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2.1.1. Targeting by the interim government

○ (a) Former soldiers and security personnel

After taking power, the interim government ordered thousands of police, security officers, and soldiers to undergo a ‘reconciliation’ process, requiring them to surrender their identification, weapons, and vehicles while awaiting investigation.170 Each governorate established centres to receive surrendering regime personnel. Those who surrendered themselves and their weapons were granted a ‘security settlement certificate’ and assured protection from prosecution.171 They were allowed to reintegrate into civilian life, provided they had not participated in massacres or war crimes during the civil war.172 In the initial weeks following the fall of the Assad government between 50 000 and 70 000 former SAA soldiers and conscripts reportedly surrendered their weapons and were demobilised, benefitting from the general amnesty announced by the new government.173

The coastal areas of Tartous and Latakia reportedly hold vast stockpiles of weapons which belong to the forces affiliated with the Assad government. While many individuals surrendered their weapons and completed reconciliation processes at designated centres, others refused to disarm, citing the fragile security environment and an ongoing need for self-defence.174 In early February 2025, between 4 000 and 5 000 men in Latakia and Tartous were estimated by a local source interviewed for a Middle East Institute (MEI) report to have evaded the settlement process/reconciliation, some being caught in security operations while others were reportedly involved in armed resistance against the interim government.175 Presumably aware that their past crimes would disqualify them from amnesty, senior figures from the former Assad regime, including top military and intelligence officials, avoided the settlement centres and instead began organising insurgent networks,176 particularly in the coastal areas. 177 Many senior regime officers, particularly brigadier generals and above, have reportedly fled abroad or gone into hiding to avoid potential accountability.178

Auxiliary militias such as the National Defence Forces (NDF) and Local Defence Forces disbanded without coordinated surrender. Many fighters went into hiding without surrendering their weapons.179

In the lead-up to the attacks by Assad loyalists that triggered the violence in the coastal areas in March, Iran-linked remnants of the Assad regime were reportedly responsible for 46 attacks against security forces across multiple governorates since mid-January.180 According to a Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies report, the dissolution of former military and security institutions left hundreds of thousands unemployed. This combined with the compulsory settlement procedures imposed on members of the dissolved army, police, and security services fuelled resentment and unrest.181

Security forces of the interim government launched operations to 'pursue the remnants' of the Assad regime. However, according to a Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies report, no list of suspects was published, no transitional body oversaw these efforts, no official procedures for accusation or arrest were established, and no courts were designated to handle legal cases. As a result, armed groups operated unchecked, often engaging in violations including extrajudicial killings. According to the source, the climate of lawlessness and fear created fertile ground for Assad-era officers to rally recruits and initiate destabilising operations across the country.182 According to International Crisis Group writing in March, the interim government largely prevented or punished acts of reprisal against individuals associated with the Assad government.183

Despite amnesty promises, there were reports that thousands of soldiers including high-ranking officers were imprisoned.184 According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), more than 8 000 individuals including former SAA soldiers and officers who surrendered, soldiers returned from Iraq after trying to escape Syria, soldiers who fought against ISIL in the Syrian desert and Deir Ez-Zor countryside and civilians detained during raids or at checkpoints have been held without charge185 for 146 days in prisons in Hama, Adra, and Harem. SOHR also reported that some high-ranking military personnel were quietly transferred to Afrin prison, with no official acknowledgement from the authorities.186 Between March and May, security forces affiliated with the MoI continued to conduct raids and detention campaigns targeting individuals accused of committing violations during the Assad regime's rule including military personnel and individuals allegedly involved in the March attacks against government forces. The arrests were recorded particularly in the governorates of Latakia, Homs, Hama, and Damascus. The operations resulted in the seizure of significant quantities of weapons and ammunition, with detainees transferred to central

prisons in Homs, Hama, and Adra (Rural Damascus governorate). According to SNHR, while these campaigns were framed as security operations, it remains unverified whether they were conducted based on lawful judicial warrants.187 According to the GPC, arbitrary detentions carried out by interim authorities, including of former Assad government officials, intelligence personnel, and militia leaders, have raised concerns over incommunicado detention and the lack of legal safeguards.188 SJAC stated that those arrested by the interim government are held incommunicado with no access to lawyers or family visits. They are not officially charged or brought to trial since the judiciary is not currently operating. SJAC noted sporadic reports of torture and abuse of detainees held for criminal or security-related reasons, including incidents in Adra prison. Cases of persons who died under torture were reported in Homs in February, with the GSS taking responsibility for some of the deaths and promising to open investigations.189

The authorities also released hundreds of persons including former military officers190 from various detention centres after it was determined that they were not involved in any crimes.191

According to Syria analysts Gregory Waters and Kayla Koontz, there are two distinct patterns emerging in the interim government's approach to pursue members of the former regime who had been involved in human rights violations: individuals who held senior positions or were involved in high-profile atrocities are often publicly named upon arrest, and generally remain in detention with some notable exceptions, such as the case of Fadi Saqr (previous leader of the National Defence Forces). In contrast, many lower-level officials and former informants remain at large. Despite frequent reports by locals to the security forces, these individuals are often detained only briefly before being released.192

SJAC observed that individuals with a higher profile are more likely to be targeted, while those with a lower profile can more easily avoid attention. According to SJAC, there is no consistent approach to the treatment of detainees. However, it is expected that higher-ranking individuals may receive relatively better treatment, either to extract information or to present them in court later as having been treated appropriately. In contrast, lower-ranking individuals are reportedly more vulnerable to mistreatment, with some appearing in videos showing signs of physical abuse.193

During the reference period, sources documented arrests of high-ranking military and intelligence officials of the Assad government including Brigadier General Bashar Mahfouz, a commander in the 25th Division, for alleged war crimes,194 Major General

Mohammad Kanjo Al-Hassan, the former head of the Military Justice Administration under Assad, for his role in mass murders at Sednaya Prison,195 and Brigadier General Salem Dagestani, the former head of the Investigation Branch in the Air Force Intelligence Directorate.196

○ (b) Other categories of professionals

Sources reported sporadic arrests of other categories of professionals by the interim government forces. For instance, SNHR documented the arrest of individuals suspected of having been involved in violations during the Assad regime's rule such as government employees,197 doctors working in military hospitals affiliated with the security services,198 and media professionals who had previously worked for state-run stations affiliated with the Assad regime.199 The source did not provide additional details.

Infrequent arrests of former Ba'ath party members, including a former provincial secretary,200 have been reported although information on the reasons behind the arrests have not been provided by the sources. Other notable arrests reported were of a former member of Parliament known for his pro-Assad position201 and of the former Grand Mufti of Syria, Ahmad Hassoun, who had endorsed the war tactics used by the former regime and is suspected of being involved signing execution orders for thousands of anti-government prisoners.202 The sources did not provide any additional information regarding the charges brought against them. According to Enab Baladi, authorities announce near-daily arrests of individuals affiliated with the former Assad regime, particularly targeting military officers, personnel, and doctors accused of crimes against Syrians. However, the source assessed that, aside from the arrest of former Mufti Ahmad Hassoun, no action has been taken against figures who publicly supported or advanced the Assad regime's narrative during the conflict.203

According to SJAC, merely being a former Ba'ath Party member does not in itself lead to targeting, as party membership was mandatory for most of the population. The targeting of former civilian officials appears to be arbitrary. More prominent individuals, who have been visible and made statements during the former regime's rule, may be

singled out to allow the authorities to demonstrate a commitment to justice. In contrast, lesser-known individuals are generally not detained unless they are implicated in specific crimes or had ties to the intelligence services.204

According to SJAC, aside from the former Minister of Interior, no other members of the Assad government have been detained. Some former officials remain in Syria and continue to appear in the media, while others have either fled the country or gone into hiding, such as the former Minister of Defence.205

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