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5.3. Recent security trends

Syria's interim government consolidated control over parts of the country including in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Hama[793] and expanded its presence in areas of central, northern[794] 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 civilians[798] 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 Damascus[802] and Sweida resulted in more than 100 fatalities[803] 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 control[807] and committed violations against civilians, notably during the violence in the coastal areas in early March[808] and in Druze-majority areas in late April.[809] The interim government's forces have faced challenges in responding to sectarian violence,[810] kidnappings[811] 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 kidnappings[815] and murders[816] 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 Syria[824] 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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