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5.8.5. Tartous governorate

1106_map7_mapaction_Tartous_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Map 7: © MapAction, Tartous governorate map1106

☐ (a) Administrative division and population estimates

Tartous governorate is divided into six administrative districts, namely Banyas (Baniyas), Dreikish, Qadmous, Safita, Sheikh Badr and Tartous, which are further divided into a total of 27 sub-districts.1107 Its capital is the city of Tartous.1108 As of March 2025, the population of Tartous governorate was 1 216 889, including residents and IDPs, according to IOM estimates.1109 By comparison, the WHO estimated the governorate's population at 939 918 as of the same month.1110 For further background information on Tartous governorate, see section 2.5.1. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

☐ (b) Territorial control and main armed actors

As of the end of May 2025, Tartous governorate was mapped by the ISW and the CTP as being entirely under the control of the transitional administration, although there were multiple pockets across the governorate where pro-Assad remnants maintained a presence.1111

Non-state armed groups in the governorate whose activities were reported during the reference period included the Sunni sectarian group Saraya Ansar al Sunnah.1112 Moreover, a number of pro-Assad insurgent groups operated in the governorate, among them the so-called Military Council for the Liberation of Syria,1113 the Syrian Popular Resistance,1114 and the Liwa' Dara' al-Sahel (Coastal Shield Brigade).1115

The general mobilisation initiated across the country in response to the March 2025 uprising[1116] saw the deployment of MOA, General Security, HTS and SNA forces, as well as non-official fighters to the coastal region,[1117] including Tartous city and Banyas.[1118] While the MOA claimed that up to 500 000 troops had been mobilised, Etana Syria estimated these numbers at around 70 000.[1119] The transitional administration's forces subsequently secured most urban areas, although some pro-Assad militant cells remained active in the governorate.[1120] Approximately 150 security checkpoints were subsequently set up by the transitional administration[1121] across western Syria.[1122]

Furthermore, there were continuing reports of Israeli aerial operations in the governorate.[1123]

☐ (c) Security trends

The reference period saw the emergence of new conflict dynamics in the coastal areas, driven by a significant increase in crimes and violence motivated by sectarian differences or perceived links to the former Assad government.[1124]

Between 6 and 10 March 2025, the security situation significantly deteriorated[1125] as an estimated 5 000 well-armed pro-Assad fighters[1126] launched coordinated attacks on military and security forces in the coastal region,[1127] targeting several sites in Tartous, including in Banyas and Qadmous districts.[1128] Ensuing large-scale security operations against the perpetrators of the attacks were accompanied by killings of a retaliatory and sectarian nature,[1129] including of civilians in Banyas town[1130] (one of the places most severely affected by the violence)[1131] as Alawite-majority civilian communities were being targeted.[1132] In mid-April, the SNHR estimated the total toll of those killed during the hostilities in Tartous and elsewhere in the coastal region between 6 and 10 March at 1 662. These deaths included at least 231 civilians killed by pro-Assad armed groups and at least 1 217 individuals, among them civilians and disarmed Assad remnants, who were killed during security operations,[1133] mainly at the hands of fighters of two former SNA rebel factions, the Sultan Suleiman Shah brigade and the Hamzat division.[1134] For further information on the events of early March 2025, see section 4.1.2. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Country Focus (March 2025).

While the large-scale operations against Assad remnants were officially announced to have ended on 10 March 2025[1135] and effectively wound down, some targeted raids by security forces against Assad loyalist cells continued.[1136] Isolated attacks by Assad

remnants targeting the security forces persisted,1137 but the general security situation was reported to have calmed significantly by late March1138 and early April 2025.1139

Meanwhile, continuing accounts were emerging of 'sectarian attacks, execution-style killings and other violations against civilians' by factions nominally affiliated with the military and security forces,1140 notably in the Al-Dinsa area,1141 and possibly near a checkpoint in the Safita area.1142 Moreover, Saraya Ansar al Sunnah claimed the killing of an Alawite man and one of his relatives in Safita town in April 2025,1143 with further killings of Alawites and clashes between Alawite and Sunni communities reported the following month.1144

The governorate further witnessed multiple killings of civilians by unidentified gunmen, including in Tartous city1145 and its countryside1146 and in the Banyas countryside, 1147 as well as several kidnappings.1148

Airstrikes by Israeli forces hit multiple sites in the vicinity of the port of Tartous in early March1149 and late May 2025.1150

☐ (d) Security incidents

Between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 140 security incidents in Tartous governorate (see Figure 17). For the period between 1 March and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 99 security incidents (defined as battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) in Tartous governorate. Of these, 12 were coded as battles, 10 as explosions/remote violence and 77 as incidents of violence against civilians. The number of security incidents across the governorate peaked in March (73 incidents) and subsequently dropped to less than 20 incidents per month in April and May.1151

1152_evolution_security_events_Tartous_dec24_may25_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 17: Evolution of security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' in Tartous governorate between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, based on ACLED data.1152

During the reference period, security incidents were recorded by ACLED in five of the six districts of the governorate (Banyas, Dreikish, Qadmous, Safita, and Tartous), with the highest numbers documented in the districts of Banyas (47 incidents) and Tartous (32). By comparison, the fewest incidents were recorded in Dreikish and Safita districts (three incidents each). According to ACLED data, police and military forces of Syria were involved as a main actor (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') in around 67 % of all security incidents recorded during the reference period, particularly in incidents

coded as violence against civilians, but also in battles and explosions/remote violence that also involved militia opposed to the MOA as another actor. These anti-MOA militia were involved in around 19 % of all security incidents, most of which were incidents coded as battles and explosions/remote violence where Syrian police and military forces were also an actor. Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 24 % of all security incidents, nearly all of which were incidents coded as violence against civilians.1153

☐ (e) Civilian casualties

In March 2025, the SNHR recorded 338 civilian fatalities in Tartous governorate and an additional 339 civilian victims who died at unspecified locations in the coastal region. After Latakia, Tartous was the governorate that witnessed the second-highest number of civilian fatalities that month, accounting for around 22 % of the total number (1 562) recorded across all governorates.1154 The number of civilian fatalities then significantly decreased to 8 in April and 6 in May.1155 SNHR attributed responsibility for the majority of the civilian fatalities it recorded over this three-month period to armed forces involved in the security crackdowns in the coastal region (291 deaths, all in March) and non-state armed groups linked to the former Assad government (38 deaths, all in March).1156 SNHR does not provide more detailed information on these fatalities. For the period between March and May 2025, UCDP recorded 171 civilian fatalities in Tartous governorate.1157

1158_civilian_fatalities_Tartous_mar_may25_snhr_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 18: Civilian fatalities in Tartous governorate between March and May 2025. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data.1158

☐ (f) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

The escalation of hostilities in early March 2025 resulted in the burning of homes in Alawite villages1159 and infrastructure damage1160 that affected at least one hospital and 30 schools in the governorate.1161 Information on incidents linked to explosive remnants of war could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

☐ (g) Conflict-induced displacement and return

According to UNHCR estimates, as of 12 June 2025, 171 273 IDPs and 4 286 individuals who had returned to areas of the governorate from internal displacement since 27 November 2024 were living in the governorate.1162 The large-scale hostilities in March 2025 resulted in the displacement of an estimated 51 000 people across the two governorates of Latakia and Tartous, of whom 6 000 fled to Lebanon.1163

UNHCR further estimated that as of 15 May 2025, a total of 7 931 individuals who had returned from abroad since the beginning of 2024 were living in the governorate, the vast majority having returned to the districts of Tartous (6 054) and Banyas (1 660). Since 8 December 2024, 5 969 individuals had returned to Tartous governorate from abroad.1164

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