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4.1.2. Coastal areas

Alleged remnants of the Assad government conducted deadly ambushes against the security forces of the new transitional administration,618 including in Tartous governorate in what was noted as the first direct challenge to the power of the new rulers619 on 24 December 2024 (leaving 14 police dead)620 and in Latakia city on 5 January 2025 (killing at least two members of the security forces).621 Tartous, Latakia and parts of Rural Damascus and Homs, all assessed by ACLED to be areas where the transitional administration has 'not gained a decisive victory' as of early February 2025, witnessed the emergence of new militias opposed to the transitional administration.622 These groups, which may arise as Assad-affiliated fighters merge into armed gangs and minorities form self-defence groups,623 attacked police and military forces to destabilise the new administration.624 Such attacks and clashes were reported well into February 2025 in Homs, the coastal region625 (including near Hmeimim base in Latakia), eastern Dar'a, and Rural Damascus.626

Following clashes in southern rural Tartous, the MOA launched a security campaign in late December 2024, searching for local remnants of the Assad government.627 This three-day operation saw the deployment of special forces known as the 'Red Bands' in the suspect villages (Khirbet Maazah, Yahmour and Zarqat) and witnessed shootouts, home raids, and checkpoints being set up. Several civilians were wounded in clashes.628 Since then, further sweeping security campaigns have been launched against remnants of the former Assad government in various governorates, including Latakia,629 Deir Ez-Zor,630 Dar'a,631 Homs,632 Hama, Aleppo and Damascus, resulting in hundreds of arrests.633 As of mid-January 2025, HTS was reportedly 'confronting small pockets of locally organized fighter cells in areas under its control', deploying tanks, attack helicopters and drones against pro-Assad groups.634 In late January, fighters affiliated to the new administration reportedly carried out 35 summary executions, killing mostly Assad-era officers.635

In early March, a significant escalation in hostilities was reported in Latakia, Tartous636 and to a lesser extent in Homs, and Hama governorates.637 Following a series of attacks by pro-Assad remnants on general security forces in Baniyas, Tartous and Jableh, Latakia638 which led to more than 100 members of security forces and 15 civilians killed in the latter,639 government security forces and affiliated armed actors 'apparently operating outside of Damascus control' initiated a general mobilisation and launched retaliatory attacks against insurgents and civilians. 640 Reports indicate summary executions along sectarian lines by unidentified perpetrators, members of the caretaker authorities' security forces, and elements linked to the former government.641

According to SOHR, 1 454 individuals were killed in the clashes, including 973 civilians.642 Most of the civilians killed were reportedly members of the Alawite community particularly from Latakia and Tartous governorates.643 According to SOHR there were 545 civilians killed in Latakia, 262 in Tartous, 156 in Hama and 10 in Homs.644 SNHR documented 803 individuals killed between 6-10 March. At least 211 civilians were killed by pro-Assad armed groups, while at least 420 civilians and disarmed combatants were killed by security forces and affiliated armed groups. The highest number of civilians and disarmed combatants was recorded in Latakia (185) and Tartous (183) governorates, with smaller numbers in Hama (29) and Homs (3). The violence involved extrajudicial killings, field executions, and systematic mass killings driven by revenge and sectarian motives.645

The OHCHR has documented 111 civilian deaths as of 11 March, but verification is ongoing, and the actual toll is believed to be significantly higher.646

Thousands of people were reportedly displaced in the coastal areas647 with an estimated 16 000 having crossed into Lebanon due to the hostilities.648 On 10 March, the transitional administration announced the end of the military operation in the coastal areas.649 President Al-Shaara issued a decision to form an independent national committee to investigate the events650 and authorities reportedly begun prosecuting individuals accused of committing crimes during the insurgent activity in western Syria between 6 and 10 March.651

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