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5.8.8. Raqqa governorate

1274_map10_mapaction_Raqqa_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Map 10: © MapAction, Raqqa governorate[1274]

☐ (a) Administrative division and population estimates

Raqqa (or Ar-Raqqah) governorate is divided into three administrative districts, namely Raqqa (or Ar-Raqqah), Al-Thawra (or Ath-Thawrah) and Tell Abiad (or Tall Abyad), which are further divided into a total of ten sub-districts.[1275] Its capital is the city of Raqqa.[1276] As of March 2025, IOM estimated the governorate's population at 843 596, including residents, IDPs, and returnees from abroad.[1277] In comparison, the WHO estimated Raqqa's population at 933 444 as of March 2025.[1278] For further background information on Raqqa governorate, see section 2.8.1. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

☐ (b) Territorial control and main armed actors

As of late May 2025, the ISW and CTP mapped the central part of Raqqa governorate bordering Aleppo governorate to the west and Deir Ez-Zor governorate to the east, as being under the control of the SDF. While a small strip of land in the north-west of the governorate also appeared to be under SDF control, most of the northern part of the governorate,[1279] where several Turkish military posts were also present,[1280] and a small area extending into Aleppo governorate at the western border below Lake Assad were mapped as being under the control of the Turkish-backed SNA,[1281] which together with other armed factions has formally come under the control of the MoD [1282] (see section 1.3.2(a) of this report for information on the integration process of the SNA into the new Syrian army). The southern parts of Raqqa governorate were mapped as being largely under the control of the transitional government, though one

area in the centre below Al-Thawra city extending from the Al-Thawra oil field to the Dubaysan oil field appeared to be contested between the SDF and the transitional government.1283 According to the ISW and CTP, these were areas where both sides conducted offensive and defensive manoeuvres, while neither group fully controlled the areas.1284 A smaller area near the eastern border and the Euphrates River also appeared to be under the transitional government's control. Two areas, one in the south-west and one in the south-east were marked as 'Lost Regime Territory'1285 . 1286 On 10 March 2025, the SDF and the transitional government signed an agreement regarding the integration of the SDF forces into the new Syrian army (see section 5.1.1).1287 However, as of early June the integration of SDF into the Syrian state military was still unresolved.1288 With reference to the Telegram channel of anti-SDF medium Al-Sharqiyya, ISW and CTP also reported in mid-April 2025 that the SDF had begun withdrawing its forces from Al-Thawra (or Al-Tabqa) city towards Raqqa city. 1289

The existence of ISIL cells in the governorate was reported during the reference period. 1290

In late April 2025, Shafaq News reported that the US-led International Coalition was expected to maintain a base in Raqqa governorate.1291

☐ (c) Security trends

In March 2025, GPC reported that security challenges in north-eastern Syria persisted, including in Raqqa governorate, where clashes had resulted in civilian casualties and displacement.1292 The report also stated that the risk of active conflict in north-eastern Syria, including in Raqqa governorate, was higher than elsewhere in the country due to ongoing clashes between the SDF and the HTS/SNA. The persistence of ISIL cells in the region, including Raqqa, further exacerbated this vulnerability.1293 The same month, ISW and CTP reported attacks by Türkiye and the Turkish-backed SNA on SDF positions in Raqqa governorate,1294 including along the Highway 4.1295 As of mid-March 2025, Türkiye had conducted aerial attacks on SDF positions in several Syrian governorates, including in Raqqa, on an almost daily basis since December 2024.1296 Between late February and 7 March 2025, an escalation in Turkish airstrikes against SDF positions in Raqqa and eastern Aleppo governorates reportedly 'resulted in some of the highest daily death tolls in weeks'.1297 According to ACLED, confrontations between the SNA and the SDF sharply declined after the 10 March agreement was signed by the transitional government and the SDF (see section 5.1.1),

coinciding with fewer Turkish airstrikes on SDF areas.1298 According to SDF commander-in-chief Mazloum Abdi as of late May 2025, the SDF had observed a 'ceasefire with Türkiye for two and half months'.1299

Sources reported of raids and detention campaigns carried out by the SDF in Raqqa governorate during the reference period.1300 In early March 2025, the SDF had reportedly conducted raids on civilians and made arrests in the governorate without providing reasons.1301 In mid-March 2025, Syria TV reported that the SDF had launched a large-scale arrest campaign in several north-eastern Syrian governorates, including Raqqa, targeting individuals who had expressed support for the transitional government.1302 In mid-May 2025, the same source reported that the SDF had carried out intense military operations in Raqqa city and its countryside, including a detention campaign.1303 In May, individuals whose family members had defected from the SDF were reportedly targeted in detention campaigns, in an attempt to put pressure on defectors.1304 SNHR reported that at least 47 persons were detained by the SDF in Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates in the second half of May 2025, including individuals who were critical of SDF policies and relatives of SDF defectors.1305

During the reference period, there were reports of raids against ISIL cells in Raqqa, carried out by the SDF1306 with the support of US and Global Coalition forces.1307 In April, an ISIL cell that had reportedly been planning to help ISIL-affiliated prisoners escape from a Raqqa prison was uncovered during a raid.1308 For further information on security trends in the period between November 2024 and February 2025, see section 4. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Country Focus (March 2025).

☐ (d) Security incidents

Between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 426 security incidents in Raqqa governorate (see Figure 22). For the period between 1 March 2025 and 31 May 2025, ACLED recorded 106 security incidents (defined as battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians) in Raqqa governorate. Of these, 61 were coded as incidents of violence against civilians, 26 as explosions/remote violence and 19 as battles. 47 of the overall incidents occurred in March.1309

1310_evolution_security_events_Raqqa_dec24_may25_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 22: Evolution of security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' in Raqqa governorate between 9 December 2024 and 31 May 2025, based on ACLED data.1310

During the reference period, security incidents were recorded by ACLED in all three districts of the governorate, with the highest number documented in the district of Raqqa (63 incidents), followed by Tell Abiad (26 incidents). The fewest incidents were recorded in Al-Thawra district (17 incidents). According to ACLED data, the SDF were the main actor involved in around 62 % of all recorded security incidents (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) during the reference period, particularly in incidents coded as violence against civilians involving detentions. The majority of these incidents occurred in March. Unidentified armed groups were involved in around 16 % of all security incidents, particularly incidents coded as explosions/remote violence caused by landmines and IEDs, which affected civilians. ISIL was involved in around 8 % of all security incidents, all of which were coded as battles involving the SDF or affiliated forces. Transitional government forces and military forces of Türkiye were also sporadically involved in security incidents in Raqqa governorate.1311

☐ (e) Civilian casualties

In March 2025, the SNHR recorded two civilian fatalities in Raqqa governorate,1312 in April 2025, SNHR recorded four civilian fatalities,1313 and in May 2025, seven civilian fatalities were recorded in the governorate.1314 For the period between March and May 2025, UCDP recorded 10 civilian fatalities in Raqqa governorate.1315

1316_civilian_fatalities_Raqqa_mar_may25_snhr_072025_coi_syria_country_focus

Figure 23: Civilian fatalities in Raqqa governorate between March and May 2025. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data.1316

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

According to UNICEF, as of March 2025, fighting around the Tishreen Dam in Aleppo governorate had rendered the dam inoperable since December 2024. This had ‘severely’ impacted the water access of thousands of families in the region, including those in the city Ein Issa in Raqqa’s Tell Abiad district.1317 In May 2025, The New Arab reported that the SDF was carrying out ‘extensive tunnelling operations’ in Raqqa governorate, and that part of a street collapsed, when a truck drove over it due to a

tunnel underneath.1318

The above-mentioned March 2025 GPC report stated that IDPs returning to north-eastern Syrian governorates, including Raqqa, faced extensive explosive ordnance contamination.1319 The report also stated that the majority of unexploded ordnance incidents since December 2024 in several governorates, including in Raqqa, had occurred 'in agricultural settings as people were trying to cultivate land or graze animals'.1320 UNOCHA reported in May 2025 that UXOs, ERWs, mines and IEDs are 'reportedly widespread and affect residential areas, farmland, infrastructure, and key access routes' particularly in a handful of Syrian governorates, including in Raqqa.1321 Unexploded ordnance detonating in various parts of the governorate has caused civilian deaths and injuries, including in central,1322 northern,1323 eastern,1324 southern1325 and western rural Raqqa governorate.1326

☐ (g) Conflict-induced displacement and return

According to UNHCR estimates, as of 12 June 2025, there were 225 167 IDPs living in the governorate and 4 616 individuals who had returned to areas of the governorate from internal displacement since 27 November 2024.1327 In March 2025, the GPC reported that more than 20 000 people had been displaced by clashes near the Tishreen Dam in Aleppo governorate (see section 5.8.1(c)). Many of these people were accommodated in emergency collective shelters in Raqqa.1328

UNHCR further estimated that a total 92 301 returnees who had returned from abroad since the beginning of 2024 were living in the governorate by 15 May 2025, with the vast majority (62 838) returning to Raqqa district, followed by Al-Thawra (28 554). Since 8 December 2024, 16 565 individuals had returned to Al-Raqqa governorate from abroad.1329

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