

1.1. Overview of conflicts

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

Etana, an independent organisation³⁷ focused on reporting on the ground in Syria,³⁸ notes, as of 3 February 2025, that in northern Syria, indications of increasing lawlessness and violence are becoming more evident across a region extending from Homs to Latakia on the coast and further east to Aleppo, with almost daily reports of killings and militant activity in recent weeks. The security situation in this area is a centre of instability driven by revenge killings and communal violence. The area is home to several Alawite and mixed sectarian communities.³⁹ The International Crisis Group reports that in central and western Syria 'less disciplined armed factions and unaffiliated gunmen' have begun taking advantage of weaknesses in HTS policing to engage in looting and instil fear. These groups loot and seek revenge on persons viewed as being associated with the Assad government. They have targeted members of minority groups, Alawites in particular.⁴⁰ Sectarian-based murders have peaked in the provinces of Homs, Hama, and Latakia.⁴¹ On the other hand, former and now unemployed members of the army of the ousted regime are reportedly unwilling to lay down their arms for reasons of self-protection and pose a security threat.⁴² According to Etana 'some of the violence is likely being fomented by formerly regime-backed gangs [...] suspected of being behind a slew of attacks'.⁴³ As of 20 February, security forces continued to face increased threats as they tried to stabilise the country, including kidnappings, sectarian violence and threats from remnants of Assad's forces.⁴⁴ In early March, coordinated attacks by pro-Assad groups on security forces, particularly in the coastal areas, led to a significant escalation which resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties, mostly from the Alawite community.⁴⁵ For more information see section [4.1.2](#).

In the north of the country, various factions are struggling for influence and control.⁴⁶ Clashes between Turkish-backed militias operating under the umbrella of the Syrian National Army (SNA)⁴⁷ and the US-backed⁴⁸ Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued during the reporting period. When the HTS-led opposition forces captured Aleppo in late November, the SNA simultaneously launched an offensive in the province⁴⁹ targeting the territories controlled by the SDF,⁵⁰ causing the displacement of

tens of thousands of civilians.⁵¹ The SDF was driven out of several towns⁵² in Aleppo's countryside and the SNA captured the strategically important cities of Manbij⁵³ and Tal Rifat⁵⁴. The clashes between the SDF and the SNA escalated⁵⁵ at the end of December 2024⁵⁶ near the Tishreen Dam on the Euphrates River in the countryside of Manbij, eastern Aleppo, a vital source of water and electricity for SDF-controlled areas.⁵⁷ Türkiye, which considers the SDF to be closely linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK),⁵⁸ has continued air and drone strikes in northern Syria, hitting SDF targets⁵⁹ as well as civilians⁶⁰ and critical civilian infrastructure⁶¹ during the reporting period. As of 28 February 2025, clashes between the SDF and the SNA were still ongoing.⁶² In addition to the conflict with the SNA and Türkiye, the SDF also faces a long-running conflict with tribal militias in Deir Ez-Zor as well as attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).⁶³ In March 2025, SDF leaders signed an agreement to integrate their armed forces and civilian institutions into the new Syrian government. The deal mandates a full cessation of hostilities and requires the SDF to relinquish control of border posts, the airport, and key oil and gas fields.⁶⁴ The practical implementation of this agreement could not be monitored within the scope of this report.

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

The situation in southern Syria was volatile during the reporting period.⁷¹ Shortly after it was known that Al-Assad had been ousted, the Israeli military moved into the UN-patrolled buffer zone⁷² in the Golan Heights border highlands,⁷³ an area it had been breaching since at least early November⁷⁴ and beyond into Syrian territory,⁷⁵ into areas of southern Quneitra and south-west Dar'a.⁷⁶ Also, Israel carried out hundreds of airstrikes in early December aimed at destroying weapon sites across Syria,⁷⁷ more than half of which took place in Dar'a, Damascus, Rural Damascus and Latakia governorates.⁷⁸ As of 20 February 2025 Israeli incursions into and beyond the buffer zone were ongoing.⁷⁹

20

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

21

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

22

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

23

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

24

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

25

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

26

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

27

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

28

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

29

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

30

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

31

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

32

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

33

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

34

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

[35](#)

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

[36](#)

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

[37](#)

Etana, About us, n.d., [url](#)

[38](#)

MEI, ETANA Syria, n.d., [url](#)

[39](#)

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

[40](#)

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

[41](#)

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

[42](#)

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

[43](#)

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

[44](#)

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

[45](#)

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

46

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

47

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

48

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

49

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

50

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

51

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

52

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

53

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

54

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

55

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

56

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

57

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

[58](#)

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

[59](#)

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

[60](#)

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

[61](#)

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

[62](#)

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

[63](#)

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

[64](#)

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

[65](#)

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

[66](#)

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

[67](#)

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

[68](#)

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

[69](#)

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

[70](#)

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

[71](#)

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

[72](#)

Washington Post (The), Israel is building outposts in Syria, raising local fears of occupation, 2 February 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Satellite images show Israel building military bases in Syria buffer zone, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

[73](#)

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

[74](#)

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

[75](#)

Washington Post (The), Israel is building outposts in Syria, raising local fears of occupation, 2 February 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Satellite images show Israel building military bases in Syria buffer zone, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

[76](#)

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

[77](#)

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

[78](#)

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

[79](#)

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

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu