

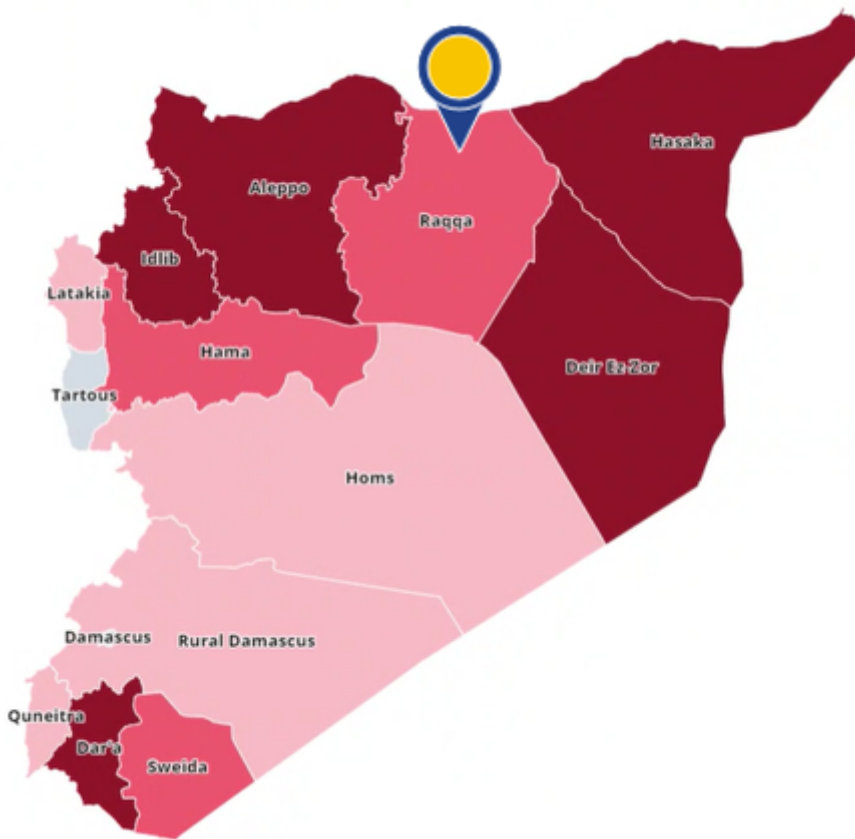
# Raqqa

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

[Main COI reference: [Security 2023](#), 2.1, pp. 49-60; [COI Update 2023](#), 2, pp. 3-10]



## General information

Ar-Raqqa (hereafter 'Raqqa') governorate is located in the north-central part of Syria. The governorate has international borders with Türkiye 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. The governorate is divided in three districts: Ar-Raqqa, Al-Thawra, and Tall Abyad. As of May 2022, UNOCHA estimated the population in Raqqa at 754 295 inhabitants.

About 90 % of the population are Sunni Arabs. The vast majority live in areas controlled by the SDF.

## **Background and actors involved in armed confrontations**

Raqqa was the first governorate completely taken from the Syrian government's control. ISIL got control of the city at the end of December 2013. On 29 June 2014, ISIL declared a 'caliphate' with its capital in Raqqa city. Towards the end of 2016, international coalition forces started offensives against ISIL in Raqqa and, in 2017, Raqqa came under SDF control. [[Security 2020](#), 2.8.2, pp. 148-149]

Following the Turkish-led incursion into northeast Syria in October 2019, the SNA together with Turkish armed forces was reported to be in control of the so called 'safe zone' established between Tall Abyad (Raqqa governorate) and Ras al Ain (Hasaka governorate). [[Security 2021](#), 2.8.2, pp. 185-186]

In December 2019, Russian troops moved into Raqqa, following an agreement with the SDF, to guarantee safety after the departure of the US forces. Russia, in collaboration with the GoS, also deployed forces to the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates River west of Raqqa city. [[Security 2022](#), 2.8.2, p. 158]

During the reference period, Kurdish forces (SDF/YPG) controlled about half of the territory of Raqqa governorate, including its capital, Raqqa city.

The SNA operated in the Operation Peace Spring area, within this northern section of the governorate under Turkish control.

GoS and its allies control the southern parts of the governorate. GoS forces were granted permission by the SDF to pass between GoS held and Kurdish-controlled territories. Along with Russian troops, they maintained presences along the Syrian-Turkish border and the front lines between the Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas.

The Russian forces were present in the GoS-controlled parts of Raqqa governorate and, to a limited extent, in the SDF-controlled parts of the governorate.

Iranian sites were situated along the contact line between the SDF-held territories and those held by the GoS.

ISIL had a presence in GoS-controlled southern Raqqa governorate.

## **Nature of violence and examples of incidents**

During the second half of 2022, in the context of the conflict between the SDF and Turkish forces/Turkish-backed armed groups, there were continuing reports of security incidents in the vicinity of the Syrian-Turkish border or SNA-controlled areas, including around Ayn Issa and Tall Abyad.

In November 2022, Turkey launched Operation Claw-Sword, carrying out a series of airstrikes in the northern countryside of Raqqa, Hasaka and Aleppo governorates. Other attacks by Turkish forces were reported, such as drone and ground-based strikes, killing civilians and SDF-backed militia members.

Several incidents were reported in the Operation Spring Area, where Turkish Armed Forces and affiliated armed groups of SNA have troops and military sites.

Following a PKK attack in Ankara (Türkiye) on 1 October 2023, Türkiye conducted a campaign of drone strikes which hit more than 150 locations including in Raqqa governorate leading to several fatalities.

On 26 December 2022, suspected ISIL members attacked an area of Raqqa city housing the headquarters of the SDF's Internal Security Forces (Asayish), anti-terrorism units, and a military intelligence prison holding around 200 ISIL prisoners, resulting in several SDF members killed.

In response to this attack, the SDF launched a large-scale security operation ('Operation Retaliation for Raqqa Martyrs') in late January 2023, targeting ISIL cells in the city and its surrounding rural areas. According to SDF, this operation resulted in dozens of possible ISIL hideouts raids, and the arrest of suspected ISIL members, including the ISIL governor for Raqqa.

ISIL attacks against GoS security forces were also reported. In November 2023, an ISIL-attributed attack killed at least 34 GoS soldiers and members of the NDF in the desert area of al-Rasafah located between Raqqa, Homs and Deir Ez-Zor governorates.

#### **Incidents: data**

ACLED recorded 751 security incidents (average of 14.6 security incidents per week) in Raqqa governorate in the period from 1 August 2022 to 28 July 2023. Of the reported incidents, 450 were coded as 'explosions/remote violence', 176 as 'violence against civilians' and 125 as 'battles'. In the period 1 August – 30 November 2023, 234 security incidents were recorded in Raqqa representing an average of 13.5 security incident per week.

#### **Geographical scope**

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.

#### **Civilian fatalities: data**

Between August 2022 and July 2023, SNHR documented 20 civilian fatalities in Raqqa governorate. In August – November 2023, the SNHR recorded 1 civilian fatality. Compared to the figures for the population as from May 2022, this represented three civilian fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants for the whole reference period.

#### **Displacement**

As of May 2022, there were 159 827 IDPs in Raqqa governorate, including 108 302 in Raqqa district.

According to UNOCHA, between January and December 2022, approximately 1 000 persons were displaced within the governorate. No IDP movements from and to Raqqa were recorded during the same period. Similarly, in the first five months of 2023, no IDP movements out of Raqqa or into or within the governorate were recorded.

In terms of IDP returns, UNOCHA recorded in 2022 approximately 95 IDP returns to Raqqa and 1 275 returns from Raqqa to other governorates. In the first five months of 2023, 9 IDP returns were recorded into Raqqa and about 26 returns from Raqqa to other governorates, with all of these movements occurring in March 2023.

#### **Further impact on civilians**

Raqqa city was reportedly ‘still slowly recovering from the devastation’ caused by the battle that led to ISIL’s defeat in October 2017, with buildings still severely damaged.

Raqqa was one of the governorates where contamination from UXOs was most widespread, including on roads, agricultural land and private property, with areas previously controlled by ISIL showing the highest levels of contamination. Between March 2011 and early April 2023, Raqqa accounted for 22 % of all landmine-related deaths recorded in the country.

Looking at the indicators, it can be concluded that ‘mere presence’ in the area would not be sufficient to establish a real risk of serious harm under Article 15(c) QD in the governorate of **Raqqa**, however indiscriminate violence reaches a **high level**. Accordingly, **a lower level of individual elements** is required in order to show substantial grounds for believing that a civilian, returned to the territory, would face a real risk of serious harm within the meaning of Article 15(c) QD.

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