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4.2. Areas under the control of the Syrian National Army (SNA)

For information regarding security trends in the areas controlled by Turkish-backed forces prior to November 2024, see sections 2.2., 2.7., 2.8. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

As of February and early March 2025, the Turkish-backed militias (i.e the Syrian National Army - SNA) controlled northern and eastern rural Aleppo, including the area between A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus (operation Euphrates Shield area). The SNA also controlled a stretch of territory further east673 that is known as the operation Peace Spring area, roughly delimited by the Tall Abyad area (Raqqa) in the west and Ras Al-Ain (Hasaka) in the east, with some SNA presence mapped as far east as Tall al-Amir (Hasaka).674 Meanwhile, control of northwestern Aleppo's Afrin area, previously occupied by SNA factions since 2018, was transferred to the transitional administration as its security forces entered Afrin city in early February 2025.675

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  ISW and CTP, Interactive Map: Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria [Map], last updated 3 March 2025, url; Carter Center (The), Exploring Historical Control in Syria [Map], n.d., url. Set filters to February 2025.

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(a) Operation Dawn of Freedom and Euphrates shield areas

Amid the Syrian armed opposition's military offensive,676 the SNA on 30 November 2024 launched its own concurrent Operation Dawn of Freedom677 in northern and eastern rural Aleppo.678 Its immediate aim was to push the SDF troops east of the Euphrates River.679 The SNA took several towns in northern Aleppo680 and conquered the city of Tall Rifaat,681 areas located south of A'zaz and Al-Bab, as well as the city of Manbij and its surroundings. Meanwhile, mapping resources disagreed on whether Aleppo city and its eastern surroundings were under HTS control682 or partly controlled by the SNA.683

After capturing the city of Tall Rifaat (northern Aleppo)684 and then seizing Manbij685 following a US-brokered temporary ceasefire that allowed for a withdrawal of the SDF from the city,686 the SNA advanced towards the Kurdish-majority border city of Kobane 687 on the eastern Euphrates riverbank.688 On 24 December 2024, the SDF announced a counteroffensive aiming to retake territory lost to the SNA689 as it made some territorial gains in eastern rural Aleppo.690

Heavy clashes between the SNA and the SDF were reported in January and February 2025 at the frontlines around the strategic Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak Bridge on the Euphrates River,691 in villages in rural Manbij692 and around the city of Kobane.693 The violent clashes using medium and heavy weapons, among which rocket-propelled grenades, in the area around the dam, lead to 116 fighters and 20 civilians killed within 15 days. Clashes around the Tishreen Dam and in Manbij countryside continued throughout January 2025.694 Besides combatants, dozens of civilians were killed or injured during exchanges of artillery and rocket fire between Turkish/Türkiye-backed forces and SDF/Kurdish forces.695

The area around Manbij city witnessed continued violence in the months following the fall of Assad.696 As of late December 2024, amid clashes following SDF attempts to retake Manbij city, the security situation was described as 'very tense' and lacking clarity.697 Between late December/early January 2025 and early February 2025, the Manbij area was struck by seven car bombings.698 These included two unclaimed car bomb explosions reported on 1 February (causing four civilian deaths)699 and 3 February (hitting a vehicle transporting women agricultural workers and resulting in at least 19 civilian deaths).700

Syria: map of Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij

Map 4: Assessed Control of Terrain around Manbij, © Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project, 4 March 2025

Amid what SOHR refers to as ‘escalating security chaos’ in areas controlled by Türkiye and its proxy groups,[702] further civilians were killed by unidentified gunmen in Manbij city[703] and its countryside,[704] as well as in eastern Aleppo’s Jarablus countryside.[705] In late December 2024 and early January 2025, there were also several explosions of booby-trapped motorbikes in northern and eastern Aleppo (including one in Tall Rifaat and two in Manbij city), some of which caused civilian casualties.[706] SNA factions were also reported to have subjected civilians to kidnapping, beating, and looting in the Al-Bab countryside (eastern Aleppo).[707]

According to ACLED data, the areas under the control of SNA/disputed in Aleppo governorate which were the most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reporting period were Ain Al Arab/Kobane (401 incidents) and Manbij districts (212 incidents), amounting to around 49 % of the total number of security incidents recorded in Aleppo governorate.[708]

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  SOHR, Fourth time in a week | Motorbike explodes in areas of Turkish-backed factions in Aleppo, 1 January 2025, url

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  ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (28 February 2025), url

☐ **(b) Operation Peace Spring area**

Localities in northern Syria that are part of the Operation Peace Spring area, including in western Raqqa709 (e.g., the Ain Issa and Tall Abyad areas)710 and Hasaka (Ras Al-Ain)711 witnessed heavy clashes between the Turkish forces/SNA and the SDF, involving the use of heavy weaponry,712 rocket fire,713 drone warfare,714 and infiltrations,715 as well as Turkish forces and Türkiye-backed SNA factions bombarding villages.716

Civilian casualties in the Operation Peace Spring area included two women who were shot dead by Military Police (Sulouk area in the Raqqa countryside), a girl injured by a

shell fired by Turkish forces (western rural Tall Abyad in northern Raqqa)717 and the killing and wounding of seven civilians in an explosion at a military headquarters in the Ras Al-Ain countryside following an infiltration by SDF special forces.718 The Ras Al-Ain area also experienced growing 'security chaos', including thefts, robberies, and infighting between armed factions719 linked to militiamen intending to leave the Operation Peace Spring area720 (such relocations into SDF territory have been facilitated by SDF).721 Turkish-backed Military Police and militias conducted security campaigns targeting individuals attempting to leave the area.722 Several members of Turkish-backed militias have been killed in this context.723

According to ACLED data, the areas under the control of SNA/disputed in Raqqa and Hasaka governorates which were the most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reporting period were Raqqa's Tall Abyad (193 incidents), and Hasaka's Ras Al Ain (111) districts, amounting to around 51 % and 27 % of all security incidents recorded in Raqqa and Hasaka governorates, respectively.724

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