



1.4. Recent security trends

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Bashar Al-Assad regime, the overall security situation across several of the country's regions was described as fragile³⁰⁰ as the transitional government struggled to establish security in areas outside Damascus³⁰¹ and to respond effectively to sectarian violence,³⁰² kidnappings³⁰³ and looting.³⁰⁴ The year 2025 saw two large waves of killings, erupting in coastal and western central Syria in March (involving intense attacks by state-affiliated actors against Alawites), and in Sweida in July (involving clashes between Druze and Bedouins³⁰⁵ and armed interventions by Syrian government and Israeli forces).³⁰⁶ The UN estimated the number of fatalities arising from these two instances of mass violence at more than 1 400 (events of March 2025)³⁰⁷ and at least 1 700 (events of July 2025), respectively.³⁰⁸ While Assadist groups continued to operate in the coastal areas,³⁰⁹ they only claimed limited attacks during the rest of 2025.³¹⁰ In Sweida, large-scale clashes declined after July 2025³¹¹ but sporadic clashes between Druze fighters and internal security forces continued ³¹² into May 2026³¹³ despite a ceasefire being in effect.³¹⁴

Compared to the fragility³¹⁵ and instability seen in the aftermath of the fall of Al-Assad,³¹⁶ sources reporting during the current reference period (1 October 2025 to 31 May 2026) pointed to signs of stabilisation.³¹⁷ According to the UN Secretary-General's deputy special envoy for Syria, Claudio Cordone, March 2026 saw the lowest levels of direct conflict-related violence in 15 years.³¹⁸ Nonetheless, significant challenges remained.³¹⁹ There was a spike in Assadist insurgent activity in late February 2026 in Latakia,³²⁰ while communal tensions remained at heightened levels in areas such as Homs³²¹ and Hama.³²² ISIL was present in some parts of Syria, while numerous weapons were still in the hands of unidentified assailants. Crimes such as robberies³²³ and murders continued.³²⁴ Minorities continued to face security threats,³²⁵ including abductions, disappearance and violent and sexual abuse targeting Alawite women.³²⁶ However, the reference period did not witness any waves of large-scale killings comparable to those of March or July 2025.³²⁷ Julien Barnes-Dacey, director of the MENA programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), noted that the transitional government's 'professional responses to security incidents have prevented new cycles of escalation' and that communal relations too appeared 'to be slowly improving on the ground'.³²⁸

In the northeast, open hostilities between government and SDF forces/Kurdish residents were reported in early October 2025 in Aleppo city's Kurdish-majority districts of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh.³²⁹ These were followed by major clashes between the government and the SDF in January 2026 that resulted between around 250 and more than 300 fatalities across Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka,³³⁰ most of them combatants.³³¹ However, these clashes did not descend into a prolonged armed conflict³³² or uncontrolled violence as seen on the coast in March 2025. According to Barnes-Dacey, this reflected a more carefully led government military

campaign and enhanced mechanisms of control within state forces.[333](#) Following this temporary spike in violence in January, levels soon reverted to a downward trend.[334](#)

Meanwhile, Sweida was 'sealed off' from the rest of Syria as residents rallied to support Druze religious leader Hikmat al-Hijri[335](#) and his calls for full independence from Damascus.[336](#) The governorate remained locked in stalemate, with neither side able or willing to bring about a fundamental shift in the military situation on the ground.[337](#) In one of the most intense escalations since the July 2025 ceasefire agreement, clashes erupted after ISC forces and affiliated tribal militias ambushed National Guard members on 19 March 2026, leading to a buildup of forces from both sides, while Israel conducted airstrikes targeting Syrian military infrastructure.[338](#)

ISIL activity significantly declined in the wake of the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, [339](#) largely due to intense aerial operations by the US-led Global Coalition against ISIL and reduced recruitment appeal.[340](#) However, the group continued a low-level insurgency over the following months,[341](#) mostly targeting the SDF over the second half of 2025.[342](#) In the reference period, ISIL re-emerged as a force of destabilisation.[343](#) Since late November 2025 the group has expanded its focus to targeting the government military forces[344](#) at an increased pace after the government joined the Global Coalition against ISIL.[345](#) ISIL's activities intensified after ISIL spokesperson Abu Hudhayfa Al-Ansari on 21 February 2026 called for confronting the transitional government[346](#) in what he declared a 'new phase of operations'.[347](#) Its pace of attacks subsequently eased in early March but then intensified again[348](#) before seeing a significant decline since late March/early April 2026.[349](#)

As of April 2026, security issues in eastern Syria (Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa and Hasaka) were mainly linked to ISIL activity.[350](#) The group Saraya Ansar Al-Sunnah, which had claimed a deadly attack on a church in Damascus in June 2025,[351](#) again targeted civilians as it attacked a mosque in Homs City in December 2025, killing at least eight people.[352](#) Meanwhile, counterterrorism operations by the US-led Global Coalition against ISIL intensified in October[353](#) and notably during Operation Hawkeye Strike, launched in December 2025, under which strikes continued at least into February 2026.[354](#) Government-led operations further led to the arrest of hundreds of ISIL suspects and the dismantling of dozens of cells since mid-2025.[355](#)

The situation in southern Syria remained volatile in the face of Israel's military intervention in the region.[356](#) Over the year 2025, Israel conducted 15 artillery attacks and 830 air raids, according to Enab Baladi.[357](#) These air strikes targeted sites in Damascus City, Rural Damascus, Latakia, Hama, Homs, Daraa, and Sweida.[358](#) The pace of Israeli patrols and operations increased in December 2025 when the IDF launched daily ground incursions and surveillance flights across Quneitra and Dar'a, while intermittently shelling areas along the border strip.[359](#) The first months of 2026 saw significant numbers of security incidents arising in the context of IDF activities,[360](#) especially in March 2026, when the IDF conducted more than 321 military operations, including 121 aerial actions.[361](#) In a new development linked to the 2026 Iran war and Hezbollah's attacks on Israel, Hezbollah forces reportedly fired artillery shells at positions of the new Syrian army in March 2026. Such instability along the border with Lebanon was deemed a threat to cities like Damascus, Tartous, and Homs.[362](#)

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