2022, [url](#)

³²⁷ MEE, Rare food convoy to camp on Syria-Jordan border signals shift in Amman policy, 19 June 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), Al-Rukban camp receives first shipment from Jordan in four years, 13 June 2022, [url](#)

³²⁸ New Arab (The), Explosions at Syria's Al-Tanf base used by US-led coalition forces: monitor, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

³²⁹ Enab Baladi, Bombing US garrison at al-Tanf is a Russian warning, not only a "message", 23 June 2022, [url](#);

Syrian Observer (The), Targeting U.S.-led Forces in al-Tanf, Russia's 'Proof of Existence', 28 June 2022, [url](#)

³³⁰ AOAV is a not-for-profit organisation that records casualties caused by explosive weapons at the global level. For more information about AOAV see AOAV, What do we do to address the impact of weapons?, n.d., [url](#)

³³¹ AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 19

³³² Airwars is a not-for-profit transparency watchdog which tracks, assesses, archives and investigates civilian harm claims resulting primarily from explosive weapons use in conflict-affected nations including Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia and Yemen. For more information see Airwars, Who we are, n.d., [url](#)



their air and artillery strikes, the majority in the Idlib region.³³³ In 2021, Turkey did not launch major new offensives, and Airwars recorded ‘a total of 26 locally alleged civilian harm incidents from Turkish-led actions in Syria, resulting in at least 29 civilian deaths’.³³⁴ According to Airwars, the US-led Coalition against ISIL continued to operate at a low level. In total, between 15 and 27 civilians were likely killed by US-led Coalition actions in 20 incidents throughout 2021.³³⁵ Regarding allegations of civilian harm against Kurdish forces during 2021, Airwars noted that Kurdish forces reportedly killed between 40 and 63 civilians, including in a single event in Afrin on 19 November 2021, where up to 17 civilians were allegedly injured during shelling.³³⁶

(b) Weapons used

In June 2022, the UNCOI released a report on attacks on civilians in Syria over the past ten years. The report mentions indiscriminate attacks on densely populated areas by GoS forces, including the use of unguided munitions and high explosive munitions with wide area effects over the past ten years.³³⁷ According to the UN Secretary General’s June 2022 report, covering April and May 2022, ‘[c]ivilians were killed and injured as a result of air strikes, ground-based strikes, attacks with various types of improvised explosive devices and gunfire’. Civilian objects were also affected by hostilities.³³⁸ In its February 2022 report (covering July to December 2021) the UNCOI reported frequent attacks involving IEDs³³⁹, the use of improvised rocket-assisted munitions and other unguided rocket artillery, which are known to be highly inaccurate.³⁴⁰ In the first nine months of 2021 a total of 309 IED incidents, killing 242 civilians and injuring 502 civilians, were recorded by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR). The incidents included vehicle borne IEDs and explosive remnants of war (ERW). Most of the IED incidents were recorded in Turkish operation areas in Aleppo governorate, mainly occurring in residential areas and markets.³⁴¹ The UNCOI also reported the use of artillery strikes and unguided munitions³⁴², including unguided Grad rockets³⁴³, the use of precision-guided artillery shells, including the Krasnopol-type³⁴⁴, and drone strikes.³⁴⁵

³³³ Airwars, Annual Report 2021, May 2022, [url](#), p. 13

³³⁴ Airwars, Annual Report 2021, May 2022, [url](#), p. 14

³³⁵ Airwars, Annual Report 2021, May 2022, [url](#), p. 14

³³⁶ Airwars, Annual Report 2021, May 2022, [url](#), p. 15

³³⁷ OHCHR, Civilians under attack in Syria; Towards preventing further civilian harm, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 28 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

³³⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

³³⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 6, 76

³⁴⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 27

³⁴¹ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

³⁴² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 56

³⁴³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 57

³⁴⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 58

³⁴⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 99

According to AOAV, in 2021, ground-launched weapons, mainly shelling, accounted for the most civilian harm (58 % of civilian casualties) of all weapon types. In 2021, the second-highest cause of civilian casualties were IEDs (26 % of civilian casualties). Air launched weapons, which had caused the highest proportion of civilian casualties between 2015 and 2020, were responsible for 11 % of the civilian casualties in 2021. Compared to 2020, this was 81 % less.³⁴⁶

According to information provided by the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) in its monthly published Explosive Weapons Monitor, ground-launched weapons caused between 46 % and 77 % of the total civilian casualties between October 2021 and April 2022. Directly emplaced weapons (e.g. improvised explosive devices, landmines, roadside bombs, car bombs) caused between 11 % and 31 %, and air launched-weapons (airstrikes, air-dropped bombs, air-launched missile) between 7 % and 38 % of civilian casualties in the same period.³⁴⁷

In areas affected by intense hostilities, including Idlib, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka, Damascus, Quneitra and Dar'a, explosive ordnance contamination is widespread. About one in three communities was potentially contaminated by explosives.³⁴⁸ UNHCR notes that 805 people were killed and nearly 3 000 others injured by mines and explosive ordnance in Syria, in 2021. An estimated half of the Syrian population lived in areas contaminated with explosive ordnance.³⁴⁹ In March 2022 the Carter Center published a report mapping unexploded ordnance in Syria between December 2012 and May 2021. According to the report, between 100 000 and 300 000 explosive munitions failed to detonate in this period, although the count is likely to be higher.³⁵⁰ In 2021, SNHR recorded the killing of 176 civilians as a result of landmine explosions. According to the organisation, the use of prohibited and indiscriminate munitions caused the maiming or death of civilians even years after they were originally deployed.³⁵¹ According to a joint report by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), Syria is the only country to have experienced continued use of cluster munitions since 2012, with at least one attack during the period of 1 August 2020 and 31 July 2021.³⁵² According to another report by the Carter Center, between January 2021 and March 2022, at least 248 incidents of civilians or other persons being killed by leftover landmines and other unexploded ordnances (UXO) were reported.³⁵³

(c) Use of chemical weapons

No information on the usage of chemical weapons within the reference period for this report could be found.

The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) concluded in April 2021 'that units of the Syrian Arab Air Force

³⁴⁶ AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor, 2022, [url](#), p. 19

³⁴⁷ INEW, Explosive Weapons Monitor, Recent Updates, n.d., [url](#); The Explosive Weapons Monitor also provides (less detailed) monthly information on the period between May and September 2021.

³⁴⁸ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

³⁴⁹ UNHCR, Protection Analysis Update, June 2022, [url](#), p. 16

³⁵⁰ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications, December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

³⁵¹ SNHR, Annual report on death toll of civilians in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

³⁵² ICBL and CMC, Cluster Munition Monitor 2021, September 2021, [url](#), p. 14

³⁵³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 17



used chemical weapons in Saraqib on 4 February 2018'.³⁵⁴ A January 2022 report of an OPCW fact-finding-mission concluded that a 'chemical blister agent was used as a weapon' in Marea in September 2015³⁵⁵, and in February 2022, another OPCW fact-finding-mission concluded that an 'industrial chlorine cylinder was used as a weapon' in Kafr Zeita on 1 October 2016.³⁵⁶ In April 2021, certain rights and privileges of the GoS at the OPCW were suspended by state parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.³⁵⁷ According to Human Rights Watch, GoS forces had used chlorine and the nerve agent sarin over the course of the war, while ISIL militants had used sulphur mustard on several occasions.³⁵⁸

(d) Attacks against civilian targets and population

Concerning the siege on Dar'a and other attacks in the wider region, the UNCOI in its February 2022 report noted that tactics used by pro-GoS forces 'violated the right to access to food and health care, and freedom of movement, and may amount to collective punishment'. The use of rocket munitions in densely populated areas 'may amount to the war crime of launching indiscriminate attacks resulting in death or injury to civilians, or damage to civilian objects, including medical facilities'.³⁵⁹ According to the UNCOI, witnesses and survivors claimed that 'attacks appeared to be aimed at harming civilians, increasing destruction and displacement and weakening chances for economic recovery or stability in opposition-held areas' in the north-west of the country.³⁶⁰ Idlib city and Ariha town faced indiscriminate attacks on densely populated civilian areas, resulting in fatalities and the damaging of two schools, residential and commercial buildings. According to the UNCOI, 'in neither case was there any indication of a military objective in the targeted urban areas'.³⁶¹ In July 2021, in Sarjah village, first responders were targeted with precision artillery strikes on a civilian home and in September 2021, in Mar'yan village a medical clinic was struck precisely by two munitions. The clinic was the last functional medical centre in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area and was severely damaged in the attack.³⁶²

Regarding northern Aleppo and the Ras al-Ayn and Tall Abyad regions, the UNCOI described strikes by pro-GoS forces or the SDF on populated areas and noted that these attacks and IED

³⁵⁴ OPCW, OPCW Releases Second Report by Investigation and Identification Team, 12 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁵ OPCW, OPCW issues Fact-Finding Mission report on chemical weapons use allegation in Marea, Syria, in September 2015, 26 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁶ OPCW, OPCW issues Fact-Finding Mission report on chemical weapons use allegation in Kafr Zeita, Syria, on 1 October 2016, 1 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁷ OPCW, Conference of the States Parties adopts Decision to suspend certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic under the CWC, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁸ HRW, World Report 2022 - Syria, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

³⁵⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 35

³⁶⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

³⁶¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 56

³⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 59

attacks ‘may amount to the war crime of launching indiscriminate attacks resulting in death or injury of civilians’.³⁶³

According to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), in the year 2021, 31 attacks on healthcare were reported country-wide, most being recorded in Dar’a, Deir Ez-Zor and Aleppo governorates.³⁶⁴ Between January and March 2022, WHO reported six attacks on healthcare facilities which led to three health care providers killed and one patient injured.³⁶⁵

1.6.2. Security incidents

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) 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 media reports, but also from reports by international institutions and non-governmental organisations and data provided by local partners of ACLED.³⁶⁶ On Syria, ACLED incorporates data from a number of partners, including SNHR, Airwars, the Carter Center, Liveuamap, Syria Direct, SOHR, the London School of Economics’ Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, the International Security and Development Center and Clingendael Institute.³⁶⁷

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 regains territory and non-state actor overtakes 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 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 attack, remote explosive/landmine/IED, grenade, chemical weapon.
- **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.

³⁶³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 81

³⁶⁴ WHO/ Health Cluster, Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. Syrian Arab Republic. Annual Report 2021, 3 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁵ WHO/ Health Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Attacks on health care in Syria, 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ ACLED, Methodology, April 2019, [url](#) ACLED, FAQs: ACLED Sourcing Methodology, February 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁷ ACLED, Syria Partner Network, April 2019, [url](#)



- **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, change to group/activity, non-violent transfer of territory, arrests.³⁶⁸

For the purpose of this report only the following type of events were included in the analysis: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. A country overview of the data on riots and protests is also provided separately (see section [Protests and riots](#)).

EUAA used the publicly available ACLED curated dataset for Middle East (12 August 2022) for security incidents figures, graphs and maps.³⁶⁹

According to the aforementioned ACLED dataset³⁷⁰, between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022 there were 12 194 security incidents recorded in Syria: 2 345 were coded as battles, 7 466 as explosions/remote violence, and 2 383 as violence against civilians. Most security incidents were recorded in Aleppo (2 776), Idlib (2 253) and Hasaka (1 671) governorates. The lowest security incidents figures were recorded in Quneitra (58), Damascus (21) and Tartous (6) governorates.

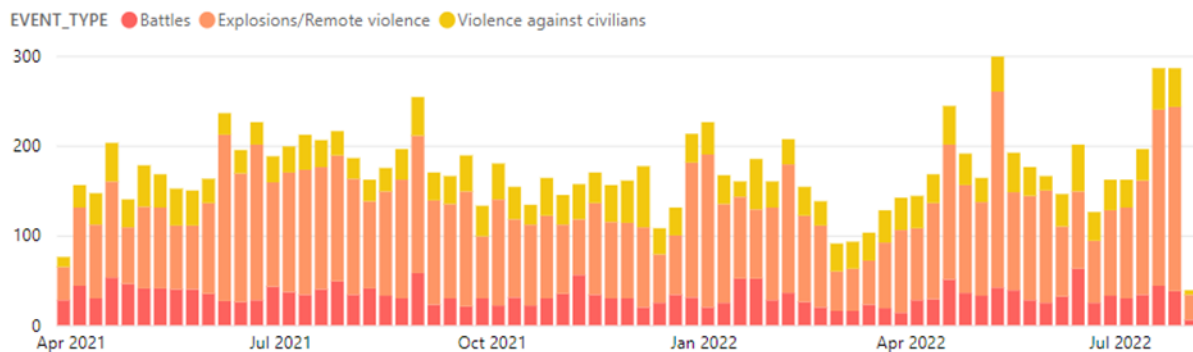


Figure 1: Evolution of security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022³⁷¹

(a) Battles

Battles (armed clashes) is the category with the third most registered security incidents. During the reference period, there were 2 345 battles recorded by ACLED, an average of 146 battles/month. Most battles were recorded in the governorates of Aleppo (493), Deir Ez-Zor (437) and Dar’a (383). The lowest number of battles were recorded in Tartous (1), Damascus (2), and Quneitra (14).³⁷²

³⁶⁸ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, January 2021, [url](#), pp. 7-17

³⁶⁹ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

³⁷⁰ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

³⁷¹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

³⁷² EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

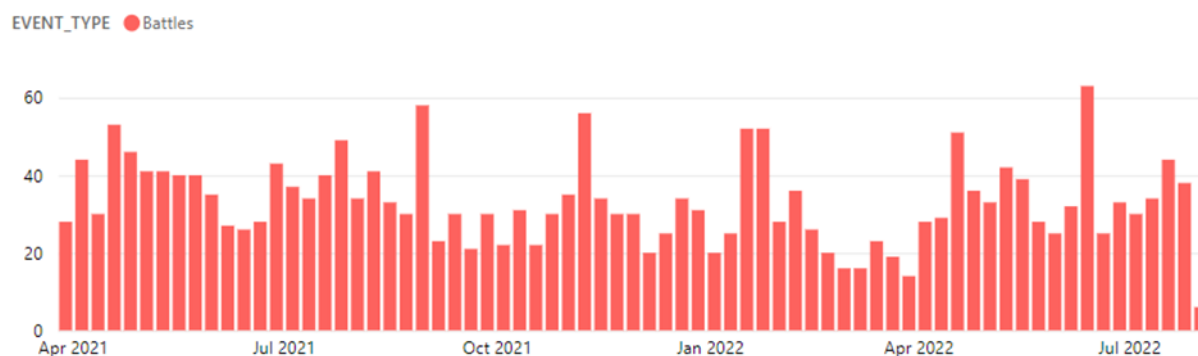


Figure 2: Evolution of security events coded ‘battles’ between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022³⁷³

(b) Explosions/remote violence

Explosions/remote violence, which includes explosive devices, artillery fire and air strikes, is the category with the highest number of individual incidents by far with 7 466 incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, an average of 466 incidents/month. The largest number of explosions/remote violence was registered in Idlib (1 943), followed by Aleppo (1 893) and Raqq (912) governorates. The lowest number of explosions/remote violence were documented in Tartous (3), Damascus (11) and Sweida (11).

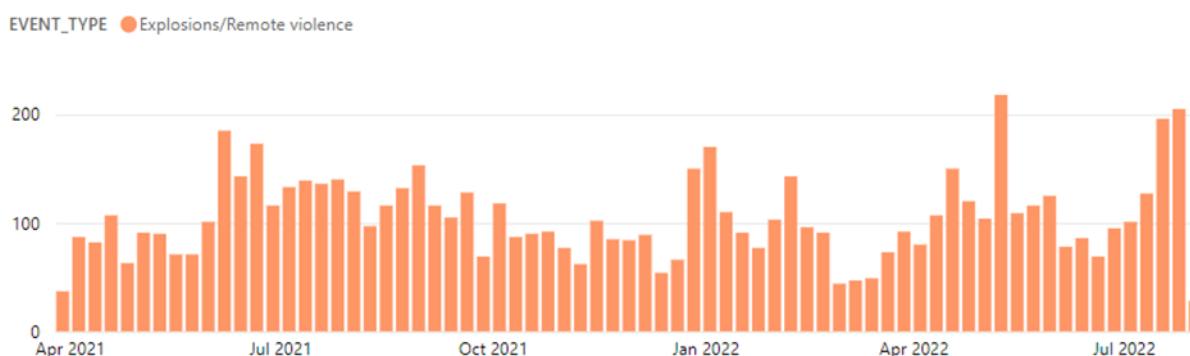


Figure 3: Evolution of security events coded ‘explosions/remote violence’ between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022³⁷⁴

(c) Violence against civilians

The second largest category of incidents is violence against civilians with 2 383 incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, an average of 148 incidents/month. Most incidents during the year were recorded in Hasaka (576), Deir Ez-Zor (402) and Aleppo (390) governorates. The lowest number of incidents were recorded in Tartous and Latakia (2 each) and Quneitra (5) governorates.

³⁷³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

³⁷⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

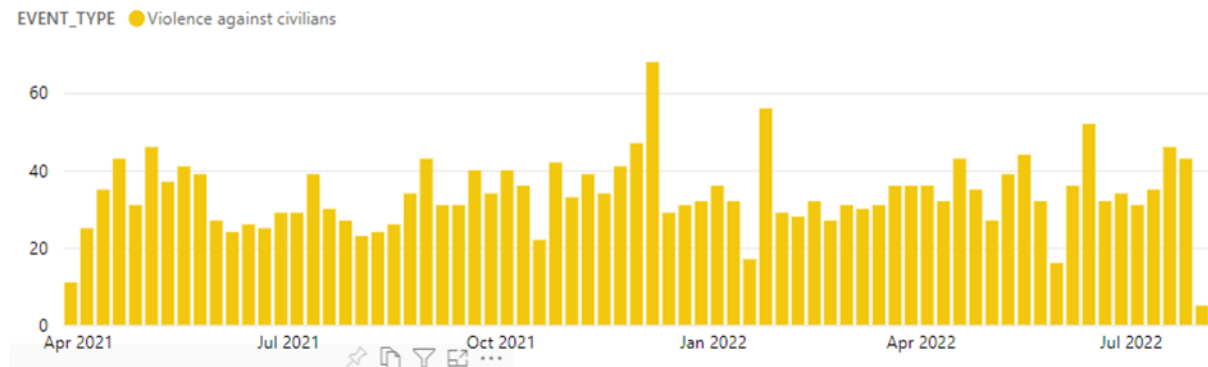


Figure 4: Evolution of 'violence against civilians' events between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022 based on ACLED data³⁷⁵

(d) Protests and riots

According to ACLED data, between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022 there were 384 protests and 105 riots. Most protests took place in Aleppo (103), Hasaka (69) and Deir Ez-Zor governorates (61). The largest number of riots were recorded in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zor (50) followed by Hasaka (18) and Sweida (17).

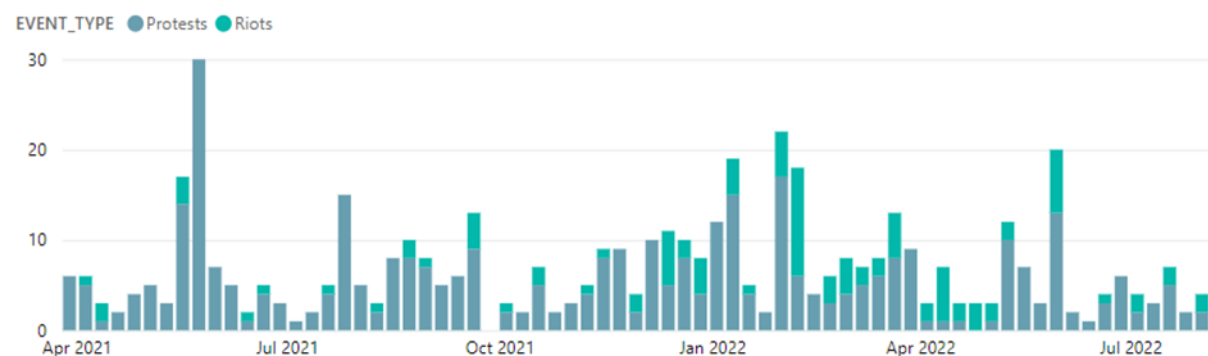


Figure 5: Evolution of events coded 'protests' and 'riots' between April 2021 and 1 August 2022 based on ACLED data³⁷⁶

1.6.3. Civilian fatalities

Many international monitoring groups have given up on providing detailed estimates of the number of fatalities because of the complexity of the situation and lack of access to first-hand information.³⁷⁷ The UN stopped publishing statistics on conflict-related deaths in 2014, stating that it was no longer possible to arrive at accurate figures.³⁷⁸ In September 2021, the UN released its first casualty figure since 2014, stating that it had identified 350 209 individuals

³⁷⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

³⁷⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

³⁷⁷ New York Times (The), How Syria's death toll is lost in the fog of war, 13 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ BBC News, Syria war: UN calculates new death toll, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

killed between March 2011 and March 2021.³⁷⁹ This figure included 27 126 children.³⁸⁰ Of the overall fatality number, 143 350 or 40.9 % were identified as civilian deaths.³⁸¹ Currently, most international experts state that the number of overall fatalities in Syria since the war broke out in 2011 is somewhere around 500 000 or higher, but indicate that these are very rough estimates.³⁸² According to SOHR, the overall death toll reached 606 000 between March 2011 and May 2021, of which the organisation itself had documented about 495 000 fatalities.³⁸³ SOHR recorded 3 746 fatalities during the year 2021, among them 1 505 civilians, which represents the lowest annual death toll recorded since the beginning of the conflict in 2011.³⁸⁴

There are several Syrian organisations that still attempt to keep count; however, the figures vary between organisations. This is related to the fact that these organisations have varying methods, ground presence, and access to information.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁹ OHCHR, High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council: 350,209 Civilians Have Been Killed in the Syrian Conflict, 24 September 2021, [url](#); BBC News, Syria war: UN calculates new death toll, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/50/68], 28 June 2022, [url](#), para. 19

³⁸¹ UN Human Rights Council, Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/50/68], 28 June 2022, [url](#), para. 23

³⁸² SOHR, Total death toll | Over 606,000 people killed across Syria since the beginning of the “Syrian Revolution”, including 495,000 documented by SOHR, 1 June 2021, [url](#); USIP, The Current Situation in Syria, 26 August 2020, [url](#); SOHR, More than 570 thousand people were killed on the Syrian territory within 8 years of revolution demanding freedom, democracy, justice, and equality, 15 March 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), How Syria’s death toll is lost in the fog of war, 13 April 2018, [url](#); SOHR, On International Human Rights Day: Millions of Syrians robbed of “rights” and 593 thousand killed in a decade, 9 December 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Why has the Syrian war lasted 11 years?, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

³⁸³ SOHR, Total death toll | Over 606,000 people killed across Syria since the beginning of the “Syrian Revolution”, including 495,000 documented by SOHR, 1 June 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁴ SOHR, SOHR: 3,746 Syrians Were Killed, Including Civilians, During 2021, 23 December 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁵ New Humanitarian (The), Counting under fire: the untold story of Syria’s casualty data, 27 October 2015, [url](#); New Arab (The), Will we ever really know how many people have died in Syria since 2011?, 28 January 2020, [url](#)



Civilian fatalities by governorate	OHCHR 2021 ³⁸⁶	SHRC 2021 ³⁸⁷	SNHR 2021 ³⁸⁸	OHCHR 2022 ³⁸⁹	SNHR 2022 ³⁹⁰
Damascus		2	1		3
Rural Damascus		1	13		80
Idlib		214	256		93

³⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

³⁸⁷ SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 5

³⁸⁸ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

³⁸⁹ Figures based on total number of civilian fatalities reported by OHCHR to the UN Security Council between 1 December 2021 and 31 May 2022. UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/135], 21 February 2022, [url](#), para 2; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para 2 (in Key points); UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 2 (in Key points)

³⁹⁰ Figures based on number of civilian fatalities documented by SNHR in the following reports: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

Civilian fatalities by governorate	OHCHR 2021 ³⁸⁶	SHRC 2021 ³⁸⁷	SNHR 2021 ³⁸⁸	OHCHR 2022 ³⁸⁹	SNHR 2022 ³⁹⁰
Deir Ez-Zor		216	201		72
Aleppo		214	237		108
Dar'a		255	203		146
Hama		94	88		27
Homs		30	28		14
Hasaka		125	154		63
Raqqa		77	75		24
Quneitra		4	10		1
Sweida		5	13		23
Latakia		-	2		-
Tartous		-	-		-
Total	747	1237	1271	256	654

Figure 6. Civilian fatalities in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR, SHRC (only for 2021) and OHCHR (only for 2021 and for the period 1 December 2021 – 31 May 2022) data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 1 271 civilian fatalities³⁹¹, a drop by 27 % compared to 2020.³⁹² Other organisations documenting civilian casualties in Syria had comparable figures for 2021. The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) recorded 1 237 civilian fatalities in 2021, although it does not provide information on their research methodology.³⁹³

SNHR provides a breakdown of civilian fatalities by the governorate in which they occurred (see Figure 6). Most civilian fatalities 2021 were recorded by SNHR in the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, Dar'a and Deir Ez-Zor. Around 46 % of all civilian fatalities documented by SNHR were recorded in governorates where anti-GoS armed groups retained some territorial control: Idlib, Aleppo, Hama and Latakia. The lowest number of civilian fatalities recorded in 2021 by SNHR were in Tartous (no civilian deaths), Latakia (2) and Quneitra (10) governorates.

In the first seven months of 2022, SNHR documented 654 civilian deaths across Syria, most of whom were recorded in Dar'a, Aleppo and Idlib governorates.

OHCHR documented 1 874 civilian casualties in 2021 (747 civilian deaths and 1 127 civilians injured)³⁹⁴, a 11 % decrease from 2020 when it recorded 2 095 civilian casualties (1 036 civilian deaths and 1 059 civilians injured).³⁹⁵ For the period between December 2021 and May 2022, OHCHR documented a further 256 civilian deaths and 276 civilians injured as a result of armed conflict in Syria.³⁹⁶

1.6.4. Displacement and return

UNHCR estimated that the conflict had driven some 5.6 million Syrian refugees out of the country by June 2022.³⁹⁷ At the end of 2021, 6.7 million Syrians were living in internal displacement, with around 80 % of displaced households having lived in displacement for at least four years.³⁹⁸ A general decrease in large-scale displacements was noted during 2020 and 2021 due to an overall reduction of violence, with displacements in 2021 happening

³⁹¹ SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, [url](#), 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

³⁹² For the year 2020 SNHR documented 1 734 civilian fatalities in Syria. See EUAA, COI Report: Syria - Security situation, July 2021, [url](#), p. 55

³⁹³ SHRC, SHRC documents the killing of 1,750 people in 2020, 2 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

³⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, March 2021, [url](#), p. 12. Figures provided by OHCHR to UNOCHA. OHCHR provided the following disclaimer: 'Civilian casualties and incidents included are not comprehensive but rather reflect what OHCHR could verify to reflect human rights concerns, patterns and the impact of the armed conflict and violence on civilians in Syria. Actual civilian casualties could be higher'. See p. 100.

³⁹⁶ Figures based on total number of civilian injured reported by OHCHR to the UN Security Council between 1 December 2021 and 31 May 2022. UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/135], 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 2; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 2; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 2

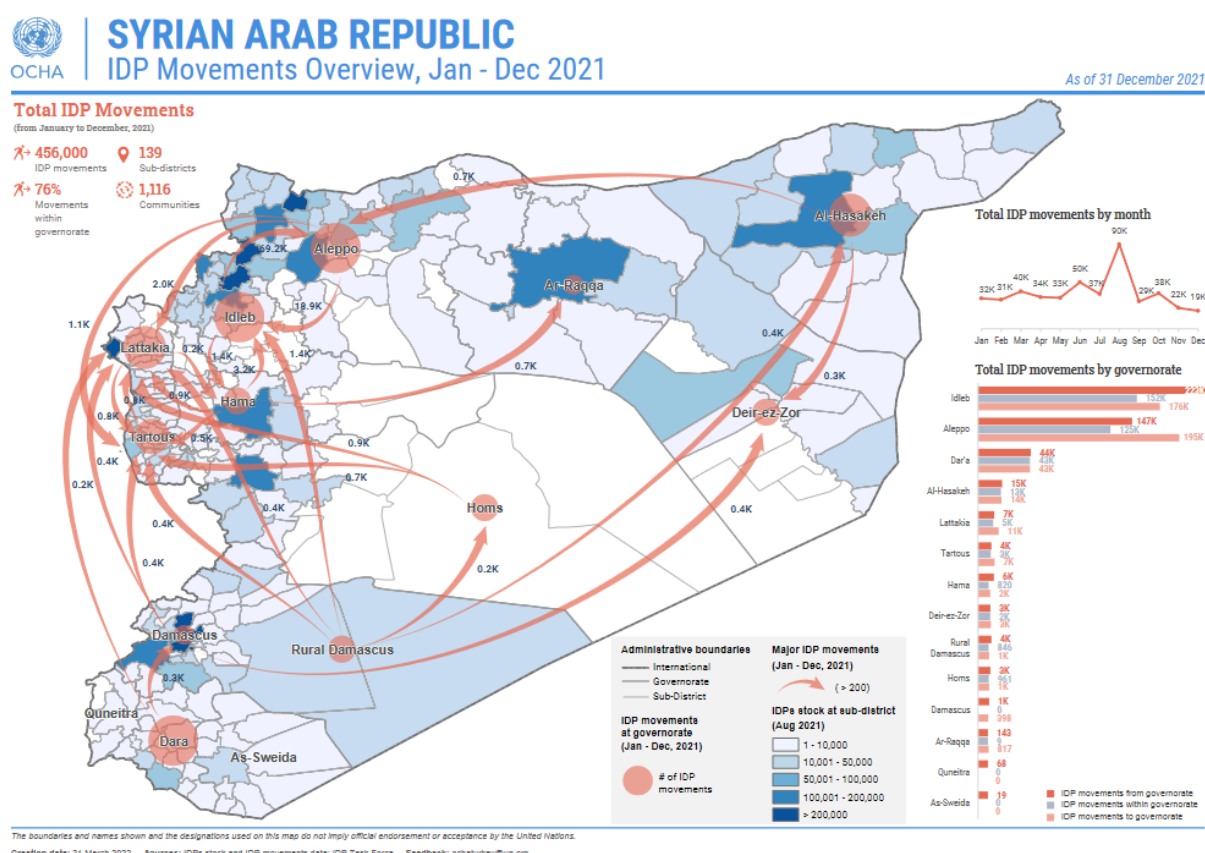
³⁹⁷ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, data updated on 7 July 2022, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ IDMC, Country Profile Syrian Arab Republic, Overview, last updated 19 May 2022, [url](#)

around the frontline areas as well as in areas with sudden outbreaks of conflict, such as in Dar'a.³⁹⁹

In 2021, a total of about 456 000 IDP movements were recorded by UNOCHA across Syria, of which 76 % were movements within the same governorate. Most IDP movements took place in the governorates of Idlib (71 000 from the governorate, 152 000 within the governorate and 24 000 to the governorate), Aleppo (22 000 from the governorate, 125 000 within the governorate, 70 000 to the governorate), Dar'a (1 000 from the governorate and 43 000 within the governorate), Hasaka (2 000 from the governorate, 13 000 within the governorate and 1 000 to the governorate) and Latakia (2 000 from the governorate, 5 000 within the governorate and 6 000 to the governorate). The lowest number of IDP movements were registered in the governorates of Sweida (19 IDP movements from the governorate), Quneitra (68 IDP movements from the governorate) and Raqqqa (134 IDP movements from the governorate, 9 within the governorate and 808 to the governorate).⁴⁰⁰

UNOCHA provides a full breakdown of the total IDP movements by governorate for 2021 (see Map 5):



Map 5: IDP movements by governorate in 2021, © UNOCHA⁴⁰¹

In July 2021, GoS forces started a military offensive against armed opposition groups in Dar'a Al-Balad in the south of the country, in the course of which 36 000 civilians were displaced.

³⁹⁹ UNHCR, Protection Analysis Update, June 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

The siege of the city ended with a ceasefire agreement in September 2021. Between June and August 2021, nearly 100 000 people were displaced due to hostilities in north-west Syria, 'the largest displacement since a ceasefire was agreed [there] in March 2020'.⁴⁰²

Between January and April 2022, around 65 300 IDP movements were recorded across Syria, the majority occurring in north-west Syria, particularly in Idlib and Aleppo governorates. Most IDP movements recorded in this timeframe took place within the respective governorate.⁴⁰³ In May 2022, 15 975 IDP movements were recorded, 81 % of which were recorded in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.⁴⁰⁴

In terms of IDP spontaneous returns in 2021, UNOCHA recorded a total of 169 000 spontaneous returns, 77 % of which were returns within the governorate. The highest number of IDP return movements took place in the governorates of Idlib (3 000 from the governorate, 35 000 within the governorate and 7 000 to the governorate), Aleppo (3 000 from the governorate, 28 000 within the governorate and 3 000 to the governorate), Rural Damascus (8 000 from the governorate, 21 000 within the governorate and 1 000 to the governorate) and Dar'a (17 000 within the governorate and 1 000 to the governorate). The lowest number of IDP returns was recorded in Sweida (786 IDP return movements from the governorate, 144 within the governorate and 32 returning to the governorate), Tartous (1 000 IDP return movements from the governorate) and Latakia (about 2 000 IDPs leaving to return to their governorate).⁴⁰⁵

UNOCHA provides a full breakdown of the total IDP spontaneous returnee movements by governorate for 2021 (see Map 6):

⁴⁰² AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22 – Syria, 29 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 353-354, 356

⁴⁰³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

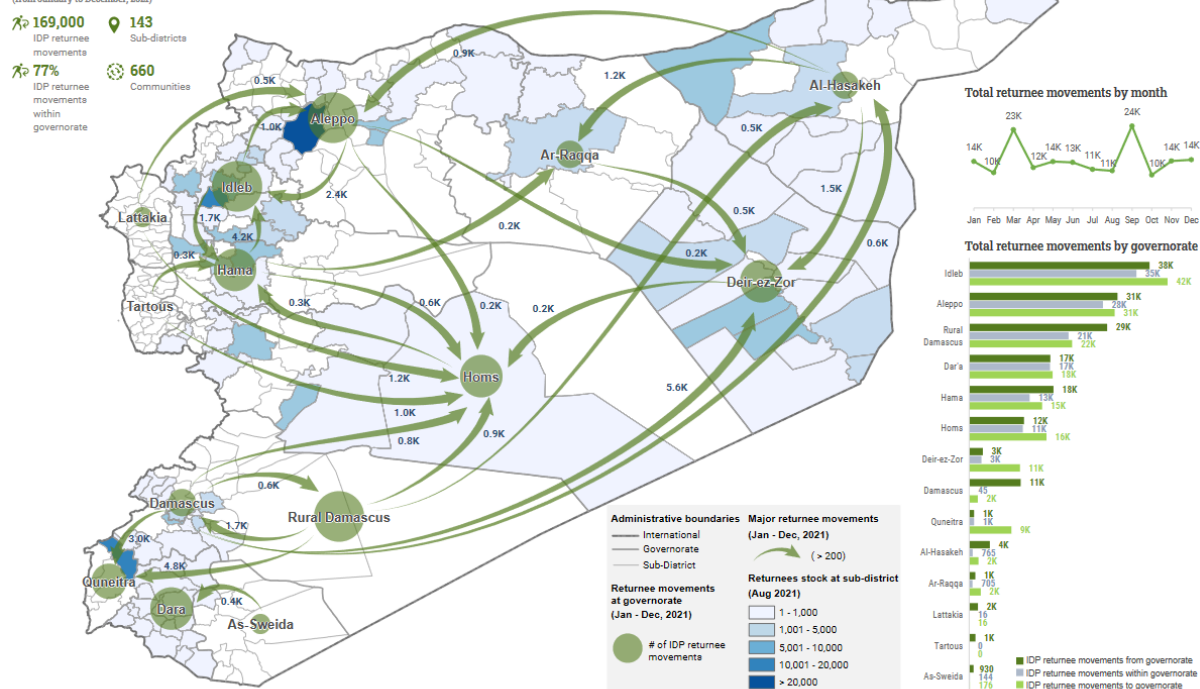


SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021

As of 31 December 2021

Total Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements (from January to December, 2021)



Map 6: Spontaneous IDP returnee movements by governorate in 2021, © UNOCHA⁴⁰⁶

Between January and April 2022, around 41 900 return movements were recorded across Syria, the majority occurring in Rural Damascus governorate followed by Idlib. Over these four months, the majority of return movements (over 80 %) took place within the governorate, apart from March 2022, where only 46 % of returns took place within the governorate.⁴⁰⁷ In May 2022, about 9 550 spontaneous returns were recorded, the majority of which were returns to and within Idlib and Rural Damascus governorates.⁴⁰⁸

Of the overall 169 000 spontaneous returns,⁴⁰⁹ 107 510 were recorded between January and August 2021, representing less than a third of the number recorded for the same period in 2020. Most of these returns were described as returns out of temporary displacement following sudden outbreaks of hostilities, such as in Dar'a in the summer of 2021.⁴¹⁰ UNHCR stated in June 2022 that surveys carried out since 2017 had revealed that the number of returns of Syrian refugees remained very limited and decreased over the years. Among the main reasons given for not returning were safety and security concerns, while reasons for

⁴⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁰ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 18



returning were the need to protect assets and properties as well as the worsening economic situation in the displaced location, especially for those returning from outside Syria.⁴¹¹

⁴¹¹ UNHCR, Protection Analysis Update, June 2022, [url](#), p. 14



2.1.1. General description of the governorate

Idlib is located in north-west Syria, bordering Turkey to the north, Hama governorate to the south, Aleppo governorate to the east, and Latakia governorate to the west. The governorate is divided into five districts: Idlib, Ariha, Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Harim and Al Mara.⁴¹³ Idlib city is the capital of the governorate and, in 2011, its population amounted to over 2 million inhabitants. The city is located at the strategic road between Aleppo and Damascus governorates and is also a 'cross border operation point from Turkey, through the Bab Al Hawa crossing'.⁴¹⁴ Bab al-Hawa, the sole border crossing for humanitarian aid destined for areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in north-west Syria,⁴¹⁵ is located in Idlib's northern Harim district.⁴¹⁶

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Idlib governorate to be of 1 172 089 as of 2021.⁴¹⁷ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Idlib governorate to be of 2 858 020.⁴¹⁸ According to UNOCHA, the total population of Idlib area⁴¹⁹ is 3.16 million of whom 2.01 million are IDPs.⁴²⁰ For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Idlib's population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

2.1.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Idlib governorate is divided into areas controlled by the GoS and areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups. Anti-GoS armed groups control the western and northern parts of the governorate, which cover virtually all the areas north and immediately south of M4 highway.⁴²¹ After the Turkish military deployment and/or incursion into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate (Operation Spring Shield) in early March 2020, a ceasefire⁴²² was mediated by Russia and Turkey between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups. Ever since the March 2020 ceasefire, the areas of control in and around the so-called 'Idlib de-escalation area'⁴²³

⁴¹³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 22

⁴¹⁴ REACH, Syria, Syrian Cities Damage Atlas, 16 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 45-46

⁴¹⁵ UN Security Council, Security Council Renews Cross-Border Aid Operations into Syria's North-West for Six Months, Adopting Resolution 2642 (2022) as 'Compromise' amid Divisions, 12 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: United Nations cross-border operations under UNSC resolutions (As of 31 May 2022), 1 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴¹⁷ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d, [url](#)

⁴¹⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁴¹⁹ The area discussed by UNOCHA as 'Idlib area' coincides with the so-called 'Idlib de-escalation area' or 'de-escalation zone', covering those parts of Idlib governorate controlled by anti-GoS armed groups as well as adjoining areas in western Aleppo and northern Hama and Latakia governorates.

⁴²⁰ UNOCHA, Northwest Syria: Factsheet (As of 14 July 2022), 14 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

⁴²¹ See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2021, [url](#) [Map]; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [Map]; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴²² For details, see UN Security Council, Letter dated 6 March 2020 from the representatives of the Russian Federation and Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, 6 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴²³ The term 'Idlib de-escalation area' or 'Idlib de-escalation zone' covers the areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate as well as the adjoining, similar areas in western Aleppo and northern Hama and Latakia governorates. On the establishment of Idlib de-escalation area (and other similar areas) see the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and Jaecke, G. & Labude, D., De-escalation zones in Syria, KAS, June 2020, [url](#)

have ‘stabilised’⁴²⁴, the major frontlines have remained ‘stagnant’⁴²⁵ and Syria has experienced a ‘period without significant frontline changes’⁴²⁶.

For more information on the conflict background, the March 2020 ceasefire and its effects on the security situation in Idlib governorate and the wider Idlib de-escalation area, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

(a) Anti-GoS armed groups

Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controls⁴²⁷ those parts of Idlib governorate under the control of anti-GoS armed groups and has almost complete control over the wider Idlib de-escalation area.⁴²⁸ HTS has been described as ‘the predominant terrorist group in Idlib’⁴²⁹ and, more generally, as the dominant⁴³⁰ and military superior⁴³¹ armed group in the governorate. HTS maintains its power⁴³² in the governorate through the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) which has been described as HTS’s ‘political arm’⁴³³. HTS has approximately 10 000 fighters under its command.⁴³⁴ For further information on HTS, see section [1.4.4](#) above.

There are also other anti-GoS armed groups present in Idlib governorate and the wider Idlib de-escalation area. The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement/Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIM/TIP), which has approximately 1 000-2 000 fighters,⁴³⁵ operates ‘under’⁴³⁶ HTS or is ‘closely allied’⁴³⁷

⁴²⁴ Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 7

⁴²⁵ FT, Syria: what is Turkey’s grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴²⁶ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁴²⁷ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3; UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

⁴²⁸ UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44

⁴²⁹ UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44

⁴³⁰ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴³¹ Solomon, C., HTS: Evolution of a Jihadi Group, Wilson Center, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴³² Serwer, D. & van Wijk, K., Divided Syria: An examination of stabilization efforts and prospects for state continuity, Middle East Institute, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴³³ The Syria Report, Salvation Government Imposes Lease Contract Regulations, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

⁴³⁵ UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 45

⁴³⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 39

⁴³⁷ UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 45



with the group and present mainly in Idlib.⁴³⁸ HTS's rival, al-Qaida-affiliated jihadist group Hurras al-Din (HAD), has 'a few thousand fighters' in the whole of Syria⁴³⁹ but merely 'a residual presence' in the governorate, which included the leaders of the organization.⁴⁴⁰ According to Enab Baladi, HAD's organizational strength has been diminished and the group has been deprived of its main religious leaders because of the crackdown by HTS and because of the airstrikes by the US-led Coalition.⁴⁴¹

Other jihadist groups present in Idlib governorate during the reporting period include groups consisting mainly of foreign fighters, such as Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah,⁴⁴² and Ansar Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (AABS), an alleged HTS splinter group, hostile towards the latter and, since August 2020, conducting attacks against Turkish forces deployed in the governorate.⁴⁴³

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), centered in Aleppo governorate, has presence in Idlib governorate⁴⁴⁴ and a headquarters in Idlib city.⁴⁴⁵ The SNA-affiliated⁴⁴⁶ National Liberation Front (NLF) is part of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room (together with HTS and Jaysh al-Izza⁴⁴⁷)⁴⁴⁸ and is fighting alongside HTS in the Idlib frontlines.⁴⁴⁹

(b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS controls the southern and eastern parts of Idlib governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo highway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.⁴⁵⁰ At the time of writing, specific information on SAA deployments in Idlib governorate during the reference period could not be found. Information on particular SAA formations and units deployed in the governorate (before April 2021) is available in previous reports: [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

⁴³⁸ UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 45

⁴³⁹ UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44

⁴⁴⁰ UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 38

⁴⁴¹ Enab Baladi, Al-Jolani's strategy, US-led Coalition strikes exhaust Hurras al-Din group, 29 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴² See, e.g. COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4; Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham driving out foreign factions, why?, 4 November 2021, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Shishani Leaves and HTS Attacks Whoever Remains, 27 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴³ Al-Monitor, HTS arrests members of little-known Syrian group behind attacks against Turkish army in Idlib, 15 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁴ Al Sharq Strategic Research, The Past, Present, and Future of the Syrian National Army, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ Al-Monitor, Syrian jihadist group, Turkish-backed opposition reportedly consider merger, 8 October 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁶ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁴⁴⁷ Jaysh al-Izza has been described by researcher Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi as 'the most notable' FSA-affiliated armed group that is not operating as a part of Turkish-backed SNA and NFL coalitions. Tamimi, A. J., Jaysh al-Izza Statement on Prisoner Swap with Syrian Government [blog], 30 January 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁸ Enab Baladi, Rationales for the Syrian regime's military escalation in northwestern Syria, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁹ Al-Monitor, Idlib sees new escalation between Syrian government, opposition forces, 22 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

GoS's allies Russia and Iran have also presence in GoS-controlled parts of Idlib governorate. According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Russian forces were deployed to six different positions in Idlib governorate. Iranian forces and those of its Lebanese ally Hezbollah were deployed to 22 different positions in the governorate.⁴⁵¹

(c) Turkey

Turkey has been described as 'the ultimate protector'⁴⁵² of the Idlib de-escalation area in a Financial Times article. Turkish forces were deployed in anti-GoS controlled Idlib governorate during the so-called Operation Spring Shield,⁴⁵³ and one analyst estimates that Turkey has deployed approx. 8 000 soldiers 'around Idlib [de-escalation area]'.⁴⁵⁴ However, a smaller contingent of Turkish forces, stationed in observation posts and monitoring the ceasefire between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups, was deployed to the Idlib de-escalation area already in October 2017.⁴⁵⁵ According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Turkish forces were deployed to 48 different positions in the parts of Idlib governorate controlled by anti-GoS armed groups.⁴⁵⁶ They have observation posts along the frontlines separating the anti-GoS areas from the GoS-controlled Idlib governorate.⁴⁵⁷ According to STJ, Turkish forces have 'mobilized forces to over 53 locations in the areas south of Idlib', which includes the Jabal al-Zawiyah [Mount Zawiyah] region.⁴⁵⁸ During the reporting period, Turkish forces deployed in Idlib governorate have been reinforced in order to deter the potential GoS advancement.⁴⁵⁹

(d) ISIL

ISIL had presence in Idlib governorate (and the wider Idlib de-escalation zone).⁴⁶⁰ According to the UN Security Council, the Idlib de-escalation zone provides a 'limited safe haven'⁴⁶¹ and 'continues to serve as a strategic location for ISIL'.⁴⁶² The International Crisis Group estimated that ISIL 'has continued to maintain communication and transit networks' also in Idlib, and ISIL's

⁴⁵¹ See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁵² FT, Syria: what is Turkey's grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ Clingendael, Turkey's interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁵⁴ FT, Syria: what is Turkey's grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁵ Jaecke, G. & Labude, D., De-escalation zones in Syria, KAS, June 2020, [url](#), p. 7;

⁴⁵⁶ See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ See the map in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

⁴⁵⁸ STJ, Idlib: Turkish Forces Stationed at Civilian Properties Against Their Will, 29 April 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 04 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 30 November 2021, 30 November 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ International Crisis Group, A Death In Idlib: The Killing of the Top ISIS Leader and Its Impact, 4 February 2022, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

⁴⁶¹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

⁴⁶² UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44



clandestine cells are present in the area,⁴⁶³ although most of ISIL's attempts to establish 'an active network' in the governorate have been quelled by HTS.⁴⁶⁴ In addition, the same source stated that ISIL 'maintains hideouts for id-level and senior commanders' in northern and north-western Syria due to the fact that they are able to 'enjoy a degree of anonymity' among the areas IDP population.⁴⁶⁵

2.1.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

The conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups

According to the UN Security Council, the 'overall level of violence in the Idlib de-escalation area remained relatively low' between April and May 2021. However, armed hostilities, including artillery shelling and armed clashes, occurred daily and were concentrated mainly along the frontlines between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups. In late April and early May 2021, a raid by HTS on GoS positions was followed by an increase in shelling. Meanwhile, the civilian population of the de-escalation area was exposed to '[d]aily shelling, renewed airstrikes, infighting between non-State armed groups and the prevalence of explosive hazards in residential areas and public spaces'.⁴⁶⁶

According to the Carter Center, between April and June 2021, persistent armed clashes and shelling between the parties were reported along the frontlines affecting the civilian population in the areas controlled by both GoS and anti-GoS armed groups.⁴⁶⁷ In June 2021, an escalation in the hostilities was reported,⁴⁶⁸ with the UN Security Council reporting an increase in shelling and airstrikes as well as 'limited clashes' between parties⁴⁶⁹ and the UN documenting 'more than 53 civilian deaths in non-government-held parts of the north-west'⁴⁷⁰ between June and July 2021. Turkish forces were also involved in the fighting on the side of the anti-GoS armed

⁴⁶³ International Crisis Group, A Death In Idlib: The Killing of the Top ISIS Leader and Its Impact, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. i

⁴⁶⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), and 2533 (2020), 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁶⁷ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁶⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, p. 4, [url](#); UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁶⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁷⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 1 [Key points]

groups.⁴⁷¹ The hostilities, including most of the airstrikes,⁴⁷² were concentrated in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area in southern anti-GoS-controlled Idlib.⁴⁷³

The UNCOI reported ‘a notable increase’ in airstrikes and shelling conducted by GoS and allies in Idlib governorate between 1 July and 31 December 2021.⁴⁷⁴ According to it, the clashes between GoS forces and anti-GoS armed groups escalated during the first half of 2021. While the second half of the year saw continuous clashes and shelling between the parties, UNCOI notes two separate escalations in the GoS attacks, the first one before the meeting in Sochi between Russia and Turkey in late September 2021 and the second one in late December 2021.⁴⁷⁵ UNCOI paid special attention to the escalation of GoS shelling targeting the areas south of the M4 highway in July and August 2021,⁴⁷⁶ while describing the villages located south of the highway, and especially in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area, as ‘the most exposed to attacks.’⁴⁷⁷

In accordance with UNCOI’s reporting, the UN Security Council reported a further intensification of hostilities between August and September 2021, including airstrikes and shelling, in the Idlib de-escalation area, with the airstrikes focusing mainly in areas south of the M4 highway (Jabal al-Zawiyah) and causing damage to civilian infrastructure.⁴⁷⁸ The International Crisis Group noted the role of Russian airstrikes in September 2021’s escalation.⁴⁷⁹

According to the UNCOI, between July and December 2021, GoS forces conducted attacks against residential areas.⁴⁸⁰ These attacks included ‘indiscriminate attacks on densely populated civilian areas’ targeting both Idlib city and the town of Ariha.⁴⁸¹ Witnesses and survivors of these attacks claimed that the apparent aim was to harm the civilian population, to increase destruction and displacement and to obstruct the prospects of attaining economic recovery or stability in areas controlled by the anti-GoS armed groups.⁴⁸² The UN described the escalation in October 2021 as ‘the most significant increase in hostilities in northwest Syria since the ceasefire agreement of March 2020.’⁴⁸³ UNCOI documented 42 and received reports of as

⁴⁷¹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4; Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷² UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁷³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁷⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

⁴⁷⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

⁴⁷⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

⁴⁷⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 55

⁴⁷⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, September 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

⁴⁸¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 55

⁴⁸² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

⁴⁸³ UN, Four children killed on their way to school in northwest Syria, 20 October 2021, [url](#)



many as 64 children killed as a result of hostilities in north-west Syria between 1 July 2021 – 31 December 2021. UNCOI stated that the number of child victims indicates ‘the pervasive lack of security’ in north-west Syria.⁴⁸⁴

According to the UN Security Council, civilians were killed and injured as the result of sporadic shelling and airstrikes in Idlib de-escalation area and its surroundings between August and September 2021. The UN Security Council notes that ‘[m]any of these attacks appeared to be targeting civilians or were carried out near locations of civilian character’.⁴⁸⁵ While assessing the level of conflict-related violence in anti-GoS controlled Idlib, Clingendael report published in September 2021 points out that Russian forces ‘regularly strike HTS targets inside northern Idlib’ and GoS forces have conducted ‘regular attacks against HTS elements along the M4 [highway].’ In turn, HTS has conducted ‘sporadic attacks’ targeting, both, joint Russian-Turkish patrols and Turkish forces.⁴⁸⁶ Between October and November 2021, civilians were killed and injured as the result of airstrikes and shelling reported in the Idlib de-escalation area and its surroundings.⁴⁸⁷

Since December 2021, there has been practically no change in the assessment by the UN Security Council of the continuing hostilities in north-western Syria. Airstrikes, shelling and armed clashes are reported along the frontlines between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups⁴⁸⁸ and some of these incidents are described as ‘attacks on the civilian population’.⁴⁸⁹ Between January and March 2022, the Carter Center reported 357 conflict-related events in Idlib governorate.⁴⁹⁰ The hostilities were concentrated⁴⁹¹ in areas south of the M4 highway (Jabal al-Zawiyah), with the absolute majority (nearly 90%) of airstrikes and shelling attributed to either GoS or Russian forces.⁴⁹² According to the International Crisis Group, after a decline in Russian airstrikes following the Russian invasion of Ukraine after 24 February 2022, airstrikes resumed in Idlib governorate on 28 March 2022.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 51

⁴⁸⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 20

⁴⁸⁶ Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 8

⁴⁸⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 3

⁴⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 4

⁴⁸⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 4

⁴⁹⁰ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁴⁹¹ See ‘Figure 4’ in Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁹² Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁹³ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#)

According to the International Crisis Group, mutual shelling between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups escalated in Idlib governorate in April 2022.⁴⁹⁴ According to Etana Syria⁴⁹⁵ ‘intense shelling against military and civilian targets resumed’ and became more intense as the month passed.⁴⁹⁶ Russian airstrikes were also reported in the governorate.⁴⁹⁷ In May 2022, Etana Syria reported that GoS and its affiliates resumed with the shelling targeting towns in southern rural Idlib while ‘Russian bombardment against opposition areas’ had reportedly ‘slowed’ since the invasion of Ukraine.⁴⁹⁸ According to Etana Syria, in June 2022, GoS ‘continued to target both military and civilian targets with artillery fire’⁴⁹⁹ in Idlib de-escalation area and an attempted advance into southern Idlib governorate by the GoS forces was reported.⁵⁰⁰

In July 2022, an escalation between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups in and around the Idlib de-escalation area was reported. GoS and Russia targeted the areas in southern Idlib governorate with shelling and airstrikes. Anti-GoS armed groups, both HTS and Turkish-backed groups, responded with shelling on GoS positions in Idlib’s southern and eastern frontlines.⁵⁰¹ Further shelling was recorded on areas controlled by GoS eastern and southern rural Idlib.⁵⁰²

On 22 July 2022, a Russian airstrike on a village near the city of Jisr-Ash-Shugur killed seven civilians and wounded several others.⁵⁰³ As a result, hostilities between GoS forces and their allies and anti-GoS armed groups escalated in late July 2022.⁵⁰⁴ In the course of the escalation, anti-GoS armed groups shelled the areas controlled by GoS in eastern and southern rural Idlib⁵⁰⁵ while GoS and Iranian forces targeted the Idlib de-escalation area with intense shelling⁵⁰⁶.

Also in August 2022, SOHR reported mutual hostilities between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate. On 14 August 2022, hostilities were reported along the Jabal Al-Zawiyah frontlines.⁵⁰⁷

The infighting between anti-GoS armed groups

Clingendael reported, in September 2021, that the infighting between HTS and ‘smaller extremist religious groups’, including the likes of al-Qaida-affiliated HAD, ‘continue to plague a vulnerable and swollen population of IDPs’ in northern Idlib.⁵⁰⁸ According to Syria analyst Orwa

⁴⁹⁴ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ Etana Syria is an NGO associated with the Syrian opposition that publishes occasional updates on the political and security developments in Syria. For more information see, Etana Syria, About us, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 28 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 28 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 02 June 2022, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Al-Monitor, Syrian government, Russia escalate attacks in Idlib amid looming Turkish operation, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰² Asharq al-Awsat, Regime Forces Ramp up Attacks in Syria’s North, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰³ Guardian (The), Russian airstrike on rebel-held region in Syria kills seven people, 22 July 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Seven killed in Russian air attack on Syria’s Idlib, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁵ Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, With over 180 shells Factions shell 25 positions in regime areas in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and Latakia, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ Asharq al-Awsat, Regime Forces Ramp up Attacks in Syria’s North, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁷ SOHR, Renewed bombardment Al-Fath Al-Mubin rebels and regime forces exchange fire on frontlines of Jabal Al-Zawiyah, Sahl Al-Ghab and Jabal Al-Krad, 14 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁸ Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 8



Ajjoub, HTS has engaged in ‘periodic crackdowns’ against al-Qaida and ISIL elements present in anti-GoS-controlled Idlib. However, in June 2021, Ajjoub described al-Qaida’s presence in Idlib as ‘insignificant.’⁵⁰⁹ During the reporting period, HTS cracked down on other anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib de-escalation zone,⁵¹⁰ including members of Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah,⁵¹¹ Hizb ut-Tahrir,⁵¹² and Ansar Abu Bakr al-Siddiq⁵¹³. Although at least one of these crackdowns took place in the context of civil discontent against HTS rule,⁵¹⁴ no civilian casualties were reported.

Airstrikes against jihadist targets

UNCOI documented two airstrikes conducted by Russian and US forces against jihadist targets in Idlib governorate that led to (collateral) civilian casualties in November and December 2021.⁵¹⁵ On 3 February 2022, US forces conducted a special operation in Atmeh town, killing ISIL leader Abdullah Qardash (*nom de guerre* Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi). According to the International Crisis Group, 10 civilians were killed in the attack.⁵¹⁶ On 28 June 2022, US-led Coalition carried out a drone strike in Idlib governorate that killed HAD leader Abu Hamza al-Yemeni.⁵¹⁷

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period there were 2 253 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Idlib governorate, of whom 1 943 were coded as explosions/remote violence, 197 battles and 113 incidents of violence against civilians.⁵¹⁸

⁵⁰⁹ Ajjoub, O., HTS is not al-Qaeda, but it is still an authoritarian regime to be reckoned with, MEI, 24 June 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹⁰ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 7

⁵¹¹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, July 2021, [url](#)

⁵¹² Al-Monitor, Jihadi group takes on Salafist opponents in Idlib, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹³ Al-Monitor, HTS arrests members of little-known Syrian group behind attacks against Turkish army in Idlib, 15 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁴ Al-Monitor, Jihadi group takes on Salafist opponents in Idlib, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁵ The airstrikes were aimed against members of Al-Qaida (the US strike on 3 December 2021) and HAD-affiliated Jund al-Sham (the Russian strike on 11 December 2021). UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 62, 63, 64.

⁵¹⁶ International Crisis Group, A Death In Idlib: The Killing of the Top ISIS Leader and Its Impact, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁷ Al Jazeera, US kills ‘senior leader’ of al-Qaeda-linked group in Syria, 28 June 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

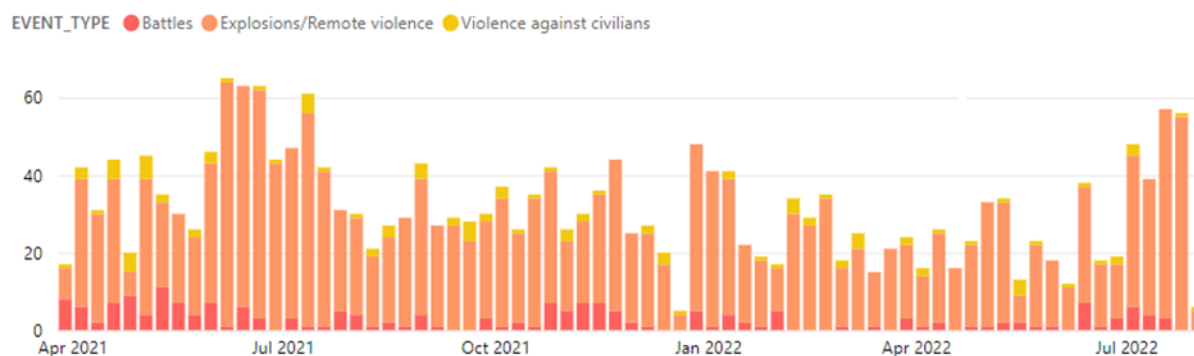


Figure 7. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Idlib governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data⁵¹⁹

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Ma'ra	65	748	4
Ariha	52	858	10
Harim	15	28	47
Idlib	52	257	42
Jisr-Ash-Shugur	13	52	10
Total	197	1943	113

Figure 8. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Idlib governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁵²⁰

During the reporting period, security incidents occurred in all districts of the governorate, with the largest overall number being recorded in the district of Ariha, followed by Al Ma'ra and Idlib (see Figure 8).

⁵¹⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

⁵²⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



(c) Civilian fatalities

In 2021, SNHR recorded 256 civilian fatalities in Idlib governorate⁵²¹, while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 93 civilian fatalities⁵²² (see Figure 9).

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	17	13
February	25	32
March	19	6
April	15	14
May	16	10
June	26	5

⁵²¹ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See:

SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁵²² Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
July	45	13
August	22	
September	16	
October	26	
November	19	
December	10	
Total	256	93

Figure 9. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Idlib governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to the WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), in the year 2021, several (2-3) attacks on healthcare were reported in Idlib governorate.⁵²³ Between January and March 2022, WHO did not report any attacks on healthcare facilities in Idlib governorate.⁵²⁴ According to Chatham House researcher Abdulkarim Ekzayez, entire facilities have been targeted in most of the attacks on healthcare in Idlib governorate and other areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups. As the result, in many cases hospitals were either completely or partially destroyed, which has caused ‘a severe disruption of the health system in these areas’.⁵²⁵

According to the UNCOI, the emergency services in the southern parts of Idlib governorate, the main locus of hostilities between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups, were provided by a single healthcare facility.⁵²⁶ International Rescue Committee noted that attacks on healthcare facilities have directly impacted 59 % of north-west Syria’s civilian population.⁵²⁷ According to the UN Security Council, an airstrike on 2 January 2022 hit the Arshani water pumping station, on which

⁵²³ WHO/ Health Cluster, Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. Syrian Arab Republic. Annual Report 2021, 3 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁵²⁴ WHO/ Health Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Attacks on health care in Syria, 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵²⁵ Ekzayez, A., Attacks on healthcare in the Syrian conflict, Chatham House, November 2021, [url](#), p. 13

⁵²⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 53

⁵²⁷ International Rescue Committee, A decade of destruction: attacks on health care in Syria, 3 March 2021, [url](#)



225 000 residents of Idlib city depend as their water source.⁵²⁸ Schools in Idlib governorate were also damaged as the result of the ongoing conflict during the reporting period.⁵²⁹ The highest number of incidents was reported between June and July 2021 when shelling and rocket attacks impacted five schools in the governorate.⁵³⁰

The extent of conflict-related infrastructure damage in Idlib governorate is discussed further in [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to UNOCHA, Idlib is one of those Syrian governorates where the contamination by explosive ordnance is assessed as 'widespread' due to previous or still ongoing hostilities.⁵³¹ The Mine Action Syria Response report published in May 2022 estimates that the majority of security incidents involving explosive ordnances recorded by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) occurred in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.⁵³² According to the Halo Trust report on explosive ordnance contamination in north-west Syria from December 2020, the areas in north-west Syria, including Idlib de-escalation area and adjoining areas in GoS-controlled Idlib governorate, are extensively contaminated by explosive ordnances. In these areas contamination was confirmed in over 400 communities (representing 41 % of all the surveyed communities) and it is blocking the use of farmlands in 73 % of confirmed cases.⁵³³ According to the Carter Center report published in March 2022, explosive munitions have been used extensively in Idlib governorate,⁵³⁴ and the governorate is contaminated by 17 750-53 000 UXOs.⁵³⁵

According to a Mine Action Review⁵³⁶ report published in September 2021, cluster munitions were used in Idlib governorate during the first quarter of 2021.⁵³⁷ Fields, villages, roadsides and

⁵²⁸ The pumping station resumed its operations at full capacity on 20 January 2022. UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 4

⁵²⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), and 2533 (2020), 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 27; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 25; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 27; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 27

⁵³⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 25

⁵³¹ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁵³² Mine Action Syria Response (The), Explosive ordnance in Syria: impact and required action, May 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁵³³ Halo Trust (The), A hidden emergency: Why explosive ordnance contamination must be addressed now in Northwest Syria, December 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁵³⁴ Estimation based on the map in Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20 [map]

⁵³⁵ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁵³⁶ Mine Action Review is an independent project conducting 'primary research and analysis on landmine and cluster munition remnant contamination, survey, and clearance'. The project's reports are published by Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). For further information, see Mine Action Review, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

⁵³⁷ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

areas around hospitals and schools are contaminated by UXO's, such as landmines and IEDs, while the large-scale displacement affecting the governorate has 'sharply increased' the size of the economically disenfranchised population living in the proximity of the contaminated areas.⁵³⁸ According to Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of 144 people in Idlib governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.⁵³⁹

(e) Displacement and return

In the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, UNOCHA stated that the number of IDPs in Idlib governorate was 1 868 494 (as of February 2022).⁵⁴⁰ According to UNOCHA, around 71 000 persons were displaced from the governorate, 152 000 within the governorate and 24 000 to the governorate in 2021. A significant number of displacements from Idlib took place to Aleppo governorate (69 200).⁵⁴¹ In 2021, new displacements were mostly recorded around the frontline areas.⁵⁴²

Between January and June 2022, IDP movements tracked by UNOCHA were concentrated mainly in north-west Syria, with 77-85 % of them taking place between the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib. Altogether, between January and June 2022, approximately 54 000 IDPs were displaced from Idlib, of whom 46 800 were displaced within the governorate. UNOCHA estimates that, during the first half of 2022, access to services and livelihoods was the main incentive for these and other IDP movements within Syria.⁵⁴³

According to UNOCHA, approximately 42 000 total IDP returns were recorded in Idlib governorate in 2021. Of these, 3 000 returned from the governorate, 35 000 within the governorate and 7 000 to the governorate.⁵⁴⁴ Between January and June 2022, approximately 19 400 IDPs returned to their homes in Idlib, of whom 13 500 were originally displaced within the governorate. In addition, around 500 returned from Idlib to other governorates. UNOCHA does not provide information on the factors determining their return.⁵⁴⁵

⁵³⁸ Mine Action Syria Response (The), Explosive ordnance in Syria: impact and required action, May 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁵³⁹ Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁵⁴¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 17

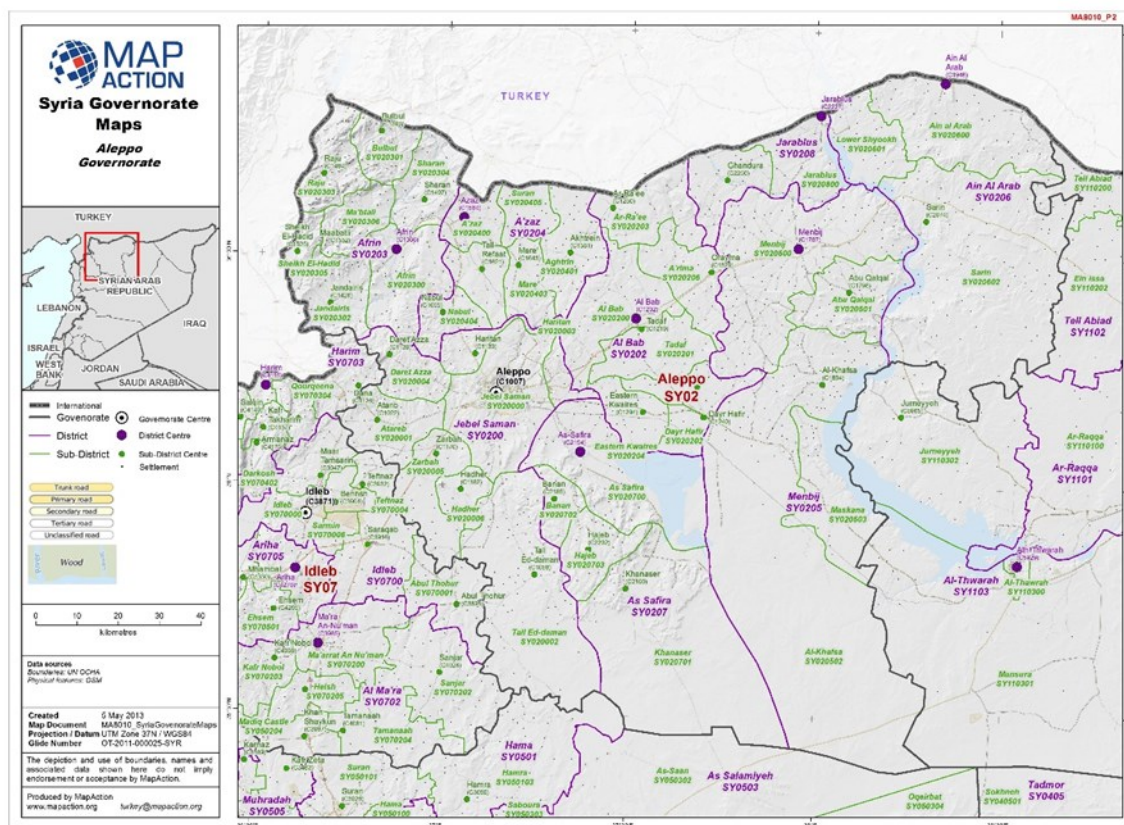
⁵⁴³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)



2.2. Aleppo governorate



Map 8: © MapAction, Aleppo governorate⁵⁴⁶

2.2.1. General description of the governorate

Aleppo governorate is located in the north of Syria, bordering Idlib governorate to the west, Hama governorate to the south and Raqqa governorate to the east. The governorate is divided in eight districts: Jebel Saman, Afrin [Efrin], A'zaz [Azaz], Al-Bab, Manbij [Menbij], Jarablus, Ain Al Arab [Kobane], and As-Safira.⁵⁴⁷

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Aleppo governorate to be of 4 117 970 as of 2021.⁵⁴⁸ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Aleppo governorate to be of 4 184 360.⁵⁴⁹ The population of Aleppo city was estimated at 2 098 million.⁵⁵⁰ According to UNOCHA, the total population of those areas in northern Aleppo under Turkish control⁵⁵¹ is approximately 1.38 million, of whom 850 000 are IDPs.⁵⁵² For more

⁵⁴⁶ MapAction, Aleppo governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁴⁸ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁵⁵⁰ US CIA World Factbook, Syria, last updated 22 August 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ The area discussed by UNOCHA as 'Turkish Operation Area' coincides with the areas captured by Turkish forces and affiliated anti-GoS armed groups during the so-called 'Euphrates Shield' and 'Olive Branch' military operations.

⁵⁵² UNOCHA, Northwest Syria Factsheet (As of 14 July 2022), 14 July 2022, [url](#)

information on the ethnic and religious composition of Aleppo's population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

2.2.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Aleppo governorate is divided into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups, areas controlled by the GoS and several separate areas and enclaves controlled by the SDF/YPG.⁵⁵³

For more information on the background of the conflict in Aleppo governorate up until April 2021, see the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

(a) Anti-GoS armed groups

Anti-GoS armed groups control the northern parts of the governorate, including the areas adjacent to the Turkish border in Afrin, A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus districts and areas west of Aleppo city adjoining the anti-GoS controlled areas in Idlib governorate.⁵⁵⁴ The SNA, a coalition formed by a number of anti-GoS armed groups and supported by Turkey, is centred in Aleppo governorate.⁵⁵⁵ Although Turkey is described as 'the supreme authority' in the so-called Euphrates Shield (A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus districts) and Olive Branch (Afrin district) areas, SNA is responsible for maintaining the security in these areas.⁵⁵⁶

HTS is the dominant armed group in the Idlib de-escalation area covering the areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in western Aleppo governorate. The crossings of al-Ghazawiya and Deir Ballut separate⁵⁵⁷ the HTS-controlled areas from northern Aleppo controlled by Turkey and SNA.⁵⁵⁸ HTS has also supported rival SNA armed groups and set out to gain presence in Turkish controlled parts of Aleppo covertly by creating a 'front group' that has operated in these areas since June 2021⁵⁵⁹ and overtly by entering these areas directly in late June 2022⁵⁶⁰. The developments in late June 2022 are discussed in detail in section [2.2.3](#) below.

⁵⁵³ See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁴ See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

⁵⁵⁵ Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁵⁶ Hatahet, S., The Recovery of the Local Economy in Northern Aleppo: Reality and Challenges, EUI, 25 March 2021, [url](#), p. 7

⁵⁵⁷ Al-Monitor, Standoff between rival groups locks down north Syria crossing, 26 April 2022, [url](#); Middle East Eye, Syria's rebel divisions laid bare as HTS takes Afrin villages from Turkish-backed groups, 23 June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁸ See the map in Operations & Policy Center, Al-Zaraee, N. & Shaar, K., The Economics of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, MEI, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁹ Zelin, A. Y., Jaysh al-Qa'qa': A New HTS Front Group In Olive Branch and Euphrates Shield Territory?, Syrian Jihadism [blog], 13 June 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁰ Al-Monitor, Syrian armed groups clash outside Aleppo, 29 June 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria's rebel divisions laid bare as HTS takes Afrin villages from Turkish-backed groups, 23 June 2022, [url](#)



(b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS controls the central and southern parts of the governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo highway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.⁵⁶¹ According to the International Crisis Group, Aleppo city is primarily in the control of GoS forces, although there have been occasional hostilities amongst the GoS-affiliated militias and between the militias and the SAA.⁵⁶² Among the GoS forces stationed in Aleppo city, the two most prominent ones are the 4th Division of the SAA and the Air Force Intelligence. In addition, Liwa al-Quds, a pro-GoS militia aligned with Russia, is also present in the city.⁵⁶³ More information on particular SAA formations and units deployed in the governorate (before April 2021) is available in previous EUAA reports: [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

GoS forces (along with Russia) are also present in SDF-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate, including Manbij and Ain al-Arab, where GoS forces have cooperated with SDF along the Turkish border and along the frontlines between SDF- and Turkish/SNA-controlled areas.⁵⁶⁴ GoS forces are also stationed in SDF-controlled Tal Rifaat.⁵⁶⁵ Following the announcement of a potential Turkish military operation in northern Syria, GoS and affiliated armed groups have also deployed more units into SDF-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate,⁵⁶⁶ including Ain al-Arab,⁵⁶⁷ Manbij,⁵⁶⁸ and Tal Rifaat.⁵⁶⁹

(c) Kurdish armed groups (SDF/YPG)

SDF/YPG are in control and/or have presence in Aleppo city⁵⁷⁰ (in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya)⁵⁷¹, in Tal Rifaat area north of Aleppo city and in Manbij and Ain al-Arab (Kobane) in eastern Aleppo governorate.⁵⁷² SDF has mobilized troops, fortified its positions along the frontlines with Turkish-backed armed groups and deployed additional reinforcements

⁵⁶¹ See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

⁵⁶² International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, Middle East Report N°234, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. i

⁵⁶³ International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, Middle East Report N°234, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁵⁶⁴ See the map in Balanche, F., How to Preserve the Autonomy of Northeast Syria [map], WINEP, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ Al-Monitor, Is Syrian government withdrawing from Tal Rifaat in favor of Turkey?, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ Reuters, Syrian, Russian forces boosted after Turkey signals operation, officials say, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁷ Al-Monitor, Syrian Kurds seek support amid Turkish threats of military action, 20 July 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 30 November 2021, 30 November 2021, [url](#); Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁸ Al-Monitor, Is Syrian government withdrawing from Tal Rifaat in favor of Turkey?, 14 July 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Syrian Kurds seek support amid Turkish threats of military action, 20 July 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 30 November 2021, 30 November 2021, [url](#); FT, Syria: what is Turkey's grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁹ FT, Syria: what is Turkey's grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁰ See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

⁵⁷¹ COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4; New Arab (The), Aleppo: Syrian regime continues siege of Kurdish neighbourhoods as SDF retaliates in Qamishli, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷² See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

from Raqqa city to different parts of eastern Aleppo countryside.⁵⁷³ In July 2022, SDF and GoS established joint military operations rooms in Manbij and Tal Rifaat while preparing for a potential Turkish military operation.⁵⁷⁴

(d) Turkey

Turkish forces have presence alongside the anti-GoS armed groups in the so-called Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield areas controlled by these groups in the northern Aleppo governorate.⁵⁷⁵ According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Turkish forces were deployed to 57 different positions in the governorate.⁵⁷⁶ According to the UNCOI, Turkish forces have established observation posts along the frontlines separating the anti-GoS controlled areas west of Aleppo city from the GoS-controlled central Aleppo governorate.⁵⁷⁷ Turkey has continued to strengthen⁵⁷⁸ its forces and anti-GoS armed groups (SNA) in Aleppo governorate, while preparing for a potential military incursion into northern Syria.⁵⁷⁹ On 23 May 2022, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced Turkey's intentions⁵⁸⁰ to launch a new military operation in Syria and, on 1 June 2022, named Tal Rifaat and Manbij as the targets of this operation.⁵⁸¹

(e) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Russian forces were deployed to 12 different positions in Aleppo governorate. These positions were located in the areas controlled by GoS and in the areas/enclaves of Manbij and Tal Rifaat controlled by the SDF/YPG.⁵⁸² Russian forces are deployed to Aleppo city, where they also monitor the entrances to the city, as well as in the eastern and northern parts of the governorate.⁵⁸³ In June 2022, Russian forces, along with GoS and Iranian forces, have been mobilized to SDF-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate, including Ain al-Arab, Manbij and Tal Rifaat.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁷³ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁴ Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [Map]

⁵⁷⁶ See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁷ See the map in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

⁵⁷⁸ COAR Global, Syria Update, 6 June 2022, [url](#), p. 6; Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁹ COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 6; Al-Monitor, Is Syrian government withdrawing from Tal Rifaat in favor of Turkey?, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁰ COAR Global, Syria Update, 30 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Al Jazeera, Erdogan: New military operation in Syria 'soon', 24 May 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸¹ Al-Monitor, Erdogan announces military operations in Syria's Manbij, Tal Rifaat, 1 June 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Erdogan says Turkey to rid Syria's Tal Rifaat, Manbij of terrorists, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸² See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸³ Enab Baladi, Russia reduces forces in Aleppo, transfers some to Hmeimim, 22 March 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁴ Reuters, Syrian, Russian forces boosted after Turkey signals operation, officials say, 7 June 2022, [url](#)



(f) Iran

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Iranian forces, including those of Lebanese Hezbollah, were deployed to 86 different positions in Aleppo governorate. These positions were located in the areas controlled by GoS as well as in the Tal Rifaat enclave controlled by the SDF/YPG.⁵⁸⁵ Iran-affiliated clientelist networks function in GoS-controlled parts of Aleppo governorate, supporting e.g. the tribal Baqir militia (Liwa al-Baqir) in Aleppo city.⁵⁸⁶ As of July 2022, Iran has deployed forces to SDF-controlled northern Aleppo governorate,⁵⁸⁷ including Tal Rifaat.⁵⁸⁸

(g) ISIL

ISIL has presence in the parts of Aleppo governorate controlled by Turkish-backed anti-GoS armed groups (SNA), where it is, according to the International Crisis Group, 'taking advantage of competition among Syrian rebel groups and an incoherent security structure to find transit routes and temporary refuge.'⁵⁸⁹ ISIL is also active in GoS-controlled southern Aleppo governorate,⁵⁹⁰ where locals have been targeted by the group.⁵⁹¹

2.2.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population**(a) Security trends during the reporting period***The conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups*

According to the Carter Center, between April and June 2021, hostilities related to the conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups were reported in Aleppo governorate.⁵⁹² In the context of these hostilities, the UN Security Council reported 'low-level mutual shelling and occasional skirmishes' in al-Bab frontlines in northern Aleppo governorate between April and May 2021.⁵⁹³ According to the Carter Center, 438 conflict-related events were reported in the governorate between April and June 2021,⁵⁹⁴ with the most of them attributed to either GoS or Turkish forces (see the subsection on 'The conflict between Turkey and Kurdish armed groups')

⁵⁸⁵ See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁶ Awad, Z., Tribes and Power in Aleppo City, European University Institute, 13 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11; the continuing presence of Liwa al-Baqir in Aleppo city is noted also in International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, Middle East Report N°234, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁵⁸⁷ Reuters, Syrian, Russian forces boosted after Turkey signals operation, officials say, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁸ Al-Monitor, Syrian Kurds seek support amid Turkish threats of military action, 20 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2; Al-Monitor, Free Syrian Army defends areas of influence against IS, HTS cells, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; Waters, G. & Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, September 2021, [url](#), pp. 3, 15

⁵⁹¹ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁵⁹² Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁹³ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), and 2533 (2020), 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁵⁹⁴ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, July Through September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

below).⁵⁹⁵ The UN Security Council reports that, between June and July 2021, rocket attacks targeted ‘civilian objects’ in GoS-controlled Aleppo city for the first time since March 2021.⁵⁹⁶

According to the UNCOI, airstrikes conducted by GoS and Russia targeted Operation Euphrates Shield areas between July and December 2021.⁵⁹⁷ Between July and September 2021, the Carter Center reported 581 conflict-related events in Aleppo governorate and emphasized the escalation of hostilities between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups and, in particular, the increase in Russian airstrikes targeting areas under Turkish/SNA control in the governorate.⁵⁹⁸

According to Etana Syria, in October 2021, an attempted GoS advance towards Kafr Noran in western Aleppo was repelled by anti-GoS armed groups.⁵⁹⁹ According to the UN Security Council, between August and September 2021, shelling and armed clashes along the northern Aleppo frontlines, were accompanied by airstrikes targeting the rural areas in southern Afrin district.⁶⁰⁰ Between October and December 2021, the Carter Center reported 396 conflict-related events in Aleppo governorate,⁶⁰¹ while the hostilities involving GoS and anti-GoS armed groups continued,⁶⁰² leading to mutual shelling⁶⁰³ and concentrating in areas west and southwest of Aleppo city.⁶⁰⁴

According to the Carter Center, between January and March 2022, 420 conflict events were reported in Aleppo governorate,⁶⁰⁵ with the hostilities concentrating in the same areas as in late 2021.⁶⁰⁶ GoS shelled towns and villages located in the vicinity of the frontlines in northern Aleppo governorate.⁶⁰⁷ Between April and June 2022, the Carter Center reported 691 conflict events in Aleppo governorate,⁶⁰⁸ with the hostilities concentrating, as in the earlier months of 2022, in areas west and southwest of Aleppo city.⁶⁰⁹ According to Etana Syria, in April 2022, mutual shelling between GoS and Turkish forces/SNA took place in Aleppo governorate. Russian airstrikes and shelling were also reported.⁶¹⁰ In May 2022, occasional escalations of violence took place between GoS and Turkish forces/SNA. Meanwhile, Russian forces targeted

⁵⁹⁵ See ‘Figure 4’ in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁹⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁵⁹⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 5

⁵⁹⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, July Through September 2021, [url](#), pp. 2, 4

⁵⁹⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 04 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁶⁰¹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁰² Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁰³ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 30 November 2021, 30 November 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁴ See ‘Figure 3’ in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁰⁵ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁰⁶ See ‘Figure 4’ in Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁰⁷ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief North West Syria 9 February 2022, 9 February 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁰⁹ See the map in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁶¹⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 28 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#)



Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch areas with airstrikes.⁶¹¹ In June 2022, an attempted GoS advance and other hostilities were reported in western Aleppo frontlines.⁶¹² In late July 2022, hostilities between GoS forces/Russia and anti-GoS armed groups escalated also in western Aleppo governorate, with GoS forces ‘stepping up their attacks on the region on a daily basis’⁶¹³ and HTS and other anti-GoS armed groups bombing GoS-controlled areas in western rural Aleppo.⁶¹⁴

The conflict between Turkey and Kurdish armed groups (SDF/YPG)

Between April and May 2021, UN Security Council reported an intensification of clashes and mutual shelling along the frontlines in Afrin, A’zaz and Tal Rifaat that led to civilian casualties.⁶¹⁵ According to the Carter Center, the hostilities between Turkish forces (and the SNA) and ‘Kurdish armed groups’⁶¹⁶ (SDF/YPG) in ‘northern Syria’, including Aleppo governorate, escalated between April and June 2021.⁶¹⁷ The hostilities took place along the frontlines between the parties as well as in the parts of Aleppo governorate controlled by the Turkish forces and their SNA allies. In June 2021, the hostilities led to mutual shelling in the Aleppo frontlines after a rocket strike on 12 June 2021 targeted the Al-Shifa Hospital in (SNA-controlled) Afrin,⁶¹⁸ with both YPG and Russia suspected for the attack.⁶¹⁹

The escalation in northern Aleppo’s frontlines continued between June and July 2021.⁶²⁰ According to the UNCOI, ‘sporadic exchanges of shelling’ and an increase in the number of drone strikes carried out by Turkish forces took place during the period between July and December 2021.⁶²¹ UNCOI describes the areas in northern Aleppo governorate as ‘highly volatile’ and notes how, in these areas, civilians ‘are caught between several conflicts’ and ‘live amid fear of shelling and improvised explosive devices’ (IED’s), with GoS forces, Turkish forces, the Turkish-backed SNA and the Kurdish-dominated SDF all involved in the hostilities.⁶²² On 5 and 6 August 2021, the town of Al-Bab and its surroundings were targeted with missile attacks,

⁶¹¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 02 June 2022, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹³ Asharq al-Awsat, Regime Forces Ramp up Attacks in Syria’s North, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁴ Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶¹⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), and 2533 (2020), 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁶¹⁶ In addition to SDF and YPG, these groups include the so-called ‘Afrin Liberation Forces’ (*Hêzên Rizgariya Efrînê*, HRE), which are described by the Carter Center as ‘the primary Kurdish armed group operating within Turkish-held Aleppo Governorate’. Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 6; for further information on HRE, see Al-Monitor, New Kurdish group in Syria attacks Turkish-backed opposition in Afrin, 24 April 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹⁷ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁶¹⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 5; According to the UN Security Council, in addition to damage suffered by the hospital itself, at least 13 people were killed and 26 wounded in the attack, including health care workers. UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), paras. 4, 25.

⁶¹⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, June 2021, [url](#)

⁶²⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁶²¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 5

⁶²² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 74

allegedly carried out by SDF,⁶²³ that resulted in at least 24 injured civilians and damaged civilians homes.⁶²⁴ According to UNOCHA, the August 2021 hostilities marked the first time Al-Bab and the surrounding areas were affected by violence since the March 2020 ceasefire. All in all, at least 20 civilians were killed and at least 41 others injured as the result of these hostilities.⁶²⁵ Between October and November 2021, hostilities were reported particularly in Tal Rifaat frontline,⁶²⁶ where a Kurdish armed group operating in Tal Rifaat conducted a missile strike targeting Turkish forces in A'zaz city on 10 October 2021, and Turkish forces retaliated by shelling SDF/YPG-controlled areas⁶²⁷. On 20 October 2021, an airstrike likely carried out by a Turkish drone in Ain al-Arab targeted a non-military vehicle stationed in front of the Social Justice Building. Two people were killed while at least three others were wounded in the airstrike.⁶²⁸

Between December 2021 and March 2022, ground-based strikes reported by OHCHR caused civilian casualties in some cities including (i.a.) cities of A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus,⁶²⁹ and in Afrin city and in villages in Ain al-Arab [Kobane] area⁶³⁰. These strikes were likely associated with the hostilities between Turkey and Turkish-backed SNA and SDF/YPG and/or GoS forces. According to the International Crisis Group, mutual rocket attacks and/or shelling between Turkish forces and Kurdish armed groups took place mid-February 2022 in A'zaz and Tal Rifaat.⁶³¹ Between January and March 2022, the Carter Center reported an increase in hostilities between Turkish forces and Kurdish armed groups.⁶³² As in late 2021,⁶³³ the hostilities were concentrated in and around Tal Rifaat.⁶³⁴

Between April and May 2022, UN Security Council reported a significant increase in the hostilities in the areas of Tal Rifaat and Manbij in northern Aleppo,⁶³⁵ including 'an increase in

⁶²³ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in August 2021, 4 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 18

⁶²⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁶²⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 22

⁶²⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 4; see also the concentration of conflict events in Tal Rifaat area in 'Figure 3' in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁶²⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 100

⁶²⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 20-21 [Annex I]

⁶³⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), p. 19 [Annex I]

⁶³¹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

⁶³² Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁶³³ See 'Figure 3' in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁶³⁴ See 'Figure 4' in Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁶³⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 16 June 2022, [url](#), p. 1 [Key points]



shelling, drone strikes and rocket attacks.’⁶³⁶ Between April and May 2022, OHCHR also reported several ground-based strikes causing civilian casualties in (Turkish-controlled) areas of Afrin, A’zaz and Al-Bab.⁶³⁷

According to Etana Syria, in June 2022, mutual shelling between Turkish forces/SNA and SDF and an increasing number of Turkish drone strikes took place in the frontlines in northern rural Aleppo.⁶³⁸ According to the Newlines Institute, SNA and armed groups associated with SDF have ‘engaged in tit-for-tat strikes’ that have resulted in civilian casualties. Newlines Institute estimates that civilians have been killed as a result of, both, indiscriminate shelling and seemingly deliberate attacks that have also caused damage to civilian infrastructure and impeded their freedom of movement. These hostilities have taken place, among others, along the frontlines in Aleppo governorate, with the Manbij frontline reportedly subjected to ‘regular artillery shelling and drone attacks’.⁶³⁹

Early July 2022, Turkish forces targeted the military positions of both GoS and SDF in Tal Rifaat area with suspected drone strikes while hostilities between Turkish-backed anti-GoS armed groups and SDF took place in the rural areas of northern Aleppo governorate.⁶⁴⁰ According to COAR Global, on 19 July 2022, Turkish forces targeted Iranian militias positioned in eastern Afrin district and GoS forces positioned in Tal Rifaat.⁶⁴¹ In late July 2022, hostilities escalated between Turkish forces and SDF in northern Aleppo governorate. In the course of the escalation, Turkish forces shelled areas in Ain al-Arab and Tal Rifaat, the latter hostilities injuring several civilians, while SDF retaliated by targeting areas controlled by Turkish-backed armed groups in Afrin district and near A’zaz city.⁶⁴²

On 16 August 2022, Turkish forces conducted airstrikes that hit GoS positions near Ain al-Arab.⁶⁴³ According to SOHR, 17 people were killed in the airstrikes targeting joint GoS-SDF positions, including 13 GoS soldiers and 4 SDF fighters,⁶⁴⁴ although Al Jazeera notes the discrepancies in the estimated casualty figures of the attack.⁶⁴⁵ On that same day, SDF targeted a Turkish border post opposite Ain al-Arab with a rocket attack⁶⁴⁶ and Turkish forces shelled

⁶³⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 21

⁶³⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 16 June 2022, [url](#), p. 19 [Annex I].

⁶³⁸ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶³⁹ Newlines Institute, The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁰ Al-Monitor, Is Syrian government withdrawing from Tal Rifaat in favor of Turkey?, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴¹ COAR Global, Syria Update, 25 July 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁶⁴² Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴³ Al Jazeera, Several Syrian soldiers killed in ‘Turkish air raids’, 17 August 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Three Syrian soldiers killed in Turkish air strike on military posts -state media, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁴ SOHR, Death toll update / Two Turkish soldiers killed and three others injured in SDF rocket attack on Turkish border post off Ain Al-Arab (Kobani), 17 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, Several Syrian soldiers killed in ‘Turkish air raids’, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁶ Al Modon, القوات التركية تحرق مواقع قسد.. بعد قصف مخفر داخل تركيا [Turkish forces set SDF positions in flames.. after the bombing of an outpost inside Turkey], 16 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, SDF rocket attack / Five Turkish soldiers killed and injured at Syria-Turkey border near Ain Al-Arab (Kobani), 16 August 2022, [url](#)

SDF positions in Ain al-Arab,⁶⁴⁷ Manbij,⁶⁴⁸ and Tal Rifaat.⁶⁴⁹ According to an update by SOHR published on 16 August 2022, one civilian was killed and seven other persons injured in the hostilities between Turkish forces and SDF that were still ongoing in the western Ain al-Arab countryside.⁶⁵⁰ On 17 August 2022, the shelling of SDF controlled villages, including Tal Rifaat, continued in northern Aleppo governorate.⁶⁵¹

Infighting among anti-GoS armed groups

Infighting between different anti-GoS armed groups in Turkish-controlled northern Aleppo was reported during the reporting period.⁶⁵² According to the Carter Center, the infighting between different SNA armed groups is ‘common’⁶⁵³ and contributes to ‘the general instability’ in Turkish controlled parts of northern Syria,⁶⁵⁴ and presents ‘a severe problem’ to the civilian population in these areas.⁶⁵⁵ According to Syria Direct’s local source in Al-Bab, the infighting means ‘increasing chaos and insecurity in the area,’ while ‘the clashes between the factions have led to civilian casualties from indiscriminate bullets.’ In addition, the source notes the danger that the recruitment of criminals by different SNA groups poses to (al-Bab’s) civilian population.⁶⁵⁶

According to COAR Global’s assessment from late June 2022, ‘the insecurity and chaos’ in the SNA-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate is mainly affecting the areas’ civilian population. Besides the infighting between different SNA factions, these areas are exposed to other security incidents, such as IED-attacks, bombings and assassinations.⁶⁵⁷ In April 2022, COAR Global noted that ‘[t]he security situation in northwest Syria remains unstable, with multiple bombings that target SNA actors, varying attributed to [ISIL], the SDF, and the Government of Syria’.⁶⁵⁸

According to UNOCHA, most of the IED attacks that took place in Syria between January and September 2021 ‘were documented in areas under the control of armed groups in Turkish operations areas of Aleppo governorate, including mainly in residential areas and inside

⁶⁴⁷ Nidaa Post, *مصرع 22 عنصر أمن قوات الأسد بغارات تركية شرق حلب* [22 members of Assad forces killed in Turkish raids east of Aleppo], 16 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *SDF rocket attack / Five Turkish soldiers killed and injured at Syria-Turkey border near Ain Al-Arab (Kobani)*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁸ Al Modon, *القوات التركية تحرق مواقع قسد.. بعد قصف مخفر داخل تركيا* [Turkish forces set SDF positions in flames.. after the bombing of an outpost inside Turkey], 16 August 2022, [url](#); Nidaa Post, *مصرع 22 عنصر أمن قوات الأسد بغارات تركية* [22 members of Assad forces killed in Turkish raids east of Aleppo], 16 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁹ Referred in the source with the name ‘al-Shahba’ (الشهباء). Al Modon, *القوات التركية تحرق مواقع قسد.. بعد قصف مخفر داخل تركيا* [Turkish forces set SDF positions in flames.. after the bombing of an outpost inside Turkey], 16 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ SOHR, *SDF rocket attack / Five Turkish soldiers killed and injured at Syria-Turkey border near Ain Al-Arab (Kobani)*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵¹ SOHR, *Renewed bombardment / Turkish shells struck Kurdish-held areas north of Aleppo*, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵² See Carter Center (The), *The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022*, [url](#), pp. 4-6; UN Security Council, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021)*, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁶⁵³ Carter Center (The), *Quarterly Review, July Through September 2021*, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁶⁵⁴ Carter Center (The), *The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022*, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁵⁵ Carter Center (The), *The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022*, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁵⁶ Syria Direct, *Mergers and tensions within the Syrian National Army: A ‘struggle for existence’*, Syria Direct, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁷ COAR Global, *Syria Update*, 20 June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁵⁸ COAR Global, *Syria Update*, 11 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9



markets'.⁶⁵⁹ UN Security Council notes the resumption of IED attacks that killed civilians in Jarablus, A'zaz and Afrin between June and July 2021⁶⁶⁰ and in Al-Bab and Afrin between August and September 2021.⁶⁶¹

According to the Carter Center, the incidents of infighting among SNA factions increased sharply between April and June 2022.⁶⁶² In June 2022, infighting between two SNA factions, one of them allied to HTS, led to HTS advancing into Turkish-/SNA-controlled northern Aleppo.⁶⁶³

According to Etana Syria, the infighting resulted in 'dozens of deaths and injuries.'⁶⁶⁴ According to Middle East Eye, on 19 June 2022, HTS took control of several villages in rural southern and southwestern Afrin district, which marked the first time HTS fighters had entered into so-called Operation Olive Branch areas.⁶⁶⁵ According to Al-Monitor, the infighting led to both military and civilian casualties.⁶⁶⁶

ISIL activities

During the reporting period, ISIL's presence has been reported in, both, northern parts of Aleppo controlled by anti-GoS armed groups⁶⁶⁷ and in southern parts of the governorate controlled by GoS.⁶⁶⁸

According to Al-Monitor, Turkish-backed anti-GoS armed groups have cracked down on ISIL's cells in northern rural Aleppo. However, ISIL is still operating in these areas and conducts recurrent terrorist operations. Arrest operations targeting ISIL members were carried out on 30 May and 23 June 2021. On 24 June 2021 clashes between the police affiliated to Turkish-backed armed groups and ISIL were reported in the city of al-Bab.⁶⁶⁹ According to COAR Global, on 6 April 2022, five SNA members were killed in a shooting incident north of A'zaz that was later claimed by ISIL.⁶⁷⁰ On 12 July 2022 a senior ISIL leader Maher al-Agal, allegedly linked to

⁶⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

⁶⁶⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁶⁶¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 4

⁶⁶² Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁶⁶³ Al-Monitor, Syrian armed groups clash outside Aleppo, 29 June 2022, [url](#); see also Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁶⁴ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁵ COAR Global, Syria Update, 4 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

⁶⁶⁶ Al-Monitor, Syrian armed groups clash outside Aleppo, 29 June 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁷ Al-Monitor, Free Syrian Army defends areas of influence against IS, HTS cells, 1 July 2022, [url](#); COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 8; France 24, US drone strike kills leader of Islamic State group in Syria, Pentagon says, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3, *passim*; Waters, G. & Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, September 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁶⁹ Al-Monitor, Free Syrian Army defends areas of influence against IS, HTS cells, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁰ COAR Global, Syria Update, 11 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9

SNA-affiliated Ahrar al-Sharqiya,⁶⁷¹ was killed by US forces in a drone strike near Jindires⁶⁷² in SNA-controlled northern Aleppo governorate.

ISIL activities were reported in the Badia, the central Syrian desert covering (among other areas) GoS-controlled southern Aleppo governorate,⁶⁷³ where ISIL attacks are reportedly ‘fairly consistent’⁶⁷⁴ and where, in 2021, ISIL was reportedly ‘preying on the [local] population’.⁶⁷⁵

Tensions in SDF-controlled areas

In late May/early June 2021, at least eight people were killed in Manbij after SDF suppressed the popular protests against forced conscription⁶⁷⁶ (the so-called “self-defence duty”) and the SDF rule in the region⁶⁷⁷.

In March 2022, a siege was put in place by GoS around the SDF/YPG-controlled neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh in Aleppo city.⁶⁷⁸ The siege lasted for three weeks⁶⁷⁹ and prevented the entry of basic necessities such as flour, fuel, and medical aid into these neighbourhoods.⁶⁸⁰ According to SOHR, members of the 4th Division of the SAA and State Security, the actors responsible for maintaining the siege had ‘clamped down’ on the neighbourhoods’ residents.⁶⁸¹ On the basis of several unnamed sources, ANHA Hawar News Agency, a Kurdish online news source sympathetic to the PYD/YPG, claims that, during the siege, members of the 4th Division searched the residents’ cellphones and threatened those who did not ‘pay royalties and taxes to the Division’s members’ with kidnapping.⁶⁸²

Israeli airstrikes

On 19 July 2021, Israeli forces carried airstrikes against Iranian targets in Al-Safirah area in southern Aleppo.⁶⁸³ No civilian casualties were reported.

⁶⁷¹ France 24, US drone strike kills leader of Islamic State group in Syria, Pentagon says, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷² COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 8; France 24, US drone strike kills leader of Islamic State group in Syria, Pentagon says, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁷³ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3, *passim*; Waters, G. & Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, September 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁷⁴ Waters, G. & Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, September 2021, [url](#), p. 15

⁶⁷⁵ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁶⁷⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 6

⁶⁷⁷ Reuters, Eight killed in protests against Kurdish-led forces in northern Syrian city, 1 June 2021, [url](#); Syria Direct, Beyond conscription: What does Manbij’s unrest reveal about SDF rule in northeast Syria?, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁸ COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁰ COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁸¹ SOHR, Amid lack of flour in most of bread bakeries / Fourth Division “besieges” SDF-held neighbourhoods in Aleppo, 5 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁸² ANHA Hawar News Agency, They fight Democratic Nation Project in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁸³ AP, Syria reports Israeli airstrikes in northern Aleppo province, 20 July 2021, [url](#); Reuters, Syrian air defences intercept Israeli attack over Aleppo - state media, 20 July 2021, [url](#)



(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 2 776 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Aleppo governorate, of whom 1 893 were coded as explosions/remote violence, 493 battles and 390 incidents of violence against civilians.⁶⁸⁴ Aleppo recorded the largest number of security incidents during the reference period out of all governorates.

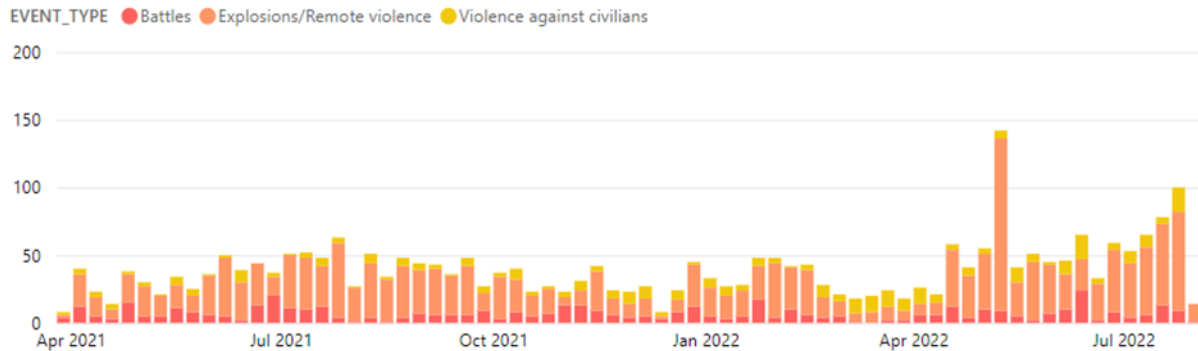


Figure 10. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Aleppo governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

⁶⁸⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Afrin	103	264	231
Ain Al Arab	3	80	15
Al Bab	101	196	45
As-Safira	2	5	-
A'zaz	121	759	38
Jarablus	53	73	8
Jebel Saman	60	384	23
Menbij	50	132	30
Total	493	1893	390

Figure 11. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Aleppo governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁶⁸⁶

Security incidents were recorded in all Aleppo governorate districts during the reporting period, with the highest number of overall incidents being recorded in May 2022. The largest number of battles took place in A'zaz and Afrin, while most incidents involving explosions/remote violence were documented in A'zaz and Jebel Saman. Incidents of violence against civilians were particularly prevalent in Afrin (see Figure 11).

(c) Civilian fatalities

In 2021, SNHR recorded 237 civilian fatalities⁶⁸⁷ in Aleppo governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 108 civilian fatalities (see Figure 12).⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

⁶⁸⁷ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial



Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	12	19
February	60	25
March	32	11
April	17	15
May	13	8
June	31	13
July	8	17
August	13	

Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁶⁸⁸ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
September	10	
October	23	
November	8	
December	10	
Total	237	108

Figure 12. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Aleppo governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to the UN Security Council, schools⁶⁸⁹ and hospitals⁶⁹⁰ in Aleppo governorate were damaged as the result of the ongoing conflict during the reporting period. The incident with the highest number of casualties occurred on 12 June 2021, when the Shifa hospital in Afrin was shelled, killing at least 13 people and injuring 26 others.⁶⁹¹ According to WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), in the year 2021, multiple (5-7) attacks on healthcare were reported in Aleppo governorate.⁶⁹² Between January and March 2022, WHO reported one attack on healthcare in Aleppo governorate.⁶⁹³ The extent of conflict-related infrastructure damage in Aleppo governorate is discussed further in [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to 2022 UN Humanitarian Needs Overview, Aleppo is one of those Syrian governorates where explosive ordnance contamination is assessed as ‘widespread’ as the result of previous or still ongoing hostilities.⁶⁹⁴ Mine Action Syria Response report published in

⁶⁸⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 33

⁶⁹⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 34

⁶⁹¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 26

⁶⁹² WHO/ Health Cluster, Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. Syrian Arab Republic. Annual Report 2021, 3 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁹³ WHO/ Health Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Attacks on health care in Syria, 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁴ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 12



May 2022 estimates that the majority of security incidents involving explosive ordnances recorded by UNMAS occurred in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.⁶⁹⁵

According to the Carter Center report published in March 2022, explosive munitions have been used extensively in the areas in and around Aleppo city,⁶⁹⁶ and the governorate is contaminated by 17 250 - 51 500 UXO.⁶⁹⁷ According to a report by Mine Action Review published in September 2021, attacks with cluster munitions were carried out in Aleppo governorate during the first quarter of 2021.⁶⁹⁸

According to Mine Action Syria Response, 87 % of communities in Aleppo governorate, and especially the communities in northern Aleppo, have reported explosive ordnance contamination in their areas, which is also reportedly affecting between 30-70 % of the farmland in the governorate. In 2021, children lost their lives in Aleppo city as the result of explosive ordnance contamination sustained before 2017.⁶⁹⁹ According to Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of 704 people in Aleppo governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.⁷⁰⁰ From September 2021 to April 2022, iMMap data revealed 204 deaths and 336 injuries in connection with landmine incidents in Aleppo governorate.⁷⁰¹

(e) Displacement and return

UNOCHA stated that the number of IDPs in Aleppo governorate was 1 283 773 (as of February 2022).⁷⁰² In 2021 UNOCHA recorded for Aleppo governorate approximately 22 000 displacements from the governorate, 125 000 within the governorate, and 70 000 to the governorate. Significant numbers of arrivals from Idlib (69 200) and Hasaka (700) were registered.⁷⁰³

Between January and June 2022, IDP movements tracked by UNOCHA were concentrated mainly in north-west Syria, with 77-85 % of them taking place between the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib. Altogether, between January and June 2022, about 23 700 IDPs were displaced from Aleppo, of whom 14 366 were displaced within the governorate. UNOCHA estimates that, during the first half of 2022, access to services and livelihoods was the main incentive for IDP movements within Syria.⁷⁰⁴

⁶⁹⁵ Mine Action Syria Response (The), Explosive ordnance in Syria: impact and required action, May 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁹⁶ Estimation based on the map in Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20 [map]

⁶⁹⁷ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁶⁹⁸ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

⁶⁹⁹ Mine Action Syria Response, Mine Action Syria Response (The), Explosive ordnance in Syria: impact and required action, May 2022, [url](#), p. 19

⁷⁰⁰ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

⁷⁰¹ iMMap, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-13

⁷⁰² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁷⁰³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements

According to UNOCHA, approximately 31 000 IDPs returned to their homes located in Aleppo governorate in 2021. Of these, about 28 000 were those displaced within Aleppo governorate. Most of the returnees from other governorates returned from Idlib (1 000), Hasaka (900) and Latakia (500).⁷⁰⁵

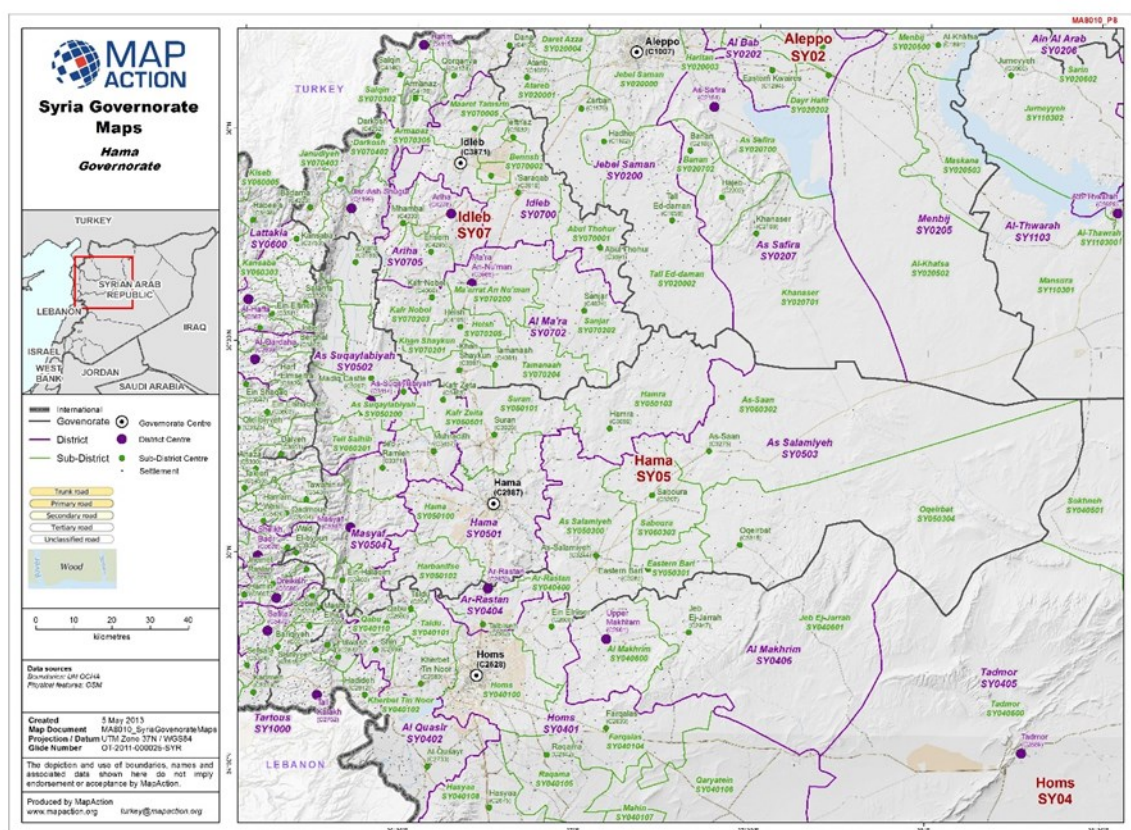
Between January and June 2022, 3 028 IDPs returned to their homes in Aleppo, of whom 2 300 were originally displaced within the governorate. In addition, approx. 1 338 returned from Aleppo to other governorates. UNOCHA did not provide information on the factors determining their return.⁷⁰⁶

(March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)

2.3. Hama governorate



Map 9: © MapAction, Hama governorate⁷⁰⁷

2.3.1. General description of the governorate

Hama governorate is located in the central region of Syria and has internal borders with the governorates of Latakia and Tartous to the west, Idlib, Aleppo and Raqqa to the north, and Homs to the south.⁷⁰⁸ The governorate comprises five administrative districts: Hama, Misyaf (Masyaf), Muhardah (Muhradah), Suqailbiya (As-Suqaylabiyah), and Salamiyah (As-Salamiyeh).⁷⁰⁹

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Hama governorate in 2021 to be 2 146 823.⁷¹⁰ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Hama governorate to be just under 1 500 000.⁷¹¹ With regards to the capital of the governorate, the CIA estimated that the population of Hama city was 964 000 in 2022.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁷ MapAction, Hama governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁸ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁹ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 102

⁷¹⁰ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

⁷¹¹ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁷¹² US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, last updated: 7 June 2022, [url](#)

According to Fabrice Balanche, Sunni Muslims constituted the majority of the residents of Hama City, while Alawites are essentially absent from the city due to the hostility of its residents towards this minority.⁷¹³ The city's western countryside, on the other hand, was described as being 'full of Alawite, Christian, and Ismaili villages'.⁷¹⁴ Syria's Ismailis⁷¹⁵ are mainly found in the Salamiya⁷¹⁶ area east of Hama City. Additionally, Hama governorate has a Christian presence.⁷¹⁷

According to reporting by UNHCR, in GoS-held areas checkpoints existed 'at the entrances to cities and towns and major highways', including the M5 motorway that runs through Hama governorate.⁷¹⁸

2.3.2. Conflict background and armed actors

As reported in section 2.3.3 of the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), during 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, the military operations in north-west Syria by GoS and pro-GoS forces continued, as did clashes and shelling between GoS and opposition forces in western rural Hama. This included ISIL attacks against GoS forces, resulting in military operations involving ISIL, GoS forces and allied militias in central and eastern Hama governorate.⁷¹⁹

As of February 2021, Hama governorate was under GoS control, 'apart from the area bordering Idlib province in the Sahl al-Ghab area', which is controlled by factions of HTS.⁷²⁰ A confidential source interviewed at the end of January 2021 by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that this area was controlled by factions of anti-GoS armed groups and HTS,⁷²¹ whilst the remaining territory of Hama governorate was under the control of the GoS.⁷²² An article by the Middle East Eye (MEE) from February 2022 reported that HTS continued to control 'slivers of territory' in Hama governorate.⁷²³ The territorial control in the governorate remained unchanged during the reference period of this report.⁷²⁴

⁷¹³ Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁷¹⁴ Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 43

⁷¹⁵ USDOS, *2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria*, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁷¹⁶ Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁷¹⁷ USDOS, *2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria*, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁷¹⁸ UNHCR, *International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic*, Update VI, March 2021, [url](#), p. 20 (Footnote 47)

⁷¹⁹ EUAA, *COI Report: Syria - Security situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 111-112

⁷²⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 28.

In May 2017, an agreement was signed by Russia, Iran and Turkey to end hostilities between forces fighting on behalf of GoS and opposition groups in four de-escalation zones, primarily in opposition-held areas of Syria. One of the zones covered north-eastern areas of Latakia, Idlib, western areas of Aleppo and northern areas of Hama.

Presently, this de-escalation zone remains the last of the four zones not retaken by the GoS. Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Security and socio-economic situation in Tartous and Latakia governorates*, September 2021, [url](#), p. 12, footnote 48

⁷²¹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 28.

The article by MEE noted that 'Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) [...] controls around half of Idlib province as well as slivers of territory in the neighbouring provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Latakia' - MEE, *Syria: Civilians killed in attack on oil company in restive north-west*, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

⁷²² UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022*, [url](#)

⁷²³ MEE, *Syria: Civilians killed in attack on oil company in restive north-west*, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

⁷²⁴ See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, *Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map]*, 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on*



(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

Within the time constraints of this report, very limited specific information was found on the SAA and its affiliated armed groups in Hama governorate among the sources consulted. For deployments of the SAA in Hama governorate as of May 2021 see section 2.3.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

The information that was available in the reference period noted the presence of the Syrian military's Fourth Division, involved in seizing and auctioning off land of forcibly displaced locals,⁷²⁵ and the presence of the Syrian Military Security Service's Branch 219 (Hama Governorate Branch).⁷²⁶

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM) referred the presence of the Palestinian militant group Liwa al-Quds in Hama, whose unit has been trained and supplied with weapons by Russia, and specifically stated that it 'sometimes engages under tension with various military groups of the regime in Hama and Deir Ez-Zor and especially with the Iran-backed 4th armored division'.⁷²⁷

(b) Russia

Whilst the presence of Russian troops was noted through the reporting of military operations involving Russian forces, mainly in northern and western Hama governorate,⁷²⁸ additional information published within the reference period for this report stating the composition and strength of Russian forces could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Russia had a total of 24 stationing sites in Hama governorate.⁷²⁹ A July 2022 article by SOHR mentioned the existence of Russian forces, 'groups of the regime-backed 25th Division and other Russian-backed militias' being stationed in Mirza fortress, north-west of Jurin, which overlooks the Sahl Al-Ghab area.⁷³⁰

(c) Iran and Iran-backed militias

Whilst the presence of Iranian troops was noted through the reporting of military operations involving Iranian forces and its proxies,⁷³¹ additional information published within the reference

the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁷²⁵ Hall, N., Rescuing Aid in Syria, CSIS Middle East Program, February 2022, [url](#), p. 38. For background information on the Fourth division see Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

⁷²⁶ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 15 (Footnote 79)

⁷²⁷ ORSAM, Pro-Regime Palestinian Militias in Syria, 2 August 2021, [url](#)

⁷²⁸ For example, SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 3, 4; ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 11-17 September 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁷²⁹ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁷³⁰ SOHR, Hama | Turkish forces start establishing new military post near Russian camp in Sahl Al-Ghab, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

⁷³¹ For example, ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 9-15 April 2022, 21 April 2022, [url](#); ORSAM, Pro-Regime Palestinian Militias in Syria, 2 August 2021, [url](#)

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Iran had a total of 18 stationing sites in Hama governorate.⁷³²

As of February 2021, 'the area bordering Idlib province in the Sahl al-Ghab area' was controlled, according to a confidential source interviewed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by factions of anti-GoS armed groups and HTS,⁷³³ whilst the remaining territory of Hama governorate was under the control of the GoS.⁷³⁴

(e) Turkey and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Turkey had a total of one stationing site in Hama governorate.⁷³⁸

ISIL's presence and activities, as reported in section 2.3.3 of the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), continued throughout 2021, specifically in northern⁷³⁹ and

⁷³³ Netherlands, (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 28. The article by MEE noted that ‘Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) [...] controls around half of Idlib province as well as slivers of territory in the neighbouring provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Latakia’ - MEE, Syria: Civilians killed in attack on oil company in restive north-west, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

⁷³⁵ UN Security Council, Twenty-ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) 2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2022/83, 3 February 2022, url, para. 39

⁷³⁷ SOHR, Hama / Turkish forces start establishing new military post near Russian camp in Sahl Al-Ghab, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

⁷³⁹ UN Security Council, Twenty-eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), paras. 31-32; UN Security Council, Thirteenth 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/2021/682, 27 July 2021, [url](#), para. 25

2.3.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

During the reference period for this report, the security situation in Hama governorate continued to be dominated by military operations in western areas by GoS and pro-GoS Russian forces, with tensions described by the UN as ‘remained high’.⁷⁴⁷ During the last quarter of 2021, conflict events recorded high numbers of shelling and aerial bombardments by GoS and Russia.⁷⁴⁸ Isolated Israeli and Turkish instigated airstrikes were reported, though mainly in 2021.⁷⁴⁹

The military operations that were launched in 2019 in north-west Syria by GoS and pro-GoS Russian forces continued in 2021 and for the first half of 2022, with reported shellings and/or aerial bombardments striking mainly military sites, but also damaging civilian infrastructure.⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁵⁰ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3; SOHR, “De-escalation zone” | Regime forces shell Kabana hills in Latakia, and renew artillery fire on Hama and Idlib, 24 May 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Weekly Conflict Summary, 24-30 May 2021, 30 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2021, 6 June 2021, [url](#), p. 3; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191(2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 2; SOHR, “De-

In July 2022 shellings were continued to be reported in Sahl Al-Ghab, specifically in the villages of Al-Ankawi and Al-Sarmaniyah, with no reported casualties.⁷⁵¹

In August 2021, as at least 29 airstrikes and daily shelling were recorded in ‘towns and villages around the frontlines in southern Idlib [...] northern Latakia and western Hama’.⁷⁵²

Military operations in southern Hama governorate

In a Skype meeting between an international security organisation and the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in April 2022, the security situation along the Hama-Homs corridor in southern Hama governorate was described as ‘relatively stable after a month [as of March 2022] without any serious insurgent activity’.⁷⁵³ However, the security situation around Rastan city, located in northern Homs and southern Hama governorate, was described as ‘complicated’ due to the ongoing presence of anti-GoS armed groups, shelling between GoS forces and anti-GoS armed groups, and attacks on the road.⁷⁵⁴

ISIL activities in eastern Hama governorate

Gregory Waters and Charlie Winter observed in April 2021 that ISIL ‘is alive and well in central Syria – specifically in the part of rural Homs, eastern Hama, southern Aleppo, southern Raqqah, and western and southern Deir Ez-Zor that are collectively known as the Badia’.⁷⁵⁵ On 6 April 2021, ISIL conducted a large attack by launching multiple ambushes against civilians and security forces on the highway along the east Hama-east Homs border, kidnapping more than 60 civilians which were later exchanged against detained ISIL family members.⁷⁵⁶

According to the UN Secretary-General, ‘multiple parties’ suffered attacks by ISIL during April and May 2021, resulting in ‘dozens of casualties’ in areas of Homs, Hama, Raqqah and Deir Ez-

escalation zone” | Russian jet strikes Kabana hills in northern Latakia, while rockets hit positions in southern Idlib and western Hama, 24 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Along with exchange of fire on Idlib frontlines / Opposition Factions bombard regime positions in countryside of Latakia and Hama, 27 July 2021, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in July 2021, 4 August 2021, [url](#), p. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 2; Syrian Documentation Center, The Syrian army responds to the militants attacks in the countryside of “Hama” and “Idlib”, 14 August 2021, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in September 2021, 4 October 2021, [url](#), p. 3; Syrian Documentation Center, Dead and wounded militants during targeting by the Syrian army on their positions in the countryside of “Hama”, 9 November 2021, [url](#); Syrian Documentation Center, The Syrian-Russian Air Force raids the positions of the militants in the Hama and Idlib countryside, 3 January 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 26 February-4 March 2022, 10 March 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 19-25 March 2022, 31 March 2022, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2022, 7 June 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁵¹ ANHA, Damascus troops shell positions in Sahl Al-Ghab north-west of Hama, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁵² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Developments in north-west Syria and Ras Al Ain-Tell Abiad, Situation Report No. 30, August 2021, 13 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁵³ Denmark, DIS, Syria, Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: International security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 25

⁷⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria, Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25, 27

⁷⁵⁵ Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁶ Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 4



Zawr Governorates'.⁷⁵⁷ Reportedly, an attack by ISIL in June 2021 in eastern Hama was the last attack against a GoS outpost, wounding a few soldiers and causing some material damage.⁷⁵⁸ In September 2021, ISIL attacked a joint GoS and Liwa Al Baqir position in the Ithariyah desert, killing eight military forces.⁷⁵⁹ According to Gregory Waters and Charlie Winter, during the second half of 2021 ISIL cells 'reportedly withdrew from east Hama'.⁷⁶⁰ In April 2022, increased airstrikes by Russia against ISIL positions were recorded in Raqqa and Hama governorates,⁷⁶¹ whilst the UN recorded 'sporadic attacks' by ISIL, including against civilians, amongst others in Hama.⁷⁶²

Israeli airstrikes

In June 2021, Israeli airstrikes hit several military targets in central Syria, including in Hama governorate.⁷⁶³ According to the SOHR, 12 Israeli airstrikes have been recorded across Syria between the beginning of 2022 and 13 May 2022, two of which were reported in Hama.⁷⁶⁴

ACLED reported that in April and May 2022, airstrikes targeting positions of the IRGC, Hezbollah, GoS and pro-Iran militias were conducted by Israel in western Hama.⁷⁶⁵ During another attack in May 2022, five Syrians were killed, including one civilian, and seven injured, including a child,⁷⁶⁶ during Israeli missile attacks on reportedly Iranian-linked targets in Masyaf area.⁷⁶⁷

Russian air and drone strikes

In April 2021, an unidentified military drone, reportedly operated by Russia, killed one civilian and wounded one other during a strike in the area of Kherbet Elnaqs.⁷⁶⁸ The month of June 2021 was described as seeing an 'unprecedented' increase in 'the pace of military operations'⁷⁶⁹ in north-western Syria especially in ground bombardments, targeting populated areas, which resulted also in counter-shelling by non-state armed factions and HTS.⁷⁷⁰ Further airstrikes were reported to have taken place in September 2021 on areas in Hama 'controlled

⁷⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 5. For more information on one of these attacks in May 2021 see Syrian Documentation Center, The Syrian army responds to an ISI attack in Hama countryside, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁸ Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁵⁹ ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 4-10 September 2021, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁰ Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁶¹ ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 16-22 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 7-13 May 2022, 19 May 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶² UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

⁷⁶³ MEE, Syria: Israeli air strikes reportedly kill 11 pro-government fighters, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁴ SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁵ ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 9-15 April 2022, 21 April 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁶ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2022, 7 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁶⁷ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁸ ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 17-23 April 2021, 28 April 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁹ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁷⁰ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4

by rebels and Islamist factions',⁷⁷¹ and in October 2021⁷⁷² and in April 2022, with a concentration in the western suburbs of Hama.⁷⁷³ On 22 April 2022, reportedly Russian missiles partially destroyed an unused high school building in al Enkawi village in the western suburbs of Hama governorate, which was, according to the SNHR, under 'joint control' of the 'Armed Opposition' and HTS at the time of the attack.⁷⁷⁴

Turkish shelling

The month of June 2021 saw shelling conducted by Turkish forces on the Jourin military camp and other military facilities housing Syrian military personnel.⁷⁷⁵ Additional information published within the reference period for this report could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 974 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Hama governorate. Of these, 86 were coded as battles, 878 explosions/remote violence and 10 incidents of violence against civilians.⁷⁷⁶

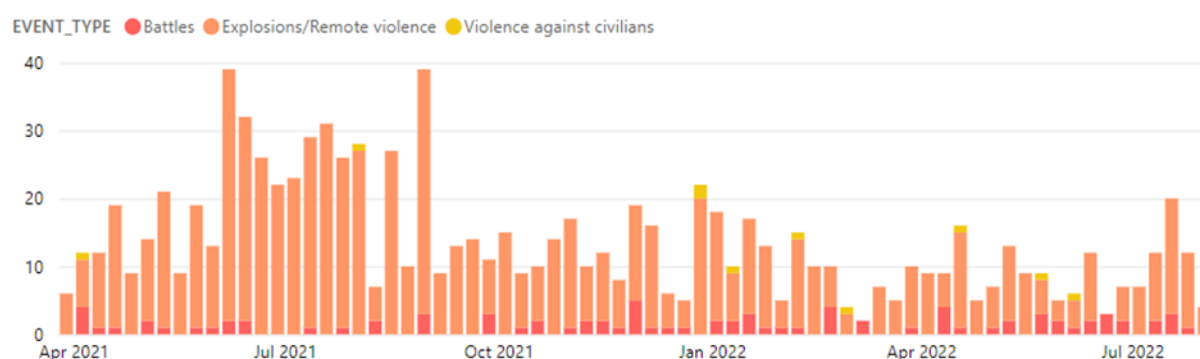


Figure 13: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hama governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷¹ ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 11-17 September 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁷² SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in October 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁷³ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁷⁴ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 20

⁷⁷⁵ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁷⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

⁷⁷⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
As-Salamiyeh	21	158	5
As-Suqaylabiyah	58	673	2
Hama	4	21	1
Masyaf	3	10	2
Muhradah	-	16	-
Total	86	878	10

Figure 14: Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hama governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁷⁷⁸

By far, most security incidents recorded by ACLED were in As-Suqaylabiyah district, followed by As-Salamiyeh district. Significantly lower level of security incidents were documented in the other districts during the reporting period (see Figure 14).

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Hama governorate during the reference period for this report included the following:

- On 6 April 2021, some 60-70 civilians and members of the GoS-allied militia NDF were kidnapped and a number of security forces members killed and injured by ISIL militants near the Tuwaynan Dam, along the Homs-Hama border, with the majority freed later that same day in exchange for detained family members of ISIL fighters.⁷⁷⁹
- One fisherman was killed, another injured, when Russia fired a missile against the Asi riverbanks on 19 April 2021.⁷⁸⁰ On the same day, a man was killed and another injured as a result of a drone strike in the village of Khirbat al-Naqus.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

⁷⁷⁹ Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#). Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 23; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 5

⁷⁸⁰ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁸¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), p. 19

- Following an attack on Na'ur Jurin town by armed groups against a GoS military camp on 20 June 2021, a two-year old girl was hit in the head by shrapnel and died, whilst her father and brother sustained injuries.⁷⁸²
- On 19 July 2021, 11 civilians were injured when a ground-based strike hit the village of Na'ur Jurin in north-western rural Hama.⁷⁸³
- Unguided artillery or rockets, originating from Jurin, under control of pro-GoS forces, hit a house in Qastoun village, both in Hama countryside, on 7 August 2021, 'killing four children, and injuring nine others (eight children and one woman), all members of the same family'.⁷⁸⁴
- On 1 September 2021, a girl was killed as her building was under artillery shelling in Na'our Jourin village in the western suburbs of Hama governorate by HTS.⁷⁸⁵
- Two civilians were injured when a strike hit a residential area in the village of Na'ur Jurin in north-western rural Hama on 23 October 2021.⁷⁸⁶
- On 30 October 2021, one civilian was killed, two children wounded, and homes and civilian properties damaged, when 'Turkish-backed armed factions' fired rockets against the town of Gorin in Al-Ghab Plain, north-western Hama.⁷⁸⁷
- Three civilian men were killed following the explosion of ERW on 27 February 2022 in the city of Salamiyah.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 66; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 20

⁷⁸³ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁷⁸⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 26

⁷⁸⁵ Syrian Documentation Center, A child victim and several injuries as a result of the armed men's targeting of the town of "Jorin" west of Hama, 1 September 2021, [url](#); SNHR, On World Children's Day: Tenth Annual Report on Violations against Children in Syria, 20 November 2021, [url](#), p. 35

⁷⁸⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 20

⁷⁸⁷ Syrian Documentation Center, Civilian casualties due to militants attacks on "Al-Ghab Plain", Hama countryside, 30 October 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 22



(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	11	4
February	3	2
March	49	4
April	2	2
May	4	3
June	5	1
July	3	11
August	6	
September	3	
October	1	
November	1	
December	-	
Total	88	27

Figure 15: Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Hama governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 88 civilian fatalities⁷⁸⁹ in Hama governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 27 civilian fatalities (see Figure 15).⁷⁹⁰

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In a report published in 2020, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) and the University of St Andrews (United Kingdom) stated that Hama City sustained 4.4 % of the total damage to physical capital in Syria.⁷⁹¹ Based on the UN Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Shelter Cluster assessed that in Hama governorate, 6.06 % of the overall population was living in damaged buildings.⁷⁹²

According to UNOCHA, explosive ordnance contamination is ‘widespread’ in Hama governorate.⁷⁹³ In March 2022 the Carter Center published a report mapping unexploded ordnance in Syria between December 2012 and May 2021. According to the report, between 188 - 994 of explosive munitions were used in this period, contributing to ‘UXO contamination’ of 19 000 – 56 750.⁷⁹⁴ Cluster munition attacks were documented in Hama governorate during 2020 and the first quarter of 2021.⁷⁹⁵ The Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor documented

⁷⁸⁹ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁷⁹⁰ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁷⁹¹ UNESCWA and University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 51; The source defines loss to physical capital as including ‘private and public construction and equipment, such as housing stock, schools, hospitals and factories, and power, water, sanitation, transport and communications infrastructure’.

UNESCWA and University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 49

⁷⁹² Shelter Cluster/UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI Sector. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁹³ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

⁷⁹⁴ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications, December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 20, 24

⁷⁹⁵ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178



and categorised in Hama governorate 25 civilian casualties, 15 civilians killed and 40 civilians injured & killed linked to 320 explosive incidents in the first quarter of 2021.⁷⁹⁶ Non-exhaustive documented incidents were reported in April,⁷⁹⁷ May,⁷⁹⁸ July,⁷⁹⁹ October,⁸⁰⁰ November,⁸⁰¹ and December 2021,⁸⁰² where civilian deaths occurred due to explosions caused by landmines or munitions remnants, mostly in the suburbs. In 2022, such incidents were reported (non-exhaustive) in February,⁸⁰³ March,⁸⁰⁴ April,⁸⁰⁵ and May,⁸⁰⁶ with most of the victims being children.

(e) Displacement and return

In 2021, in Hama governorate UNOCHA recorded approximately 5 200 IDP movements from the governorate, 820 IDP movements within the governorate, and about 1 200 IDP movements to the governorate.⁸⁰⁷

UNOCHA's 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview showed that, as of August 2021, there were 226 911 IDPs in Hama governorate, which was also the number of IDPs categorised as 'vulnerable residents'.⁸⁰⁸

In 2022, UNOCHA reported 212 IDP departures from and 98 arrivals to Hama governorate in January,⁸⁰⁹ 486 departures and 530 arrivals in February,⁸¹⁰ 219 departures and 212 arrivals in March 2022⁸¹¹ and 184 departures and 62 arrivals in April 2022.⁸¹²

In 2021 in Hama governorate, UNOCHA recorded 5 000 IDP returnee movements from the governorate, 13 000 returnee movements within the governorate and 2 000 IDP returnee

⁷⁹⁶ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Syrian Arab Republic: Explosive Hazard Risks Governorate Profile, May 2021, [url](#), Estimated # of civilians killed & injured per year [Open source data on explosive incidents since 2015] and Estimated # of explosive incidents by governorate, district & sub-district.

⁷⁹⁷ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁷⁹⁸ SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁹⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 20

⁸⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 20

⁸⁰¹ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in November 2021, 4 December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁰² SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in December 2021, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 62

⁸⁰³ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 22

⁸⁰⁴ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March 2022, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁰⁵ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁰⁶ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2022, 7 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁸ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 23, 102

⁸⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

movements to the governorate.⁸¹³ In 2022, UNOCHA recorded 247 spontaneous returns to the governorate from locations within Hama and from outside in January,⁸¹⁴ 728 in February,⁸¹⁵ and 594 in March,⁸¹⁶ and 589 in April 2022.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

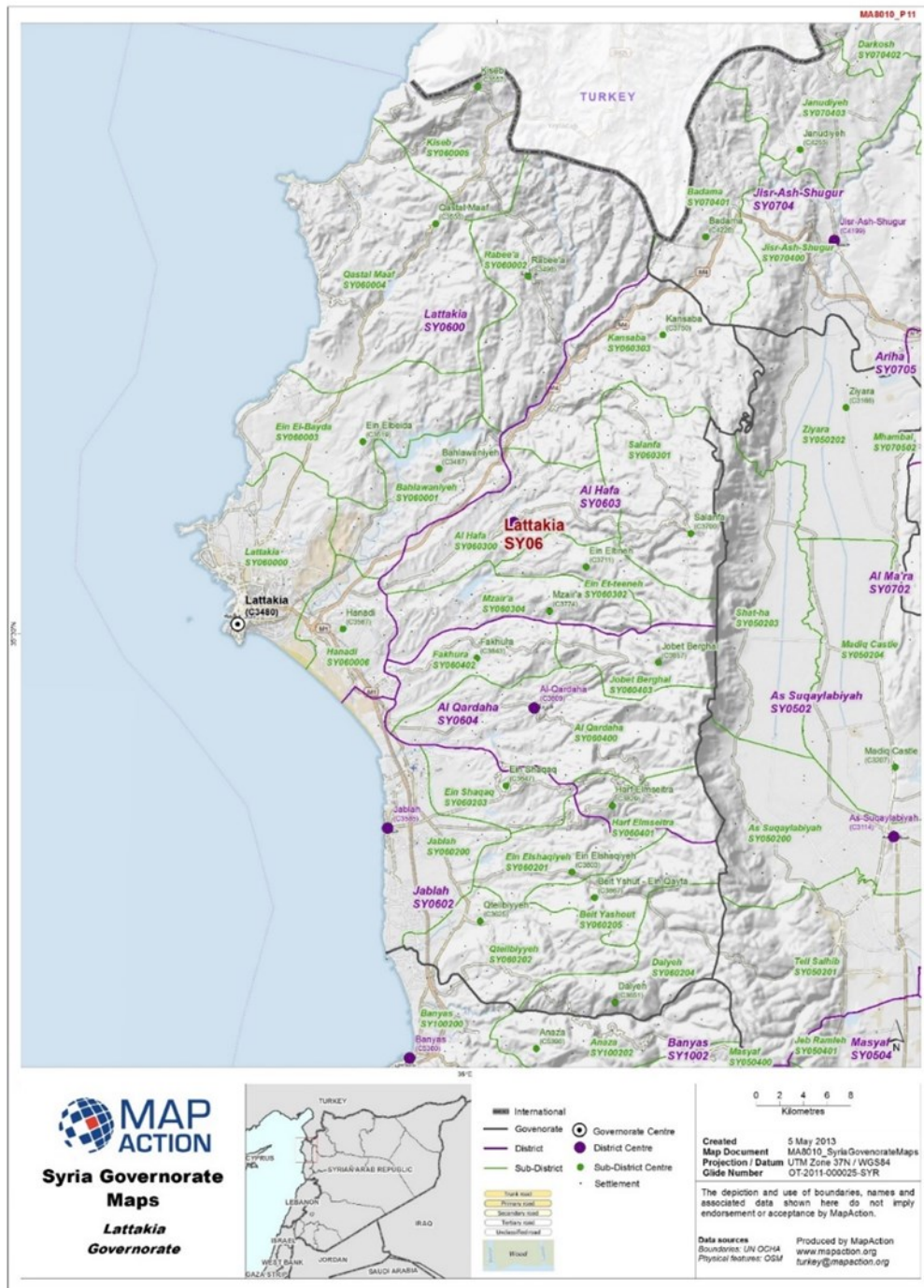
⁸¹⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

⁸¹⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸¹⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

2.4. Latakia governorate



Map 10: © MapAction, Latakia governorate⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁸ MapAction, Syria 2013-2015, Latakia Governorate [map], last updated: 29 July 2016, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

2.4.1. General description of the governorate

Latakia governorate is situated in the north-west of the country and borders the Mediterranean Sea on its western border. To the north, it shares an international border with Turkey. Latakia is bordered by Tartous to the south, Hama to the east, and Idlib to the north-east. Latakia is divided into four administrative districts, from north to south: Latakia, Al-Haffa, Al-Qardaha, Jablah.⁸¹⁹

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Latakia governorate to be of 1 345 855 as of 2021.⁸²⁰ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Latakia governorate to be of 1 274 433.⁸²¹ For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Latakia's population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

2.4.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Latakia governorate is mainly controlled by GoS. Anti-GoS armed groups control a narrow slice of territory in the north-eastern corner of the governorate limited by the Turkish border and adjoining the anti-GoS controlled areas in Idlib and Hama governorates.⁸²²

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

For the reference period of the report, information on the SAA deployments in Latakia governorate could not be found. Information on particular SAA formations and units deployed in the governorate (before April 2021) is available in previous EUAA reports: [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

(b) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Russian forces were deployed to three different positions in GoS-controlled Latakia governorate.⁸²³ The Hmeimin Air Base, described as Russia's main base⁸²⁴, as well as one of 'the main hubs' (along the navy base in the port of Tartous) for Russia's military intervention in Syria⁸²⁵ is located in the governorate. However, it has been estimated that 'the Russian military is not well established outside the Hmeimin Base,'⁸²⁶ and, in May 2022, there were reports that Russian forces had withdrawn to Hmeimin

⁸¹⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 19

⁸²⁰ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d, [url](#)

⁸²¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁸²² See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸²³ See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁸²⁴ Daraj, Syria: Did Russia Allow Israel to Bomb Latakia Port?, 19 December 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Russia reduces forces in Aleppo, transfers some to Hmeimim, 22 March 2022, [url](#)

⁸²⁵ VOA, Russia Expands Military Facilities in Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸²⁶ Al Shami, I., Mapping Russian Soft Power: How Coastal Syrians Engage with Russia, WINEP, 26 May 2022, [url](#)



Air Base and transferred other bases in Latakia governorate to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah.⁸²⁷

(c) Iran

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Iranian forces were deployed to eight different positions in GoS-controlled Latakia governorate. Jusoor's map does not contain information on the presence of Lebanese Hezbollah in the governorate.⁸²⁸ Back in March 2019, media sources speculated that GoS had given Iran the right to administer the port of Latakia.⁸²⁹ In May 2022, the International Crisis Group noted the reports according to which the control of Russian bases in Latakia (the main Hmeimin base not included) had been transferred to IRGC and Hezbollah.⁸³⁰

(d) Anti-GoS armed groups

During the reference period, HTS strengthened its control over areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in north-eastern Latakia governorate after forcing jihadist groups Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah to reduce their presence in the area.⁸³¹ For further information see the subsection on '*Infighting among anti-GoS armed groups*'

(e) Turkey

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Turkish forces were deployed to two positions in the north-eastern parts of Latakia governorate controlled by anti-GoS armed groups.⁸³² Turkish military posts have been established in the governorate in the context of monitoring the wider Idlib de-escalation zone.⁸³³

2.4.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

The conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups

According to the Carter Center, between April and June 2021, incidents related to the conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups were reported also in Latakia governorate.⁸³⁴ The UN

⁸²⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

⁸²⁸ See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁸²⁹ See, e.g. L'Orient-Le Jour, L'Iran avance ses pions à Lattaquié, « terrain russe », 22 March 2019, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Iran to Take Lattakia Port, 18 March 2019, [url](#)

⁸³⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

⁸³¹ COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4; Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham driving out foreign factions, why?, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸³² See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁸³³ See Asharq al-Awsat, Turkey Sets Up Military Post Near Latakia, 10 August 2020, [url](#); NPA, New Turkish Military Point Established in Latakia Countryside, Syria, 1 September 2020, [url](#)

⁸³⁴ See 'Figure 4' in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

Security Council reports ‘an increase in violence’ in the so-called Idlib de-escalation zone between June and July 2021, in the context of which air assaults took place also in Latakia governorate.⁸³⁵ In June 2021, HTS and other anti-GoS armed groups operating in Idlib de-escalation area targeted GoS positions in the rural areas of northern Latakia with recurring shelling.⁸³⁶ According to the Carter Center, 38 conflict events were reported in Latakia governorate between July and September and 23 between October and December 2021.⁸³⁷ The hostilities were concentrated in the north-eastern part of the governorate controlled by the anti-GoS armed groups.⁸³⁸

According to Etana Syria, in October 2021, an attempted GoS advance in Jabal al-Turkman area in northern Latakia was repelled by anti-GoS armed groups. Russian airstrikes against targets in northern Latakia were also reported. These and other Russian airstrikes targeting anti-GoS areas in Idlib and Aleppo governorates caused wide ranging material damage and resulted in civilian casualties.⁸³⁹

Between January and March 2022, the Carter Center reported 24 conflict-related events in Latakia governorate.⁸⁴⁰ As in 2021, the hostilities concentrated mainly in the north-eastern corner of the governorate under anti-GoS armed groups.⁸⁴¹ Between April and June 2022, the Carter Center reported 35 conflict-related events in Latakia governorate.⁸⁴² As in the earlier months of 2022, the hostilities were concentrated in the area controlled by the anti-GoS armed groups in north-eastern Latakia.⁸⁴³

According to Etana Syria, in April 2022, Russian airstrikes were carried out in Latakia governorate. In addition, shelling took place in Jabal al-Akrad area.⁸⁴⁴ In May 2022, Etana Syria documented incidents of GoS shelling in northern Latakia governorate.⁸⁴⁵ Hostilities were documented in the area also in June 2022.⁸⁴⁶ These hostilities included shelling by HTS targeting GoS-controlled town of Kassab on 15 June, intense shelling by GoS forces on 18 June targeting anti-GoS areas in Latakia governorate⁸⁴⁷ and shelling by anti-GoS armed groups targeting GoS positions in Jabal al-Akrad area.⁸⁴⁸

⁸³⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

⁸³⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

⁸³⁷ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁸³⁸ See ‘Figure 3’ in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸³⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 04 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁰ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁴¹ See ‘Figure 4’ in Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

⁸⁴² Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁴³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

⁸⁴⁴ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 28 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁵ See the map on ‘Military Developments in North-West Syria’ in Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 02 June 2022 [map], 2 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁶ See the map on ‘Military Developments in North-West Syria’ in Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022 [map], 1 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁷ Al-Monitor, Idlib sees new escalation between Syrian government, opposition forces, 22 June 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁸ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)



In mid-July 2022, SOHR reported mutual rocket and heavy machine gun fire between GoS forces and anti-GoS armed groups of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room.⁸⁴⁹ In late July 2022, hostilities between GoS forces and Russia and anti-GoS armed groups escalated also in north-eastern Latakia governorate, with anti-GoS armed groups bombing GoS-controlled areas in Kabbana and Jabal al-Turkman region.⁸⁵⁰ In mid-August 2022, SOHR reported exchanges of shelling and heavy machine-gun fire between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups along the Kabbana frontline in northern Latakia's Jabal al-Akrad region.⁸⁵¹

Infighting among anti-GoS armed groups

According to the Carter Center, between October and December 2021, a military operation by HTS targeting rival anti-GoS armed groups was reported in northern Latakia governorate.⁸⁵² The hostilities broke out on 25 October 2021 between HTS and two jihadist groups, Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah,⁸⁵³ consisting for the most part of foreign fighters.⁸⁵⁴ The goal of the operation was reportedly to extend HTS's control over the areas with alleged HAD and ISIL presence in northern Latakia and western Idlib countryside.⁸⁵⁵ The hostilities ended on 27 October 2021, when, both, Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah members had withdrawn⁸⁵⁶ their positions and HTS took over the areas controlled by these groups in the Jabal al-Turkman region⁸⁵⁷ and returned to the frontlines between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups in Latakia governorate⁸⁵⁸. However, the International Crisis Group reports that the crackdown on jihadist groups in eastern Latakia and western Idlib governorates continued also in November 2021, with Jund Allah (still) as the primary target.⁸⁵⁹ According to Al-Monitor, a security settlement between HTS and Jund Allah was announced on 7 November 2021. In accord with this settlement, Jund Allah members were to disarm and participate in a Sharia training course supervised by ETIM/TIP (for further information on ETIM/TIP, see section [2.1.2.](#)), after which they are allowed to reside in HTS-controlled areas as civilians.⁸⁶⁰

Israeli airstrikes

According to the International Crisis Group, Israeli missile strikes against 'Iran-linked targets' took place on 5 May 2021 in rural Latakia (and Hama) governorates, killing one civilian.⁸⁶¹ According to the UNCOI, two Israeli air strikes hit the port in Latakia during the reporting period

⁸⁴⁹ SOHR, De-escalation zone / Regime forces and Al-Fateh Al-Mubin factions trade fire on Jabal Al-Akrad and Sahl Al-Ghab frontlines, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁰ Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, With over 180 shells Factions shell 25 positions in regime areas in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and Lattakia, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵¹ SOHR, Renewed bombardment / Al-Fath Al-Mubin rebels and regime forces exchange fire on frontlines of Jabal Al-Zawiyah, Sahl Al-Ghab and Jabal Al-Krad, 14 August 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁵² Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁵³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 5; COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁵⁴ COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁵⁵ The Syrian Observer, Shishani Leaves and HTS Attacks Whoever Remains, 27 October 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁶ According to the Syrian Observer, Jund al-Sham members moved to ETIM/TIP-controlled areas in rural Idlib governorate. The Syrian Observer, Shishani Leaves and HTS Attacks Whoever Remains, 27 October 2021, [url](#); Jund Allah members were relocated to (SNA-controlled) Afrin. COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁵⁷ COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁵⁸ Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham driving out foreign factions, why?, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁰ Al-Monitor, HTS makes rival jihadis in Syria's Idlib take Sharia courses, give up weapons, 20 November 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶¹ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2021, [url](#)

between July and December 2021.⁸⁶² These attacks took place on 7 and 28 December 2021.⁸⁶³ According to the Guardian, the attack on 7 December targeted an Iranian arms shipment while the origin of ‘arms and munitions’ targeted in the 28 December attack was uncertain.⁸⁶⁴ The International Crisis Group reports that two GoS affiliated militia members were killed in the later attack.⁸⁶⁵ No civilian casualties were reported.

On 20 July 2022, Russian forces shot down two drones over Hmeimin Air Base. No casualties or damage were reported.⁸⁶⁶

(b) Security incidents

During the reference period, there were 192 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Latakia governorate, of whom 49 were coded as battles, 141 explosions/remote violence and 2 incidents of violence against civilians.⁸⁶⁷

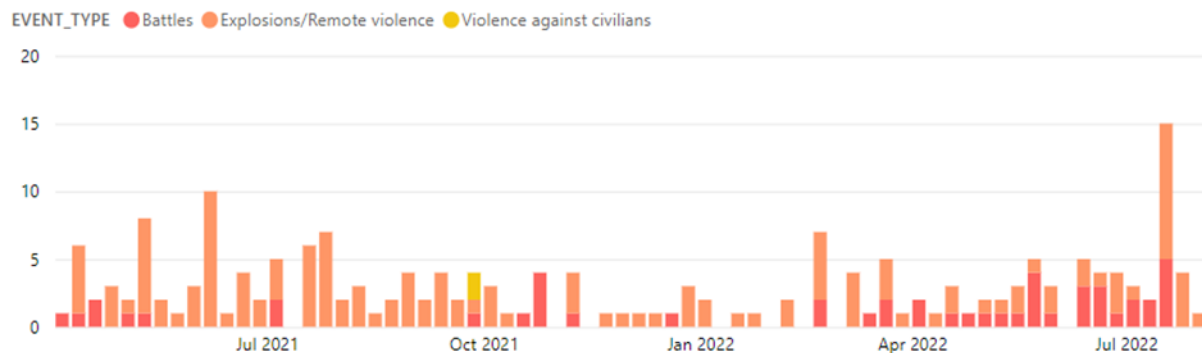


Figure 16. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Latakia governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 5

⁸⁶³ Guardian (The), Israeli airstrike sets port of Latakia ablaze, says Syrian media, 28 December 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, December 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁴ Guardian (The), Israeli airstrike sets port of Latakia ablaze, says Syrian media, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, December 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁶ New Arab (The), Russia says it shot down two drones over Hmeimim base in Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Russian forces in Syria shot down two drones aimed at air base - Interfax, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

⁸⁶⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al-Hafa	40	102	-
Al-Qardaha	-	3	-
Jablah	1	2	-
Latakia	8	34	2
Total	49	141	2

Figure 17. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Latakia governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁸⁶⁹

Around 74% of all security incidents documented by ACLED in Latakia governorate during the reference period were recorded in Al-Hafa district (see Figure 17).

⁸⁶⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

(c) Civilian fatalities

In 2021, SNHR recorded two civilian fatalities in Latakia governorate (both documented in August 2021)⁸⁷⁰, while for the first seven months of 2022 no civilian fatalities were documented.⁸⁷¹

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), in the year 2021 several (2-3) attacks on healthcare were reported in Latakia governorate. SSA did not provide additional details on these attacks.⁸⁷² Between January and March 2022, WHO did not report any attacks on healthcare in Latakia governorate.⁸⁷³ The extent of conflict-related infrastructure damage in Latakia governorate is discussed further in [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to Mine Action Review report published in September 2021, Latakia governorate has experienced attacks with cluster munitions since 2012.⁸⁷⁴ According to the Carter Center report published in March 2022, explosive munitions have been used mainly in the northern parts of Latakia governorate,⁸⁷⁵ and the governorate is contaminated by 3 000-9 250 UXO.⁸⁷⁶ According

⁸⁷⁰ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁸⁷¹ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁸⁷² WHO/ Health Cluster, Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. Syrian Arab Republic. Annual Report 2021, 3 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁷³ WHO/ Health Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Attacks on health care in Syria, 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁴ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

⁸⁷⁵ Estimation based on the map in Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20 [map]

⁸⁷⁶ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20



to Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of two people in Latakia governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.⁸⁷⁷

(e) Displacement and return

UNOCHA stated that the number of IDPs in Latakia governorate was 449 317 (as of February 2022).⁸⁷⁸ According to UNOCHA, approximately 7 000 IDPs were newly displaced in Latakia governorate in 2021. Of these, around 5 000 were displaced within Latakia governorate while displacements to Tartous (800) and Hama (200) were also registered. Around 6 000 IDPs from other governorates were displaced to Latakia. Significant numbers of arrivals from Aleppo (2 000), Hama (900), Homs (900), Tartous (800), Rural Damascus (400), Damascus (400) and Dar'a (200) were registered.⁸⁷⁹

Between January and June 2022, 3 339 IDPs were displaced from Latakia, of whom 2 330 were displaced within the governorate. In addition, 2 655 IDPs were displaced to Latakia from other governorates. UNOCHA estimates that, during the first half of 2022, access to services and livelihoods was the main incentive for these and other IDP movements within Syria.⁸⁸⁰

According to UNOCHA, 16 IDPs returned to their homes located in Latakia governorate in 2021, all of them were those displaced within Latakia governorate.⁸⁸¹ In January 2022, approx. 1 600 IDPs returned to their homes in Latakia governorate, of whom all (1 600) were originally displaced within the governorate, while 200 IDPs returned from Latakia to other governorates.⁸⁸² UNOCHA does not provide information on the factors determining these returns.⁸⁸³ Between February and May 2022, no returns to Latakia governorate were reported.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁷⁷ Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁸⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)

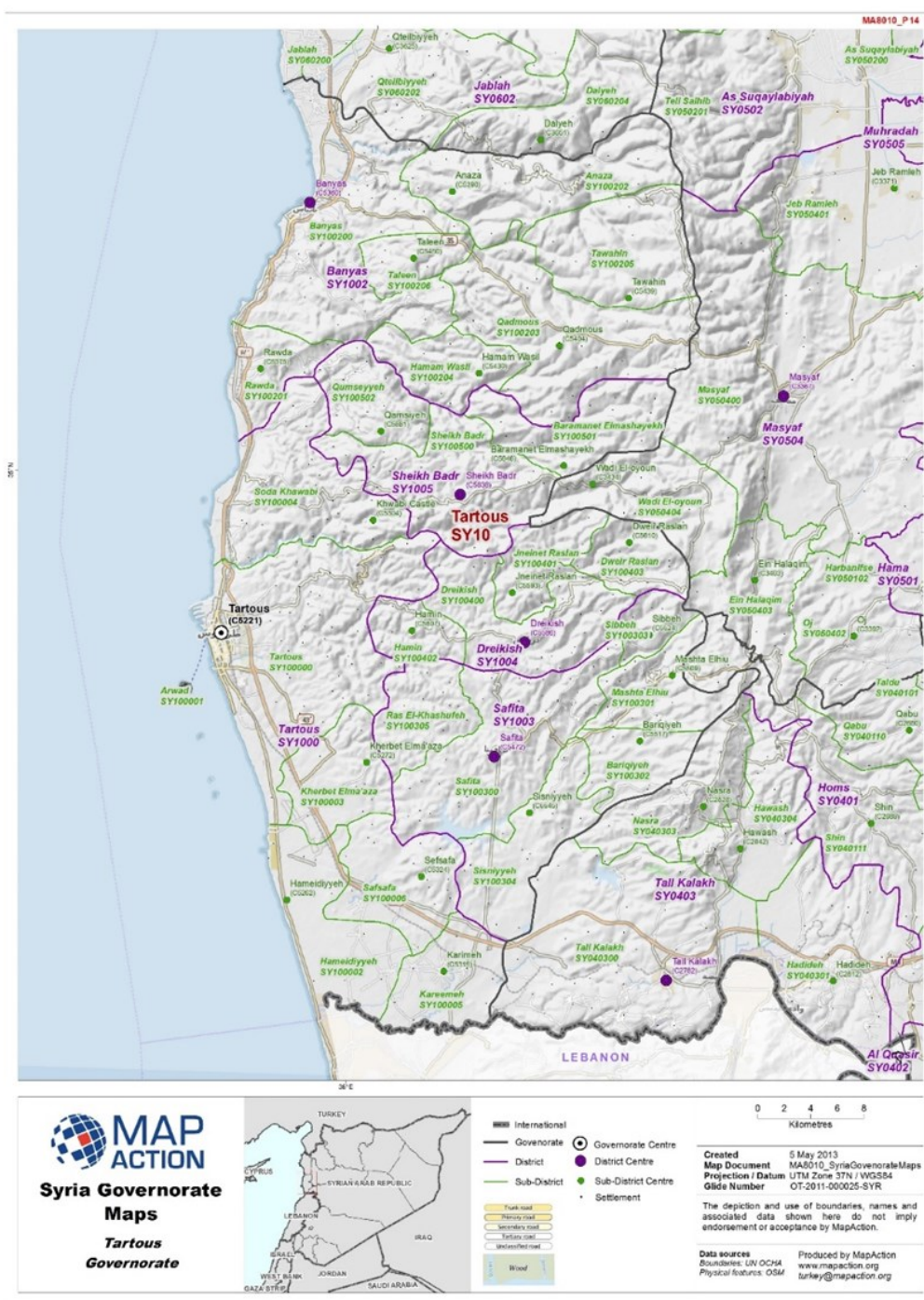
⁸⁸¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#)

2.5. Tartous governorate



Map 11: © MapAction, Tartous governorate map⁸⁸⁵

⁸⁸⁵ MapAction, Syria Governorate Maps – Tartous Governorate, last updated on 29 July 2019, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

2.5.1. General description of the governorate

Tartous and Latakia governorates form the coastal region of Syria. Tartous governorate borders the Mediterranean Sea in the west, Latakia governorate in the north, the governorates of Hama and Homs in the east, and Lebanon in the south.⁸⁸⁶ It consists of five administrative districts: Baniyas, Dreikish, Safita, Sheikh Badr and Tartous City,⁸⁸⁷ which are in turn subdivided into 27 sub-districts.⁸⁸⁸ The governorate is considered a 'regime stronghold' and referred to as an 'island of stability'.⁸⁸⁹

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Tartous governorate in 2021 to be 1 171 802.⁸⁹⁰ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Tartous governorate to be 943 100.⁸⁹¹

In a 2018 publication, the share of Alawites in Tartous City was estimated to be 80 %.⁸⁹²

In 2017, Syria and Russia signed a 49-year lease agreement, allowing an automatic renewal for another 25 years for the development and modernisation of a Russian permanent naval base (first established in 1971)⁸⁹³ in the port of Tartous – the 'only navy facility the Kremlin possesses outside the former Soviet Union',⁸⁹⁴ and which grants Russia a 'symbolic "power projection" into the Mediterranean Sea',⁸⁹⁵ the Middle East and North Africa.⁸⁹⁶ According to a news report of September 2021, a 'sizable' naval contingent is based at the port supporting Russian air and ground operations in Syria.⁸⁹⁷ For example, it was reported in June 2021, that the Russian military conducted naval manoeuvres off the coast of Tartous governorate, including the 'search for enemy submarines and repelling air attacks'.⁸⁹⁸

2.5.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The governorate saw violent incidents in the earlier years of the conflict, especially in 2011 and 2013 when there were 'violent clashes in the Sunni-majority city of Baniyas', and in 2016 when ISIL targeted Tartous city in a number of separate bomb attacks, killing almost 100 people.⁸⁹⁹ According to section 2.5.3.1 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#)

⁸⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Tartous governorate, January 2016, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 31

⁸⁸⁸ UNHCR, UNHCR Syria / Tartous FO, End of year 2017 / Factsheet, January – December 2017, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁸⁹ Haider, S., Kinship Ties in Safe Areas During the Syrian Conflict: The Case of Tartous, MED, 12 May 2022, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁹⁰ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁹¹ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁸⁹² Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 38

⁸⁹³ RIAC, Turkish and Russian Approaches to Security in the Eastern Mediterranean, 10 November 2020, [url](#). For more detailed information and analysis see Kjellen, J. and Lund, A., From Tartous to Tobruk, The Return of Russian Sea Power in the Eastern Mediterranean, FOI, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁴ VOA, Russia Expands Military Facilities in Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁵ McDermott, R., Moscow plans enhanced military basing in Syria, Jamestown Foundation, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁶ ISW, Jennifer Cafarella, Testimony before US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism, "10 years of war: examining the ongoing conflict in Syria", 15 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7

⁸⁹⁷ RFE/RL, Putin, Assad Meet For First Time in Over A Year, 14 September 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁸ Syrian Documentation Center, Russian military exercises on the Syrian coasts, 30 June 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁹ Reuters, Bombs kill nearly 150 in Syrian government-held cities: monitor, 23 May 2016, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria's war: Bombs hit Tartous, Homs, Hasaka, 6 September 2016, [url](#)

there were two security incidences recorded in 2019, whilst only one security incident ('violence against civilians') was recorded between 1 January 2020 and 31 March 2021 – see section 2.5.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

During the reference period, the whole of Tartous governorate was under GoS control.⁹⁰⁰

For a detailed background overview of the conflict preceding March 2020 please consult section 2.5.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

Very limited specific information was found on the SAA and its affiliated armed groups among the sources consulted within time constraints. For deployments of the SAA in Tartous governorate as of May 2021 see section 2.5.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to the sources interviewed by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), the Syrian president's brother Maher al-Assad, who is commander of the SAA's 4th Armoured Division,⁹⁰¹ controls the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartous, whose official and unofficial ports have been considered a hotbed for smuggling of illegal goods into and out of Syria, which in turn are used to finance militias under GoS control.⁹⁰²

(b) Russia

Whilst the presence of Russian naval and airforce was noted,⁹⁰³ very limited additional information published within the referencing period for this report stating the composition, strength and additional locations of Russian forces in Tartous governorate could be found among the sources consulted within time constraints of this report. For such information as of May 2021 see section 2.5.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Russia had one stationing site in Tartous governorate.⁹⁰⁴

In February 2022 it was reported that six large assault ships by the Russian Navy⁹⁰⁵ had arrived at the port of Tartous, whose location was considered the 'logistical center of the Russian Navy'.⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰⁰ See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰¹ Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁰² OCCRP, Assad regime implicated in massive Captagon bust, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁰³ For example VOA, Russia Expands Military Facilities in Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Russian Naval Ships Arrive at Syria's Tartus, 5 February 2022, [url](#); MEE, Russia's defence minister arrives in Syria ahead of naval drills, 15 February 2022, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁰⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁵ SOHR, Russian Naval Ships Arrive at Syria's Tartus, 5 February 2022, [url](#); MEE, Russia's defence minister arrives in Syria ahead of naval drills, 15 February 2022, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁰⁶ SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3



(c) Anti-GoS armed groups

According to an international security organisation and an expert at Omran Center for Strategic Studies, both interviewed in October 2020, anti-GoS groups were not present in the governorate of Tartous.⁹⁰⁷ No further information on the presence of anti-GoS armed groups was found during the reference period.

2.5.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

Two Israeli airstrikes have been documented in the reporting period.⁹⁰⁸

On 3 November 2021, Israel's military targeted Tartous City with airstrikes aiming to hit Iran-controlled arms depots,⁹⁰⁹ whilst injuring two soldiers.⁹¹⁰ On 2 July 2022, Israeli airstrikes south of Tartous, near the town of al-Hamidiyah, hit former poultry farms reportedly now used by Lebanon's Hezbollah,⁹¹¹ wounding two civilians.⁹¹²

(b) Security incidents

During the reference period, there were six security incidents recorded by ACLED in Tartous governorate, of whom one was coded as battle, three incidents of remote violence and 2 of violence against civilians (see Figure 18).

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Banyas	-	1	-
Safita	-	-	2
Tartous	1	2	-
Total	1	3	2

⁹⁰⁷ DIS, Syria – security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Tartous, Latakia and Quneitra [original sources: International security organisation (p. 40) and Omran (p. 52), 18 December 2020, [url](#), p. 40 and 52]

⁹⁰⁸ SOHR, SOHR: Syria says Israel struck near Homs, Tartus in the third alleged attack in 2 weeks, 10 November 2021, [url](#);

MEE, Israel strike on Syria hits poultry farms, wounds two civilians, ministry says, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁹ SOHR, SOHR: Syria says Israel struck near Homs, Tartus in the third alleged attack in 2 weeks, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹⁰ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch - Syria, November 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹¹ MEE, Israel strike on Syria hits poultry farms, wounds two civilians, ministry says, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹² Al Jazeera, Syria says Israeli strike on Tartous coast wounds two civilians, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

Figure 18: Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Tartous governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data⁹¹³

Within the time constraints and during the reference period for this report, illustrative security incidents targeting or impacting civilians could not be found among the sources consulted beyond those relating to the Israeli airstrike wounding two civilians in July 2022 and reported on further above.

(c) Civilian fatalities

SNHR did not record any civilian fatalities in Tartous either in 2021⁹¹⁴ or the first seven months of 2022.⁹¹⁵

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, in all governorates, with the exception of Tartous governorate, cluster munitions have been extensively used since 2012.⁹¹⁶ The same

⁹¹³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

⁹¹⁴ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8

⁹¹⁵ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13; SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁹¹⁶ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Syria impact, last updated: 15 November 2021, [url](#)





source did not record any civilian casualties (injured or killed) linked to four explosive incidents in the first quarter of 2021.⁹¹⁷

(e) Displacement and return

In 2021, UNOCHA recorded in Tartous governorate approximately 1 000 IDP movements from the governorate, 3 000 IDP movements within the governorate, and 4 000 IDP movements to the governorate.⁹¹⁸ UNOCHA showed that, as of August 2021, there were 182 297 IDPs in Tartous governorate, who were also classified as ‘vulnerable residents’.⁹¹⁹

In 2022, UNOCHA reported 85 IDP departures from Tartous governorate in January,⁹²⁰ 70 in February,⁹²¹ 65 in March⁹²² and 114 in April 2022⁹²³.

As regards returns, UNOCHA in 2021 recorded for Tartous governorate approximately 1 000 IDP returnee movements from the governorate, and no IDP returnee movements within the governorate nor to the governorate.⁹²⁴ In 2022, UNOCHA reported no spontaneous returns to the governorate from locations within Tartous and outside in January,⁹²⁵ February,⁹²⁶ March⁹²⁷ or April 2022.⁹²⁸

⁹¹⁷ Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Syrian Arab Republic: Explosive Hazard Risks Governorate Profile, May 2021, [url](#), Estimated # of civilians killed & injured per year [Open source data on explosive incidents since 2015] and Estimated # of explosive incidents by governorate, district & sub-district

⁹¹⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹¹⁹ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 104

⁹²⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

⁹²¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

⁹²² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

⁹²³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

⁹²⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹²⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

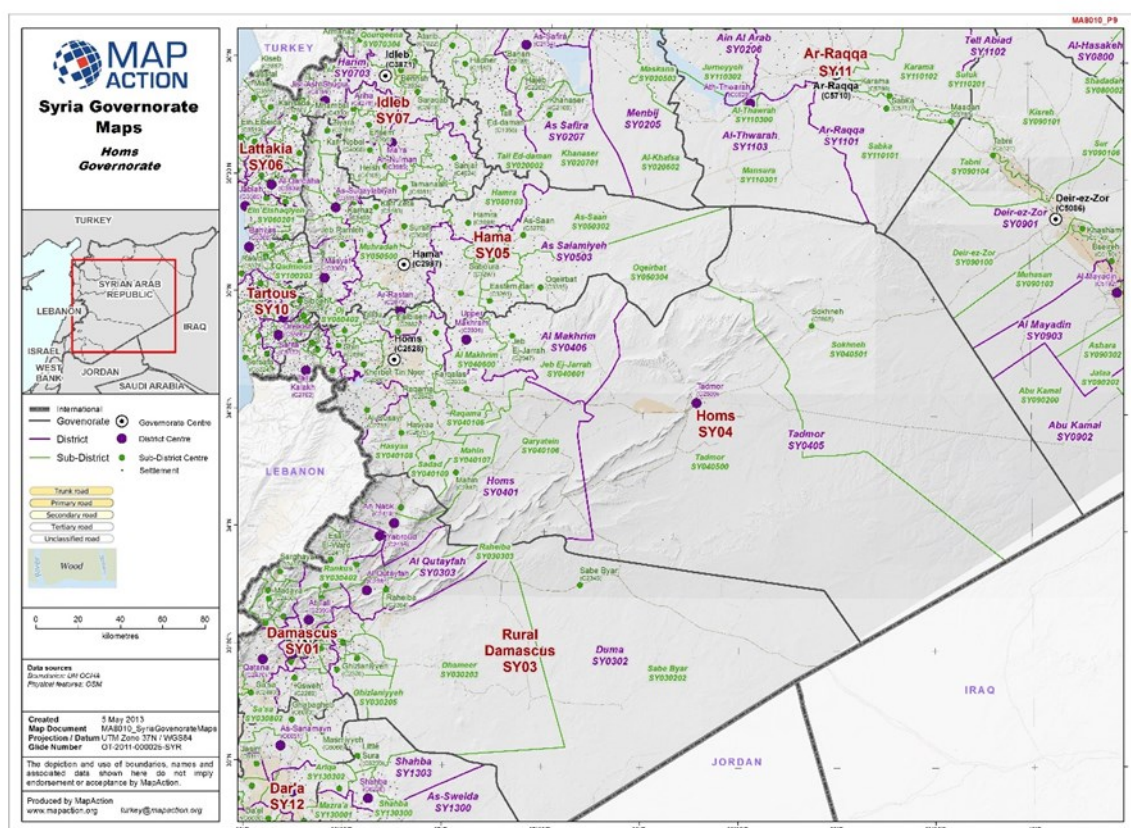
⁹²⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

⁹²⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

⁹²⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)



2.6. Homs governorate



Map 12: © MapAction, Homs governorate map⁹²⁹

2.6.1. General description of the governorate

Homs governorate is located in central Syria and has borders with Iraq to the east and Lebanon to the west. It has internal borders with Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hama, Tartous, and Rural Damascus governorates.⁹³⁰ The Syrian E-Government website stated that Homs governorate shares an international border with Jordan to the east as well.⁹³¹ UNOCHA mentioned in a February 2022 report that Homs governorate comprised six administrative districts: Homs, Al-Makhrim, Al-Qusayr, Ar-Rastan, Tadmor (Palmyra) and Tall Kalakh.⁹³² Homs was the largest governorate in Syria in terms of surface, and the third in terms of population, as of May 2014. The capital of the governorate is Homs city which is also the central city of Homs district.⁹³³

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Homs governorate in 2021 to be 1 790 376.⁹³⁴ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Homs

⁹²⁹ MapAction, Homs Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

⁹³⁰ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

⁹³¹ Syria, E-Government, سورية [About Syria], n.d., [url](#)

⁹³² UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 102

⁹³³ UN Habitat and SDC, City Profile – Homs: Multi Sector Assessment, May 2014, [url](#), p. 5

⁹³⁴ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

governorate to be 1 520 596.⁹³⁵ With regards to the capital of the governorate, the CIA estimated that the population of Homs city was 1 398 000 in June 2022.⁹³⁶ For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Homs population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

In 2015, Homs City was reported to be one of the country's most important industrial centres. Reportedly, Syria's largest oil refinery stood there, and the city was also a 'hub of an important road and rail network' linking the country's s main towns and cities.⁹³⁷ Homs was also reported to have a strategic importance for GoS because it connected the capital Damascus with coastal GoS strongholds.⁹³⁸ In 2019, it was reported that Homs governorate had two oil fields (Hayan and Jazal) as well as seven gas fields.⁹³⁹ Furthermore, in June 2022, the first gas well in a gas field in Zumlat al-Muhr, which was reportedly discovered in late 2021, was inaugurated in Homs governorate.⁹⁴⁰

2.6.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The city of Homs was among the most impacted cities in the war. Its old part suffered a two-year-long siege till it became accessible again in May 2014.⁹⁴¹ Sectarian violence and forced displacement occurred there in 2011 and only few neighbourhoods maintained their mixed sectarian elements such as Al-Waer, Ikrima, and Id-Dikhar.⁹⁴² In May 2017, the SAA captured the totality of Homs city and hundreds of rebels and their family members were evacuated.⁹⁴³

In early 2018, the SAA launched a military operation in northern rural Homs⁹⁴⁴ which forced the rebel groups in the region to either negotiate their exit to northern Syria or to reconcile with the GoS.⁹⁴⁵ The GoS forces seized the last rebel enclave in Homs on 15 May 2018,⁹⁴⁶ and buses evacuated rebels and their families from the region to northern Syria.⁹⁴⁷ For more information on the background of the conflict in Homs governorate up until April 2021, see the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

⁹³⁵ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

⁹³⁶ US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, last updated: 7 June 2022, [url](#)

⁹³⁷ BBC News, Homs: Syrian revolution's fallen 'capital', 9 December 2015, [url](#)

⁹³⁸ Reuters, Battles intensify in Syria's strategic city of Homs, 8 July 2013, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), Decoder:

The Battle for Khaldiyyeh, 30 July 2013, [url](#)

⁹³⁹ BBC Arabic, الثروات الموجودة في مناطق سيطرة الأكراد شرق سوريا [Resources in the Kurds-controlled areas in eastern Syria], 7 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁰ COAR, Recent Tensions Highlight the Enduring Syrian Refugee Crisis, 13 June 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁴¹ UN Habitat and SDC, City Profile – Homs: Multi Sector Assessment, May 2014, [url](#), pp. 3, 4

⁹⁴² Saleh, M., حوار مع محمد (أبو علي) صالح: الطائفية ومجزرة الساعة في حمص [Dialogue with Muhammad (Abu Ali) Saleh: Sectarianism and the Clock Massacre in Homs], 14 June 2019, [url](#); Muhammad Saleh is a Marxist Syrian writer and activist.

⁹⁴³ Reuters, Syrian rebels leave last opposition district in Homs, 21 May 2017, [url](#); France24, Assad regime regains total control of Syrian city of Homs, 21 May 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁴ AA, Assad begins attacks to retake rebel-held areas in Homs, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁵ Enab Baladi, After Daraa, seeds of unrest in Homs, 24 August 2021, [url](#); RFE/RL, Syrian Rebels Accept Russian-Brokered Surrender Deal In Homs Enclave, 3 May 2018, [url](#); VOA, Syrian Government Seizes Last Rebel Enclave in Homs, 15 May 2018, [url](#); AP News, Syrian government forces seize last rebel enclave in Homs, 15 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁶ AP News, Syrian government forces seize last rebel enclave in Homs, 15 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁷ Homs News, بانوراما الأحداث التي مرت بها حمص عام 2018 [Panorama of the main events that Homs witnessed in 2018], 31 December 2018, [url](#); Syria Direct, Rebel forces and civilians begin evacuating besieged Homs countryside: 'We don't want another Ghouta', 7 May 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Rebels begin evacuation of Syria's last besieged enclave, 7 May 2018, [url](#)

In a map produced by the UN, as of December 2021 the majority of Homs governorate was shown to be under GoS control, with some ISIL presence in the east of the governorate.⁹⁴⁸ The map further shows a so-called US-declared 55-km exclusion zone⁹⁴⁹ stretching between the southeast of the governorate and neighbouring Rural Damascus governorate around Tanf,⁹⁵⁰ controlled by US troops and Mughawir al-Thawra (MaT),⁹⁵¹ a rebel group⁹⁵² consisting of former Syrian military officers.⁹⁵³

According to a Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS, the GoS had control of towns in eastern parts of the governorate, including Tadmor and Al-Sukhna. The old city of Homs was controlled by different GoS intelligence services. Furthermore, in northern Homs governorate, GoS forces were in control of government buildings and police stations, while former rebel fighters who had reconciled with the government were in control of the rest of that area and the cities.⁹⁵⁴ The Lebanese Hezbollah controlled the area in and around Al-Qusayr city, southwest of Homs city.⁹⁵⁵

In March 2022, an analysis published by MEI reported that Iran controlled parts of the border along Homs governorate to the east.⁹⁵⁶ Outside of the urban areas and towns in the Badia⁹⁵⁷ desert, ISIL was present, according to DIS sources. The group reportedly operated northeast of Tadmor, around Abu Rajmin, which included regions 30 to 50 km east of Homs city.⁹⁵⁸ Below is a description of the actors present on the ground in Homs governorate and their places of deployment where information is available.

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

For deployments of the SAA in Homs governorate as of May 2021 see section 2.6.2 of the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

In February 2021, it was reported that the SAA had ‘fixed military posts’ manned by the 18th Division, the 11th Division-Tanks, the Badia National Defense, Military Security Shield Forces, and the 4th Division’s Security Office in Al-Sukhna, where the Iranian Baqir Brigade and the

⁹⁴⁸ UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁹ UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁰ Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁵¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 64

⁹⁵² Edwards, M., and Al-Homsi, O., Jordan returns refugees to desolate Syrian border camp, rights groups cry foul, TNH, 16 September 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵³ WINEP, D., The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria, WINEP, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), pp. 27-28

⁹⁵⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 27; Enab Baladi, Eight years under Hezbollah’s rule: al-Qusayr today, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁶ Hassan, M. and Al-Ahmed, S., Iran’s growing presence in Syria’s al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁷ ‘Parts of rural Homs, eastern Hama, southern Aleppo, southern Raqqah, and western and southern Deir ez-Zor [...] are collectively known as the Badia’. Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 28



Quick Reaction Force, both affiliated with the Badia Security Branch functioning under the Military Security in Tadmor city, were reportedly present too.⁹⁵⁹ In August 2021, Enab Baladi reported that GoS had increased the number of military troops and equipment in the city of Homs and northern rural Homs.⁹⁶⁰

A security analyst for an NGO working in GoS-held areas stated, in a February 2022 report, that Military Intelligence in northern Homs had a 'robust presence' in Talbiseh and Rastan.⁹⁶¹ In March 2022, due to a major operation against ISIL cells,⁹⁶² the GoS dispatched reinforcements from its Special Forces and the Desert Commandos Regiment to eastern rural Homs, in particular to Tadmor and Al-Sukhna. In support of the operation, Iranian militias too sent 'huge military reinforcements' there. This included the dispatch of 'large numbers' of the Afghan Fatemiyoun⁹⁶³ militia and the Iraqi militia Al-Nujaba from Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa and Hama governorates. Russia also sent major reinforcements from the NDF militias in Hama to Tadmor in March 2022.⁹⁶⁴ Reportedly, the Zainabiyoun militia, the Iraqi Hezbollah and the 47th Regiment as well as Division 17 participated in the operation in the area's Jabal Ma'moor region.⁹⁶⁵

The presence of NDF was reported in the eastern countryside of Homs governorate.⁹⁶⁶

Russian forces and the Russian-backed Syrian 5th Corps⁹⁶⁷ started withdrawing or regrouping from some positions in Homs governorate in early 2022.⁹⁶⁸ The large Mahin depot for military arms east of Homs city was turned over to the Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias in April 2022, after the Russian forces and the 5th Corps withdrew to the military airport in Tadmor. In mid-April, they withdrew from there too and turned the military airport over to Iranian backed militias.⁹⁶⁹ Also, an Enab Baladi article published in March 2022 indicated that the 5th Corps had a presence in the Tadmor desert.⁹⁷⁰

Furthermore, a May 2022 Baladi News article indicated that dozens of Iranian militias were operating in Homs governorate, particularly in Tadmor and its surroundings. According to the article, this region was 'practically completely under Iranian control'.⁹⁷¹ The Fatemiyoun Brigade, together with GoS forces and other pro-Iranian militias, reportedly held the Tiyas

⁹⁵⁹ Enab Baladi, Al-Sukhna predominated by security chaos as regime and Iranian forces grapple with IS, 20 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁰ Enab Baladi, After Daraa, seeds of unrest in Homs, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶¹ Hall, N., Rescuing Aid in Syria, CSIS, 15 February 2022, [url](#), p. 34

⁹⁶² Baladi News, خسائر كبيرة لقوات النظام في حمص [Heavy losses for the regime forces in Homs], 10 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶³ MEMO, Iran sends military reinforcements to Syria's Homs, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁴ MEMO, Iran sends military reinforcements to Syria's Homs, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁵ Baladi News, خسائر كبيرة لقوات النظام في حمص [Heavy losses for the regime forces in Homs], 10 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁶ For example, Baladi News, هجوم جديد يستهدف قوات النظام بريف حمص.. تكبدت خسائر مادية وبشرية.. [Human and material loss: another attack on regime forces in Homs countryside], 24 December 2021, [url](#); Baladi News, تحت أنظار الطائرات الروسية.. هجوم مسلح يخلف خسائر بصفوف ميليشيا "الدفاع الوطني" شرق حمص [Under the gaze of Russian airplanes: armed attack causes losses in the ranks of the 'National Defense' militia east of Homs], 15 November 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁷ MEMO, Russia, Iran-backed militias clash in Syria's Palmyra, 5 May 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Homs: Hezbollah joins recruitment market, Fifth Corps most preferred by needy youth, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁸ Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine - Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁹ Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine - Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁰ Enab Baladi, Homs: Hezbollah joins recruitment market, Fifth Corps most preferred by needy youth, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷¹ Baladi News, حمص.. خسائر لـ "حزب الله" واشتباكات بين الحرس الثوري و"الدفاع الوطني" [Homs: Hezbollah's losses and clashes between the IRGC and the National Defense Forces], 4 May 2022, [url](#)

airbase (T4 airbase).⁹⁷² Furthermore, Afghan and Iraqi militias under IRGC command reportedly controlled the road connecting Deir Ez-Zor and Homs, while the road between Homs city and Tadmor was controlled by the 4th Division of the SAA.⁹⁷³ The presence of Russian-backed private security companies in Homs governorate was noted in the reference period, without additional details.⁹⁷⁴

(b) Lebanese Hezbollah

A Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS in April 2022 reported that the Lebanese Hezbollah controlled the area in and around Al-Qusayr city, southwest of Homs city.⁹⁷⁵ In late March 2022, it was reported that the IRGC had seized the Zumlat al-Muhr gas field in the desert in Homs from GoS. Reportedly then, Hezbollah, on orders of the IRGC dispatched its forces to the gas field⁹⁷⁶ to turn it into a military base.⁹⁷⁷

(c) ISIL

ISIL maintained pockets in Homs governorate.⁹⁷⁸ ISIL cells were reportedly present in the Syrian Badia region,⁹⁷⁹ 'primarily in the central Badia desert in Homs'⁹⁸⁰ where they extended through the eastern countryside of Homs and Hama and reached the rural areas of Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa.⁹⁸¹ From there, it continued to launch attacks in the named governorates.⁹⁸² In July 2022, the UN Security Council reported that ISIL had mounted 'sporadic attacks' in Syria, which were focused on a number of Syrian governorates, including the eastern part of Homs

⁹⁷² ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (2-8 October 2021), 13 October 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁷³ Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 28

⁹⁷⁴ Waters, G. The Central Syria ISIS Insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁷⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 27

⁹⁷⁶ COAR, Recent Tensions Highlight the Enduring Syrian Refugee Crisis, 13 June 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁷ Ayn al-Furat, حزب الله اللبناني ينشر عناصره في حفل زملة المهر ببادية حمص بأوامر من الحرس الثوري الإيراني [The Lebanese Hezbollah dispatches its forces to the Zumlat al-Muhr field in the Badia of Homs, on orders of the IRGC], March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁸ Baladi News, تكبدت خسائر مادية وبشرية.. هجوم جديد يستهدف قوات النظام بريف حمص [Human and material loss: another attack on regime forces in Homs countryside], 24 December 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I October-December 2021, 28 March 2021, [url](#), p. 13; UN Security Council, Fourteenth 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/2022/63, 28 January 2022, [url](#), para. 29; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 26

⁹⁷⁹ Baladi News, تكبدت خسائر مادية وبشرية.. هجوم جديد يستهدف قوات النظام بريف حمص [Human and material loss: another attack on regime forces in Homs countryside], 24 December 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I October-December 2021, 28 March 2021, [url](#), p. 13

⁹⁸⁰ UN Security Council, Fourteenth 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/2022/63], 28 January 2022, [url](#), para. 29

⁹⁸¹ Baladi News, 7 regime forces, including an officer, killed in Hama and Homs according to local sources, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸² UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 11; UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) 1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2022/83, 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 36



governorate, ‘utilizing insurgent tactics’.⁹⁸³ According to a January 2022 UN Secretary General report, the hideouts in the desert were used ‘for training, possibly for regional operations or even to revive an external operations capability’.⁹⁸⁴ According to the July 2022 UN Security Council report, some of its Member States believed that ISIL had taken up its ‘training activities that had been previously curtailed, especially in the Badiya desert’.⁹⁸⁵

In July 2022, the International Crisis Group reported that ISIL activity had remained low in the governorate in early 2022, although the group, having come under ‘increased pressure’, had shifted to a ‘defensive stance, relying on mines, other explosive devices and harassing fire to slow regime patrols and keep them out of the Badia’s remotest parts’. The source further elaborated that the group had reached capabilities comparable to those in 2019 despite the experienced challenges. ISIL cells had further carried out 10 to 15 monthly attacks on GoS forces, the majority of which were carried out in Deir Ez-Zor and eastern Homs governorate. According to the International Crisis Group this trend had continued into 2022, but with ISIL’s position having become ‘slightly stronger’ than in 2019. Moreover, the group had penetrated southern rural Homs since the end of 2021 close to the town of Mheen and was starting to gradually carry out operations there.⁹⁸⁶

(d) Anti-GoS armed groups

An August 2021 Enab Baladi article reported that the al-Tawhid Army was one of the major factions of rural Homs governorate and that its members have had their headquarters in the city of Talbiseh. They were the only faction to maintain its military formation after reaching a settlement in early 2018 with GoS under Russian guarantees. Russian security clearances allowed the group’s members to possess weapons. Reportedly, the GoS, however, started attempts to dissolve the group by causing some to join the conflict in Libya as mercenaries and by imprisoning many of the group’s leaders. According to the same source, members of the group, who were still in the region, were operating via loosely organised sleeper cells in GoS-held areas, from where they were targeting officers of the GoS and security elements in the area.⁹⁸⁷ Sources indicated the presence of the anti-GoS armed group ‘Saraya 2011’ in Homs governorate, who claimed to have killed two officers of GoS forces in the second half of 2021.⁹⁸⁸ For additional information on anti-GoS groups as of May 2021 see section 2.6.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

⁹⁸³ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

⁹⁸⁴ UN Security Council, Fourteenth 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/2022/63], 28 January 2022, [url](#), para. 29

⁹⁸⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

⁹⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁹⁸⁷ Enab Baladi, After Daraa, seeds of unrest in Homs, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 10; Enab Baladi, فصیل مسلح یتبنی قتل عنصر من قوات النظام في ريف حمص [An armed faction claims the killing of a member of the regime forces in Homs], 12 August 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, After Daraa, seeds of unrest in Homs, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

2.6.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

During the reference period for this report, the security situation in Homs governorate remained stable, with a decrease of security incidents in urban centres.⁹⁸⁹ Attacks on and by militias and ISIL took place in the Badia desert region.⁹⁹⁰ According to an April 2021 article by the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), ‘ungoverned spaces’, like in the Homs desert, had emerged due to the ‘complexity of the security landscape’ in the country.⁹⁹¹ In mid-April 2021, a major GoS operation against ISIL hideouts started in eastern Homs. Forces of the 4th Division, NDF and Syrian private military contractors, supported by Russian airstrikes, seized Kawm, a strategic town at the Highway to Raqqa, from ISIL. Subsequently, the area, previously ‘heavily populated’ by ISIL cells, was emptied from ISIL activity. From June until autumn 2021, GoS proceeded via smaller operations stepwise into the mountains north of Tadmor.⁹⁹²

In March 2022, another major operation in the Badia region of eastern rural Homs against ISIL hideouts was carried out by Russian and Iranian forces⁹⁹³ and the GoS, particularly in Tadmor and Al-Sukhna.⁹⁹⁴

In May 2022, fighting between pro-Iranian militias and Russian forces was reported in this area as well.⁹⁹⁵ Furthermore, military areas and sites which belong to Iranian forces and Iran-affiliated militias who operate in Homs governorate were reportedly targeted by Israeli airstrikes.⁹⁹⁶ In the northern part of Homs governorate, in particular around Rastan city, the security situation was described as ‘complicated’ due to the presence of former GoS armed groups,⁹⁹⁷ many members of which have reconciled with the GoS.⁹⁹⁸ Shelling between anti-GoS forces and GoS-forces was frequent in the area.⁹⁹⁹ Moreover, sources stated that kidnappings occurred in several Syrian governorates, including Homs governorate.¹⁰⁰⁰ Reportedly, former anti-GoS groups have committed abductions and extortions of

⁹⁸⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 25; Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Syria Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 7, [source: Austrian Embassy in Damascus] 24 January 2022, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 35

⁹⁹⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Syrië [Country of origin information report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁹⁹¹ GIGA, Not a Storm in a Teacup: The Islamic State after the Caliphate, April 2021, [url](#), p. 6

⁹⁹² Waters, G. The Central Syria ISIS Insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁹³ Baladi News, خسائر كبيرة لقوات النظام في حمص [Heavy losses for the regime forces in Homs], 10 March 2022, [url](#);

⁹⁹⁴ MEMO, Iran sends military reinforcements to Syria's Homs, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁵ MEMO, Russia, Iran-backed militias clash in Syria's Palmyra, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, November 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, July 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation and international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25, 27

⁹⁹⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 27

⁹⁹⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁰⁰⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Syrië [Country of origin information report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 17



businessmen on the roads in the northern Homs area, towards Rastan city and on the way to Talbiseh city.¹⁰⁰¹

An international security organisation interviewed by DIS in its May 2022 report stated that it had not documented any security incidents caused by the Hezbollah in the area in and around Al-Qusayr city since August 2021.¹⁰⁰²

ISIL activities

ISIL was active in the eastern part of Homs governorate in the reference period, where it carried out attacks¹⁰⁰³ on units and convoys of the SAA,¹⁰⁰⁴ SAA-affiliated forces¹⁰⁰⁵ and civilians.¹⁰⁰⁶ While in June 2021, almost daily clashes between ISIL and GoS forces or militia forces had reportedly occurred for months in the Badia region,¹⁰⁰⁷ the UN Secretary General reported in January 2022 that the number of ISIL attacks had decreased.¹⁰⁰⁸ However, according to an international security organisation interviewed by DIS, the first quarter of 2022 saw an increase in ISIL attacks in eastern Homs governorate, particularly in the central desert of Homs governorate in March 2022,¹⁰⁰⁹ which resulted in the abovementioned military intervention by the GoS and affiliated forces.¹⁰¹⁰

Russian forces carried out air strikes against ISIL hideouts in eastern Homs in the reference period.¹⁰¹¹ In October 2021, Russian airstrikes, in collaboration with GoS forces, targeted ISIL

¹⁰⁰¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁰⁰² Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: International security organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁰⁰³ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/890, 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 9; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 9; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁴ Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Syria Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 7, [source: Austrian Embassy in Damascus] 24 January 2022, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 35; SOHR, ISIS ambush kills and injures regime members in Homs desert, 10 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁵ ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (11 December 2021–7 January 2022), 13 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attacks positions of regime forces and affiliated militias in eastern Homs, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

¹⁰⁰⁷ Baladi News, صباط.. صفحات موالية تتعي 7 من قوات النظام قتلوا في حماة وحمص, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁸ UN Security Council, Fourteenth 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/2022/63, 28 January 2022, [url](#), para. 29

¹⁰⁰⁹ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview - Middle East (5 - 11 March 2022), 17 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁰¹¹ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, June 2022, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 10; SOHR, 20 Russian airstrikes hit ISIS hideouts in Al-Raqqa and Homs deserts amid escalation in ISIS activity, 26 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Russian jets target ISIS hideouts in Al-Sokhnah desert in eastern Homs countryside, 11 April 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview - Middle East (19 - 25 March 2022), 31 March 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Russian airstrikes hit ISIS

hideouts in the area around Al-Sukhna on the road between Deir Ez-Zor and Homs.¹⁰¹² Reportedly, Russian air strikes against ISIL targets were frequent in the first week of March 2022 and were followed by a series of daily air strikes in collaboration with SAA air force in mid-March in eastern Homs for a week.¹⁰¹³

Israeli airstrikes

In June 2021, Israeli airstrikes hit several military targets in central Syria, including in Homs governorate.¹⁰¹⁴ Israeli airstrikes on Homs governorate were moreover documented from July to November 2021.¹⁰¹⁵

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 256 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Homs governorate, of whom 72 were coded as battles, 157 explosions/remote violence and 27 incidents of violence against civilians.¹⁰¹⁶

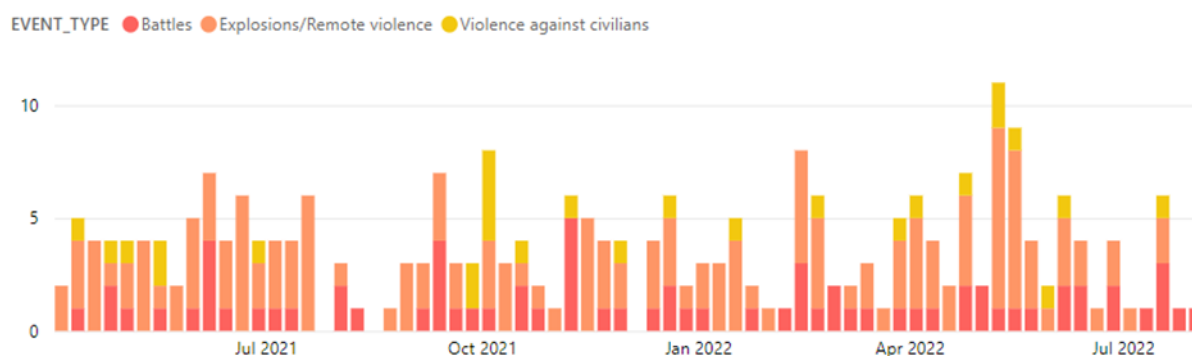


Figure 16: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Homs governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data¹⁰¹⁷

hideouts in Palmyra desert, east of Homs, 31 March 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Four Russian fighter jets strike ISIS positions in Homs and Deir Ezzor, 16 November 2021, [url](#); Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 26 April 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰¹² Al-Monitor, Russia ramps up strikes on Islamic State in Syrian desert, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰¹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰¹⁴ MEE, Syria: Israeli air strikes reportedly kill 11 pro-government fighters, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁵ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, November 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (2-8 October 2021), 13 October 2021, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (9-15 October 2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#); Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 11 October 2021, [url](#), p. 11; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, July 2021, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (17-23 July 2021), 23 July 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰¹⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Makhrim	-	5	3
Al Qusayr	1	4	2
Ar Rastan	2	2	7
Homs	7	18	9
Tadmor	59	127	6
Tall Kalakh	3	1	-
Total	72	157	27

Figure 20: Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Homs governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data¹⁰¹⁸

Around 75 % of all security incidents documented in Homs governorate during the reference period were recorded in Tadmor district (see Figure 20).

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Homs governorate during the reference period for this report included the following:

- On 6 April 2021, 60 civilians and NDF fighters were ambushed by ISIL fighters near the Tuwayan Dam along the border between Homs and Hama. Reportedly, ‘most if not all of them had been captured alive’¹⁰¹⁹ and the majority was later freed in exchange for detained ISIL family members.¹⁰²⁰
- On 12 June 2021, a landmine left behind by ISIL in the area around Jabal Abu Rajmin, north of Tadmor, reportedly exploded killing two civilians and injuring another.¹⁰²¹

¹⁰¹⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁹ Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁰ Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#); Waters, G. The Central Syria ISIS Insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰²¹ SANA, Two civilians martyred and another wounded in a mine explosion in Palmyra countryside, 12 June 2021, [url](#)

- In early October 2021, Israeli airstrikes targeted the Tiyas airbase (T4 airbase).¹⁰²²
- On 20 October 2021, the US base in Al-Tanf was targeted by a weaponized drone.¹⁰²³ The attack was reportedly carried out by Iran-affiliated forces.¹⁰²⁴
- On 19 November 2021, the explosion of a landmine, reportedly left behind by ISIL members in a residential area in Tadmor district, killed two children and injured two others.¹⁰²⁵
- In January and March 2022, military buses were attacked by ISIL near Tadmor leading to casualties among the soldiers.¹⁰²⁶
- On 5 May 2022, it was reported that the Russian-backed 5th Corps clashed with an IRGC-backed militia close to Tadmor city.¹⁰²⁷
- On 1 June 2022, a woman was reportedly abducted, tortured and raped by forces affiliated with the NDF in northern Homs governorate.¹⁰²⁸
- On 20 July 2022, it was reported that unidentified gunmen believed to be ISIL members attacked a vehicle between Al-Kom and Al-Tabiya villages in the countryside of eastern Homs.¹⁰²⁹ On 23 July 2022, it was reported that GoS checkpoints and other areas near the Al-Hail oil field in the countryside of eastern Homs were attacked by ISIL forces.¹⁰³⁰

(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	5	-
February	2	1
March	3	2
April	2	2
May	1	3

¹⁰²² ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (2-8 October 2021), 13 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²³ SANA, Multiple explosions rock US base at al-Tanf area in Homs countryside, 21 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁴ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁵ SANA, Two children martyred in landmine blast in Palmyra, 19 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁶ ANI, 13 soldiers killed in bus ambush in Syria's Homs: State media, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁷ MEMO, Russia, Iran-backed militias clash in Syria's Palmyra, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁸ Shaam Network, "الشبكة السورية" تدنن قيام قوات الأسد باختطاف سيدة من حمص وتعذيبها واغتصابها [Syrian Network condemns kidnapping, torturing and raping of woman in Homs by Assad's forces], 10 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁹ SOHR, ISIS attack | Casualties among Al-Nugabaa Iraqi militias in the Syrian desert, 20 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁰ SOHR, ISIS offensive | Regime soldiers killed and injured in attack on their checkpoints and posts east of Homs, 23 July 2022, [url](#)



Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
June	-	3
July	1	3
August	-	
September	1	
October	4	
November	8	
December	1	
Total	28	14

Figure 7: Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Homs governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 28 civilian fatalities¹⁰³¹ in Homs governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 14 civilian fatalities.¹⁰³²

¹⁰³¹ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁰³² Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13; SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to an international security organization interviewed by DIS, a large part of the city of Homs has been destroyed by the conflict. As of April 2022, the organization estimated that approximately 30 to 40 % 'of the pre-war city' was destroyed.¹⁰³³ Based on the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Shelter Cluster assessed that in Homs governorate, 9.22 % of the overall population was living in damaged buildings.¹⁰³⁴ In a May 2021 news article, Reuters stated that the 'city centre and several neighbourhoods were almost entirely destroyed after years of air strikes and barrel bombs, and still lie in ruin and deserted'.¹⁰³⁵ Most of the destruction was reportedly concentrated in the old neighbourhoods of Homs city (Al-Khalidiyah, Bab Al-Seba'a, Bab Al-Draib, Al-Bayadah, and Al-Hamidiyah), but also in some newer neighbourhoods (Al-Qusour, Jurat Al-Shayyah, and Al-Qarabees).¹⁰³⁶

As of July 2021, 651 buildings were reported to be damaged in the city of Tadmor (45 completely, 112 severely and 444 partially destroyed).¹⁰³⁷ The destruction caused by past years' conflict had reportedly also affected educational buildings in Tadmor.¹⁰³⁸ In Al-Qaryatayn town, 525 buildings were allegedly damaged (79 completely, 190 severely and 256 partially destroyed) as of July 2021.¹⁰³⁹ As of July 2022, most of Rastan's neighbourhoods were reported to be still in ruins, with 'costs of restoring homes [...] far too expensive for most residents'.¹⁰⁴⁰

In February 2022, UNOCHA noted that explosive ordnance contamination remained prevalent in regions particularly affected by the conflict, including in Homs governorate.¹⁰⁴¹ A September 2021 article by Syria's public international news organization SANA reporting on the death of a family due to a landmine explosion in Tadmor stated that mines and explosive devices laid by terrorist organizations in villages, towns, and agricultural areas in the run-up to their defeat in the region were particularly complex to locate and defuse.¹⁰⁴² In a 2022 report on UXO in

2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰³³ Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁰³⁴ Shelter Cluster/UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI Sector. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰³⁵ Reuters, Homs, former rebel stronghold, prepares to vote, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁶ Enab Baladi, With no hope or wish to return, Syrians sell destroyed properties in Homs, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁷ Enab Baladi, With no hope or wish to return, Syrians sell destroyed properties in Homs, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁸ SANA, Department of Education in Homs Rehabilitate school in Palmyra, 22 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁹ Enab Baladi, With no hope or wish to return, Syrians sell destroyed properties in Homs, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁰ Syria Report (The), Demolished Properties and Exaggerated Returnee Numbers in Rural Homs, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴¹ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁴² SANA, A man and his wife and daughter martyred in mine explosion west of Palmyra, 9 September 2021, [url](#)



Syria, the Carter Center assumed that there are 1 200 to 3 500 or 5 250 to 15 500¹⁰⁴³ unexploded ordnance in Homs governorate.¹⁰⁴⁴

(e) Displacement and return

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that the IDP population in Homs governorate was 303 971, of which about 4 500 lived in camps.¹⁰⁴⁵ In 2021, UNOCHA recorded approximately 2 040 IDP movements from Homs governorate, 40 IDP movements to the governorate as well as 961 movements within the governorate.¹⁰⁴⁶ In 2022, UNOCHA reported 155 IDP departures from and 61 IDP arrivals to Homs governorate in January,¹⁰⁴⁷ 155 departures and 55 arrivals in February,¹⁰⁴⁸ 150 departures and no arrivals in March,¹⁰⁴⁹ 130 departures and 25 arrivals in April,¹⁰⁵⁰ and 10 IDP movements within the governorate as well as 190 departures and 45 arrivals to the governorate in May 2022.¹⁰⁵¹

As regards returns, in 2021 UNOCHA recorded approximately 11 000 returns within Homs governorate, 1 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from the governorate and 5 000 IDP returnee movements to the governorate.¹⁰⁵² In 2022, UNOCHA recorded 138 returns within, approximately 8 spontaneous IDP returns from and 471 returns to the governorate in January,¹⁰⁵³ 141 returns within, 5 returns from and 487 to the governorate in February,¹⁰⁵⁴ 75 returns within, 6 returns from and 723 to the governorate in March,¹⁰⁵⁵ 213 returns within, 98 returns from and 482 returns to the governorate in April,¹⁰⁵⁶ and 240 returns within, 6 returns from and 695 returns to the governorate in May.¹⁰⁵⁷

¹⁰⁴³ Please note that the Carter Center presents two different ranges for the amount of UXO contamination in Homs governorate.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 16, 24

¹⁰⁴⁵ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁰⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

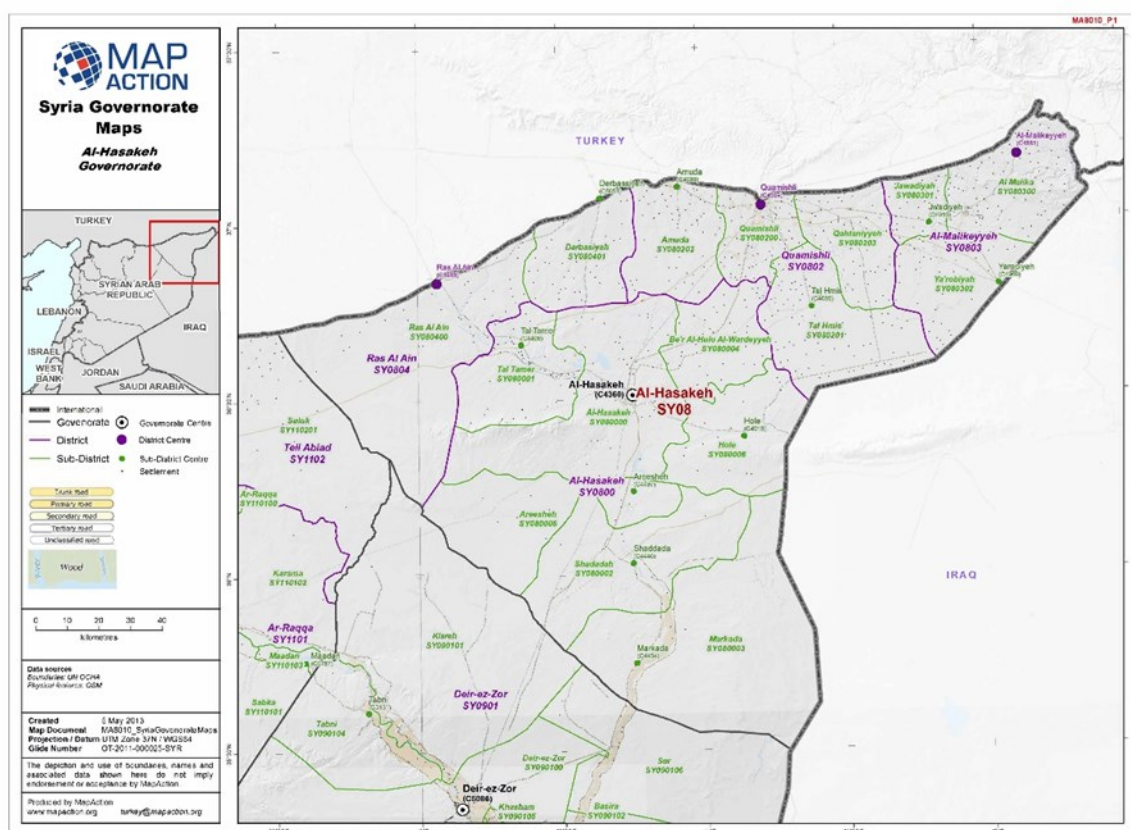
¹⁰⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns. March 2022, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

2.7. Hasaka governorate



Map 13: © MapAction, Hasaka governorate¹⁰⁵⁸

2.7.1. General description of the governorate

Al-Hasakah governorate (hereafter 'Hasaka' governorate) is located in the north-eastern corner of Syria, bordering Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east and Syrian Raqqah and Deir Ez-Zor governorates to the west and south-west respectively. Its capital, Hasaka, is located in the middle of the governorate, on the intersection of the Khabour river and the road from Qamishli (bordering Turkey to the north) towards Deir-Ez Zor.¹⁰⁵⁹ There are four main districts in the governorate: Hasaka, Ras al-Ayn, Qamishli, and al-Malikiya, divided into, in total, 16 sub-districts, and a large number of small towns and villages.¹⁰⁶⁰

Population estimates for 2021 issued by the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that Hasaka governorate had 1 865 169 inhabitants.¹⁰⁶¹ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Hasaka governorate to be of 1 148 643 inhabitants.¹⁰⁶²

¹⁰⁵⁸ MapAction, Al-Hasakeh governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, 2017, al Hasakeh Governorate, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, 2017, al Hasakeh City, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶¹ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n. d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁶² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

Information on Hasaka's ethnic structure, as well as its strategic importance for Syria's wheat and oil production can be found in an earlier issue of this report: [EUAA, Syria Security Situation, Country of Origin Information Report, July 2021](#), pp. 157-159.

2.7.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the reporting period, Hasaka governorate was mainly under the control of the Kurdish-led SDF.¹⁰⁶³ Their allies in the US-led Coalition against ISIL had presence in the governorate.¹⁰⁶⁴ The GoS maintained its own enclaves or 'security zones' inside the SDF-controlled cities of Hasaka and Qamishli, while the GoS forces also control Qamishli airport.¹⁰⁶⁵ In addition, the GoS forces and their Russian allies were present in the Syrian-Turkish border and along the frontlines between the SDF-controlled areas and the Turkish-controlled area in northern Hasaka governorate.¹⁰⁶⁶ According to Jusoor for Studies, there has also been a stationing point for Iranian forces in GoS-controlled Hasaka (city) at the turn of the year 2021/22.¹⁰⁶⁷

Since the military incursion in October 2019 dubbed Operation Peace Spring¹⁰⁶⁸, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and the Turkish-backed Syrian armed groups operating under the umbrella of the so-called 'Syrian National Army' (SNA) have been in control of a territory roughly delimited by the Syrian-Turkish border in the north, the M4 highway in the south, administrative border between Raqqqa and Hasaka governorates in the west and the Khabur river in the east. This area includes the town of Ras al-Ayn (*Serê Kaniyê* in Kurdish) and its surroundings.¹⁰⁶⁹ Along with an adjoining territory of roughly equal size in northern Raqqqa governorate (see Chapter [2.8 Raqqqa governorate](#)), this area constitutes the so-called Operation Peace Spring area.¹⁰⁷⁰

¹⁰⁶³ Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁴ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

¹⁰⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, The SDF Seeks a Path Toward Durable Stability in North East Syria, 25 November 2020, [url](#); Mehchy Z. et al., Assessing control and power dynamics in Syria, Chatham House, November 2020, [url](#), p. 10; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹⁰⁶⁶ Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁷ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁸ For further information on the October 2019 Turkish incursion, see EUAA, Syria - Security Situation. May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁹ Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰⁷⁰ Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, European University Institute, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), pp. 5-6

(a) Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

Hasaka governorate is mainly under the control of the Autonomous Administration of North and East of Syria (hereafter 'Autonomous Administration', AANES) (see also Section [1.4.3 Syrian Democratic Forces](#)), with a unified military force, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)¹⁰⁷¹ and a political assembly, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC).¹⁰⁷² The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), have a dominant role in the SDF¹⁰⁷³ and the SDC.¹⁰⁷⁴ In this administrative context, Hasaka governorate is also called Jazeera (in Kurdish, *Cizire*) and it has been one of the 'cantons'¹⁰⁷⁵ or one of the 'regions'¹⁰⁷⁶ (since 2018) under the Autonomous Administration.

(b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS maintains its own enclaves or 'security zones' inside the SDF-controlled cities of Hasaka and Qamishli.¹⁰⁷⁷ GoS forces were also stationed on the Syrian Turkish border and on the internal border separating the 'Operation Peace Spring' area from the areas controlled by the SDF in Hasaka governorate¹⁰⁷⁸, including around the frontline town of Tal Tamr.¹⁰⁷⁹ Elements of the SAA's 4th Division were reported to control the largest military base in the governorate - the Tartab Regiment -, located in the southwest part of Qamishli.¹⁰⁸⁰

(c) The US-led Coalition against ISIL

According to Fabrice Balanche, US troops were present in Hasaka towns of Rmelan and Shaddada and controlled the crossroads between the M4 highway and the Amuda-Hasaka road and the road between Rmelan and the Fish Khabour border crossing with Iraq.¹⁰⁸¹ In July 2021, the SOHR reported that large reinforcements have entered the base in Shaddada.¹⁰⁸² Media reports from April 2022 confirmed the expansion of the Shaddada military base, which now reportedly has the largest US military presence in all of Syria.¹⁰⁸³ According to Jusoor for

¹⁰⁷¹ ECFR, MENA armed groups, Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria), n. d., [url](#); RIC, Beyond the Frontlines, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁰⁷² RIC, Beyond the Frontlines, 19 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 31-32

¹⁰⁷³ Haenni, P. & Guesnay, A., Surviving the Aftermath of Islamic State: The Syrian Kurdish Movement's Resilience Strategy, European University Institute, 17 February 2020, [url](#), p. 1, fn 2

¹⁰⁷⁴ Netjes R. & van Veen, E., Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist. The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, Clingendael, April 2021, [url](#), p. 44

¹⁰⁷⁵ Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 54

¹⁰⁷⁶ RIC, Beyond the Frontlines, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁷⁷ Duch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 25; International Crisis Group, The SDF Seeks a Path Toward Durable Stability in North East Syria, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁸ Based on reading of the map in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22

¹⁰⁷⁹ Enab Baladi, Three sides blamed; Who bombs northern Aleppo?, 12 June 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), Four killed in 'rare' clash between Syrian regime troops, Kurdish forces: monitor, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁰ Hassan, M. and al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸¹ Balanche, F., The Fragile Status Quo in Northeast Syria, WINEP, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸² SOHR, [url](#) [With the aim of establishing a new base, the "international coalition" brings large military and logistical reinforcements to northeastern Syria], 24 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸³ Syrian Observer (The), How are U.S. Bases Distributed in Northeastern Syria, 22 April 2022, [url](#)



Studies, the US-led Coalition had a total of 17 stationing points in Hasaka governorate at the turn of the year 2021/22.¹⁰⁸⁴

(d) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia had a total of 16 stationing points in Hasaka at the turn of the year 2021/22.¹⁰⁸⁵ Russian forces were present in several military bases in the border zones between Syria and Turkey as well as between the areas controlled by the SDF and the Operation Peace Spring area, respectively.¹⁰⁸⁶ According to earlier reporting by Fabrice Balanche, they had been stationed alongside the GoS forces since October 2019 and, since May 2020, the traffic along the M4 highway between Ain Issa and Tal Tamr had been restricted to convoys with Russian escorts and no SDF units or local civilians were allowed to use this section of the highway on their own.¹⁰⁸⁷

According to a news report from July 2022, Russian ground patrols further expanded to areas in the countryside of Qamishli¹⁰⁸⁸, following the deployment of warplanes and helicopters near Qamishli airport and the launch of reconnaissance flights in the same area a month earlier.¹⁰⁸⁹

(e) Iran

According to Jusoor for Studies, Iran had one stationing point in Hasaka at the turn of the year 2021/22.¹⁰⁹⁰ According to two experts at the MEI, as of March 2022 the Iranian military presence was concentrated in the southeast of the governorate, particularly around the military base at Tartab Regiment, at Qamishli airport, and as part of the Military Intelligence branch in Hasaka city which Iran reportedly controls.¹⁰⁹¹

(f) Turkey and affiliated armed groups

Turkey and SNA forces controlled the territory roughly delimited by the Syrian–Turkish border in the north, the M4 highway in the south, administrative border between Raqqqa and Hasaka governorates in the west and the Khabur river in the east. This area includes the town of Ras al-Ayn (Serê Kaniyê) and its surroundings.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁸⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁶ Based on reading of maps in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

¹⁰⁸⁷ Balanche, F., The Fragile Status Quo in Northeast Syria, WINEP, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁸ NPA, Russian forces patrol areas of Syria's Qamishli for first time, 30 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁹ Asharq al-Awsat, Russia deploys jets to US-held regions in Syria's East, 29 May 2022, [url](#); Daily Sabah, Russian forces conduct air patrols in Syria's Tal Rifaat area, 4 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁰ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹¹ Hassan, M./ al-Ahmed, Samer, Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹² Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, The stumbling blocks facing Turkey's new operation plan in Syria, 30 May 2022, [url](#)

The town of Ras al-Ayn, the main population centre of the eastern half of Operation Peace Spring area, was controlled mainly by two Turkish-backed armed groups, Sultan Murad Division and Hamza Division, both operating under the official SNA umbrella.¹⁰⁹³

In February 2022, four other SNA groups, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Jaysh al-Sharqiya, the 20th Division, and Suqur al-Sham, announced the formation of the Liberation and Construction Movement (LCM). Its representatives claim to command 7 000 fighters across Aleppo and Afrin and between Ras al-Ayn (Hasaka) and Tal Abyad (Raqqah), operating within the SNA umbrella.¹⁰⁹⁴ According to researcher Khayrallah al-Hilu, Turkey has placed the local administration in both Ras al-Ayn and Tal Abyad under the administrative supervision of Şanlıurfa province in November 2019.¹⁰⁹⁵ Şanlıurfa is a province of the Republic of Turkey. According to Jusoor for Studies, Turkey had a total of four stationing points in Hasaka at the turn of the year 2021/22.¹⁰⁹⁶

(g) ISIL

International Crisis Group noted in a July 2022 report that, while ISIL has concentrated its attacks in Deir-Ez Zor, the group is also present in the south and east of Hasaka governorate¹⁰⁹⁷, confirming assessments by the US Department of Defense (USDOD)¹⁰⁹⁸ and the Rojava Information Center¹⁰⁹⁹. According to a report to the UN Security Council from July 2022, '[ISIL] [a]ctivities were concentrated in Dayr al-Zawr, southern Raqqah and Hasakah, eastern Homs and southwestern Dar'a and Suwayda' Governorates.'¹¹⁰⁰ The Shaddadi countryside which is located at the boundaries between Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorates was assessed by some SDF commanders to serve as an ISIL storehouse for weapons and supplies.¹¹⁰¹

In January 2022, ISIL was able to conduct a large-scale attack on al-Sina'a prison in Hasaka (city).¹¹⁰²

¹⁰⁹³ Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, European University Institute, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), p. 11.; STJ, Syria: Crops Looted, Lands Seized in "Peace Spring" Territories, 11 March 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰⁹⁴ Hauch, L., Syria's eastern factions unite in the Liberation and Construction Movement: A conversation with the leadership, MEI, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁵ Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, European University Institute, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰⁹⁶ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁹⁸ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁰⁹⁹ RIC, Annual Sleeper Cell Report for North and East Syria, February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 15 July 2022, S/2022/547, [url](#), para. 43, p. 12

¹¹⁰¹ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 21

¹¹⁰² International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 20



2.7.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

The conflict between the SDF and Turkish-backed armed groups

According to the UNCOI, the overall security situation deteriorated in the territories under SDF-control during the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021¹¹⁰³ and life remained insecure during the second half of 2021 (1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021).¹¹⁰⁴

For the period between July and December 2021, the UNCOI stated that armed clashes in and around the city of Tal Tamr led casualties and displacement of civilians living in the area.¹¹⁰⁵ In August 2021, the Turkish military reportedly intensified its artillery, drone and conventional air strikes in areas west of Qamishli, in Ras al-Ayn, and in areas close to Abu Rasayn and Tal Tamr, resulting in the deaths of both military personnel and civilians.¹¹⁰⁶ Clashes between Turkish-backed forces and the SDF continued throughout September 2021, notably near Tal Tamr¹¹⁰⁷ and public hints from the Turkish government at an imminent ground offensive into northern Syria¹¹⁰⁸ have been met with joint military manoeuvres and exercises by the Russian military and SDF fighters across Raqqqa and Hasaka.¹¹⁰⁹

In December 2021, Turkish forces shelled rural Tal Tamr¹¹¹⁰, forcing residents of villages in the area to flee and evacuate the front lines.¹¹¹¹

While no further ground offensive took place in 2021, Turkey launched an air campaign in early February 2022 against targets in northern Syria and northern Iraq.¹¹¹² Jusoor for Studies registered a new military escalation on part of Turkey against SDF and YPG targets in that same areas in April 2022.¹¹¹³ For its reporting period of April to May 2022, the UN Security Council reported ‘increased hostilities [...] in the northern part of the country’, particularly in the Abu Rasayn area and in the Tal Tamr subdistrict of Hasaka.¹¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 94

¹¹⁰⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 94

¹¹⁰⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 94

¹¹⁰⁶ Kurdistan 24, Turkish drone targets vehicle near northern Syrian town of Qamishlo: Source, 22 August 2021, [url](#); al-Monitor, Syrian Kurdish parties feel abandoned by US in wake of Turkish-backed attack, 8 September 2021, [url](#); SOHR, [بقتل 20 قتيلاً وجرحاً بينهم قياديين من “قسد” بقصف طائرة مسيرة تركية على مقر عسكري في ريف الحسكة](#), 20 August 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, September 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁸ Reuters, Turkey says it will do “what is necessary” after Syria attacks, 13 October 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Turkey’s parliament votes to extend mandate for troops in Iraq, Syria, 26 October 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁹ Enab Baladi, SDF look to Russia for support against Turkey, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁰ SOHR, Killing two SDF members/ Turkish forces renew shelling on Al-Hasakah along with clashes on frontlines, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹¹ COAR, Syria Update, Cross-Line Convoy Sets up Debate on Early Recovery and Cross-Border Quid Pro Quo, 20 December 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹² France 24, Turkey strikes Kurd targets in Iraq, Syria, 2 February 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, Turkey’s recent bombardment amounts to declaration of war: Mazloum Abdi, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹³ Jusoor for Studies, New military escalation by Turkey against the PKK in Syria: Causes and effects, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁴ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General, 16 June 2022, S/2022/492, [url](#), para. 4

According to a May 2022 report by iMMAP, 'Turkish forces and Turkish backed groups are frequently bombing villages around Turkish controlled [Operation Peace Spring] area. They also frequently target SDF commanders, vehicles, and social figures with drones. These attacks left many casualties and increased in 2022, also in areas that have witnessed relatively little violence in past years, such as Qamishli.'¹¹¹⁵

Fighting between the SDF and GoS forces

After the GoS-backed, NDF reportedly killed one Asayish officer in Qamishli in April 2021¹¹¹⁶, clashes broke out between the two sides that lasted for several days, resulting in both military and civilian casualties.¹¹¹⁷ According to an anonymous source from inside the SDF, Russia was asked to mediate between the two parties, which led to the NDF retreating from the Tayy and Halako neighbourhoods¹¹¹⁸ and the patrolling of Russian military units in the area to guarantee the truce.¹¹¹⁹ Tensions between the SDF and GoS-forces escalated again in March 2022, when clashes in Tal Tamr reportedly left two SAA soldiers and two SDF-militiamen dead. Both Syrian state news and a SDF spokesperson confirmed the incident, but disagreed over the progression of events.¹¹²⁰

In April 2022, the SDF confiscated several governmental administrative offices in GoS-controlled neighbourhoods in Qamishli and Hasaka (city) and closed a highway leading to Qamishli airport, effectively putting the area under siege.¹¹²¹ While the security forces who entered the neighbourhoods pulled back again after two days, they maintained a blockade of goods and reportedly prevented entry of wheat, food, and fuel.¹¹²² Eventually, the siege was lifted after a total of 20 days when the two parties came to reach a diplomatic solution.¹¹²³

Ras al-Ayn (Operation 'Peace Spring') area

During the reference period, clashes among different armed factions of the SNA escalated throughout northern Syria where the SNA holds territory¹¹²⁴, also affecting Ras al-Ayn area but reportedly not having led to any civilian casualties there.¹¹²⁵

¹¹¹⁵ iMMAP, Progress, Northeast Syria. Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 8

¹¹¹⁶ Rojava Information Center, via Twitter @RojavaIC, 20 April 2021, [url](#); Rûdaw, One dead in clashes between Rojava and Syrian regime-backed forces in Qamishli, 21 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁷ Rûdaw, At least two children killed in Qamishli clashes: medical source, 22 April 2021, [url](#); NPA, Child killed, 2 civilians wounded by pro-Syrian government NDF's bullets in Qamishli, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁸ Al-Monitor, Syrian government, Kurdish forces end dispute in Qamishli, 30 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁹ NPA, Russian, Asayish Forces Patrol Qamishli's Al-Tai Neighborhood Amid Return Of Residents, 28 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²⁰ France 24, 4 dead in rare Syria-Kurdish clash: monitor, 1 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹²¹ Reuters, U.S.-backed Kurds tighten siege of Syrian army-run enclaves in northeast, 14 April 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, SDF seizes six state buildings in Qamishli, 14 April 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Tit-for-Tat siege in Sheikh Maqsood and Qamishli between SDF and the Syrian regime: causes and scenarios, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹²² New Arab (The), Syrian Kurdish-led forces withdraw from regime zones in Qamishli, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹²³ SOHR, Preliminary agreement I Regime forces agree with Asayish to lift blockade on Al-Sheikh Maqsood and Al-Ashrafieh neighbourhoods in Aleppo in return for lifting siege on Al-Hasakah and Al-Qamishli, 28 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹²⁴ Al-Monitor, Factional infighting escalates in northern Syria, 19 April 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), الاشتباكات بين فصائل الجيش الوطني "تتزايد خلال رمضان في الشمال السوري" [Clashes between the "National Army" factions are increasing from Ramadan in northern Syria], 7 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹²⁵ New Arab (The), الاشتباكات بين فصائل الجيش الوطني "تتزايد خلال رمضان في الشمال السوري" [Clashes between the "National Army" factions are increasing from Ramadan in northern Syria], 7 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Peace Spring



According to UNCOI's report covering the second half of 2021, people in the Ras al-Ayn area 'continued to live amid fear of shelling and improvised explosive devices', although the region 'experienced a relatively calm period' compared with neighbouring northern Aleppo.¹¹²⁶

General opposition to the SDF's rule

In May 2021, several protests erupted in several SDF-controlled areas, including Hasaka (city), against the AANES after it had raised fuel prices in light of an accelerating economic crisis¹¹²⁷, following a similar move by Damascus in the GoS-controlled territories.¹¹²⁸ According to estimates of the SADC, demonstrations were held in 15 protest points in various regions and villages across Hasaka.¹¹²⁹ The SDF reportedly shot five protesters in the city of al-Shaddada.¹¹³⁰

ISIL insurgency

During the period from June to July 2021, the UN Security Council documented continuing ISIL attacks across Hasaka governorate leading to both military casualties as well as destruction of energy infrastructure.¹¹³¹ In January 2022, ISIL militants attacked the al-Sina'a detention centre in Hasaka (city) in what turned out to be the largest attack carried out by ISIL since its territorial defeat in 2019.¹¹³² They managed to storm the prison, free some of the inmates and hold their position inside the building for several days before the SDF, with military support from the US-led Coalition against ISIL, eventually recaptured the place.¹¹³³ According to the SDF, the fighting caused at least 200 deaths among the inmates and 27 deaths of its own fighters. Further, it led to the temporary displacement of about 45 000 inhabitants of the neighbourhoods near the detention centre.¹¹³⁴ Estimates on the number of escaped ISIL prisoners reportedly varied between several hundred and a 'low double'-digit number.¹¹³⁵

areas | New armed clashes with RPGs in Ras al-Ayn (Sere Kaniye), 10 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Factional infighting | Al-Hamza Division member killed in Ras Al-Ain city (Sere Kaniye), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹²⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 74

¹¹²⁷ New Arab (The), Fuel price hike sparks deadly Syria Kurd protests, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²⁸ France 24, Damascus hikes fuel prices by more than 50 percent, 16 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹²⁹ SADC, SADC statement on the wave of public demonstrations in Al-Hasakah and the suppression by the Syrian Democratic Forces, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

¹¹³⁰ Etana, Syria Military Brief: Northeast Syria, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

¹¹³¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2021/735], 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 9

¹¹³² New York Times (The), U.S. Allies Retake Control of Prison in Syria, Subduing ISIS Fighters, 30 January 2022, [url](#)

¹¹³³ New York Times (The), Kurdish-Led Forces End Prison Siege, Defeating ISIS Fighters, 26 January 2022, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, IS Prison Raid, Biggest Attack since '19, Displaces 45,000, 31 January 2022, [url](#)

¹¹³⁴ Reuters, UNICEF says fears grow over fate of 850 children in besieged Syrian prison, 25 January 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syria: Qamishli Flash Update 2: Displacement from Al-Hasakeh (as of 27 January 2022), 27 January 2022, [url](#)

¹¹³⁵ Hassan, M. and Al-Ahmed, S., A closer look at the ISIS attack on Syria's al-Sina Prison, MEI, 14 February 2022, [url](#); COAR, IS Prison Raid, Biggest Attack since '19, Displaces 45,000, 31 January 2022, [url](#)

Covering the months February and March 2022, the UN Security Council noted ISIL carried out 'sporadic attacks, including on civilians' in areas including Hasaka governorate.¹¹³⁶ During April and June 2022, SDF operations against ISIL were carried out including in Hasaka governorate.¹¹³⁷

Security situation in al-Hol camp

In late March and the beginning of April 2021, the SDF conducted a two-week-long security operation in al-Hol camp that, according to the SDF's own account, led to the arrest of 125 suspected ISIL affiliated individuals, including six senior leaders of the group.¹¹³⁸ Preceding the SDF's raid, a deteriorating security situation existed inside al-Hol camp, resulting in an increase of violence and more than 40 reported killings since the beginning of 2021.¹¹³⁹ According to the SDF's own account, the security situation in al-Hol stabilized in the following weeks.¹¹⁴⁰

In July 2021, the SDF released 82 families, 229 women and children in total, from al-Hol camp.¹¹⁴¹ Reportedly, most were in detention for familial relationships with (suspected) ISIL members.¹¹⁴²

In March 2022, the SDF and Asayish forces, in coordination with the US-led Coalition against ISIL, conducted several raids in al-Hol, securing weapons, ammunition and tunnels.¹¹⁴³

However, only two weeks after, ISIL militants from within the camp reportedly managed to stage an attack on its guards, resulting in the destruction of tents and deaths of both combatants and civilians. According to one report, the SDF were said to be expecting an attempted take-over of al-Hol after ISIL's earlier attack on al-Sina'a prison in January.¹¹⁴⁴

By the end of June 2022, al-Hol reportedly witnessed 25 murders since the beginning of the year.¹¹⁴⁵

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 1 671 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Hasaka governorate, of whom 285 were coded as battles, 810 explosions/remote violence and 576 incidents of violence against civilians.¹¹⁴⁶

¹¹³⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 5

¹¹³⁷ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022, 29 July 2022, [url](#), p. 54

¹¹³⁸ VOA, Crackdown at Syria's al-Hol Camp Nets Senior Islamic State Operative, 2 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹³⁹ UNICEF, Two children killed in al-Hol camp in Syria, statement from Bo Viktor Nylund, UNICEF Representative in Syria, 24 March 2021, [url](#); Asharq al-Awsat, حملة أمنية في مخيم الهول بعد تصاعد الاغتيالات [Security campaign in Al-Hol camp after the escalation of assassinations], 30 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁰ SDF - Coordination & Military Ops Center, via Twitter @cmoc_sdf, 10 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴¹ Rudaw, 82 Syrian families leave Al-Hol camp towards their areas in Raqqa, 16 July 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴² Al-Monitor, More women prisoners linked to Islamic State released from al-Hol camp, 31 July 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴³ Asharq al-Awsat, Kurdish Forces Launch Massive Raids in Syria's Al-Hol Camp, 14 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁴ Syria.tv, تمرد لخلايا "داعش". اشتباكات عنيفة وأبناء عن قتل وجرحى في مخيم الهول [A rebellion by ISIS cells. Violent clashes and reports of dead and wounded in al-Hol camp], 29 March 2022, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, Syrian Minister Asserts Syria's 'Right' to Access International Climate Funds, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁵ ANHA, ISF: A decapitated woman found in Al-Hol camp, 25 June 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



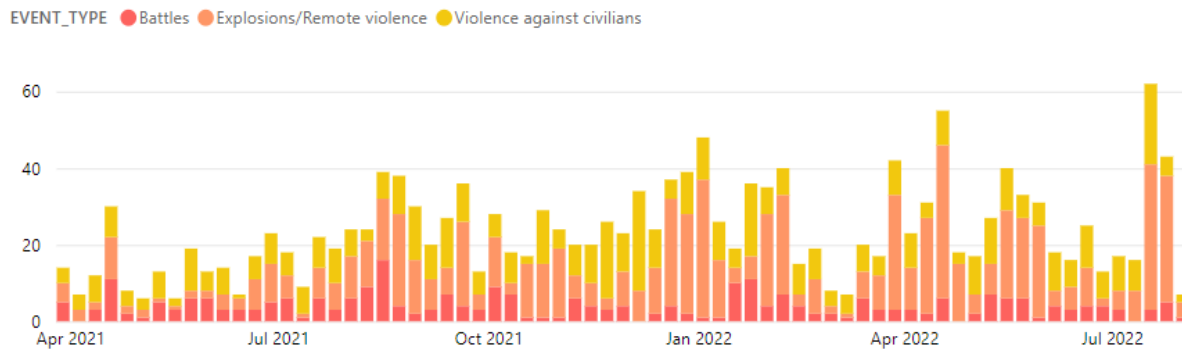


Figure 22. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hasaka governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data¹¹⁴⁷

Most security incidents were recorded in Hasaka and Ras Al Ain districts during the reporting period. Incidents of violence against civilians were significantly higher Hasaka district as compared with the other districts of the governorate (see Figure 23 below).

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Hasaka	167	416	405
Malikeyyeh	4	21	32
Qamishli	26	29	65
Ras Al Ain	88	344	74
Total	285	810	576

Figure 23. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hasaka governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data¹¹⁴⁸

¹¹⁴⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

Illustrative security incidents

- On 2 April 2021, the SDF declared an end to a five-day raid in al-Hol camp. 125 suspects on extremism were said to be arrested.¹¹⁴⁹
- On 27 April 2021, Russia deployed its military police to Qamishli¹¹⁵⁰ after clashes between the Asayish and the NDF lasted for days.¹¹⁵¹
- On 18 May 2021, SDF personnel reportedly opened fire on demonstrators who protested against rising fuel prices, killing at least one civilian in al-Shaddadi.¹¹⁵²
- On 18 August 2021, Turkish troops and Turkey-backed Syrian forces shelled the area of Abu Rassine (Navçeya Ebû Rasên), killing, according to the SDF, two civilians and wounding 15 people.¹¹⁵³
- On 21 January 2022, ISIL fighters launched a large-scale attack on al-Sina'a prison in the Ghuwayran neighbourhood in Hasaka (city)¹¹⁵⁴ that lasted for over a week and ended with several hundred persons having been killed after SDF forces ended the siege and regained control over the prison on 30 January 2022.¹¹⁵⁵
- On 2 February 2022, Turkey's armed forces have launched air raids targeting YPG positions in the district of al-Malikiya (Dêrik) as part of their Winter Eagle (Kış Kartalı)¹¹⁵⁶ operation.¹¹⁵⁷ According to SOHR, at least four persons were killed when two rockets hit a civilian power plant near the district's centre of the same name.¹¹⁵⁸
- On 8 February 2022, guards of the al-Hol refugee camp under the SDF command opened fire on its residents, resulting in one fatality and five injuries, when a group of women and children attacked the security forces. One member of the security forces was also injured.¹¹⁵⁹
- On 29 March 2022, ISIL members exchanged fire with Asayish forces at the al-Hol refugee camp, involving automatic rifles and rocket propelled grenades. According to SOHR, two civilians and one ISIL fighter were killed. Ten civilians were injured.¹¹⁶⁰
- On 22 July 2022 an airstrike by the TAF reportedly killed three SDF members near Qamishli, including a deputy commander.¹¹⁶¹

¹¹⁴⁹ AP News, Syrian Kurdish forces end sweep in camp housing IS families, 2 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁰ AP News, Russian military intervenes to halt clashes in Syrian city, 27 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵¹ AP News, Clashes between Kurdish, government forces kill 1 in Syria, 21 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵² SNHR, Two civilians shot dead by SDF in al Shaddadi city in Hasaka suburbs on May 18, [url](#); SOHR, Rise of fuel prices/ Popular protest in Autonomous Administration-held areas against the new decision, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵³ AP News, Shelling in northern Syria kills 5; at least 15 wounded, 18 August 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁴ New York Times (The), ISIS Fighters Attack Syria Prison to Free Fellow Jihadists, 21 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Ghuwayran attack latest updates/ ISIS members cremated bodies of hostages in stove of the prison's kitchen, 5 February, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁵ New York Times (The), U.S. Allies Retake Control of Prison in Syria, Subduing ISIS Fighters, 30 January 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁶ Turkish Ministry of National Defense, Derik, Sincar ve Karacak Bölgelerine İcra Edilen Kış Kartalı Hava Harekâtı Hakkında Açıklama [Statement on the Winter Eagle Air Operation to Derik, Sinjar and Karacak Regions], 1 February 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁷ Reuters, Turkish warplanes attack Kurdish fighters in Iraq, Syria, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁸ AP News, Turkish jets target Kurdish positions in Iraq, Syria; 4 die, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁹ New York Times (The), Violence Erupts at Syrian Camp for ISIS Families, Leaving a Child Dead, 9 February 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁰ AP News, Clashes in Syrian camp housing IS families kill at least 3, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁶¹ Washington Kurdish Institute, Kurdistan's Weekly Brief, 26 July 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, SDF commander vows to avenge fighters killed in drone strike, 24 July 2022, [url](#)



(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	25	9
February	17	3
March	31	5
April	12	21
May	12	7
June	6	10
July	13	8
August	13	
September	9	
October	2	
November	7	
December	7	
Total	154	63

Figure 24. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Hasaka governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 154 civilian fatalities¹¹⁶² in Hasaka governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 63 civilian fatalities (see Figure 24).¹¹⁶³

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

UNESCWA estimates the cost of physical capital loss of Hasaka governorate between 2011 and 2018 at around USD 1.3 billion (1.6 % of all the damage inflicted on Syrian physical capital).¹¹⁶⁴ Based on the Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Shelter Cluster assessed that in Hasaka governorate, 85.41 % of the overall population¹¹⁶⁵ was living in damaged buildings.¹¹⁶⁶

According to Mine Action Review and the Carter Center, the Hasaka governorate is largely contaminated with improvised mines and other improvised devices, mainly because retreating ISIL fighters planted booby traps before territory was retaken from SDF.¹¹⁶⁷ The contamination

¹¹⁶² Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹¹⁶³ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹¹⁶⁴ UNESCWA/University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 2020, 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 51

¹¹⁶⁵ The source assessed a total of 33 171 households country-wide. The data are representative on sub-district level for total population and on district level for population groups (confidence level is 95% and margin of error is 10%). Shelter Cluster/UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI Sector. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁶⁶ Shelter Cluster/UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI Sector. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹⁶⁷ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23; Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 378



causes heavy damage to civilians.¹¹⁶⁸ The Carter Center assumes that there are 1 500 to 4 500 unexploded ordnance in the Hasaka governorate.¹¹⁶⁹

Mine Action Review notes that international and national demining organisations as well as commercial companies have taken part in demining activities in areas under SDF control in north-east Syria.¹¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, according to the Carter Center, the SDF also clears unexploded ordnance in those territories.¹¹⁷¹

Regarding contamination, Hasaka (city), Shaddadi, Tal Tamr, and Ras al-Ayn remain the governorate's most severely affected districts, according to a report by iMMAP.¹¹⁷² From September 2021 to April 2022, the report lists 372 deaths and 144 injuries in connection with landmine incidents for Hasaka governorate.¹¹⁷³

(e) Displacement and return

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that the IDP population in Hasaka governorate was 120 246.¹¹⁷⁴ In 2021, UNOCHA recorded approximately 1 000 IDP movements from Hasaka governorate, 400 IDP movements to the governorate as well as 13 000 movements within the governorate.¹¹⁷⁵

In the first half of 2022, IDP departures from Hasaka governorate amounted to 2 501, displacements within the governorate amounted to 2 162, and IDP arrivals to the governorate amounted to 3 415.¹¹⁷⁶

For 2021, UNOCHA's registered about 4 000 IDP returnee movements from Hasaka governorate, 765 IDP returnee movements within the governorate, and around 1 100 returnee movements to the governorate.¹¹⁷⁷

In the first half of 2022, IDP returns to Hasaka governorate amounted to 384 (, IDP returns within the governorate amounted to 262, and IDP returns from the governorate amounted to 1 036.¹¹⁷⁸

¹¹⁶⁸ Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 270, 378

¹¹⁶⁹ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹¹⁷⁰ Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 379

¹¹⁷¹ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹¹⁷² iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹¹⁷³ iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹¹⁷⁴ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

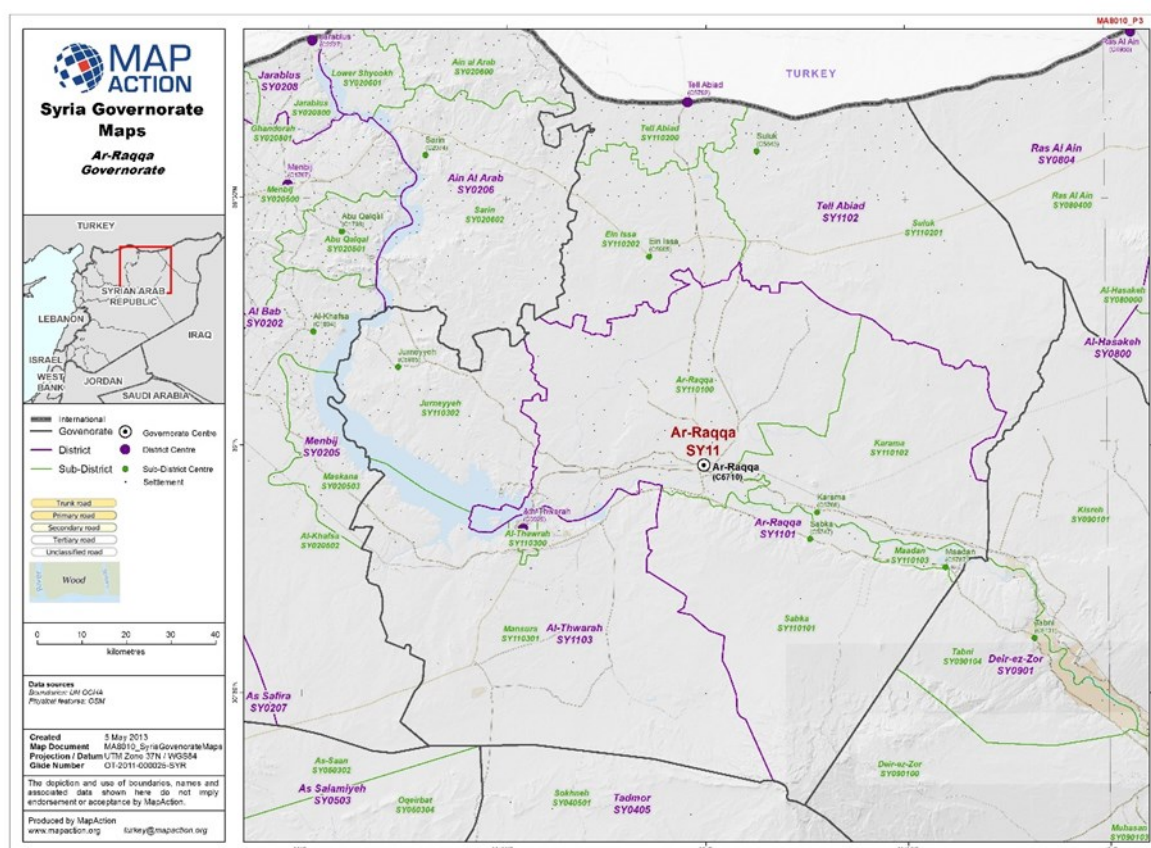
¹¹⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (as of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous

2.8. Raqqa governorate



Map 14: © MapAction, Raqqa governorate¹¹⁷⁹

2.8.1. General description of the governorate

Ar-Raqqa (hereafter 'Raqqa') governorate is located in the north-central part of Syria. The governorate has international borders with Turkey to the north, and borders to the west with Aleppo governorate, to the east with Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zor governorates and to the south with Hama and Homs governorates.¹¹⁸⁰ The governorate is divided in three districts with its respective capitals: Raqqa (Raqqa city), al-Thawra (Tabqa), and Tal Abyad.¹¹⁸¹

Returns, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁹ MapAction, Ar Raqqa Governorate [map], 29 July 2016, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 15

¹¹⁸¹ The district of Raqqa further divided into sub-districts of Raqqa, Karama, Maadan and Sabka; Tal Abyad into sub-districts of Tal Abyad, Ayn Issa and Suluk; and al-Thawra into sub-districts of al-Thawra, Jurneyyeh and Mansura. See, also: UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 15

The Syrian Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Raqqa governorate at 940 333 in 2021.¹¹⁸² In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Raqqa governorate to be of 773 026 inhabitants.¹¹⁸³

According to an analysis published by MEI, ethnic Arabs affiliated to local tribes form 90 % of Raqqa's population, while the remaining 10 % consist of other ethnic groups, including Kurds, Turkmen, Circassians and Armenians. The majority of Raqqa's Arab population are Sunni Muslims. The great majority of Raqqa's population and resources are located in areas controlled by the SDF.¹¹⁸⁴

2.8.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The central parts of Raqqa governorate are under the control of the Kurdish-led SDF. The GoS and its allies control the southern parts of the governorate.¹¹⁸⁵ As the result of the Turkish military incursion in October 2019, the GoS forces and/or their Russian allies have been present along the main roads¹¹⁸⁶ in the SDF-controlled areas and in the frontlines¹¹⁸⁷ separating the SDF-controlled parts of Raqqa from the Turkish-controlled area in northern Raqqa governorate. Since October 2019, the TAF and the Turkish-backed Syrian armed groups operating under the umbrella of the SNA have been in control of most of the territory north of M4 highway in northern Raqqa governorate, including the border town of Tal Abyad and its surroundings and the sub-district of Suluk.¹¹⁸⁸ Along with an adjoining territory of roughly equal size in northern Hasaka governorate (see Section [2.7.1](#)), this area constitutes the so-called Operation Peace Spring area.¹¹⁸⁹

The Russian military does not hold territory, but individual stationing posts from which its forces conduct joint patrols with either Turkish troops or the SDF.¹¹⁹⁰

¹¹⁸² Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n. d., [url](#)

¹¹⁸³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹¹⁸⁴ Dukhan, H. et al., The Kin Who Count: Mapping Raqqa's Tribal Topology, MEI, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁵ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), Appendices A (p. 22) and B (p. 23); Jusoor for Studies, Map of Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁶ IMMAP, Thematic Report 6, Operation Peace Spring and Potential Turkish Intervention Scenarios, October 2021, [url](#), p. 18; Jusoor for Studies, Map of Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁷ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. i

¹¹⁸⁸ Based on reading of maps in Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22

¹¹⁸⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22

¹¹⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. i

(a) Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

SDF controls the central parts of the governorate¹¹⁹¹ including Raqqa city¹¹⁹², and governs this territory with the aid of affiliated local councils such as the Raqqa civil council.¹¹⁹³ In July 2022, GoS forces have reportedly further reinforced their presence in the governorate's countryside by sending in additional personnel and heavy military equipment after having coordinated the move with the SDF and Russia.¹¹⁹⁴

(b) The US-led Coalition against ISIL

The USDOD does not release fixed locations of single military sites, but instead marks vaguely its areas of operations in Northeast Syria, which it calls 'the Eastern Syria Security Area—which includes parts of Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zor governorates east of the Euphrates River'¹¹⁹⁵ and does not show any presence in Raqqa governorate.¹¹⁹⁶ Also, Jusoor for Studies does not include any stationing points by the US-led Coalition for Raqqa governorate at the turn of the year 2021/22.¹¹⁹⁷ According to an opposition website's article from April 2022, the US-led Coalition in Northeast Syria does, in fact, confine its presence to the governorates Hasaka and Deir-Ez Zor.¹¹⁹⁸

However, in May 2022, there were news reports of a US military return to bases in Northeast Syria from which they had withdrawn in 2019¹¹⁹⁹, including the 17th Division base north of Raqqa (city) and the airbase at Tabqa.¹²⁰⁰

(c) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

As already stated above, the GoS and its allies control the southern parts of Raqqa governorate and are also present in the SDF-controlled parts of the governorate (the main roads and the frontlines between the SDF-controlled and the Turkish-controlled areas).¹²⁰¹ Beginning in June 2022, the SAA had sent additional troops to Raqqa's borders with

¹¹⁹¹ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), Appendices A (p. 22) and B (p. 23); Jusoor for Studies, Map of Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁹² International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. i

¹¹⁹³ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 10-11

¹¹⁹⁴ Asharq al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Forces Deploy Quality Weapons in SDF Areas, 8 July 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁵ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publically released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 64

¹¹⁹⁶ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publically released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

¹¹⁹⁷ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁸ Syrian Observer (The), A spokesman for the Syrian Tribes and Clans Council revealed to Nedaa Post the distribution of U.S. bases in northeastern Syria, 22 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁹ Jusoor for Studies, Potential for US forces return to locations they vacated in 2019 in Aleppo, Raqqa, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁰ Syria Direct, Military and civilian sources: US forces redeploy to former positions in northeastern Syria, 31 May 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰¹ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), Appendices A (p. 22) and B (p. 23); Jusoor for Studies, Map of Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22



Turkey.¹²⁰² As of July 2022, GoS forces, including the 93 Brigade, were stationed around the Ain Issa frontline.¹²⁰³

According to the USDOD's first quarterly report of 2022, the SAA was present roughly along the 42 Highway south of Raqqa (city), which leads west out of the governorate, and controls a section of the M4 highway on the southern edge of Lake Assad.¹²⁰⁴ An earlier published, but more detailed map by the International Crisis Group paints a similar picture, only adding a small insular area of political control within the SDF-controlled territory south of Tabqa¹²⁰⁵, which is the Tabqa military air base that the GoS holds control over since October 2019, although the city itself is under SDF control.¹²⁰⁶

(d) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia had a total of seven military sites in Raqqa governorate: six north of the city of Raqqa (with three in the border area between Turkish-controlled and SDF-controlled areas and one immediately north of the city) and one further south in Tabqa.¹²⁰⁷ In its 2022's first quarterly report, the USDOD notes two Russian bases; one at Ain Issa and one south of Raqqa (city) bordering different areas of territorial control between the SDF, the GoS and Iran-aligned militias.¹²⁰⁸

(e) Iran

According to a map published by the Atlantic Council and charting the influence of Iran and its militias in Syria in 2020, Iranian-backed armed groups were in control the town of Resafa in southern Raqqa governorate and had influence in the Euphrates river valley in the eastern part of the governorate, near the administrative border between Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor and on the main roads in GoS-controlled parts of the governorate. In addition, Iranian-backed armed groups were depicted to have a pocket of influence in Ain Issa area, bordering the Operation Peace Spring area controlled by Turkey and its affiliates.¹²⁰⁹ According to an MEE analysis, Iran has provided support to tribal militias in Raqqa governorate in order to gain influence in the governorate.¹²¹⁰

According to Jusoor for Studies, Iranian Forces had a total of 15 stationing points in Raqqa at the turn of the year 2021/22, mostly situated in GoS-controlled areas with the exception of three, which are positioned in mostly SDF-controlled territory around Tabqa.¹²¹¹

¹²⁰² Reuters, Syrian, Russian forces boosted after Turkey signals operation, officials say, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁰³ Asharq al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Forces Deploy Quality Weapons in SDF Areas, 8 July 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁴ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

¹²⁰⁵ International Crisis Group, Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 22

¹²⁰⁶ VOA, Rebuilding Efforts Continue in Syria's Former IS Stronghold, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁷ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁸ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

¹²⁰⁹ Saban, N., Factbox: Iranian influence and presence in Syria, Atlantic Council, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²¹⁰ Dukhan, H./Alhamad, A., Iran's Growing Network of Influence among Eastern Syrian Tribes, WINEP/ Fikra Forum, 6 April 2021, [url](#)

¹²¹¹ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

(f) Turkey and affiliated armed groups

In February 2022, four SNA groups, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Jaysh al-Sharqiya, the 20th Division, and Suqur al-Sham, announced the formation of the Liberation and Construction Movement (LCM). Its representatives claim to command 7 000 fighters across Aleppo and Afrin and between Ras al-Ayn (Hasaka) and Tal Abyad (Raqqa), operating within the SNA umbrella. The LCM is said to maintain ‘a particularly strong presence in the [Operation] Peace Spring area’, more so in its western parts, ‘where it controls the vital Tufaha crossing that connects it with SDF-held parts of Raqqa province.’¹²¹²

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Turkey has a total of ten stationing sites in Raqqa, all of which are located in the Operation Peace Spring area.¹²¹³

(g) ISIL

For its 2021 report, the Rojava Information Center described ISIL’s influence, while most of its attacks took place in Deir-Ez Zor, ‘to run north well into’ Raqqa and Hasaka governorates.¹²¹⁴ According the USDOD’s report from May 2022, ISIL ‘retained a smaller, but still active presence in the northern Raqqa and Hasaka governorates’, compared with its stronger presence in Central Syria’s desert.¹²¹⁵

Senior SDF security officers shared information with the International Crisis Group in May 2021, according to which ISIL had recently conducted attacks in both SDF- and GoS-controlled areas of the governorate.¹²¹⁶ ISIL cells were reported by International Crisis Group to operate in rural areas of Kabash and Hazima in northern Raqqa province.¹²¹⁷

In a more recent report by the International Crisis Group, the authors conclude that Raqqa’s residents are at ‘high risk of ISIL recruitment’¹²¹⁸, but attacks by the militants were comparatively lower in Raqqa than in other governorates since at least the beginning of 2021.¹²¹⁹ According to the report, ‘[ISIL] keeps a low profile in Raqqa, where the SDF is stronger and where it fears provoking a US-led Coalition against ISIL return, though it still uses the province as a conduit for smuggling of people, goods and weapons.’¹²²⁰

¹²¹² Hauch, L., Syria’s eastern factions unite in the Liberation and Construction Movement: A conversation with the leadership, MEI, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²¹³ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹²¹⁴ RiC, Annual Sleeper Cell Report 2021, February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹²¹⁵ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publically released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 21

¹²¹⁶ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa’s Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 17-18

¹²¹⁷ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 20

¹²¹⁸ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. ii

¹²¹⁹ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹²²⁰ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20



2.8.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

According to the UNCOI, the overall security situation deteriorated in the territories under SDF-control during the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021¹²²¹ and life remained insecure during the second half of 2021 (1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021).¹²²²

The conflict between the SDF and Turkish-backed armed groups Turkish (proxy) forces

For the second half of 2021, the UNCOI documented continued fighting in and around the city of Ain Issa, 'leading to deaths, injuries and ongoing displacement among civilians living close to the front lines inside territory controlled by the [SDF]'.¹²²³ SNA and SDF were reportedly frequently involved in mutual shelling and skirmishes along the line of control near Ain Issa in Raqqa¹²²⁴, which at times resulted in civilian casualties.¹²²⁵ Between October and November 2021, the UN Security Council registered mutual shelling and clashes particularly in Ain Issa.¹²²⁶

In January 2022, the Turkish military reportedly carried out a retaliatory operation, killing 22 members of the YPG and PKK¹²²⁷, after an earlier explosion at a border post at Tal Abyad in Turkish-controlled northern Raqqa governorate killed three Turkish soldiers.¹²²⁸ The SDF denied involvement in the attack.¹²²⁹ In February 2022, non-specified areas in Raqqa were targeted by Turkey's 'Winter Eagle' military operation against Kurdish forces by air, although to a lesser degree than areas in Hasaka (See [2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population](#), Hasaka).¹²³⁰

During the first quarter of 2022, the Carter Center recorded an increase in conflict events in Raqqa governorate, documenting 37 clashes and aerial bombardments.¹²³¹ In a report by the UN Security Council covering April and May 2022, it documented 'an increase in shelling, drone strikes and rocket attacks' in parts of Raqqa.¹²³²

¹²²¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 94

¹²²² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 94

¹²²³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 96

¹²²⁴ Hoffman, M. and Makovsky, A., Northern Syria Security Dynamics and the Refugee Crisis, CAP, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²²⁵ STJ, Ain Issa: A Father, His Three Children, Killed in an Artillery Attack by the Elite Army, 8 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²²⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2021/1029], 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 4

¹²²⁷ Syria.tv, سوريا: عملياتنا العسكرية سوف تتصاعد في سوريا [Turkish Defense Minister: Our military operations will escalate in Syria], 12 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²²⁸ Al-Arabiya, Three Turkish soldiers killed on Syria border, 8 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²²⁹ ANHA, Youssef identifies 3 main goals behind Turkey's allegations of being attacked by SDF, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²³⁰ Asharq al-Awsat, Turkey Expands Strikes on SDF in Northern Syria, 3 February 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch (Syria), February 2022, [url](#)

¹²³¹ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

¹²³² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 21

General opposition to the SDF's rule

In January 2022, a protest against fuel and bread shortages in al-Suwaydiyah with approximately 100 participants left at least three civilians wounded, after SDF personnel opened fire on the crowd. The SDF also imposed a curfew in the village, conducted raids, and reportedly arrested more than 46 people.¹²³³ In light of these events, the AANES was said to have dismissed dozens of its own employees who participated in the protests and arrested several people in western Raqqa.¹²³⁴

For March 2022, ACLED observed an almost threefold increase of abductions by the SDF in Hasaka and Raqqa governorates, 'driven by acts of forced conscription', according to the source.¹²³⁵

ISIL insurgency

According to observations and interviews by the International Crisis Group with civil society representatives from May 2021, the threat of unexploded mines from the battle against ISIL has overall receded in Raqqa governorate. However, "[...] intermittent ISIS attacks continue, including by improvised explosive devices, hit-and-run assaults and assassinations in both the city and the governorate at large, especially in the eastern al-Karama sub-district, a former ISIS stronghold."¹²³⁶

However, most of ISIL's attacks in Raqqa governorate were said to have targeted security forces in GoS-controlled areas in the south, likely because of its proximity to a strong ISIL presence in neighbouring Homs and Hama governorates, where it had seemingly regained strength.¹²³⁷

In October 2021, the SDF conducted several security operations throughout northeast Syria, including Raqqa (city), in cooperation with the US-led International Coalition against ISIL. Two active leaders of an active ISIL cell were said to be arrested in Raqqa city.¹²³⁸

Following the attack on al-Sina'a prison in Hasaka (see [2.7.3 2.7.3Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population](#)), the SDF and the PYD militia reportedly arrested about 50 suspects in raids in SDF-controlled Raqqa city and al-Jarniyah in January 2022. The arrested were said to be transferred to Ayed prison in Tabqa, west of Raqqa (city).¹²³⁹ Similar arrests reportedly took place in the eastern countryside of Raqqa.¹²⁴⁰ During April and June 2022,

¹²³³ Syria.tv, "جرحى برصاص "قسد" خلال احتجاجات على أزمة المحروقات في الرقة", 10 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²³⁴ Syria.tv, "الإدارة الذاتية" تفصل موظفين لمشاركتهم باحتجاجات غربي الرقة", 12 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²³⁵ ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East (26 March – 1 April 2022), 7 April 2022, [url](#)

¹²³⁶ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 17

¹²³⁷ International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 18

¹²³⁸ NPA, SDF, Coalition Arrested 57 ISIS Members In Syria's Northeast In A Month, 2 November 2021, [url](#)

¹²³⁹ Syria News Agency, "قسد" تطلق حملة اعتقالات في دير الزور وأخرى في الرقة تسفر عن اعتقال 50 شخصاً", 27 January 2022, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, HRW Report Highlights Human Rights Risks. Is Nexus the Solution?, 7 February 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁰ NPA, SDF Arrests 27 People Suspected Of Belonging To ISIS In Syria's Raqqa, 31 January 2022, [url](#)



SDF operations against ISIL were carried out including in Raqqa governorate.¹²⁴¹ Regarding the first half of 2022, the UN Security Council documented a concentration of ‘sporadic attacks [...] utilizing insurgent tactics’ in north-eastern Syria including Raqqa governorate.¹²⁴²

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 1 561 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Raqqa governorate, of whom 254 were coded as battles, 912 explosions/remote violence and 395 incidents of violence against civilians.

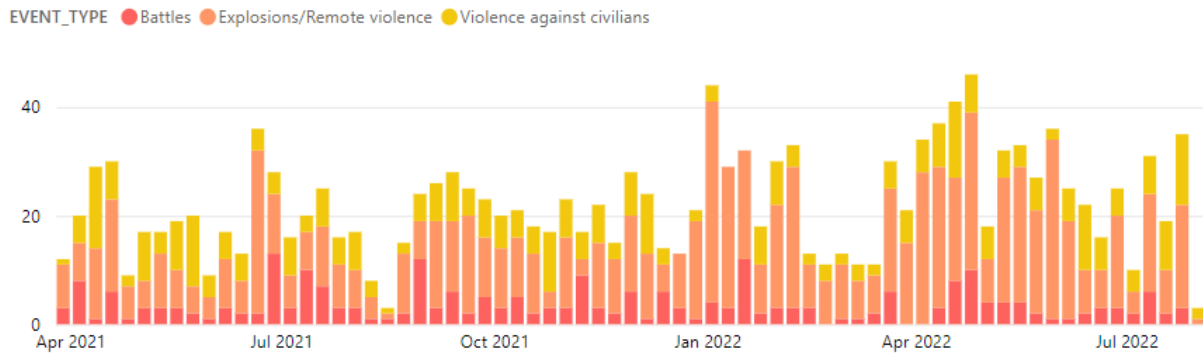


Figure 25. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Raqqa governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data¹²⁴³

Security incidents were recorded in all districts of the governorate. Most security incidents were recorded in Tall Abyad district, which also had the highest number of remote violence incidents. The largest number of incidents of violence against civilians was recorded in Raqqa district (see Figure 26).

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Raqqa	110	128	245
Ath-Thawrah	51	209	66

¹²⁴¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022, 29 July 2022, [url](#), p. 54

¹²⁴² UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, para. 43, p. 12

¹²⁴³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Tall Abyad	93	575	84
Total	254	912	395

Figure 26. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Raqqqa governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data¹²⁴⁴

Illustrative security incidents

- In April 2021, clashes that initiated in Qamishli (Hasaka) between the SDF and the GoS-backed NDF spilled over to Ain Issa countryside.¹²⁴⁵
- In September 2021, STJ reported on the death of four civilians, including three children, after their house near Ain Issa was hit by a strike following an exchange of artillery fire between SDF and Jaysh al-Nukhba (Elite Army), an SNA-affiliated armed group.¹²⁴⁶
- On 3 February 2022, Turkey's armed forces have apparently expanded their Winter Eagle (Kış Kartalı)¹²⁴⁷ operation to targets in Raqqqa governorate, reportedly conducting around 10 air raids on separate targets in both Hasaka and Raqqqa.¹²⁴⁸ No information could be found regarding potential casualties.
- On 1 June 2022, at least three people were killed and 10 more injured when a rocket hit Tal Abyad. The SDF denied responsibility for the attack.¹²⁴⁹
- On 20 June 2022, ISIL attacked a bus on a highway connecting Raqqqa with Homs in the area of Jabal al-Bishri, killing at least 13 people, most of which were GoS soldiers. The Syrian Ministry of Defence and SOHR conflicted over whether it was a civilian or a military bus.¹²⁵⁰

¹²⁴⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹²⁴⁵ Enab Baladi, Fresh clashes in al-Qamishli: Who is to benefit, and how will they affect the region's future?, 27 April 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁶ STJ, Ain Issa: A Father, His Three Children, Killed in an Artillery Attack by the Elite Army, 8 September 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁷ Turkish Ministry of National Defense, Derik, Sincar ve Karacak Bölgelerine İcra Edilen Kış Kartalı Hava Harekâtı Hakkında Açıklama [Statement on the Winter Eagle Air Operation to Derik, Sinjar and Karacak Regions], 1 February, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁸ Asharq al-Awsat, Turkey Expands Strikes on SDF in Northern Syria, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁹ AP News, Rocket attack in rebel-held Syrian town kills at least 3, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁰ Reuters, Islamic State claims responsibility for attack that killed 13 in Syria's Raqqqa, 20 June 2022, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, At least 13 killed in northern Syria bus attack, 20 June 2022, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attack | 15 regime soldiers killed in Al-Raqqah desert, 20 June 2022, [url](#)



- On 29 July 2022, four Asayish members were killed when reportedly a Turkish drone hit their car in the area of Ain Issa.¹²⁵¹

(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	5	1
February	4	4
March	7	6
April	14	2
May	8	1
June	2	7
July	4	3
August	15	
September	9	
October	3	
November	2	
December	2	
Total	75	24

Figure 27. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Raqqa governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 75 civilian fatalities¹²⁵² in Raqqa governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 24 civilian fatalities (see Figure 27).¹²⁵³

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to February 2022 estimates by local officials, 30 % of the governorate's capital, Raqqa city, remains destroyed.¹²⁵⁴ UNESCWA reports the damage to physical capital of Raqqa governorate at around 6.7 billion USD (8.3 % of all the damage inflicted on Syrian physical capital) between 2011 and 2018, noting the US-led Coalition's bombing campaign against ISIL in 2017 'destroyed the entire urban system' in the governorate.¹²⁵⁵

According to reports from Mine Action Review and the Carter Center, Raqqa governorate is heavily contaminated with mines causing damage to civilians, mainly because retreating ISIL forces left behind improvised mines and other improvised devices.¹²⁵⁶ Overall, the Carter Center estimates in its 2021 report the number of unexploded devices in Raqqa governorate between 1 750 to 5 750.¹²⁵⁷ According to COAR, the city of Raqqa is particularly affected.¹²⁵⁸

¹²⁵¹ Syrian Observer (The), Dozens of Bodies Found in Mass Grave in Northern Syria, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁵² Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹²⁵³ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹²⁵⁴ VOA/Associated Press, Poverty, Fear Drive Exodus from Syria's One-time IS Capital, 22 February 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁵ UNESCWA/University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 2020, 23 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 50-51

¹²⁵⁶ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23; Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 270, 378

¹²⁵⁷ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹²⁵⁸ COAR, Demining in Ar-Raqqa, 27 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1





Regarding contamination, Raqqa city remains the governorate's most severely affected district, according to a report by iMMAP. From September 2021 to April 2022, the report lists 194 deaths and 148 injuries in connection with landmine incidents for Raqqa governorate.¹²⁵⁹

(e) Displacement and return

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that the IDP population in Raqqa governorate was 114 860.¹²⁶⁰ In 2021, UNOCHA recorded approximately 143 IDP movements from Raqqa governorate, 9 IDP movements within the governorate as well as 817 movements to the governorate.¹²⁶¹ In the first half of 2022, there were 157 IDP departures from Raqqa governorate, 134 displacements within the governorate, and 208 IDP arrivals to the governorate.¹²⁶²

For 2021, UNOCHA's registered about 1 400 IDP returnee movements to Raqqa governorate, 705 IDP returnee movements within, and about 500 returnee movements from the governorate.¹²⁶³

In the first half of 2022, IDP returns to Raqqa governorate amounted to 20, no IDP returns within the governorate, and 1 284 IDP returns from the governorate.¹²⁶⁴

¹²⁵⁹ iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-13

¹²⁶⁰ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹²⁶¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

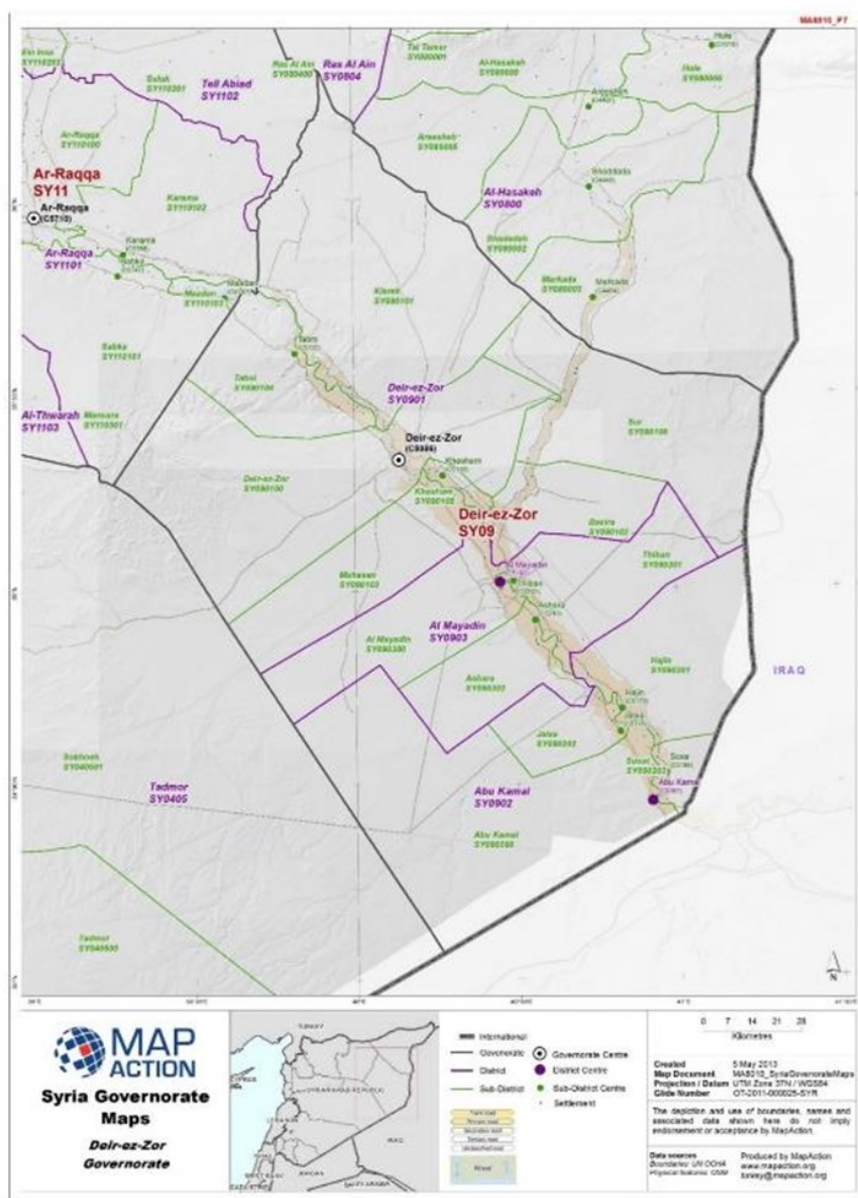
¹²⁶² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁶³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (as of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)



2.9. Deir Ez-Zor governorate



Map 15: © MapAction, Deir Ez-Zor governorate map¹²⁶⁵

2.9.1. General description of the governorate

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is located in eastern Syria. The governorate has an international border with Iraq to the east, and internal borders to with Homs to the south, with Raqqa to the west and with Hasaka to the north. The Euphrates River passes through the governorate,

¹²⁶⁵ MapAction, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

dividing it into two parts (see Map 15)¹²⁶⁶, also known as al-Shamiya and al-Jazeera.¹²⁶⁷

Administratively, Deir Ez-Zor is divided into three districts: Deir Ez-Zor, al-Mayadin, and al-Bukamal (alternatively Abu Kamal, Abu Kamal), and into 14 sub districts.¹²⁶⁸

The Central Statistics Bureau of Syria estimated that the population of Deir Ez-Zor governorate was 1 266 561 in 2021.¹²⁶⁹ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Deir Ez-Zor governorate to be of 1 107 720 inhabitants.¹²⁷⁰

The SDF-controlled areas to the east of the Euphrates River are believed to currently host about 70 % of the governorate's total population.¹²⁷¹

2.9.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is roughly divided into two areas of control. The western part of the governorate – that is, mainly the areas west of the Euphrates River – is controlled by the GoS and its Iranian and Russian allies. This area covers the major cities (Deir Ez-Zor city, al-Mayadin and al-Bukamal) and the logistical route connecting GoS-controlled areas to the Syrian-Iraqi border. The eastern part of the governorate – most of the areas east of the Euphrates River – is controlled by the Kurdish-led SDF.¹²⁷²

While Jusoor Studies, by the end of 2021, still assumed a presence of the US-led Coalition against ISIL forces at al-Bukamal¹²⁷³, other experts stated in March 2022 that 'Iran now controls the al-Bukamal crossing and the entire border separating the Deir Ez-Zor Governorate from Iraq'.¹²⁷⁴ However, there seems to have been an agreement between the GoS and the SDF to establish a corridor between its each controlled areas to enable the SDF access to the border crossing with Iraq.¹²⁷⁵

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS forces – consisting mostly of the SAA formations and the NDF – control the western part of Deir Ez-Zor governorate with the help of Iranian-backed armed groups and Russia.¹²⁷⁶

¹²⁶⁶ MapAction, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 13

¹²⁶⁷ SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁸ The district of Deir Ez-Zor is further divided into sub-districts of Deir ez-Zor, Busayra, Khasham, Kisreh, Muhasan, Sur and Tabi; Abu Kamal into sub-districts of Abu Kamal, Hajin, Jalaa and Susat; and al-Mayadin into sub-districts of al-Mayadin, Ashara and Thiban (See: UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 13)

¹²⁶⁹ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n. d., [url](#)

¹²⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹²⁷¹ SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁷² Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁷³ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁴ Hassan, M./ al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁵ Jusoor for Studies, SDF to open the 'al-Baghuz – al-Bukamal' Crossing. Motives and potential risks, 20 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁶ Koontz, K. & Waters, G., Between the Coalition, ISIS, and Assad: Courting the Tribes of Deir ez-Zor, MEI, 3 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 4–5

According to Oula Alrifai and Ali Alleile, Syria experts at the WINEP¹²⁷⁷, the GoS-controlled western parts of Deir Ez-Zor governorate can be divided into two ‘spheres of influence’. The SAA is in control of the northern part of this area, ‘run’ by the 4th Division and the 5th Corps.¹²⁷⁸

(b) Iran and Iran-backed armed groups

Iranian forces and other Iranian-affiliated armed groups are present in eastern Syria where they provide support for other GoS-affiliated forces¹²⁷⁹, operate smuggling routes along the Iraqi-Syrian border¹²⁸⁰, and allegedly work to antagonize the local population against the SDF and the US-led Coalition against ISIL.¹²⁸¹ The southern part of GoS-controlled Deir Ez-Zor governorate, including the cities of al-Mayadin and al-Bukamal, is ‘increasingly dominated’ by the Iranian-backed armed groups¹²⁸² and continued to be so recently.¹²⁸³ According to an article by the Washington Post from January 2022, Iran-backed armed groups are more successful in recruiting members than the GoS’ own security forces, while also providing more benefits to its members.¹²⁸⁴

Omar Abu Layla, a specialist on affairs in Deir Ez-Zor at the WINEP¹²⁸⁵, describes the IRGC as ‘the administrative, military, and financial nucleus of the Iranian-backed militias in Deir Ezzor governorate’¹²⁸⁶, whose largest headquarters in eastern Syria are based near the al-Assad Hospital in southern Deir Ez-Zor. In addition to the militias associated with the IRGC, Iran also backs Afghan and Pakistani Shia forces and militias comprised solely of Syrian recruits.¹²⁸⁷ Between the years 2021/22, Jusoor for Studies counted a total of 27 ‘places of Iranian military points’ in Deir Ez-Zor, all of which are located in GoS-controlled territory.¹²⁸⁸

(c) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia had 10 military sites in GoS-controlled Deir Ez-Zor by the turn of the year 2021/22, most of them in the Euphrates river valley.¹²⁸⁹ According to Alrifai and Alleile, Russian forces operating in Deir Ez-Zor governorate have pursued to ‘secure

¹²⁷⁷ See: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Experts (Oula A. Alrifai), n.d., [url](#); WINEP, Experts (Ali Alleile), n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁷⁸ Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁹ Saban, N., Factbox: Iranian presence in Syria’s Deir ez-Zor province, Atlantic Council, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁰ Asharq al-Awsat, Iran-backed Militias Use Vegetable Trucks to Smuggle Weapons into Syria, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸¹ USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 71

¹²⁸² Alrifai, O. A. & Alleile A., Russian-Iranian Tensions in Deir al-Zour, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 4 September 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸³ Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁴ Washington Post (The), Iran is putting down roots in eastern Syria, outcompeting Assad’s regime in signing up fighters, 28 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁵ See: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Experts (Omar Abu Layla), n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁸⁶ Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁷ Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#); The source says Afghan but mentions both the Fatemiyoun and the Zainabiyoun Brigade; the first is said to be Afghan, the latter Pakistani. See: Jamestown Foundation (The), The Shia Fatemiyoun Brigade: Iran’s Prospective Proxy Militia in Afghanistan, 26 March 2021, [url](#); Jamestown Foundation (The), The Zainabiyoun Brigade: A Pakistani Shiite Militia Amid the Syrian Conflict, 27 May 2016, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁸ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁹ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)



strategic sites', including the Deir Ez-Zor military airport.¹²⁹⁰ Significant Russian presence in al-Mayadin district as well as control over areas of Deir Ez-Zor city was also reported.¹²⁹¹

(d) Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

According to Fabrice Balanche, the SDF controls the internal border between the GoS-controlled western part and the SDF-controlled eastern part of Deir Ez-Zor governorate.¹²⁹² In the eastern part of the governorate, the SDF's control over the international border between Syria and Iraq began to crumble, when, according to a report from March 2022, Iran took control over the al-Bukamal crossing 'and the entire border separating the Deir Ez-Zor Governorate from Iraq'.¹²⁹³ A WINEP analysis claimed that the eastern Deir Ez-Zor governorate can be considered as an administrative hinterland for the SDF which focused mainly on Hasaka governorate. ISIL has reportedly benefitted from this lack of local control and support for the SDF in Deir Ez-Zor as well as from the October 2019 Turkish military incursion, which forced the SDF to relocate its forces closer to Turkish border.¹²⁹⁴

Recently, the SDF have increasingly been challenged in Deir Ez-Zor, either by popular unrest¹²⁹⁵ or by ISIL attacks.¹²⁹⁶

(e) The US-led Coalition against ISIL

The US-led Coalition against ISIL has reportedly reinforced its presence in Deir Ez-Zor during the referenced period of this report¹²⁹⁷, guarding particularly the both strategically important al-Omar oil field and the Tabiya (Conoco)¹²⁹⁸ gas plant.¹²⁹⁹ According to a map in the USDOD's July 2022 report, its forces are displayed along the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, in the vicinity of the governorate's capital, Deir Ez-Zor city.¹³⁰⁰ According to Jusoor for Studies, the US-led Coalition forces had a total of nine stationing sites Deir Ez-Zor governorate by the turn of the year 2021/22.¹³⁰¹

¹²⁹⁰ Alrifai, O. A./ Alleile A., Russian-Iranian Tensions in Deir al-Zour, WINEP, 4 September 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹¹ SADC, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁹² Balanche F., The Assad Regime Has Failed to Restore Full Sovereignty Over Syria, WINEP, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁹³ Hassan, M./ al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁴ Zelin, A. Y. & Knights, M., The Islamic State's Resurgence in the COVID Era?, WINEP, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁵ Enab Baladi, Arabs look for missing representation in SDF-controlled areas, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁶ NPA, ISIS, Government Outlets Claim Responsibility For Attacks In Syria's Deir Ez-Zor, 19 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁷ NPA, US Fighting Vehicles Drive To Syria's Deir Ez-Zor, 6 December 2021, [url](#); MEMO, US beefs up military presence in Syria oil fields, 8 January 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁸ The gas field is located in Tabiya, on the outskirts of Deir ez-Zor (city), but was named after the US company which discovered the site and built a processing plant there. See: Reuters, U.S.-backed forces capture big gas field in Syria's Deir al-Zor: senior commander, 23 September 2017, [url](#);

It has been fought over in the past, even after ISIL's territorial defeat. See: New York Times (The), How a 4-Hour Battle Between Russian Mercenaries and U.S. Commandos Unfolded in Syria, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁹ Asharq al-Awsat, US Forces Conduct Drills in Bases Attacked by Iran, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁰ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022, 29 July 2022, [url](#), p. 55

¹³⁰¹ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [Map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

(f) ISIL

The Rojava Information Center concluded in its report covering the year 2021, that ‘the vast majority of ISIS attacks took place in the relatively unstable, Arab-majority region of Deir Ez-Zor.’ And ‘[t]hough officially under SDF control, the security situation in Deir Ez-Zor remains precarious.’¹³⁰² In the second half of 2021, according to the UNCOI, ISIL activity contributed to a particularly volatile security situation in Deir Ez-Zor, ‘with continuous Da’esh attacks and counter-terrorism operations in response.’¹³⁰³

According to a report by the International Crisis Group from July 2022, ISIL’s reach in Deir Ez-Zor has recently increased, frightening residents and thereby making it harder for ISIL’s adversaries to gather intelligence from the local population.¹³⁰⁴ Most of ISIL’s attacks in the governorate since late 2021 have taken place in Deir Ez-Zor’s western (GoS-controlled) countryside.¹³⁰⁵ Reporting on the first half of 2022, the UN Security Council noted that ISIL continued to concentrate its attack in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, among other areas.¹³⁰⁶

2.9.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

According to the UNCOI, the overall security situation deteriorated in the territories under SDF-control during the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021¹³⁰⁷ and life remained insecure during the second half of 2021 (1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021).¹³⁰⁸

In May 2022, Deir Ez-Zor governorate also witnessed airstrikes near the town of Masyaf on what is believed to be a base for Iranian and Iran-affiliated militias¹³⁰⁹ and near al-Bukamal on a convoy by the IRGC¹³¹⁰, both assumed to be conducted by the Israeli military.

Infighting among GoS forces

In May 2021, members of the NDF reportedly clashed with members of Liwa al-Quds in Deir Ez-Zor city.¹³¹¹ In another incident, different factions within the NDF clashed with each other, causing several injuries and temporarily cut off the city from its western countryside.¹³¹²

¹³⁰² RiC, Annual Slepper Cell Report 2021, February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁰³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 95

¹³⁰⁴ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. ii

¹³⁰⁵ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹³⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Fifteenth 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/2022/576], 26 July 2022, [url](#), para 28

¹³⁰⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 94

¹³⁰⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 94

¹³⁰⁹ Times of Israel (The), Syria says airstrikes target area where Iran-backed forces known to operate, 7 May 2022, [url](#)

¹³¹⁰ NPA, Airstrikes Hit IRGC Convoy East Of Syria’s Deir Ez-Zor, 21 May 2022, [url](#)

¹³¹¹ Deir ez-Zor 24, Clash between militias in Deir Ezzor requires intervention by Republican Guard, n. d., [url](#)

¹³¹² The Euphrates Post, استنفار في دير الزور وعزلها عن ريفها الغربي بعد خلافات بين عناصر ميليشيا “الدفاع الوطني” [Alert in Deir ez-Zor; isolated from its western countryside after disputes between members of the “National Defense” militia], 7 May 2021, [url](#);



In the same month, a SAA major general has been arrested by the military police, reportedly due to his personal differences with Iranian militias in Deir Ez-Zor.¹³¹³

General opposition to the SDF's rule

Preceding an already strained relationship between the SDF and Arab tribes, described as 'hostile' by COAR¹³¹⁴, protests erupted in May 2021 across the SDF-controlled areas in northeast Syria, triggered mainly by a decision of the AANES to raise fuel prices. In Deir Ez-Zor city, protesters took to the streets in the governorate's capital and blocked roads in the countryside.¹³¹⁵ Similar protests over rising commodity prices took place again in March¹³¹⁶ and April 2022, when protesters again blocked roads in Deir Ez-Zor's countryside.¹³¹⁷ However, unlike in Hasaka governorate, there seemingly have been no violent crackdowns by security forces or reports of casualties.

Protests against SDF recruitment campaigns were also reported in December 2021.¹³¹⁸ In the same month, violent protests erupted in the city of Busayra¹³¹⁹ in Deir Ez-Zor's eastern countryside after reports of mass arrests and alleged executions of local men at the hands of the SDF.¹³²⁰ Days prior, several SDF bases in Busayra have been attacked by ISIL.¹³²¹

ISIL insurgency

In April and May 2021, there have been numerous killings in Deir Ez-Zor, often attributed to ISIL-activity¹³²²: for example, in one instance, unknown gunmen on motor bikes killed a religious official from Deir Ez-Zor's Civil Council in the western countryside¹³²³ and, in another incident, a SDF leader was shot and killed by unknown gunmen on motorbikes in the

¹³¹³ Al-Hal Net, «الميليشيات الإيرانية» تعتقل أعلى رتبة عسكرية للقوات الحكومية في دير الزور [Not being satisfied with him, "Iranian militias" arrest the highest military rank of government forces in Deir ez-Zor], 11 May 2021, [url](#); Zaman al-Wasl, تواصل مع الأميركيين.. النظام يعتقل رئيس اللجنة الأمنية والعسكرية في دير الزور [Communicated with the Americans. The regime arrests the head of the security and military committee in Deir ez-Zor], 9 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁴ COAR, Northeast Syria Social Tensions and Stability Monitoring: April Update, 28 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁵ Al-Hurra, غليان شعبي "ولغز" وراء مضاعفة أسعار المحروقات [Eastern Syria. Popular upheaval and a "mystery" behind the doubling of fuel prices], 18 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁶ SOHR, Renewed protests in SDF-held areas/ Residents demand improvement of living conditions in Deir Ezzor countryside, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

¹³¹⁷ Kurdistan 24, Protesters in Syria's Deir al-Zor demand better living conditions from the Kurdish-led administration, 24 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Renewed protests in SDF-held areas/ Protestors call for improving living conditions west of Deir Ezzor, 24 April 2022, [url](#)

¹³¹⁸ New Arab (The), تجدد المظاهرات ضد "قسد" احتجاجاً على التجنيد الإجباري [Renewed demonstrations against the "SDF" in protest against the forced conscription], 7 December 2021, [url](#); Jesr Press, مظاهرات في ريف دير الزور احتجاجاً على انتشار الفساد وقطان الطحين [Demonstrations in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor protesting the spread of corruption and the loss of flour], 4 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁹ Sada al-Sharqieh, via Twitter @Sada_AlSharqieh, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁰ Al-Monitor, Pentagon: Four Islamic State fighters killed in nighttime Syria raid, 13 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Al-Busayrah security campaign targets "arm dealers and ISIS affiliates", while death toll jumps to four, 13 December 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, إنزال جوي لـ"قسد" بدعم من التحالف يخلف ثلاثة قتلى وعدداً من المعتقلين شرقي دير الزور [An airdrop of "SDF" with the support of the coalition leaves three dead and a number of detainees east of Deir Ezzor], 13 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³²¹ NPA, ISIS Claims Responsibility For Attacks On SDF Headquarters In Syria's Deir Ez-Zor, 12 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³²² UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2021/583], 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 5

¹³²³ NPA, Unidentified Individuals Assassinated Cleric In Syria's Deir Ez-Zor, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

governorate's East.¹³²⁴ The Asayish conducted several raids targeting ISIL, focusing on both Deir Ez-Zor's northern and northeastern countryside¹³²⁵, as well as its eastern¹³²⁶ and northwestern¹³²⁷ countryside.

In June 2021, ISIL militants reportedly established temporary checkpoints in the eastern countryside of Deir Ez-Zor, stopping civilians and enforcing radical Islamic.¹³²⁸ The governorate's eastern countryside is considered to be the area where the SDF's authority is weakest, according to COAR.¹³²⁹

In December 2021, Deir Ez-Zor's eastern countryside became the focal point of clashes between the SDF and ISIL militants, when several attacks by ISIL on SDF bases in Busayra¹³³⁰ prompted a joint military operation between the SDF and the US-led Coalition against ISIL reportedly resulting in both military and civilian casualties.¹³³¹ In the same month, ISIL militants attacked the SDF-controlled Subaihan oil field¹³³² and were likely behind an IED-attack targeting a bus carrying workers on their way back from the GoS-controlled Kharata oil field.¹³³³

At the turn of the year 2021/22, ISIL cells reportedly carried out an average of 10 to 15 attacks on GoS forces per month, many of them in rural western Deir Ez-Zor.¹³³⁴

A general trend of ISIL gaining ground in Deir Ez-Zor either by staging attacks on the SDF and civilians, by imposing taxes on the local population or by kidnapping and exacting ransom from people could be observed by the turn of the year 2021/22.¹³³⁵

In February 2022, following an attempted jailbreak in Hasaka (see section 2.7.3), ISIL conducted a string of attacks in the SDF-controlled areas of Deir Ez-Zor.¹³³⁶ In April 2022, ISIL militants reportedly attacked the GoS-controlled Kharata oil field in the governorate's southwest¹³³⁷ in what appeared to be part of a larger campaign against GoS targets in the

¹³²⁴ Rûdaw, Unknown gunmen assassinate SDF leader in Deir ez-Zor, 4 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁵ Rûdaw, 14 ISIS suspects arrested in new Deir ez-Zor operation, 12 May 2021, [url](#); ANHA, Second operation by SDF in Wadi Al-Ajeej in less than month, what for?, 11 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁶ NPA, الأسايش تنفذ عمليتين أمنيتين بريفي الحسكة ودير الزور [The Asayish carry out two security operations in the countryside of Hasaka and Deir Ezzor], 31 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁷ SDF Press Center, Our Forces Dismantle Daesh Terrorist Cells In Deir Ezzor Western Countryside, 24 May 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁸ SY 24, "حسبة داعش" تظهر مجدداً وتهدد الأهالي بالقتل [Deir ez-Zor. "Daesh Hesba" reappears and threatens the people with death], 9 June 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Islamic State revives religious police in northeast Syria, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁹ COAR, Syria Update, Bye, Bye Badia: IS Challenges SDF in Bid for Wider Relevance, 28 June 2021, [url](#)

¹³³⁰ NPA, ISIS Claims Responsibility for Attacks On SDF Headquarters In Syria's Deir Ez-Zor, 12 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³³¹ Al-Monitor, Pentagon: Four Islamic State fighters killed in nighttime Syria raid, 13 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Al-Busayrah security campaign targets "arm dealers and ISIS affiliates", while death toll jumps to four, 13 December 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, إنزال جوي لـ "قصد" بدعم من التحالف يخلف ثلاثة قتلى وعدداً من المعتقلين شرقي دير الزور [An airdrop of "SDF" with the support of the coalition leaves three dead and a number of detainees east of Deir Ezzor], 13 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³³² Al-Monitor, Islamic State cells impose levy on oil investors in northeastern Syria, 29 December 2021, [url](#); Baladi News, "داعش" يتنظيم "داعش" يهاجم حقلاً نفطياً في دير الزور [ISIS raids an oil field in Deir ez-Zor], 16 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³³³ Al-Monitor, Oil workers killed in Islamic State attack in Syria, 3 December 2021, [url](#); Asharq al-Awsat, مقتل 10 عمال حقلاً نفطياً بهجوم شمال شرقي سوريا [10 oil field workers killed in northeastern Syria attack], 3 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³³⁴ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹³³⁵ Al-Monitor, Islamic State ramps up activities in eastern Syria, 6 January 2022, [url](#)

¹³³⁶ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 26, fn 133

¹³³⁷ Euphrates Post (The), "يهاجم حقلاً نفطياً غربى دير الزور" [ISIS attacks an oil field west of Deir Ezzor], 6 April 2022, [url](#); al-Badia 24, via Twitter @ALBADIA24, 7 April 2022, [url](#)



South of Deir Ez-Zor and areas across its neighbouring governorates.¹³³⁸

For the first half of 2022, the UN Security Council registered a concentration of ISIL activities in Deir E z-Zor governorate among other areas in Syria. It described them at ‘sporadic attacks [...] utilizing insurgent tactics.’¹³³⁹

Most of ISIL-related activity documented by the Carter Center in the first half of 2022 was recorded in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.¹³⁴⁰ According to International Crisis Group July 2022 report, SDF-raids backed by airpower from the US-led Coalition ‘often cause harm to civilians, including wrongful arrests, due to faulty intelligence.’¹³⁴¹ In that same report, the authors conclude that, because of the militants’ ability to easily cross SDF- and GoS-controlled areas and ‘[d]espite regular arrests and killings of ISIS fighters, security in Deir al-Zor in 2021 and 2022 was the same or worse than in 2020.’¹³⁴²

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 1 177 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, of whom 437 were battles, 338 explosive/remote violence and 402 incidents of violence against civilians.¹³⁴³

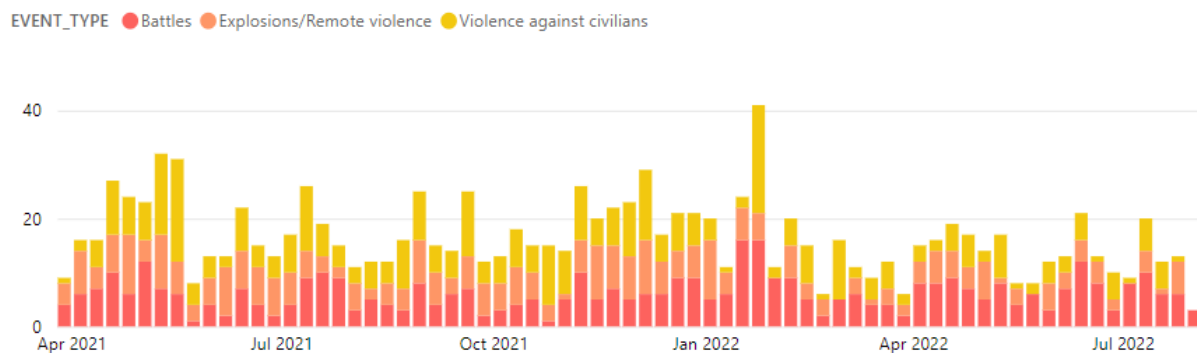


Figure 28. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data¹³⁴⁴

¹³³⁸ Al-Monitor, Islamic State escalates attacks in Syrian desert, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

¹³³⁹ UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022 [url](#), para. 43

¹³⁴⁰ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 16; Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April-June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹³⁴¹ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 15

¹³⁴² International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 22

¹³⁴³ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹³⁴⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Albu Kamal	67	62	52
Al Mayadin	97	61	98
Deir Ez-Zor	273	215	252
Total	437	338	402

Figure 29. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data¹³⁴⁵

Security incidents were recorded in all districts, but significant higher numbers were documented in Deir Ez-Zor district (see Figure 29).

Illustrative security incidents

- On 17 April 2021, unknown attackers shot and killed two Syrian aid workers in SDF-controlled Busayra¹³⁴⁶ According to COAR, it is believed to be the first incident in which aid workers have been targeted in the area.¹³⁴⁷
- On 27 June 2021, the US Air Force carried out airstrikes against two sites used for ammunition storage and logistical purposes by (Iran-affiliated) Iraqi militias Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada along the Syrian-Iraqi border.¹³⁴⁸ In an apparent retaliation attack, US troops in the vicinity of al-Omar oil field came under fire from artillery rounds the next day.¹³⁴⁹
- On 18 July 2021, a US drone strike destroyed a truck by Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, shortly after it crossed the border to Syria. SOHR reported that the driver was killed.¹³⁵⁰
- On 8 November 2021, the Asayish, with the support of the US-led Coalition, reportedly thwarted a plan by an ISIL cell to attack Hasaka's Sina'a prison by raiding a hide-out in the countryside north of Deir Ez-Zor (city).¹³⁵¹ The next day, retaliation attacks followed, when

¹³⁴⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹³⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Press Release: United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Imran Riza, condemns killing of two aid workers in Deir-Ez-Zor, Syria, 18 April 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁷ COAR, Syria Update, Quamishli Clashes Bring Arab-Kurd Tensions to the Surface, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁸ New York Times (The), U.S. Carries Out Airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, 27 June 2021 (updated 28 August 2021), [url](#); USDOD, Statement by the Department of Defense (Immediate Release), 27 June 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁹ Reuters, U.S. troops come under fire in Syria after strikes against Iran-backed militias, 29 June 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁰ AP News, Militia officials: US drone destroys militia truck in Syria, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵¹ NPA, Asayish Thwarts ISIS Attack On Prison In Syria's Hasakah, 9 November 2021, [url](#)



ISIL militants attacked the SDF headquarters in Busayra and several other bases throughout the SDF-controlled areas.¹³⁵²

- On 2 December 2021, 10 workers of the GoS-controlled Kharata oil field were killed in an IED attack on a transport bus.¹³⁵³ State media called it a 'terrorist attack' and blamed ISIL for it.¹³⁵⁴
- On 13 December 2021, the SDF stated to have killed five suspected ISIL militants during a raid in Busayra, on the east bank of the Euphrates River. Reportedly, the raid was conducted as a joint operation with the US-led Coalition against ISIL. SOHR said that two of those killed were executed after being captured.¹³⁵⁵ Meanwhile, state media reported that several civilians were supposedly kidnapped in Busayra by US forces.¹³⁵⁶
- On 7 April 2022, artillery hit a base housing US troops, injuring two members of the US-led Coalition against ISIL. SOHR reported that five rockets in total were fired from positions where Iran-backed militias were based.¹³⁵⁷
- On 28 April 2022, ISIL militants attacked a former SDF spokesman's home in Abu Khashab, killing him and six other people. According to media reports, the gunmen arrived on motorcycles and opened fire as their targets gathered for Iftar, the fast-breaking meal during Ramadan.¹³⁵⁸

(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	23	8
February	22	6
March	14	14
April	16	12
May	17	13
June	8	12

¹³⁵² VOA, IS Cells in NE Syria Retaliate for Foiled Prison-Break Plot, 9 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵³ AP News, Report: 10 oil workers killed in attack on bus in Syria, 2 December 2021, [url](#)

SANA, Ten workers of al-Kharata oil file martyred in a terrorist attack in Deir Ezzor, 2 December 2021, [url](#)¹³⁵⁵ AP News, US-backed Syria forces say 5 IS suspects killed in raid, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁵ AP News, US-backed Syria forces say 5 IS suspects killed in raid, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁶ Reuters, Syria state media say U.S. forces 'kidnapped civilians' near Deir al-Zor, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁷ AP News, Attack in east Syria injures 2 US-led coalition members, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁸ AP News, Suspected IS militants kill 7 Syrians at Ramadan iftar meal, 28 April 2022, [url](#)

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
July	21	7
August	8	
September	20	
October	13	
November	16	
December	23	
Total	201	72

Figure 30. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Deir Ez-Zor governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 201 civilian fatalities¹³⁵⁹ in Deir Ez-Zor governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 72 civilian fatalities.¹³⁶⁰

¹³⁵⁹ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹³⁶⁰ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101



(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

UNESCWA estimates the physical capital loss of Deir Ez-Zor governorate around USD 5.5 billion (6.8 % of all the damage inflicted on Syrian physical capital) between 2011–2018 and explains the amount of damage by noting that between 2014 and 2017 intense hit-and-run clashes between the GoS forces and ISIL took place.¹³⁶¹

In March 2022 the Carter Center published a report mapping unexploded ordnance in Syria between December 2012 and May 2021. According to the report, around 39 951 explosive munitions were used in this period in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, contributing to 'UXO contamination' of between 4 000 – 12 000.¹³⁶²

Regarding explosive ordnance contamination, Deir Ez-Zor is considered one of Syria's most affected governorates, according to a report by iMMAP. However, as the report notes, the situation in Deir Ez-Zor is more difficult to assess due to 'access issues in the south and east of the governorate'. From September 2021 to April 2022, the report lists 392 deaths and 232 injuries in connection with landmine incidents for Deir Ez-Zor governorate.¹³⁶³

Mine Action Review reports that international and national demining organisations as well as commercial companies have taken part in demining activities in areas under SDF control in north-east Syria. The company Tetra Tech 'focused on critical infrastructure such as healthcare, schools, water and electricity'.¹³⁶⁴ According to the Carter Center, the SDF is also involved in the clearance of unexploded ordnance in the areas under its control.¹³⁶⁵

(e) Displacement and return

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that the IDP population in Deir Ez-Zor governorate was 39 274.¹³⁶⁶ In 2021, UNOCHA recorded approximately 1 000 IDP movements from Deir Ez-Zor governorate, 2 000 IDP movements within the governorate as well as 700 movements towards it.¹³⁶⁷ In the first half of 2022, there were 1 510 IDP departures from Deir Ez-Zor governorate, 1 363 displacements within the governorate amounted), and IDP arrivals to the governorate amounted to 1 564.¹³⁶⁸

Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹³⁶¹ UNESCWA/University of St Andrews, Syria at War; Eight Years On, 2020, 23 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 50-51

¹³⁶² Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications, December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹³⁶³ iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 9, 13

¹³⁶⁴ Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 379

¹³⁶⁵ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹³⁶⁶ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹³⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements,

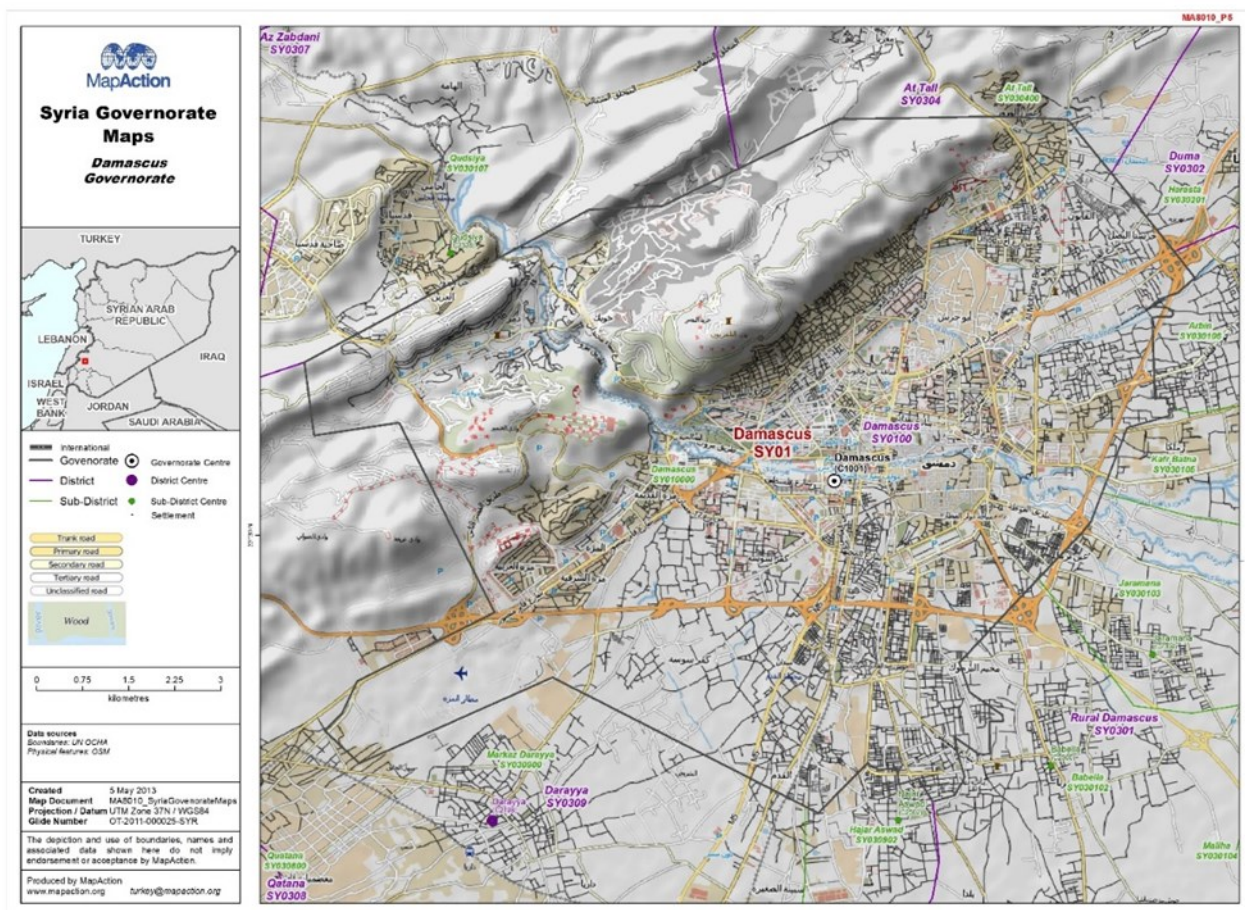
For 2021, UNOCHA's registered about 8 000 IDP returnee movements to Deir Ez-Zor governorate and 3 000 IDP returnee movements within.¹³⁶⁹ In the first half of 2022, there were 6 673 IDP returns to Deir Ez-Zor governorate, 4 914 IDP returns within the governorate and 4 927 IDP returns from the governorate.¹³⁷⁰

March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (as of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

2.10. Damascus governorate



Map 16: © MapAction, Damascus governorate¹³⁷¹

2.10.1. General description of the governorate

Damascus governorate, which includes Syria's capital, is located in the south-western part of the country and is completely surrounded by Rural Damascus (Rif Damashq) governorate. The governorate is divided into two districts, Damascus city and Yarmouk. Damascus city itself comprises 15 sub-district-level areas: Barzeh, Qaboun, Jobar, Al-Shaghour, Al-Midan, Al-Qadam, Kafr Sousa, Dummar, Al-Mazzeh, Rukn Al-Din, Al-Salihyah, Al-Mouhajrin, Saroujah, Al-Qanawat, and Old Damascus.¹³⁷²

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the city's population at 2 103 405 as of mid-2021.¹³⁷³ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Damascus governorate to be 1 828 845.¹³⁷⁴

¹³⁷¹ UNOCHA, Syria sub-districts maps [maps], n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁷² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Governorates profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹³⁷³ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](http://www.cbs.gov.sy)

¹³⁷⁴ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23



National government and administrative institutions, including large military and security services establishments, are centred in Damascus.¹³⁷⁵ A wide peripheral boulevard surrounds Damascus city, flanked by 'wide avenues that create ruptures in the urban space'. Balanche refers to this urban planning as part of the GoS's anti-insurgency strategy, through which it 'likely sought to optimize the movement of armored vehicles'.¹³⁷⁶

Major highways connect Damascus with major cities as well as with the capitals of neighbouring countries.¹³⁷⁷ Damascus International Airport is situated 30 km south-east of central Damascus.¹³⁷⁸

For information on the ethnic and religious composition of Damascus governorate see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus city \(August 2022\)](#).

2.10.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Maps published by several sources indicated that the GoS and affiliated groups were in control of Damascus governorate throughout the reference period of this report.¹³⁷⁹

The GoS special forces were able to defend the capital during the entire war, and while Sunni rebels captured the suburbs in the early stages of the conflict, they were never able to advance towards the central districts. The Al-Midan neighbourhood was briefly occupied by the rebel Free Syrian Army in 2012, but GoS forces soon regained control. It was noted that, while Al-Midan is a predominantly Sunni neighbourhood, it is mostly inhabited by upper- and middle-class families who apparently did not side with the rebels.¹³⁸⁰

The Carter Center emphasised that the conflict inside Damascus city mainly played out in opposition-held areas, including the Jobar, Qaboun, Tishreen, and Barzeh neighbourhoods that were connected to eastern Ghouta, the opposition's stronghold. The southern neighbourhoods of Yarmouk Camp and Tadamoun also frequently experienced conflict activity.¹³⁸¹ The GoS forces, backed by Iran and Russia, regained complete control of the capital in 2018.¹³⁸² Since then, the Damascus area has been characterised by a 'relative absence of anti-regime activities'.¹³⁸³ Over 2018¹³⁸⁴ and 2019¹³⁸⁵, the GoS removed security barriers that had been erected between neighbourhoods in proportion 'to the security

¹³⁷⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Damascus, last updated 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁶ Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32

¹³⁷⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Damascus, last updated 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁸ Damascus International Airport, Maps of Damascus airport, 2021 (n.d.), [url](#)

¹³⁷⁹ Based on reading of the following maps: Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics | January-March 2022*, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 2; UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022*, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, *Map of military control in Syria: End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022*, 24 December 2021, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁰ Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 31

¹³⁸¹ Carter Center (The), *Explosive Munitions in Syria - Report 2 - Damascus City and Rural Damascus Governorate*, January 2020, [url](#), p. 10

¹³⁸² SOHR, *Soldier killed in rare Damascus bombing*, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸³ Haid, H., *Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus*, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁴ Enab Baladi, *Damascus checkpoints are being removed... Has Syria become "safe"?!* , 27 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁵ Denmark, DIS, *Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, [source: Syria Direct], October 2020, [url](#), p. 35



conditions of each area and its proximity to the security centres and intelligence branches'.¹³⁸⁶ The GoS has since sought to present Damascus city as a 'haven of calm' within Syria, although this view has been contested by Haid Haid,¹³⁸⁷ a Syrian columnist and consulting fellow with Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa programme, who pointed to recurring attacks on members of the security forces in the city.¹³⁸⁸ Most notably, it was reported that an IED attack on a bus with employees of the Military Housing Corporation killed 14 people in October 2021.¹³⁸⁹

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The SAA's First¹³⁹⁰ and Fifth Corps¹³⁹¹, as well as its Republican Guard¹³⁹² reportedly had their headquarters in the capital. The Fourth Armoured Division, comprising four brigades (38, 40, 41, and 42) and led by Maher al-Assad, has the mission 'to secure Damascus and protect the regime from any significant threats', particularly from within.¹³⁹³ As of September 2021, it was reported to operate two supply and repair points in the military section of Damascus airport and at Mezzeh military airport.¹³⁹⁴

(b) Iran and Iran-backed armed groups

A map published by Jusoor for Studies shows multiple Hezbollah and Iranian bases as being located in the Damascus area.¹³⁹⁵ In the governorate, as of late 2019, Hezbollah was surveilling the Shiite al-Shaghour neighbourhood, the vicinity of the Umayyad Mosque, and the Sayyidah Ruqayya shrine area where the Hezbollah headquarters is located. The area around the Sayyidah Ruqayya shrine has been described as a 'closed security area' where Shia militias of various nationalities are deployed 'to protect Shia pilgrims at the shrine and the Bab al-Saghir cemetery'.¹³⁹⁶

(c) Anti-GoS armed groups

While sources interviewed by the DIS in August and September 2020 stated that ISIL and other opposition groups no longer had a presence in Damascus governorate,¹³⁹⁷ a February 2022 report of the UN Security Council noted that ISIL had an 'active presence' in Damascus

¹³⁸⁶ Enab Baladi, Damascus checkpoints are being removed... Has Syria become "safe"?!, 27 June 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁷ Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁸ Chatham House, Haid Haid, n.d., [url](#)

¹³⁸⁹ COAR, Deadly Bus Blast Evinces Security Risks in Damascus and Beyond, 25 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁹⁰ Al-Khanadeq, القوات البرية السورية: سر من أسرار الانتصار [Syrian ground forces – a secret for victory], 26 November 2021, [url](#); Suwayda 24, البلاد جنوب الأول للفيلق جديد قائد [New commander of the 1st Corps in the south of the country... Changes in the Syrian army], 30 April 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁹¹ Al-Khanadeq, القوات البرية السورية: سر من أسرار الانتصار [Syrian ground forces – a secret for victory], 26 November 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹² Waters, G., Understanding Syria's Military Deployments in Idlib, International Review, 10 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁹³ Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁴ Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Map of the military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁶ Ezzi, M., Lebanese Hezbollah's Experience in Syria [source: journalist Raed al-Salhani], EUI, 13 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹³⁹⁷ Denmark, DIS, Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus, [sources: Syria Direct; Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)], October 2020, [url](#), pp. 35, 52

Two deadly high-profile attacks on GoS security personnel were claimed by the armed insurgent factions Hurras al-Din, an al-Qaida loyalist group,¹⁴⁰⁰ and a little-known group named Saraya Qasioun.¹⁴⁰¹ The latter group has been active since 2019 and was reported to have been carrying out a ‘low-level insurgency in and around Damascus’. While Saraya Qasioun has claimed attacks targeting GoS forces, COAR noted that some doubted the group’s capability to stage such attacks, pointing to local sources alleging in 2021 that some of these attacks were ‘inside jobs’¹⁴⁰² perpetrated between GoS officers.¹⁴⁰³ Sources interviewed by the DIS in August 2020 even questioned the existence of opposition cells in Damascus¹⁴⁰⁴ and of Saraya Qasioun specifically.¹⁴⁰⁵

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

While it was noted that attacks had become rare inside Damascus governorate since the GoS recaptured the surrounding countryside in 2018,¹⁴⁰⁶ during the reference period there were several reported incidents targeting officials or supporters of the GoS. These included three deadly bombings of military buses in August 2021,¹⁴⁰⁷ October 2021,¹⁴⁰⁸ and February 2022¹⁴⁰⁹ and an IED attack on a non-civilian individual in April 2022.¹⁴¹⁰ One of the incidents was an attack in Masaken al-Haras, an area that is predominantly inhabited by Alawite members of the GoS military and security establishment and their families and is known for its tight security.¹⁴¹¹ Though attacks often went unclaimed, Haid assessed that it was likely that former

¹⁴¹¹ COAR, Hurras al-Din Lays Claim to Deadly Damascus Bus Blast, 9 August 2021, url

rebels (i.e. individuals with the ‘motives, skills, and resources to carry out attacks’) were behind some of the incidents reported in Damascus city and its surroundings.¹⁴¹²

In September 2021, ISIL claimed responsibility for destroying a gas pipeline supplying the Deir Ali and Tishreen power plants, as well as two power pylons. The group referred to the attack as being part of a new ‘economic war’ against the GoS.¹⁴¹³

Moreover, several strikes by Israeli forces were recorded during the reference period, targeting locations at or near Damascus International Airport¹⁴¹⁴ including military posts and warehouses of GoS forces, Iranian troops or Iran-backed militias.¹⁴¹⁵

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period there were 21 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Damascus governorate, of whom 2 were coded as battles, 11 explosions/remote violence and 8 incidents of violence against civilians. All security incidents were recorded in Damascus city.

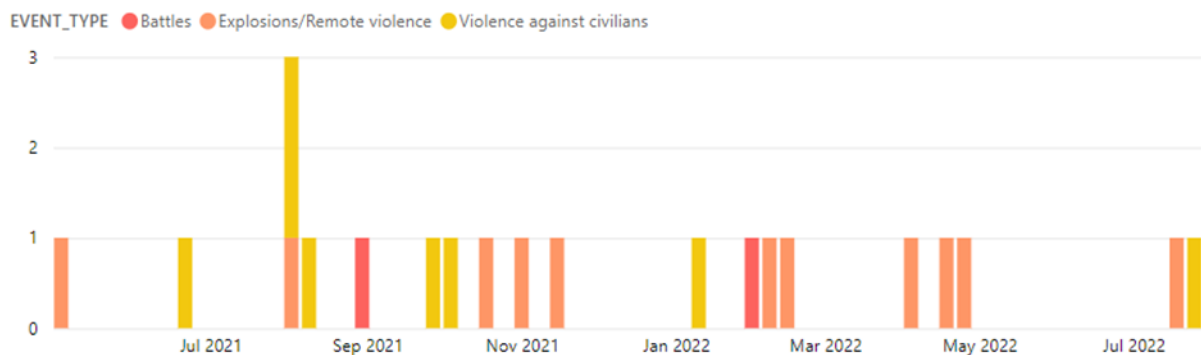


Figure 31: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Damascus governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data¹⁴¹⁶

Very few security incidents were recorded in Damascus governorate during the reference period for this report. These include the following:

- On 4 August 2021, a bus transporting Syrian military personnel detonated at the entrance of Masaken al-Haras (Guards’ residences) near Mashru’a Dummar in Damascus city. The driver was reportedly killed, and three other persons were injured. While the state-run news agency SANA stated that the explosion had been caused by

¹⁴¹² Haid, H., Assad’s fake narrative of a ‘safe’ Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴¹³ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 14, footnote 58

¹⁴¹⁴ SOHR, After suspension of attacks for more than a month | Israeli strikes hit military sites in Damascus and middle of Syria, 8 June 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Israeli missiles hitting vicinity of Damascus airport kill four regime fighters and civil servant, 23 May 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Israeli attack on Damascus airport | Runway and control tower sustain damage and air flights transported to Aleppo airport, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁵ SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

a short circuit that ignited the fuel tank of the bus,¹⁴¹⁷ COAR noted that Hurras al-Din, an al-Qaida loyalist group, had claimed responsibility for the incident.¹⁴¹⁸

- On 20 October 2021, two IEDs planted on a military bus in Damascus city killed 14 people and injured several others, SANA reported.¹⁴¹⁹ All victims were reported to have been employees of the Military Housing Corporation. The insurgent group Saraya Qasioun claimed responsibility for the attack.¹⁴²⁰ It was noted that this was the deadliest attack in the capital since March 2017.¹⁴²¹
- On 15 February 2022, an SAA soldier was killed and more than 10 others were wounded when an IED planted in a military transport bus detonated in the Al-Barakma area of Damascus city.¹⁴²²
- On 24 February 2022, rocket fire from Israeli forces hit posts and weapons storages of Iran-backed militias near Damascus International Airport and air-defence systems south of Damascus city, killing seven people, including two GoS soldiers, two Syrians linked to Hezbollah, and three members of Iran-backed militias.¹⁴²³
- In July 2022, the Washington Post reported with reference to the Syrian state news agency SANA that three Syrian soldiers were killed and seven others injured in Israeli air strikes on Damascus. The death toll later rose to five, according to the Jordanian state television.¹⁴²⁴

¹⁴¹⁷ SANA, A military bus explosion in Damascus causes martyrdom of the driver and injury of three others, 4 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁸ COAR, Hurras al-Din Lays Claim to Deadly Damascus Bus Blast, 9 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁹ SANA, 14 martyrs in terrorist attack on military bus, Damascus-video, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁰ COAR, Deadly Bus Blast Evinces Security Risks in Damascus and Beyond, 25 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁴²¹ DW, Deadly twin bus blasts rock Syria, 20 October 2021, [url](#); BBC News, Syria war: Deadly bomb blasts hit military bus in Damascus, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²² SOHR, Soldier killed in rare Damascus bombing, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴²³ SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁴ Washington Post (The), Russian and Israeli planes hit Syria in separate strikes, kill at least 10, 22 July 2022, [url](#)



(c) Civilian fatalities

In 2021, SNHR recorded one civilian fatality (documented in January 2021)¹⁴²⁵ in Damascus governorate, while in the first seven months of 2022 it recorded three civilian fatalities (two in May 2022 and one in June 2022).¹⁴²⁶

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In a report published in 2020, UNESCWA and the University of St Andrews (United Kingdom) stated that Damascus governorate sustained about 3 % of the total damage to physical capital in Syria.¹⁴²⁷ Yarmouk refugee camp was affected by severe property damage during the conflict years. As of March 2021, UNRWA noted that the basic infrastructure of the Yarmouk refugee camp remained heavily damaged.¹⁴²⁸

The Carter Center reported that between December 2012 and May 2021, 31 744 explosives were deployed in Damascus city.¹⁴²⁹ The source estimated that the use of explosives resulted in a contamination of the city by 3 000–9 500 pieces of UXO.¹⁴³⁰ While it was noted that UXO

¹⁴²⁵ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁴²⁶ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴²⁷ UNESCWA and University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 51; The source defines loss to physical capital as including 'private and public construction and equipment, such as housing stock, schools, hospitals and factories, and power, water, sanitation, transport and communications infrastructure'. UNESCWA and University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 49

¹⁴²⁸ UNRWA, Yarmouk (unofficial camp), n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴²⁹ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications: December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁴³⁰ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications: December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

clearance efforts by GoS and Russian forces largely went unreported,¹⁴³¹ the Carter Center pointed to the specific risks a substantial presence of UXO poses in the densely populated Damascus area.¹⁴³² Furthermore, in a September 2021 report, Mine Action Review indicated that Damascus governorate was one of 13 governorates that had experienced use of cluster munitions since 2012.¹⁴³³

In May 2022, four civilians died under a collapsing building in the Jobar neighbourhood of Damascus city. The building had previously been shelled by the GoS and Russian air forces.¹⁴³⁴

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 609 682 IDPs.¹⁴³⁵ In 2021, UNOCHA in Damascus governorate recorded approximately 1 000 IDP movements from the governorate and 398 IDP movements to the governorate.¹⁴³⁶

In 2022, UNOCHA reported 80 IDP departures from and 7 IDP arrivals to Damascus governorate in January,¹⁴³⁷ 65 departures and 20 arrivals in February,¹⁴³⁸ 255 departures in March,¹⁴³⁹ 133 departures and 27 arrivals in April,¹⁴⁴⁰ and 139 departures and 8 arrivals in May.¹⁴⁴¹

As regards returns, in 2021 UNOCHA recorded for Damascus governorate approximately 11 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from the governorate and some 2 000 IDP returnee movements to the governorate.¹⁴⁴² In 2022, UNOCHA recorded 53 spontaneous IDP returns from and 197 returns to the governorate in January,¹⁴⁴³ 382 returns from and 307 to the governorate in February,¹⁴⁴⁴ some 1 800 returns from and 221 returns to the governorate in March,¹⁴⁴⁵ and 276 returns from the governorate in April,¹⁴⁴⁶ and 160 returns from the governorate in May.¹⁴⁴⁷

Information on reasons for displacement and return movements from or to Damascus governorate could not be identified within the time constraints of this report.

¹⁴³¹ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 181

¹⁴³² Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications: December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁴³³ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

¹⁴³⁴ SOHR, Following previous airstrikes | Four civilians die under collapsing building in Jobar, 23 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁵ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁴³⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

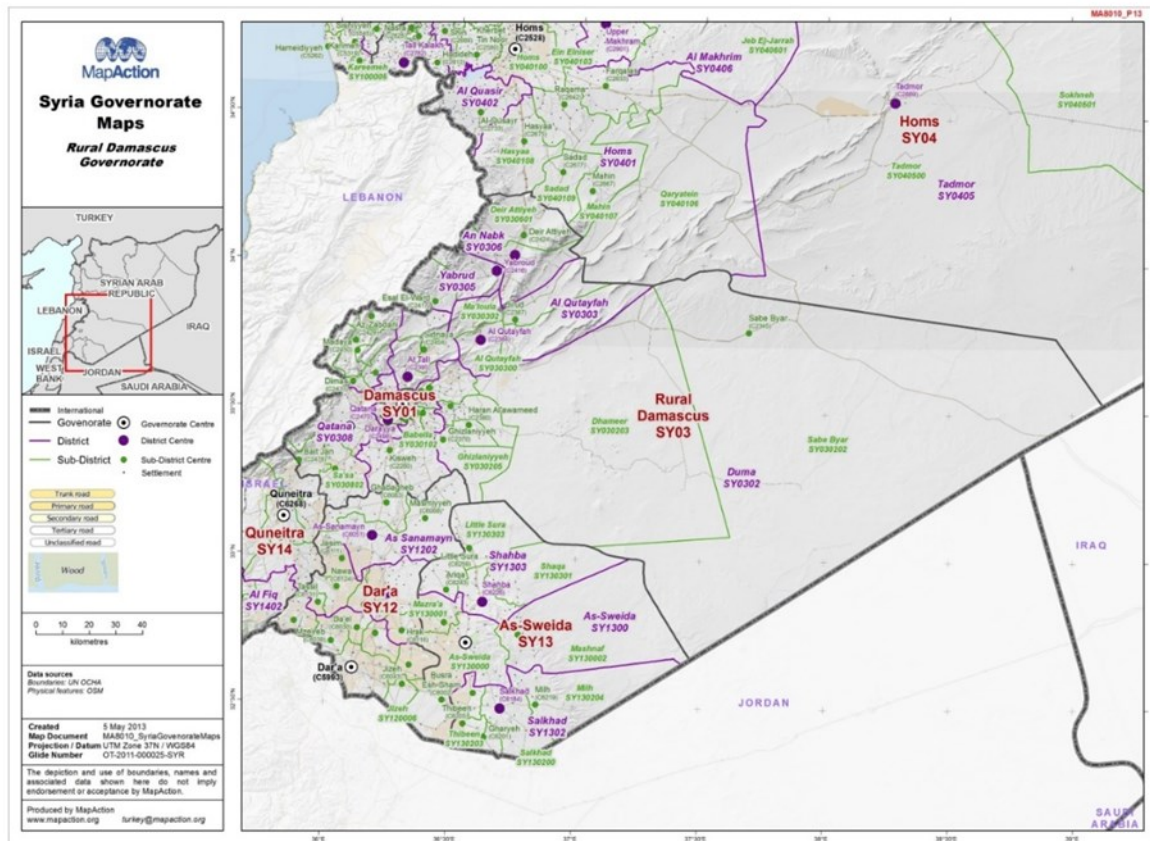
¹⁴⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)



2.11. Rural Damascus



Map 17. MapAction, Rural Damascus governorate¹⁴⁴⁸

2.11.1. General description of the governorate

Rural Damascus (*Rif Dimashq* in Arabic) is a largely agricultural governorate surrounding Damascus city.¹⁴⁴⁹ It is located in the south-western part of Syria and has international borders with Jordan and Iraq to the south and east and Lebanon to the west. Internally, it borders Homs governorate to the north and Quneitra, Dara'a and Sweida governorates to the south.¹⁴⁵⁰

The governorate comprises nine administrative districts: Rural Damascus, Douma (Duma), Al Qutayfah, An Nabk, Yabroud (Yabrud), At Tall, Az-Zabadani, Darayya, and Qatana. The governorate's territory is further subdivided into a total of 36 subdistricts.¹⁴⁵¹ Moreover, the governorate comprises 28 towns and 190 villages. Large parts of Damascus city's environs that

¹⁴⁴⁸ Mapaction, Syria 2013-2015, Rural Damascus Governorate [map], last updated:29 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁹ REACH, Rural Damascus Governorate, April 2018, Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria (HSOS), April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁵⁰ UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵¹ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 103-104

fall under the administration of Rural Damascus governorate are integrated with the capital's urban landscape in contiguous built-up areas.¹⁴⁵²

The territory administrated by Rural Damascus governorate includes a largely suburban area named Eastern Ghouta bordering Damascus city to the east¹⁴⁵³ that comprises 22 communities,¹⁴⁵⁴ including Douma, Harasta, Arbin, Misraba and Jisrein.¹⁴⁵⁵ To the southwest of the capital, there is an area called Western Ghouta that comprises Darayya and Moadamiya.¹⁴⁵⁶

The Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that the governorate's population at 3 371 987 as of mid-2021.¹⁴⁵⁷ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Rural Damascus governorate to be 3 026 227.¹⁴⁵⁸ According to a map provided by Fabrice Balanche in 2018, the western areas of Rural Damascus governorate were mostly inhabited by Sunni Arabs. In the areas surrounding the capital, there were some communities of Druze¹⁴⁵⁹ and Christians.¹⁴⁶⁰ Twelver Shia Muslims were present around Damascus city,¹⁴⁶¹ notably in Sayyida Zainab, a Shiite-dominated town¹⁴⁶² located south of the capital¹⁴⁶³ that is characterised by 'a dense population mix of Sunni Syrians, Iraqis and groups of Shia from Foua, Kefraya, al-Nubl and al-Zahraa'.¹⁴⁶⁴ The eastern parts of the governorate were inhabited by Bedouins.¹⁴⁶⁵

According to Balanche (2018), some lower-ranking GoS officials were residing in the small Druze/Christian towns in the Damascus suburbs (Jaramana, Jdeidat Artouz, and Sahnaya).¹⁴⁶⁶ Meanwhile, conservative Sunni populations inhabited localities in the Ghouta area¹⁴⁶⁷ such as Douma,¹⁴⁶⁸ Zamalka, Daraya,¹⁴⁶⁹ Qudsaya,¹⁴⁷⁰ and the three 'southern Damascus towns' (Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahm).¹⁴⁷¹

¹⁴⁵² Abdin, Y., The fragility of community security in Damascus and its environs, in: International Review of the Red Cross, Issue 99, No. 3, 2017, [url](#), p. 900

¹⁴⁵³ REACH, Syrian Cities Damage Atlas, 16 March 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴⁵⁴ Al Jazeera, Inside Syria: How life goes on in a besieged town, 24 May 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁵ REACH, Syrian Cities Damage Atlas, 16 March 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴⁵⁶ Al Jazeera, Inside Syria: How life goes on in a besieged town, 24 May 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁷ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁸ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁴⁵⁹ Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. Xiii

¹⁴⁶⁰ USDOS, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. Xiii

¹⁴⁶¹ USDOS, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4

¹⁴⁶² NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#); Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 17;

¹⁴⁶³ NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁴ Salaam Times, Afghan militiamen involved in escalating drug war in Syria, 30 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁵ Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. Xiii

¹⁴⁶⁶ Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32

¹⁴⁶⁷ Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32

¹⁴⁶⁸ Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32; Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁴⁶⁹ Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32

¹⁴⁷⁰ Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁴⁷¹ Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 17



2.11.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The GoS recaptured Rural Damascus governorate in 2018,¹⁴⁷² defeating the armed opposition in Eastern Ghouta¹⁴⁷³ in a Russian-supported¹⁴⁷⁴ military offensive launched between February and April 2018,¹⁴⁷⁵ during which GoS forces used chemical weapons against Douma city,¹⁴⁷⁶ the largest opposition stronghold in the vicinity of the capital from 2011 to 2018. According to one estimate, 70 % of the local infrastructure of Eastern Ghouta was destroyed.¹⁴⁷⁷ In towns like Douma, Zabadani,¹⁴⁷⁸ Darayya¹⁴⁷⁹ and Hajar al-Aswad¹⁴⁸⁰ most of the population was displaced.¹⁴⁸¹ For more information on the conflict background in Rural Damascus governorate, see section 2.11.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

Maps published by several sources indicated that, throughout the reference period of this report, the GoS and affiliated groups were controlling all of the governorate's territory except for a zone in its easternmost section.¹⁴⁸² This so-called US-declared 55-km exclusion zone¹⁴⁸³ around Tanf (the zone also extends into Homs governorate)¹⁴⁸⁴ was being controlled by US troops and MaT.¹⁴⁸⁵ As of March 2022, an estimated 200 US forces were garrisoned at At-Tanf.¹⁴⁸⁶

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

At the time of writing, specific information on SAA deployments in Idlib governorate during the reference period could not be found. Information on particular SAA formations and units deployed in the governorate (before April 2021) is available in previous reports: [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

¹⁴⁷² Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷³ International Crisis Group, Lessons from the Syrian State's Return to the South, 25 February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁷⁴ SADC, Before Mariupol, there was Douma: How Russia's tactics of targeting civilians were transplanted from Syria to Ukraine, 6 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁵ International Crisis Group, Lessons from the Syrian State's Return to the South, 25 February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁷⁶ SNHR, The Syrian Regime's Chemical Attacks on Khan Sheikhoun and Douma Remain with No Accountability for Five Years, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁷⁷ Al Ra'i, N., Facets of Syrian Regime Authority in Eastern Ghouta, EUI, 23 August 2019, [url](#), p. 1-2

¹⁴⁷⁸ Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁴⁷⁹ SADC, UN report on Syrian returnees leaves too much out to be useful, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁰ Syria Report (The), Returnee Numbers Remain Very Low in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad as Looting Continues, 8 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸¹ Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁴⁸² Based on reading of the following maps: Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics | January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 2; UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control in Syria: End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2021, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸³ UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁴ Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁵ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 64

¹⁴⁸⁶ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 64

As of December 2021, SAA's Fourth Armored Division reportedly withdrew from its positions in Eastern Ghouta, which were taken over the Military Security service.¹⁴⁸⁷

More recent information regarding the presence of the SAA and affiliated armed groups in the governorate could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

(b) Russia

A map published by Jusoor for Studies in January 2021 showed several Russian bases as being located in the governorate, including in Douma, near Damascus airport and to the west of Damascus city.¹⁴⁸⁸

(c) Iran and Iran-backed militias

According to a local source quoted by Kurdish media network North Press Agency (NPA) in June 2022, the Damascus region is one of three Syrian regions that are of interest to Iran.¹⁴⁸⁹ A map published by Jusoor for Studies in January 2021 showed multiple Iranian bases/posts as being clustered in the surroundings of Damascus city.¹⁴⁹⁰ Bases or posts run by Lebanese Hezbollah were shown in Sayyida Zainab, at locations north of Damascus city, in Al-Dumayr, and along the Lebanese border, amongst others. Moreover, the map showed that there were several Iranian and Hezbollah bases/posts along the internal border with Quneitra governorate in the southwest.¹⁴⁹¹

In Sayyida Zainab, where an absence of GoS institutions allowed Iranian institutions to expand,¹⁴⁹² there were 'Iranian, Afghan, Pakistani, Iraqi and Lebanese Hizbullah militia elements', each with their own sectors, a local newspaper editor told Salaam Times¹⁴⁹³ in May 2022.¹⁴⁹⁴ As of late 2019, Hezbollah maintained a direct presence in the town, running intelligence centres, operations rooms, prisons and weapons armouries. In addition, dozens of local Shia militias with close links to Hezbollah were based in the town.¹⁴⁹⁵ In December 2021, it was reported that the adjacent Al-Bahdaliya area (Babila district) also saw a presence of Iran-backed militias and their families.¹⁴⁹⁶

Moreover, as of January 2022, the IRGC and Iran-backed militias were reported to be almost exclusively in control of Al-Dimas military airbase west of Damascus city.¹⁴⁹⁷

¹⁴⁸⁷ NPA, Government-Backed Armored Division Withdraws From Rif Dimashq, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁸ Jusoor for Studies, Map of the military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁹ NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁰ Jusoor for Studies, Map of the military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹¹ Jusoor for Studies, Map of the military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹² NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹³ Salaam Times is a news website sponsored by the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM). See [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁴ Salaam Times, Afghan militiamen involved in escalating drug war in Syria, 30 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁵ Ezzi, M., Lebanese Hezbollah's Experience in Syria [source: journalist Raed al-Salhani], EUI, 13 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁹⁶ SOHR, Iran increases presence south Damascus | Afghan families of Iranian proxies leave Palmyra and head to Sayyida Zainab area, 21 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁷ SOHR, SOHR: Hezbollah Expands Old Military Base in Syria, 3 January 2022, [url](#)



(d) Anti-GoS armed groups

Sources interviewed by the DIS in August and September 2020 stated that ISIL and other opposition groups no longer had a presence in Rural Damascus governorate.¹⁴⁹⁸ However, a year later, ISIL claimed an attack on a major gas pipeline southeast of Damascus city in September 2021¹⁴⁹⁹ and two bombings near Kisweh (south of Damascus city) in May 2022.¹⁵⁰⁰

The anti-GoS armed group Saraya Qasioun was reported in previous years to be active in and around Damascus.¹⁵⁰¹ Its activity and even existence was doubted by several sources.¹⁵⁰² During the reporting period, no further information on this group was found.

For further information on past activities of anti-GoS armed groups in Rural Damascus governorate, see section 2.11.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

2.11.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

Security incidents recorded over the reporting period included multiple cases of assassinations and assassination attempts targeting members of GoS military forces and GoS-affiliated militias,¹⁵⁰³ at least one instance of assassination of a former opposition commander,¹⁵⁰⁴ attacks involving IEDs,¹⁵⁰⁵ several attacks by unknown gunmen on SAA checkpoints,¹⁵⁰⁶ and several instances of civilians being killed in infighting between members of GoS forces,¹⁵⁰⁷ community disputes,¹⁵⁰⁸ and gang-related crime.¹⁵⁰⁹ COAR reported that, between May 2021 and May 2022,

¹⁴⁹⁸ Denmark, DIS, Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus, [sources: Syria Direct; Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)], October 2020, [url](#), pp. 35, 52

¹⁴⁹⁹ AFP, IS claims Syria gas pipeline attack, 18 September 2021

¹⁵⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

¹⁵⁰¹ COAR, Deadly Bus Blast Evinces Security Risks in Damascus and Beyond, 25 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰² Denmark, DIS, Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus, [source: Syria Direct], October 2020, [url](#), p. 35; COAR, Deadly Bus Blast Evinces Security Risks in Damascus and Beyond, 25 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰³ SOHR, Western Rif Dimashq | Member of 4th Division stabbed to death in Muadamiyat al-Sham, 20 May 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Reef Dimashq | Regime force lieutenant killed by unknown gunmen in military checkpoint at Lebanese-Syrian borders, 6 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Attempted assassination | Regime-backed militia leader targeted in Rif Dimashq, 9 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Two separate attempted assassinations | Unknown gunmen try to kill leaders of 4th Division and military security local militia in west Damascus, 5 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Fourth crime in Rif Dimashq since early 2022 | Failed assassination attempt of a "political security" volunteer in eastern Ghouta, 12 January 2022, [url](#); Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁴ SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Most prominent military opposition commander shot dead in Jabal Al-Sheikh, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁵ Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#); NPA, Two IED Blasts In Syria's Rif Dimashq Leave Four Casualties, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁶ SOHR, Motor bike attack | Tensions rise in western reef Dimashq after targeting regime forces checkpoint with grenade, 12 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Anti-regime attack | Gunmen open fire on regime checkpoint in Qudsaya, Rif Dimashq, while regime forces amass troops and block the area's entrances, 15 June 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Armed attack | Two members of the 4th Division killed in western Qalamoun, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁷ SOHR, Armed clashes | Child killed and four injured by gunfire and grenade explosions during infighting between two NDF members in western Qalamoun in Rif Dimashq, 26 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁸ SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Dispute over a bread basket killed civilian in western Rif Dimashq, 10 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Growing security chaos in regime-held areas | Family clashes leave injuries in Rif Dimashq, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁹ SOHR, For ransom | Young man killed by a gang in horrific crime in Reef Dimashq, 7 September 2021, [url](#)

several explosions were reported inside Damascus city and its vicinity.¹⁵¹⁰ Haid Haid observed that between April and June 2022, 16 attacks had been reported in and around Damascus, resulting in the deaths of 13 persons affiliated with the GoS. Places in Rural Damascus governorate that witnessed attacks included Qatana, Kisweh, Beit Jinn and Al Worood, Beit Sahm, Hudjara, and Fer Yaboos, Hawsh Nasri, Qudsaya and Sbeneh.¹⁵¹¹

As Haid pointed out, pro-GoS media outlets refrained from reporting on every incident and tended instead 'to downplay the uptick in violence'. Moreover, GoS-supported media 'generally portrayed the targets as civilians', whereas independent news sources reported that the majority of the casualties were GoS fighters or combatants.¹⁵¹²

The reported incidents included two bombings in the countryside of Kisweh (in Deir Khabiye)¹⁵¹³ for which ISIL claimed responsibility.¹⁵¹⁴ The other attacks recorded in the second quarter of 2022 went unclaimed, Haid assessed that it was likely that former rebels (i.e. individuals with the 'motives, skills, and resources to carry out attacks') were behind some of these reported incidents, although it was also possible that some incidents were 'inside jobs' between pro-GoS groups (especially when these involved shootings).¹⁵¹⁵ An instance of deadly infighting between pro-Iranian militiamen reportedly took place in Sayyida Zainab in early May 2022.¹⁵¹⁶ Further reports analysing security trends, especially outside the second quarter of 2022, could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

Airstrikes and missile attacks by Israeli forces on targets in Rural Damascus governorate were reported during the reference period.¹⁵¹⁷ These strikes included attacks targeting locations at or near Damascus International Airport,¹⁵¹⁸ including military posts and warehouses of GoS forces, Iranian troops or Iran-backed militias.¹⁵¹⁹ In addition, the Air-Defence Battalion in Al-Dumayr¹⁵²⁰ (northeast of Damascus city)¹⁵²¹ and the Zakia area (south of Damascus city)¹⁵²² were attacked.

¹⁵¹⁰ COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵¹¹ Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹² Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹³ Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

¹⁵¹⁵ Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁶ NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁷ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, April 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, January 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁸ SOHR, After suspension of attacks for more than a month | Israeli strikes hit military sites in Damascus and middle of Syria, 8 June 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Israeli missiles hitting vicinity of Damascus airport kill four regime fighters and civil servant, 23 May 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Israeli attack on Damascus airport | Runway and control tower sustain damage and air flights transported to Aleppo airport, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁹ SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁰ SOHR, After suspension of attacks for more than a month | Israeli strikes hit military sites in Damascus and middle of Syria, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵²¹ TV 7 Israel News, Syria alleges overnight IDF airstrikes, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵²² Ynetnews, Israel strikes south of Damascus, Syrian state media reports, 17 February 2022, [url](#)



Several persons, including GoS soldiers, allied militia fighters and IRGC members were reportedly killed in these attacks.¹⁵²³

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period there were 202 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Rural Damascus governorate, of whom 36 were battles, 62 explosions/remote violence and 104 incidents of violence against civilians.¹⁵²⁴

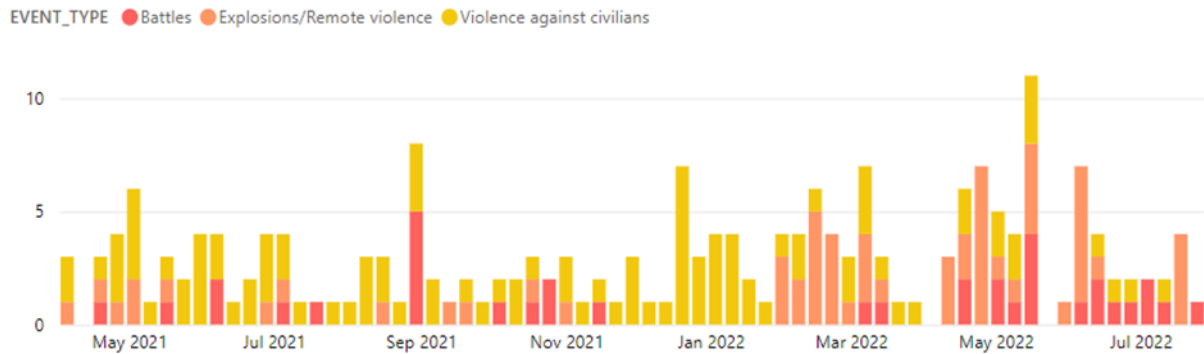


Figure 32: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Rural Damascus governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data¹⁵²⁵

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Al Qutayfah	1	2	1
An Nabk	-	2	-
At Tall	3	-	87
Az-Zabadani	4	4	1
Darayya	1	1	1

¹⁵²³ International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, June 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, February 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁵²⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Duma	14	24	5
Qatana	4	4	2
Rural Damascus	8	23	6
Yabroud	1	2	1
Total	36	62	104

Figure 33: Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Rural Damascus governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data¹⁵²⁶

Most security incidents recorded by ACLED during the reporting period in Rural Damascus were coded as violence against civilians, the highest number being documented in At-Tall district (see Figure 33). However, most incidents of violence against civilians documented in At-Tall concerned information released on deaths of civilians under torture in GoS prisons. Most cases reported referred to civilians who have been under arrest for multiple years.

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Rural Damascus governorate during the reference period for this report includes the following:

- On 6 July 2021, clashes near the town of Kfer Yaboos, allegedly between GoS soldiers and a group of smugglers, resulted in the death of an army officer while leaving four other GoS soldiers injured, according to the opposition website Sowt Al-Asima.¹⁵²⁷
- On 24 February 2022, rocket fire from Israeli forces hit posts and weapons storages of Iran-backed militias near Damascus International Airport and air-defence systems in Kisweh and Sayyida Zainab south of Damascus city, killing seven people, including two GoS soldiers, two Syrians linked to Hezbollah, and three members of Iran-backed militias.¹⁵²⁸
- On 7 March 2022, two IRGC colonels were killed in an Israeli missile attack targeting the outskirts of Damascus city, the IRGC reported.¹⁵²⁹

¹⁵²⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁵²⁷ Sowt Al-Asima, Officer killed, Four Regime Soldiers Injured in Rural Damascus, The Syrian Observer, 7 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁸ SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁹ Al Arabiya, Iran says IRGC members killed in Israeli missile strike in Syria, vows revenge, 9 March 2022, [url](#)



- In early May 2022, seven people, among them a 12-year old child, were killed in Sayyida Zainab during infighting between Iran-backed militants due to disputes over money issues.¹⁵³⁰
- On 16 May 2022, two IEDs exploded in the Deir Khabiyeh area¹⁵³¹ of the Kisweh countryside,¹⁵³² killing two persons and injuring one¹⁵³³ or two others.¹⁵³⁴ As COAR assessed, those killed were ‘members of local militia committees affiliated with the Fourth Division’.¹⁵³⁵ ISIL claimed responsibility for these attacks.¹⁵³⁶
- On 7 July 2022, unidentified gunmen targeted a checkpoint in Assal Al-Ward town in western Qalamoun, killing two members of the SAA 4th Division, SOHR reported.¹⁵³⁷

(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	-	-
February	2	67
March	1	2
April	1	-
May	1	2
June	-	4
July	2	5
August	-	

¹⁵³⁰ NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran’s Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵³¹ NPA, Two IED Blasts In Syria’s Rif Dimashq Leave Four Casualties, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵³² COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵³³ COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵³⁴ NPA, Two IED Blasts In Syria’s Rif Dimashq Leave Four Casualties, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁵ COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵³⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5; COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵³⁷ SOHR, Armed attack | Two members of the 4th Division killed in western Qalamoun, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
September	2	
October	2	
November	-	
December	2	
Total	13	80

Figure 34: Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Rural Damascus governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 13 civilian fatalities¹⁵³⁸ in Rural Damascus governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 80 civilian fatalities (see Figure 34).¹⁵³⁹ Most of the civilian fatalities were documented by SNHR in February 2022, when GoS released death

¹⁵³⁸ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁵³⁹ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9



notifications for persons arrested in previous years who have died in custody. Most of them were originally from Deir al-Asafir town.¹⁵⁴⁰

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

No information on infrastructure damage arising from conflict activities during the reference period could be found within the time constraints of this report. For information on destructions caused by the conflict that ended in Rural Damascus in April 2018 and the (lack of) reconstruction of damaged infrastructure up to March 2021, see section 2.11.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

A Syrian economist interviewed in November 2021 by Al-Mashareq, a news website sponsored by the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), estimated that in Rural Damascus only around 10 % of the debris resulting from the war had been cleared, 'despite government decisions and decrees on the removal of rubble and cracked buildings in preparation for the reconstruction process'.¹⁵⁴¹

The Carter Center reported that, between December 2012 and May 2021, 153 042 explosive munitions were deployed in Rural Damascus governorate and that the governorate showed a 'heavy distribution' of explosive munitions use, with 82.8 % of such munitions in Damascus and Rural Damascus concentrated in the latter area. The source estimated that the use of explosives resulted in a contamination of the governorate by 15 250–46 000 pieces of UXO,¹⁵⁴² although the Mine Action Review noted that UXO clearance efforts by GoS and Russian forces largely went unreported.¹⁵⁴³ Furthermore, in a September 2021 report, Mine Action Review indicated that Rural Damascus was one of 13 governorates that had experienced use of cluster munitions since 2012.¹⁵⁴⁴ In February 2022, the UN Secretary-General reported that mine clearance operations supported by UNMAS had started in Western Ghouta in what was referred to as the 'first humanitarian mine action clearance activities in a government-controlled area' in Syria.¹⁵⁴⁵ As of end of March 2022, the same source reported that a total of 372 000 m² had been cleared of mines since the beginning of the operations.¹⁵⁴⁶

During the reporting period, a number of civilians (including children) were killed in explosions caused by landmines or munitions remnants, including in Douma city,¹⁵⁴⁷ Deir al-Asafir (also

¹⁵⁴⁰ SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁴¹ Al-Mashareq, Neglect, rampant corruption afflict regime-controlled Syria, 15 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴² Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications: December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁵⁴³ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 181

¹⁵⁴⁴ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

¹⁵⁴⁵ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/135, 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 30

¹⁵⁴⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 38

¹⁵⁴⁷ SOHR, Old ordnance | Child killed in landmine explosion nearby Douma city in Rif Dimashq, 31 May 2022, [url](#)

Eastern Ghouta),¹⁵⁴⁸ Jaramana,¹⁵⁴⁹ Az-Zabadani,¹⁵⁵⁰ Harasta city,¹⁵⁵¹ and Yabroud Balkalmon in the north-western part of the governorate.¹⁵⁵² Moreover, in April 2022 two people died when a building in Daraya collapsed, likely as a result of indirect damage caused by nearby bombardment during the war.¹⁵⁵³

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 1 115 922 IDPs in the governorate.¹⁵⁵⁴ In 2021, UNOCHA in Rural Damascus governorate recorded approximately 3 150 IDP movements from the governorate, 846 IDP movements inside the governorate, and 150 IDP movements to the governorate.¹⁵⁵⁵

In 2022, UNOCHA reported 645 IDP departures from and 6 IDP arrivals to Rural Damascus governorate in January,¹⁵⁵⁶ 381 departures and no arrivals in February,¹⁵⁵⁷ 577 departures and no arrivals in March,¹⁵⁵⁸ 754 departures and 55 arrivals in April,¹⁵⁵⁹ and 348 departures and 74 arrivals to the governorate.¹⁵⁶⁰

As regards returns, in 2021 UNOCHA recorded for Rural Damascus governorate approximately 8 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from the governorate, 21 000 IDP return movements inside the governorate, and 1 000 IDP returnee movements to the governorate.¹⁵⁶¹ In 2022, UNOCHA recorded approximately 500 spontaneous IDP returns from and 500 returns to the governorate in January,¹⁵⁶² around 500 returns from and 200 to the governorate in February,¹⁵⁶³ some 640 returns from and 1 640 returns to the governorate in March,¹⁵⁶⁴ 200 returns from and 200 returns to the governorate in April,¹⁵⁶⁵ and 400 returns from and 100 returns to the governorate in May.¹⁵⁶⁶

In December 2021, the GoS allowed residents of Hajar al-Aswad to return to their homes upon receiving approval from the governorate's authorities.¹⁵⁶⁷ However, according to the Syria Report, as of early March 2022 only 40 families had been able to return to the 'nearly deserted

¹⁵⁴⁸ SOHR, War ordnance | Child killed in explosion in Rif Dimashq, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁹ PRC, Palestinian Refugee Child Killed by Explosive Ordnance in Syria Displacement Camp, 25 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁰ SOHR, Old ordnance | Child killed and another injured in landmine explosion in Rif Dimashq, 20 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵¹ SOHR, Second case in 24 hours | Landmine explosion kills civilian in Rif Dimashq, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵² SOHR, War remnants | Shell explosion kills three civilians including woman in Rif Dimashq, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵³ Syria Report (The), Building Collapses in Darayya After Indirect Damage from Prior Bombing, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁴ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁵⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶¹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶² UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁷ SADC, UN report on Syrian returnees leaves too much out to be useful, 12 January 2022, [url](#)





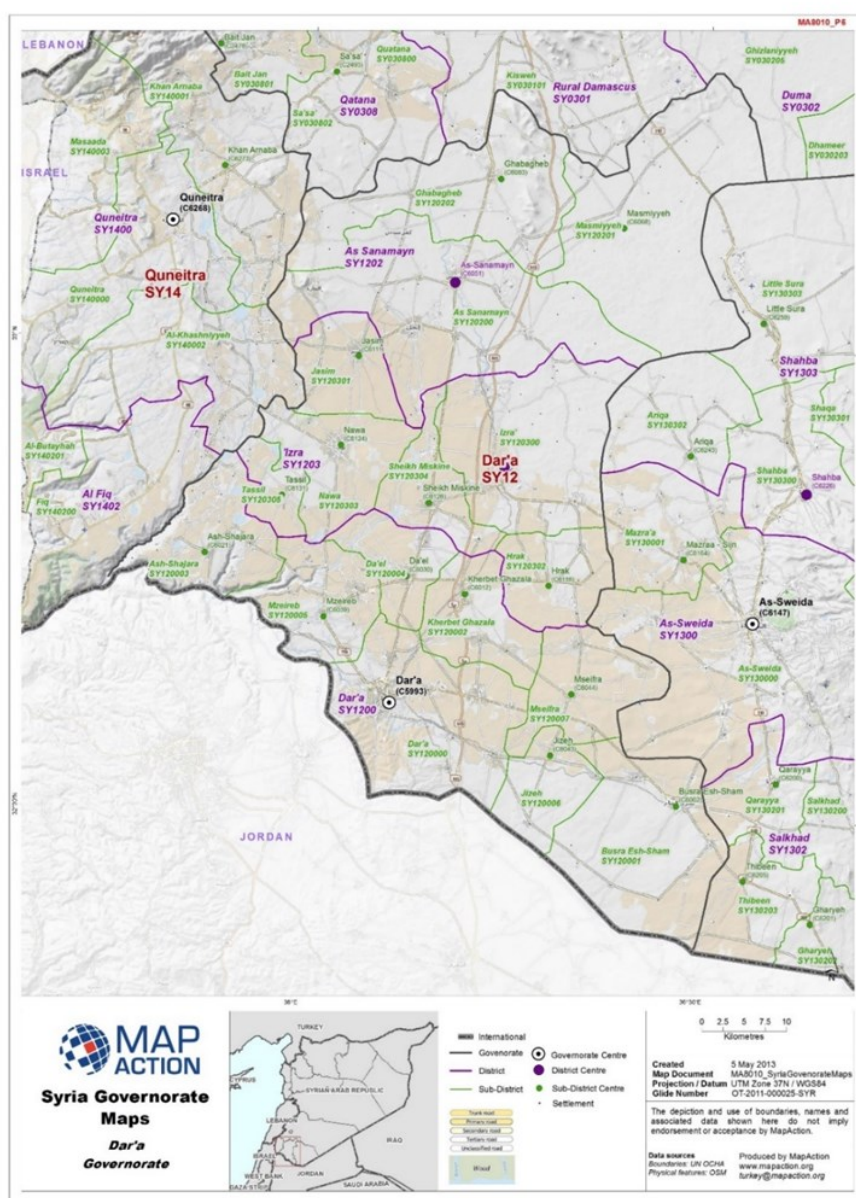
town', 'as rubble still covers large areas of the town and basic public services remain absent'.¹⁵⁶⁸
A Syrian economist interviewed by Al-Mashareq news website in November 2021 indeed explained that the limited clearance of debris from the war in Rural Damascus governorate contributed to the small number of persons returning to war-affected areas and has in fact 'caused dozens of families to move to other areas'.¹⁵⁶⁹

¹⁵⁶⁸ Syria Report (The), Returnee Numbers Remain Very Low in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad as Looting Continues, 8 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁹ Al-Mashareq, Neglect, rampant corruption afflict regime-controlled Syria, 15 November 2021, [url](#)



2.12. Dar'a governorate



Map 18: © MapAction, Dar'a governorate¹⁵⁷⁰

2.12.1. General description of the governorate

Dar'a governorate is located in the southern part of Syria, below Damascus, sharing borders with the governorates of Quneitra to the west, Rural Damascus to the north, Sweida to the east and an international border with Jordan to its south. Dar'a governorate is comprised of

¹⁵⁷⁰ MapAction, Dar'a governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

the three administrative districts of Dar'a, Izra' and As-Sanamayn.¹⁵⁷¹ Each district is subdivided further into sub-districts:

- Dar'a district: Dar'a, Jizeh, Bushra Esh-Sham, Mseifra, Kherbet Ghazala, Da'eel, Mzeireb, Ash Shajara, Dar'a City is the governorate capital;
- As Sanamayn district: As Sanamayn [includes district capital], Ghabagheb, Massimiyyeh;
- Izra' district: Izra', Hrak, Sheikh Miskine, Nawa [district capital is Nawa town], Jassim, Tassil.¹⁵⁷²

According to 2022 estimates by UNOCHA, the population of Dar'a governorate was 1 025 484 inhabitants.¹⁵⁷³ The last official estimations of the Syrian Bureau of Statistics from 2021 numbered the population of Dar'a approximately 966 430.¹⁵⁷⁴

Dar'a governorate is strategically important as a transit route between Syria, Jordan, and Gulf states, because of the border to the Golan Heights.¹⁵⁷⁵ The M5 highway passes through the governorate connecting Damascus to Jordan, and leads northwards connecting Aleppo to the north.¹⁵⁷⁶

In recent years drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased in the south of Syria¹⁵⁷⁷, including in Dar'a governorate. COAR concludes in its July 2022 report that 'Dar'a governorate can be understood both as a key drug production region and as the main thoroughfare for the transit of Syrian [...] narcotics into Jordan, and from there, towards the Gulf.'¹⁵⁷⁸

2.12.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The governorate of Dar'a, where the first protests against the Assad government began in 2011,¹⁵⁷⁹ played a significant role in the conflict as an opposition stronghold.¹⁵⁸⁰ In 2018 however, the GoS was able to regain control over the area with the support of Russia through a combination of military campaigns,¹⁵⁸¹ and reconciliation agreements with opposition

¹⁵⁷¹ Based on UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas. Syrian Arab Republic, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁷² UNOCHA, Dar'a Governorate Reference Map, December 2015, [url](#); Alternative spellings can be found in: Integrity Research and Consultancy, Research Summary Report: Local Governance in Dara'a Governorate, August 2014, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁵⁷³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁵⁷⁴ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁵⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Dar'a Governorate Reference Map, December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁷ Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁸ COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁵⁷⁹ Integrity Research and Consultancy, Research Summary Report: Local Governance in Dara'a Governorate, August 2014, [url](#), p. 6; UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁵⁸⁰ Guardian (The), Syria: Assad shells former opposition stronghold Deraa, 29 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸¹ COAR, Southwestern Dar'a: Needs Oriented Strategic Area Profile (NOSAP), September 2019, [url](#), p. 12; COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

factions.¹⁵⁸² During the negotiations, the GoS-affiliated Security Committee represented the interests of the government¹⁵⁸³, while locals were represented by negotiation committees, consisting of ‘opposition figures, former rebel leaders and local notables’. Two major committees were established in Tafas and Dar’a al-Balad.¹⁵⁸⁴ The latter was known as the Central Committee of Dar’a (DCC).¹⁵⁸⁵ Since 2018, the governorate was hence nominally under the control of the GoS¹⁵⁸⁶, while its control in certain parts of the governorate, such as Tafas¹⁵⁸⁷ and Dar’a al-Balad, was limited by the de facto semi-autonomy, allowing locals to take care of ‘local affairs and to continue to manifest opposition’.¹⁵⁸⁸ The influence of the GoS was limited in 2018 by the acceptance to have restrictions on its presence of military and security forces from ‘the areas that participated in the negotiations’,¹⁵⁸⁹ including Dar’a al-Balad and Tafas.¹⁵⁹⁰

In the western part of the governorate, where negotiations and agreements took place in Tafas and ‘its surrounding areas’, large numbers of former rebels were reported to have rejected the agreement and stayed unreconciled ‘or have signed contracts to join the ranks of the regime’s military and security forces as an ostensible tactic to guarantee security, continue possessing their light weapons and remain in their localities’.¹⁵⁹¹

Over the years, the demands of locals asked for in the agreements of 2018 have not been met in the eyes of the Daarawi population. From June 2019 onwards, through 2020 as well as 2021, the governorate’s strategic geographical location¹⁵⁹² combined with a ‘weak regime control’ in the south¹⁵⁹³ led to an increase of assassinations, clashes and overall insecurity.¹⁵⁹⁴ Foreign actors expanded their influence in the area, particularly Israel at the armistice line with

¹⁵⁸² Syria Direct, Months into new Daraa settlement, assassinations continue unabated, 29 December 2021, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸³ Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime’s control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁴ Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 2, fn. 2

¹⁵⁸⁵ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁵⁸⁶ Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁷ Asia Times, Assad’s strategy in southern Syria fated to fail, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁸ Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁵⁸⁹ Syrian Observer (The), Jabassini: Regime Negotiates Deployment of Eighth Brigade in Daraa al-Balad, 30 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁰ Asia Times, Assad’s strategy in southern Syria fated to fail, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹¹ Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁹² SOHR, Daraa in one year: security chaos, overlapping interests and hidden conflict... people suffer the scourge of external and internal interventions, 25 June 2020, [url](#); Tokmajyan, A., How Southern Syria Has Been Transformed Into a Regional Powder Keg, Carnegie Middle East Center, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹³ Tokmajyan, A., How Southern Syria Has Been Transformed Into a Regional Powder Keg, Carnegie Middle East Center, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁴ Al-Ghazi, S., Insecurity In Southern Syria: Tracking Daraa, Quneitra and Suwayda (January – February 2021), ORSAM, March 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2; SOHR, Daraa in one year: security chaos, overlapping interests and hidden conflict... people suffer the scourge of external and internal interventions, 25 June 2020, [url](#); Syria Direct, Months into new Daraa settlement, assassinations continue unabated, 29 December 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11



the Golan Heights, as well as Iran and Russia, who engaged in ‘an indirect competition for influence in the region’.¹⁵⁹⁵

Further information on the conflict background and actors in Dar’a is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

As of August 2021, the 4th Division was present in ‘Daraa city, Daraa western countryside, al-Yarmouk Basin’.¹⁵⁹⁶ According to Syria Direct, the 4th Division had a limited presence in the governorate after the settlement agreements in September 2021, while increasing its presence again in mid-May 2022 by opening recruiting offices.¹⁵⁹⁷

The Tiger Forces¹⁵⁹⁸ were reported in August 2021 to be present in Dar’a city and having weapons, armoury and artillery to their use, while having excellent relations to Russia and good ties to Iran.¹⁵⁹⁹

As of August 2021, the Air Force Intelligence and Military Security Branch were present throughout the governorate, using light and medium weapons and fostering excellent ties to Iran, while balancing good relations with Russia. The NDF as well as the Local Defense Forces¹⁶⁰⁰ were reported to be primarily present in the northern and western countryside while being in possession of light and medium weapons.¹⁶⁰¹

COAR reported that the 4th Division, Hezbollah, and the Military Intelligence within Dar’a governorate were deeply involved in drug production as well as drug trafficking, especially concerning Captagon.¹⁶⁰²

¹⁵⁹⁵ SOHR, Daraa in one year: security chaos, overlapping interests and hidden conflict... people suffer the scourge of external and internal interventions, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁶ Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁵⁹⁷ Syria Direct, Southern Syria’s drug war: Jordan’s options ‘limited’ as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁸ The Tiger forces were described in 2018 as a ‘Syrian Air Intelligence-affiliated militia fighting for the Syrian government and backed by Russia.’ While in 2019, the militia was reportedly integrated in the SAA as the 25th Special Task Forces Division. Waters, G., The Tiger Forces - Pro-Assad Fighters Backed By Russia, MEI, October 2018, [url](#), p. 4/Summary; Waters, G., The 25th Division: Syria’s Tiger Forces get Rebranded. International Review, 20 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁹ Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶⁰⁰ The Local Defense Forces (LDF) are the largest Iran-backed armed forces within Syria. They consist of different militias and are integrated in the SAA. In 2020, they reportedly consisted of 50 000 fighters.

Navvar, S., Factbox: Iranian influence and presence in Syria, Atlantic Council, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

Despite its integration into the SAA in 2017 the LDF remained lead by and dependent on Iran.

Enab Baladi, The Syrian Army: Between Russian control and Iranian infiltration, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰¹ Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶⁰² COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria’s Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-9

(b) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia operated four security and military points within the governorate at the end of 2021.¹⁶⁰³ In August 2021, the STJ noted that the Russian Military Police had posts in Dar'a city as well as Izra' and Busra al-Sham and did 'conduct patrols in the rest of the province'.¹⁶⁰⁴ A May 2022 report of the Turkey-based think tank ORSAM stated that there were no military bases or camps under direct Russian control in the south of Syria.¹⁶⁰⁵

According to some sources Russia decreased its troops in the south since February 2022¹⁶⁰⁶, were they had a rather strong presence in the last years of the conflict. Included in the withdrawal were 'mercenaries affiliated with the Wagner company' as well as '200 soldiers from the pro-Russian 5th Division'.¹⁶⁰⁷ These reports remained unconfirmed.¹⁶⁰⁸

For a long time, the Russian forces in Dar'a were perceived as a mediator by the former anti-GoS opposition. However this perception was challenged in the siege of Dar'a al-Balad in June and July 2021, when Russian troops were said to have a leading role in the siege.¹⁶⁰⁹ Russia also played a major role as a main mediator in the settling of the siege of Dar'a al-Balad.¹⁶¹⁰ COAR argued that the developments in the governorate, especially the siege of Dar'a al-Balad, indicated a shift in Russia's approach in the south from a conciliatory role towards a more aggressive stance.¹⁶¹¹

The Russian-backed 5th Corps of the SAA composed of the reconciled former opposition armed groups and fighters was created to prevent 'security vacuums' in Dar'a and contain Iranian influence in the area.¹⁶¹² The 8th Brigade of the 5th Corps in Dar'a had a large presence in the eastern rural parts of Dar'a, as the main influential armed actor.¹⁶¹³ It had its main stronghold in Busra al-Sham¹⁶¹⁴ and controlled in August 2021 also the town Ma'araba according to STJ.¹⁶¹⁵ It coordinated with Russia exclusively¹⁶¹⁶ and remained hostile to Iran and the GoS.¹⁶¹⁷ However, in October 2021 local media outlets reported on the dismantling of the

¹⁶⁰³ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁴ STJ, Syria: A Timeline of the Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 27 August 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶⁰⁵ Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁰⁶ Enab Baladi, [دراعا، سوريا جنوبية تتركز نقاط تخطي روسيا](#) [Dar'a...Russia evacuates outposts in southern Syria], 24 May 2022, [url](#); Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁰⁷ Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁰⁸ Prasad, H., Blog: Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Complicates the Situation in Syria, Carter Center (The), 7 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶¹⁰ STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 6-11

¹⁶¹¹ COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹² COAR, Southwestern Dar'a: Needs Oriented Strategic Area Profile (NOSAP), September 2019, [url](#), p. 40

¹⁶¹³ COAR, Security Archipelago: Security Fragmentation in Dar'a Governorate, 3 December 2019, [url](#), p. 12; STJ, Syria: A Timeline of the Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 27 August 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶¹⁴ Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶¹⁵ STJ, Syria: A Timeline of the Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 27 August 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶¹⁶ COAR, Security Archipelago: Security Fragmentation in Dar'a Governorate, 3 December 2019, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁶¹⁷ Haid, H., Russia maintains grip on Syria despite Ukraine commitments, Arab News, 17 June 2022, [url](#)



8th Brigade¹⁶¹⁸ and its far-reaching integration into the Military Security branch.¹⁶¹⁹ COAR reported on 8 November 2021, that the 8th Brigade was to be dissolved in the countryside and integrated into military structures, while it would remain in the city of Busra al-Sham.¹⁶²⁰ According to Syria Direct as of June 2022, the 8th Brigade is now affiliated with the Military Intelligence Division 238, located in Sweida.¹⁶²¹

(c) Iran and Iranian-backed armed groups

According to Jusoor for Studies, Iranian-affiliated forces and Hezbollah operated 22 military and security points within the Dar'a governorate, at the end of 2021.¹⁶²² Sources interviewed by Syria Direct indicated the presence of Iran and Hezbollah in Dar'a, especially in the western countryside close to the Golan heights and the Jordanian border.¹⁶²³ Hezbollah presence was further reported in the al-Lajat area in southern Dar'a countryside¹⁶²⁴, on the Dar'a-Damascus highway, and in the eastern and western countryside.¹⁶²⁵ Hezbollah was reportedly involved in drug production and trafficking in Dar'a governorate,¹⁶²⁶ which led to protests among the population.¹⁶²⁷

Several reports assume that Iranian(-backed) forces would try to fill the void left in case of a decreasing Russian presence in the south of Syria.¹⁶²⁸ In May 2022 Ahram Online reported information from a defected Syrian army officer that the number of military points controlled by Iranian-affiliated militias in the south more than doubled to a number of approximately 150 in the last two years.¹⁶²⁹ This information could not be corroborated.

¹⁶¹⁸ Syrian Observer (The)/Al-Souria Net, Russia Ceases Financial Support to Daraa Eighth Brigade, 14 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁹ Horan Free League, [الرياح مهب](#) "في اللواء: الثامن اللواء في قيادي" [A commander in the Eighth Brigade: The Brigade is in 'the wind' and the files of its members are in the Military Intelligence Directorate], 11 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁰ COAR, Syria Update, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²¹ Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶²² Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²³ Syria Direct, Months into new Daraa settlement, assassinations continue unabated, 29 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁴ Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁵ Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶²⁶ Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7; COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁶²⁷ NPA, People In Syria's Daraa Take To Street Against Iran, 15 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁸ Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7; Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine, Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁹ Ahram Online, Russian withdrawal threats to Syria, 28 May 2022, [url](#)

(d) ISIL

ISIL reportedly still has a presence¹⁶³⁰ in Dar'a with activities especially taking place in the southwest of the governorate¹⁶³¹ and the presence of sleeper cells in the governorate.¹⁶³² According to the International Crisis Group, cells are not necessarily connected to the overall network in Syria, but could be 'remnants of a historically isolated ISIS affiliate that controlled parts of the Yarmouk river basin at the intersection of the Syrian, Israeli and Jordanian borders'.¹⁶³³ According to a report of the UN Security Council, one member state shared estimations of more than 300 fighters within Dar'a 'in addition to sleeper cells located around the Hawran mountains'.¹⁶³⁴ ISIL-linked groups reportedly conducted a number of assassinations within Dar'a in 2022, including the killing of the DCC member Musab al-Bardan¹⁶³⁵, which entailed a number of retaliation killings.¹⁶³⁶

2.12.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

The security situation in Dar'a governorate deteriorated during the reporting period,¹⁶³⁷ while the security control remained fragmented with GoS having 'only tenuous control'.¹⁶³⁸

During the reporting period high numbers of assassinations and attacks on individuals were reported.¹⁶³⁹ While most of the conflict incidents, attacks and assassinations targeting 'GoS officials and former opposition fighters' with local influence were reportedly conducted by

¹⁶³⁰ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1, fn. 2; UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

¹⁶³¹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

¹⁶³² Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶³³ International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1, fn. 2

¹⁶³⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 36

¹⁶³⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 19; Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#); Al-Jabassini, Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 23

¹⁶³⁸ Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹⁶³⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7; New Arab (The), Former Baath official, relatives killed in southern Syria: reports, 28 June 2022, [url](#)



‘unidentified armed actors’, GoS officials and former opposition members accuse each other of perpetrating the attacks.¹⁶⁴⁰ In the period running up to the presidential elections in May 2021 assassinations and killings attempts rose.¹⁶⁴¹ The Carter Center counted up to 123 attacks on GoS-members and former opposition members in Dar’a in the second quarter of 2021.¹⁶⁴² The overall increase in violence was accompanied by the refusal of several communities to participate in the elections.¹⁶⁴³ In Tafas, Dar’a al-Balad and Busra al-Sham no voting took place as a way of protest against the GoS¹⁶⁴⁴ and to emphasize the wish of semi-autonomy in the governorate.¹⁶⁴⁵

Siege of Dar’a al-Balad and other locations

As part of the reconciliation agreements concluded in communities in Dar’a in 2018, some former opposition fighters were allowed to defer military conscription, keep light weapons and hence ‘allowed to remain active’.¹⁶⁴⁶ In the aftermath of the presidential elections in May 2021 and in an attempt to restore its security grip and its influence over the area¹⁶⁴⁷, the GoS demanded the surrender of ‘light personal weapons’¹⁶⁴⁸, which the Central Committee of Dar’a (DCC) rejected¹⁶⁴⁹, as well as the transfer of wanted individuals.¹⁶⁵⁰ In reaction, the GoS-forces on 24 June 2021 started to blockade roads and supply routes to Dar’a al-Balad¹⁶⁵¹, a neighbourhood of Dar’a city where reconciled opposition groups have been in partial control.¹⁶⁵² The resulting siege of the area that restricted the supply of food and electricity,¹⁶⁵³ lasted for ten weeks while the GoS increased pressure by military shelling.¹⁶⁵⁴ With only the

¹⁶⁴⁰ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 10; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁶⁴¹ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 11; Reuters, Syria’s Assad wins 4th term with 95% of vote, in election the West calls fraudulent, 28 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴² Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 7-9

¹⁶⁴³ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁴ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁵ COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁶ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

¹⁶⁴⁷ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁴⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 23

¹⁶⁴⁹ The Central Committee of Dar’a is ‘a group composed of former opposition fighters negotiating with Russia and the GoS about local governance grievances’, Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶⁵⁰ Al- Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 8; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 21

¹⁶⁵¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 21; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶⁵² COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 23; Al Bawaba, Assad Regime Imposes Full Siege on Daraa, 28 June 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 24

Saraya entry to the neighbourhood being partially open since 12 August 2021¹⁶⁵⁵, people had to bear 'invasive security checks'¹⁶⁵⁶, pay bribes to access and leave the area and had only very limited access to food, water and electricity.¹⁶⁵⁷ The only medical centre consisting of one makeshift clinic was damaged during the shelling and was closed and declared inoperable on 27 July 2021.¹⁶⁵⁸ Shelling as well as a ground offensive by the GoS-forces started at the end of July 2021 when local opposition groups refused to agree to the conditions demanded by the GoS.¹⁶⁵⁹

The DCC and the GoS-affiliated Security Committee reached a first agreement to end the siege of Dar'a al-Balad on 24 July.¹⁶⁶⁰ The agreement 'collapsed' on 27 July 2021, leading to a ground offensive and renewed shelling of the besieged area by the GoS and its affiliated forces such as Hezbollah and other militias.¹⁶⁶¹ The UNCOI reported the usage of 'improvised rocket-assisted munitions as well as other unguided rocket artillery' by the GoS-affiliated forces, which are reported to be 'highly inaccurate'.¹⁶⁶² Furthermore, fighting between local forces and GoS-forces broke out in numerous towns and villages in the governorate, including al-Yadoudah, Umm al-Miadin, Tafas, al-Karak and Nawa, resulting in several deaths.¹⁶⁶³ Various towns became targets for GoS-shelling.¹⁶⁶⁴

GoS and the DCC signed another agreement in early September 2021.¹⁶⁶⁵ In this agreement the complete surrender of weapons, the establishment of nine GoS-operated checkpoints within Dar'a al-Balad, status settling for wanted individuals, the postponement of military services for draft evaders, as well as the presence of GoS-forces in specified locations within Dar'a al-Balad, were stipulated.¹⁶⁶⁶ Furthermore, about 70 opposition figures had to resettle with their families to areas in northern Syria, which are not controlled by the GoS.¹⁶⁶⁷ The siege and violence accompanying it were the 'largest and deadliest confrontation in the governorate since the 2018 takeover'.¹⁶⁶⁸ In October 2021, STJ published a list of more than 40 names of

¹⁶⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Syria. Dara'a Flash Update 3, Hostilities in Dara'a Governorate, As of 23 August 2021, 23 August 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 28

¹⁶⁵⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 01 July 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 23

¹⁶⁵⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 25

¹⁶⁵⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 24

¹⁶⁶⁰ STJ, Syria: A Timeline of the Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 27 August 2021, [url](#), pp. 7-9

In the agreement the GoS-Security Committee and the Central Committee of Dar'a stipulated the surrender of some 70 personal weapons (instead of the demanded 200), the establishment of renewed status settlement processes for individuals in the governorate, and the setup of three GoS-checkpoints operated by the Military security and former opposition members together. COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶¹ STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 27

¹⁶⁶³ STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁶⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 02, 27 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2; STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶⁶⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 5, 32

¹⁶⁶⁶ STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12

¹⁶⁶⁷ SADC, Did Daraa mark the end of reconciliation agreements in Syria?, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁸ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 9



locals, mostly civilians, killed in the siege.¹⁶⁶⁹ GoS-forces established checkpoints in the reconciled areas, including Dar'a al-Balad and other towns and communities in the governorate.¹⁶⁷⁰ The developments thus left more GoS-forces present in the governorate, with the exception of the south-eastern part, which is a stronghold of the 8th Brigade.¹⁶⁷¹

In the village of al-Yadoudah, in the northwest of Dar'a al-Balad local fighters attacked GoS-checkpoints on 27 July 2021, reportedly in support of the besieged people in Dar'a al-Balad. On 29 July 2021, the GoS responded with the shelling of areas in al-Yadoudah, resulting in several casualties.¹⁶⁷² Following disagreements concerning the transfer of weapons by local forces to the GoS, the town of Jasim was also besieged, with its main roads blocked and shelling of residential areas according to Enab Baladi.¹⁶⁷³

The agreement reached in Dar'a al-Balad was in similar forms replicated in agreements and status settlement processes in other restive towns in the governorate.¹⁶⁷⁴ According to Enab Baladi the agreement was first replicated in al-Yadoudah in the western part of Dar'a.¹⁶⁷⁵ Starting with Jasim more towns and areas in the north reconciled and 'the regime forces settled the security status of hundreds of people from the Daraa northern countryside, with the city of al-Sanamayn being the last to join the settlements with the regime.'¹⁶⁷⁶

In November 2021, UNOCHA reported that agreements were reached in approximately 51 communities across the governorate and that one quarter of these were met in the sub-district of al-Shajarah.¹⁶⁷⁷ Hundreds of residents and members of the 8th Brigade reportedly made use of the settlement processes during the initial time of status settlement activities in the governorate, which ended on 25 October and continued in a smaller scale in bigger cities in Dar'a.¹⁶⁷⁸ Reports mentioned by the UNCOI estimated that more than 12 000 people from Dar'a governorate reconciled through those processes and approximately 1 700 weapons were surrendered.¹⁶⁷⁹

Although many reconciliation agreements were already met and violent incidents decreased significantly in September 2021¹⁶⁸⁰, there were different incidents like temporary road blockades to the towns al-Sura, al-Jizah and Alma as well as al-Hrak city resulting from the negotiation process between 14 and 21 October 2021.¹⁶⁸¹ Moreover, weeks after the agreed

¹⁶⁶⁹ STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 13-14

¹⁶⁷⁰ Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷¹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 10; Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶⁷² Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷³ Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁴ STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁶⁷⁵ Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁶ Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁷⁸ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 20

¹⁶⁸⁰ Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁸¹ UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 2

establishment of nine GoS-operated security checkpoints in Dar'a al-Balad, the GoS dissolved three of those.¹⁶⁸² The increase in tensions in 2022 led to the GoS 'tightening security' in proximity to the governorate capital including reinforcement of troops.¹⁶⁸³

On 22 July 2022, GoS-forces reportedly 'clashed with former opposition leaders known for their affiliation to ISIL in al-Yadoudah'.¹⁶⁸⁴ At the end of July 2022, the GoS demanded the surrender of wanted people from Dar'a governorate, which was refused by the population. On 27 July 2022, GoS-troops encircled and cut off the town of Tafas and started shelling Tafas as well as the town of al-Yadoudah. One day later a ceasefire-deal was reached between representatives of Tafas and the GoS,¹⁶⁸⁵ which collapsed shortly after.¹⁶⁸⁶ In the agreement, the negotiating parties agreed on the surrender of the wanted individuals and the withdrawal of the GoS-forces from the town after searching certain houses. The situation remained tense, with the town being cut off by road blockades and shelled by GoS-forces for more than two weeks. As of 15 August 2022,¹⁶⁸⁷ the situation had somewhat stabilised amid reports of a preliminary agreement being reached between the parties.¹⁶⁸⁸

Continuing tensions, assassinations, and attacks

Despite the settlement agreements insecurity prevailed in Dar'a.¹⁶⁸⁹ In 2021, Dar'a had the highest proportion of homicides in all of Syria, with 115 out of a total of 414, according to an EUI report.¹⁶⁹⁰ The Horan Free League, a local pro-opposition media platform, reported on an overall of 637 killings in 2021, with a peak in July (106) and August (90), but quite constant levels between 59 and 67 cases each in the months of September until December 2021. Accordingly, almost half of the victims were reported to be civilians.¹⁶⁹¹

According to the Carter Center, the overall conflict incidents decreased in the months following the reconciliation agreements of September 2021, while reports on 'attacks on former opposition fighters doubled from the 3rd quarter'.¹⁶⁹² Following this increase of violence between opposition groups and pro-GoS forces in Dar'a al-Balad, tensions were rising in communities all over the governorate in November and December 2021 with 'numerous reported improvised explosive device attacks and instances of targeted or retaliatory killings on both sides'.¹⁶⁹³ The UN Security Council reported in December 2021 and January 2022 on

¹⁶⁸² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸³ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁴ COAR, Syria Update, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁵ New Arab (The), As violence proliferates in Syria's south, cracks appear in regime-held areas, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁶ Asia Times, Assad's strategy in southern Syria fated to fail, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁷ NPA, Calm in Syria's Daraa Following Reports Of Agreement, 15 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁸ NPA, Preliminary Deal Between Government, Locals West Of Syria's Daraa, 13 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, Calm in Syria's Daraa Following Reports Of Agreement, 15 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁹ New Arab (The), Former Baath official, relatives killed in southern Syria: reports, 28 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁰ Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁹¹ Horan Free League, سقوط التسوية - تقرير حقوقي [The Fall of the settlement – A human rights report], 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁶⁹² Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-10

¹⁶⁹³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 33



‘targeted killings of civilians and former members of non-State armed opposition groups’.¹⁶⁹⁴ Syria Direct reported in December 2021 that the highest number of a purported escalation of assassinations took place in western Dar’a countryside.¹⁶⁹⁵

Covering the second half of 2021, the UNCOI noted that the course of action of the assailants targeting opposition members was ‘consistent with previously identified patterns of targeted killings’, whereby ‘victims were shot with small arms by individuals riding motorcycles or other vehicles.’¹⁶⁹⁶ During the period from February to May 2022, the UN Security Council reported further continuing violence in the overall south-western region of Syria, consisting of ‘improvised explosive device attacks’, gunfights, assassinations, kidnappings, as well as clashes of limited extend.¹⁶⁹⁷ The New Arab reported that violence escalated in April 2022, when reportedly more than 50 people were assassinated. The targets were primarily ‘civilians or former-opposition fighters given amnesty by the regime’ while 20 casualties were reportedly GoS-affiliates.¹⁶⁹⁸

Furthermore, the Carter Center reported on increasing attacks on former opposition members as well as GoS-soldiers during the first half of 2022, documenting 171 attacks during this period, with a peak in April 2022. Most of the targets of unclaimed attacks were ‘officials and soldiers associated with various GoS armed groups.’¹⁶⁹⁹ In March¹⁷⁰⁰ and April¹⁷⁰¹ 2022, the GoS deployed additional forces to the region in response to the exacerbating security situation.¹⁷⁰² According to Etana, the GoS increased pressure primarily on former opposition strongholds in Jasim and Dar’a al-Balad in March 2022, while threatening with another military escalation.¹⁷⁰³

Drug smuggling and increase of criminal activities, including kidnappings

The security situation was further aggravated by the prevalence of drugs.¹⁷⁰⁴ According to New Lines Institute, Captagon manufacturing sites are located in various GoS-held territories,

¹⁶⁹⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), [S/2022/135], 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 22

¹⁶⁹⁵ Syria Direct, Months into new Daraa settlement, assassinations continue unabated, 29 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 33

¹⁶⁹⁷ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹⁶⁹⁸ New Arab (The), 51 killed in Syria’s Daraa province in April as violence escalates, 2 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-12

¹⁷⁰⁰ Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – South Syria – 12 May 2022, 12 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰² Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – South Syria – 12 May 2022, 12 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰³ Etana Syria: Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 April 2022, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁴ Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 7-8

including Dar'a.¹⁷⁰⁵ Routes through Dar'a as well as Sweida are used to smuggle Captagon to Jordan and further to the Gulf states.¹⁷⁰⁶ GoS-forces, especially the 4th Division are reportedly linked to the drug trafficking assisted by Hezbollah.¹⁷⁰⁷ The Military Intelligence was reported to be an important actor in production and transport as well.¹⁷⁰⁸ The 4th Division, Hezbollah and the Military Intelligence were relying on local actors to carry out the drug trafficking. In Dar'a these actors consist primarily of 'rebels turned regime collaborators'¹⁷⁰⁹ that are often backed by a local militia.¹⁷¹⁰ An EUI report pointed out that individuals, who have been prompted to refrain from their drug smuggling activities, were killed in Dar'a.¹⁷¹¹ According to Syria Direct, individuals involved in drug trafficking were increasingly targeted in southern Syria since May 2022, while it is unclear who is conducting this supposed campaign.¹⁷¹² A COAR report cited the case of an unnamed group that has been facing attacks because of its involvement in drug trafficking.¹⁷¹³

In general, Al-Jabassini reported increasing criminal activities like '[t]heft, homicide, robbery, mugging, and profit kidnapping (especially of children)' at the beginning of 2022.¹⁷¹⁴ Gangs were conducting kidnappings for ransom in the governorate. On 2 November 2021 for example, an eight-year-old boy was abducted on his way home from school and held for three months until his family paid an enormous ransom for his release in February 2022. During this time, he was reportedly mistreated and tortured.¹⁷¹⁵

Tribal and cross-border conflicts

Tribes also clash in some incidents, for example on 25 June 2021, when the tribes of al-Zoubi and al-Kiwan clashed in Tafas over the alleged killing of a member of the Kiwan tribe.¹⁷¹⁶ In addition, tensions between residents of Dar'a and neighbouring Sweida prevailed in the reporting period.¹⁷¹⁷ for further information see section [2.14.3](#).

¹⁷⁰⁵ New Lines Institute, Intelligence Briefing – The Captagon Threat – A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, April 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁷⁰⁶ Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷⁰⁷ New Lines Institute, Intelligence Briefing – The Captagon Threat – A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, April 2022, [url](#), pp. 17, 19; Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7; Syria Direct, Who is assassinating suspected drug traffickers in southern Syria?, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁸ COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-9

¹⁷⁰⁹ Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷¹⁰ COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁷¹¹ Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷¹² Syria Direct, Who is assassinating suspected drug traffickers in southern Syria?, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷¹³ COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁷¹⁴ Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷¹⁵ BBC News, Syria: Kidnapped boy released after video of beating sparks outcry, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 01 July 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁷ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 14



(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 965 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Dar'a governorate, of whom 383 were coded as battles, 268 explosions/remote violence and 314 incidents of violence against civilians.¹⁷¹⁸

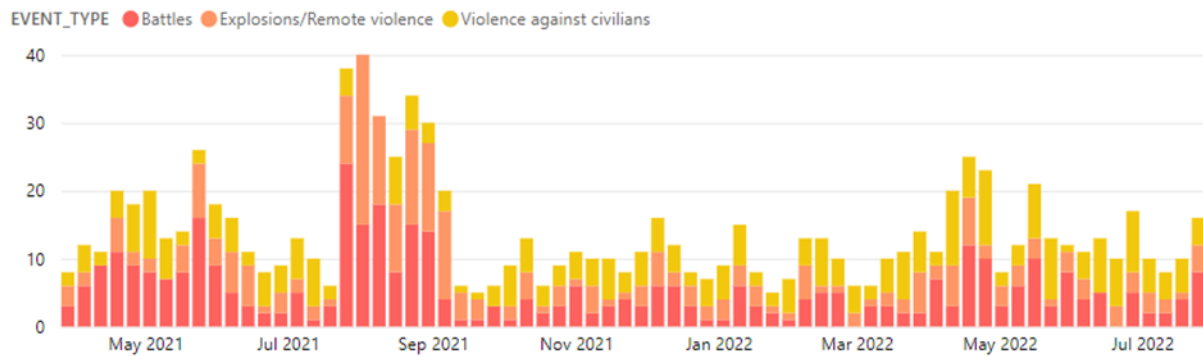


Figure 35. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dar'a governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data¹⁷¹⁹

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
As-Sanamayn	29	20	28
Dar'a	248	189	176
Izra	106	59	110
Total	383	268	314

Figure 36. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dar'a governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data¹⁷²⁰

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Dar'a and Izra districts. As-Sanamayn recorded significantly lower number of security incidents than the other two districts (see Figure 36).

¹⁷¹⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁷²⁰ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

Illustrative security incidents

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Dar'a governorate in 2021 and 2022 included the following:

- On 29 July 2021, unknown individuals attacked areas close to the Dar'a National Hospital, damaging it and killing a child running errands. As a result of the damage, it was declared partially inoperable.¹⁷²¹
- A woman was hit and killed by GoS-shelling in her home in Tafas on 26 August 2021.¹⁷²²
- Two civilians were killed in shelling of Dar'a al-Balad conducted by GoS-forces on 29 August 2021, while one woman was killed by pro-GoS-shelling on the village of Masakin Jalin.¹⁷²³
- Two teachers died in shelling on Nawa, which happened shortly after an IED-attack that left some GoS-forces dead earlier on 29 November 2021.¹⁷²⁴
- On 20 October 2021, armed individuals attacked a GoS-checkpoint, resulting in one person 'injured by a stray bullet'.¹⁷²⁵
- On 30 October 2021, the explosion of a landmine killed two boys and one girl near Kutaybah.¹⁷²⁶
- On 10 February 2022, unknown assailants attacked the car of a Dar'a Central Committee member, killing him and another person.¹⁷²⁷
- On 9 April 2022, two armed unknown perpetrators attacked an UNRWA health clinic in Dar'a refugee camp with a grenade and firearms. Nobody was wounded and only limited damage was recorded.¹⁷²⁸
- On 11 June 2022, 11 farmers, the majority being children and women, died through the explosion of a remnant landmine, while on their way to work. Another 28 people were injured.¹⁷²⁹
- On 29 June 2022, former secretary-general of the Baath Party branch in Dar'a, Kamal al-Atmeh, and four of his relatives were killed in their house by unknown attackers.¹⁷³⁰

¹⁷²¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 25

¹⁷²² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 29

¹⁷²³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 29

¹⁷²⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 34

¹⁷²⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2021/1029], 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁷²⁷ Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁸ European Commission, ECHO DailyFlash Updates, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁹ AOAV, 11 agricultural labourers killed, 34 injured in landmine explosion, Daraa Governorate, Syria, 14 June 2022, [url](#); SOHR, SOHR: 11 killed in Syria landmine explosion, 14 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁰ New Arab (The), Former Baath official, relatives killed in southern Syria: reports, 28 June 2022, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The)/Al-Modon, Daraa: Assassination of Baath Party Branch Secretary and his Family, 29 June 2022, [url](#)



(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	13	15
February	13	20
March	18	16
April	18	26
May	24	21
June	17	32
July	31	16
August	14	
September	14	
October	7	
November	23	
December	11	
Total	203	146

Figure 37. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Dar'a governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 203 civilian fatalities¹⁷³¹ in Dar'a governorate, while in the first seven months of 2022 it recorded 146 civilian fatalities.¹⁷³²

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to UNOCHA, during the shelling and siege in 2021 an estimated 18 000 people were affected by fighting causing damage to approximately 1 198 'residential buildings' in Dar'a al-Balad. During the course of fighting, those buildings were severely damaged while 7 % of the buildings were completely destroyed. The neighbourhoods of Alabbasiah and Ghernata were most affected by the damage.¹⁷³³ This destruction added to the difficult situation around housing and accommodations with 15 % of housing in Dar'a governorate being already declared destroyed or unfit to live in.¹⁷³⁴ Based on the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Shelter Cluster assessed that in Dar'a governorate, 22.6 % of the population live in damaged buildings.¹⁷³⁵ During the shelling in 2021, the Dar'a National Hospital in Dar'a al-Balad was damaged.¹⁷³⁶ After several years of conflict, only two hospitals in the governorate are fully functioning.¹⁷³⁷ The Health Cluster Whole of Syria provided

¹⁷³¹ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁷³² Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁷³³ UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷³⁴ UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷³⁵ Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷³⁶ UNOCHA, Syria. Dara'a Flash Update, Hostilities in Dara'a Governorate, As of 2 August 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 02, 27 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷³⁷ WHO, Health sector Syria hub update for Southern Syria (Dara'a, Quneitra, Sweida), 5 May 2022, [url](#), p. 15



information on attacks on health care within Syria. While not specifying the targets of attacks, they registered nine attacks within Dar'a governorate between January 2021 and March 2022.¹⁷³⁸

Different actors in the conflict have used explosive munition and ordnances including landmines, especially in 'areas that have witnessed military operations.'¹⁷³⁹ According to a Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of 238 people in Dar'a governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.¹⁷⁴⁰ The Carter Center estimated in a March 2022 report that there were between 7 750 and 23 500 unexploded ordnances in the governorate, after the estimated use of 78 031 explosive munitions during conflict in the area. The area around Dar'a city was especially estimated to be contaminated by explosive remnants.¹⁷⁴¹

According to the European Commission ECHO Flash Update, 18 children were killed or injured by explosive remnants in the governorate of Dar'a from the beginning of 2022 until 16 June 2022.¹⁷⁴²

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 103 155 IDPs in the governorate.¹⁷⁴³ From January to December 2021, UNOCHA recorded 43 055 IDP movements in Dar'a governorate, with a peak of 42 673 movements in August.¹⁷⁴⁴ This correlates with the time of the siege and shelling in Dar'a al-Balad, where two thirds of the inhabitants of Dar'a al-Balad¹⁷⁴⁵, approximately 38 000 people, fled the escalation of violence. This number includes 1 400 IDPs who had been living in shelters in Dar'a city, as well as 3 000 Palestinian refugees.¹⁷⁴⁶ Almost all IDP movements (43 000) recorded by UNOCHA in 2021 took place within the governorate.¹⁷⁴⁷

In 2022, the numbers show increased IDP movements in May, and report 508 recorded IDP movements,¹⁷⁴⁸ 330 of which took place within the governorate itself.¹⁷⁴⁹ According to Etana,

¹⁷³⁸ Health Cluster Whole of Syria, Attacks on healthcare in Syria 1 Jan – 31 March 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁹ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria: 11 killed by landmine explosion should draw attention to combating mines urgency, 12 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁰ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁷⁴¹ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 15-16

¹⁷⁴² European Commission, ECHO Daily Flash Updates, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴³ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁷⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016

¹⁷⁴⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁷⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016

¹⁷⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in: Table_Origin_vs_Departure

the continuing insecurity in the south of Syria leads young people to leave the region in high numbers.¹⁷⁵⁰ Sources, contacted by Al-Jabassini, indicated that approximately 8 000 to 10 000 people fled Dar'a and Syria altogether, between June and December 2021,¹⁷⁵¹ reportedly driven primarily by security and economic concerns.¹⁷⁵²

The UNOCHA data on IDPs spontaneous returns shows that throughout 2021, 17 517 return movements were recorded in Dar'a, with a peak of 15 367 movements in September 2021¹⁷⁵³, when violence declined in several communities in the governorate. Hence, most of these movements took place primarily inside the governorate itself, with 17 000 movements.¹⁷⁵⁴

Although the majority of IDPs resulted from the siege of Dar'a al-Balad was able to return after the new settlement agreement, the houses of as many as 3 700 persons are estimated to be destroyed to a degree that was preventing their return. Those people were still hosted by friends or family as of November 2021.¹⁷⁵⁵ The contamination by explosive hazards was another reported major reason for people being hesitant or unable to return to their homes.¹⁷⁵⁶

According to Etana, approximately 200 civilians were able to return to their homes in Lajat in the east of Dar'a governorate in May 2021. According to the same source, the residents were displaced by Hezbollah,¹⁷⁵⁷ while Enab Baladi reported that the families had fled ISIL-attacks.¹⁷⁵⁸ Reportedly the returnees' homes had been seized by Hezbollah¹⁷⁵⁹ and the 9th Division¹⁷⁶⁰ and their return was negotiated by 'former opposition and Russia', especially with the 8th Brigade being involved.¹⁷⁶¹ Etana reported that five families who had perceived permission by the Military Intelligence returned to their homes in al-Tayf in the Lajat region in October 2021, while 30 other families were denied the return.¹⁷⁶²

In 2022, the return numbers were peaking as high as 634 in February and 585 in May.¹⁷⁶³

¹⁷⁵⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria: Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 April 2022, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵¹ Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷⁵² Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 7-8; NPA, Expatriates from Syria's Daraa Fear Returning Home, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016

¹⁷⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 02, 27 September 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷⁵⁷ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁸ Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁰ Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

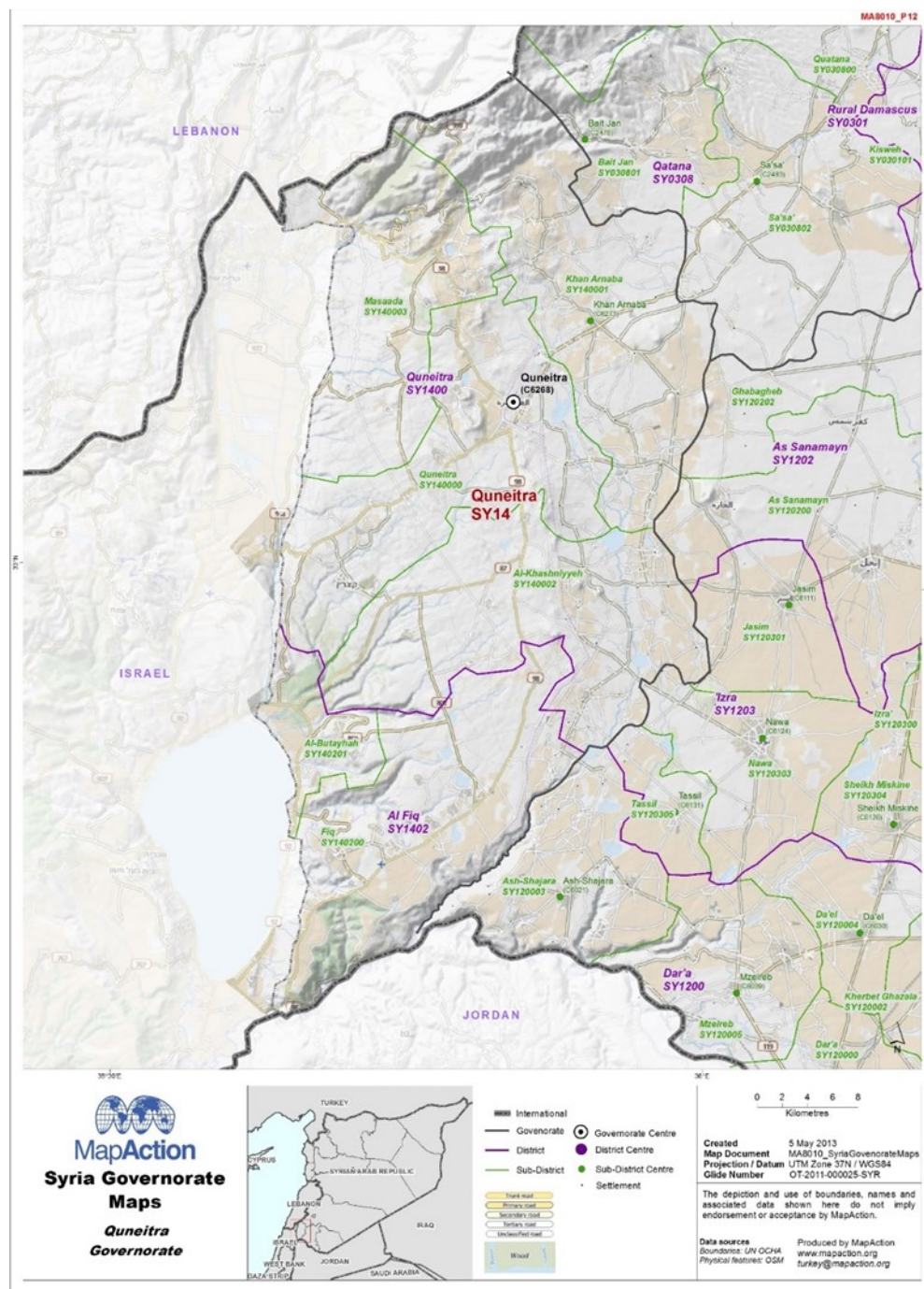
¹⁷⁶¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶³ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016



2.13. Quneitra governorate



Map 19: © MapAction, Quneitra governorate¹⁷⁶⁴

¹⁷⁶⁴ MapAction, Syria Governorate Maps – Quneitra Governorate, last updated 29 July 2016, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

2.13.1. General description of the governorate

The governorate of Quneitra is situated in southern Syria, 70 km from Damascus¹⁷⁶⁵, and borders Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel.¹⁷⁶⁶ The governorate is divided into two districts: the district of Quneitra, which comprises the sub-districts of Quneitra, Masaada, Khan Arnaba and al-Khashniyyeh, of which large parts are under Israeli control or administered by UNDOF (UN Disengagement Observer Forces). Especially Masaada is almost entirely under Israeli or UNDOF administration. The second district, al-Fiq, is divided into the sub-districts of Fiq and Al-Butayhah, with the latter being completely under Israeli control, while only a small part of Fiq is still under Syrian control.¹⁷⁶⁷ The city of Quneitra remained abandoned after it was destroyed by Israel in 1974 and is part of the demilitarised buffer zone between Syria and Israel under the supervision of UNDOF.¹⁷⁶⁸ The new provincial administrative centre is Madinat al-Baath (Baath city).¹⁷⁶⁹

According to 2022 estimates by UNOCHA, the population of Quneitra governorate consisted of 113 165 inhabitants.¹⁷⁷⁰ The last official estimations of the Syrian Bureau of Statistics from 2021, number the population of Quneitra on approximately 123 790.¹⁷⁷¹

2.13.2. Conflict background and armed actors

GoS-control has been contested in Quneitra between 2013 and 2018 by different armed GoS-opposition forces including the FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra.¹⁷⁷² In August 2018, GoS-forces regained control over areas formerly held by armed groups as well as by ISIL.¹⁷⁷³ The retrieval of control was realised through intense fighting¹⁷⁷⁴ during a 'Russian-backed offensive', and a withdrawal agreement negotiated with the armed opposition forces. In October 2018 the temporarily closed Quneitra crossing was reopened¹⁷⁷⁵ for UNDOF-Observers.¹⁷⁷⁶ In a map produced by the UN, as of December 2021, the whole Syrian controlled part of Quneitra governorate appeared to be under GoS control. UNDOF was present in the demilitarised area between Quneitra governorate and the Golan Heights.¹⁷⁷⁷ As of July 2022, Liveuamap confirms this status.¹⁷⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶⁵ Jamestown Foundation (The), The Battle for al-Quneitra, the 'Gateway to Damascus', in: Terrorism Monitor Volume 12, Issue 5, 6 March 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁶ Based on UNOCHA, Quneitra Governorate Reference Map, 1 February 2016, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁷⁶⁷ Based on UNOCHA, Quneitra Governorate Reference Map, 1 February 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁸ Encyclopedia Britannica, Al-Qunaytirah, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁹ Reuters, Syrian insurgents attack government-held town near Israel, 20 November 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁷⁷¹ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁷² DW, Syrian rebels announce seizure of Golan Heights border crossing, 27 August 2014, [url](#); ICRC, Syria: Emergency relief for thousands displaced by fighting in Quneitra, 15 September 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019. Syrian Arab Republic, March 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁷⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019. Syrian Arab Republic, March 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁷⁷⁵ Reuters, Explainer – What is the significance of the Golan Heights, 21 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁶ BBC News, Golan Heights profile, 25 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁷ UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁸ Liveuamap, Syria, 29 July 2022, [url](#)



Further information on the conflict background and actors in Quneitra is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated groups

The Military Security branch sitting in Sasa, Rural Damascus was reportedly also involved in Quneitra.¹⁷⁷⁹ According to a report by Suhail al-Ghazi from March 2021, the Fourth Division as well as the Military Security branch were ‘attempting to expand into Quneitra governorate to give cover for the entry of Iranian forces to enter into the province [...]’.¹⁷⁸⁰ As of November 2021, the SAA Brigade 90 was present in several locations in Quneitra.¹⁷⁸¹

As reported by the UN Secretary-General in March 2022, UNDOF observed ‘the continued presence’ of the Syrian Armed Forces in the separation area, engaged in clearance of unexploded ordnance and training as well as staffing checkpoints.¹⁷⁸² In one incident on 8 June 2022, the Israeli Defense Forces destroyed a checkpoint built by the SAA in the demilitarised zone, close to the village of al-Malgah.¹⁷⁸³

(b) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia operated in the end of 2021 two stationing points within the governorate.¹⁷⁸⁴ A May 2022 report of the Turkey-based think tank ORSAM stated that there were no military bases or camps under direct Russian control in the south of Syria and as a result the Russian presence was hard to measure.¹⁷⁸⁵ According to Etana, there was one Russian military location close to the town of al-Kom, affiliated with the 90th Brigade, close to the highway to Damascus in March 2022.¹⁷⁸⁶

(c) Iran and Iranian-backed armed groups

Ahram Online reported in May 2022 on information from an officer who has defected from the SAA that the number of military points controlled by Iranian-affiliated militias in the south more than doubled to a number of approximately 150 in the last two years.¹⁷⁸⁷ This information could not be corroborated. According to COAR, the presence of Iranian-backed forces in Quneitra, as well as a ‘weaker state security presence’ left the governorate more volatile than other

¹⁷⁷⁹ Syria Direct, ‘Expelling the usurper’: Legal avenues to retake homes stolen by Hezbollah in Quneitra thwarted by security concerns, 17 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁰ Al-Ghazi, S., Insecurity in Southern Syria: Tracking Daraa, Quneitra and Suweyda (January – February 2021), ORSAM, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁷⁸¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸² UN Security Council, United Nations Disengagement Observer Force – Report of the Secretary General [S/2022/247], 18 March 2022, [url](#), para. 14

¹⁷⁸³ Times of Israel (The), Israeli tanks said to destroy Syrian army outpost built in Golan demilitarized zone, 8 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁴ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁵ Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷⁸⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁷ Ahram Online, Russian withdrawal threats to Syria, 28 May 2022, [url](#)

areas.¹⁷⁸⁸ Jusoor for Studies assessed that Iranian-affiliated forces and Hezbollah operated 19 security and military points within the governorate at the end of 2021.¹⁷⁸⁹

(d) Israel

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) carried out airstrikes, particularly against (pro-)Iranian forces and Hezbollah,¹⁷⁹⁰ as well as surface-to-surface attacks on targets close to the ceasefire-line.¹⁷⁹¹

(e) ISIL

According to the International Crisis Group, ISIL still has some cells within Quneitra and ‘occasionally claimed attacks’ in the governorate. However, those cells, as well as in Dar’a governorate, would not need to be connected to the overall Syria network, but could be ‘remnants of a historically isolated ISIS affiliate that controlled parts of the Yarmouk river basin at the intersection of the Syrian, Israeli and Jordanian borders.’¹⁷⁹²

2.13.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

According to the Carter Center, reports on increasing violence in Dar’a as well as Sweida and Quneitra accumulated in the run-up to the May 2021 presidential elections resulting in a surge in tensions and attacks by unidentified armed actors on GoS-officials and former opposition fighters.¹⁷⁹³ An attack on a GoS-affiliated security checkpoint (reports differ whether the post was operated by an Iranian militia¹⁷⁹⁴, military security¹⁷⁹⁵, or military¹⁷⁹⁶) close to the towns of Jaba and Umm Batnah,¹⁷⁹⁷ by an unidentified armed group¹⁷⁹⁸ killed four people.¹⁷⁹⁹ In reaction, GoS-affiliated forces, according to different reports including Syrian Military Intelligence

¹⁷⁸⁸ COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁹ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#), see August 2021, May 2022; Times of Israel (The), Syria says IDF chopper bombs site near border, 1 injured, in rare daytime strike, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹¹ Times of Israel (The), Israeli tanks said to fire into Syria, wounding shepherds who approached border, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹² International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1, fn. 2

¹⁷⁹³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁷⁹⁴ Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22

¹⁷⁹⁶ COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁷ SOHR, قوات النظام تحاصر بلدة قرب الجولان المحتل بريف القنيطرة وسط مفاوضات بين وجهاء البلدة وضباط النظام

[Regime forces besiege a town near the occupied Golan in the Quneitra countryside, amid negotiations between the town’s notables and the regime’s officers], 1 May 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22; COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁸ Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22

¹⁷⁹⁹ COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)



forces¹⁸⁰⁰ and Hezbollah troops¹⁸⁰¹, encircled the town of Umm Batnah¹⁸⁰² and started shelling the area on 1 May 2021.¹⁸⁰³ The ensuing siege, was the first recorded in the governorate since its recapture by the GoS in 2018. The confrontation lasted until 15 May 2021 and led to the temporary displacement of residents from the town during the shelling.¹⁸⁰⁴ As condition to the end of the siege '30 former opposition fighters and their families' had to transfer to northwest Syria.¹⁸⁰⁵ GoS justified the transfer with the allegation of the concerned being involved in 'terroristic activities'.¹⁸⁰⁶ According to reports, Russia brokered the agreement¹⁸⁰⁷, while Enab Baladi spoke of mediation from the Quneitra Reconciliation Committee as well as the Dar'a Central Committee.¹⁸⁰⁸

Attacks and assassination attempts on individuals, especially GoS-affiliates and Hezbollah members were recorded in the reporting period. Suhail Al-Ghazi¹⁸⁰⁹ reported that 12 people were killed in these incidents between April and June 2021, among them four civilians and two children. On 23 April 2021, two children were killed in a bombing attack targeting their father, who was reported to be a former rebel who joined the military security.¹⁸¹⁰ On 21 April 2021, armed individuals killed two members of the Air Force Intelligence, while they were on patrol in Ghadeer al-Bustan.¹⁸¹¹ On 31 August 2021, two civilians died because of the explosion of an IED in Jubata al-Khashab, without claims for responsibility.¹⁸¹² For the period between February and May 2022, the UN Security Council reported continuing security threats, including assassinations, shootings, 'limited-scale clashes', as well as 'improvised explosive device attacks' in the southern governorates of Dar'a, Sweida and Quneitra.¹⁸¹³

The opposition newspaper Zaman al-Wasl reported attacks on Hezbollah-affiliated individuals in mid-2022. One prominent figure of the GoS, reportedly close to Iranian forces in the region, who is also said to be involved in drug trafficking, was killed on 6 July 2022 by the IDF.¹⁸¹⁴ In June 2022, one former FSA member, who reportedly joined Hezbollah in 2018, was killed by

¹⁸⁰⁰ COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰¹ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁰² COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰³ Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 May 2021, 3 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁴ Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁵ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁸⁰⁶ Asharq Al-Awsat, 'Settlement Agreement' Displaces 150 Syrians to Al-Bab in the North, 21 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁷ Asharq Al-Awsat, 'Settlement Agreement' Displaces 150 Syrians to Al-Bab in the North, 21 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁸ Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁹ Suhail al-Ghazi is a research assistant at the ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies and a non-resident fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy.

¹⁸¹⁰ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸¹¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 May 2021, 3 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹² Al-Monitor, Two killed in southern Syria explosion, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹³ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021)

[S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 26 ; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹⁸¹⁴ Jerusalem Post (The), Syrian militant killed in alleged Israeli drone strike in Quneitra – report, 6 July 2022, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Assassinations Target Iranian Militiamen in Quneitra, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

an IED ‘planted by unknown assailants in the village of al-Asbah’.¹⁸¹⁵ Furthermore, according to the article one Hezbollah-member was killed on 12 July 2022¹⁸¹⁶ by unidentified gunmen on the road connecting Jaba and Umm Batnah.¹⁸¹⁷ Syria Direct reported in July 2022 that he was involved in drug trafficking in the south, seeing the assassination as one in a row of attacks on individuals involved in smuggling in the governorates of Dar’a, Sweida and Quneitra.¹⁸¹⁸

Israeli attacks

During the reporting period, airstrikes by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) on targets connected to GoS and Iranian-backed forces¹⁸¹⁹, as well as attacks by tank fire and snipers in an attempt to contain Hezbollah’s forces close to its borders¹⁸²⁰ were reported. On 10 May 2021 for example, the IDF struck a target in the village of Hader¹⁸²¹ where – according to The Times of Israel – there is a stronghold of GoS-forces as well as Iran and Hezbollah forces.¹⁸²² The wounded person was officially declared to be a civilian, while SOHR reported him to be a member of Hezbollah.¹⁸²³ Furthermore, Israeli tanks conducted attacks on different targets, destroying one SAA-outpost close to the village of al-Maalqah, within the demilitarized zone in June 2022.¹⁸²⁴ In another incident in August 2022, Israeli tank fire targeted the Syrian side, injuring two persons. Different sources disagreed whether those two were shepherds or Hezbollah-affiliates.¹⁸²⁵ According to New Lines Institute, Captagon manufacturing sides are located in different GoS-held territories, including Quneitra.¹⁸²⁶ GoS-forces, especially the 4th Division and Hezbollah are allegedly linked to the drug trafficking.¹⁸²⁷

(b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 58 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Quneitra governorate, of whom 14 were coded as battles, 39 explosions/remote violence and 5

¹⁸¹⁵ Syrian Observer (The), Assassinations Target Iranian Militiamen in Quneitra, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁶ Syria Direct, Who is assassinating suspected drug traffickers in southern Syria?, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁷ Syrian Observer (The), Assassinations Target Iranian Militiamen in Quneitra, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁸ Syria Direct, Who is assassinating suspected drug traffickers in southern Syria?, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Times of Israel (The), Syria says IDF chopper bombs site near border, 1 injured, in rare daytime strike, 10 May 2021, [url](#); Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁸²⁰ Jerusalem Post (The), Syrian militant killed in alleged Israeli drone strike in Quneitra – report, 6 July 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

¹⁸²¹ International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Times of Israel (The), Syria says IDF chopper bombs site near border, 1 injured, in rare daytime strike, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸²² Times of Israel (The), Syria says IDF chopper bombs site near border, 1 injured, in rare daytime strike, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸²³ SOHR, 2021 – Israel attacks Syria on nearly 20 occasions, destroying over 70 targets and killing nearly 130 people, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁴ Times of Israel (The), Israeli tanks said to destroy Syrian army outpost built in Golan demilitarized zone, 8 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁵ Times of Israel (The), Israeli tanks said to fire into Syria, wounding shepherds who approached border, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁶ New Lines Institute, Intelligence Briefing – The Captagon Threat – A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, April 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁸²⁷ New Lines Institute, Intelligence Briefing – The Captagon Threat – A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, April 2022, [url](#), pp. 17, 19



incidents of violence against civilians. All security incidents were recorded in the district of Quneitra.¹⁸²⁸

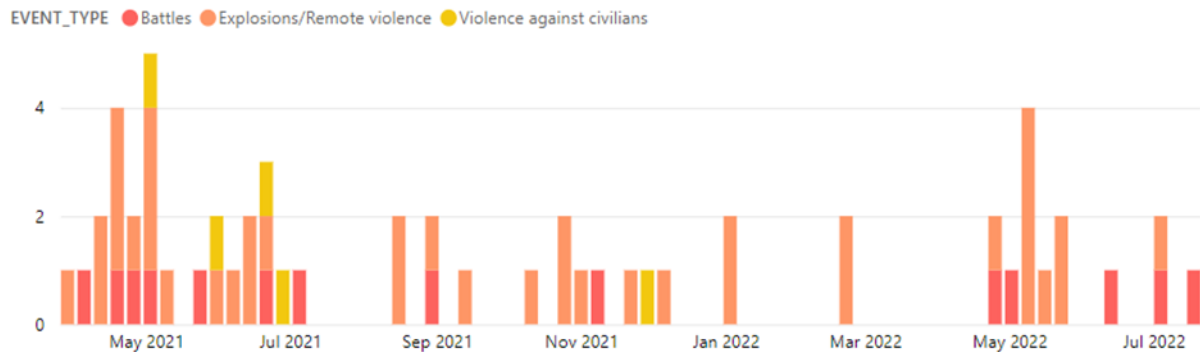


Figure 38. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Quneitra governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data¹⁸²⁹

Illustrative security incidents

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Quneitra governorate in 2021 and 2022 included the following:

- On 20 April 2021, ISIL members claimed the killing of two fighters of the 112th Brigade in the town of Ghadeer al-Bustan.¹⁸³⁰
- On 1 May 2021, unknown gunmen attacked GoS-affiliates at a checkpoint in proximity to Umm Batnah,¹⁸³¹ killing four of the operating forces.¹⁸³²
- On 3 May 2021, a retired Air Force Intelligence brigadier general was shot dead by unknown armed individuals¹⁸³³ in the town of Girgis.¹⁸³⁴
- On 4 June 2021, a Hezbollah member was killed in his car by an IED near al-Muallaqa, while his wife was wounded.¹⁸³⁵

¹⁸²⁸ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁸²⁹ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁸³⁰ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸³¹ Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22

¹⁸³² COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸³³ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸³⁴ Baladi, القنيطرة في متقاعدا ضابطا يغتالون مجهولون [Unidentified assailants assassinate a retired officer in Quneitra], 3 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁵ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

- On 25 June 2021, one man was killed and two boys wounded when an IED, attached to their car exploded in the town of Girgis.¹⁸³⁶ On 16 October 2021, an Israeli sniper reportedly shot a former Druze lawmaker in a village close to the Golan Heights.¹⁸³⁷
- On 6 July 2022, a Syrian soldier was killed by an Israeli airstrike in the town of Hader.¹⁸³⁸
- On 9 July 2022, SOHR reported on two GoS soldiers that were shot dead by unidentified gunmen, while on route on public roads. One incident took place in proximity to al-Jabaliyah, the other one between the two towns of al-Qurkas and al-Qusaibah.¹⁸³⁹
- On 22 July 2022, SOHR reported that unidentified assailants killed one member of the Military Security, while targeting his brother, a commander of the Military Intel in Mumtanah.¹⁸⁴⁰

(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	-	-
February	-	1
March	2	-
April	5	-
May	-	-
June	-	-
July	-	-
August	-	

¹⁸³⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2021/735], 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁸³⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸³⁸ Times of Israel (The), Syrian soldier said killed in Israeli drone strike near Golan border, 6 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁹ SOHR, New assassination – Unidentified gunmen shoot regime soldier dead in Al-Qonaitara, 9 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁰ SOHR, Security vacuum – Brother of commandor of military intelligence branch killed in armed attack on headquarters in al-Quneitra countryside, 22 July 2022, [url](#)



Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
September	2	
October	-	
November	1	
December	-	
Total	10	1

Figure 39. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Quneitra governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 10 civilian fatalities¹⁸⁴¹ in Quneitra governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented one civilian fatality¹⁸⁴² (see Figure 39).

¹⁸⁴¹ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁸⁴² Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Based on the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Global Shelter Cluster assessed that in Quneitra governorate, 15.07 % of the assessed shelter consisted of damaged buildings.¹⁸⁴³

Even though Quneitra was spared from large-scale fighting compared to other areas of Syria, the governorate witnessed its 'own internal tensions between armed factions and GoS armed groups' as well as Israeli missiles targeting Iranian-backed and Hezbollah locations. These also led to explosive remnants like airstrike munition, as well as landmines and IEDs resulting from land-based operations.¹⁸⁴⁴ In its 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, UNOCHA listed Quneitra as one of the governorates with areas contaminated with explosive ordnance.¹⁸⁴⁵

The Carter Center estimated in March 2022 that of about 11 802 explosive munitions used in the governorate, approximately 100 – 300 still pose a threat to the civil population as UXO.¹⁸⁴⁶ According to a Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of three people in Quneitra governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.¹⁸⁴⁷

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 3 752 IDPs in the governorate.¹⁸⁴⁸ From January to December 2021, UNOCHA did not record any IDP movements to or from Quneitra governorate and only 68 IDP movements within the governorate.¹⁸⁴⁹ According to the UNOCHA dataset up to four movements each within April and May 2022 were recorded within the governorate itself.¹⁸⁵⁰ Etana highlighted that the continuing insecurity in the south leads young people in increasing numbers to leave the region.¹⁸⁵¹ The events in Umm Batnah in April and May 2021 resulted in the temporary displacement of residents from the town during the shelling¹⁸⁵² as well as in the evacuation of 30 families, approximately 150 persons, from Umm Batnah to al-Bab in the northwest of Syria, which is under control of SNA factions.¹⁸⁵³ According to an article by Syria Direct, Hezbollah and affiliated forces seized

¹⁸⁴³ Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸⁴⁴ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁸⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁸⁴⁶ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁸⁴⁷ Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁸⁴⁸ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁸⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Dara Apr-2022, 17 June 2022, [url](#), in: Table-Origin_vs_Departure; UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in: Table-Origin_vs_Departure

¹⁸⁵¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria: Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 April 2022, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵² Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵³ Asharq Al-Awsat, 'Settlement Agreement' Displaces 150 Syrians to Al-Bab in the North, 21 May 2021, [url](#); MEMO, Assad regime evicts 30 families from southern Syria, 24 May 2021, [url](#)



approximately 25 houses of displaced persons that at least in parts wanted to return under Russian-brokered settlement agreements in 2018. The affected families are still not able to return to their homes. The seizure was justified with security reasons because of the close proximity to the Israeli border.¹⁸⁵⁴

In 2021, UNOCHA recorded 4 800 returns of the overall 8 902 returns to Quneitra, around half of which came from Rural Damascus governorate, and 1 000 return movements within the governorate itself.¹⁸⁵⁵ During the first half of 2022, low number of return movements were recorded, such as 38 in March 2022¹⁸⁵⁶ and 29 in May 2022 (all within the governorate¹⁸⁵⁷).¹⁸⁵⁸

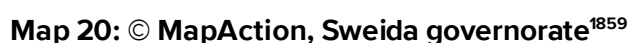
¹⁸⁵⁴ Syria Direct, 'Expelling the usurper': Legal avenues to retake homes stolen by Hezbollah in Quneitra thwarted by security concerns, 17 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return Data Mar-2022, 20 May 2022, [url](#), in: Table_Origin_vs_Departure

¹⁸⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return Data Mar-2022, 20 May 2022, [url](#), in: Table_Origin_vs_Departure

¹⁸⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016



2.14.1. General description of the governorate

The governorate of Sweida is located in the southern part of Syria and has borders with the governorates of Dar'a and Rural Damascus and an international border with Jordan to its south. Sweida governorate comprises three districts: As-Sweida, Shahba and Salkhad, which each have subdistricts.¹⁸⁶⁰

The Syrian Bureau of Statistics estimated that the population in the governorate of Sweida in 2021 was 540 409.¹⁸⁶¹ In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Sweida governorate to be of 380 050 inhabitants.¹⁸⁶² The Druze community makes up 91 % of

¹⁸⁵⁹ MapAction, Sweida Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁰ Based on UNOCHA, As Sweida Governorate Reference Map, December 2015, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), pp. 9, 40

¹⁸⁶¹ Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁶² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23.

the governorate's total population. Other groups present as of 2018 included Christians (3 %) and Sunni Muslims (6 %), who have Bedouin roots.¹⁸⁶³

The societal structure of the governorate was described as 'semitribal family community' by Nowras Aziz, a France-based journalist of Sweida origin. He further explains that therefore the use of weapons is not an expedient measure in dispute resolution and that '[a]ny confrontation with any member of the Suwayda families will lead to a confrontation between villages and areas'.¹⁸⁶⁴ Often so called *sulh* (reconciliation) delegations, consisting of local notables, are necessary to solve a conflict.¹⁸⁶⁵ Because of the increasing insecurity and absence of the GoS, Sweida residents increasingly turn towards tribal law to settle disputes.¹⁸⁶⁶

Factors such as the geographical proximity to Jordan, the limited GoS-control, the considerable influence of armed gangs and high crime rate in the governorate have contributed in making Sweida one of Syria's smuggling hotspots.¹⁸⁶⁷ In recent years drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased since the GoS' recapture of southern Syria in general¹⁸⁶⁸, including in Sweida governorate.¹⁸⁶⁹

2.14.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the conflict, the governorate of Sweida has officially remained under GoS control. However, much of its military and civil authority comes from political and military factions within the governorate, preoccupied with defending it from outside attackers.¹⁸⁷⁰ Historically, the GoS has not exercised its power directly in Sweida, having mainly relied on local armed factions sponsored by intelligence agencies and security branches.¹⁸⁷¹ Those armed factions sometimes receive security cards from the GoS that enable its owners to move freely throughout the governorate. In return, they are supposed to keep the area under control and fulfill other orders in the interest of the GoS.¹⁸⁷²

¹⁸⁶³ Zaidan, Taim, Sweida: Conflict Dynamics and the Role of Civil Society, Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, 6 January 2020, [url](#), p. 4. The report cites the Decision Support Office in Sweida Province as a source for these percentages.

¹⁸⁶⁴ Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁵ Al-Jabassini, Abdullah; Ezzi, Maen, Tribal 'Sulh' and the Politics of Persuasion in Volatile Southern Syria, EUI, 22 March 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁸⁶⁶ Al-Monitor, Violence on rise in Syria's Suwayda, 17 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁷ Daher, Joseph; Ahmad, Nizar; Taha, Salwan, Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹⁸⁶⁸ Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁹ COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁸⁷⁰ Syria Direct, At least 150 people killed in devastating IS ground offensive, suicide attacks on Suwayda province, 25 July 2018, [url](#); Syria Direct, The state of Syria's south: A month-long reporting series from Syria Direct, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷¹ Syria Direct, In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#); MEI, Kidnappings, cross-border clashes threaten increasingly fragile status quo in Syria's south, 20 May 2020, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷² New Arab (The), Suweida gang leader confesses to working for Syrian military intelligence, 22 July 2021, [url](#); Syria Direct, In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

As of July 2022, Sweida governorate was formally under GoS-control,¹⁸⁷³ while various sources point out the chaotic character of the fragmented security control in Sweida governorate.¹⁸⁷⁴

Further information on the conflict background and actors in Sweida is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

As of December 2021, Sweida governorate continued to remain under the formal control of the SAA, including its affiliated foreign troops such as Russia and Iran.¹⁸⁷⁵ In August 2021, the 15th Division was reported to be present in the southeast of the governorate.¹⁸⁷⁶ According to Syria Direct, the 8th Brigade, located in Busra al-Sham, Dar'a, now is affiliated with the Military Intelligence Division 238, located in Sweida.¹⁸⁷⁷ The Military Intelligence in Sweida is according to COAR deeply involved in drug trafficking.¹⁸⁷⁸ Enab Baladi reported in July 2022 that different GoS-affiliated militias were present in the governorate, including the NDF.¹⁸⁷⁹

(b) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia operated in the end of 2021 nine security and military points within the governorate.¹⁸⁸⁰ Russian delegations were trying to play a role as mediators in the reporting period of 2021, because of the proximity to the Russian-backed 5th Corps, having a major stronghold in Busra al-Sham on the eastern border in the Dar'a governorate. However, as COAR pointed out, Russia is lacking 'direct relations with important stakeholders in As-Sweida' and is distrusted by the Druze majority.¹⁸⁸¹ According to some sources Russia decreased its troops in the south since February 2022¹⁸⁸², although these reports remain unconfirmed.

¹⁸⁷³ Based on reading of maps in Liveuamap, Syria, 29 July 2022, [url](#); UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁴ Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnapping sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 7 October 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Violence on rise in Syria's Suwayda, 17 February 2022, [url](#); Daher, J.; Ahmad, N.; Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸⁷⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁶ Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁸⁷⁷ Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁸ COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁸⁷⁹ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, "Wait for the next": Iran warns As-Suwayda residents as 'next' can exceed reprisals, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁰ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸¹ COAR, Syria Update, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸² Enab Baladi, سوريا جنوبية تتركز نقاط تخلي روسيا.. درعا [Dar'a...Russia evacuates outposts in southern Syria], 24 May 2022, [url](#); Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7



(c) Iran and Iranian-backed armed groups

According to Jusoor for Studies, by the end of 2021, Iranian-affiliated forces and Hezbollah operated eight stationing points within the governorate.¹⁸⁸³ The Lebanese Hezbollah is reported to be involved in cross-border drug trafficking.¹⁸⁸⁴ The NDF were present in Sweida and are linked to Iran,¹⁸⁸⁵ with whom they foster excellent relations.¹⁸⁸⁶ According to Nowras Aziz, a journalist of Sweida origin, there were no Iranian-held positions in the eastern area of the governorate.¹⁸⁸⁷

(d) ISIL

The UN Security Council reported in February and July 2022 on an ‘active presence’¹⁸⁸⁸ and activities¹⁸⁸⁹ of ISIL in Sweida governorate. In a map of July 2022 Etana indicated that ISIL activity areas were within Sweida governorate.¹⁸⁹⁰ According to Nowras Aziz, as of August 2021 no ISIL members were present in the eastern area of the governorate.¹⁸⁹¹

(e) Factions, militias and gangs

New armed groups involved in criminal activities such as kidnappings, emerged during the reporting period.¹⁸⁹² According to a report by Nizar Ahmad, from the European University Institute, gangs and armed groups are often named after the town or village ‘they operate’ in.¹⁸⁹³

One of the local factions backed by the Military Intelligence¹⁸⁹⁴ is the so-called Falhout/Falahout-group, after its leader Raji Falhout/Falahout.¹⁸⁹⁵ It is also known as the al-Fajr movement.¹⁸⁹⁶ According to Suhail al-Ghazi, it splintered from the Rajjal al-Karama

¹⁸⁸³ Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁴ Enab Baladi, Syria’s As-Suwayda: drug trafficking stop on road from Lebanon to Jordan, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁵ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁶ Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁸⁸⁷ Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 36

¹⁸⁸⁹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para 43

¹⁸⁹⁰ Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria – July 2022, July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹¹ Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹² Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸⁹³ Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁹⁴ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁵ Syria Direct, In Suwayda, ‘organized gangs’ serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁶ Syrian Observer (The), Recap: Suweida Revolts Against Corruption, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

movement.¹⁸⁹⁷ It has its main stronghold in the town of Atil, north of As-Sweida city, where they are in possession of various ‘light and medium weapons as well as vehicles equipped with machine guns and ammunition depots’. According to media reports the gang consists of 30 members and is infamous for cutting of the main road connecting As-Sweida with Damascus¹⁸⁹⁸, and being involved in criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, kidnapping and burglary.¹⁸⁹⁹

Other factions/gang operating during the reporting period included:

- The Falhout gang which was reportedly situated close by in Qanawat and suspected by locals of being affiliated with Russian forces. It reportedly had a strength of 50 people¹⁹⁰⁰ In July 2022, the gang was dissolved following clashes with other local armed factions (see section [2.14.2](#))
- The gang of Fadia al-Andari, in the northeast of the governorate, which is affiliated with the Military Intelligence, has its main stronghold and its arms and equipment in the village of al-Taiba.¹⁹⁰¹
- In the capital As-Sweida many gangs are affiliated with the security branches. Among them the Mizhar group which is reported to carry out kidnappings for ransom.¹⁹⁰²
- A group of 50 operates in southern Syria and is reportedly affiliated to Hezbollah. It possessed light and medium weapons as well as armed cars. Its stronghold is Salkhad. Enab Baladi also alleges that the group is involved in drug trafficking.¹⁹⁰³

Local armed groups were founded in attempts to ‘counter those gangs and maintain the security of As-Suwayda and its civilian residents.’¹⁹⁰⁴ The Rajjal al-Karama movement (‘Men of Dignity’) was established as a local Druze defence force independent from the GoS in 2012.¹⁹⁰⁵ According to Suhail al-Ghazi ‘the movement turned from an opposition movement towards a neutral stand and focuses on attempts to establish some kind of security and protection for Sweida residents’.¹⁹⁰⁶ It reportedly plays an important role in the security situation in the

¹⁸⁹⁷ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁸⁹⁸ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁹ New Arab (The), Suweida gang leader confesses to working for Syrian military intelligence, 22 July 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁰ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰¹ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰² Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰³ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁴ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁵ Rollins, T., Kidnappings, cross-border clashes threaten increasingly fragile status quo in Syria’s south, MEI, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁶ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 8



region.¹⁹⁰⁷ Enab Baladi reported in October 2021 that the group would consist of up to 2 000 fighters.¹⁹⁰⁸ There were some reports on tensions between the Men of Dignity movement and the Falhout group.¹⁹⁰⁹

In July 2021 a new Druze political party emerged, called al-Liwa Party¹⁹¹⁰ /Syrian Brigade Party, which, according to its own account, opposes the GoS and Hezbollah.¹⁹¹¹ The armed wing of this party was called the Anti-Terrorism Force (ATF) and consisted primarily of Druze fighters from the region. It says its foundation was based on the aim to provide security for the population in the face of increasing violence and of the neglect and mistreatment of Sweida by the GoS. The declared goal of the armed unit is to fight gangs and criminal groups, especially if funded and backed in their crimes by the GoS. Furthermore, it wants to limit the Iranian influence.¹⁹¹² According to Suhail al-Ghazi, the armed wing consisted of approximately 40 individuals in August 2021¹⁹¹³, while in October 2021 Enab Baladi cited unconfirmed information that the group would consist of up to 1 000 fighters.¹⁹¹⁴ Enab Baladi reported rising tensions between the ATF, which by then claimed to be supported by the US-backed MaT group,¹⁹¹⁵ and the GoS-backed groups.¹⁹¹⁶ ATF was reportedly disbanded in June 2022 after its commander had died following clashes with GoS forces and affiliated local groups.¹⁹¹⁷ (see section [2.14.2](#) for further information)

2.14.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

(a) Security trends during the reporting period

In Sweida governorate 'lawlessness, chaos and rampant criminal and political violence' were impacting security situation during the reporting period. Local armed factions and criminal gangs were reportedly trying to establish their own areas of influence at the expense of the GoS.¹⁹¹⁸ Reporting on the period between February and May 2022, the UN Security Council stated that continuing security threats in the governorate of Dar'a, Quneitra and Sweida

¹⁹⁰⁷ New Arab (The), Suweida gang leader confesses to working for Syrian military intelligence, 22 July 2021, [url](#); COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁹⁰⁸ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁹ Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁰ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹¹ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁹¹² Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹³ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁹¹⁴ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁵ Enab Baladi, "Wait for the next": Iran warns As-Suwayda residents as 'next' can exceed reprisals, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁶ Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁷ Syria Direct, In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁸ Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

included ‘improvised explosive attacks, targeted killings, exchanges of fire’ as well as clashes of limited extent and kidnappings. Parties involved included GoS forces and affiliated militias, former members of anti-Gos armed groups, ISIL and unidentified elements.¹⁹¹⁹

Fighting between local forces and GoS-forces

The Carter Center reported increasing violence including in Sweida governorate, accumulating in the run-up to the May 2021 presidential elections, resulting in a surge in tensions and attacks by unidentified armed actors on GoS-officials and former opposition fighters.¹⁹²⁰ Furthermore, it reported an increase in violence in Sweida during the second half of 2021, consisting especially of violence related to armed groups.¹⁹²¹ Al-Monitor connected the increasing violence to the lack of rule of law within the governorate.¹⁹²² Local disputes at times evolved to clashes between various armed groups and forces, sometimes including GoS-forces,¹⁹²³ or even the civilian population.¹⁹²⁴ For example, tensions between the ATF and pro-GoS NDF led to multiple confrontations between the two parties, including clashes on 10 August 2021 in Al-Raha that were resolved through pressure exercised by the residents of the area. However, another flare-up led to the establishment of a GoS checkpoint close to the village of al-Harisa.¹⁹²⁵ In December 2021, the International Crisis Group reported troop reinforcements in Sweida, as well as armed conflicts between local forces and GoS-troops in Sweida city.¹⁹²⁶

Two major gangs that controlled parts of the road connecting Damascus and Sweida were dispersed in 2021.¹⁹²⁷ One gang from Shahba, which was affiliated with Air Force Intelligence¹⁹²⁸ left the city in July 2021 because of pressure by the ‘local community’, when it had lost popular support by killing a popular activist.¹⁹²⁹ In contrast, COAR reported that the driving force in the eviction of the gang were ‘the city’s most prominent families’ motivated by the killing of three civilians.¹⁹³⁰ Furthermore, according to a EUI report of March 2022 one

¹⁹¹⁹ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 6

¹⁹²⁰ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁹²¹ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁹²² Al-Monitor, Violence on rise in Syria’s Suwayda, 17 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹²³ Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁴ COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁵ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, July Through September 2021, [url](#), pp. 9-10; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁹²⁶ International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹²⁷ Suwayda24, انتفاضة شعبية ضد العصابات الإجرامية في شهباء.. التفاصيل منذ بدايتها [A popular uprising against criminal gangs in Shahba. Details from its beginning], 18 July 2021, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁸ Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁹ Suwayda24, انتفاضة شعبية ضد العصابات الإجرامية في شهباء.. التفاصيل منذ بدايتها [A popular uprising against criminal gangs in Shahba. Details from its beginning], 18 July 2021, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁰ COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)



gang having its stronghold in Ariqa got dissolved by GoS-forces, after it has been urged by the GoS to halt kidnappings, but failed to do so.¹⁹³¹

Increasing tensions between local armed groups and GoS forces led to confrontations during the first half of 2022.¹⁹³² Clashes between GoS-forces and local armed groups occurred in the first months of 2022, resulting from local groups targeting checkpoints.¹⁹³³ For example in Sweida city, local factions in March 2022 took over a GoS-checkpoint by force. GoS-troops regained control over the checkpoint shortly.¹⁹³⁴

According to the Carter Center, clashes between the ATF and GoS-affiliated groups occurred on a regular basis, especially with the NDF in the villages of al-Raha and al-Harisa.¹⁹³⁵ On 8 June 2022, clashes broke out between the ATF and forces of the Military Intelligence Directorate supported by Iran, Hezbollah,¹⁹³⁶ and GoS-affiliated militias¹⁹³⁷ in the village of Khazma. This led to the death of a number of members¹⁹³⁸ as well as of the ATF commander, while his forces were dispersed and its members fled to areas in the desert.¹⁹³⁹ The group was reportedly disbanded as of July 2022.¹⁹⁴⁰

Criminal gang activities, including drug trafficking and kidnapping for ransom

An increase in assassinations, kidnappings and attacks ‘targeting the headquarters of local factions, dignitaries and political and human rights activists’ in the governorate in 2021, was reported especially since August 2021.¹⁹⁴¹ Suwayda24, a Syrian local news agency, published reports that indicated that 134 individuals were killed in 2021 in violent incidents. According to the report 35 civilians were killed by known assailants for reasons such as personal disputes, revenge or theft, while 27 civilians were killed under unclear circumstances. Furthermore, three civilians were killed by branches of the intelligence services, three by the Military

¹⁹³¹ Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹³² Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 12-13; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-12

¹⁹³³ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, [url](#), p. 13; Enab Baladi, فصائل محلية تزيل حاجزًا للنظام وسط السويداء والآخر يعود بتعزيزات [Local factions remove a barrier of the regime in the center of Sweida city, the latter returns with reinforcements], 16 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁴ Enab Baladi, فصائل محلية تزيل حاجزًا للنظام وسط السويداء والآخر يعود بتعزيزات [Local factions remove a barrier of the regime in the center of Sweida city, the latter returns with reinforcements], 16 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁵ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁹³⁶ Enab Baladi, “Wait for the next”: Iran warns As-Suwayda residents as ‘next’ can exceed reprisals, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁷ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁹³⁸ Suwayda24, هل انتهت قوة مكافحة الإرهاب ؟ [Is the Anti-Terror Force over?], 9 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁹ Syria Direct, In Suwayda, ‘organized gangs’ serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, “Wait for the next”: Iran warns As-Suwayda residents as ‘next’ can exceed reprisals, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁰ Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), p. 12;

¹⁹⁴¹ Jusoor for Studies, Policing as-Suwayda As A Key Pretext By The Regime And Its Allies For Further Intervention In The Governorate, 15 September 2019, [url](#)

Intelligence, two by the ATF.¹⁹⁴² In the first half of 2022, Suwayda24 counted at least 85 killed persons.¹⁹⁴³

Several sources reported on cases of abduction and kidnapping for ransom during the reporting period.¹⁹⁴⁴ Since 2018, kidnappings for ransom became a major security threat for residents within Sweida. Especially 'wealthy persons and businessmen, whether Druze or from other governorates' seem to be targeted, but not exclusively. Armed groups and gangs, of which several are backed by the GoS, increasingly operated in this field to generate income.¹⁹⁴⁵ In some cases, those gangs and groups received security passes issued by the GoS that enable them 'to cross checkpoints and postpone [their] mandatory military service.'¹⁹⁴⁶ A report published in March 2022 by EUI mentions estimations of 500 kidnapped persons in Sweida governorate from 2018 until 2021, amounting to approximately 10 persons per month kidnapped for ransom. Reportedly, torture of kidnapped persons is common and there are cases in which the [non-Druze] victims were killed, after the families were not able to pay the ransom.¹⁹⁴⁷ According to Suwayda24, 140 civilians were kidnapped in 2021. This number includes kidnappings, coercive detention and arbitrary arrests.¹⁹⁴⁸

Kidnappings and criminal activities of gangs linked GoS forces, were also reported during the first quarter of 2022.¹⁹⁴⁹ Suwayda24 reported in July 2022 that the Military Security branch-affiliated¹⁹⁵⁰ Falhout-gang kidnapped two citizens of Shahba, resulting in parts of the population protesting against the kidnapping by conducting retaliation-takings of citizens from Attil, where the leader of the gang stems from, as well as blocking the road connecting the town to Damascus for several days.¹⁹⁵¹ On 26 July 2022, the Rajjal al-Karama movement attacked and took over the headquarter of the Falhout-gang in Attil, killing or arresting all gang-members present. The leader, Raji Falhout apparently was warned and went into hiding.¹⁹⁵² The movement found supplies for drug production as well as GoS-issued ID cards

¹⁹⁴² Suwayda24, [السويداء: 134 قتيلاً خلال 2021.. ارتفاع العنف ضد المدنيين](#) [Sweida: 134 people killed during 2021... an increase of violence against civilians], 1 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴³ Suwayda24, [السويداء: 29 قتيلاً في الشهر الأول 2022](#) [Sweida: 29 people killed in the first month 2022], 2 February 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: قتلان وأربعة مصابين في فبراير شباط 2022](#) [Sweida: Two killed and four injured in February 2022], 1 March 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [10 أشخاص بين قتيل وجريح في السويداء خلال آذار 2022](#) [10 people killed or injured in Sweida during March 2022], 2 April 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: مقتل 16 مدنياً في شهر نيسان الفائت](#) [Sweida: 16 civilians killed in April], 2 May 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: مقتل 25 شخصاً في السويداء خلال أيار الماضي](#) [Sweida: 25 people killed in Sweida during May], 1 June 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: رصد العنف: 8 قتل الشهر الماضي في السويداء](#) [Monitoring violence: 8 people killed last month in Sweida], 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020) [S/2021/583], 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 6; Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#); Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Violence on rise in Syria's Suwayda, 17 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁵ Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁹⁴⁶ Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁹⁴⁷ Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 2-3

¹⁹⁴⁸ Suwayda24, [السويداء: 140 مدنياً تعرضوا لمذبحة في الاعتقال للخطف](#) [Sweida: 140 civilians were kidnapped and arrested in 2021], 2 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁹ Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 12-13

¹⁹⁵⁰ Syrian Observer (The), Recap: Suweida Revolts Against Corruption, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵¹ Suwayda24, [السويداء: الغضب.. مغلقة السويداء](#) [Sweida is closed...Anger escalates from military security gangs], 24 July 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: غضب شعبي ينفجر ضد جماعات الأمن العسكري](#) [Sweida: Popular anger erupts against military security groups], 23 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵² Syrian Observer (The), Recap: Suweida Revolts Against Corruption, 29 July 2022, [url](#)



proving the ‘affiliation with the regime’s security forces’, while the GoS denied any connection to the gang.¹⁹⁵³ International Crisis Group reported that 17 persons were killed and dozens wounded during the confrontation.¹⁹⁵⁴ Most of the killed persons were reportedly members of the Falhout-gang, while the rest belonged to the Rajjal al-Karama movement.¹⁹⁵⁵

Tensions among local groups in Qurayya and cross-border with Dar’a residents

Tensions were reportedly rising between Dar’a and Sweida due to ‘land disputes and mutual kidnappings.’¹⁹⁵⁶ In April 2021, according to local media, tensions refaced between Druze local forces in Qurayya, and Bedouins, who are accused by the population to have supported the 8th Brigade in clashes with local armed groups in the past year. Reportedly, Russian representatives tried without success to mediate between the factions and establish a way of return for displaced Bedouins.¹⁹⁵⁷ Clashes between the two groups broke out several times throughout the reporting period.¹⁹⁵⁸ On 29 June 2022, they resulted in three persons killed and numerous Bedouins displaced to neighbouring Dar’a.¹⁹⁵⁹ According to Etana Syria, kidnappings conducted by the Bedouins additionally aggravate the situation and trigger retributive kidnappings and clashes.¹⁹⁶⁰

Furthermore, cross governorate border kidnappings increased in 2021, leading to a rise in tensions.¹⁹⁶¹ In June 2021 for example, a group from Sweida kidnapped a Dar’a resident from the town Busr al-Harir in the Dar’a governorate and demanded ransom from his family. Since the responsible gang did not release the victim, his family kidnapped numerous people from Sweida in return.¹⁹⁶² In July 2021, a farmer from the village was kidnapped and brought to Dar’a. In return, his family and local armed groups abducted around 10 Dar’a residents. Reportedly, all abductees of the latter events were released at the end of September.¹⁹⁶³

(b) Security incidents

According to ACLED data, there were 82 security incidents recorded in Sweida governorate, of whom 36 were coded as battles, 11 explosions/remote violence and 35 incidents of violence against civilians.¹⁹⁶⁴

¹⁹⁵³ New Arab (The), As violence proliferates in Syria’s south, cracks appear in regime-held areas, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁵ Al Arabiya News, At least 17 dead in rare clashes in Syria’s Sweida, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁶ Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹⁵⁷ Suwayda24, “الحارة مختار” دور تلعب روسيا [Russia plays the role of ‘Mukhtar al-Hara’ in order to resolve dispute between neighbours in Sweida], 13 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁸ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – South Syria – 12 May 2022, 12 May 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, القرية مزارعي على جنيد اعتداء [New attack on farmers of the villages...Who is obstructing the solution to the crisis?], 25 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – South Syria – 12 May 2022, 12 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶¹ Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁹⁶² Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹⁶³ Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁴ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

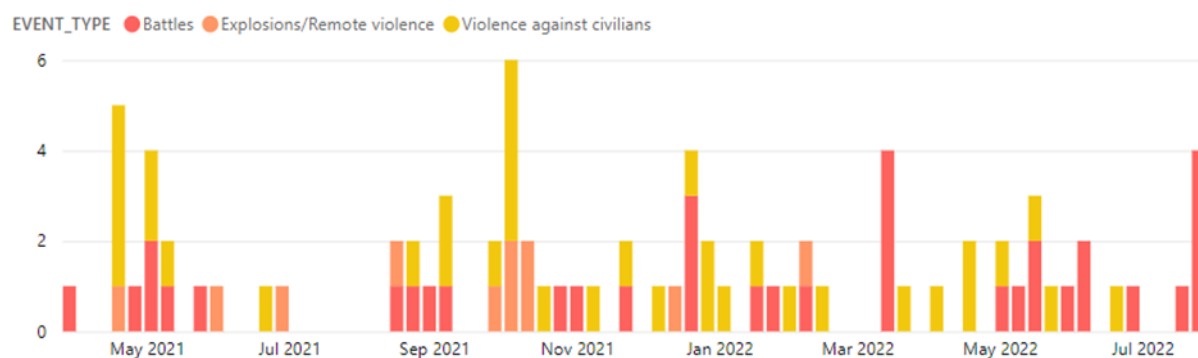


Figure 40. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Sweida governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data¹⁹⁶⁵

District	Battles	Remote violence	Violence against civilians
Sweida	28	6	26
Salkhad	5	1	1
Shahba	3	4	8
Total	36	11	35

Figure 41. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Sweida governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data¹⁹⁶⁶

Most security incidents documented by ACLED took place in Sweida district (see Figure 41).

Illustrative security incidents

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Sweida governorate in 2021 and 2022 included the following:

- In May 2021, a 75-year-old resident of Dar'a was kidnapped in Sweida while on his way to sell his products. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of approximately 7 000 USD.¹⁹⁶⁷

¹⁹⁶⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁷ Enab Baladi, السويداء، ارتفاع حالات الخطف يثير مخاوف أهالي [Sweida: A rise in kidnappings raises fears among the people], 3 October 2021, [url](#)

- In July 2021, a farmer was kidnapped and transferred to Dar'a governorate, while working on his land near the village of Samma.¹⁹⁶⁸
- On 27 January 2022, Jordanian soldiers reported the killing of at least 27 armed smugglers who crossed the border from Sweida in an attempt to traffick large quantities of amphetamines. Several other smugglers were able to flee back to Syria.¹⁹⁶⁹
- On 11 February 2022, GoS-soldiers shot a civilian at a checkpoint in al-Shahba city.¹⁹⁷⁰
- On 21 April 2022, two individuals were shot under unclear circumstances near the village Kharba.¹⁹⁷¹
- On 6 June 2022, the Falhout-gang kidnapped the Sweida police chief as well as the head of the Criminal Security Branch in Sweida, using a roadblock close to the town of Salim.¹⁹⁷²

(c) Civilian fatalities

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
January	1	-
February	-	-
March	1	1
April	2	7
May	-	8
June	-	4
July	1	3

¹⁹⁶⁸ Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁹ Reuters, Jordan says 27 drug smugglers killed at border with Syria, 27 January 2022, [url](#); Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁹⁷⁰ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 22; SOHR, Al-Suwayda – Regime soldiers shoot young man at a checkpoint in Al-Shahba city, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷¹ Zaman al-Wasl, السويداء: غامضة بطروف شخصين مقتل. "خربا" في غامضة بطروف شخصين مقتل. [Sweida, two people were killed under mysterious circumstances in Kharba], 22 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷² Syrian Observer (The)/Al-Modon, Suweida: Kidnapping of Head of Criminal Security Branch and Police Chief, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

Month	SNHR 2021	SNHR 2022
August	1	
September	-	
October	3	
November	1	
December	3	
Total	13	23

Figure 42. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Sweida governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data

In 2021, SNHR recorded 13 civilian fatalities¹⁹⁷³ in Sweida governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 23 civilian fatalities¹⁹⁷⁴ (see Figure 42).

¹⁹⁷³ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁹⁷⁴ Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9



(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Even though Sweida was spared from large-scale fighting compared to other areas of Syria and hence avoided extensive damage in the conflict¹⁹⁷⁵, the governorate witnessed its ‘own internal tensions between armed factions and GoS armed groups’, in which explosive munition gets commonly used.¹⁹⁷⁶ Based on the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Global Shelter Cluster assessed that in Sweida governorate, 4.59 % of the residents lived in damaged buildings¹⁹⁷⁷, a significant increase from 0,7 % in the same assessment in 2020.¹⁹⁷⁸ The Health Cluster Whole of Syria While counted three attacks against healthcare in Sweida governorate between January 2021 and March 2022, without providing additional information.¹⁹⁷⁹

The internal tensions and attacks left explosive remnants such as landmines and IEDs behind. UXOs still gets used in internal disputes and conflicts to date.¹⁹⁸⁰ The Carter Center estimated that from about 2 101 munitions used in the governorate, approximately 200 – 625 pose a threat to the civil population as unexploded ordnance.¹⁹⁸¹ According to a Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of three people in Quneitra governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.¹⁹⁸² According to Suwayda24, at least eight civilians died in 2021 due to explosions of remnants of war within the governorate in 2021. Most of the victims were reportedly children.¹⁹⁸³

(e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 71 313 IDPs in the governorate.¹⁹⁸⁴ From January to December 2021, UNOCHA recorded 19 IDP movements from Sweida governorate. In early 2022, IDP movements increased, from nine in January 2022 (21 in February; 68 in March) to 56 in April 2022, with a sharp increase to 546 in May 2022. The source did not provide information on the reason for displacement.¹⁹⁸⁵ Etana reported that the continuing insecurity in the south of Syria is driving young people out of the region and to leave Syria in increasing numbers.¹⁹⁸⁶ Clashes between residents of the two governorates of Dar’a and Sweida also caused IDP movements. For example, on 29 June 2022, clashes

¹⁹⁷⁵ Arab Weekly (The), Rising discontent in Syria’s Daraa, Sweida reflects simmering woes, 16 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁶ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁹⁷⁷ Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁹⁷⁸ Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁹⁷⁹ Health Cluster Whole of Syria, Attacks on healthcare in Syria 1 Jan – 31 March 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁰ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁹⁸¹ Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁹⁸² Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Syria’s Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁹⁸³ Suwayda24, ارتفاع العنف ضد المدنيين.. 134 قتيلاً خلال 2021 [Sweida: 134 people killed during 2021... an increase of violence against civilians], 1 January 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁴ UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

¹⁹⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria: Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 April 2022, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

erupted between Bedouins and Druze armed groups within Sweida, which resulted in three persons being killed and numerous Bedouins being displaced to neighbouring Dar'a.¹⁹⁸⁷

The UNOCHA data on IDP spontaneous returnees for 2021 shows that there were 176 IDPS return movements to Sweida governorate, around 400 IDP return movements from the governorate and 144 IDP return movements within the governorate.¹⁹⁸⁸ In 2022, 156 returns to the governorate were recorded (53 in February, nine in April, 94 in May) until May.¹⁹⁸⁹

¹⁹⁸⁷ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016

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Annex II: Terms of Reference

The research should cover the period between April 2021 – July 2022. Background information and older trends should be kept very brief and crosslinked as much as possible with previous EUAA COI reports published, such as [Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [Security situation \(May 2020\)](#). Significant changes to the justice system in GoS-controlled areas and SDF-controlled areas should be addressed under the respective actor. The aim of including the sections on the justice system is to provide a limited update on these topics, which were previously covered in the EUAA COI Report [Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

☐ General description of the security situation

▪ Overview of the conflict

- Political developments
- International involvement
- Recent security trends and armed confrontations during the reference period

▪ Actors in conflict

- Brief description and capacity
- Presence and areas of control/influence of the different actors
- Type of weapons and tactics used

▪ Overview of the security situation

- Security incidents
- Civilian casualties
- Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
- Conflict-induced displacement and return

☐ Security situation and conflict impact on civilians by governorates

The below structure is to be replicated for each governorate.

- General description of the governorate
- Actors involved in the conflict during the reference period
- Recent security trends
- Impact of the security situation on the civilian population
 - Security incidents
 - Civilian casualties
 - Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
 - Conflict-induced displacement and return (indicate the reason for displacement/return or lack of such info.)





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