

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 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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