

3.4. Anti-government armed groups

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2024

The **Syrian National Army (SNA)** is an umbrella organisation of a loose formation of militias backed by Türkiye and several Gulf states.

In 2019, the SNA incorporated the **National Liberation Front (NLF)**, also a Turkish-backed alliance of opposition-armed groups using the brand of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), into its ranks [[Actors](#), 4.3, p. 56, 5.1, p. 58].

The SNA controls two areas adjoining the Turkish border: the first covers the northern countryside of Aleppo from Afrin to Jarablus, and the second one spans from Tall Abyad to Ras al-Ayn in the north of Raqqqa and Hasaka governorates [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.2, p. 26].

The SNA forces play an essential role in day-to-day matters in the areas under their control, 'impacting everything from the security situation to real estate sales, business dealings, the work of NGOs, and local governance institutions'. The SNA is reportedly comprised of more than 40 factions with several sources reporting the group's internal conflicts and rivalries as a major issue [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.2, p. 26-27]

According to recent sources, abuses by the SNA against civilians continued, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, including rape, and pillage. Looting, theft, occupation and expropriation of predominately Kurdish properties by SNA were also reported [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.2, p. 28; [Targeting 2022](#), 10.2, p. 92].

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham or Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant (HTS) is a coalition of Islamist Sunni anti-government armed groups which continues to be listed as a terrorist organisation by the EU, the UN and many states [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.4, p. 30, [Security 2021](#), 1.4.4, p. 25]. HTS is comprised of several armed factions, including Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (also known as Jabhat al-Nusrah and previously as the Al-Nusrah Front). It maintains its power through the Syrian Salvation Government, which has been as the group's 'political arm'. [[Security 2022](#), 2.1.2, p. 69; [Actors](#), 4.1.1, p. 50]

HTS exercised military and security control within its territory in Idlib governorate, parts of Aleppo's western countryside and Latakia's countryside as well as the Al-Ghab Plain located northwest of Hama and is considered as the dominant actor and military superior armed group in the area. In October 2022, HTS fighters took control of the city of Afrin and surrounding areas before a Turkish-brokered truce led to their withdrawal. HTS personnel, however, reportedly remained in the Afrin area, but avoided being publicly visible [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.4, pp. 30-31, 2.1.2, p. 69, 2.2.3, p. 83].

HTS forces have been involved in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention of civilians [[Security 2022](#), 1.4.4, p. 35, 1.4.5, p. 27, 2.1.2, p. 67]. Enforced disappearances, confiscation of property, harassment and intimidation against women were also reported [[Targeting 2022](#), 8.2, p. 82, 11, p. 96, 13.4.2, pp. 118-119]. In recent times, the group attempted to publicly distance itself from al-Qaeda and portray it as a legitimate civilian authority. Despite its legitimisation efforts, HTS continued to commit serious human rights violations [[Security 2023](#), 1.4.4, p. 31].

A number of other anti-GoS armed groups are also present in the Idlib area.



For further information on human rights violations committed by various anti-government armed groups and their relevance as potential exclusion grounds, see [8. Exclusion](#).

See other topics concerning actors of persecution or serious harm:

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