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2.2. Syrian National Army (SNA)

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

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

The National Liberation Front (NLF), the result of a 2018 merger of 11 rebel groups,374 in turn merged with the SNA in 2019 and consists of various armed groups, such as Faylaq al-Sham, Ahrar al-Sham, the Free Idlib Army and Harakat Nour Al-Din Al-Zenki, mostly fighting under the Free Syrian Army label.375 The NLF altogether was estimated to comprise about 25 000 fighters.376 Of those, Ahrar Al-Sham, a group that as of 2015 estimates had about 15 000 fighters, was mostly active an Aleppo and Idlib governorates.377 As of mid-January 2025, the NLF was largely in charge of securing control in Idlib.378

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

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

The advances by the SNA in the north of the country reportedly caused fear among the Kurdish population,390 with an estimated 120 000 people fleeing from areas in northern Aleppo captured by the SNA at the start of December.391 The SNA reportedly employed indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas.392 Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on an SNA drone strike that hit a Kurdish Red Crescent ambulance transporting a wounded civilian near Tishreen Dam on 18 January. The organisation further mentioned attacks carried out by the SNA with support from Türkiye on protesters gathering near the dam, leading to deaths and injuries according to the SDF.393

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