



**Please cite as:** EUAA, '[5.3. Recent security trends](#)' in *COI Report - Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025.

## 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<sup>793</sup> and expanded its presence in areas of central, northern<sup>794</sup> and southern Syria.<sup>795</sup> However, insecurity persisted in many areas of the country.<sup>796</sup> 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.<sup>797</sup> The escalation triggered intense hostilities and sectarian violence, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians<sup>798</sup> and the displacement of tens of thousands.<sup>799</sup> Since peaking in March, insurgent attacks by pro-Assad loyalists have significantly declined.<sup>800</sup> In Sweida and Dar'a governorates, resistance of local armed groups to government control and integration into state forces,<sup>801</sup> 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<sup>802</sup> and Sweida resulted in more than 100 fatalities<sup>803</sup> including dozens of civilians.<sup>804</sup>

The interim government's forces have reportedly been overstretched,<sup>805</sup> operating with limited effectiveness and facing challenges from armed groups that, while nominally integrated in their structure, have been operating semi-independently.<sup>806</sup> At times, armed groups affiliated with the interim government reportedly operated outside its control<sup>807</sup> and committed violations against civilians, notably during the violence in the coastal areas in early March<sup>808</sup> and in Druze-majority areas in late April.<sup>809</sup> The interim government's forces have faced challenges in responding to sectarian violence,<sup>810</sup> kidnappings<sup>811</sup> and looting.<sup>812</sup> 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.<sup>813</sup> Sectarian-motivated assassinations of Alawites have been particularly notable in Homs governorate.<sup>814</sup> An increase in criminal activity and lawlessness, including of kidnappings<sup>815</sup> and murders<sup>816</sup> has been reported across the areas controlled by the interim government.<sup>817</sup> This situation has been partly attributed to post-Assad security vacuum,<sup>818</sup> deep societal divides and economic hardship caused by the civil war,<sup>819</sup> the interim government's shortcomings in bringing competing armed groups under its control,<sup>820</sup> and the lack of effective transitional justice mechanisms.<sup>821</sup>

Meanwhile, Israel 'has emerged as the most destabilising external force in post-Assad Syria' according to International Crisis Group.<sup>822</sup> It continued to occupy the demilitarised zone in the Golan Heights and a 'buffer zone' in southern Syria.<sup>823</sup> Israel continued to carry out incursions and attacks in south-west Syria<sup>824</sup> and airstrikes on multiple targets, including in the vicinity of the Presidential palace in Damascus.<sup>825</sup> 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 remain[828](#) 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 SDF[831](#) and civilians[832](#) 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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