

5.3. Recent security trends

Syria's interim government consolidated control over parts of the country including in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Hama⁷⁹³ and expanded its presence in areas of central, northern⁷⁹⁴ and southern Syria.⁷⁹⁵ However, insecurity persisted in many areas of the country.⁷⁹⁶ In early March, pro-Assad loyalists launched an insurgency against the interim government's security forces primarily in the coastal areas of Tartous and Latakia.⁷⁹⁷ The escalation triggered intense hostilities and sectarian violence, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians⁷⁹⁸ and the displacement of tens of thousands.⁷⁹⁹ Since peaking in March, insurgent attacks by pro-Assad loyalists have significantly declined.⁸⁰⁰ In Sweida and Dar'a governorates, resistance of local armed groups to government control and integration into state forces,⁸⁰¹ resulted at times in clashes and casualties. In late April and early May, fighting between local Druze armed groups and pro-government forces in Rural Damascus⁸⁰² and Sweida resulted in more than 100 fatalities⁸⁰³ including dozens of civilians.⁸⁰⁴

The interim government's forces have reportedly been overstretched,⁸⁰⁵ operating with limited effectiveness and facing challenges from armed groups that, while nominally integrated in their structure, have been operating semi-independently.⁸⁰⁶ At times, armed groups affiliated with the interim government reportedly operated outside its control⁸⁰⁷ and committed violations against civilians, notably during the violence in the coastal areas in early March⁸⁰⁸ and in Druze-majority areas in late April.⁸⁰⁹ The interim government's forces have faced challenges in responding to sectarian violence,⁸¹⁰ kidnappings⁸¹¹ and looting.⁸¹² Revenge killings targeting individuals linked to the former Assad regime's security apparatus and the Alawite community by unidentified actors continued to be reported across multiple governorates.⁸¹³ Sectarian-motivated assassinations of Alawites have been particularly notable in Homs governorate.⁸¹⁴ An increase in criminal activity and lawlessness, including of kidnappings⁸¹⁵ and murders⁸¹⁶ has been reported across the areas controlled by the interim government.⁸¹⁷ This situation has been partly attributed to post-Assad security vacuum,⁸¹⁸ deep societal divides and economic hardship caused by the civil war,⁸¹⁹ the interim government's shortcomings in bringing competing armed groups under its control,⁸²⁰ and the lack of effective transitional justice mechanisms.⁸²¹

Meanwhile, Israel 'has emerged as the most destabilising external force in post-Assad Syria' according to International Crisis Group.⁸²² It continued to occupy the demilitarised zone in the Golan Heights and a 'buffer zone' in southern Syria.⁸²³ Israel continued to carry out incursions and attacks in south-west Syria⁸²⁴ and airstrikes on multiple targets, including in the vicinity of the Presidential palace in Damascus.⁸²⁵ It has reiterated its position against the deployment of Syrian forces south of Damascus and has actively sought the support of the Druze minority in the area, offering them protection.⁸²⁶

In northeast Syria, the integration agreement between the interim government and SDF in early March led to a significant decline in armed confrontations between the SDF and the SNA factions nominally affiliated with the government.⁸²⁷ However, tensions between SDF and the interim government remain⁸²⁸ and the integration of military and civilian institutions of the DAANES into the state remained largely unresolved as of late May.⁸²⁹

Sporadic ISIL attacks targeting interim government's forces,⁸³⁰ the SDF⁸³¹ and civilians⁸³² particularly in Deir Ez Zor governorate, were reported during the reference period. An increase in ISIL activity and anti-ISIL operations by the interim government's forces was reported in May.⁸³³

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