

## 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.<sup>725</sup> These territories comprised about 70 percent of Syria's oil and gas fields.<sup>726</sup> 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,<sup>727</sup> situated south of Lake Assad and near the Tishreen Dam.<sup>728</sup> 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.<sup>729</sup> 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.<sup>730</sup>

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

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,<sup>740</sup> 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.<sup>741</sup> 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.<sup>742</sup> As of January 2025, it was noted that the SDF, weakened by its loss of territory and retreat east of the Euphrates,<sup>743</sup> was facing an existential threat<sup>744</sup> as it fought to safeguard its autonomous territory.<sup>745</sup> At the

same time, the reference period saw forces of the US-led Global Coalition intensifying military patrols<sup>746</sup> and bringing in military equipment to reinforce its bases.<sup>747</sup> 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,<sup>748</sup> SDF has been facing dissent from some Arab tribal factions in Deir E-Zor<sup>749</sup> and these long-standing conflicts also continued during the reference period.<sup>750</sup> Armed men linked to Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hafel,<sup>751</sup> a tribal leader known for mobilising tribes in Deir Ez-Zor against the SDF,<sup>752</sup> 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,<sup>753</sup> 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.<sup>754</sup>

SDF-controlled areas witnessed civilians being killed or injured in a variety of incidents, including assassinations,<sup>755</sup> tribal<sup>756</sup> and family disputes,<sup>757</sup> multiple attacks by Turkish forces,<sup>758</sup> SDF members shooting at protesters,<sup>759</sup> and (alleged) ISIL attacks.<sup>760</sup> 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).<sup>761</sup>

ISIL cells conducted attacks on SDF positions and military patrols in northeastern Syria, causing a number of casualties among SDF troops.<sup>762</sup> 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 civilians<sup>763</sup> and members of Kurdish security forces.<sup>764</sup> 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.<sup>765</sup>

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.<sup>766</sup>

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.<sup>767</sup>

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