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4.5.2. Tactics and weapons used

During the course of the large-scale military offensive ('Operation Deterrence of Aggression') that was launched in November 2024 by HTS⁸¹² and several HTS-led armed opposition groups and was supported by Türkiye-backed factions,⁸¹³ opposition forces carried out attacks using medium and heavy weaponry,⁸¹⁴ as well as drones developed by the HTS's own drone unit.⁸¹⁵ Multiple ground-based strikes⁸¹⁶ by HTS left four civilians dead in Aleppo city.⁸¹⁷

On the other hand, forces of the Assad government and affiliated militia carried out large-scale ground-based rocket and artillery strikes and airstrikes,⁸¹⁸ while Russian forces resumed airstrikes, causing dozens of civilian deaths, including in Idlib city and western rural Aleppo's Al-Atareb and Darat Izza towns.⁸¹⁹ Assad's forces, known for their random use of drones mainly targeting civilians,⁸²⁰ had already escalated their suicide drone attacks against opposition-held areas in southern Idlib and western Aleppo in November 2024.⁸²¹ According to UN figures, multiple aerial strikes by pro-Assad forces in Idlib city killed 22 civilians on 1 December 2024 as they struck a local market and five of the city's residential areas.⁸²² According to SOHR, Iran-backed militias in Syria and Iraq conducted seven attacks on three bases of the US-led Global Coalition on Syrian territory in November 2024 (Koniko gas field, Al-Tanf garrison, and Al-Shaddadi).⁸²³ For more information, [see section 4.1.](#) of this report.

Meanwhile, airstrikes conducted by the US-led Global coalition and Israeli forces the same month resulted in the deaths of dozens of Iran-backed militiamen, while also killing some Lebanese Hezbollah fighters and unidentified individuals. Attacks targeting Iran-backed militias in Deir Ez-Zor in November 2024 further involved unidentified aircraft and drone usage. According to SOHR, airstrikes launched by Israeli forces in November 2024 left 16 civilians dead.⁸²⁴ For more information, see sections [3.4.](#), [3.5.](#), [4.3.](#) and [4.4.](#) of this report.

Following the ouster of Assad in December 2024, HTS operations targeting loyalists of the former government saw the deployment of tanks, attack helicopters,⁸²⁵ drones⁸²⁶ and long-range rockets⁸²⁷ and took the form of raids⁸²⁸ and combing operations. Meanwhile, the cities on the coast witnessed assaults and targeted attacks by remnants of the former Assad government.⁸²⁹ Likely former pro-Assad gangs (shabiha) were suspected of carrying out ambushes against HTS-led security forces.⁸³⁰ Attacks targeting the HTS/MOA involved the use of explosives⁸³¹ and small firearms.⁸³² Unknown armed men reportedly dressed in military fatigues and impersonating security forces in one instance committed over a dozen killings in Fahl (Homs) in retaliation for the new transitional administration's violent crackdown on shabiha.⁸³³ For more information, [see section 4.1.](#) of this report.

Turkish-backed SNA factions and SDF units continued to engage in armed confrontations and attacks using remote violence.⁸³⁴ The Turkish armed forces launched multiple air and drone attacks against SDF troops in the countryside of Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasaka, including in eastern rural Aleppo's Tishreen Dam area. These aerial attacks were carried out alongside artillery attacks on SDF positions by ground-based SNA fighters.⁸³⁵ Turkish artillery shelling,⁸³⁶ drone strikes⁸³⁷ and airstrikes⁸³⁸ reportedly left dozens of civilians dead,⁸³⁹ including in attacks targeting protesters who had gathered near the Tishreen Dam. As part of the ongoing skirmishes in the Tishreen Dam area, the SDF in turn carried out ambushes,⁸⁴⁰ artillery strikes⁸⁴¹ and drone strikes.⁸⁴² There were reports of dozens of casualties both among the SNA⁸⁴³ and Kurdish forces.⁸⁴⁴ The Manbij area further witnessed a series of unclaimed car bombings,⁸⁴⁵ which in total left over a dozen civilians dead.⁸⁴⁶ For more information, [see sections 4.2 and 4.3](#) of this report.

Following the fall of Assad, Israeli airstrikes saw a significant escalation, reaching nearly 500 attacks by 18 December 2024, according to SOHR records. Launched across multiple governorates,⁸⁴⁷ these strikes targeted military assets⁸⁴⁸ and caused a number of civilian deaths.⁸⁴⁹ After Assad's fall, Israel deployed tanks and bulldozers in its ground incursions into parts of Quneitra and Dar'a, while Israeli airstrikes targeted an HTS-led convoy, killing a town mayor.⁸⁵⁰ Meanwhile, US airstrikes on 8 December 2024 hit over 75 ISIL targets⁸⁵¹ and aerial strikes by the Global Coalition continued into early 2025.⁸⁵² For more information on Israeli operations during the reference period, [see section 4.4](#) of this report.

At communal level, exchanges of gunfire were reported between tribal groups in Al-Bukamal city (early November 2024), resulting in injuries among several tribesmen. Further armed clashes were reported between Lebanese Hezbollah/Lebanese tribesmen and local villagers in the countryside of Al-Qusayr city⁸⁵³ in southwestern Homs,⁸⁵⁴ resulting in several deaths among villagers.⁸⁵⁵

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