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5.1.2. Assad-aligned militias

Former Assad government senior military and intelligence officials formed new groups and networks aimed at fighting against the new authorities. Several new armed formations have emerged since the fall of the Assad regime:

- The Syrian Popular Resistance, with its Coastal Shield Forces detachment active in Latakia, Tartous, Homs, and Hama. It is led by former Republican Guard commander Miqdad Fatiha, who has threatened further attacks on the new government following the ambush on 6 March.752 It is reportedly comprised of former SAA and Assad regime members.753

- The Syrian Islamic Resistance Front (Uli al-Baas), assessed to likely be an Iranian/Hezbollah proxy, was active in Dar'a and Quneitra. Promoted in Iranian state media as a 'resistance' group, it features typical proxy iconography and was officially formed two months earlier.

- Remnants of the National Defence Forces, the former regime's irregular units, were attempting to reorganise in Deir Ez Zor, though many members have been arrested by the interim authorities.

- The Military Council to Free Syria, led by Brigadier General Ghaith Dala, was announced on the morning of the ambush against government security forces on 6 March. Unlike Fatiha, Dala has called for negotiations.754

These groups are reportedly attempting to incite sectarian tensions while portraying themselves as protectors of the Alawite community.755 The factions operating in Syria's coastal areas were regarded as most organised insurgent groups. Their activities are, according to ISW, likely supported by Hezbollah-linked smuggling networks active along the Lebanon-Syria border.756 In May, GSS forces arrested a member of the Coastal Shield Forces in Latakia city.757 After recoding a peak in March, insurgent attacks by Assad-aligned Alawite militias against the interim government and Sunni communities have since 'become increasingly rare'. According to ISW, the decrease is likely due to limited Alawite support, increased pressure from government forces leading to arrests of insurgents and seizure of weapons caches, and poorly executed insurgent operations.758

- 5.1.3. ISIL

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