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# 4.3. Areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

For information regarding security trends in the Kurdish-controlled areas prior to November 2024, see sections 2.2., 2.7., 2.8. and 2.9. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

The SDF control a large swath of territory in northeastern Syria that accounts for almost one-third of the country's overall area.[725] These territories comprised about 70 percent of Syria's oil and gas fields.[726] As of February and March 2025, the territories controlled, occupied, or seized by the SDF encompassed most of Hasaka, approximately half of Raqqa (including Raqqa city), and the portions of Deir Ez-Zor and Aleppo that are located east of the Euphrates River, as well as a narrow salient on Aleppo's western Euphrates bank,[727] situated south of Lake Assad and near the Tishreen Dam.[728] According to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and the Critical Threats Project (CTP) some small areas west of the Euphrates, located south of Al-Bab and Manbij, were contested between the SDF and the SNA.[729] At least in the immediate aftermath of the takeover of Aleppo city by the armed opposition, the SDF remained in control of the city's two Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods Ashrafieh and Sheikh Maqsoud.[730]

On 6 December 2024, the former Assad government withdrew from Deir Ez-Zor city and its environs and the SDF advanced into these areas, seeking to fill this vacuum.[731] As Assad's troops started to hand over territory to the SDF,[732] the SNA, launching its own Operation Dawn of Freedom[733] in northern and eastern rural Aleppo,[734] expelled the Kurdish forces from key points on the western bank,[735] seizing Tall Rifaat[736] and the strategic city of Manbij on 10 December 2024.[737] However, the SDF made some territorial gains in eastern rural Aleppo in late December 2024[738] and by January 2025 was again sending units deep into former Assad areas in Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa and Aleppo.[739]

As of late February 2025, Turkish forces/the SNA and the SDF continued to engage in heavy fighting in northern Syria near the Qara Qozak Bridge and the Tishreen Dam,[740] with ISW and CTP suggesting that Türkiye was possibly attempting to cut the SDF's supply lines to the dam, located on the eastern Euphrates bank in Aleppo governorate.[741] For more information on the clashes in northern Syria, see section 4.2 of this report. Moreover, during the reference period, Türkiye has been shelling SDF sites throughout northeastern Syria.[742] As of January 2025, it was noted that the SDF, weakened by its loss of territory and retreat east of the Euphrates,[743] was facing an existential threat[744] as it fought to safeguard its autonomous territory.[745] At the

same time, the reference period saw forces of the US-led Global Coalition intensifying military patrols746 and bringing in military equipment to reinforce its bases.747 For more information on the reinforcement of coalition bases in the region, see section 3.4. of this report.

While the conflict between the SDF and the SNA remained central in northeastern Syria,748 SDF has been facing dissent from some Arab tribal factions in Deir E-Zor749 and these long-standing conflicts also continued during the reference period.750 Armed men linked to Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hafel,751 a tribal leader known for mobilising tribes in Deir Ez-Zor against the SDF,752 attacked security headquarters and patrolling SDF troops. In January 2025, several civilians were injured as the SDF shot at young men in the aftermath of a series of such attacks,753 while dozens of suspected Assad loyalists, National Defence Forces (NDF) militiamen and Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hafel supporters were arrested in a sweeping security campaign in the Deir Ez-Zor countryside.754

SDF-controlled areas witnessed civilians being killed or injured in a variety of incidents, including assassinations,755 tribal756 and family disputes,757 multiple attacks by Turkish forces,758 SDF members shooting at protesters,759 and (alleged) ISIL attacks.760 Dozens of civilians were killed or injured in multiple Turkish drone strikes allegedly launched against civilian targets in the vicinity of the Tishreen Dam (eastern Aleppo).761

ISIL cells conducted attacks on SDF positions and military patrols in northeastern Syria, causing a number of casualties among SDF troops.762 SOHR recorded 27 ISIL operations in November 2024 (including 22 in Deir Ez-Zor and 3 in Hasaka) and a further 13 ISIL operations during the first three weeks of January 2025 in the SDF-controlled areas (10 in Deir Ez-Zor and 3 in Hasaka). ISIL attacks resulted in a number of deaths or injuries among civilians763 and members of Kurdish security forces.764 In early February 2025, following large-scale aerial operations against ISIL across Syria in December 2024, the US-led coalition and the SDF launched a new campaign against the group in southern areas of Hasaka, killing two ISIL operatives.765

According to ACLED data, the areas under the control of SDF/disputed most affected by security incidents (battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) during the reference period were Deir Ez-Zor (258 incidents) and Hasaka districts (229 incidents), amounting to around 56 % and 57 % of all security incidents recorded in Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorate, respectively.766

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.767

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