



# Syria: Security situation

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## **Country of Origin Information Report**

**September 2022**



Manuscript completed in September 2022

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

PDF ISBN 978-92-9400-465-9 doi: 10.2847/19498 BZ-07-22-901-EN-N

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# Acknowledgements

EUAA would like to acknowledge the following national asylum departments and organisations as co-drafters of this report:

- Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)
- Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Country Analysis
- Finland, Finnish Immigration Service, Legal Service and Country Information Unit

The following departments and organisations have reviewed respective parts of this report

- Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Country of Origin Information Department
- Belgium, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS), Centre for Documentation and Research (Cedoca)
- The Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin (COI) unit
- Slovakia, Migration Office, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation

All parts of this report have been reviewed by at least one reviewer.

It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of the EUAA.





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## Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2019\)](#). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither the EUAA, nor any person acting on its behalf, may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 17 August 2022. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).

## Glossary and abbreviations

| Term         | Definition                                                                                                                   |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AANES</b> | Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria                                                                            |
| <b>ACLED</b> | Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project                                                                                 |
| <b>AOAV</b>  | Action on Armed Violence                                                                                                     |
| <b>COAR</b>  | Center for Operational Analysis and Research                                                                                 |
| <b>ERW</b>   | Explosive Remnants of War                                                                                                    |
| <b>GoS</b>   | Government of Syria                                                                                                          |
| <b>HAD</b>   | Hurras al-Din                                                                                                                |
| <b>HTS</b>   | Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham                                                                                                        |
| <b>IED</b>   | Improvised Explosive Device                                                                                                  |
| <b>ISIL</b>  | Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh |
| <b>NDF</b>   | National Defence Forces                                                                                                      |
| <b>NLF</b>   | National Liberation Front                                                                                                    |
| <b>OHCHR</b> | Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights                                                                              |
| <b>PYD</b>   | Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)                                                                                             |
| <b>SAA</b>   | Syrian Arab Army                                                                                                             |
| <b>SDF</b>   | Syrian Democratic Forces                                                                                                     |





| Term          | Definition                                                                  |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SHRC</b>   | Syrian Human Rights Committee                                               |
| <b>SNA</b>    | Syrian National Army                                                        |
| <b>SNHR</b>   | Syrian Network for Human Rights                                             |
| <b>SOHR</b>   | Syrian Observatory of Human Rights                                          |
| <b>STJ</b>    | Syrians for Truth & Justice                                                 |
| <b>UNCOI</b>  | Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic |
| <b>UNOCHA</b> | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs          |
| <b>USDOD</b>  | United States Department of Defense                                         |
| <b>UXO</b>    | Unexploded Ordnance                                                         |
| <b>WINEP</b>  | Washington Institute for Near East Policy                                   |
| <b>YPG</b>    | Kurdish People's Protection Units                                           |



# Introduction

The purpose of this security situation report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in updating EUAA's country guidance development on Syria.

In order to support the assessment of the application of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive on a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict, the security situation report examines the nature of armed conflicts taking place in the territory, the nature of the violence and presence of armed actors in different areas, and the impact on civilians, for example in terms of casualties/fatalities and conflict-linked displacement.

The report covers the period of April 2021 – July 2022, and it is an update of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#). A limited update of sections addressing the justice system in government-held areas and areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, previously covered in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#), is also included.

## Methodology

This report was jointly drafted by national COI departments in EU+ countries<sup>1</sup> and ACCORD and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries, as mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2019)<sup>2</sup> and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).<sup>3</sup>

## Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by EUAA based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI specialist network on Syria and from policy experts in EU+ countries within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Syria. The Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex II](#) of this report.

## Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 25 July 2022. Some limited additional information was added during

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<sup>1</sup> All EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

<sup>2</sup> EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)



the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 17 August 2022.

## Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and almost all of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 17 August 2022. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

## Sources

In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include: COI reports by governments; information from civil society, advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations, and NGOs; international and NGO human rights reports; reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations; Syrian and regionally-based media and social media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Syria. All information from these sources was consulted within time constraints and within the research constraints posed by Syria's challenging information-gathering environment.

### Sources on civilian casualties

The main source on civilian fatalities in Syria used in this report is the Syrian Network of Human Rights (SNHR). The [Syrian Network of Human Rights \(SNHR\)](#) is a non-profit human rights organisation founded in 2011 which works on documenting human rights violations in Syria. SNHR relies on a network of volunteers in each governorate to compile lists of civilian fatalities and verify victims' identities by photo or video and by speaking with family members, witnesses, and hospitals. SNHR reports fatalities by gender, age, perpetrator, governorate, and other classifications. It only records civilian fatalities – with the exception of the death toll among victims who died due to torture, which includes armed combatants and civilians.<sup>4</sup> Where available, information from other sources documenting civilian casualties in the Syrian conflict (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Syrian Human Rights Committee, The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) has been included.

### Sources on security incidents

For data on violent incidents, publicly available curated datasets from the organisation [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#) have been used. ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on crisis and conflict in Africa, south and south-east Asia and Middle East and provides datasets on conflict incidents. It collects data on

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<sup>4</sup> For detailed information on SNHR's methodology see [url](#); SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 1,734 Civilians in Syria in 2020, Including 99 in December, 1 January 2021, [url](#), p. 4

violent incidents in Syria, coding each incident with the time and place, type of violent incident, the parties involved and the number of fatalities. The information is collected in a database that is openly accessible, searchable and kept continuously up to date. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as media reports, but also from reports by international institutions and non-governmental organisations and data provided by local partners of ACLED.<sup>5</sup>

Security incidents numbers and associated graphs/maps at country and governorate level are based on a publicly available ACLED curated dataset for Middle East (updated until 12 August 2022).<sup>6</sup> Additional sources have been researched to the extent possible to corroborate the ACLED findings.

Further information on ACLED's methodology and the dataset used for this report is available in 1.6.2 [Security incidents](#).

## Structure and use of the report

The report is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on presenting an overview of the armed conflicts in Syria, current political developments and information on the main parties to the conflict. It goes on to describe the security trends in different parts of Syria between April 2021 and July 2022, with a focus on the nature of the violence and impact on civilians.

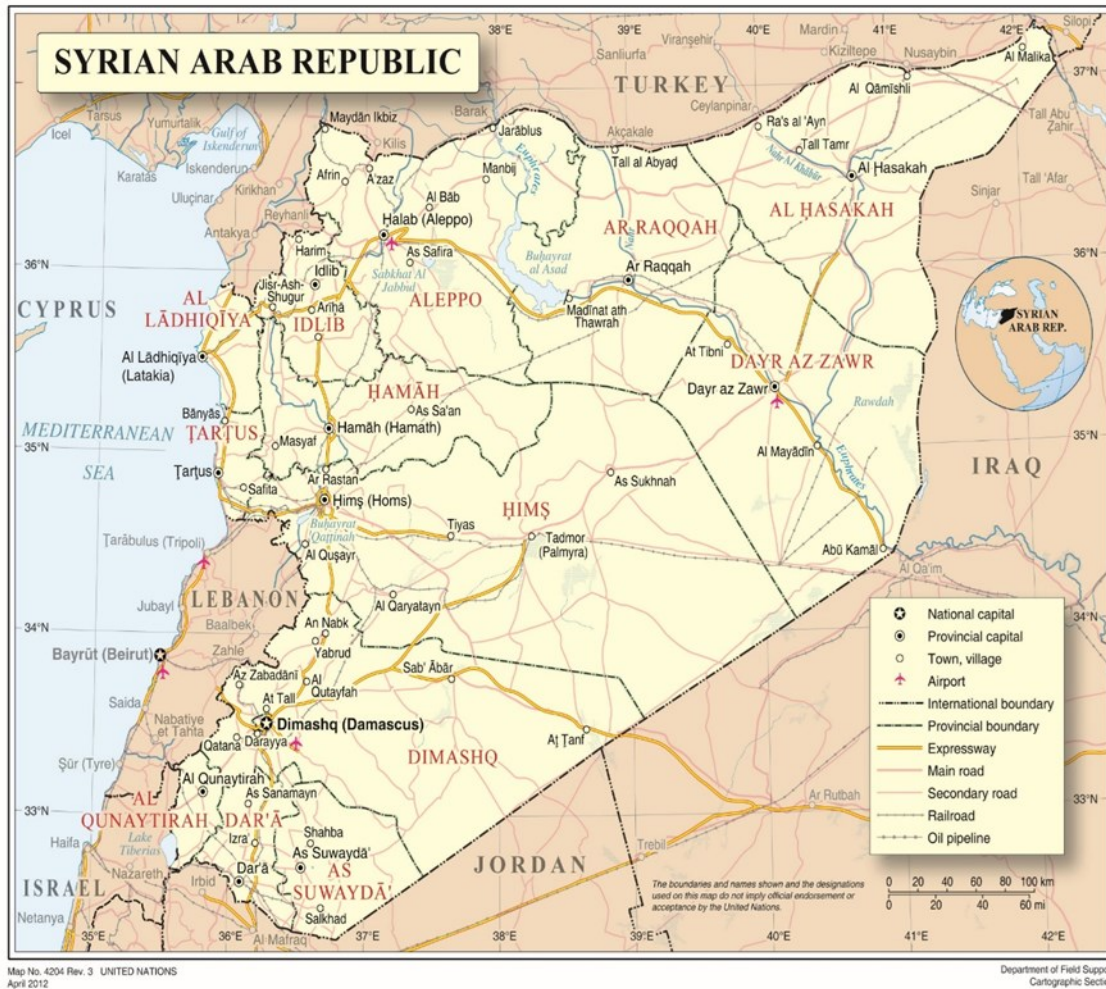
The second part provides a governorate-level description of the security situation. Each governorate chapter includes a map, brief description of the governorate, background conflict dynamics and armed actors present in the area, recent security trends, including information on civilian fatalities, security incidents and trends, armed confrontations (etc.), displacement and return, and civilian infrastructure impacted.

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<sup>5</sup> ACLED, Methodology, April 2019, [url](#); ACLED, FAQ ACLED Sourcing Methodology, February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> For more details on ACLED's reporting see Section [1.6.2](#), ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

# Map of the Syrian Arab Republic



Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Syria, Map No. 4204 Rev. 3, April 2012, United Nations, [url](#)

# 1. General description of the security situation

## 1.1. Overview of conflicts

The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (referred to in this report as the UNCOI) noted, in February 2022, that five foreign military forces - including Iran, Israel, Russia, Turkey and the United States of America -, 'as well as non-State armed groups and UN-designated terrorist groups' continued to be active in Syria.<sup>8</sup>

Syria continued to be involved in international armed conflicts, including against the US-led coalition to fight Daesh/ISIL (the so-called Global Coalition, currently comprising 85 members)<sup>9</sup>, as well as against Turkey and Israel, both of which continued to occupy parts of Syrian territory.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Syria – together with its allies Russia and Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah<sup>11</sup> and other Shia militia – continued to be involved in several non-international armed conflicts, including against armed groups opposing the Government of Syria (GoS) such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Ahrar al-Sham, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Syrian National Army (SNA), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group, and others. Non-international armed conflicts on Syrian territory further included ongoing infighting between various non-State armed groups, as well as Turkey's attacks on Kurdish militias and ISIL and Israel's attacks on Hezbollah.<sup>12</sup>

Further information on the conflict background in Syria is available in section 1.1 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

## 1.2. Political developments

Presidential elections were held on 26 May 2021. Of 51 potential candidates, President Assad and two more men were eventually registered to run: a former cabinet minister and the leader of an opposition party 'tolerated' by the GoS. These two other candidates obtained 1.5 % and 3.3 % of the valid votes, respectively, while the incumbent president received the remaining more than 95 % votes.<sup>13</sup> The elections were not monitored by the United Nations.<sup>14</sup> The New Arab, a London-based news outlet focusing on the MENA region, reported that the country's

<sup>8</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>9</sup> Global Coalition (The), Mission, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> RULAC, International armed conflicts in Syria, 24 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> CFR, What is Hezbollah?, 25 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Syria, 24 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> UK, House of Commons Library, Syria: 2021 presidential election and future prospects, 9 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 11

<sup>14</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 12



leadership had invited observers from ‘friendly and brotherly’ countries such as Russia, Iran, China, and Belarus.<sup>15</sup> Ahead of the elections, President Assad reportedly pardoned persons convicted of smuggling, drug abuse and foreign currency trading, and released some of the prisoners.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the president released a number of persons held in detention for expressing some form of criticism on social media. While Reuters reported on the release of several hundreds of persons, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) noted that 81 persons were released under the amnesty. Opponents and political detainees were reportedly not included in the amnesty decree and neither pardoned nor released.<sup>17</sup> Further information on the presidential elections is available in section 1.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

The UN Security Council Resolution 2254, adopted in December 2015, calls for creating a constitutional committee that would draft a new constitution and organise UN supervised elections.<sup>18</sup> A sixth session of the constitutional committee’s drafting group took place in October 2021, where draft constitutional texts on four titles were presented. However, no consensus on further steps could be reached between representatives of the GoS and the opposition,<sup>19</sup> an outcome that the UN Special Envoy for Syria called ‘a disappointment’.<sup>20</sup> A seventh meeting in March 2022 ended with ‘no substantial progress’, according to a report by Al Jazeera.<sup>21</sup> At the constitutional committee’s eight meeting in June 2022, draft constitutional texts and revisions were discussed. In a concluding statement, the UN Special Envoy observed the continued inability of the parties included to reach an agreement.<sup>22</sup> A ninth meeting, scheduled for the end of July 2022, was cancelled after the GoS delegation stated that it would only participate if Russia’s demand for a change of venue were met. A representative of Russia had previously requested a move to a ‘more neutral’ place than Geneva.<sup>23</sup>

Further information on the constitutional committee is available in section 1.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#). According to some analysts, doubts over confidence-building measures, the format’s failure to represent all key stakeholders<sup>24</sup>, and a disproportionate focus on the Constitution at the expense of other issues such as, for example, the creation of a transitional government, were some of the underlying causes for

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<sup>15</sup> New Arab (The), Belarusian observers arrive to monitor ‘fake’ Syrian presidential elections amid voter intimidation, 23 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 13

<sup>17</sup> SNHR, The Syrian Regime has Released 81 Individuals Under Amnesty Decree No. 13 of May 2021 and Arrested Nearly 176 Since its Issuance, 15 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 9, 17; Reuters, Syria releases hundreds of social media critics ahead of election, 11 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Syria Study Group, Final Report and Recommendations, USIP, 24 September 2019, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>19</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 7; UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, Briefing to the Security Council on Syria, 27 October 2021, [url](#), paras. 3, 6

<sup>20</sup> UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, Briefing to the Security Council on Syria, 27 October 2021, [url](#), para. 8

<sup>21</sup> Al Jazeera, Syria constitutional talks fail again in Geneva, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> UN OSES, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Mr. Geir O. Pedersen statement at the conclusion of the eighth session of the small body of the Syrian constitutional committee, 3 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> Syria Direct, Syrian Constitutional Committee at an impasse following cancellation of its ninth session, 26 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> COAR, 18th Round of ‘Astana Talks’ Fizzles as Guarantors Lose Momentum, 20 June 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria constitutional talks fail again in Geneva, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

the ongoing lack of progress.<sup>25</sup> Qatar, Russia and Turkey reportedly launched a new trilateral consultation process in March 2021, after a meeting of the countries' foreign ministers in Doha, noting that this format was not meant to interfere with the Astana process<sup>26</sup>, where representatives of the GoS, the opposition and the so-called guarantor states (Russia, Iran and Turkey) meet for peace talks. The latest meeting in Astana took place in June 2022, however, with no substantive progress.<sup>27</sup>

Some states in the region reportedly made some efforts to re-establish diplomatic, security and economic ties with the GoS<sup>28</sup>, with President Assad visiting the UAE in March 2022<sup>29</sup> and Jordan deciding to resume ties with the GoS.<sup>30</sup> For some countries, however, a political solution to the conflict and the safe return of refugees reportedly remained preconditions for Syria's re-admission into the League of Arab States.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR) observed that the GoS's alliance with Russia might negatively impact further regional rapprochement after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>32</sup> Despite initial reports on thousands of Syrians being recruited by Russia to fight in Ukraine<sup>33</sup>, as of June 2022, a large-scale presence of Syrian fighters in the country was not observed by US officials.<sup>34</sup> In July 2022, the EU imposed several restrictive measures against six Syrian nationals and one company involved in the recruitment of Syrian mercenaries to fight on the side of the Russian forces against Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

On 12 July 2022, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2642 extending the mandate to deliver humanitarian aid via the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing for six months, with a possible further six-month extension depending on a separate resolution.<sup>36</sup> The previous one-year mandate had expired on 10 July 2022, and an extension for another 12 months had been vetoed by Russia.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Enab Baladi, Constitution or political transition; what do Syrians need?, 18 May 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria constitutional talks fail again in Geneva, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 15

<sup>27</sup> COAR, 18th Round of 'Astana Talks' Fizzles as Guarantors Lose Momentum, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 8

<sup>29</sup> COAR, Iranian Foreign Minister to Damascus, Welcoming Arab Normalisation or Reminding of Tehran Influence?, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> Alajlouni, L., Jordan is pushing for rapprochement with Syria. But is it to reinforce artificial stability in the region?, Atlantic Council, 19 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 8

<sup>32</sup> COAR, Crisis in Ukraine: Impacts for Syria, 10 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> SOHR, SOHR: Over 40,000 Syrians reportedly register to fight for Russia in Ukraine, 15 March 2022, [url](#); AP, Explainer: Will Russia bring Syrian fighters to Ukraine?, 11 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Al-Monitor, Russia remains committed to Syria's Assad despite Ukraine war, Pentagon says, 8 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> EU, Official Journal of the European Union, Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1274 of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> ECHO, Syria: Statement by High Representative Borrell and Commissioner Lenarčič on the renewal of cross border humanitarian deliveries, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> UN, Security Council Renews Cross-Border Aid Operations into Syria's North-West for Six Months, Adopting Resolution 2642 (2022) as 'Compromise' amid Divisions, 12 July 2022, [url](#)



## 1.3. International involvement

### 1.3.1. Russia

As of February 2022, Russia had by its own account about 63 000 military personnel deployed to Syria, according to an AFP report.<sup>38</sup> Experts quoted by Enab Baladi, a Syrian independent news site, noted that this number might include not only fighting forces, but also personnel with non-combat missions, experts and consultants, and forces and militia ‘unofficially’ linked with the Russian government.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Russia controlled an airbase at Hmeymim, near Latakia, established in 2015, and a naval base at the port of Tartous. The latter had already been used by the Soviet Navy in the 1980s but has since then been expanded and upgraded.<sup>40</sup> Both military bases have reportedly been leased by the GoS to Russia<sup>41</sup> for a period of 49 years.<sup>42</sup> As of the beginning of 2022, Russian forces had 114 military, security, and operational points in Syria.<sup>43</sup>

In September 2021, Russia brokered an agreement between the GoS and local opposition forces, ending a 10-week siege of the Dar’a Al-Balad area of Dar’a city by pro-GoS forces, during which tens of thousands of civilians were displaced and others killed or injured.<sup>44</sup> For more information see also section [1.5.1](#) and [2.12.3](#) of this report.

Since the beginning of Russia’s war against Ukraine in February 2022, there had been media reports on the withdrawal of Russian military personnel from some of their positions in Syria (including the Syrian desert, and areas around Aleppo, Idlib and at borders with Turkey and Israel)<sup>45</sup> and their regrouping at the Russian-controlled Hmeymim airbase and other airports. Reports suggested they might be redeployed to Russia or Ukraine.<sup>46</sup> Some vacated positions were reportedly turned over to Iran-backed militia.<sup>47</sup>

### 1.3.2. Iran

As of the beginning of 2022, Iranian forces had 333 military, security, and operational points in Syria, including 186 sites of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), 80 sites of Hezbollah, an Iran-backed, Lebanese armed group<sup>48</sup>, and 67 sites that were shared by both

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<sup>38</sup> AFP, Russia’s growing ties to Syria amid military backing, 28 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> Enab Baladi, The truth about 60,000 Russian troops in Syria, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Kjellen, J. and Lund, A., From Tartous to Tobruk: The Return of Russian Sea Power in the Eastern Mediterranean, FOI, 11 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>41</sup> According to an AFP report, Tartous has been leased to the Russian company Stroytransgaz. The same company reportedly received a 50-year concession to extract phosphate in the Palmyra region. AFP, Russia’s growing ties to Syria amid military backing, 28 February 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Kjellen, J. and Lund, A., From Tartous to Tobruk: The Return of Russian Sea Power in the Eastern Mediterranean, FOI, 11 February 2022, [url](#), p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 20, 23

<sup>45</sup> MEMO, Rumoured Russian scale-back from Syria prompts regional alarm, 30 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine, Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Russia reduces forces in Aleppo, transfers some to Hmeimim, 22 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine, Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> CFR, What is Hezbollah?, 25 May 2022, [url](#)

forces. Of all foreign forces in Syria, the number of Iranian sites has increased the most in 2021, according to Jusoor for Studies.<sup>49</sup>

Iranian IRGC militias located in Hasaka governorate have reportedly increased and strengthened their military presence in the governorate's southeast in early 2022.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Iran has reportedly increased its influence in Deir Ez-Zor governorate by providing services to the local population, helping to improve their living conditions and by recruiting local Syrian men into Iran-linked militia groups. Some of these militia groups reportedly consisted of foreign fighters including Iranians, Afghans and Pakistanis.<sup>51</sup> Attacks on US-military bases in north-eastern Syria in 2021 and early 2022 were reportedly often attributed to forces loyal to Iran operating in the region.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, Iran has increased its military presence in Syria's southern governorates, including Dar'a, Sweida and Quneitra governorates. According to Jusoor for Studies, the number of outposts held by Iran, Iran-aligned forces and the Lebanese Hezbollah in these areas has more than doubled from 40 military and security outposts in August 2018 to 88 by August 2021.<sup>53</sup>

Further information on Iranian involvement in Syria is available in section 1.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### 1.3.3. Turkey

As of the beginning of 2022, Turkish forces had 122 military, security and operational points in Syria, especially along the Syrian-Turkish border in the country's north and north-west.<sup>54</sup> Turkish forces and Turkish-backed opposition groups reportedly continued to attack SDF-positions in northern Syria during the reference period, including through shelling and arial bombardment.<sup>55</sup> Turkey's military operations in northern Syria reportedly aimed at creating a 'buffer zone' along the Turkish-Syrian border (see also section 1.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and section 1.5.2 [Areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups](#) of this report). Perceiving the Kurdish-dominated YPG (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, People's Defense Units), the SDF and the PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, Democratic Union Party) as linked to the PKK (Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê, Kurdistan Workers' Party) in Turkey<sup>56</sup>,

<sup>49</sup> Jusoor for Studies is 'an independent institution specializing in information management and conducting studies and research related to the Syrian political and social affairs in particular and the Middle East region in general'.

Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>50</sup> Hassan, M. and Al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> Washington Post (The), Iran is putting down roots in eastern Syria, outcompeting Assad's regime in signing up fighters, 28 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>52</sup> Hassan, M. and Al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Mapping the Iranian Military's Footprint in Southern Syria from August 2018 to August 2021, 20 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syria Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> YPG and PYD reportedly received substantial support from the PKK in the first years of the Syrian civil war and until today continue to be strategically dominated by the organisation. See Netjes, R. and van Veen, E., Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist. The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, Clingendael CRU Report, April 2021, [url](#), p. 1



Turkey justified its cross-border operations as ‘self-defence’<sup>57</sup>, claiming that operations to free ‘borders from the threat of terrorism’ did ‘not target the territorial integrity and sovereignty’ of its neighbours, while Syria noted that it considered any Turkish military incursions into the country ‘war crimes and crimes against humanity’.<sup>58</sup> Areas in northern Syria under Turkish control were reportedly put under the administration of governors of Turkish cities beyond the border, while the Syrian pound was replaced with Turkish currency.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, sources have reported that Turkey increased water shortages and risks of drought in Kurdish-led areas of Syria by cutting water supplies<sup>60</sup> at least 24 times in 2020 alone.<sup>61</sup> Turkish authorities have denied these claims.<sup>62</sup> For more information see also section 1.5.2 Areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### 1.3.4. US-led Coalition against ISIL

At the beginning of 2022, the US-led coalition forces had 28 military, security and operational points in Syria, the majority of them in North-eastern Syria<sup>63</sup>, which constituted a slight decrease compared to the same period a year earlier, when the coalition had 33 sites.<sup>64</sup> As of 2022, the USA had about 900 troops based in Syria, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Military Balance 2022<sup>65</sup> including between 100 and 200 soldiers at the Tanf base (see also section [1.5.5 Tanf](#) of this report).<sup>66</sup>

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), US-forces carried out air strikes in northern Syria, targeted at individual members of Al-Qaida and ISIL in the second half of 2021.<sup>67</sup> The then leader of ISIL, Abu Ibrahim Al-Quraishi, was killed during a helicopter raid by US special forces in Idlib province in February 2022.<sup>68</sup> In May 2022, Syrian media reported on the return of US forces to some of the military bases from which they had withdrawn in 2019, including the 17<sup>th</sup> Division base in the north of Raqqa, Tabqa airport to the south of Raqqa, and possibly also the Kharab Ishk base southeast of Kobane [Ain Al Arab]. The report suggested this return might be linked to Turkey’s

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<sup>57</sup> Çevik, S., Turkey’s Military Operations in Syria and Iraq, SWP Comment No. 37 May 2022, 30 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>58</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), paras. 21, 22

<sup>59</sup> Çevik, S., Turkey’s Military Operations in Syria and Iraq, SWP Comment No. 37 May 2022, 30 May 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>60</sup> Al-Monitor, Turkey’s war of attrition against Syria’s Kurds, 17 November 2021, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syrian Kurds warn of ‘disastrous’ water shortages, accuse Turkey as military offensive looms, 12 June 2022, [url](#); DW, Syria: Are water supplies being weaponized by Turkey?, 24 January 2021, [url](#); BTI, Syria, 2022 Country Report, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>61</sup> BTI, Syria, 2022 Country Report, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>62</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian Kurds warn of ‘disastrous’ water shortages, accuse Turkey as military offensive looms, 12 June 2022, [url](#); DW, Syria: Are water supplies being weaponized by Turkey?, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>64</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map Of The Military Bases And Posts Of Foreign Forces In Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>65</sup> Adar, S. et al., The War in Ukraine and Its Impact on Syria, SWP Comment No. 32 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>66</sup> WINEP, D., The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria, WINEP, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>67</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>68</sup> Al Jazeera, ISIL leader detained in Syria: US-led coalition, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

announcement of a new military operation in Syria.<sup>69</sup> No further information confirming the actual return of US forces to these areas was found.

### **1.3.5. Israel**

In 2021, Israel reportedly carried out 28 large-scale military strikes in Syria, that affected 57 sites in 11 governorates, most of them in Damascus and Rural Damascus (24 sites) and the southern governorates of Quneitra, Dar'a and Sweida (14 sites). 84.2 % of these attacks were targeting IRGC and Hezbollah forces, 1.8 % were targeting only Hezbollah and 14 % were targeting GoS forces. The attacks were reportedly focused on sites hosting military equipment, arms depots, and surveillance systems.<sup>70</sup> The port of Latakia was targeted in two airstrikes in the second half of 2021<sup>71</sup>, while an attack on Damascus International Airport in June 2022, allegedly to stop the shipment of arms to Hezbollah, led to a temporary halt of commercial flights as the runway and several buildings were damaged.<sup>72</sup>

For an overview of the number and location of military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria as documented by Jusoor for Studies in January 2022, see Map 2 below:

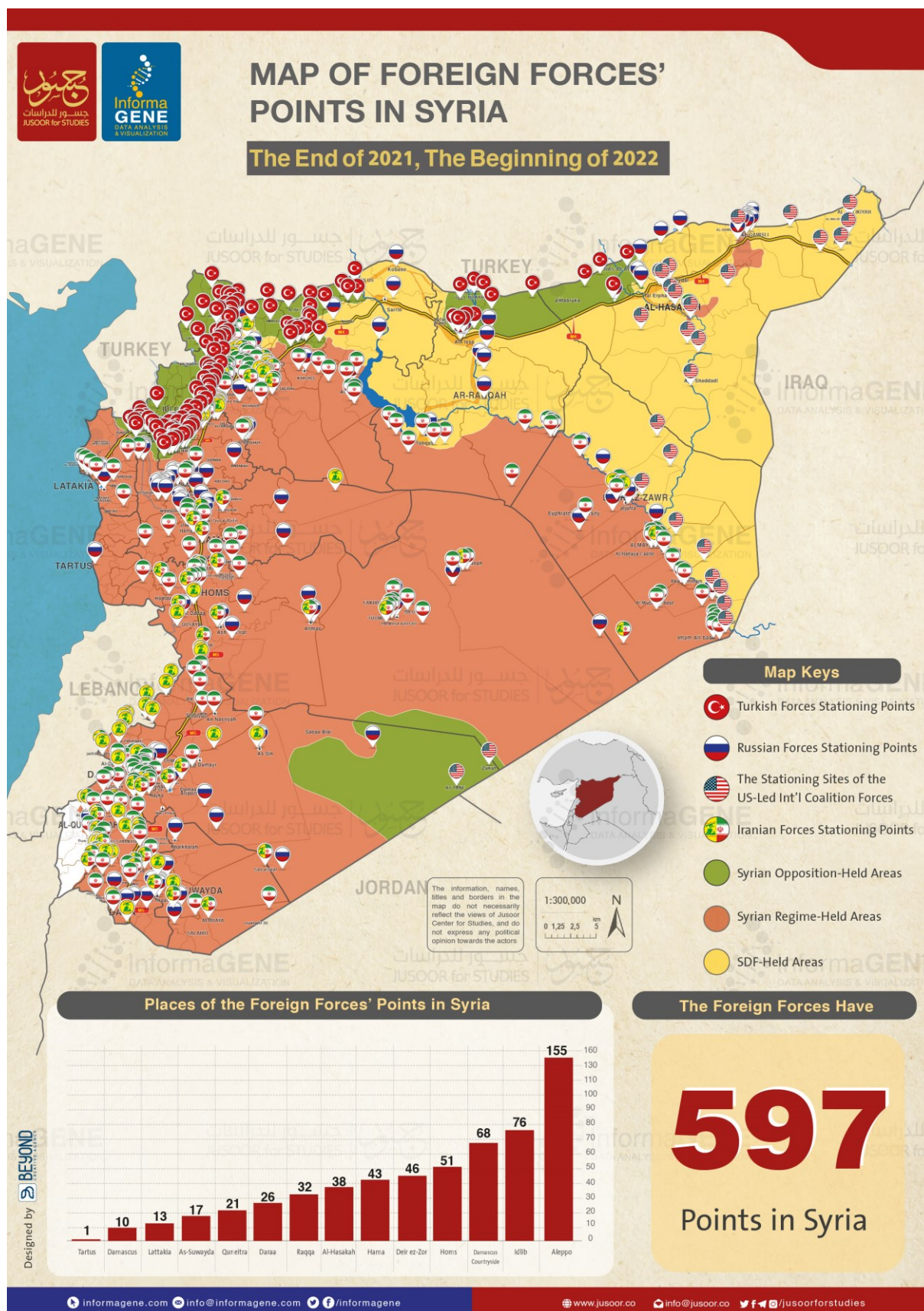
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<sup>69</sup> Syria Direct, Military and civilian sources: US forces redeploy to former positions in northeastern Syria, 31 May 2022, [url](#)

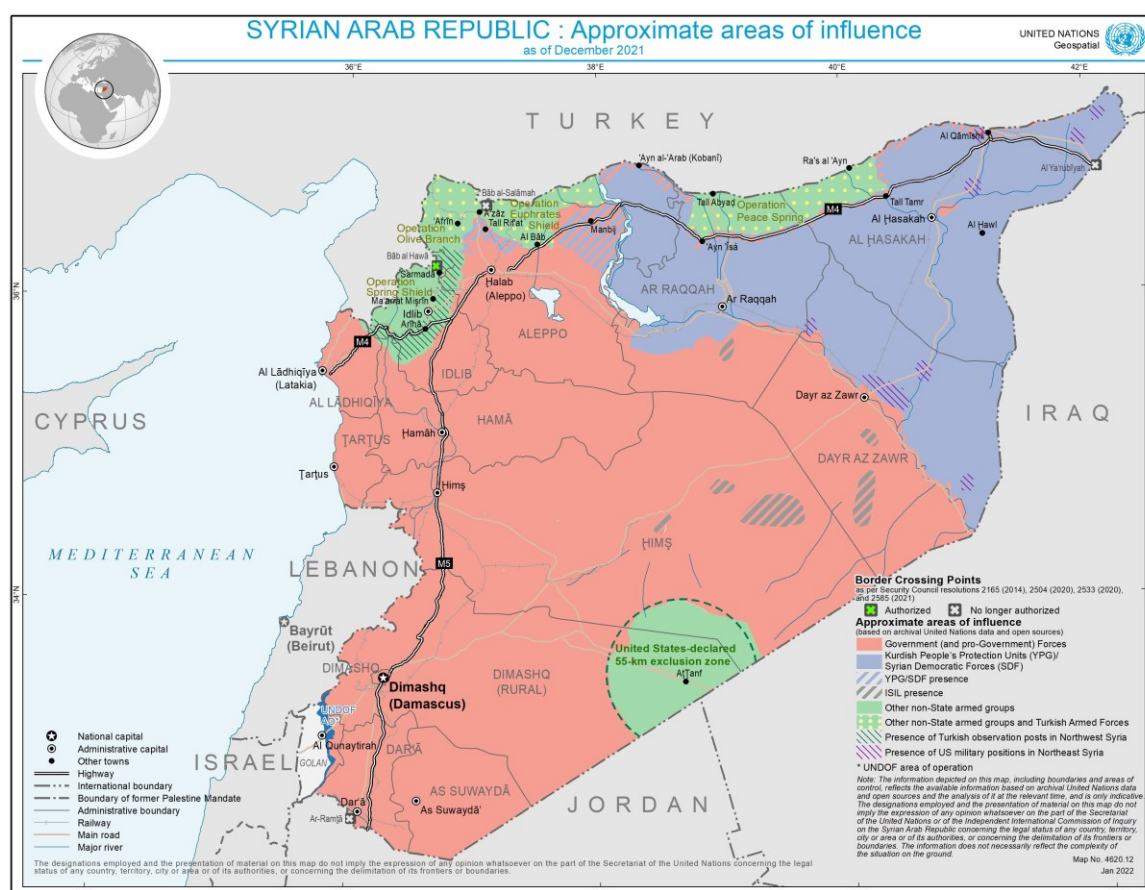
<sup>70</sup> Jusoor for Studies, The Israeli Strikes in Syria during 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>71</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>72</sup> AP, Israel strike crippling Syria's main airport hikes tensions, 14 June 2022, [url](#)

Map 2: Military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria. © Jusoor for Studies<sup>73</sup>

## 1.4. Armed actors



**Map 3: Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, © UN Geospatial<sup>74</sup>**

### 1.4.1. Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The Syrian Armed Forces consist of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) (which includes the Republican Guard), the Naval Forces, Air Forces, Air Defence Forces and National Defence Forces (which include pro-government militia and auxiliary forces). During the reporting period, the SAA was supported by a number of militia forces, the Russian armed forces, the Lebanese Hezbollah, Iranian backed Shia militias as well as Iran's IRGC.<sup>75</sup>

President Bashar al-Assad is the Supreme Commander of the Army and Armed Forces, with the Minister of Defence, the Head of the National Security Bureau and the Minister of Interior directly linked to him. All appointments and promotions of commanders, chiefs, directors and

<sup>73</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of foreign forces' points in Syria, The end of 2021, the beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, Military and Security, last updated 2 August 2022, [url](#)

officers of all armed forces units are being carried out or approved by President Bashar al-Assad personally.<sup>76</sup>

Major General Muhammad Al-Hajj Ali, a defector and high-ranking career soldier in the Syrian army until 2021, explained in a report for Harpoon Center for Contemporary Studies that as of August 2021, there remained a maximum of 150 000 fighters in the SAA, most of whom were deployed at checkpoints and to guard their commanders. 95 % of military personnel professionally employed by the SAA belong to the Alawite sect (with conscripts coming from all sects), with discrimination based on sectarian affiliation as well as corruption being described as ‘deeply’ entrenched in all divisions.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast to the situation before 2011, SAA leaders allegedly lack control over their divisions. Army divisions are said to be controlled by the government’s intelligence services<sup>78</sup> and to be under the authority of Iranian and Russian influence.<sup>79</sup> The army is no longer considered a cohesive force, but rather a coalition of regular forces and allied militias,<sup>80</sup> such the National Defence Forces (NDF<sup>81</sup>)<sup>82</sup> or Palestinian militias (the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) and Liwa al-Quds).<sup>83</sup> Militias affiliated to Russia and Iran were reported as controlling most of GoS-held regions in April 2021 and a growing number of men were choosing to join militias rather than the SAA.<sup>84</sup> Private security companies are also extending their influence.<sup>85</sup>

The Fourth Division (formerly Defence Companies), led by the president’s brother, Maher al-Assad, and supported by Iran, had developed into a parallel army that deployed its forces throughout Syria with the aim of protecting Damascus and the GoS from attacks. In an analysis published by the Middle East Institute (MEI) the Fourth Division was described as ‘superior’ to the SAA, ‘morally, financially, and militarily’. The Division consists of four brigades (38, 40, 41 and 42) with regiments number 555, 666 and 54 as well as a number of specialized factions and brigades affiliated with it. It is estimated to comprise 16 000 fighters and to own 500 tanks, as well as armoured vehicles. The Fourth Division reportedly includes a 600-men strong suicide battalion, which has until now not been used, as well as a Chemistry Battalion. Over 95 % of officers in the Fourth Division are Alawites.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Chain of Command in the Syrian Military: Formal and Informal Tracks, 9 November 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>77</sup> Al-Haj Ali, M. and Ibrahim, K., Restructuring the army in the new Syria, 16 August 2021, [url](#), p. 25, 28

<sup>78</sup> Al-Haj Ali, M. and Ibrahim, K., Restructuring the army in the new Syria, 16 August 2021, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>79</sup> OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Chain of Command in the Syrian Military: Formal and Informal Tracks, 9 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1; Al-Haj Ali, M. and Ibrahim, K., Restructuring the army in the new Syria, 16 August 2021, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>80</sup> Caravenserai, Hollowed out Syrian army unable to act independently from Russia, Iran, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>81</sup> The NDF was created by the Syrian government at the beginning of the civil war to incorporate local pro-government militias into an effective source of manpower. According to Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, a Syria researcher at Swansea University (UK), ‘many of the NDF were originally from popular committees or intelligence bodies’ (VOA, Who Are Syria’s National Defense Forces?, 26 August 2022, [url](#))

<sup>82</sup> Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>83</sup> ORSAM, Pro-Regime Palestinian Militias in Syria, 2 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> Caravenserai, Hollowed out Syrian army unable to act independently from Russia, Iran, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> Al-Mashareq, Private security firms proliferate in Syria as regime’s military falters, 5 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>86</sup> Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria’s parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

During the reporting period, GoS forces continued to arbitrarily detain people, with detention leading to torture, ill-treatment, and in some instances to death of detainees.<sup>87</sup>

Further information on the Syrian Arab Army is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

#### **(a) Developments regarding the Syrian government justice system**

A detailed description of the judiciary and penal system in areas controlled by the Syrian government can be found in section 2.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

According to an analysis by the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC), there have been little systematic or structural changes to the justice system in areas controlled by the GoS in recent years. Institutions of justice persistently fell ‘far short’ of meeting international standards of impartiality and independence, especially in the running of the ‘exceptional courts’.<sup>88</sup> The justice system was described by judges as being under the control of the Ba’ath Party, the President and the security services.<sup>89</sup> While it goes against the Syrian constitution to interfere with the civil judiciary, prosecutors and judges were in practice required to belong to the ruling party<sup>90</sup>, with 90 % of judges being Ba’ath Party members.<sup>91</sup> The entire judicial system was said to be highly politicised<sup>92</sup>, with people who are perceived to belong to the opposition, mainly Sunni Arabs and Kurds, facing likely discrimination by the state.<sup>93</sup> As one analysis reported, ‘[t]he power of the security services overrides any separation of powers’.<sup>94</sup>

Corruption and bribery were assessed by ILAC to continue diminishing the independence of the judiciary.<sup>95</sup> More than half of the 533 respondents of interviews carried out by the Syrian Association for Citizens’ Dignity (SACD), an association formed by a group of displaced people from Syria, in September and October 2020 considered that existing corruption and a lack of independence impeded a fair access to the judicial system.<sup>96</sup> The Global Protection Cluster and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) confirmed in June 2022 that ‘an insufficiently transparent, accountable and reliable justice system is causing additional obstacles for civilians to access their rights’.<sup>97</sup> Lawyers had to pay money to court employees to ensure the smooth processing of a case. The amount required for bribes depended on the amount paid by the opposing counsel.<sup>98</sup> It was uncommon to hold officials accountable for

<sup>87</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 22; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>88</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>89</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>90</sup> Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F1

<sup>91</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>92</sup> BTI, Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>93</sup> Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F4

<sup>94</sup> BTI, Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>95</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>96</sup> SACD, Normalisation of Horror, Security and Living Conditions in Assad-held Syria, 2020, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>97</sup> Global Protection Cluster and UNHCR, Protection Analysis Update, June 2022, 24 June 2022, [url](#), p.12

<sup>98</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 20



corruption. According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), officials were only held to account, if it was in the government's interest to do so.<sup>99</sup>

Also in the 'exceptional courts', the Counter-Terrorism Court and the Military Field Courts, which are part of a parallel system of, operating outside the regular court structure, bribery was rife.<sup>100</sup> Many of the trials held in the Counter-Terrorism Court were allegedly rushed, did not follow legal procedures and had no possibility of appeal.<sup>101</sup> Civilians were tried by military officers in field courts, as well as in conventional military courts, with judges being subordinate to the military.<sup>102</sup> ILAC reported that Syrian laws and judicial procedures could not be implemented effectively due to interference from the executive. Civilians who were tried before 'exceptional courts', were deprived of the protection by Syrian's procedural and substantive law.<sup>103</sup>

In areas which had not been continuously under GoS control, such as Aleppo, Dar'a, Sweida and East Ghouta, efforts had been made to reinstall official state justice structures, but justice continued to remain largely absent.<sup>104</sup> The UNCOI noted the continued seizure of property through public auctions in areas retaken by GoS forces, with the majority of affected owners being displaced persons. In September 2021, the Ministry of Justice adopted a circular, which makes security clearances of both the representative and the represented, a pre-condition for power-of-attorney arrangements, which further inhibits the possibility of having a third-party act on behalf of an absent or missing Syrian with regards to their property. During the same month, Presidential Decree No. 237, facilitating expropriation in parts of Qaboun and Harasta in northern Damascus, was established.<sup>105</sup>

On 28 March 2022, the GoS passed an anti-torture law (Law No. 16 of 2022). It criminalises torture with a penalty of minimum of three years' imprisonment and imposes the death penalty in the case of rape or death. The law prohibits authority from ordering torture and makes evidence gathered through torture invalid.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, Article No. 16 of Law No. 14 of 1969 remains in force, which stipulates that 'it is prohibited to prosecute any of the employees of the State Security Department for crimes they commit while carrying out the specific tasks entrusted to them or in the course of carrying out them unless pursuant to a prosecution order issued by the director'. It is furthermore not possible to apply the law retroactively.<sup>107</sup> The anti-torture law's effectiveness and intention was amongst others questioned by Amnesty International,<sup>108</sup> Human Rights Watch<sup>109</sup> and Syrians on social media<sup>110, 111</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> BTI, Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>100</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 20-21

<sup>101</sup> BTI, Syria, 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>102</sup> Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F2

<sup>103</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>104</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>105</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 45-49

<sup>106</sup> HRW, Torture in Syrian Prisons is Not a Joke, 1 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> Enab Baladi, No more "coffee cups" in Syrian security basements due to newly anti-torture law, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>108</sup> AI, Syria: New anti-torture law "whitewashes" decades of human rights violations, 31 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>109</sup> HRW, Torture in Syrian Prisons is Not a Joke, 1 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>110</sup> Enab Baladi, No more "coffee cups" in Syrian security basements due to newly anti-torture law, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>111</sup> Additional information about the Anti-Torture Law can be found here: STJ, Syria: Anti-Torture Law Issued 35 Years After the Convention against Torture Went Effective, 12 July 2022, [url](#)

In mid-April 2022, the GoS issued Law No. 20 of 2022, which amended the existing cybercrime law of 2012. According to the new law, online criticism of the constitution and president or state could lead to imprisonment of up to 15 years and penalties of up to 15 million Syrian Pounds.<sup>112</sup> A prison sentence of between three to five years will apply to people publishing “fake news” which “undermines the prestige of the state” or “prejudices national unity”.<sup>113</sup> Beginning of June it was reported that 11 people were arrested in Aleppo for ‘spreading “fake news” on social media’.<sup>114</sup>

On 30 April 2022, President Bashar al-Assad issued a general amnesty for terrorism crimes, with hundreds of Syrians released from detention.<sup>115</sup> No formal list of names was published, which, according to Le Monde, made it difficult to assess its scope.<sup>116</sup> According to SNHR, 476 people were released under the amnesty decree by May 2022.<sup>117</sup>

At the same time, the death penalty continued to be applied. In October 2021, the GoS executed 24 people for allegedly starting wildfires.<sup>118</sup> A review committee was reinstated in April 2022. The committee has the power to review death penalties imposed by the Syrian criminal courts, but not those of the special courts.<sup>119</sup> Official mechanisms aimed at safeguarding women’s rights were reported to not be functional and the law was reported to discriminate against LGBT+ people and criminalise same-sex relations.<sup>120</sup>

### 1.4.2. The Syrian National Army

The Syrian National Army (SNA) is the second largest opposition coalition in Syria (after Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham) and is composed of multiple Free Syrian Army factions, with many of the factions functioning as distinct units and engaging in armed infighting.<sup>121</sup> SNA was supported by Turkey and was active within the Turkish-controlled areas in northern Syria,<sup>122</sup> namely northern Aleppo governorate as well as areas of Raqqa and Hasaka governorates<sup>123</sup>, with Turkey paying the SNA’s salaries and coordinating SNA’s major offensives.<sup>124</sup> According to Al-Sharq Strategic Research the number of SNA fighters has increased to 80 000 since its merger with the National Front for Liberation from Idlib (Arabic: الجبهة الوطنية للتحرير, Al-Jabhat al-Wataniya lil-Tahrir).<sup>125</sup>

<sup>112</sup> New Arab (The), Syria cybercrime law could see minor online criticism result in 15 year jail terms, 22 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> MEMO, Syrians to be imprisoned for up to 15 years for minor criticism of regime, under new cybercrime law, 24 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>114</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian regime arrests citizens under new cybercrime law, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> COAR, ‘Terrorism’ Amnesty Is Wartime Syria’s Most Sweeping, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>116</sup> Le Monde, In Syria, an unprecedented amnesty revives the trauma of families of prisoners and missing persons, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> SNHR, The Syrian Regime Has Released 476 People Under Amnesty Decree 7/2022 and Is Still Detaining Some 132,000 of Those Arrested Since March 2011, 16 May 2022, [url](#), p.1

<sup>118</sup> Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F3

<sup>119</sup> STJ, Syria: The President Enforces Death Sentences through a Formal Pardon Committee, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>120</sup> Freedom House, Syria, 2022, [url](#), F4

<sup>121</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>122</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>123</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>124</sup> Hauch L., Syria’s eastern factions unite in the Liberation and Construction Movement, MEI, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> Al-Sharq Strategic Research, The Past, Present, and Future of the Syrian National Army, 31 August 2021, [url](#)



In June 2021, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), an independent, nongovernmental organization, working on documenting human rights violations in Syria, published findings that former ISIL members had gained positions in various factions of the SNA, including as first and second-level leaders and security officials.<sup>126</sup>

The SNA lacked the unified central command of a conventional army.<sup>127</sup> In order to consolidate the divided factions of the SNA, efforts were made to merge factions into bigger formations. A variety of mergers were conducted throughout 2021.<sup>128</sup> By January 2022 a single formation, called the Azm Operations Room, incorporated most of the major SNA groups.<sup>129</sup> As of 1 March 2022, the Azm Operations Room consisted of Division 13 (incorporating the Sultan Muhammad Faith Brigade, Semerkand Brigade and Al-Wakkas Brigade), the Second Division, the Third Legion (incorporating the Sultan Malek Shah Brigades, Liwa 51, Jaish al-Islam, Liwa al-Salam, Al-Jabha al-Shamiya and Faylaq al-Majid), Suqur al-Shamal, the Thaeroun Front for Liberation (incorporating the First Division, Levant Revolutionaries, Sham Legion North Sector, Muntasir Billah, Sultan Murad, Suleiman Shah Brigade, Al-Mutasim Brigade, Hamza Division and Special Forces Division) and the Liberation and Construction Movement (incorporating Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Suqur al-Sham, Al-Sharqiya Army and the 20<sup>th</sup> Division).<sup>130</sup> The Liberation and Construction Movement (LCM) was formed in Raqqa and according to a MEI article chose to become a coalition in its own right. It claimed to command 7 000 fighters across northern Aleppo, Afrin and in a corridor between Ras al-Ayn and Tall Abyad.<sup>131</sup>

Despite the regrouping, violent clashes continued in April 2022 between different factions of the SNA in Aleppo governorate.<sup>132</sup>

According to Syria Direct, an independent Syrian online news source, the main SNA faction involved in infighting between January and middle of May 2022 was the Hamza Division (11 incidents), followed by al-Jabha al-Shamiya and Ahrar al-Sham (five incidents each), Ahrar al-Sharqiya (four incidents) and Thaeroun for Liberation, Failaq al-Sham and the Military Police (three incidents each).<sup>133</sup>

In June 2022 it was reported that the SNA prepared for a new Turkish operation announced by Turkey against the (Kurdish-led) SDF in Tal Rifaat and Manbij, Aleppo governorate.<sup>134</sup> SNA artillery strikes against the SDF were reported in al-Jat, Menji and al-Halwanji in northern Aleppo.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> STJ, Ongoing Violations Without Accountability, 28 June 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>127</sup> Al-Sharq Strategic Research, The Past, Present, and Future of the Syrian National Army, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>128</sup> The details of the various mergers conducted can be found in Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-16

<sup>129</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>130</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>131</sup> Hauch L., Syria's eastern factions unite in the Liberation and Construction Movement, MEI, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> Syria Direct, Chronic infighting and uncontrolled weapons turn civilian lives into a nightmare in Turkish-backed opposition areas of northern Syria, 24 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> Al Jazeera, Turkish-backed Syrian forces expect military operation soon, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>135</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

During the reporting period, abuses by the SNA continued against civilians, including arbitrary detention, abduction, torture and other ill-treatment.<sup>136</sup>

For further information, please see sections [2.2 Aleppo governorate](#), [2.8 Raqqa governorate](#) and [2.7 Hasaka governorate](#) of this report.

Further information on the SNA is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#).

### 1.4.3. Syrian Democratic Forces

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are an armed force led by the People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG). It is militarily and financially supported by the US to fight ISIL in northeast Syria.<sup>137</sup> The SDF is a mixed force, with Arab, Kurds and fighters of other minorities within its ranks.<sup>138</sup> In comparison, the YPG, which leads the SDF, features Kurdish fighters from Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, and is linked to the PKK.<sup>139</sup>

The SDF's control stretches across the governorates of Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka and Raqqa.<sup>140</sup> Particularly in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka and Raqqa, the SDF controls areas purely inhabited by Arabs.<sup>141</sup> According to Clingendael, approximately 70 % of the population under SDF control are Syrian Arabs.<sup>142</sup>

No up-to-date numbers of soldiers enrolled with the YPG and SDF respectively could be found.

Throughout the second half of 2021, the SDF – together with the US-led Coalition against ISIL – frequently carried out counter-terrorism operations against ISIL, mainly in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, and occasionally in Hasaka and Raqqa governorates.<sup>143</sup> In March 2022, the international coalition and the SDF conducted military exercises with heavy weapons, including Bradley tanks and anti-armour weapons, in areas of Deir Ez-Zor countryside. The SDF continued to fight ISIL cells in rural Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorate.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>136</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 82-88; AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22 – Syria, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 353; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>137</sup> Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>138</sup> Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>139</sup> Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>140</sup> Balanche, F., How to Preserve the Autonomy of Northeast Syria, WINEP, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>141</sup> Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>142</sup> Clingendael, Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist - The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, April 2021, [url](#), p. 68

<sup>143</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 98

<sup>144</sup> Syrian Observer (The), U.S. Maneuvers with SDF in Eastern Syria with Heavy Weapons, 28 March 2022, [url](#)



During the reporting period, the SDF engaged in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention of civilians.<sup>145</sup>

**(a) Developments regarding the justice system in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES)**

A description of the judiciary and penal system in the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria can be found in section 3.1.4 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

In Northeast Syria, two justice systems continue to operate next to each other, the justice system of the GoS and that of the AANES, which is not recognised by the GoS.<sup>146</sup> As the AANES lacks a recognised property register and a civil register, courts under its jurisdiction cannot establish the sales and transfer of property or register parenthood, divorce, or marriage.<sup>147</sup>

The AANES justice system is based on the 'Social Contract', a document which lays out the essential aspects of coexistence, as agreed on by the people.<sup>148</sup> In June 2021, authorities of the AANES announced the formation of a committee to reformulate the Social Contract.<sup>149</sup> In May 2022, the Social Contract Drafting Committee held its second meeting, as part of which it read the contract to the public and participants were able to share their opinions and suggestions.<sup>150</sup>

Within the AANES system, local laws (nearly 70 of them) are applied next to Syrian criminal and civil law. This has led to confusions on which law to apply.<sup>151</sup> In addition, as a result of the social law principle applied in the region, it is possible for judges to completely ignore the written law and use social justice principles (i.e., social conventions) instead.<sup>152</sup>

The social justice system under the AANES was described as having a great number of different and distinct institutions, with their work varying significantly<sup>153</sup>, particularly between the different regions under AANES control.<sup>154</sup> Key councils were missing in certain governorates, such as in Deir Ez-Zor, and were described as ineffective in other areas.<sup>155</sup>

Before a case (mainly civil cases) can be brought to court, it must pass through a Peace and Consensus Committee (PCC), which is a non-judicial body existing in every neighbourhood

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<sup>145</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 102-106; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>146</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 168

<sup>147</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 128

<sup>148</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 115

<sup>149</sup> Enab Baladi, Charter of Autonomous Administration: Infringement of society components' rights?, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>150</sup> ANF News, Northern and Eastern Syria Social Contract Drafting Committee holds second meeting in Amûdê, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>151</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>152</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 120

<sup>153</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 125

<sup>154</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 164

<sup>155</sup> OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 137

across the AANES and which is made up of three to five people of the area, who have no particular training or qualification.<sup>156</sup> It was reported that also within the court system, practitioners were either trained in a different legal system or completely untrained in law.<sup>157</sup> Of 326 judges appointed in AANES, 30 % had a high school diploma, 5 % were holders of bachelor's degrees in disciplines other than law and 65 % were lawyers, half of whom were new graduates.<sup>158</sup> 64 % of the appointed judges were Kurds, 33 % Arabs and 3 % of different ethnicity, such as Assyrians, Turkmen and Circassians. Of the 'People's Defence' court, 100 % of judges were Kurds.<sup>159</sup>

The court system was reported by ILAC as suffering from a 'fundamental lack of independence from the executive'.<sup>160</sup> Lawyers in the AANES reported interference by the PYD, YPG and/or PKK in the administration of justice, particularly if courts are perceived to interfere with security or military interests.<sup>161</sup> According to the OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, PKK cadres dominated social justice institutions and supervised them with regards to finances, security and administration. They were further reported as intervening in legal cases, bypassing judges and legal mechanisms.<sup>162</sup> Gaps in the legal system, which undermine due procedures and the right to a fair trial, were said to remain, especially in cases of political character.<sup>163</sup> The rule that every security practice had to inform the Prosecution Commission prior to an arrest was not followed in practice. The security forces and the anti-crime bureau 'kidnapped people and interrogated [them] for an indeterminate period of time', without being held accountable.<sup>164</sup> As reported by an attorney in the AANES, SDF security services (Asayish) arrested civilians without presenting a warrant, without an order from the public prosecutor and without informing them of their right to be represented by a lawyer. Defendants did not have lawyers present during interrogations or in court. Arbitrary detention of political opponents took place during the reporting period, such as the imprisonment of four members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria in July 2021.<sup>165</sup>

Capital punishment is outlawed in the AANES.<sup>166</sup> Torture, which led to death, was reported to continue to take place in SDF detention facilities.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>156</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 132-133

<sup>157</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 125

<sup>158</sup> OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 137-138

<sup>159</sup> OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 138

<sup>160</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 172

<sup>161</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 123-124

<sup>162</sup> OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 138

<sup>163</sup> Enab Baladi, Detainees in northeastern Syria: Autonomous Administration breaking their own legal code, 21 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 157-158

<sup>165</sup> Enab Baladi, Detainees in northeastern Syria: Autonomous Administration breaking their own legal code, 21 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>166</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>167</sup> MEE, Syria: Families in northeast say sons tortured to death in SDF prisons, 8 July 2021, [url](#); STJ, Northeastern Syria: Detainees Tortured and Maltreated, 18 January 2022, [url](#); Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria: Investigate deaths of detainees in SDF prisons, 9 March 2022, [url](#)



The general situation with regards to repatriating ISIL detainees or putting them on trial remained unresolved during the reporting period.<sup>168</sup> An ‘extraordinary court’, the ‘people’s defence’ court, tries crimes considered as terrorism. It does not allow the right to a defence and the applicable counter-terrorism law has not been made public.<sup>169</sup>

At the end of March 2021, representatives of 18 Arab, Assyrian, Kurdish, Syriac and Yazidi tribes in northeast Syria agreed to reaffirm a tribal judicial system, called *Madbata*, to resolve inter-clan disputes, robberies, lootings and actions of revenge in the Jazira region of Hasaka governorate.<sup>170</sup> In March 2022 it was reported that also the people of eastern Deir Ez-Zor turned to tribal settlements as a result of a lack of judicial alternatives that were accepted by the population.<sup>171</sup>

#### 1.4.4. Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham

Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham or the Organization for the Liberation of the Levant (HTS) is a Sunni Islamist group under the leadership of Abu-Muhammad Al-Jawlani. It is based in north-western Syria and opposes the GoS of President Bashar Al-Assad. Its predecessor, Jabhat al-Nusra was linked to al-Qaida. HTS continues to be listed as a terrorist organization by the governments of Australia, Canada, the US and the UK, among others.<sup>172</sup> The group sought its removal from the lists of terrorist organizations and built its function more like a government than a non-state actor, while continuing to ‘glamorize terrorism abroad’, espouse ‘extremist views’ and crack down on opponents.<sup>173</sup>

During the reporting period, HTS was the dominant armed actor in the province of Idlib, part of Aleppo’s western countryside, the Syrian coast’s mountains, and the al-Ghab Plain in north-western Hama.<sup>174</sup> According to the UN Security Council, HTS retained around 10 000 fighters<sup>175</sup>, whom the organization largely recruited within Syria.<sup>176</sup> Since the Turkish Operation Spring Shield<sup>177</sup> in 2020, northern Idlib had become a Turkish protectorate.<sup>178</sup> HTS did not attack Turkish forces and Turkey used a soft power approach towards HTS.<sup>179</sup> Russia, in

<sup>168</sup> ILAC, Syria 2021, 2021, [url](#), pp. 170-171

<sup>169</sup> OMRAN Center for Strategic Studies, The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>170</sup> Al-Monitor, Tribes in east Syria resort to their own judiciary over lack of trust in official courts, 4 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> Enab Baladi, Amid judiciary absence, “Tribal Justice” reigns in Deir Ezzor, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>172</sup> Australia, Australian National Security, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>173</sup> Zelin, Aaron, From Global Jihad to Local Regime: HTS Builds Different Forms of Legitimacy, 6 August 2021, [url](#); Zelin, Aaron, The Age of Political Jihadism, A Study of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>174</sup> Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham dismantling “jihadist” groups to win international recognition, 20 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2022/547, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>176</sup> Australia, Australian National Security, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>177</sup> Operation Spring Shield was a military operation conducted by the Turkish forces against the Syrian army and its allies in Idlib governorate in March 2020 (see: Al-Monitor, Turkey launches Operation Spring Shield against Syrian forces, 1 March 2020, [url](#))

<sup>178</sup> Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>179</sup> Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 4

contrast, reserved its right to strike HTS on the basis that it was an UN-designated terrorist group.<sup>180</sup>

HTS divided its areas of influence into sectors, each of which is headed by a military commander, called an ‘emir’, with Al-Jawlani being the general emir of the organization. These sectors include Idlib, Hama, Aleppo, the coast and the border. HTS consists of its general army, Jabhat al-Nusra, the Red Bands ‘Islamist commando’ (which carries out special operations), and a public security agency, with security officials and detectives working in a civilian capacity. According to the MENA Research and Studies Centre, HTS worked with booby-trapped vehicles, suicide bombers and self-made ‘Elephant’ missiles. It manufactures mortar cannons and ammunition and possesses more than 160 tanks and armoured vehicles.<sup>181</sup> HTS is active in recruiting new fighters.<sup>182</sup>

The Chechen Jund Al-Sham (Soldiers of the Levant)<sup>183</sup> evacuated its military positions after HTS put pressure on the group to either join HTS’s ranks or to leave the country.<sup>184</sup> Other foreign groups, which were loyal to HTS and worked under its supervision, such as Ansar al-Tawhid, the Turkestan Islamic Party, Ajnad al-Kavkaz and Uzbek groups did not dissolve.<sup>185</sup> The move to request Jund Al-Sham to join forces or leave the country was described by the opposition news outlet Enab Baladi and Senior Fellow at Georgetown University, Nagwan Soliman, as being part of HTS’s aim to rebrand its organization<sup>186</sup>, as well as a step to implement Turkey’s wish<sup>187</sup> and to eliminate rivals.<sup>188</sup> At the same time, HTS moved to expanding its engagements with tribes in Idlib.<sup>189</sup> In October 2021, fighting erupted between HTS and Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah in western Idlib and the northern Latakia countryside.<sup>190</sup>

During the reporting period, HTS continued extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention of civilians.<sup>191</sup>

Further information on HTS is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#).

<sup>180</sup> Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>181</sup> MENA Research and Studies Center, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, 16 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>182</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian government steps up attack against Islamist enclave, 19 January 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, “HTS” brings in new blood to its ranks, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>183</sup> Doukaev, A., Chechnya’s Veteran Fighters Have Their Backs to the Wall, Jamestown Foundation (The), 2 August 2021 [url](#)

<sup>184</sup> Al-Monitor, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham kicks Chechen jihadis out of Idlib, 15 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>185</sup> Al-Monitor, Jihadist group in Idlib vows to keep foreign fighters in Syria, 15 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham dismantling “jihadist” groups to win international recognition, 20 July 2021, [url](#); Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The New Jihadists and the Taliban Model, 20 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>187</sup> COAR, HTS Cracks Down on Rival Groups as Northwest Pressure Builds, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>188</sup> Al-Monitor, Jihadist group in Idlib vows to keep foreign fighters in Syria, 15 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>189</sup> Zelin, Aaron, Hanging on in Idlib: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham’s Expanding Tribal Engagement, 11 June 2021, [url](#);

Carnegie Middle East Center, Why Kabul has an Echo in Idlib, 17 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>190</sup> COAR, HTS Cracks Down on Rival Groups as Northwest Pressure Builds, 1 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>191</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 16



#### 1.4.5. Other anti-government armed groups in the Idlib area

During the reporting period, Idlib hosted dozens of mainly Islamic armed groups, of which HTS is dominant, with others in the area being<sup>192</sup> Ansar al-Islam, Ansar al-Tawhid, Ansar al-Din, Ajnad al-Kavkaz, the Turkistan Islamic Movement<sup>193</sup>, Katibat al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (KTJ) and Imam Bukhari Jamaat, which is mainly made up of Uzbek fighters.<sup>194</sup>

The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), mainly operated in Idlib and comprised between 1 000 and 2 000 fighters. The group allied with HTS when carrying out terrorist operations and held armed training sessions.<sup>195</sup>

While KTJ joined HTS, Imam Bukhari Jammāt acted independently. Al-Monitor reported that the Uzbek jihadis were deployed mainly in the mountainous regions of north-western Syria. While Imam Bukhari Jammāt has been designated a terrorist organization by the US since 2018<sup>196</sup>, KTJ, which is estimated to have between 500 and 1 200 fighters<sup>197</sup>, joined the list on March 7, 2022. KTJ has further been added to the UN Security Council sanctions list.<sup>198</sup>

HTS actively took steps against rival groups in Idlib (see section [1.4.4](#)), including Hurras al-Din, Sham al-Islam and the Kurdish jihadi group Ansar al-Islam, by arresting their leaders and members.<sup>199</sup> The umbrella group of al-Qaida-inspired factions, Hurras al-Din (HAD), allegedly dissolved itself, but its factions remained in the region. Similarly, Jund Al-Sham, which disintegrated upon HTS' request has not been eliminated.<sup>200</sup> According to the UN Security Council, HAD was at its 'weakest point', counting between 1 000 and 3 000 fighters, with many having relocated to the south, around Dar'a and Sweida, having lost many of its leaders in Idlib. HAD merely retained a 'residual presence' in Idlib.<sup>201</sup>

The National Liberation Front (NLF), which is affiliated to the Turkish backed SNA (formerly Free Syrian Army)<sup>202</sup> continued to be militarily active in Idlib as late as June 2022.<sup>203</sup>

<sup>192</sup> Serwer D., *Divided Syria: An examination of stabilization efforts and prospects for state continuity*, MEI, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>193</sup> Al-Monitor, Turkey's blind eye to jihadis worsens its predicaments in Syria, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>194</sup> Al-Monitor, Uzbek fighters complicate makeover campaign by jihadi group in Idlib, 19 August 2021, [url](https://www.al-monitor.com/uk/regions/middle-east/2021/08/uzbek-fighters-complicate-makeover-campaign-by-jihadi-group-in-idlib/)

<sup>195</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2022/547, 15 July 2022, url, para. 45

<sup>196</sup> Al-Monitor, Uzbek fighters complicate makeover campaign by jihadi group in Idlib, 19 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>197</sup> STJ, Who is Katibat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad?, 20 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>198</sup> USDOS, Terrorist Designation of Katibat al Tawhid wal Jihad, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>199</sup> Al-Monitor, Jihadi group steps up arrests of rivals, former jihadi allies in Idlib, 9 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>200</sup> Al-Monitor, Turkey's blind eye to jihadis worsens its predicaments in Syria, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>201</sup> UN Security Council, Twenty-ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2022/83, 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 38

<sup>202</sup> Al-Monitor, Political, military wings of Islamist movement clash in Idlib, 11 May 2021, [url](https://www.al-monitor.com/story/idlib-isis-2021-05)

<sup>203</sup> SOHR, Military escalation | Regime ground forces shell National Liberation Front positions killing one member and injuring four others, 9 June 2022, [url](#)

See also section [2.1 Idlib governorate](#). Further information on anti-GoS armed groups in the Idlib area is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### 1.4.6. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS, IS or Daesh)

ISIL in Syria has its centre in the desert south of the Euphrates, called al-Badia<sup>204</sup>, where ISIL militants are brought together and trained prior to being dispatched to Syria or Iraq.<sup>205</sup> US-led Coalition officials and ISIL experts interviewed by the European University Institute (EUI) estimated that, as of February 2022, ISIL had around 1 000 active fighters in Syria and Iraq combined and was supported by 5 000 to 10 000 non-combatants.<sup>206</sup> The UN Security Council estimated its strength at between 6 000 and 10 000 fighters across Syria and Iraq, with the group's operational leaders being mainly based in Syria.<sup>207</sup>

ISIL continued to exert its influence on the local population in eastern Deir Ez-Zor, which is described as an ISIL stronghold. In south-eastern Deir Ez-Zor (in the triangle of cities of al-Zir, Dhiban and al-Buseyrah) ISIL demanded and received protection money from traders. Targeted killings remained frequent in the area and ISIL put pressure on civilians' lifestyle choices by subjecting them to threats. It further appointed a sharia judge, who intervened in cases of theft or debt. In north-eastern Deir Ez-Zor, ISIL regularly targeted or killed AANES representatives, leading to an administrative vacuum. ISIL is said to have embedded itself within the local shepherd communities.<sup>208</sup> In the city of Sweida, ISIL started imposing flying checkpoints at night, while in the city of Tayyana all officials are assumed to having pledged allegiance to ISIL.<sup>209</sup> From the end of 2021, ISIL militants from north-eastern Syria started to infiltrate Deir Ez-Zor's National Defence Forces and at least one ISIL cell penetrated the southern Homs countryside.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>204</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3; Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>205</sup> Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>206</sup> Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 5

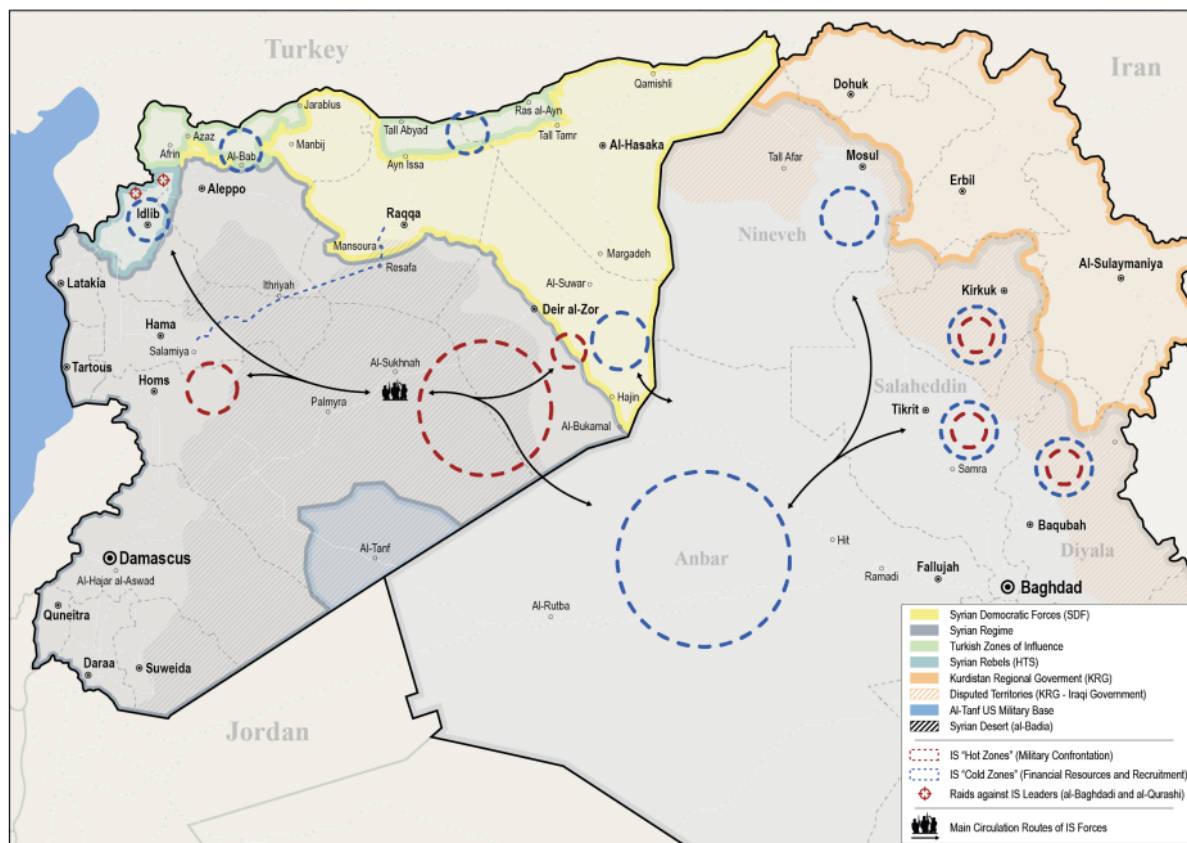
<sup>207</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2022/547, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 41

<sup>208</sup> Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>209</sup> Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>210</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13







seemed to consolidate in the desert and prepare for increased activity. The group at the same time continued recruitment and indoctrination at the al-Hol camp<sup>223</sup>, which holds approximately 57 000 displaced people, mainly women and children. A further 10 000 ISIL fighters are detained in SDF facilities.<sup>224</sup>

In January 2022, ISIL conducted its biggest military operation in Syria since the fall of Baghouz in March 2019. The group attacked al-Sina'a prison, located in the city of Hasaka and controlled by the SDF and the US-led Coalition<sup>225</sup>, and took control of two adjacent neighbourhoods for five days.<sup>226</sup> According to an analysis published by EUI, the operation demonstrated ISIL's continuous centralised structure and its capability of mobilising forces.<sup>227</sup> For the US Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve the attack demonstrated ISIL's continuous ability to launch complex attacks.<sup>228</sup>

In February 2022 ISIL's leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi, killed himself following a US raid in Idlib governorate. In March 2022 his successor, Abu Hasan al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi, was announced.<sup>229</sup>

In early April 2022, ISIL escalated its attacks against GoS forces and allied militias in the Syrian desert, known as Badia. The attacks targeted big military convoys, military barracks and oil fields. ISIL fighters used a variety of weapons, including medium- and short-range missiles, heavy machine guns, mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), Grad rockets and mortars. The new tactics inflicted a heavy loss on GoS forces. Attacks were also launched in Deir Ez-Zor, Homs and Raqqah governorates, focusing on oil fields run by companies close to the GoS.<sup>230</sup> Throughout the first quarter of 2022, ISIL operated mainly in Badia and across northern and eastern provinces of Syria, while top ISIL leaders 'likely remained in the western Idlib governorate'. In northeastern and southern Syria, ISIL worked on extending their influence among the Sunni Arab population. The group further retained a 'smaller, but still active presence in the northern Raqqah and Hasakah governorates'.<sup>231</sup>

Further information on ISIL is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

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<sup>223</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress July 1, 2021– September 30, 2021, 3 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>224</sup> US, CRS (United States Congressional Research Service), The Islamic State, 10 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>225</sup> Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>226</sup> Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>227</sup> Haenni, P and Quesnay, A, Coming Up Through the Cracks, EUI, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>228</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>229</sup> France 24, Islamic State names new leader, confirms death of predecessor, 10 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>230</sup> Al-Monitor, Islamic State escalates attacks in Syrian desert, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>231</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 21

## 1.5. Recent security trends and armed confrontations during the reference period

### 1.5.1. Areas under the control of the Government of Syria (GoS)

As of the beginning of 2022, the GoS had control over 63.38 % of the state's territory, including central and southern Syria, the governorates along the Mediterranean coast, and parts of eastern Syria and Aleppo. The GoS also controlled Syria's most important cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, or Hama. GoS control over Dar'a governorate increased after a military operation, while it remained 'fragile' in Sweida, with the GoS' focus on strengthening its security services and state institutions in the region, as reported by Jusoor for Studies.<sup>232</sup> According to iMMAP, an international NPO, 66 % of the Syrian population were living in GoS-controlled areas as of November 2021, including 10.4 million residents and 3.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>233</sup>

From June 2021, the GoS besieged a neighbourhood of Dar'a city, Dar'a al-Balad, for 75 days, where intense fighting took place and over 38 000 residents were temporarily displaced.<sup>234</sup> After shelling and a ground offensive conducted by pro-GoS forces,<sup>235</sup> including the Fourth Division<sup>236</sup>, an agreement was reached on 8 September and the GoS ended the siege.<sup>237</sup> As part of their attack on Dar'a al-Balad, the pro-GoS forces used improvised rocket-assisted munition and other rocket munitions in tightly populated areas, resulting in loss of civilian lives and denying residents access to food and health care.<sup>238</sup> The UNCOI is investigating whether these attacks amount to war crimes.<sup>239</sup>

Violent incidents, including retaliatory killings with victims on both sides and targeted killings of persons refusing to 'reconcile with the government' continued in November and December 2021 across Dar'a countryside.<sup>240</sup> Similarly, targeted killings, IED attacks, exchanges of fire, clashes and abductions were reported from Dar'a, Quneitra and Sweida governorates in the first half of 2022<sup>241</sup>, involving GoS forces and pro-GoS militia groups, former members of

<sup>232</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control in Syria end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, 24 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>233</sup> iMMAP, The Current Status of Social Support in Syria, January 2022, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>234</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>235</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 23-31; New Arab (The), Syrian Insight: What do the regime and Russia want from Daraa province?, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>236</sup> Reuters, Syrian army steps up offensive on rebel redoubt in southwestern city, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>237</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 32; France 24, Syrian army enters opposition bastion under Russian-negotiated truce, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>238</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 35

<sup>239</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 35

<sup>240</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 33-34

<sup>241</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 6



armed opposition groups, ISIL fighters and other unidentified actors.<sup>242</sup> Violent incidents including killings and assassination attempts in Dar'a governorate were also reported in the context of drug trade and other criminal activities, as well as previous, political and personal conflicts.<sup>243</sup>

Violent incidents in April and May 2022, including killings of GoS-affiliated individuals, were also reported from Rural Damascus governorate. Reportedly, the perpetrators of these attacks remained unknown except for two incidents for which ISIL claimed responsibility.<sup>244</sup> The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported on attacks on military checkpoints in Rural Damascus in June<sup>245</sup> and July<sup>246</sup> 2022 and on the killings of alleged collaborators with GoS forces,<sup>247</sup> among other violent incidents. SOHR reportedly has registered 78 murders in GoS-controlled areas since early 2022.<sup>248</sup>

Hostilities, clashes and mutual shelling of pro-GoS and opposition forces along the frontlines in the north-west of Syria (Idlib and western Aleppo governorates) continued throughout the reference period, causing the death of civilians and displacement.<sup>249</sup> In June 2021, the SAA was reportedly shelling the southern parts of north-western Idlib. The forces then changed location to the Badia desert to fight ISIL, together with the Russian air force.<sup>250</sup> Shellings by GoS forces of areas in Idlib continued from July, killing civilians.<sup>251</sup> Between July and December 2021, the UNCOI documented an increase in air strikes and shelling by pro-GoS forces in Idlib. During July and August in particular, intense shelling was conducted south of the M4 highway.<sup>252</sup> Air strikes by pro-GoS forces further targeted Operation Euphrates Shield areas in the north of the country.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>243</sup> COAR, Dar'a Killings Highlight Unseen Local Toll of Syria's Drug Trade, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>244</sup> Arab Weekly (The), Violence surges in countryside surrounding Damascus, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>245</sup> SOHR, Anti-regime attack | Gunmen open fire on regime checkpoint in Qudsaya, Rif Dimashq, while regime forces amass troops and block the area's entrances, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>246</sup> SOHR, Security chaos | Gunmen with weapons with silencers attack Military Security checkpoint killing two and injuring others in Rif Dimashq, 30 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>247</sup> SOHR, Rampant security chaos | Collaborator with regime's security services killed after being kidnapped for ten days south of Damascus, 27 July 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Dispute over people smuggling | Collaborator with regime security branches shot dead in Rif Dimashq, 7 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>248</sup> SOHR, 78th crime in regime-held areas in 2022 | Young man stabbed to death in fights among young men in Yabroud city in western Qalamoun, 10 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>249</sup> Al-Monitor, Idlib sees new escalation between Syrian government, opposition forces, 22 June 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 46; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | April through June 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>250</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Syria Regime Reroutes Forces from Idlib to Badia Desert in Clampdown on ISIS, 18 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>251</sup> France 24, Syria army shells rebel bastion, killing seven: monitor, 22 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>252</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>253</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

### 1.5.2. Areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups

The areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups are two discontinuous areas along the Syrian-Turkish border encompassing most of northern Aleppo and segments of the northern governorates of Raqqqa and Hasaka.<sup>254</sup> Turkey has organised these armed groups under the umbrella of Syrian National Army (SNA).<sup>255</sup> Between 2016 and 2020, Turkey conducted four major military operations in northern Syria. In the course of Operation ‘Euphrates Shield’, Turkish-backed forces seized control over 2 055 square kilometres of northern Aleppo governorate in August 2016. With Operation ‘Olive Branch’, Turkey captured Afrin district in January 2018. Through Operation ‘Peace Spring’ Turkey expanded the areas under its control east of the Euphrates River in late 2019. A subsequent operation called ‘Spring Shield’ was conducted in north-western Idlib governorate in February 2020, which further consolidated Turkish control over the northern areas of Syria. According to a July 2022 article by Hamidreza Azizi, fellow researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Turkey and Turkish-backed forces hold about 10 % of Syria’s territory as a result of these operations.<sup>256</sup>

For April and May 2021, the UN Secretary-General reported on ‘low-level mutual shelling’ and sporadic fighting between pro-GoS forces and non-state armed opposition groups along the front lines near Al-Bab in northern Aleppo governorate, but also on an intensification of mutual shelling and fighting along the contact lines in Afrin, A’zaz, and Tal Rifaat, including reports of civilian casualties.<sup>257</sup> For the period between April and June 2021, the Carter Center, a nongovernmental organization focused on human rights and conflict prevention and solution, reported frequent shelling and skirmishes at the frontlines between Kurdish-controlled and Turkish-held areas, with a clear increase in incidents at the end of June 2021 and with most of the conflict events taking place in Raqqqa Governorate (30 of 47 incidents). Tensions reportedly escalated after a rocket hit Al-Shifa Hospital in Afrin on 12 June 2021.<sup>258</sup>

Between July and September 2021, fighting between Turkish forces/Turkish-backed armed groups and various Kurdish armed groups reportedly increased, including shelling, clashes, and airstrikes, with a rise in conflict events reported for Manbij region, Tall Abyad and Dardara.<sup>259</sup> Moreover, at the end of September 2021, Russia was reported to have conducted airstrikes on territory held by Turkish-backed forces in Afrin.<sup>260</sup> For the fourth quarter of 2021, the Carter Center reported that the conflict had slightly decreased, ‘with much of the activity’ taking place in Tal Tamr, Ras Al-Ain, Afrin, A’zaz, and Ain Issa, and with more than 95 % of the documented airstrikes and shelling activity reportedly stemming from the Turkish side.<sup>261</sup>

<sup>254</sup> PHR, Destruction, Obstruction, and Inaction - The Makings of a Health Crisis in Northern Syria, December 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | April through June 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>255</sup> COAR, Northern Corridor: Needs Oriented Strategic Area Profile, October 2019, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>256</sup> Azizi, H., How Iran sees Turkey’s plan for a new military operation in Syria, MEI, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>257</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>258</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | April through June 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>259</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>260</sup> Al-Monitor, Russia bombs Turkey’s allies in Syria ahead of Putin-Erdogan summit, 28 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>261</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 28 March 2021, [url](#), p. 7



In its report covering the period from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, the UNCOI mentioned that, although the overall security situation had improved in northern Aleppo and the Ras Al-Ain and Tall Abyad areas compared to the ‘immediate aftermath of Operation Peace Spring and Operation Olive Branch’, people were still living ‘amid fear of shelling and improvised explosive devices’. Northern Aleppo saw several incidents of bombardment and vehicle-borne IEDs while the area between Ras Al-Ain and Tall Abyad reportedly witnessed a period of relative calm. Civilians in this ‘highly volatile region’ were reported to be confronted with ‘several conflicts, involving both pro-government and Turkish forces as well as non-State armed groups’, including SNA and SDF forces.<sup>262</sup>

The Carter Center recorded an increase in conflict incidents between Kurdish and Turkish-backed armed groups for the period between January and March 2022 compared to the previous quarter.<sup>263</sup> For April and May 2022, the UN Secretary-General reported on significantly increasing hostilities in northern Syria, ‘including but not limited to’ Tal Rifaat in northern Aleppo, Manbij, Ain Issa and Tal Tamr.<sup>264</sup> In June 2022, the London-based digital news organisation Middle East Eye reported that HTS militants had seized control over a number of villages in the southern Afrin area that were previously held by Turkish-backed armed groups.<sup>265</sup>

In July 2022, Calvin Wilder, analyst at the Washington D.C.-based think tank Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, described the front lines between areas under Turkish-backed forces and SDF-held territories as ‘largely static’ since October 2019, and as complicated to maintain and oftentimes marked by violence.<sup>266</sup> Along the frontline, ‘tit-for-tat strikes’ by Turkish-affiliated armed groups and the SDF continued to occur, resulting in the deaths of both soldiers and civilians. According to Wilder, the situation was particularly ‘tense’ in Tal Rifaat, an isolated area under SDF control west of the Euphrates, and along the frontline near Manbij and the SDF’s main territories in the east of the Euphrates, where artillery shelling and drone attacks were regularly witnessed.<sup>267</sup>

According to various news reports published in July 2022, Turkey was planning another military operation in northern Syria. The operation is reported to be aiming at clearing a 30-

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<sup>262</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 74

<sup>263</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics | January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>264</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 1 (in Key points)

<sup>265</sup> MEE, Syria's rebel divisions laid bare as HTS takes Afrin villages from Turkish-backed groups, 23 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>266</sup> Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>267</sup> Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

kilometer-deep ‘security zone’ of Kurdish armed groups.<sup>268</sup> As of early July, the cities of Manbij and Tal Rifaat were named as the main targets of the potential offensive.<sup>269</sup>

Internal fighting between SNA factions reportedly exacerbated the overall instability in areas held by Turkish-backed armed groups. These internal conflicts were described as being far greater than those witnessed within the Kurdish-backed forces or the HTS and were considered ‘a severe problem for the political leadership and residents within Turkish-held areas’.<sup>270</sup> According to an April 2022 news article, SNA infighting occurred almost daily and mainly in the cities of Jarablus, al-Bab, Afrin, Ras Al-Ain und A’zaz. As these clashes often took place amidst residential areas, residents were reported to be negatively affected and sometimes even injured<sup>271</sup> or killed.<sup>272</sup>

As reported by UNOCHA in its Humanitarian Needs Overview, most of the 309 IED attacks recorded in the first months of 2021 happened in areas controlled by ‘armed groups in Turkish operations areas of Aleppo Governorate’, particularly in residential areas and markets.<sup>273</sup>

### 1.5.3. Kurdish-controlled areas in north-east Syria

According to a UN map (see Map 3) depicting estimated areas of influence as of January 2022, areas under control of Kurdish forces - including the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - comprise Hasaka governorate (except for the Turkish-controlled so-called Operation Peace Spring area, see also section 1.5.2 of this report) as well as parts of Aleppo, Raqqqa and Deir Ez-Zor governorates in north-eastern Syria. Moreover, Manbij and its surrounding area, the area around Tal Rifaat and strips of land along the border with Turkey are under joint control of GoS and pro-GoS forces and Kurdish forces, while some parts of Syria’s international border zone with Turkey are controlled by Turkish forces and affiliated non-state armed groups.<sup>274</sup>

Clashes between the GoS-aligned NDF and Kurdish security forces in Qamishli city in the period from 20 to 25 April 2021 ended with Kurdish forces taking control over Tayy neighbourhood, an area of the city that has an Arab majority. Fighting erupted following the arrest of an NDF leader and member of the Arab Tayy tribe by Kurdish security forces. At least 10 NDF fighters and 3 Kurdish security forces were reportedly killed in the fighting.<sup>275</sup> According to a UN report of June 2021, the clashes between GoS forces and Kurdish security forces in Qamishli city led to the temporary displacement of up to 20 000 people and killed 14 civilians, including 3 children. Fighting lasted for several days and also affected UN

<sup>268</sup> MEMO, Kurdish SDF calls on Russia, Iran to prevent planned Turkish military operation, 17 July 2022, [url](#); VOA, US Officials Speak Out Against Turkish Plans for Northern Syria, 13 July 2022, [url](#); Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 July 2022, [url](#); Azizi, H., How Iran sees Turkey’s plan for a new military operation in Syria, MEI, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>269</sup> Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>270</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>271</sup> Al-Monitor, Factional infighting escalates in northern Syria, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>272</sup> New Arab (The), Two civilians shot in inter-rebel fighting in northern Syria, 8 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>273</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>274</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>275</sup> COAR, Qamishli Clashes Bring Arab-Kurd Tensions to the Surface, 26 April 2021, [url](#)



humanitarian aid transports, which were prevented from entering the city until a ceasefire was agreed.<sup>276</sup>

In March 2022, GoS forces began blocking the delivery of flour, fuel and medicines to Kurdish-majority and Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods in Aleppo, allegedly to prevent smuggling and the delivery of supplies to four unlicensed bakeries. In an apparently retaliatory move, Kurdish security forces blocked bakeries in GoS-controlled areas in Qamishli and Hasaka in early April 2022, and reportedly briefly took control of the GoS-controlled city centre of Qamishli.<sup>277</sup>

In June 2022, villages around Manbij were reportedly attacked with heavy weapons by Turkish forces and associated groups, while SDF and GoS forces reinforced their positions in the area and sought support from local Arab tribes in anticipation of a large-scale military operation announced by Turkey.<sup>278</sup> For the same reason, SDF declared a state of emergency in July 2022.<sup>279</sup>

Clashes and mutual shelling between Turkish armed forces and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups on the one side and Kurdish armed groups on the other side continued with varying intensity throughout the reference period. Periods of increased tensions were reported in the Ain Issa and Tall Abyad areas in Raqqa governorate in June 2021<sup>280</sup>, in the Manbij area in Aleppo governorate, in Dardara in Hasaka governorate, and in Tall Abyad in the period from July to September 2021<sup>281</sup>, and across northern Syria in the first quarter of 2022. Of 233 conflict events recorded by the Carter Center in the period from January to March that year, 46 were clashes between groups, while 186 were shelling and aerial bombardment by Turkish armed forces and their allies targeting SDF positions.<sup>282</sup> SNA and SDF were reportedly frequently involved in mutual shelling and skirmishes along the line of control near Ain Issa in Raqqa and Tal Tamr in Hasaka governorates<sup>283</sup>, which at times resulted in civilian casualties.<sup>284</sup>

An SDF commander was killed by a Turkish drone strike near Qamishli in Hasaka governorate in August 2021.<sup>285</sup> In the same month, a Turkish soldier and two Turkish-backed fighters were reportedly killed in Ras Al-Ain countryside by an explosive device of suspected SDF origin.

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<sup>276</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 13; WFP, WFP Syria Situation Report #4, April 2021, 24 May 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>277</sup> New Arab (The), Aleppo: Syrian regime continues siege of Kurdish neighbourhoods as SDF retaliates in Qamishli, 19 April 2022, [url](#); COAR, SDF Imposes Siege on Government of Syria Enclaves in Response to Siege of Sheikh Maqsoud, 18 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>278</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian Kurds, Arabs join forces to defend Manbij ahead of Turkish military operation, 24 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>279</sup> Wilder, C., The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, Newlines Institute, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>280</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I April through June 2021, 20 July 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>281</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>282</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics I January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-9

<sup>283</sup> Hoffman, M. and Makovsky, A., Northern Syria Security Dynamics and the Refugee Crisis, CAP, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>284</sup> STJ, Ain Issa: A Father, His Three Children, Killed in an Artillery Attack by the Elite Army, 8 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>285</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

Airstrikes by Turkish forces targeting Kurdish forces in northern Syria reportedly continued throughout the month.<sup>286</sup>

ISIL continued to carry out attacks during 2021 and the first six months of 2022 across Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorates and the SDF continued to carry out counter-operations in the region east of the Euphrates.<sup>287</sup> While most of the SDF and the US-led Coalition's counter-terrorism operations took place in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, some were conducted also in Hasaka and Raqqqa governorates.<sup>288</sup> On 20 January 2022, ISIL attacked al-Sina prison in the city of Hasaka in an attempt to free imprisoned former members of the group. The attack and ensuing siege of the prison and of two nearby neighbourhoods by SDF forces lasted for several days and caused scores of casualties, including civilians.<sup>289</sup> Around 45 000 civilians from the nearby neighbourhoods were displaced. However, by April 2022 most of them had been able to return.<sup>290</sup>

#### 1.5.4. Areas in north-west Syria under anti-GoS armed groups control

Please also see section [1.5.2](#) of this report for an overview on the situation in north-western areas under control of Turkish-backed armed groups, and section 1.5.4 of the [EUAA COI Report – Syria: Security situation \(2021\)](#) for information on developments in north-western areas prior to April 2021.

The areas of north-west Syria under control of anti-GoS armed groups include the northern parts of Idlib governorate, parts of western Aleppo governorate as well as small parts of Latakia and Hama governorates. The main towns are Idlib city, Jisr Al-Shoghour and Ariha.<sup>291</sup>

The opposition-held areas of north-west Syria are administered by the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), which is affiliated with HTS.<sup>292</sup> Over the course of several years, HTS had cracked down on Hurras al-Din (HAD) and ISIL cells and in summer 2021 started to pressure 'smaller jihadi outfits to merge into HTS or disband and/or depart Idlib altogether'.<sup>293</sup> As of September 2021, HTS was the 'the unchallenged, de facto governor' of areas controlled by

<sup>286</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>287</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 9; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 12; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>288</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 98

<sup>289</sup> Haenni, P. and Quesnay, A., Coming Up Through the Cracks: The Islamic State's Resurgence in Syria and Iraq, EUI, Policy Brief Issue 2022/16, 5 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>290</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 17

<sup>291</sup> Based on reading of the following maps: Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics I January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Balanche, F., Idlib May Become the Next Gaza Strip, WINEP, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>292</sup> US, CRS, Syria and U.S. Policy, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>293</sup> Lister, C., The Fight for Supremacy in Northwest Syria and the Implications for Global Jihad, September 2021, CTC, Vol. 14, Issue 7, [url](#), p. 48



the opposition in north-western Syria, and as such controlled the ‘most populous region of Syria outside of regime control’.<sup>294</sup>

According to a February 2022 report, despite the ceasefire agreement of March 2020 between Russia and Turkey to prevent a GoS offensive, the north-western area was affected by some of the most intense aerial bombardment by GoS and Russian forces in Syria.<sup>295</sup> After a lull in violence following the ceasefire, hostilities intensified in the first six months of 2021.<sup>296</sup> Over the year 2021, airstrikes by GoS and Russian forces struck sites with civilian presence, including hospitals, markets, schools, IDP settlements, and farms in the north-western parts of the country.<sup>297</sup>

In April and May 2021, ‘mutual artillery shelling and clashes between pro-GoS forces and non-State armed groups’ occurred on a daily basis in the Idlib de-escalation area.<sup>298</sup> However, the level of violence was reported to have remained relatively low. In late April and early May shelling increased, following an attack by HTS on GoS positions. HTS also continued to target rival groups during April and May.<sup>299</sup> HTS reportedly killed and arrested HAD members in April<sup>300</sup>, while rural Idlib was affected by air strikes.<sup>301</sup> In June and July 2021, air strikes and shelling increased in north-west Syria, including in Jabal Al-Zawiyah region in southern Idlib.<sup>302</sup> SNHR documented ‘a sudden military escalation by the Syrian-Russian alliance forces’ in early June 2021 around Jabal Al-Zawiyah area which resulted in ‘civilian casualties and significant material damage to vital facilities’.<sup>303</sup> In June and July, more than 20 civilian fatalities were documented by the UN in areas held by anti-GoS groups in north-west Syria. Airstrikes on military sites, including HTS sites, were carried out mostly south of the M4 highway, also damaging civilian infrastructure. Over 20 000 people were displaced in June 2021 due to the conflict in the north-west, resulting in the largest displacement in the area since the March 2020 ceasefire.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Lister, C., The Fight for Supremacy in Northwest Syria and the Implications for Global Jihad, September 2021, CTC, Vol. 14, Issue 7, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>295</sup> Hall, N., Rescuing Aid in Syria, CSIS, February 2022, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>296</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

<sup>297</sup> USDOS, 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>298</sup> Please see section 2.1.2 of the [url](#) for further information regarding the establishment of de-escalation areas.

<sup>299</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>300</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>301</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 3; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>302</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 1 in ‘Key points’; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, July 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>303</sup> SNHR, Russian and Syrian Regime Forces Committed Violations That Constitute War Crimes During Unlawful Attacks on and Around the Jabal al Zaweya Area, 9 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>304</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

In August and September 2021, violence further intensified in the Idlib de-escalation area.<sup>305</sup> Airstrikes and shelling resulted in the killing and wounding of civilians, including women and children. Civilian infrastructure was damaged almost daily by intensifying air strikes, mostly south of the M4 highway.<sup>306</sup> In early September the outskirts of an IDP camp in Ma'arrat Misrin were affected by air strikes.<sup>307</sup> The escalation of Russian airstrikes in Turkish-held territory in Aleppo governorate in September 2021 led to concerns over a possible new military offensive to secure the strategic M4 highway in Idlib Governorate. This and attacks against refugee camps in Aleppo and Idlib Governorates resulted in the displacement of civilians in the north-west.<sup>308</sup>

In October 2021, HTS attacked two of rival groups, Junud Al-Sham and Jund Allah, in Latakia governorate, leading to Junud Al-Sham agreeing to withdraw from confrontation areas.<sup>309</sup> In October and November 2021, shelling and clashes between armed opposition groups and GoS forces continued<sup>310</sup>, including south of the M4 highway in Idlib Governorate.<sup>311</sup> Attacks in the north-west of the country also impacted humanitarian operations, as there were hostilities close to warehouses of the United Nations and their partners, and to delivery routes and distribution points.<sup>312</sup>

Between July and December 2021, more than 80 % of conflict-related activities in Idlib were pro-GoS shelling and aerial bombardment in predominantly southern Idlib.<sup>313</sup> In late December 2021 violence escalated, when pro-GoS forces attacked residential areas.<sup>314</sup> Shelling and clashes between armed opposition groups and GoS forces continued across contact lines in the north-west in December 2021 and January 2022. In early January 2022, an air strike affected the Arshani water pumping station, and until 20 January 2022 access to water in Idlib city remained below previous levels.<sup>315</sup>

<sup>305</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/890, 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 3; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, September 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>306</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/890, 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>307</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/890, 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>308</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>309</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I October-December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>310</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, November 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>311</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>312</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>313</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I October-December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>314</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

<sup>315</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/135, 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 4



In February and March 2022, shelling and clashes between armed opposition groups and GoS forces continued across contact lines in the north-west. However, in comparison with the end of 2021, 'the pace of such strikes decreased.'<sup>316</sup> In February 2022, a US special forces raid in Atma town in Idlib governorate resulted in the killing of several civilians and ISIL fighters and raised concerns that Idlib might still be an ISIL hideout.<sup>317</sup>

According to a report by the Carter Center, conflict activity decreased from 992 events recorded in the previous quarter to 934 in the first quarter of 2022. Over 80 % of the activity in the north-west region took place in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.<sup>318</sup> In late April 2022, the tempo of air strikes increased again<sup>319</sup>, and in May 2022 Russian forces continued to carry out air-strikes in Idlib governorate.<sup>320</sup> In the first half of July 2022, HTS and the Turkish-backed armed groups intensified attacks of GoS posts on the southern and eastern fronts. The opposition forces launched the campaign in response to increasing land and air attacks by GoS and Russian forces in the countryside of Idlib earlier in July.<sup>321</sup>

As of June 2022, more than 2.8 million people in the north-west remained internally displaced. According to the UN Secretary General, 'continued attacks on the civilian population in the north-west exposed them to serious violations of international humanitarian law'.<sup>322</sup>

### 1.5.5. Tanf

Tanf Garrison is a US-controlled military base established in 2016 and is located in close proximity to Syria's borders with Jordan and Iraq. It is surrounded by a 55-kilometer deconfliction zone, based on a 2016 understanding between the USA and Russia. About 300 members of the Syrian opposition group Maghawir Al-Thawra (MaT), reportedly former military officers, were estimated to be spread around the deconfliction zone and collaborating with the coalition forces on operations against ISIL. MaT was reportedly also occasionally involved in preventing ISIL drug smuggling operations in the border region and in providing security for aid deliveries to the Rukban refugee camp located near the Tanf base<sup>323</sup>, which hosted an estimated 7 000 to 10 000 Syrian IDPs.<sup>324</sup> However, according to an article by Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor of April 2022, Rukban has not received any humanitarian aid since 2019, when GoS forces began blocking the entry of any supplies into the camp in an attempt to push the camp's residents to return to areas under GoS-control. With Jordan's borders

<sup>316</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>317</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>318</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics I January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>319</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>320</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>321</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian government, Russia escalate attacks in Idlib amid looming Turkish operation, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>322</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>323</sup> WINEP, D., The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria, WINEP, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>324</sup> Al-Monitor, Desperate residents flee Syrian refugee camp as supplies run out, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020, and coalition forces reportedly not providing humanitarian assistance<sup>325</sup>, the camp's residents had relied on smugglers to bring in and sell basic goods, according to media reports. A crackdown on smugglers in May 2022 interrupted this supply line and brought residents 'to the brink of famine'<sup>326</sup> until a food convoy by Jordanian traders was allowed to enter the camp in June 2022.<sup>327</sup>

A drone attack on Tanf was reported in October 2021<sup>328</sup>, while MaT positions around Tanf were reportedly attacked in airstrikes in June 2022. According to media reports, the latter attack was carried out by Russian forces who allegedly issued a warning ahead.<sup>329</sup>

Further information on Tanf is available in section 1.5.5 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

## 1.6. Impact of violence on the civilian population

### 1.6.1. Tactics and weapons used

#### (a) General

According to Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)<sup>330</sup>, the extent of explosive violence in the country continued to fall in 2021. Syria, however, was the second-worst impacted country worldwide for the second year in a row in this regard. From 2015 to 2019, Syria had been the worst impacted country. The data for 2021 showed a 33 % decrease in civilian casualties (from 3 013 in 2020 to 2 016 in 2021). Idlib and Aleppo remained the worst impacted regions. Compared to 2020, however, the number of casualties in both regions decreased. In Aleppo, the number fell from 1 287 civilian casualties from explosive weapons in 2020 to 714 in 2021, and in Idlib from 998 in 2020 to 671 in 2021. The perpetrators of attacks frequently remained unknown, but according to AOAV, the GoS's use of explosive weapons resulted in at least 659 civilian casualties. Russian explosive violence resulted in 132 civilian casualties and Turkey was responsible for at least 118 civilian casualties resulting from explosive violence.<sup>331</sup> Please also see section [1.6.3](#) of this report for further information on civilian casualties.

According to Airwars<sup>332</sup> in 2021, Russia and the GoS did not make a concerted effort to seize Idlib governorate. However, at least 22 and up to 280 civilians in total were allegedly killed by

<sup>325</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria: 8,000 IDPs in Rukban camp need urgent humanitarian intervention, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>326</sup> MEE, Rare food convoy to camp on Syria-Jordan border signals shift in Amman policy, 19 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>327</sup> MEE, Rare food convoy to camp on Syria-Jordan border signals shift in Amman policy, 19 June 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), Al-Rukban camp receives first shipment from Jordan in four years, 13 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>328</sup> New Arab (The), Explosions at Syria's Al-Tanf base used by US-led coalition forces: monitor, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>329</sup> Enab Baladi, Bombing US garrison at al-Tanf is a Russian warning, not only a "message", 23 June 2022, [url](#);

Syrian Observer (The), Targeting U.S.-led Forces in al-Tanf, Russia's 'Proof of Existence', 28 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>330</sup> AOAV is a not-for-profit organisation that records casualties caused by explosive weapons at the global level. For more information about AOAV see AOAV, What do we do to address the impact of weapons?, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>331</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor 2021, 2022, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>332</sup> Airwars is a not-for-profit transparency watchdog which tracks, assesses, archives and investigates civilian harm claims resulting primarily from explosive weapons use in conflict-affected nations including Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia and Yemen. For more information see Airwars, Who we are, n.d., [url](#)



their air and artillery strikes, the majority in the Idlib region.<sup>333</sup> In 2021, Turkey did not launch major new offensives, and Airwars recorded ‘a total of 26 locally alleged civilian harm incidents from Turkish-led actions in Syria, resulting in at least 29 civilian deaths’.<sup>334</sup> According to Airwars, the US-led Coalition against ISIL continued to operate at a low level. In total, between 15 and 27 civilians were likely killed by US-led Coalition actions in 20 incidents throughout 2021.<sup>335</sup> Regarding allegations of civilian harm against Kurdish forces during 2021, Airwars noted that Kurdish forces reportedly killed between 40 and 63 civilians, including in a single event in Afrin on 19 November 2021, where up to 17 civilians were allegedly injured during shelling.<sup>336</sup>

## **(b) Weapons used**

In June 2022, the UNCOI released a report on attacks on civilians in Syria over the past ten years. The report mentions indiscriminate attacks on densely populated areas by GoS forces, including the use of unguided munitions and high explosive munitions with wide area effects over the past ten years.<sup>337</sup> According to the UN Secretary General’s June 2022 report, covering April and May 2022, ‘[c]ivilians were killed and injured as a result of air strikes, ground-based strikes, attacks with various types of improvised explosive devices and gunfire’. Civilian objects were also affected by hostilities.<sup>338</sup> In its February 2022 report (covering July to December 2021) the UNCOI reported frequent attacks involving IEDs<sup>339</sup>, the use of improvised rocket-assisted munitions and other unguided rocket artillery, which are known to be highly inaccurate.<sup>340</sup> In the first nine months of 2021 a total of 309 IED incidents, killing 242 civilians and injuring 502 civilians, were recorded by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR). The incidents included vehicle borne IEDs and explosive remnants of war (ERW). Most of the IED incidents were recorded in Turkish operation areas in Aleppo governorate, mainly occurring in residential areas and markets.<sup>341</sup> The UNCOI also reported the use of artillery strikes and unguided munitions<sup>342</sup>, including unguided Grad rockets<sup>343</sup>, the use of precision-guided artillery shells, including the Krasnopol-type<sup>344</sup>, and drone strikes.<sup>345</sup>

<sup>333</sup> Airwars, Annual Report 2021, May 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>334</sup> Airwars, Annual Report 2021, May 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>335</sup> Airwars, Annual Report 2021, May 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>336</sup> Airwars, Annual Report 2021, May 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>337</sup> OHCHR, Civilians under attack in Syria; Towards preventing further civilian harm, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 28 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>338</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>339</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 6, 76

<sup>340</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 27

<sup>341</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>342</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 56

<sup>343</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 57

<sup>344</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 58

<sup>345</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 99

According to AOAV, in 2021, ground-launched weapons, mainly shelling, accounted for the most civilian harm (58 % of civilian casualties) of all weapon types. In 2021, the second-highest cause of civilian casualties were IEDs (26 % of civilian casualties). Air launched weapons, which had caused the highest proportion of civilian casualties between 2015 and 2020, were responsible for 11 % of the civilian casualties in 2021. Compared to 2020, this was 81 % less.<sup>346</sup>

According to information provided by the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) in its monthly published Explosive Weapons Monitor, ground-launched weapons caused between 46 % and 77 % of the total civilian casualties between October 2021 and April 2022. Directly emplaced weapons (e.g. improvised explosive devices, landmines, roadside bombs, car bombs) caused between 11 % and 31 %, and air launched-weapons (airstrikes, air-dropped bombs, air-launched missile) between 7 % and 38 % of civilian casualties in the same period.<sup>347</sup>

In areas affected by intense hostilities, including Idlib, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka, Damascus, Quneitra and Dar'a, explosive ordnance contamination is widespread. About one in three communities was potentially contaminated by explosives.<sup>348</sup> UNHCR notes that 805 people were killed and nearly 3 000 others injured by mines and explosive ordnance in Syria, in 2021. An estimated half of the Syrian population lived in areas contaminated with explosive ordnance.<sup>349</sup> In March 2022 the Carter Center published a report mapping unexploded ordnance in Syria between December 2012 and May 2021. According to the report, between 100 000 and 300 000 explosive munitions failed to detonate in this period, although the count is likely to be higher.<sup>350</sup> In 2021, SNHR recorded the killing of 176 civilians as a result of landmine explosions. According to the organisation, the use of prohibited and indiscriminate munitions caused the maiming or death of civilians even years after they were originally deployed.<sup>351</sup> According to a joint report by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), Syria is the only country to have experienced continued use of cluster munitions since 2012, with at least one attack during the period of 1 August 2020 and 31 July 2021.<sup>352</sup> According to another report by the Carter Center, between January 2021 and March 2022, at least 248 incidents of civilians or other persons being killed by leftover landmines and other unexploded ordnances (UXO) were reported.<sup>353</sup>

### (c) Use of chemical weapons

No information on the usage of chemical weapons within the reference period for this report could be found.

The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) concluded in April 2021 'that units of the Syrian Arab Air Force

<sup>346</sup> AOAV, Explosive Violence Monitor, 2022, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>347</sup> INEW, Explosive Weapons Monitor, Recent Updates, n.d., [url](#); The Explosive Weapons Monitor also provides (less detailed) monthly information on the period between May and September 2021.

<sup>348</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>349</sup> UNHCR, Protection Analysis Update, June 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>350</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications, December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>351</sup> SNHR, Annual report on death toll of civilians in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>352</sup> ICBL and CMC, Cluster Munition Monitor 2021, September 2021, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>353</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 17



used chemical weapons in Saraqib on 4 February 2018'.<sup>354</sup> A January 2022 report of an OPCW fact-finding-mission concluded that a 'chemical blister agent was used as a weapon' in Marea in September 2015<sup>355</sup>, and in February 2022, another OPCW fact-finding-mission concluded that an 'industrial chlorine cylinder was used as a weapon' in Kafr Zeita on 1 October 2016.<sup>356</sup> In April 2021, certain rights and privileges of the GoS at the OPCW were suspended by state parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.<sup>357</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, GoS forces had used chlorine and the nerve agent sarin over the course of the war, while ISIL militants had used sulphur mustard on several occasions.<sup>358</sup>

#### **(d) Attacks against civilian targets and population**

Concerning the siege on Dar'a and other attacks in the wider region, the UNCOI in its February 2022 report noted that tactics used by pro-GoS forces 'violated the right to access to food and health care, and freedom of movement, and may amount to collective punishment'. The use of rocket munitions in densely populated areas 'may amount to the war crime of launching indiscriminate attacks resulting in death or injury to civilians, or damage to civilian objects, including medical facilities'.<sup>359</sup> According to the UNCOI, witnesses and survivors claimed that 'attacks appeared to be aimed at harming civilians, increasing destruction and displacement and weakening chances for economic recovery or stability in opposition-held areas' in the north-west of the country.<sup>360</sup> Idlib city and Ariha town faced indiscriminate attacks on densely populated civilian areas, resulting in fatalities and the damaging of two schools, residential and commercial buildings. According to the UNCOI, 'in neither case was there any indication of a military objective in the targeted urban areas'.<sup>361</sup> In July 2021, in Sarjah village, first responders were targeted with precision artillery strikes on a civilian home and in September 2021, in Mar'yan village a medical clinic was struck precisely by two munitions. The clinic was the last functional medical centre in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area and was severely damaged in the attack.<sup>362</sup>

Regarding northern Aleppo and the Ras al-Ayn and Tall Abyad regions, the UNCOI described strikes by pro-GoS forces or the SDF on populated areas and noted that these attacks and IED

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<sup>354</sup> OPCW, OPCW Releases Second Report by Investigation and Identification Team, 12 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>355</sup> OPCW, OPCW issues Fact-Finding Mission report on chemical weapons use allegation in Marea, Syria, in September 2015, 26 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>356</sup> OPCW, OPCW issues Fact-Finding Mission report on chemical weapons use allegation in Kafr Zeita, Syria, on 1 October 2016, 1 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>357</sup> OPCW, Conference of the States Parties adopts Decision to suspend certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic under the CWC, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>358</sup> HRW, World Report 2022 - Syria, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>359</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 35

<sup>360</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

<sup>361</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 56

<sup>362</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 59

attacks ‘may amount to the war crime of launching indiscriminate attacks resulting in death or injury of civilians’.<sup>363</sup>

According to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), in the year 2021, 31 attacks on healthcare were reported country-wide, most being recorded in Dar’a, Deir Ez-Zor and Aleppo governorates.<sup>364</sup> Between January and March 2022, WHO reported six attacks on healthcare facilities which led to three health care providers killed and one patient injured.<sup>365</sup>

## 1.6.2. Security incidents

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) collects data on violent incidents in Syria, coding each incident with the time and place, type of violent incident, the parties involved and the number of fatalities. The information is collected in a database that is openly accessible, searchable and kept continuously up to date. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as media reports, but also from reports by international institutions and non-governmental organisations and data provided by local partners of ACLED.<sup>366</sup> On Syria, ACLED incorporates data from a number of partners, including SNHR, Airwars, the Carter Center, Liveuamap, Syria Direct, SOHR, the London School of Economics’ Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, the International Security and Development Center and Clingendael Institute.<sup>367</sup>

ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- **Battles:** violent clashes between at least two armed groups. Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein. Sub-events of battles are armed clashes, government regains territory and non-state actor overtakes territory.
- **Violence against civilians:** violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. It includes violent attacks on unarmed civilians such as sexual violence, attacks, abduction/forced disappearance.
- **Explosions/remote violence:** events where an explosion, bomb or other explosive device was used to engage in conflict. They include one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the targets to engage or defend themselves and their location. They include air/drone strikes, suicide bombs, shelling/artillery/missile attack, remote explosive/landmine/IED, grenade, chemical weapon.
- **Riots:** are a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include violent demonstration, mob violence.
- **Protests:** public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. It includes peaceful protests, protests with intervention, excessive force against protesters.

<sup>363</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 81

<sup>364</sup> WHO/ Health Cluster, Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. Syrian Arab Republic. Annual Report 2021, 3 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>365</sup> WHO/ Health Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Attacks on health care in Syria, 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>366</sup> ACLED, Methodology, April 2019, [url](#) ACLED, FAQs: ACLED Sourcing Methodology, February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>367</sup> ACLED, Syria Partner Network, April 2019, [url](#)

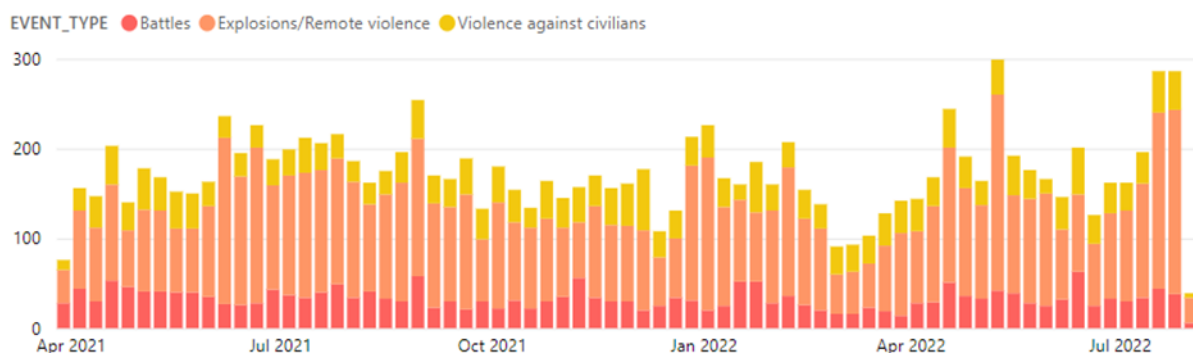


- **Strategic developments:** information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states. It includes agreements, change to group/activity, non-violent transfer of territory, arrests.<sup>368</sup>

For the purpose of this report only the following type of events were included in the analysis: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. A country overview of the data on riots and protests is also provided separately (see section [Protests and riots](#)).

EUAA used the publicly available ACLED curated dataset for Middle East (12 August 2022) for security incidents figures, graphs and maps.<sup>369</sup>

According to the aforementioned ACLED dataset<sup>370</sup>, between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022 there were 12 194 security incidents recorded in Syria: 2 345 were coded as battles, 7 466 as explosions/remote violence, and 2 383 as violence against civilians. Most security incidents were recorded in Aleppo (2 776), Idlib (2 253) and Hasaka (1 671) governorates. The lowest security incidents figures were recorded in Quneitra (58), Damascus (21) and Tartous (6) governorates.



**Figure 1: Evolution of security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022<sup>371</sup>**

#### (a) Battles

Battles (armed clashes) is the category with the third most registered security incidents. During the reference period, there were 2 345 battles recorded by ACLED, an average of 146 battles/month. Most battles were recorded in the governorates of Aleppo (493), Deir Ez-Zor (437) and Dar’a (383). The lowest number of battles were recorded in Tartous (1), Damascus (2), and Quneitra (14).<sup>372</sup>

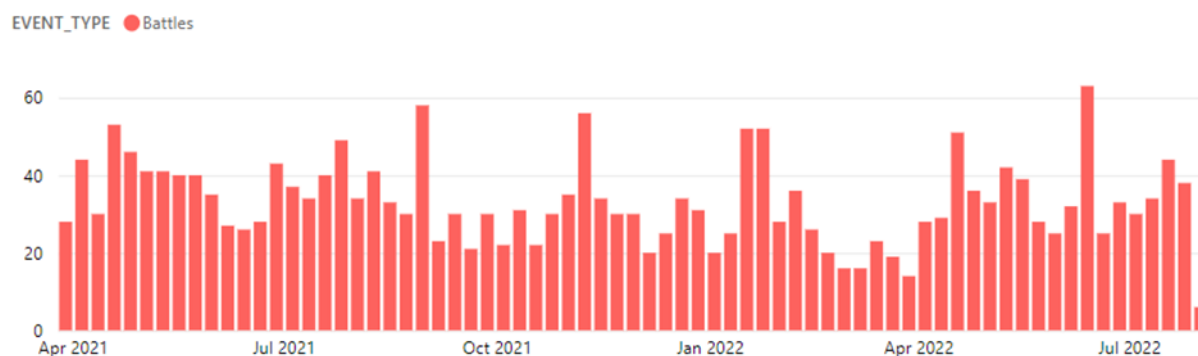
<sup>368</sup> ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, January 2021, [url](#), pp. 7-17

<sup>369</sup> ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>370</sup> ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>371</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

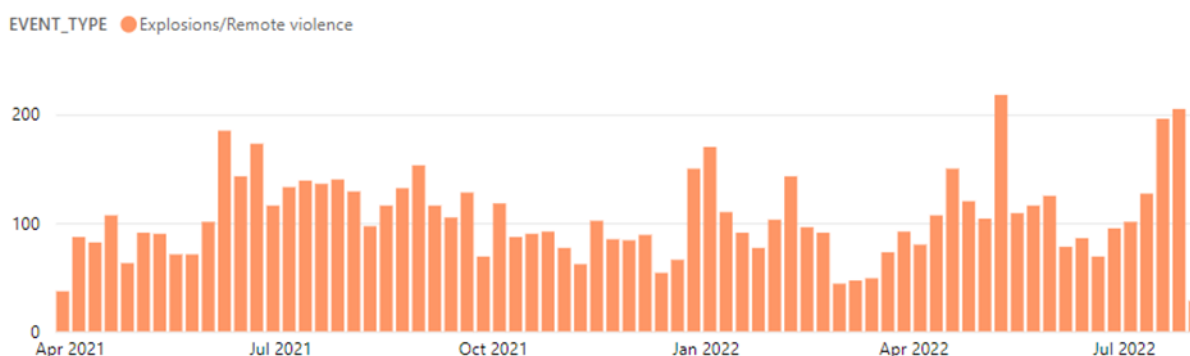
<sup>372</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



**Figure 2: Evolution of security events coded 'battles' between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022<sup>373</sup>**

### (b) Explosions/remote violence

Explosions/remote violence, which includes explosive devices, artillery fire and air strikes, is the category with the highest number of individual incidents by far with 7 466 incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, an average of 466 incidents/month. The largest number of explosions/remote violence was registered in Idlib (1 943), followed by Aleppo (1 893) and Raqqa (912) governorates. The lowest number of explosions/remote violence were documented in Tartous (3), Damascus (11) and Sweida (11).



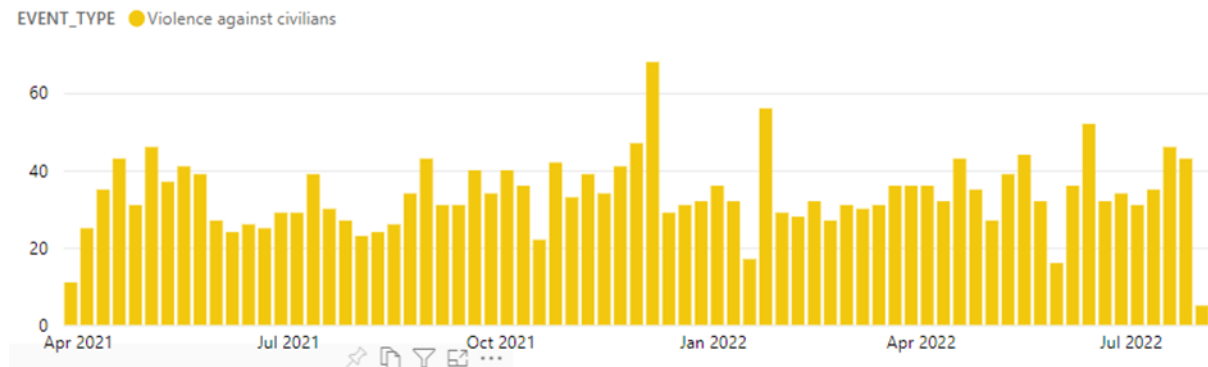
**Figure 3: Evolution of security events coded 'explosions/remote violence' between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022<sup>374</sup>**

### (c) Violence against civilians

The second largest category of incidents is violence against civilians with 2 383 incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, an average of 148 incidents/month. Most incidents during the year were recorded in Hasaka (576), Deir Ez-Zor (402) and Aleppo (390) governorates. The lowest number of incidents were recorded in Tartous and Latakia (2 each) and Quneitra (5) governorates.

<sup>373</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

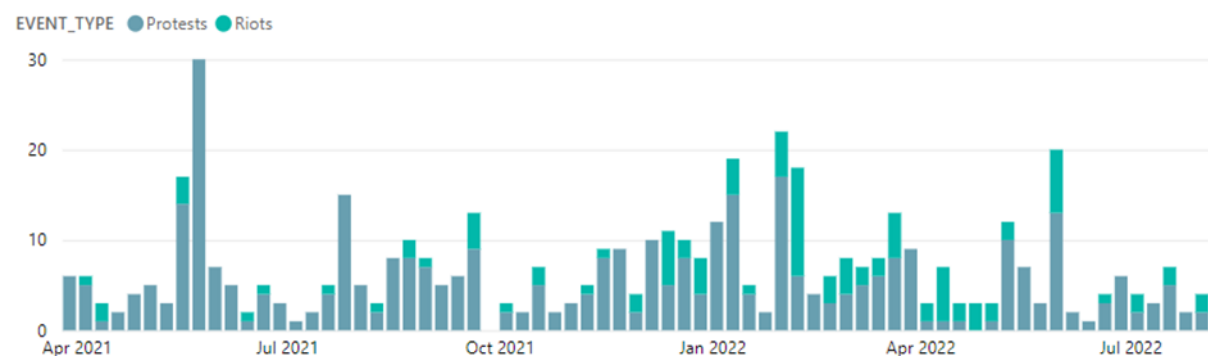
<sup>374</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



**Figure 4: Evolution of 'violence against civilians' events between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022 based on ACLED data<sup>375</sup>**

#### (d) Protests and riots

According to ACLED data, between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022 there were 384 protests and 105 riots. Most protests took place in Aleppo (103), Hasaka (69) and Deir Ez-Zor governorates (61). The largest number of riots were recorded in the governorates of Deir Ez-Zor (50) followed by Hasaka (18) and Sweida (17).



**Figure 5: Evolution of events coded 'protests' and 'riots' between April 2021 and 1 August 2022 based on ACLED data<sup>376</sup>**

### 1.6.3. Civilian fatalities

Many international monitoring groups have given up on providing detailed estimates of the number of fatalities because of the complexity of the situation and lack of access to first-hand information.<sup>377</sup> The UN stopped publishing statistics on conflict-related deaths in 2014, stating that it was no longer possible to arrive at accurate figures.<sup>378</sup> In September 2021, the UN released its first casualty figure since 2014, stating that it had identified 350 209 individuals

<sup>375</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>376</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>377</sup> New York Times (The), How Syria's death toll is lost in the fog of war, 13 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>378</sup> BBC News, Syria war: UN calculates new death toll, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

killed between March 2011 and March 2021.<sup>379</sup> This figure included 27 126 children.<sup>380</sup> Of the overall fatality number, 143 350 or 40.9 % were identified as civilian deaths.<sup>381</sup> Currently, most international experts state that the number of overall fatalities in Syria since the war broke out in 2011 is somewhere around 500 000 or higher, but indicate that these are very rough estimates.<sup>382</sup> According to SOHR, the overall death toll reached 606 000 between March 2011 and May 2021, of which the organisation itself had documented about 495 000 fatalities.<sup>383</sup> SOHR recorded 3 746 fatalities during the year 2021, among them 1 505 civilians, which represents the lowest annual death toll recorded since the beginning of the conflict in 2011.<sup>384</sup>

There are several Syrian organisations that still attempt to keep count; however, the figures vary between organisations. This is related to the fact that these organisations have varying methods, ground presence, and access to information.<sup>385</sup>

<sup>379</sup> OHCHR, High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council: 350,209 Civilians Have Been Killed in the Syrian Conflict, 24 September 2021, [url](#); BBC News, Syria war: UN calculates new death toll, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>380</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/50/68], 28 June 2022, [url](#), para. 19

<sup>381</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/50/68], 28 June 2022, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>382</sup> SOHR, Total death toll | Over 606,000 people killed across Syria since the beginning of the “Syrian Revolution”, including 495,000 documented by SOHR, 1 June 2021, [url](#); USIP, The Current Situation in Syria, 26 August 2020, [url](#); SOHR, More than 570 thousand people were killed on the Syrian territory within 8 years of revolution demanding freedom, democracy, justice, and equality, 15 March 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), How Syria’s death toll is lost in the fog of war, 13 April 2018, [url](#); SOHR, On International Human Rights Day: Millions of Syrians robbed of “rights” and 593 thousand killed in a decade, 9 December 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Why has the Syrian war lasted 11 years?, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>383</sup> SOHR, Total death toll | Over 606,000 people killed across Syria since the beginning of the “Syrian Revolution”, including 495,000 documented by SOHR, 1 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>384</sup> SOHR, SOHR: 3,746 Syrians Were Killed, Including Civilians, During 2021, 23 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>385</sup> New Humanitarian (The), Counting under fire: the untold story of Syria’s casualty data, 27 October 2015, [url](#); New Arab (The), Will we ever really know how many people have died in Syria since 2011?, 28 January 2020, [url](#)



| Civilian fatalities by governorate | OHCHR 2021 <sup>386</sup> | SHRC 2021 <sup>387</sup> | SNHR 2021 <sup>388</sup> | OHCHR 2022 <sup>389</sup> | SNHR 2022 <sup>390</sup> |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Damascus                           |                           | 2                        | 1                        |                           | 3                        |
| Rural Damascus                     |                           | 1                        | 13                       |                           | 80                       |
| Idlib                              |                           | 214                      | 256                      |                           | 93                       |

<sup>386</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>387</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>388</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>389</sup> Figures based on total number of civilian fatalities reported by OHCHR to the UN Security Council between 1 December 2021 and 31 May 2022. UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/135], 21 February 2022, [url](#), para 2; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para 2 (in Key points); UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 2 (in Key points)

<sup>390</sup> Figures based on number of civilian fatalities documented by SNHR in the following reports: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

| Civilian fatalities by governorate | OHCHR 2021 <sup>386</sup> | SHRC 2021 <sup>387</sup> | SNHR 2021 <sup>388</sup> | OHCHR 2022 <sup>389</sup> | SNHR 2022 <sup>390</sup> |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Deir Ez-Zor                        |                           | 216                      | 201                      |                           | 72                       |
| Aleppo                             |                           | 214                      | 237                      |                           | 108                      |
| Dar'a                              |                           | 255                      | 203                      |                           | 146                      |
| Hama                               |                           | 94                       | 88                       |                           | 27                       |
| Homs                               |                           | 30                       | 28                       |                           | 14                       |
| Hasaka                             |                           | 125                      | 154                      |                           | 63                       |
| Raqqa                              |                           | 77                       | 75                       |                           | 24                       |
| Quneitra                           |                           | 4                        | 10                       |                           | 1                        |
| Sweida                             |                           | 5                        | 13                       |                           | 23                       |
| Latakia                            |                           | -                        | 2                        |                           | -                        |
| Tartous                            |                           | -                        | -                        |                           | -                        |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>747</b>                | <b>1237</b>              | <b>1271</b>              | <b>256</b>                | <b>654</b>               |

**Figure 6. Civilian fatalities in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR, SHRC (only for 2021) and OHCHR (only for 2021 and for the period 1 December 2021 – 31 May 2022) data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 1 271 civilian fatalities<sup>391</sup>, a drop by 27 % compared to 2020.<sup>392</sup> Other organisations documenting civilian casualties in Syria had comparable figures for 2021. The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) recorded 1 237 civilian fatalities in 2021, although it does not provide information on their research methodology.<sup>393</sup>

SNHR provides a breakdown of civilian fatalities by the governorate in which they occurred (see Figure 6). Most civilian fatalities 2021 were recorded by SNHR in the governorates of Idlib, Aleppo, Dar'a and Deir Ez-Zor. Around 46 % of all civilian fatalities documented by SNHR were recorded in governorates where anti-GoS armed groups retained some territorial control: Idlib, Aleppo, Hama and Latakia. The lowest number of civilian fatalities recorded in 2021 by SNHR were in Tartous (no civilian deaths), Latakia (2) and Quneitra (10) governorates.

In the first seven months of 2022, SNHR documented 654 civilian deaths across Syria, most of whom were recorded in Dar'a, Aleppo and Idlib governorates.

OHCHR documented 1 874 civilian casualties in 2021 (747 civilian deaths and 1 127 civilians injured)<sup>394</sup>, a 11 % decrease from 2020 when it recorded 2 095 civilian casualties (1 036 civilian deaths and 1 059 civilians injured).<sup>395</sup> For the period between December 2021 and May 2022, OHCHR documented a further 256 civilian deaths and 276 civilians injured as a result of armed conflict in Syria.<sup>396</sup>

#### 1.6.4. Displacement and return

UNHCR estimated that the conflict had driven some 5.6 million Syrian refugees out of the country by June 2022.<sup>397</sup> At the end of 2021, 6.7 million Syrians were living in internal displacement, with around 80 % of displaced households having lived in displacement for at least four years.<sup>398</sup> A general decrease in large-scale displacements was noted during 2020 and 2021 due to an overall reduction of violence, with displacements in 2021 happening

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<sup>391</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, [url](#), 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>392</sup> For the year 2020 SNHR documented 1 734 civilian fatalities in Syria. See EUAA, COI Report: Syria - Security situation, July 2021, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>393</sup> SHRC, SHRC documents the killing of 1,750 people in 2020, 2 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>394</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>395</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, March 2021, [url](#), p. 12. Figures provided by OHCHR to UNOCHA. OHCHR provided the following disclaimer: 'Civilian casualties and incidents included are not comprehensive but rather reflect what OHCHR could verify to reflect human rights concerns, patterns and the impact of the armed conflict and violence on civilians in Syria. Actual civilian casualties could be higher'. See p. 100.

<sup>396</sup> Figures based on total number of civilian injured reported by OHCHR to the UN Security Council between 1 December 2021 and 31 May 2022. UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/135], 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 2; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 2; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 2

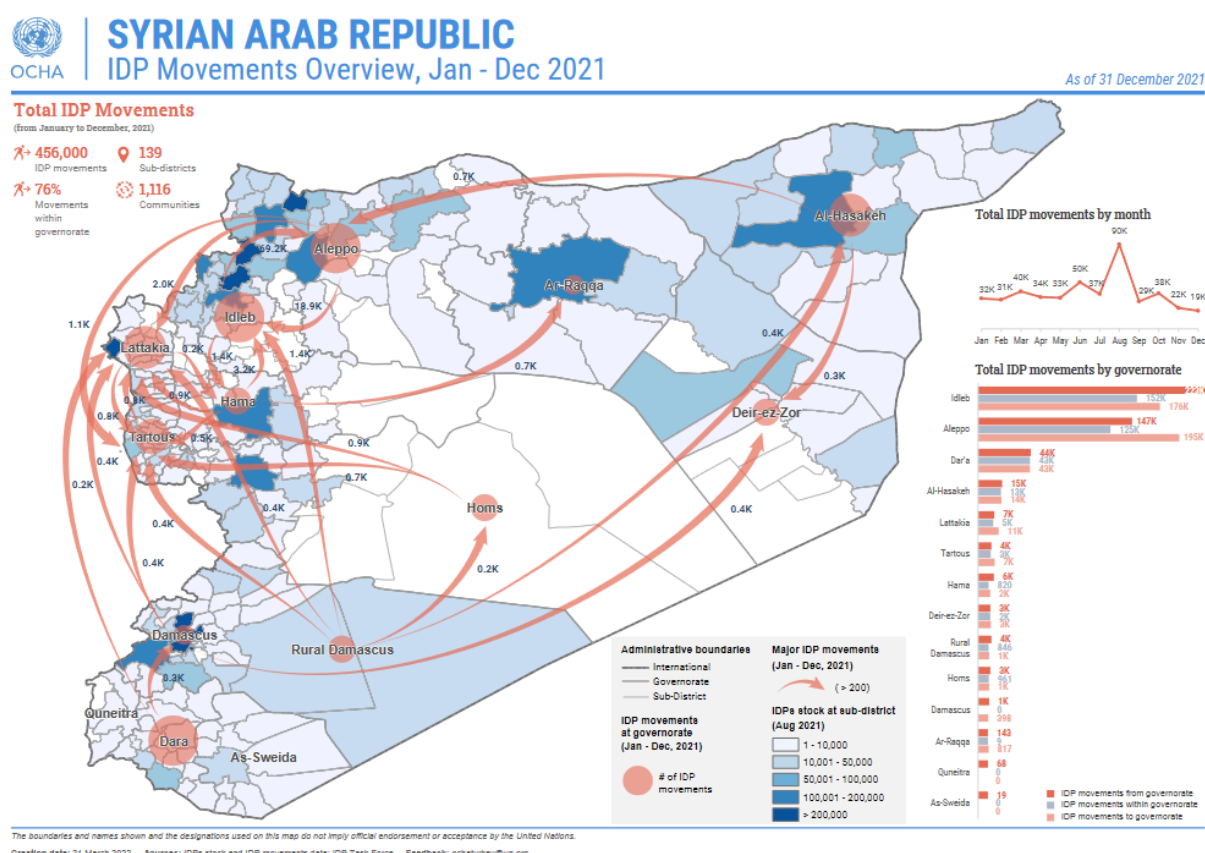
<sup>397</sup> UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, data updated on 7 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>398</sup> IDMC, Country Profile Syrian Arab Republic, Overview, last updated 19 May 2022, [url](#)

around the frontline areas as well as in areas with sudden outbreaks of conflict, such as in Dar'a.<sup>399</sup>

In 2021, a total of about 456 000 IDP movements were recorded by UNOCHA across Syria, of which 76 % were movements within the same governorate. Most IDP movements took place in the governorates of Idlib (71 000 from the governorate, 152 000 within the governorate and 24 000 to the governorate), Aleppo (22 000 from the governorate, 125 000 within the governorate, 70 000 to the governorate), Dar'a (1 000 from the governorate and 43 000 within the governorate), Hasaka (2 000 from the governorate, 13 000 within the governorate and 1 000 to the governorate) and Latakia (2 000 from the governorate, 5 000 within the governorate and 6 000 to the governorate). The lowest number of IDP movements were registered in the governorates of Sweida (19 IDP movements from the governorate), Quneitra (68 IDP movements from the governorate) and Raqqqa (134 IDP movements from the governorate, 9 within the governorate and 808 to the governorate).<sup>400</sup>

UNOCHA provides a full breakdown of the total IDP movements by governorate for 2021 (see Map 5):



**Map 5: IDP movements by governorate in 2021, © UNOCHA<sup>401</sup>**

In July 2021, GoS forces started a military offensive against armed opposition groups in Dar'a Al-Balad in the south of the country, in the course of which 36 000 civilians were displaced.

<sup>399</sup> UNHCR, Protection Analysis Update, June 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>400</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>401</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

The siege of the city ended with a ceasefire agreement in September 2021. Between June and August 2021, nearly 100 000 people were displaced due to hostilities in north-west Syria, ‘the largest displacement since a ceasefire was agreed [there] in March 2020’.<sup>402</sup>

Between January and April 2022, around 65 300 IDP movements were recorded across Syria, the majority occurring in north-west Syria, particularly in Idlib and Aleppo governorates. Most IDP movements recorded in this timeframe took place within the respective governorate.<sup>403</sup> In May 2022, 15 975 IDP movements were recorded, 81 % of which were recorded in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.<sup>404</sup>

In terms of IDP spontaneous returns in 2021, UNOCHA recorded a total of 169 000 spontaneous returns, 77 % of which were returns within the governorate. The highest number of IDP return movements took place in the governorates of Idlib (3 000 from the governorate, 35 000 within the governorate and 7 000 to the governorate), Aleppo (3 000 from the governorate, 28 000 within the governorate and 3 000 to the governorate), Rural Damascus (8 000 from the governorate, 21 000 within the governorate and 1 000 to the governorate) and Dar’a (17 000 within the governorate and 1 000 to the governorate). The lowest number of IDP returns was recorded in Sweida (786 IDP return movements from the governorate, 144 within the governorate and 32 returning to the governorate), Tartous (1 000 IDP return movements from the governorate) and Latakia (about 2 000 IDPs leaving to return to their governorate).<sup>405</sup>

UNOCHA provides a full breakdown of the total IDP spontaneous returnee movements by governorate for 2021 (see Map 6):

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<sup>402</sup> AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22 – Syria, 29 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 353-354, 356

<sup>403</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>404</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>405</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

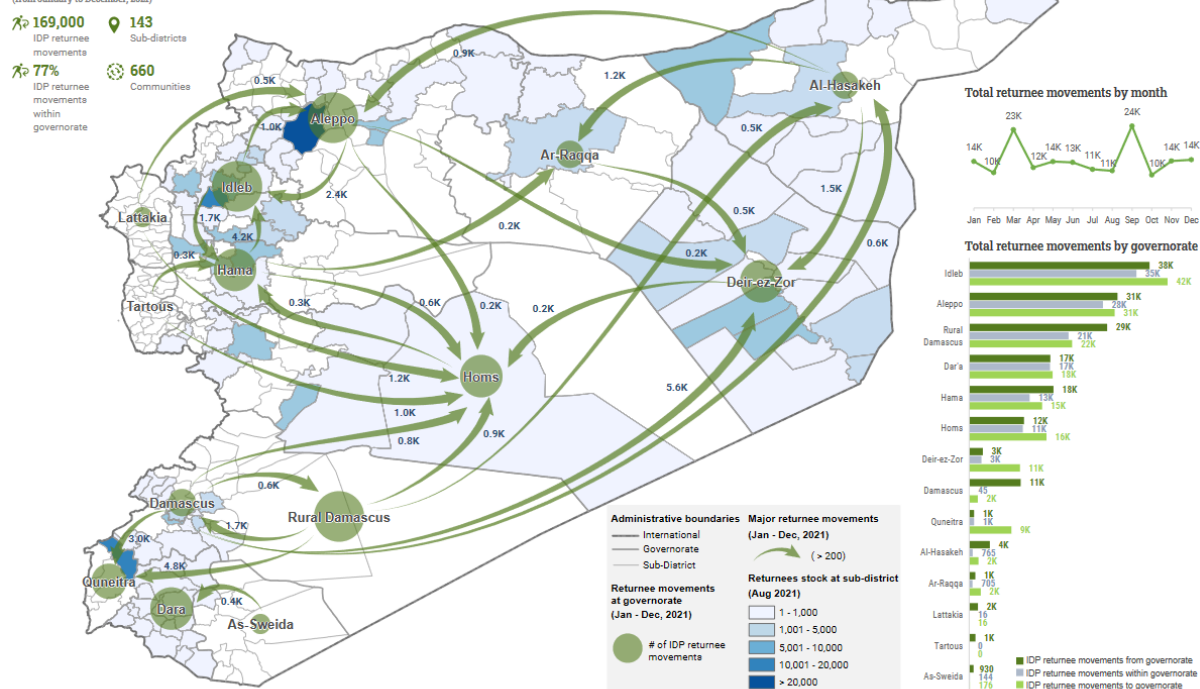


## SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

### Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021

As of 31 December 2021

#### Total Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements (from January to December, 2021)



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.  
Creation date: 21 March 2022 Sources: Returnees stock data: Population Task Force; Returnee movements data: IDP Task Force Feedback: ochaTurkey@un.org

#### Map 6: Spontaneous IDP returnee movements by governorate in 2021, © UNOCHA<sup>406</sup>

Between January and April 2022, around 41 900 return movements were recorded across Syria, the majority occurring in Rural Damascus governorate followed by Idlib. Over these four months, the majority of return movements (over 80 %) took place within the governorate, apart from March 2022, where only 46 % of returns took place within the governorate.<sup>407</sup> In May 2022, about 9 550 spontaneous returns were recorded, the majority of which were returns to and within Idlib and Rural Damascus governorates.<sup>408</sup>

Of the overall 169 000 spontaneous returns,<sup>409</sup> 107 510 were recorded between January and August 2021, representing less than a third of the number recorded for the same period in 2020. Most of these returns were described as returns out of temporary displacement following sudden outbreaks of hostilities, such as in Dar'a in the summer of 2021.<sup>410</sup> UNHCR stated in June 2022 that surveys carried out since 2017 had revealed that the number of returns of Syrian refugees remained very limited and decreased over the years. Among the main reasons given for not returning were safety and security concerns, while reasons for

<sup>406</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>407</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>408</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>409</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>410</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 18



returning were the need to protect assets and properties as well as the worsening economic situation in the displaced location, especially for those returning from outside Syria.<sup>411</sup>

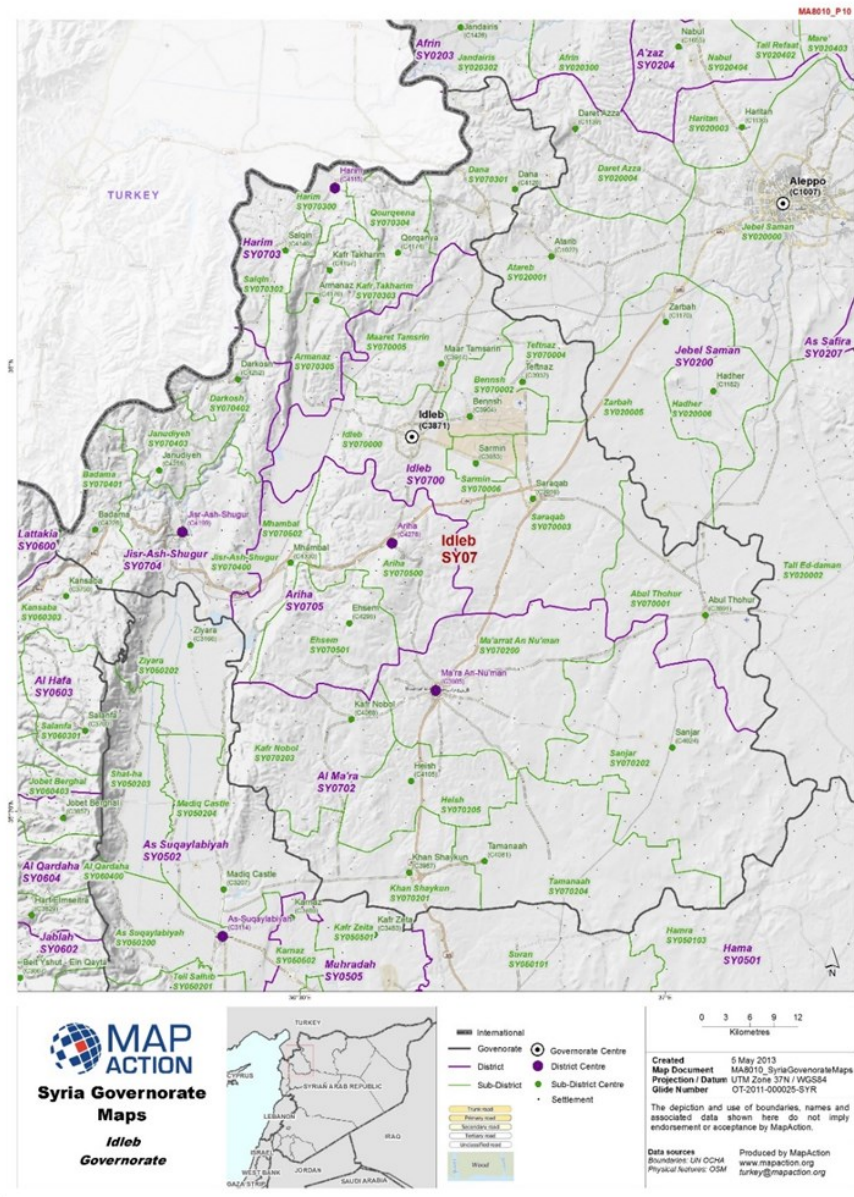
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<sup>411</sup> UNHCR, Protection Analysis Update, June 2022, [url](#), p. 14



## 2. Governorate-level description of the security situation

### 2.1. Idlib governorate



Map 7: © MapAction, Idlib governorate<sup>412</sup>

<sup>412</sup> MapAction, Idlib governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](http://url)

### 2.1.1. General description of the governorate

Idlib is located in north-west Syria, bordering Turkey to the north, Hama governorate to the south, Aleppo governorate to the east, and Latakia governorate to the west. The governorate is divided into five districts: Idlib, Ariha, Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Harim and Al Mara.<sup>413</sup> Idlib city is the capital of the governorate and, in 2011, its population amounted to over 2 million inhabitants. The city is located at the strategic road between Aleppo and Damascus governorates and is also a 'cross border operation point from Turkey, through the Bab Al Hawa crossing'.<sup>414</sup> Bab al-Hawa, the sole border crossing for humanitarian aid destined for areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in north-west Syria,<sup>415</sup> is located in Idlib's northern Harim district.<sup>416</sup>

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Idlib governorate to be of 1 172 089 as of 2021.<sup>417</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Idlib governorate to be of 2 858 020.<sup>418</sup> According to UNOCHA, the total population of Idlib area<sup>419</sup> is 3.16 million of whom 2.01 million are IDPs.<sup>420</sup> For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Idlib's population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### 2.1.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Idlib governorate is divided into areas controlled by the GoS and areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups. Anti-GoS armed groups control the western and northern parts of the governorate, which cover virtually all the areas north and immediately south of M4 highway.<sup>421</sup> After the Turkish military deployment and/or incursion into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate (Operation Spring Shield) in early March 2020, a ceasefire<sup>422</sup> was mediated by Russia and Turkey between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups. Ever since the March 2020 ceasefire, the areas of control in and around the so-called 'Idlib de-escalation area'<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>414</sup> REACH, Syria, Syrian Cities Damage Atlas, 16 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 45-46

<sup>415</sup> UN Security Council, Security Council Renews Cross-Border Aid Operations into Syria's North-West for Six Months, Adopting Resolution 2642 (2022) as 'Compromise' amid Divisions, 12 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>416</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: United Nations cross-border operations under UNSC resolutions (As of 31 May 2022), 1 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>417</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d, [url](#)

<sup>418</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>419</sup> The area discussed by UNOCHA as 'Idlib area' coincides with the so-called 'Idlib de-escalation area' or 'de-escalation zone', covering those parts of Idlib governorate controlled by anti-GoS armed groups as well as adjoining areas in western Aleppo and northern Hama and Latakia governorates.

<sup>420</sup> UNOCHA, Northwest Syria: Factsheet (As of 14 July 2022), 14 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>421</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2021, [url](#) [Map]; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [Map]; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>422</sup> For details, see UN Security Council, Letter dated 6 March 2020 from the representatives of the Russian Federation and Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, 6 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>423</sup> The term 'Idlib de-escalation area' or 'Idlib de-escalation zone' covers the areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate as well as the adjoining, similar areas in western Aleppo and northern Hama and Latakia governorates. On the establishment of Idlib de-escalation area (and other similar areas) see the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and Jaecke, G. & Labude, D., De-escalation zones in Syria, KAS, June 2020, [url](#)

have ‘stabilised’<sup>424</sup>, the major frontlines have remained ‘stagnant’<sup>425</sup> and Syria has experienced a ‘period without significant frontline changes’<sup>426</sup>.

For more information on the conflict background, the March 2020 ceasefire and its effects on the security situation in Idlib governorate and the wider Idlib de-escalation area, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

#### (a) Anti-GoS armed groups

Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controls<sup>427</sup> those parts of Idlib governorate under the control of anti-GoS armed groups and has almost complete control over the wider Idlib de-escalation area.<sup>428</sup> HTS has been described as ‘the predominant terrorist group in Idlib’<sup>429</sup> and, more generally, as the dominant<sup>430</sup> and military superior<sup>431</sup> armed group in the governorate. HTS maintains its power<sup>432</sup> in the governorate through the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) which has been described as HTS’s ‘political arm’<sup>433</sup>. HTS has approximately 10 000 fighters under its command.<sup>434</sup> For further information on HTS, see section [1.4.4](#) above.

There are also other anti-GoS armed groups present in Idlib governorate and the wider Idlib de-escalation area. The Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement/Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIM/TIP), which has approximately 1 000-2 000 fighters,<sup>435</sup> operates ‘under’<sup>436</sup> HTS or is ‘closely allied’<sup>437</sup>

<sup>424</sup> Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>425</sup> FT, Syria: what is Turkey’s grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>426</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>427</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3; UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

<sup>428</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>429</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>430</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>431</sup> Solomon, C., HTS: Evolution of a Jihadi Group, Wilson Center, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>432</sup> Serwer, D. & van Wijk, K., Divided Syria: An examination of stabilization efforts and prospects for state continuity, Middle East Institute, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>433</sup> The Syria Report, Salvation Government Imposes Lease Contract Regulations, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>434</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

<sup>435</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 45

<sup>436</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 39

<sup>437</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 45



with the group and present mainly in Idlib.<sup>438</sup> HTS's rival, al-Qaida-affiliated jihadist group Hurras al-Din (HAD), has 'a few thousand fighters' in the whole of Syria<sup>439</sup> but merely 'a residual presence' in the governorate, which included the leaders of the organization.<sup>440</sup> According to Enab Baladi, HAD's organizational strength has been diminished and the group has been deprived of its main religious leaders because of the crackdown by HTS and because of the airstrikes by the US-led Coalition.<sup>441</sup>

Other jihadist groups present in Idlib governorate during the reporting period include groups consisting mainly of foreign fighters, such as Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah,<sup>442</sup> and Ansar Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (AABS), an alleged HTS splinter group, hostile towards the latter and, since August 2020, conducting attacks against Turkish forces deployed in the governorate.<sup>443</sup>

The Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), centered in Aleppo governorate, has presence in Idlib governorate<sup>444</sup> and a headquarters in Idlib city.<sup>445</sup> The SNA-affiliated<sup>446</sup> National Liberation Front (NLF) is part of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room (together with HTS and Jaysh al-Izza<sup>447</sup>)<sup>448</sup> and is fighting alongside HTS in the Idlib frontlines.<sup>449</sup>

#### **(b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups**

The GoS controls the southern and eastern parts of Idlib governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo highway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.<sup>450</sup> At the time of writing, specific information on SAA deployments in Idlib governorate during the reference period could not be found. Information on particular SAA formations and units deployed in the governorate (before April 2021) is available in previous reports: [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

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<sup>438</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 45

<sup>439</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44

<sup>440</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 38

<sup>441</sup> Enab Baladi, Al-Jolani's strategy, US-led Coalition strikes exhaust Hurras al-Din group, 29 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>442</sup> See, e.g. COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4; Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham driving out foreign factions, why?, 4 November 2021, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Shishani Leaves and HTS Attacks Whoever Remains, 27 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>443</sup> Al-Monitor, HTS arrests members of little-known Syrian group behind attacks against Turkish army in Idlib, 15 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>444</sup> Al Sharq Strategic Research, The Past, Present, and Future of the Syrian National Army, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>445</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian jihadist group, Turkish-backed opposition reportedly consider merger, 8 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>446</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>447</sup> Jaysh al-Izza has been described by researcher Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi as 'the most notable' FSA-affiliated armed group that is not operating as a part of Turkish-backed SNA and NFL coalitions. Tamimi, A. J., Jaysh al-Izza Statement on Prisoner Swap with Syrian Government [blog], 30 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>448</sup> Enab Baladi, Rationales for the Syrian regime's military escalation in northwestern Syria, 16 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>449</sup> Al-Monitor, Idlib sees new escalation between Syrian government, opposition forces, 22 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>450</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

GoS's allies Russia and Iran have also presence in GoS-controlled parts of Idlib governorate. According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Russian forces were deployed to six different positions in Idlib governorate. Iranian forces and those of its Lebanese ally Hezbollah were deployed to 22 different positions in the governorate.<sup>451</sup>

### (c) Turkey

Turkey has been described as 'the ultimate protector'<sup>452</sup> of the Idlib de-escalation area in a Financial Times article. Turkish forces were deployed in anti-GoS controlled Idlib governorate during the so-called Operation Spring Shield,<sup>453</sup> and one analyst estimates that Turkey has deployed approx. 8 000 soldiers 'around Idlib [de-escalation area]'.<sup>454</sup> However, a smaller contingent of Turkish forces, stationed in observation posts and monitoring the ceasefire between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups, was deployed to the Idlib de-escalation area already in October 2017.<sup>455</sup> According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Turkish forces were deployed to 48 different positions in the parts of Idlib governorate controlled by anti-GoS armed groups.<sup>456</sup> They have observation posts along the frontlines separating the anti-GoS areas from the GoS-controlled Idlib governorate.<sup>457</sup> According to STJ, Turkish forces have 'mobilized forces to over 53 locations in the areas south of Idlib', which includes the Jabal al-Zawiyah [Mount Zawiyah] region.<sup>458</sup> During the reporting period, Turkish forces deployed in Idlib governorate have been reinforced in order to deter the potential GoS advancement.<sup>459</sup>

### (d) ISIL

ISIL had presence in Idlib governorate (and the wider Idlib de-escalation zone).<sup>460</sup> According to the UN Security Council, the Idlib de-escalation zone provides a 'limited safe haven'<sup>461</sup> and 'continues to serve as a strategic location for ISIL'.<sup>462</sup> The International Crisis Group estimated that ISIL 'has continued to maintain communication and transit networks' also in Idlib, and ISIL's

<sup>451</sup> See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>452</sup> FT, Syria: what is Turkey's grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>453</sup> Clingendael, Turkey's interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>454</sup> FT, Syria: what is Turkey's grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>455</sup> Jaecke, G. & Labude, D., De-escalation zones in Syria, KAS, June 2020, [url](#), p. 7;

<sup>456</sup> See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>457</sup> See the map in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

<sup>458</sup> STJ, Idlib: Turkish Forces Stationed at Civilian Properties Against Their Will, 29 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>459</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 04 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 30 November 2021, 30 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>460</sup> International Crisis Group, A Death In Idlib: The Killing of the Top ISIS Leader and Its Impact, 4 February 2022, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

<sup>461</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

<sup>462</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 44



clandestine cells are present in the area,<sup>463</sup> although most of ISIL's attempts to establish 'an active network' in the governorate have been quelled by HTS.<sup>464</sup> In addition, the same source stated that ISIL 'maintains hideouts for id-level and senior commanders' in northern and north-western Syria due to the fact that they are able to 'enjoy a degree of anonymity' among the areas IDP population.<sup>465</sup>

## 2.1.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

#### *The conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups*

According to the UN Security Council, the 'overall level of violence in the Idlib de-escalation area remained relatively low' between April and May 2021. However, armed hostilities, including artillery shelling and armed clashes, occurred daily and were concentrated mainly along the frontlines between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups. In late April and early May 2021, a raid by HTS on GoS positions was followed by an increase in shelling. Meanwhile, the civilian population of the de-escalation area was exposed to '[d]aily shelling, renewed airstrikes, infighting between non-State armed groups and the prevalence of explosive hazards in residential areas and public spaces'.<sup>466</sup>

According to the Carter Center, between April and June 2021, persistent armed clashes and shelling between the parties were reported along the frontlines affecting the civilian population in the areas controlled by both GoS and anti-GoS armed groups.<sup>467</sup> In June 2021, an escalation in the hostilities was reported,<sup>468</sup> with the UN Security Council reporting an increase in shelling and airstrikes as well as 'limited clashes' between parties<sup>469</sup> and the UN documenting 'more than 53 civilian deaths in non-government-held parts of the north-west'<sup>470</sup> between June and July 2021. Turkish forces were also involved in the fighting on the side of the anti-GoS armed

<sup>463</sup> International Crisis Group, A Death In Idlib: The Killing of the Top ISIS Leader and Its Impact, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>464</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>465</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. i

<sup>466</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), and 2533 (2020), 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>467</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>468</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, p. 4, [url](#); UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>469</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>470</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 1 [Key points]

groups.<sup>471</sup> The hostilities, including most of the airstrikes,<sup>472</sup> were concentrated in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area in southern anti-GoS-controlled Idlib.<sup>473</sup>

The UNCOI reported ‘a notable increase’ in airstrikes and shelling conducted by GoS and allies in Idlib governorate between 1 July and 31 December 2021.<sup>474</sup> According to it, the clashes between GoS forces and anti-GoS armed groups escalated during the first half of 2021. While the second half of the year saw continuous clashes and shelling between the parties, UNCOI notes two separate escalations in the GoS attacks, the first one before the meeting in Sochi between Russia and Turkey in late September 2021 and the second one in late December 2021.<sup>475</sup> UNCOI paid special attention to the escalation of GoS shelling targeting the areas south of the M4 highway in July and August 2021,<sup>476</sup> while describing the villages located south of the highway, and especially in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area, as ‘the most exposed to attacks.’<sup>477</sup>

In accordance with UNCOI’s reporting, the UN Security Council reported a further intensification of hostilities between August and September 2021, including airstrikes and shelling, in the Idlib de-escalation area, with the airstrikes focusing mainly in areas south of the M4 highway (Jabal al-Zawiyah) and causing damage to civilian infrastructure.<sup>478</sup> The International Crisis Group noted the role of Russian airstrikes in September 2021’s escalation.<sup>479</sup>

According to the UNCOI, between July and December 2021, GoS forces conducted attacks against residential areas.<sup>480</sup> These attacks included ‘indiscriminate attacks on densely populated civilian areas’ targeting both Idlib city and the town of Ariha.<sup>481</sup> Witnesses and survivors of these attacks claimed that the apparent aim was to harm the civilian population, to increase destruction and displacement and to obstruct the prospects of attaining economic recovery or stability in areas controlled by the anti-GoS armed groups.<sup>482</sup> The UN described the escalation in October 2021 as ‘the most significant increase in hostilities in northwest Syria since the ceasefire agreement of March 2020.’<sup>483</sup> UNCOI documented 42 and received reports of as

<sup>471</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4; Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>472</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>473</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>474</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>475</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

<sup>476</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>477</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 55

<sup>478</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>479</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>480</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

<sup>481</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 55

<sup>482</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 51

<sup>483</sup> UN, Four children killed on their way to school in northwest Syria, 20 October 2021, [url](#)



many as 64 children killed as a result of hostilities in north-west Syria between 1 July 2021 – 31 December 2021. UNCOI stated that the number of child victims indicates ‘the pervasive lack of security’ in north-west Syria.<sup>484</sup>

According to the UN Security Council, civilians were killed and injured as the result of sporadic shelling and airstrikes in Idlib de-escalation area and its surroundings between August and September 2021. The UN Security Council notes that ‘[m]any of these attacks appeared to be targeting civilians or were carried out near locations of civilian character’.<sup>485</sup> While assessing the level of conflict-related violence in anti-GoS controlled Idlib, Clingendael report published in September 2021 points out that Russian forces ‘regularly strike HTS targets inside northern Idlib’ and GoS forces have conducted ‘regular attacks against HTS elements along the M4 [highway].’ In turn, HTS has conducted ‘sporadic attacks’ targeting, both, joint Russian-Turkish patrols and Turkish forces.<sup>486</sup> Between October and November 2021, civilians were killed and injured as the result of airstrikes and shelling reported in the Idlib de-escalation area and its surroundings.<sup>487</sup>

Since December 2021, there has been practically no change in the assessment by the UN Security Council of the continuing hostilities in north-western Syria. Airstrikes, shelling and armed clashes are reported along the frontlines between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups<sup>488</sup> and some of these incidents are described as ‘attacks on the civilian population’.<sup>489</sup> Between January and March 2022, the Carter Center reported 357 conflict-related events in Idlib governorate.<sup>490</sup> The hostilities were concentrated<sup>491</sup> in areas south of the M4 highway (Jabal al-Zawiyah), with the absolute majority (nearly 90%) of airstrikes and shelling attributed to either GoS or Russian forces.<sup>492</sup> According to the International Crisis Group, after a decline in Russian airstrikes following the Russian invasion of Ukraine after 24 February 2022, airstrikes resumed in Idlib governorate on 28 March 2022.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 51

<sup>485</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 20

<sup>486</sup> Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>487</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>488</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>489</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>490</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>491</sup> See ‘Figure 4’ in Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>492</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>493</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#)

According to the International Crisis Group, mutual shelling between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups escalated in Idlib governorate in April 2022.<sup>494</sup> According to Etana Syria<sup>495</sup> ‘intense shelling against military and civilian targets resumed’ and became more intense as the month passed.<sup>496</sup> Russian airstrikes were also reported in the governorate.<sup>497</sup> In May 2022, Etana Syria reported that GoS and its affiliates resumed with the shelling targeting towns in southern rural Idlib while ‘Russian bombardment against opposition areas’ had reportedly ‘slowed’ since the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>498</sup> According to Etana Syria, in June 2022, GoS ‘continued to target both military and civilian targets with artillery fire’<sup>499</sup> in Idlib de-escalation area and an attempted advance into southern Idlib governorate by the GoS forces was reported.<sup>500</sup>

In July 2022, an escalation between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups in and around the Idlib de-escalation area was reported. GoS and Russia targeted the areas in southern Idlib governorate with shelling and airstrikes. Anti-GoS armed groups, both HTS and Turkish-backed groups, responded with shelling on GoS positions in Idlib’s southern and eastern frontlines.<sup>501</sup> Further shelling was recorded on areas controlled by GoS eastern and southern rural Idlib.<sup>502</sup>

On 22 July 2022, a Russian airstrike on a village near the city of Jisr-Ash-Shugur killed seven civilians and wounded several others.<sup>503</sup> As a result, hostilities between GoS forces and their allies and anti-GoS armed groups escalated in late July 2022.<sup>504</sup> In the course of the escalation, anti-GoS armed groups shelled the areas controlled by GoS in eastern and southern rural Idlib<sup>505</sup> while GoS and Iranian forces targeted the Idlib de-escalation area with intense shelling<sup>506</sup>.

Also in August 2022, SOHR reported mutual hostilities between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib governorate. On 14 August 2022, hostilities were reported along the Jabal Al-Zawiyah frontlines.<sup>507</sup>

### *The infighting between anti-GoS armed groups*

Clingendael reported, in September 2021, that the infighting between HTS and ‘smaller extremist religious groups’, including the likes of al-Qaida-affiliated HAD, ‘continue to plague a vulnerable and swollen population of IDPs’ in northern Idlib.<sup>508</sup> According to Syria analyst Orwa

<sup>494</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>495</sup> Etana Syria is an NGO associated with the Syrian opposition that publishes occasional updates on the political and security developments in Syria. For more information see, Etana Syria, About us, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>496</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 28 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>497</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 28 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>498</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 02 June 2022, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>499</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>500</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>501</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian government, Russia escalate attacks in Idlib amid looming Turkish operation, 17 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>502</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Regime Forces Ramp up Attacks in Syria’s North, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>503</sup> Guardian (The), Russian airstrike on rebel-held region in Syria kills seven people, 22 July 2022, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Seven killed in Russian air attack on Syria’s Idlib, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>504</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>505</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, With over 180 shells Factions shell 25 positions in regime areas in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and Latakia, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>506</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Regime Forces Ramp up Attacks in Syria’s North, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>507</sup> SOHR, Renewed bombardment Al-Fath Al-Mubin rebels and regime forces exchange fire on frontlines of Jabal Al-Zawiyah, Sahl Al-Ghab and Jabal Al-Krad, 14 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>508</sup> Clingendael, Turkey’s interventions in its near abroad: The case of Idlib, September 2021, [url](#), p. 8



Ajjoub, HTS has engaged in ‘periodic crackdowns’ against al-Qaida and ISIL elements present in anti-GoS-controlled Idlib. However, in June 2021, Ajjoub described al-Qaida’s presence in Idlib as ‘insignificant.’<sup>509</sup> During the reporting period, HTS cracked down on other anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib de-escalation zone,<sup>510</sup> including members of Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah,<sup>511</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir,<sup>512</sup> and Ansar Abu Bakr al-Siddiq<sup>513</sup>. Although at least one of these crackdowns took place in the context of civil discontent against HTS rule,<sup>514</sup> no civilian casualties were reported.

#### *Airstrikes against jihadist targets*

UNCOI documented two airstrikes conducted by Russian and US forces against jihadist targets in Idlib governorate that led to (collateral) civilian casualties in November and December 2021.<sup>515</sup> On 3 February 2022, US forces conducted a special operation in Atmeh town, killing ISIL leader Abdullah Qardash (*nom de guerre* Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi). According to the International Crisis Group, 10 civilians were killed in the attack.<sup>516</sup> On 28 June 2022, US-led Coalition carried out a drone strike in Idlib governorate that killed HAD leader Abu Hamza al-Yemeni.<sup>517</sup>

#### **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period there were 2 253 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Idlib governorate, of whom 1 943 were coded as explosions/remote violence, 197 battles and 113 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>518</sup>

<sup>509</sup> Ajjoub, O., HTS is not al-Qaeda, but it is still an authoritarian regime to be reckoned with, MEI, 24 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>510</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 7

<sup>511</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>512</sup> Al-Monitor, Jihadi group takes on Salafist opponents in Idlib, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>513</sup> Al-Monitor, HTS arrests members of little-known Syrian group behind attacks against Turkish army in Idlib, 15 July 2022, [url](#)

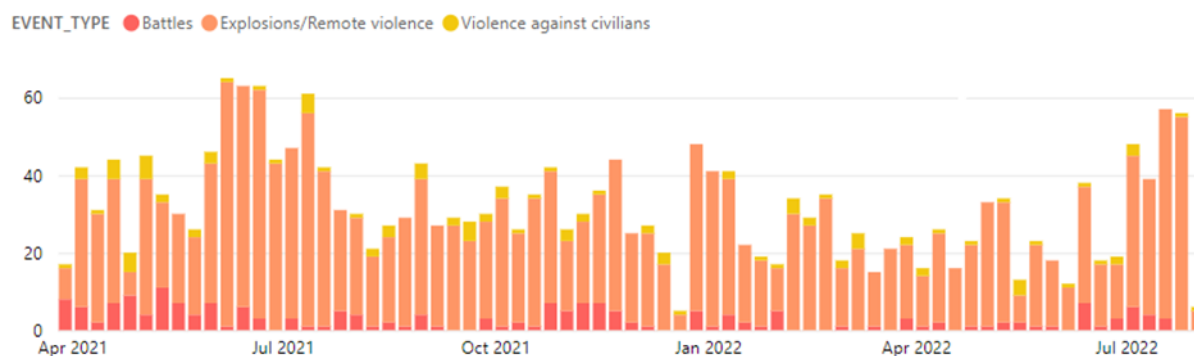
<sup>514</sup> Al-Monitor, Jihadi group takes on Salafist opponents in Idlib, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>515</sup> The airstrikes were aimed against members of Al-Qaida (the US strike on 3 December 2021) and HAD-affiliated Jund al-Sham (the Russian strike on 11 December 2021). UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 62, 63, 64.

<sup>516</sup> International Crisis Group, A Death In Idlib: The Killing of the Top ISIS Leader and Its Impact, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>517</sup> Al Jazeera, US kills ‘senior leader’ of al-Qaeda-linked group in Syria, 28 June 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>518</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



**Figure 7. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Idlib governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>519</sup>**

| District        | Battles    | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|-----------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Al Ma'ra        | 65         | 748             | 4                          |
| Ariha           | 52         | 858             | 10                         |
| Harim           | 15         | 28              | 47                         |
| Idlib           | 52         | 257             | 42                         |
| Jisr-Ash-Shugur | 13         | 52              | 10                         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>197</b> | <b>1943</b>     | <b>113</b>                 |

**Figure 8. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Idlib governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>520</sup>**

During the reporting period, security incidents occurred in all districts of the governorate, with the largest overall number being recorded in the district of Ariha, followed by Al Ma'ra and Idlib (see Figure 8).

<sup>519</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>520</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



### (c) Civilian fatalities

In 2021, SNHR recorded 256 civilian fatalities in Idlib governorate<sup>521</sup>, while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 93 civilian fatalities<sup>522</sup> (see Figure 9).

| Month    | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| January  | 17        | 13        |
| February | 25        | 32        |
| March    | 19        | 6         |
| April    | 15        | 14        |
| May      | 16        | 10        |
| June     | 26        | 5         |

<sup>521</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See:

SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>522</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

| Month        | SNHR 2021  | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|------------|-----------|
| July         | 45         | 13        |
| August       | 22         |           |
| September    | 16         |           |
| October      | 26         |           |
| November     | 19         |           |
| December     | 10         |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>256</b> | <b>93</b> |

**Figure 9. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Idlib governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

According to the WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), in the year 2021, several (2-3) attacks on healthcare were reported in Idlib governorate.<sup>523</sup> Between January and March 2022, WHO did not report any attacks on healthcare facilities in Idlib governorate.<sup>524</sup> According to Chatham House researcher Abdulkarim Ekzayez, entire facilities have been targeted in most of the attacks on healthcare in Idlib governorate and other areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups. As the result, in many cases hospitals were either completely or partially destroyed, which has caused ‘a severe disruption of the health system in these areas’.<sup>525</sup>

According to the UNCOI, the emergency services in the southern parts of Idlib governorate, the main locus of hostilities between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups, were provided by a single healthcare facility.<sup>526</sup> International Rescue Committee noted that attacks on healthcare facilities have directly impacted 59 % of north-west Syria’s civilian population.<sup>527</sup> According to the UN Security Council, an airstrike on 2 January 2022 hit the Arshani water pumping station, on which

<sup>523</sup> WHO/ Health Cluster, Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. Syrian Arab Republic. Annual Report 2021, 3 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>524</sup> WHO/ Health Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Attacks on health care in Syria, 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>525</sup> Ekzayez, A., Attacks on healthcare in the Syrian conflict, Chatham House, November 2021, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>526</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 53

<sup>527</sup> International Rescue Committee, A decade of destruction: attacks on health care in Syria, 3 March 2021, [url](#)



225 000 residents of Idlib city depend as their water source.<sup>528</sup> Schools in Idlib governorate were also damaged as the result of the ongoing conflict during the reporting period.<sup>529</sup> The highest number of incidents was reported between June and July 2021 when shelling and rocket attacks impacted five schools in the governorate.<sup>530</sup>

The extent of conflict-related infrastructure damage in Idlib governorate is discussed further in [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to UNOCHA, Idlib is one of those Syrian governorates where the contamination by explosive ordnance is assessed as 'widespread' due to previous or still ongoing hostilities.<sup>531</sup> The Mine Action Syria Response report published in May 2022 estimates that the majority of security incidents involving explosive ordnances recorded by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) occurred in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.<sup>532</sup> According to the Halo Trust report on explosive ordnance contamination in north-west Syria from December 2020, the areas in north-west Syria, including Idlib de-escalation area and adjoining areas in GoS-controlled Idlib governorate, are extensively contaminated by explosive ordnances. In these areas contamination was confirmed in over 400 communities (representing 41 % of all the surveyed communities) and it is blocking the use of farmlands in 73 % of confirmed cases.<sup>533</sup> According to the Carter Center report published in March 2022, explosive munitions have been used extensively in Idlib governorate,<sup>534</sup> and the governorate is contaminated by 17 750-53 000 UXOs.<sup>535</sup>

According to a Mine Action Review<sup>536</sup> report published in September 2021, cluster munitions were used in Idlib governorate during the first quarter of 2021.<sup>537</sup> Fields, villages, roadsides and

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<sup>528</sup> The pumping station resumed its operations at full capacity on 20 January 2022. UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>529</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), and 2533 (2020), 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 27; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 25; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 27; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 27

<sup>530</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>531</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>532</sup> Mine Action Syria Response (The), Explosive ordnance in Syria: impact and required action, May 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>533</sup> Halo Trust (The), A hidden emergency: Why explosive ordnance contamination must be addressed now in Northwest Syria, December 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>534</sup> Estimation based on the map in Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20 [map]

<sup>535</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>536</sup> Mine Action Review is an independent project conducting 'primary research and analysis on landmine and cluster munition remnant contamination, survey, and clearance'. The project's reports are published by Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). For further information, see Mine Action Review, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>537</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

areas around hospitals and schools are contaminated by UXO's, such as landmines and IEDs, while the large-scale displacement affecting the governorate has 'sharply increased' the size of the economically disenfranchised population living in the proximity of the contaminated areas.<sup>538</sup> According to Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of 144 people in Idlib governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.<sup>539</sup>

### (e) Displacement and return

In the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, UNOCHA stated that the number of IDPs in Idlib governorate was 1 868 494 (as of February 2022).<sup>540</sup> According to UNOCHA, around 71 000 persons were displaced from the governorate, 152 000 within the governorate and 24 000 to the governorate in 2021. A significant number of displacements from Idlib took place to Aleppo governorate (69 200).<sup>541</sup> In 2021, new displacements were mostly recorded around the frontline areas.<sup>542</sup>

Between January and June 2022, IDP movements tracked by UNOCHA were concentrated mainly in north-west Syria, with 77-85 % of them taking place between the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib. Altogether, between January and June 2022, approximately 54 000 IDPs were displaced from Idlib, of whom 46 800 were displaced within the governorate. UNOCHA estimates that, during the first half of 2022, access to services and livelihoods was the main incentive for these and other IDP movements within Syria.<sup>543</sup>

According to UNOCHA, approximately 42 000 total IDP returns were recorded in Idlib governorate in 2021. Of these, 3 000 returned from the governorate, 35 000 within the governorate and 7 000 to the governorate.<sup>544</sup> Between January and June 2022, approximately 19 400 IDPs returned to their homes in Idlib, of whom 13 500 were originally displaced within the governorate. In addition, around 500 returned from Idlib to other governorates. UNOCHA does not provide information on the factors determining their return.<sup>545</sup>

<sup>538</sup> Mine Action Syria Response (The), Explosive ordnance in Syria: impact and required action, May 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>539</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>540</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>541</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>542</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 17

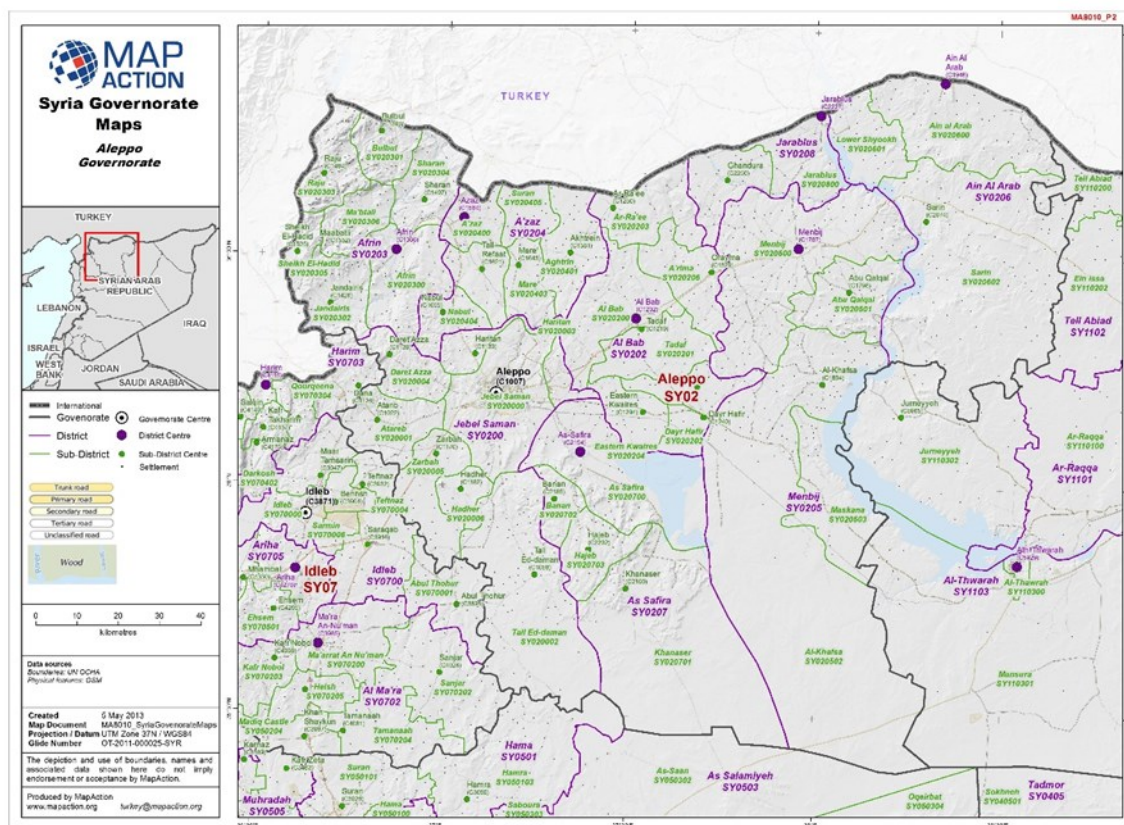
<sup>543</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>544</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>545</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)



## 2.2. Aleppo governorate



Map 8: © MapAction, Aleppo governorate<sup>546</sup>

### 2.2.1. General description of the governorate

Aleppo governorate is located in the north of Syria, bordering Idlib governorate to the west, Hama governorate to the south and Raqqqa governorate to the east. The governorate is divided in eight districts: Jebel Saman, Afrin [Efrin], A'zaz [Azaz], Al-Bab, Manbij [Menbij], Jarablus, Ain Al Arab [Kobane], and As-Safira.<sup>547</sup>

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Aleppo governorate to be of 4 117 970 as of 2021.<sup>548</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Aleppo governorate to be of 4 184 360.<sup>549</sup> The population of Aleppo city was estimated at 2 098 million.<sup>550</sup> According to UNOCHA, the total population of those areas in northern Aleppo under Turkish control<sup>551</sup> is approximately 1.38 million, of whom 850 000 are IDPs.<sup>552</sup> For more

<sup>546</sup> MapAction, Aleppo governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>547</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>548</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>549</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>550</sup> US CIA World Factbook, Syria, last updated 22 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>551</sup> The area discussed by UNOCHA as 'Turkish Operation Area' coincides with the areas captured by Turkish forces and affiliated anti-GoS armed groups during the so-called 'Euphrates Shield' and 'Olive Branch' military operations.

<sup>552</sup> UNOCHA, Northwest Syria Factsheet (As of 14 July 2022), 14 July 2022, [url](#)

information on the ethnic and religious composition of Aleppo's population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

## 2.2.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Aleppo governorate is divided into areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups, areas controlled by the GoS and several separate areas and enclaves controlled by the SDF/YPG.<sup>553</sup>

For more information on the background of the conflict in Aleppo governorate up until April 2021, see the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### (a) Anti-GoS armed groups

Anti-GoS armed groups control the northern parts of the governorate, including the areas adjacent to the Turkish border in Afrin, A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus districts and areas west of Aleppo city adjoining the anti-GoS controlled areas in Idlib governorate.<sup>554</sup> The SNA, a coalition formed by a number of anti-GoS armed groups and supported by Turkey, is centred in Aleppo governorate.<sup>555</sup> Although Turkey is described as 'the supreme authority' in the so-called Euphrates Shield (A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus districts) and Olive Branch (Afrin district) areas, SNA is responsible for maintaining the security in these areas.<sup>556</sup>

HTS is the dominant armed group in the Idlib de-escalation area covering the areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in western Aleppo governorate. The crossings of al-Ghazawiya and Deir Ballut separate<sup>557</sup> the HTS-controlled areas from northern Aleppo controlled by Turkey and SNA.<sup>558</sup> HTS has also supported rival SNA armed groups and set out to gain presence in Turkish controlled parts of Aleppo covertly by creating a 'front group' that has operated in these areas since June 2021<sup>559</sup> and overtly by entering these areas directly in late June 2022<sup>560</sup>. The developments in late June 2022 are discussed in detail in section [2.2.3](#) below.

<sup>553</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>554</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

<sup>555</sup> Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>556</sup> Hatahet, S., The Recovery of the Local Economy in Northern Aleppo: Reality and Challenges, EUI, 25 March 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>557</sup> Al-Monitor, Standoff between rival groups locks down north Syria crossing, 26 April 2022, [url](#); Middle East Eye, Syria's rebel divisions laid bare as HTS takes Afrin villages from Turkish-backed groups, 23 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>558</sup> See the map in Operations & Policy Center, Al-Zaraee, N. & Shaar, K., The Economics of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, MEI, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>559</sup> Zelin, A. Y., Jaysh al-Qa'qa': A New HTS Front Group In Olive Branch and Euphrates Shield Territory?, Syrian Jihadism [blog], 13 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>560</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian armed groups clash outside Aleppo, 29 June 2022, [url](#); MEE, Syria's rebel divisions laid bare as HTS takes Afrin villages from Turkish-backed groups, 23 June 2022, [url](#)



## **(b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups**

The GoS controls the central and southern parts of the governorate, including the Damascus-Aleppo highway (M5) and its immediate surroundings.<sup>561</sup> According to the International Crisis Group, Aleppo city is primarily in the control of GoS forces, although there have been occasional hostilities amongst the GoS-affiliated militias and between the militias and the SAA.<sup>562</sup> Among the GoS forces stationed in Aleppo city, the two most prominent ones are the 4<sup>th</sup> Division of the SAA and the Air Force Intelligence. In addition, Liwa al-Quds, a pro-GoS militia aligned with Russia, is also present in the city.<sup>563</sup> More information on particular SAA formations and units deployed in the governorate (before April 2021) is available in previous EUAA reports: [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

GoS forces (along with Russia) are also present in SDF-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate, including Manbij and Ain al-Arab, where GoS forces have cooperated with SDF along the Turkish border and along the frontlines between SDF- and Turkish/SNA-controlled areas.<sup>564</sup> GoS forces are also stationed in SDF-controlled Tal Rifaat.<sup>565</sup> Following the announcement of a potential Turkish military operation in northern Syria, GoS and affiliated armed groups have also deployed more units into SDF-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate,<sup>566</sup> including Ain al-Arab,<sup>567</sup> Manbij,<sup>568</sup> and Tal Rifaat.<sup>569</sup>

## **(c) Kurdish armed groups (SDF/YPG)**

SDF/YPG are in control and/or have presence in Aleppo city<sup>570</sup> (in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya)<sup>571</sup>, in Tal Rifaat area north of Aleppo city and in Manbij and Ain al-Arab (Kobane) in eastern Aleppo governorate.<sup>572</sup> SDF has mobilized troops, fortified its positions along the frontlines with Turkish-backed armed groups and deployed additional reinforcements

<sup>561</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

<sup>562</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, Middle East Report N°234, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. i

<sup>563</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, Middle East Report N°234, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>564</sup> See the map in Balanche, F., How to Preserve the Autonomy of Northeast Syria [map], WINEP, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>565</sup> Al-Monitor, Is Syrian government withdrawing from Tal Rifaat in favor of Turkey?, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>566</sup> Reuters, Syrian, Russian forces boosted after Turkey signals operation, officials say, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>567</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian Kurds seek support amid Turkish threats of military action, 20 July 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 30 November 2021, 30 November 2021, [url](#); Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>568</sup> Al-Monitor, Is Syrian government withdrawing from Tal Rifaat in favor of Turkey?, 14 July 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Syrian Kurds seek support amid Turkish threats of military action, 20 July 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 30 November 2021, 30 November 2021, [url](#); FT, Syria: what is Turkey's grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>569</sup> FT, Syria: what is Turkey's grand plan?, 25 July 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>570</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

<sup>571</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4; New Arab (The), Aleppo: Syrian regime continues siege of Kurdish neighbourhoods as SDF retaliates in Qamishli, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>572</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

from Raqqa city to different parts of eastern Aleppo countryside.<sup>573</sup> In July 2022, SDF and GoS established joint military operations rooms in Manbij and Tal Rifaat while preparing for a potential Turkish military operation.<sup>574</sup>

#### (d) Turkey

Turkish forces have presence alongside the anti-GoS armed groups in the so-called Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield areas controlled by these groups in the northern Aleppo governorate.<sup>575</sup> According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Turkish forces were deployed to 57 different positions in the governorate.<sup>576</sup> According to the UNCOI, Turkish forces have established observation posts along the frontlines separating the anti-GoS controlled areas west of Aleppo city from the GoS-controlled central Aleppo governorate.<sup>577</sup> Turkey has continued to strengthen<sup>578</sup> its forces and anti-GoS armed groups (SNA) in Aleppo governorate, while preparing for a potential military incursion into northern Syria.<sup>579</sup> On 23 May 2022, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced Turkey's intentions<sup>580</sup> to launch a new military operation in Syria and, on 1 June 2022, named Tal Rifaat and Manbij as the targets of this operation.<sup>581</sup>

#### (e) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Russian forces were deployed to 12 different positions in Aleppo governorate. These positions were located in the areas controlled by GoS and in the areas/enclaves of Manbij and Tal Rifaat controlled by the SDF/YPG.<sup>582</sup> Russian forces are deployed to Aleppo city, where they also monitor the entrances to the city, as well as in the eastern and northern parts of the governorate.<sup>583</sup> In June 2022, Russian forces, along with GoS and Iranian forces, have been mobilized to SDF-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate, including Ain al-Arab, Manbij and Tal Rifaat.<sup>584</sup>

<sup>573</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>574</sup> Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>575</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [Map]

<sup>576</sup> See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>577</sup> See the map in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]

<sup>578</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 6 June 2022, [url](#), p. 6; Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>579</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 6; Al-Monitor, Is Syrian government withdrawing from Tal Rifaat in favor of Turkey?, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>580</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 30 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Al Jazeera, Erdogan: New military operation in Syria 'soon', 24 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>581</sup> Al-Monitor, Erdogan announces military operations in Syria's Manbij, Tal Rifaat, 1 June 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Erdogan says Turkey to rid Syria's Tal Rifaat, Manbij of terrorists, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>582</sup> See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>583</sup> Enab Baladi, Russia reduces forces in Aleppo, transfers some to Hmeimim, 22 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>584</sup> Reuters, Syrian, Russian forces boosted after Turkey signals operation, officials say, 7 June 2022, [url](#)



**(f) Iran**

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Iranian forces, including those of Lebanese Hezbollah, were deployed to 86 different positions in Aleppo governorate. These positions were located in the areas controlled by GoS as well as in the Tal Rifaat enclave controlled by the SDF/YPG.<sup>585</sup> Iran-affiliated clientelist networks function in GoS-controlled parts of Aleppo governorate, supporting e.g. the tribal Baqir militia (Liwa al-Baqir) in Aleppo city.<sup>586</sup> As of July 2022, Iran has deployed forces to SDF-controlled northern Aleppo governorate,<sup>587</sup> including Tal Rifaat.<sup>588</sup>

**(g) ISIL**

ISIL has presence in the parts of Aleppo governorate controlled by Turkish-backed anti-GoS armed groups (SNA), where it is, according to the International Crisis Group, 'taking advantage of competition among Syrian rebel groups and an incoherent security structure to find transit routes and temporary refuge.'<sup>589</sup> ISIL is also active in GoS-controlled southern Aleppo governorate,<sup>590</sup> where locals have been targeted by the group.<sup>591</sup>

**2.2.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population****(a) Security trends during the reporting period***The conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups*

According to the Carter Center, between April and June 2021, hostilities related to the conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups were reported in Aleppo governorate.<sup>592</sup> In the context of these hostilities, the UN Security Council reported 'low-level mutual shelling and occasional skirmishes' in al-Bab frontlines in northern Aleppo governorate between April and May 2021.<sup>593</sup> According to the Carter Center, 438 conflict-related events were reported in the governorate between April and June 2021,<sup>594</sup> with the most of them attributed to either GoS or Turkish forces (see the subsection on 'The conflict between Turkey and Kurdish armed groups')

<sup>585</sup> See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>586</sup> Awad, Z., Tribes and Power in Aleppo City, European University Institute, 13 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11; the continuing presence of Liwa al-Baqir in Aleppo city is noted also in International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo's Ruins, Middle East Report N°234, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>587</sup> Reuters, Syrian, Russian forces boosted after Turkey signals operation, officials say, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>588</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian Kurds seek support amid Turkish threats of military action, 20 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>589</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2; Al-Monitor, Free Syrian Army defends areas of influence against IS, HTS cells, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>590</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; Waters, G. & Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, September 2021, [url](#), pp. 3, 15

<sup>591</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>592</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>593</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), and 2533 (2020), 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>594</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, July Through September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

below).<sup>595</sup> The UN Security Council reports that, between June and July 2021, rocket attacks targeted ‘civilian objects’ in GoS-controlled Aleppo city for the first time since March 2021.<sup>596</sup>

According to the UNCOI, airstrikes conducted by GoS and Russia targeted Operation Euphrates Shield areas between July and December 2021.<sup>597</sup> Between July and September 2021, the Carter Center reported 581 conflict-related events in Aleppo governorate and emphasized the escalation of hostilities between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups and, in particular, the increase in Russian airstrikes targeting areas under Turkish/SNA control in the governorate.<sup>598</sup>

According to Etana Syria, in October 2021, an attempted GoS advance towards Kafr Noran in western Aleppo was repelled by anti-GoS armed groups.<sup>599</sup> According to the UN Security Council, between August and September 2021, shelling and armed clashes along the northern Aleppo frontlines, were accompanied by airstrikes targeting the rural areas in southern Afrin district.<sup>600</sup> Between October and December 2021, the Carter Center reported 396 conflict-related events in Aleppo governorate,<sup>601</sup> while the hostilities involving GoS and anti-GoS armed groups continued,<sup>602</sup> leading to mutual shelling<sup>603</sup> and concentrating in areas west and southwest of Aleppo city.<sup>604</sup>

According to the Carter Center, between January and March 2022, 420 conflict events were reported in Aleppo governorate,<sup>605</sup> with the hostilities concentrating in the same areas as in late 2021.<sup>606</sup> GoS shelled towns and villages located in the vicinity of the frontlines in northern Aleppo governorate.<sup>607</sup> Between April and June 2022, the Carter Center reported 691 conflict events in Aleppo governorate,<sup>608</sup> with the hostilities concentrating, as in the earlier months of 2022, in areas west and southwest of Aleppo city.<sup>609</sup> According to Etana Syria, in April 2022, mutual shelling between GoS and Turkish forces/SNA took place in Aleppo governorate. Russian airstrikes and shelling were also reported.<sup>610</sup> In May 2022, occasional escalations of violence took place between GoS and Turkish forces/SNA. Meanwhile, Russian forces targeted

<sup>595</sup> See ‘Figure 4’ in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>596</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>597</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 5

<sup>598</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, July Through September 2021, [url](#), pp. 2, 4

<sup>599</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 04 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>600</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>601</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>602</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>603</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 30 November 2021, 30 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>604</sup> See ‘Figure 3’ in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>605</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>606</sup> See ‘Figure 4’ in Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>607</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief North West Syria 9 February 2022, 9 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>608</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>609</sup> See the map in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>610</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 28 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#)



Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch areas with airstrikes.<sup>611</sup> In June 2022, an attempted GoS advance and other hostilities were reported in western Aleppo frontlines.<sup>612</sup> In late July 2022, hostilities between GoS forces/Russia and anti-GoS armed groups escalated also in western Aleppo governorate, with GoS forces ‘stepping up their attacks on the region on a daily basis’<sup>613</sup> and HTS and other anti-GoS armed groups bombing GoS-controlled areas in western rural Aleppo.<sup>614</sup>

### *The conflict between Turkey and Kurdish armed groups (SDF/YPG)*

Between April and May 2021, UN Security Council reported an intensification of clashes and mutual shelling along the frontlines in Afrin, A’zaz and Tal Rifaat that led to civilian casualties.<sup>615</sup> According to the Carter Center, the hostilities between Turkish forces (and the SNA) and ‘Kurdish armed groups’<sup>616</sup> (SDF/YPG) in ‘northern Syria’, including Aleppo governorate, escalated between April and June 2021.<sup>617</sup> The hostilities took place along the frontlines between the parties as well as in the parts of Aleppo governorate controlled by the Turkish forces and their SNA allies. In June 2021, the hostilities led to mutual shelling in the Aleppo frontlines after a rocket strike on 12 June 2021 targeted the Al-Shifa Hospital in (SNA-controlled) Afrin,<sup>618</sup> with both YPG and Russia suspected for the attack.<sup>619</sup>

The escalation in northern Aleppo’s frontlines continued between June and July 2021.<sup>620</sup> According to the UNCOI, ‘sporadic exchanges of shelling’ and an increase in the number of drone strikes carried out by Turkish forces took place during the period between July and December 2021.<sup>621</sup> UNCOI describes the areas in northern Aleppo governorate as ‘highly volatile’ and notes how, in these areas, civilians ‘are caught between several conflicts’ and ‘live amid fear of shelling and improvised explosive devices’ (IED’s), with GoS forces, Turkish forces, the Turkish-backed SNA and the Kurdish-dominated SDF all involved in the hostilities.<sup>622</sup> On 5 and 6 August 2021, the town of Al-Bab and its surroundings were targeted with missile attacks,

<sup>611</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 02 June 2022, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>612</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>613</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Regime Forces Ramp up Attacks in Syria’s North, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>614</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>615</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), and 2533 (2020), 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>616</sup> In addition to SDF and YPG, these groups include the so-called ‘Afrin Liberation Forces’ (*Hêzên Rizgariya Efrînê*, HRE), which are described by the Carter Center as ‘the primary Kurdish armed group operating within Turkish-held Aleppo Governorate’. Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 6; for further information on HRE, see Al-Monitor, New Kurdish group in Syria attacks Turkish-backed opposition in Afrin, 24 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>617</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>618</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 5; According to the UN Security Council, in addition to damage suffered by the hospital itself, at least 13 people were killed and 26 wounded in the attack, including health care workers. UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), paras. 4, 25.

<sup>619</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>620</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>621</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 5

<sup>622</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 74

allegedly carried out by SDF,<sup>623</sup> that resulted in at least 24 injured civilians and damaged civilians homes.<sup>624</sup> According to UNOCHA, the August 2021 hostilities marked the first time Al-Bab and the surrounding areas were affected by violence since the March 2020 ceasefire. All in all, at least 20 civilians were killed and at least 41 others injured as the result of these hostilities.<sup>625</sup> Between October and November 2021, hostilities were reported particularly in Tal Rifaat frontline,<sup>626</sup> where a Kurdish armed group operating in Tal Rifaat conducted a missile strike targeting Turkish forces in A'zaz city on 10 October 2021, and Turkish forces retaliated by shelling SDF/YPG-controlled areas<sup>627</sup>. On 20 October 2021, an airstrike likely carried out by a Turkish drone in Ain al-Arab targeted a non-military vehicle stationed in front of the Social Justice Building. Two people were killed while at least three others were wounded in the airstrike.<sup>628</sup>

Between December 2021 and March 2022, ground-based strikes reported by OHCHR caused civilian casualties in some cities including (i.a.) cities of A'zaz, Al-Bab and Jarablus,<sup>629</sup> and in Afrin city and in villages in Ain al-Arab [Kobane] area<sup>630</sup>. These strikes were likely associated with the hostilities between Turkey and Turkish-backed SNA and SDF/YPG and/or GoS forces. According to the International Crisis Group, mutual rocket attacks and/or shelling between Turkish forces and Kurdish armed groups took place mid-February 2022 in A'zaz and Tal Rifaat.<sup>631</sup> Between January and March 2022, the Carter Center reported an increase in hostilities between Turkish forces and Kurdish armed groups.<sup>632</sup> As in late 2021,<sup>633</sup> the hostilities were concentrated in and around Tal Rifaat.<sup>634</sup>

Between April and May 2022, UN Security Council reported a significant increase in the hostilities in the areas of Tal Rifaat and Manbij in northern Aleppo,<sup>635</sup> including 'an increase in

<sup>623</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in August 2021, 4 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 18

<sup>624</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>625</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>626</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 4; see also the concentration of conflict events in Tal Rifaat area in 'Figure 3' in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>627</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>628</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 100

<sup>629</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 20-21 [Annex I]

<sup>630</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 February 2022, [url](#), p. 19 [Annex I]

<sup>631</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>632</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>633</sup> See 'Figure 3' in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>634</sup> See 'Figure 4' in Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>635</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 16 June 2022, [url](#), p. 1 [Key points]



shelling, drone strikes and rocket attacks.’<sup>636</sup> Between April and May 2022, OHCHR also reported several ground-based strikes causing civilian casualties in (Turkish-controlled) areas of Afrin, A’zaz and Al-Bab.<sup>637</sup>

According to Etana Syria, in June 2022, mutual shelling between Turkish forces/SNA and SDF and an increasing number of Turkish drone strikes took place in the frontlines in northern rural Aleppo.<sup>638</sup> According to the Newlines Institute, SNA and armed groups associated with SDF have ‘engaged in tit-for-tat strikes’ that have resulted in civilian casualties. Newlines Institute estimates that civilians have been killed as a result of, both, indiscriminate shelling and seemingly deliberate attacks that have also caused damage to civilian infrastructure and impeded their freedom of movement. These hostilities have taken place, among others, along the frontlines in Aleppo governorate, with the Manbij frontline reportedly subjected to ‘regular artillery shelling and drone attacks’.<sup>639</sup>

Early July 2022, Turkish forces targeted the military positions of both GoS and SDF in Tal Rifaat area with suspected drone strikes while hostilities between Turkish-backed anti-GoS armed groups and SDF took place in the rural areas of northern Aleppo governorate.<sup>640</sup> According to COAR Global, on 19 July 2022, Turkish forces targeted Iranian militias positioned in eastern Afrin district and GoS forces positioned in Tal Rifaat.<sup>641</sup> In late July 2022, hostilities escalated between Turkish forces and SDF in northern Aleppo governorate. In the course of the escalation, Turkish forces shelled areas in Ain al-Arab and Tal Rifaat, the latter hostilities injuring several civilians, while SDF retaliated by targeting areas controlled by Turkish-backed armed groups in Afrin district and near A’zaz city.<sup>642</sup>

On 16 August 2022, Turkish forces conducted airstrikes that hit GoS positions near Ain al-Arab.<sup>643</sup> According to SOHR, 17 people were killed in the airstrikes targeting joint GoS-SDF positions, including 13 GoS soldiers and 4 SDF fighters,<sup>644</sup> although Al Jazeera notes the discrepancies in the estimated casualty figures of the attack.<sup>645</sup> On that same day, SDF targeted a Turkish border post opposite Ain al-Arab with a rocket attack<sup>646</sup> and Turkish forces shelled

<sup>636</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 21

<sup>637</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 16 June 2022, [url](#), p. 19 [Annex I].

<sup>638</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>639</sup> Newlines Institute, The Deteriorating Security Situation in Northeast Syria, 11 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>640</sup> Al-Monitor, Is Syrian government withdrawing from Tal Rifaat in favor of Turkey?, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>641</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 25 July 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>642</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>643</sup> Al Jazeera, Several Syrian soldiers killed in ‘Turkish air raids’, 17 August 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Three Syrian soldiers killed in Turkish air strike on military posts -state media, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>644</sup> SOHR, Death toll update / Two Turkish soldiers killed and three others injured in SDF rocket attack on Turkish border post off Ain Al-Arab (Kobani), 17 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>645</sup> Al Jazeera, Several Syrian soldiers killed in ‘Turkish air raids’, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>646</sup> Al Modon, القوات التركية تحرق مواقع قسد.. بعد قصف مخفر داخل تركيا [Turkish forces set SDF positions in flames.. after the bombing of an outpost inside Turkey], 16 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, SDF rocket attack / Five Turkish soldiers killed and injured at Syria-Turkey border near Ain Al-Arab (Kobani), 16 August 2022, [url](#)

SDF positions in Ain al-Arab,<sup>647</sup> Manbij,<sup>648</sup> and Tal Rifaat.<sup>649</sup> According to an update by SOHR published on 16 August 2022, one civilian was killed and seven other persons injured in the hostilities between Turkish forces and SDF that were still ongoing in the western Ain al-Arab countryside.<sup>650</sup> On 17 August 2022, the shelling of SDF controlled villages, including Tal Rifaat, continued in northern Aleppo governorate.<sup>651</sup>

### *Infighting among anti-GoS armed groups*

Infighting between different anti-GoS armed groups in Turkish-controlled northern Aleppo was reported during the reporting period.<sup>652</sup> According to the Carter Center, the infighting between different SNA armed groups is ‘common’<sup>653</sup> and contributes to ‘the general instability’ in Turkish controlled parts of northern Syria,<sup>654</sup> and presents ‘a severe problem’ to the civilian population in these areas.<sup>655</sup> According to Syria Direct’s local source in Al-Bab, the infighting means ‘increasing chaos and insecurity in the area,’ while ‘the clashes between the factions have led to civilian casualties from indiscriminate bullets.’ In addition, the source notes the danger that the recruitment of criminals by different SNA groups poses to (al-Bab’s) civilian population.<sup>656</sup>

According to COAR Global’s assessment from late June 2022, ‘the insecurity and chaos’ in the SNA-controlled areas in northern Aleppo governorate is mainly affecting the areas’ civilian population. Besides the infighting between different SNA factions, these areas are exposed to other security incidents, such as IED-attacks, bombings and assassinations.<sup>657</sup> In April 2022, COAR Global noted that ‘[t]he security situation in northwest Syria remains unstable, with multiple bombings that target SNA actors, varying attributed to [ISIL], the SDF, and the Government of Syria’.<sup>658</sup>

According to UNOCHA, most of the IED attacks that took place in Syria between January and September 2021 ‘were documented in areas under the control of armed groups in Turkish operations areas of Aleppo governorate, including mainly in residential areas and inside

<sup>647</sup> Nidaa Post, *مصرع 22 عنصر أمن قوات الأسد بغارات تركية شرق حلب* [22 members of Assad forces killed in Turkish raids east of Aleppo], 16 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *SDF rocket attack / Five Turkish soldiers killed and injured at Syria-Turkey border near Ain Al-Arab (Kobani)*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>648</sup> Al Modon, *القوات التركية تحرق مواقع قسد.. بعد قصف مخفر داخل تركيا* [Turkish forces set SDF positions in flames.. after the bombing of an outpost inside Turkey], 16 August 2022, [url](#); Nidaa Post, *مصرع 22 عنصر أمن قوات الأسد بغارات تركية* [22 members of Assad forces killed in Turkish raids east of Aleppo], 16 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>649</sup> Referred in the source with the name ‘al-Shahba’ (الشهباء). Al Modon, *القوات التركية تحرق مواقع قسد.. بعد قصف مخفر داخل تركيا* [Turkish forces set SDF positions in flames.. after the bombing of an outpost inside Turkey], 16 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>650</sup> SOHR, *SDF rocket attack / Five Turkish soldiers killed and injured at Syria-Turkey border near Ain Al-Arab (Kobani)*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>651</sup> SOHR, *Renewed bombardment / Turkish shells struck Kurdish-held areas north of Aleppo*, 17 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>652</sup> See Carter Center (The), *The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022*, [url](#), pp. 4-6; UN Security Council, *Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021)*, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>653</sup> Carter Center (The), *Quarterly Review, July Through September 2021*, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>654</sup> Carter Center (The), *The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022*, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>655</sup> Carter Center (The), *The State of the Syrian National Army, March 2022*, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>656</sup> Syria Direct, *Mergers and tensions within the Syrian National Army: A ‘struggle for existence’*, Syria Direct, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>657</sup> COAR Global, *Syria Update*, 20 June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>658</sup> COAR Global, *Syria Update*, 11 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9



markets'.<sup>659</sup> UN Security Council notes the resumption of IED attacks that killed civilians in Jarablus, A'zaz and Afrin between June and July 2021<sup>660</sup> and in Al-Bab and Afrin between August and September 2021.<sup>661</sup>

According to the Carter Center, the incidents of infighting among SNA factions increased sharply between April and June 2022.<sup>662</sup> In June 2022, infighting between two SNA factions, one of them allied to HTS, led to HTS advancing into Turkish-/SNA-controlled northern Aleppo.<sup>663</sup>

According to Etana Syria, the infighting resulted in 'dozens of deaths and injuries.'<sup>664</sup> According to Middle East Eye, on 19 June 2022, HTS took control of several villages in rural southern and southwestern Afrin district, which marked the first time HTS fighters had entered into so-called Operation Olive Branch areas.<sup>665</sup> According to Al-Monitor, the infighting led to both military and civilian casualties.<sup>666</sup>

### *ISIL activities*

During the reporting period, ISIL's presence has been reported in, both, northern parts of Aleppo controlled by anti-GoS armed groups<sup>667</sup> and in southern parts of the governorate controlled by GoS.<sup>668</sup>

According to Al-Monitor, Turkish-backed anti-GoS armed groups have cracked down on ISIL's cells in northern rural Aleppo. However, ISIL is still operating in these areas and conducts recurrent terrorist operations. Arrest operations targeting ISIL members were carried out on 30 May and 23 June 2021. On 24 June 2021 clashes between the police affiliated to Turkish-backed armed groups and ISIL were reported in the city of al-Bab.<sup>669</sup> According to COAR Global, on 6 April 2022, five SNA members were killed in a shooting incident north of A'zaz that was later claimed by ISIL.<sup>670</sup> On 12 July 2022 a senior ISIL leader Maher al-Agal, allegedly linked to

<sup>659</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>660</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>661</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>662</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>663</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian armed groups clash outside Aleppo, 29 June 2022, [url](#); see also Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>664</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>665</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 4 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>666</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian armed groups clash outside Aleppo, 29 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>667</sup> Al-Monitor, Free Syrian Army defends areas of influence against IS, HTS cells, 1 July 2022, [url](#); COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 8; France 24, US drone strike kills leader of Islamic State group in Syria, Pentagon says, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>668</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3, *passim*; Waters, G. & Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, September 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>669</sup> Al-Monitor, Free Syrian Army defends areas of influence against IS, HTS cells, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>670</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 11 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9

SNA-affiliated Ahrar al-Sharqiya,<sup>671</sup> was killed by US forces in a drone strike near Jindires<sup>672</sup> in SNA-controlled northern Aleppo governorate.

ISIL activities were reported in the Badia, the central Syrian desert covering (among other areas) GoS-controlled southern Aleppo governorate,<sup>673</sup> where ISIL attacks are reportedly ‘fairly consistent’<sup>674</sup> and where, in 2021, ISIL was reportedly ‘preying on the [local] population’.<sup>675</sup>

#### *Tensions in SDF-controlled areas*

In late May/early June 2021, at least eight people were killed in Manbij after SDF suppressed the popular protests against forced conscription<sup>676</sup> (the so-called “self-defence duty”) and the SDF rule in the region<sup>677</sup>.

In March 2022, a siege was put in place by GoS around the SDF/YPG-controlled neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh in Aleppo city.<sup>678</sup> The siege lasted for three weeks<sup>679</sup> and prevented the entry of basic necessities such as flour, fuel, and medical aid into these neighbourhoods.<sup>680</sup> According to SOHR, members of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division of the SAA and State Security, the actors responsible for maintaining the siege had ‘clamped down’ on the neighbourhoods’ residents.<sup>681</sup> On the basis of several unnamed sources, ANHA Hawar News Agency, a Kurdish online news source sympathetic to the PYD/YPG, claims that, during the siege, members of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division searched the residents’ cellphones and threatened those who did not ‘pay royalties and taxes to the Division’s members’ with kidnapping.<sup>682</sup>

#### *Israeli airstrikes*

On 19 July 2021, Israeli forces carried airstrikes against Iranian targets in Al-Safirah area in southern Aleppo.<sup>683</sup> No civilian casualties were reported.

<sup>671</sup> France 24, US drone strike kills leader of Islamic State group in Syria, Pentagon says, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>672</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 8; France 24, US drone strike kills leader of Islamic State group in Syria, Pentagon says, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>673</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 3, *passim*; Waters, G. & Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, September 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>674</sup> Waters, G. & Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, September 2021, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>675</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>676</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>677</sup> Reuters, Eight killed in protests against Kurdish-led forces in northern Syrian city, 1 June 2021, [url](#); Syria Direct, Beyond conscription: What does Manbij’s unrest reveal about SDF rule in northeast Syria?, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>678</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>679</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>680</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 18 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>681</sup> SOHR, Amid lack of flour in most of bread bakeries / Fourth Division “besieges” SDF-held neighbourhoods in Aleppo, 5 April 2022, [url](#)

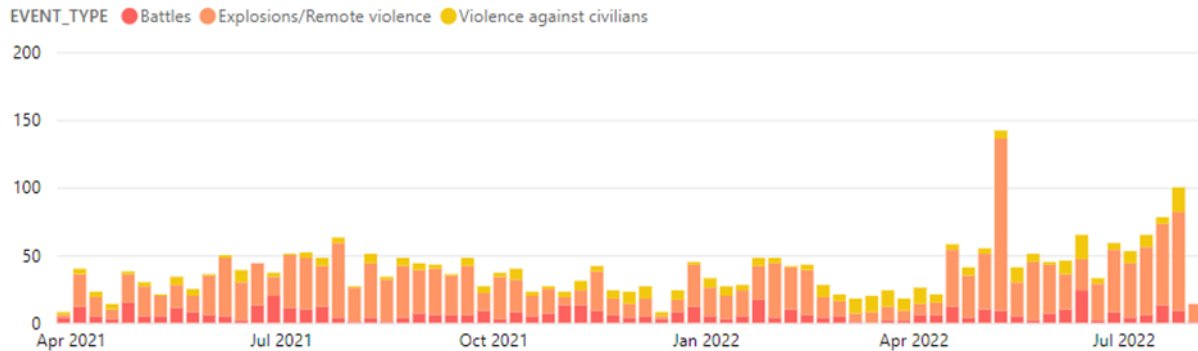
<sup>682</sup> ANHA Hawar News Agency, They fight Democratic Nation Project in Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>683</sup> AP, Syria reports Israeli airstrikes in northern Aleppo province, 20 July 2021, [url](#); Reuters, Syrian air defences intercept Israeli attack over Aleppo - state media, 20 July 2021, [url](#)



## (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 2 776 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Aleppo governorate, of whom 1 893 were coded as explosions/remote violence, 493 battles and 390 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>684</sup> Aleppo recorded the largest number of security incidents during the reference period out of all governorates.



**Figure 10. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Aleppo governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>685</sup>**

<sup>684</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>685</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

| District     | Battles    | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Afrin        | 103        | 264             | 231                        |
| Ain Al Arab  | 3          | 80              | 15                         |
| Al Bab       | 101        | 196             | 45                         |
| As-Safira    | 2          | 5               | -                          |
| A'zaz        | 121        | 759             | 38                         |
| Jarablus     | 53         | 73              | 8                          |
| Jebel Saman  | 60         | 384             | 23                         |
| Menbij       | 50         | 132             | 30                         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>493</b> | <b>1893</b>     | <b>390</b>                 |

**Figure 11. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Aleppo governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>686</sup>**

Security incidents were recorded in all Aleppo governorate districts during the reporting period, with the highest number of overall incidents being recorded in May 2022. The largest number of battles took place in A'zaz and Afrin, while most incidents involving explosions/remote violence were documented in A'zaz and Jebel Saman. Incidents of violence against civilians were particularly prevalent in Afrin (see Figure 11).

### (c) Civilian fatalities

In 2021, SNHR recorded 237 civilian fatalities<sup>687</sup> in Aleppo governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 108 civilian fatalities (see Figure 12).<sup>688</sup>

<sup>686</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>687</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial



| Month    | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| January  | 12        | 19        |
| February | 60        | 25        |
| March    | 32        | 11        |
| April    | 17        | 15        |
| May      | 13        | 8         |
| June     | 31        | 13        |
| July     | 8         | 17        |
| August   | 13        |           |

Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>688</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

| Month        | SNHR 2021  | SNHR 2022  |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| September    | 10         |            |
| October      | 23         |            |
| November     | 8          |            |
| December     | 10         |            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>237</b> | <b>108</b> |

**Figure 12. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Aleppo governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

According to the UN Security Council, schools<sup>689</sup> and hospitals<sup>690</sup> in Aleppo governorate were damaged as the result of the ongoing conflict during the reporting period. The incident with the highest number of casualties occurred on 12 June 2021, when the Shifa hospital in Afrin was shelled, killing at least 13 people and injuring 26 others.<sup>691</sup> According to WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), in the year 2021, multiple (5-7) attacks on healthcare were reported in Aleppo governorate.<sup>692</sup> Between January and March 2022, WHO reported one attack on healthcare in Aleppo governorate.<sup>693</sup> The extent of conflict-related infrastructure damage in Aleppo governorate is discussed further in [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to 2022 UN Humanitarian Needs Overview, Aleppo is one of those Syrian governorates where explosive ordnance contamination is assessed as ‘widespread’ as the result of previous or still ongoing hostilities.<sup>694</sup> Mine Action Syria Response report published in

<sup>689</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 33

<sup>690</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 34

<sup>691</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 26

<sup>692</sup> WHO/ Health Cluster, Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. Syrian Arab Republic. Annual Report 2021, 3 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>693</sup> WHO/ Health Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Attacks on health care in Syria, 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>694</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 12



May 2022 estimates that the majority of security incidents involving explosive ordnances recorded by UNMAS occurred in Aleppo and Idlib governorates.<sup>695</sup>

According to the Carter Center report published in March 2022, explosive munitions have been used extensively in the areas in and around Aleppo city,<sup>696</sup> and the governorate is contaminated by 17 250 - 51 500 UXO.<sup>697</sup> According to a report by Mine Action Review published in September 2021, attacks with cluster munitions were carried out in Aleppo governorate during the first quarter of 2021.<sup>698</sup>

According to Mine Action Syria Response, 87 % of communities in Aleppo governorate, and especially the communities in northern Aleppo, have reported explosive ordnance contamination in their areas, which is also reportedly affecting between 30-70 % of the farmland in the governorate. In 2021, children lost their lives in Aleppo city as the result of explosive ordnance contamination sustained before 2017.<sup>699</sup> According to Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of 704 people in Aleppo governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.<sup>700</sup> From September 2021 to April 2022, iMMAP data revealed 204 deaths and 336 injuries in connection with landmine incidents in Aleppo governorate.<sup>701</sup>

#### **(e) Displacement and return**

UNOCHA stated that the number of IDPs in Aleppo governorate was 1 283 773 (as of February 2022).<sup>702</sup> In 2021 UNOCHA recorded for Aleppo governorate approximately 22 000 displacements from the governorate, 125 000 within the governorate, and 70 000 to the governorate. Significant numbers of arrivals from Idlib (69 200) and Hasaka (700) were registered.<sup>703</sup>

Between January and June 2022, IDP movements tracked by UNOCHA were concentrated mainly in north-west Syria, with 77-85 % of them taking place between the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib. Altogether, between January and June 2022, about 23 700 IDPs were displaced from Aleppo, of whom 14 366 were displaced within the governorate. UNOCHA estimates that, during the first half of 2022, access to services and livelihoods was the main incentive for IDP movements within Syria.<sup>704</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> Mine Action Syria Response (The), Explosive ordnance in Syria: impact and required action, May 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>696</sup> Estimation based on the map in Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20 [map]

<sup>697</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>698</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

<sup>699</sup> Mine Action Syria Response, Mine Action Syria Response (The), Explosive ordnance in Syria: impact and required action, May 2022, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>700</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>701</sup> iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-13

<sup>702</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>703</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>704</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements

According to UNOCHA, approximately 31 000 IDPs returned to their homes located in Aleppo governorate in 2021. Of these, about 28 000 were those displaced within Aleppo governorate. Most of the returnees from other governorates returned from Idlib (1 000), Hasaka (900) and Latakia (500).<sup>705</sup>

Between January and June 2022, 3 028 IDPs returned to their homes in Aleppo, of whom 2 300 were originally displaced within the governorate. In addition, approx. 1 338 returned from Aleppo to other governorates. UNOCHA did not provide information on the factors determining their return.<sup>706</sup>

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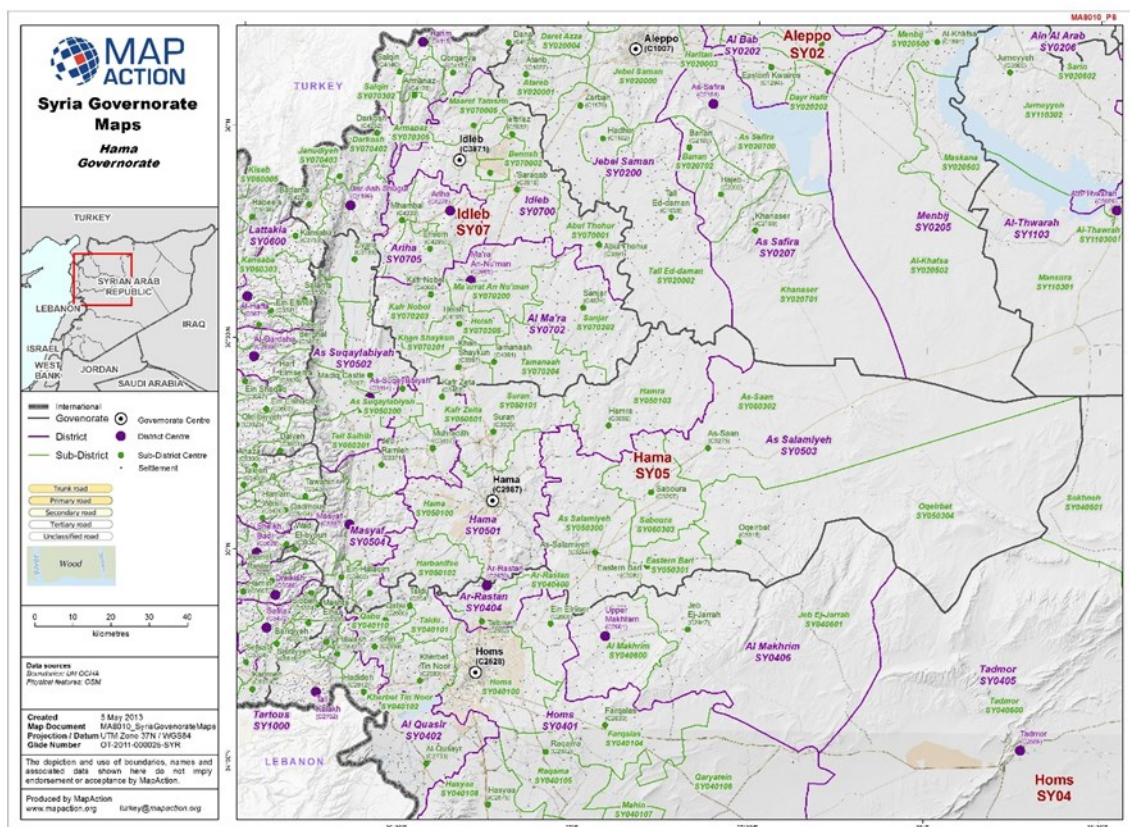
(March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>705</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>706</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)



## 2.3. Hama governorate



Map 9: © MapAction, Hama governorate<sup>707</sup>

### 2.3.1. General description of the governorate

Hama governorate is located in the central region of Syria and has internal borders with the governorates of Latakia and Tartous to the west, Idlib, Aleppo and Raqqa to the north, and Homs to the south.<sup>708</sup> The governorate comprises five administrative districts: Hama, Misyaf (Masyaf), Muhardah (Muhradah), Suqailbiya (As-Suqaylabiyah), and Salamiyah (As-Salamiyeh).<sup>709</sup>

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Hama governorate in 2021 to be 2 146 823.<sup>710</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Hama governorate to be just under 1 500 000.<sup>711</sup> With regards to the capital of the governorate, the CIA estimated that the population of Hama city was 964 000 in 2022.<sup>712</sup>

<sup>707</sup> MapAction, Hama governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>708</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

<sup>709</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 102

<sup>710</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>711</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>712</sup> US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, last updated: 7 June 2022, [url](#)

According to Fabrice Balanche, Sunni Muslims constituted the majority of the residents of Hama City, while Alawites are essentially absent from the city due to the hostility of its residents towards this minority.<sup>713</sup> The city's western countryside, on the other hand, was described as being 'full of Alawite, Christian, and Ismaili villages'.<sup>714</sup> Syria's Ismailis<sup>715</sup> are mainly found in the Salamiya<sup>716</sup> area east of Hama City. Additionally, Hama governorate has a Christian presence.<sup>717</sup>

According to reporting by UNHCR, in GoS-held areas checkpoints existed 'at the entrances to cities and towns and major highways', including the M5 motorway that runs through Hama governorate.<sup>718</sup>

### 2.3.2. Conflict background and armed actors

As reported in section 2.3.3 of the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), during 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, the military operations in north-west Syria by GoS and pro-GoS forces continued, as did clashes and shelling between GoS and opposition forces in western rural Hama. This included ISIL attacks against GoS forces, resulting in military operations involving ISIL, GoS forces and allied militias in central and eastern Hama governorate.<sup>719</sup>

As of February 2021, Hama governorate was under GoS control, 'apart from the area bordering Idlib province in the Sahl al-Ghab area', which is controlled by factions of HTS.<sup>720</sup> A confidential source interviewed at the end of January 2021 by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that this area was controlled by factions of anti-GoS armed groups and HTS,<sup>721</sup> whilst the remaining territory of Hama governorate was under the control of the GoS.<sup>722</sup> An article by the Middle East Eye (MEE) from February 2022 reported that HTS continued to control 'slivers of territory' in Hama governorate.<sup>723</sup> The territorial control in the governorate remained unchanged during the reference period of this report.<sup>724</sup>

<sup>713</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>714</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>715</sup> USDOS, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>716</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>717</sup> USDOS, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>718</sup> UNHCR, *International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic*, Update VI, March 2021, [url](#), p. 20 (Footnote 47)

<sup>719</sup> EUAA, *COI Report: Syria - Security situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 111-112

<sup>720</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 28.

In May 2017, an agreement was signed by Russia, Iran and Turkey to end hostilities between forces fighting on behalf of GoS and opposition groups in four de-escalation zones, primarily in opposition-held areas of Syria. One of the zones covered north-eastern areas of Latakia, Idlib, western areas of Aleppo and northern areas of Hama.

Presently, this de-escalation zone remains the last of the four zones not retaken by the GoS. Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Security and socio-economic situation in Tartous and Latakia governorates*, September 2021, [url](#), p. 12, footnote 48

<sup>721</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 28.

The article by MEE noted that 'Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) [...] controls around half of Idlib province as well as slivers of territory in the neighbouring provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Latakia' - MEE, *Syria: Civilians killed in attack on oil company in restive north-west*, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>722</sup> UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022*, [url](#)

<sup>723</sup> MEE, *Syria: Civilians killed in attack on oil company in restive north-west*, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>724</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, *Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map]*, 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on*



### **(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups**

Within the time constraints of this report, very limited specific information was found on the SAA and its affiliated armed groups in Hama governorate among the sources consulted. For deployments of the SAA in Hama governorate as of May 2021 see section 2.3.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

The information that was available in the reference period noted the presence of the Syrian military's Fourth Division, involved in seizing and auctioning off land of forcibly displaced locals,<sup>725</sup> and the presence of the Syrian Military Security Service's Branch 219 (Hama Governorate Branch).<sup>726</sup>

The Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM) referred the presence of the Palestinian militant group Liwa al-Quds in Hama, whose unit has been trained and supplied with weapons by Russia, and specifically stated that it 'sometimes engages under tension with various military groups of the regime in Hama and Deir Ez-Zor and especially with the Iran-backed 4th armored division'.<sup>727</sup>

### **(b) Russia**

Whilst the presence of Russian troops was noted through the reporting of military operations involving Russian forces, mainly in northern and western Hama governorate,<sup>728</sup> additional information published within the reference period for this report stating the composition and strength of Russian forces could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Russia had a total of 24 stationing sites in Hama governorate.<sup>729</sup> A July 2022 article by SOHR mentioned the existence of Russian forces, 'groups of the regime-backed 25<sup>th</sup> Division and other Russian-backed militias' being stationed in Mirza fortress, north-west of Jurin, which overlooks the Sahl Al-Ghab area.<sup>730</sup>

### **(c) Iran and Iran-backed militias**

Whilst the presence of Iranian troops was noted through the reporting of military operations involving Iranian forces and its proxies,<sup>731</sup> additional information published within the reference

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the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>725</sup> Hall, N., Rescuing Aid in Syria, CSIS Middle East Program, February 2022, [url](#), p. 38. For background information on the Fourth division see Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>726</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 15 (Footnote 79)

<sup>727</sup> ORSAM, Pro-Regime Palestinian Militias in Syria, 2 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>728</sup> For example, SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 3, 4; ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 11-17 September 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>729</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>730</sup> SOHR, Hama | Turkish forces start establishing new military post near Russian camp in Sahl Al-Ghab, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>731</sup> For example, ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 9-15 April 2022, 21 April 2022, [url](#); ORSAM, Pro-Regime Palestinian Militias in Syria, 2 August 2021, [url](#)

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Iran had a total of 18 stationing sites in Hama governorate.<sup>732</sup>

As of February 2021, 'the area bordering Idlib province in the Sahl al-Ghab area' was controlled, according to a confidential source interviewed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by factions of anti-GoS armed groups and HTS,<sup>733</sup> whilst the remaining territory of Hama governorate was under the control of the GoS.<sup>734</sup>

**(e) Turkey and Turkish-backed armed opposition groups**

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Turkey had a total of one stationing site in Hama governorate.<sup>738</sup>

ISIL's presence and activities, as reported in section 2.3.3 of the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#), continued throughout 2021, specifically in northern<sup>739</sup> and

<sup>733</sup> Netherlands, (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 28. The article by MEE noted that ‘Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) [...] controls around half of Idlib province as well as slivers of territory in the neighbouring provinces of Aleppo, Hama and Latakia’ - MEE, Syria: Civilians killed in attack on oil company in restive north-west, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>735</sup> UN Security Council, Twenty-ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) 2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017)2368(2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2022/83, 3 February 2022, url, para. 39

<sup>737</sup> SOHR, Hama / Turkish forces start establishing new military post near Russian camp in Sahl Al-Ghab, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>739</sup> UN Security Council, Twenty-eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), paras. 31-32; UN Security Council, Thirteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2021/682, 27 July 2021, [url](#), para. 25

eastern Hama.<sup>740</sup> The UN Security Council noted that, in the second half of 2021, whilst ISIL operations focused on Deir Ez-Zor, attacks also occurred in Hama governorate.<sup>741</sup> The Carter Center stated in December 2021 that ISIL's activity remained 'predominantly concentrated in the Badia desert region', including parts of Raqqa, Deir-ez-Zor, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo Governorates.<sup>742</sup> However, Gregory Waters stated that, by the second half of 2021, ISIL reportedly withdrew most of its cells from east Hama.<sup>743</sup> ACLED changed ISIL's status in Salamiyeh sub-district in Hama governorate from 'active' in Q3 of 2021 to 'inactive' in Q4 of 2021.<sup>744</sup> However, the International Crisis Group reported in November 2021 that Hama (and northern Homs) was the governorate where ISIL had 'regained strength',<sup>745</sup> whilst the same source reported that in early 2022 ISIL activity was 'nearly non-existent in Hama governorate'.<sup>746</sup>

### 2.3.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

**(a) Security trends during the reporting period**

During the reference period for this report, the security situation in Hama governorate continued to be dominated by military operations in western areas by GoS and pro-GoS Russian forces, with tensions described by the UN as ‘remained high’.<sup>747</sup> During the last quarter of 2021, conflict events recorded high numbers of shelling and aerial bombardments by GoS and Russia.<sup>748</sup> Isolated Israeli and Turkish instigated airstrikes were reported, though mainly in 2021.<sup>749</sup>

### *Military operations in northern and western Hama governorate*

The military operations that were launched in 2019 in north-west Syria by GoS and pro-GoS Russian forces continued in 2021 and for the first half of 2022, with reported shellings and/or aerial bombardments striking mainly military sites, but also damaging civilian infrastructure.<sup>750</sup>

<sup>740</sup> Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#); Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>741</sup> UN Security Council, Twenty-ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2022/83, 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 36.

<sup>742</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>743</sup> Waters, G., *The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021*, January 2022, [url](#), pp. 5, 44-45

<sup>744</sup> ACLED, The State of Syria: Q3 2021 – Q4 2021, 8 February 2022, [url](https://www.acledevent.org/2022/02/08/syria-q3-2021-q4-2021/)

<sup>745</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](https://www.icg.org/syria-shoring-up-raqqa-s-shaky-recovery)

<sup>746</sup> International Crisis Group, *Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria*, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>747</sup> UN Security Council, Escalating Conflict, Deepening Economic Crisis in Syria Pushing Humanitarian Needs to Highest Levels Since Start of Conflict. Senior Officials Tell Security Council, 24 August 2021, [url](https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc10489.doc.htm)

<sup>748</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review | October-December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>749</sup> For example, MEE, Syria: Israeli air strikes reportedly kill 11 pro-government fighters, 9 June 2021, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>750</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3; SOHR, “De-escalation zone” | Regime forces shell Kabana hills in Latakia, and renew artillery fire on Hama and Idlib, 24 May 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Weekly Conflict Summary, 24-30 May 2021, 30 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2021, 6 June 2021, [url](#), p. 3; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 2; SOHR, “De-



In July 2022 shellings were continued to be reported in Sahl Al-Ghab, specifically in the villages of Al-Ankawi and Al-Sarmaniyah, with no reported casualties.<sup>751</sup>

In August 2021, as at least 29 airstrikes and daily shelling were recorded in ‘towns and villages around the frontlines in southern Idlib [...] northern Latakia and western Hama’.<sup>752</sup>

#### *Military operations in southern Hama governorate*

In a Skype meeting between an international security organisation and the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in April 2022, the security situation along the Hama-Homs corridor in southern Hama governorate was described as ‘relatively stable after a month [as of March 2022] without any serious insurgent activity’.<sup>753</sup> However, the security situation around Rastan city, located in northern Homs and southern Hama governorate, was described as ‘complicated’ due to the ongoing presence of anti-GoS armed groups, shelling between GoS forces and anti-GoS armed groups, and attacks on the road.<sup>754</sup>

#### *ISIL activities in eastern Hama governorate*

Gregory Waters and Charlie Winter observed in April 2021 that ISIL ‘is alive and well in central Syria – specifically in the part of rural Homs, eastern Hama, southern Aleppo, southern Raqqah, and western and southern Deir Ez-Zor that are collectively known as the Badia’.<sup>755</sup> On 6 April 2021, ISIL conducted a large attack by launching multiple ambushes against civilians and security forces on the highway along the east Hama-east Homs border, kidnapping more than 60 civilians which were later exchanged against detained ISIL family members.<sup>756</sup>

According to the UN Secretary-General, ‘multiple parties’ suffered attacks by ISIL during April and May 2021, resulting in ‘dozens of casualties’ in areas of Homs, Hama, Raqqah and Deir Ez-

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escalation zone” | Russian jet strikes Kabana hills in northern Latakia, while rockets hit positions in southern Idlib and western Hama, 24 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Along with exchange of fire on Idlib frontlines / Opposition Factions bombard regime positions in countryside of Latakia and Hama, 27 July 2021, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in July 2021, 4 August 2021, [url](#), p. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 2; Syrian Documentation Center, The Syrian army responds to the militants attacks in the countryside of “Hama” and “Idlib”, 14 August 2021, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in September 2021, 4 October 2021, [url](#), p. 3; Syrian Documentation Center, Dead and wounded militants during targeting by the Syrian army on their positions in the countryside of “Hama”, 9 November 2021, [url](#); Syrian Documentation Center, The Syrian-Russian Air Force raids the positions of the militants in the Hama and Idlib countryside, 3 January 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 26 February-4 March 2022, 10 March 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 19-25 March 2022, 31 March 2022, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2022, 7 June 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>751</sup> ANHA, Damascus troops shell positions in Sahl Al-Ghab north-west of Hama, 16 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>752</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Developments in north-west Syria and Ras Al Ain-Tell Abiad, Situation Report No. 30, August 2021, 13 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>753</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria, Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: International security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>754</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria, Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25, 27

<sup>755</sup> Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>756</sup> Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 4



Zawr Governorates'.<sup>757</sup> Reportedly, an attack by ISIL in June 2021 in eastern Hama was the last attack against a GoS outpost, wounding a few soldiers and causing some material damage.<sup>758</sup> In September 2021, ISIL attacked a joint GoS and Liwa Al Baqir position in the Ithariyah desert, killing eight military forces.<sup>759</sup> According to Gregory Waters and Charlie Winter, during the second half of 2021 ISIL cells 'reportedly withdrew from east Hama'.<sup>760</sup> In April 2022, increased airstrikes by Russia against ISIL positions were recorded in Raqqa and Hama governorates,<sup>761</sup> whilst the UN recorded 'sporadic attacks' by ISIL, including against civilians, amongst others in Hama.<sup>762</sup>

### *Israeli airstrikes*

In June 2021, Israeli airstrikes hit several military targets in central Syria, including in Hama governorate.<sup>763</sup> According to the SOHR, 12 Israeli airstrikes have been recorded across Syria between the beginning of 2022 and 13 May 2022, two of which were reported in Hama.<sup>764</sup>

ACLED reported that in April and May 2022, airstrikes targeting positions of the IRGC, Hezbollah, GoS and pro-Iran militias were conducted by Israel in western Hama.<sup>765</sup> During another attack in May 2022, five Syrians were killed, including one civilian, and seven injured, including a child,<sup>766</sup> during Israeli missile attacks on reportedly Iranian-linked targets in Masyaf area.<sup>767</sup>

### *Russian air and drone strikes*

In April 2021, an unidentified military drone, reportedly operated by Russia, killed one civilian and wounded one other during a strike in the area of Kherbet Elnaqs.<sup>768</sup> The month of June 2021 was described as seeing an 'unprecedented' increase in 'the pace of military operations'<sup>769</sup> in north-western Syria especially in ground bombardments, targeting populated areas, which resulted also in counter-shelling by non-state armed factions and HTS.<sup>770</sup> Further airstrikes were reported to have taken place in September 2021 on areas in Hama 'controlled

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<sup>757</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 5. For more information on one of these attacks in May 2021 see Syrian Documentation Center, The Syrian army responds to an ISI attack in Hama countryside, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>758</sup> Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>759</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 4-10 September 2021, 16 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>760</sup> Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>761</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 16-22 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 7-13 May 2022, 19 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>762</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>763</sup> MEE, Syria: Israeli air strikes reportedly kill 11 pro-government fighters, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>764</sup> SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>765</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 9-15 April 2022, 21 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>766</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2022, 7 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>767</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>768</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 17-23 April 2021, 28 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>769</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>770</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4

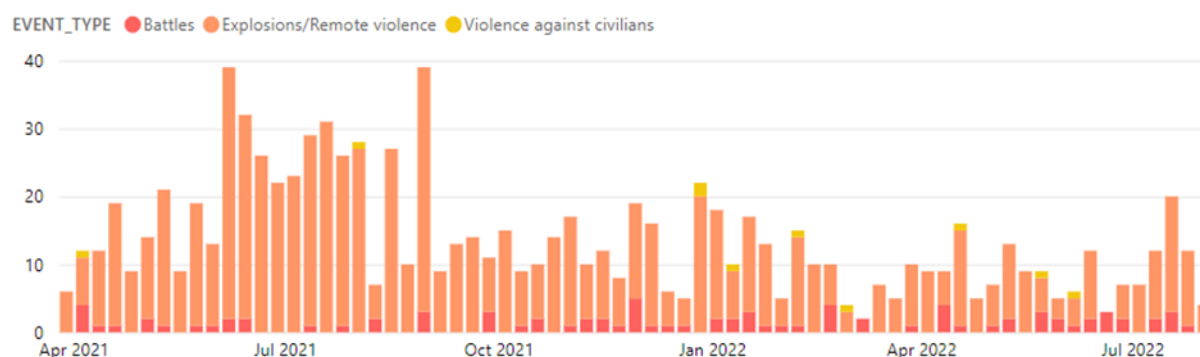
by rebels and Islamist factions',<sup>771</sup> and in October 2021<sup>772</sup> and in April 2022, with a concentration in the western suburbs of Hama.<sup>773</sup> On 22 April 2022, reportedly Russian missiles partially destroyed an unused high school building in al Enkawi village in the western suburbs of Hama governorate, which was, according to the SNHR, under 'joint control' of the 'Armed Opposition' and HTS at the time of the attack.<sup>774</sup>

### *Turkish shelling*

The month of June 2021 saw shelling conducted by Turkish forces on the Jourin military camp and other military facilities housing Syrian military personnel.<sup>775</sup> Additional information published within the reference period for this report could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

## **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period, there were 974 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Hama governorate. Of these, 86 were coded as battles, 878 explosions/remote violence and 10 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>776</sup>



**Figure 13: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hama governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>777</sup>**

<sup>771</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East 11-17 September 2021, 22 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>772</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in October 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>773</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>774</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>775</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 5 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>776</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>777</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

| District        | Battles   | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| As-Salamiyeh    | 21        | 158             | 5                          |
| As-Suqaylabiyah | 58        | 673             | 2                          |
| Hama            | 4         | 21              | 1                          |
| Masyaf          | 3         | 10              | 2                          |
| Muhradah        | -         | 16              | -                          |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>86</b> | <b>878</b>      | <b>10</b>                  |

**Figure 14: Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hama governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>778</sup>**

By far, most security incidents recorded by ACLED were in As-Suqaylabiyah district, followed by As-Salamiyeh district. Significantly lower level of security incidents were documented in the other districts during the reporting period (see Figure 14).

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Hama governorate during the reference period for this report included the following:

- On 6 April 2021, some 60-70 civilians and members of the GoS-allied militia NDF were kidnapped and a number of security forces members killed and injured by ISIL militants near the Tuwaynan Dam, along the Homs-Hama border, with the majority freed later that same day in exchange for detained family members of ISIL fighters.<sup>779</sup>
- One fisherman was killed, another injured, when Russia fired a missile against the Asi riverbanks on 19 April 2021.<sup>780</sup> On the same day, a man was killed and another injured as a result of a drone strike in the village of Khirbat al-Naqus.<sup>781</sup>

<sup>778</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>779</sup> Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#). Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 23; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>780</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>781</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), p. 19

- Following an attack on Na'ur Jurin town by armed groups against a GoS military camp on 20 June 2021, a two-year old girl was hit in the head by shrapnel and died, whilst her father and brother sustained injuries.<sup>782</sup>
- On 19 July 2021, 11 civilians were injured when a ground-based strike hit the village of Na'ur Jurin in north-western rural Hama.<sup>783</sup>
- Unguided artillery or rockets, originating from Jurin, under control of pro-GoS forces, hit a house in Qastoun village, both in Hama countryside, on 7 August 2021, 'killing four children, and injuring nine others (eight children and one woman), all members of the same family'.<sup>784</sup>
- On 1 September 2021, a girl was killed as her building was under artillery shelling in Na'our Jourin village in the western suburbs of Hama governorate by HTS.<sup>785</sup>
- Two civilians were injured when a strike hit a residential area in the village of Na'ur Jurin in north-western rural Hama on 23 October 2021.<sup>786</sup>
- On 30 October 2021, one civilian was killed, two children wounded, and homes and civilian properties damaged, when 'Turkish-backed armed factions' fired rockets against the town of Gorin in Al-Ghab Plain, north-western Hama.<sup>787</sup>
- Three civilian men were killed following the explosion of ERW on 27 February 2022 in the city of Salamiyah.<sup>788</sup>

<sup>782</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/48/70, 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 66; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>783</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>784</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>785</sup> Syrian Documentation Center, A child victim and several injuries as a result of the armed men's targeting of the town of "Jorin" west of Hama, 1 September 2021, [url](#); SNHR, On World Children's Day: Tenth Annual Report on Violations against Children in Syria, 20 November 2021, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>786</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>787</sup> Syrian Documentation Center, Civilian casualties due to militants attacks on "Al-Ghab Plain", Hama countryside, 30 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>788</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 22



### (c) Civilian fatalities

| Month        | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| January      | 11        | 4         |
| February     | 3         | 2         |
| March        | 49        | 4         |
| April        | 2         | 2         |
| May          | 4         | 3         |
| June         | 5         | 1         |
| July         | 3         | 11        |
| August       | 6         |           |
| September    | 3         |           |
| October      | 1         |           |
| November     | 1         |           |
| December     | -         |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>88</b> | <b>27</b> |

**Figure 15: Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Hama governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 88 civilian fatalities<sup>789</sup> in Hama governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 27 civilian fatalities (see Figure 15).<sup>790</sup>

#### **(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

In a report published in 2020, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) and the University of St Andrews (United Kingdom) stated that Hama City sustained 4.4 % of the total damage to physical capital in Syria.<sup>791</sup> Based on the UN Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Shelter Cluster assessed that in Hama governorate, 6.06 % of the overall population was living in damaged buildings.<sup>792</sup>

According to UNOCHA, explosive ordnance contamination is ‘widespread’ in Hama governorate.<sup>793</sup> In March 2022 the Carter Center published a report mapping unexploded ordnance in Syria between December 2012 and May 2021. According to the report, between 188 - 994 of explosive munitions were used in this period, contributing to ‘UXO contamination’ of 19 000 – 56 750.<sup>794</sup> Cluster munition attacks were documented in Hama governorate during 2020 and the first quarter of 2021.<sup>795</sup> The Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor documented

<sup>789</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>790</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>791</sup> UNESCWA and University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 51; The source defines loss to physical capital as including ‘private and public construction and equipment, such as housing stock, schools, hospitals and factories, and power, water, sanitation, transport and communications infrastructure’.

UNESCWA and University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 49

<sup>792</sup> Shelter Cluster/UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI Sector. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>793</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>794</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications, December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 20, 24

<sup>795</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178



and categorised in Hama governorate 25 civilian casualties, 15 civilians killed and 40 civilians injured & killed linked to 320 explosive incidents in the first quarter of 2021.<sup>796</sup> Non-exhaustive documented incidents were reported in April,<sup>797</sup> May,<sup>798</sup> July,<sup>799</sup> October,<sup>800</sup> November,<sup>801</sup> and December 2021,<sup>802</sup> where civilian deaths occurred due to explosions caused by landmines or munitions remnants, mostly in the suburbs. In 2022, such incidents were reported (non-exhaustive) in February,<sup>803</sup> March,<sup>804</sup> April,<sup>805</sup> and May,<sup>806</sup> with most of the victims being children.

### **(e) Displacement and return**

In 2021, in Hama governorate UNOCHA recorded approximately 5 200 IDP movements from the governorate, 820 IDP movements within the governorate, and about 1 200 IDP movements to the governorate.<sup>807</sup>

UNOCHA's 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview showed that, as of August 2021, there were 226 911 IDPs in Hama governorate, which was also the number of IDPs categorised as 'vulnerable residents'.<sup>808</sup>

In 2022, UNOCHA reported 212 IDP departures from and 98 arrivals to Hama governorate in January,<sup>809</sup> 486 departures and 530 arrivals in February,<sup>810</sup> 219 departures and 212 arrivals in March 2022<sup>811</sup> and 184 departures and 62 arrivals in April 2022.<sup>812</sup>

In 2021 in Hama governorate, UNOCHA recorded 5 000 IDP returnee movements from the governorate, 13 000 returnee movements within the governorate and 2 000 IDP returnee

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<sup>796</sup> Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Syrian Arab Republic: Explosive Hazard Risks Governorate Profile, May 2021, [url](#), Estimated # of civilians killed & injured per year [Open source data on explosive incidents since 2015] and Estimated # of explosive incidents by governorate, district & sub-district.

<sup>797</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2021, 5 May 2021, [url](#), p. 4; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020), S/2021/583, 17 June 2021, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>798</sup> SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>799</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>800</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/1029, 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>801</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in November 2021, 4 December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>802</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in December 2021, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Waters, G., The Central Syria ISIS insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 62

<sup>803</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>804</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in March 2022, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>805</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in April 2022, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>806</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in May 2022, 7 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>807</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>808</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 23, 102

<sup>809</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>810</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>811</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>812</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

movements to the governorate.<sup>813</sup> In 2022, UNOCHA recorded 247 spontaneous returns to the governorate from locations within Hama and from outside in January,<sup>814</sup> 728 in February,<sup>815</sup> and 594 in March,<sup>816</sup> and 589 in April 2022.<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>813</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

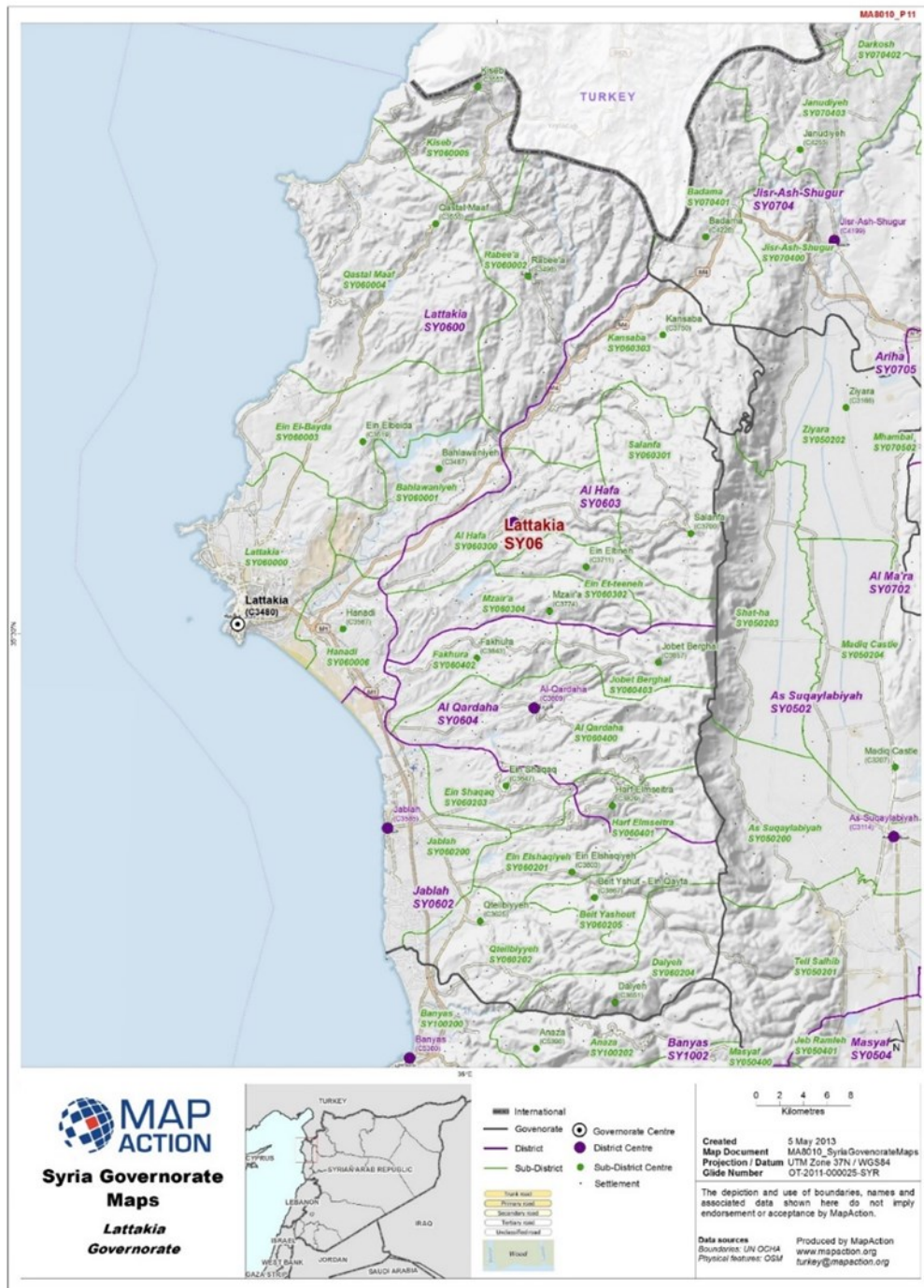
<sup>814</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>815</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>816</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>817</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

## 2.4. Latakia governorate



Map 10: © MapAction, Latakia governorate<sup>818</sup>

<sup>818</sup> MapAction, Syria 2013-2015, Latakia Governorate [map], last updated: 29 July 2016, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

### 2.4.1. General description of the governorate

Latakia governorate is situated in the north-west of the country and borders the Mediterranean Sea on its western border. To the north, it shares an international border with Turkey. Latakia is bordered by Tartous to the south, Hama to the east, and Idlib to the north-east. Latakia is divided into four administrative districts, from north to south: Latakia, Al-Haffa, Al-Qardaha, Jablah.<sup>819</sup>

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Latakia governorate to be of 1 345 855 as of 2021.<sup>820</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Latakia governorate to be of 1 274 433.<sup>821</sup> For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Latakia's population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### 2.4.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Latakia governorate is mainly controlled by GoS. Anti-GoS armed groups control a narrow slice of territory in the north-eastern corner of the governorate limited by the Turkish border and adjoining the anti-GoS controlled areas in Idlib and Hama governorates.<sup>822</sup>

#### (a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

For the reference period of the report, information on the SAA deployments in Latakia governorate could not be found. Information on particular SAA formations and units deployed in the governorate (before April 2021) is available in previous EUAA reports: [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

#### (b) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Russian forces were deployed to three different positions in GoS-controlled Latakia governorate.<sup>823</sup> The Hmeimin Air Base, described as Russia's main base<sup>824</sup>, as well as one of 'the main hubs' (along the navy base in the port of Tartous) for Russia's military intervention in Syria<sup>825</sup> is located in the governorate. However, it has been estimated that 'the Russian military is not well established outside the Hmeimin Base,'<sup>826</sup> and, in May 2022, there were reports that Russian forces had withdrawn to Hmeimin

<sup>819</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic. Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>820</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>821</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>822</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22 [Annex II] [map]; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>823</sup> See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>824</sup> Daraj, Syria: Did Russia Allow Israel to Bomb Latakia Port?, 19 December 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Russia reduces forces in Aleppo, transfers some to Hmeimim, 22 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>825</sup> VOA, Russia Expands Military Facilities in Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>826</sup> Al Shami, I., Mapping Russian Soft Power: How Coastal Syrians Engage with Russia, WINEP, 26 May 2022, [url](#)



Air Base and transferred other bases in Latakia governorate to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah.<sup>827</sup>

### **(c) Iran**

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Iranian forces were deployed to eight different positions in GoS-controlled Latakia governorate. Jusoor's map does not contain information on the presence of Lebanese Hezbollah in the governorate.<sup>828</sup> Back in March 2019, media sources speculated that GoS had given Iran the right to administer the port of Latakia.<sup>829</sup> In May 2022, the International Crisis Group noted the reports according to which the control of Russian bases in Latakia (the main Hmeimin base not included) had been transferred to IRGC and Hezbollah.<sup>830</sup>

### **(d) Anti-GoS armed groups**

During the reference period, HTS strengthened its control over areas controlled by anti-GoS armed groups in north-eastern Latakia governorate after forcing jihadist groups Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah to reduce their presence in the area.<sup>831</sup> For further information see the subsection on '*Infighting among anti-GoS armed groups*'

### **(e) Turkey**

According to Jusoor for Studies, in late 2021/early 2022, Turkish forces were deployed to two positions in the north-eastern parts of Latakia governorate controlled by anti-GoS armed groups.<sup>832</sup> Turkish military posts have been established in the governorate in the context of monitoring the wider Idlib de-escalation zone.<sup>833</sup>

## **2.4.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population**

### **(a) Security trends during the reporting period**

#### *The conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups*

According to the Carter Center, between April and June 2021, incidents related to the conflict between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups were reported also in Latakia governorate.<sup>834</sup> The UN

<sup>827</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>828</sup> See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>829</sup> See, e.g. L'Orient-Le Jour, L'Iran avance ses pions à Lattaquié, « terrain russe », 22 March 2019, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Iran to Take Lattakia Port, 18 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>830</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>831</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4; Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham driving out foreign factions, why?, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>832</sup> See the map in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>833</sup> See Asharq al-Awsat, Turkey Sets Up Military Post Near Latakia, 10 August 2020, [url](#); NPA, New Turkish Military Point Established in Latakia Countryside, Syria, 1 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>834</sup> See 'Figure 4' in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, [url](#), p. 4

Security Council reports ‘an increase in violence’ in the so-called Idlib de-escalation zone between June and July 2021, in the context of which air assaults took place also in Latakia governorate.<sup>835</sup> In June 2021, HTS and other anti-GoS armed groups operating in Idlib de-escalation area targeted GoS positions in the rural areas of northern Latakia with recurring shelling.<sup>836</sup> According to the Carter Center, 38 conflict events were reported in Latakia governorate between July and September and 23 between October and December 2021.<sup>837</sup> The hostilities were concentrated in the north-eastern part of the governorate controlled by the anti-GoS armed groups.<sup>838</sup>

According to Etana Syria, in October 2021, an attempted GoS advance in Jabal al-Turkman area in northern Latakia was repelled by anti-GoS armed groups. Russian airstrikes against targets in northern Latakia were also reported. These and other Russian airstrikes targeting anti-GoS areas in Idlib and Aleppo governorates caused wide ranging material damage and resulted in civilian casualties.<sup>839</sup>

Between January and March 2022, the Carter Center reported 24 conflict-related events in Latakia governorate.<sup>840</sup> As in 2021, the hostilities concentrated mainly in the north-eastern corner of the governorate under anti-GoS armed groups.<sup>841</sup> Between April and June 2022, the Carter Center reported 35 conflict-related events in Latakia governorate.<sup>842</sup> As in the earlier months of 2022, the hostilities were concentrated in the area controlled by the anti-GoS armed groups in north-eastern Latakia.<sup>843</sup>

According to Etana Syria, in April 2022, Russian airstrikes were carried out in Latakia governorate. In addition, shelling took place in Jabal al-Akrad area.<sup>844</sup> In May 2022, Etana Syria documented incidents of GoS shelling in northern Latakia governorate.<sup>845</sup> Hostilities were documented in the area also in June 2022.<sup>846</sup> These hostilities included shelling by HTS targeting GoS-controlled town of Kassab on 15 June, intense shelling by GoS forces on 18 June targeting anti-GoS areas in Latakia governorate<sup>847</sup> and shelling by anti-GoS armed groups targeting GoS positions in Jabal al-Akrad area.<sup>848</sup>

<sup>835</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 3

<sup>836</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>837</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>838</sup> See ‘Figure 3’ in Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>839</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 04 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>840</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>841</sup> See ‘Figure 4’ in Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>842</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>843</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics, April-June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>844</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 28 April 2022, 28 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>845</sup> See the map on ‘Military Developments in North-West Syria’ in Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – North-West Syria – 02 June 2022 [map], 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>846</sup> See the map on ‘Military Developments in North-West Syria’ in Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022 [map], 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>847</sup> Al-Monitor, Idlib sees new escalation between Syrian government, opposition forces, 22 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>848</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – 01 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)



In mid-July 2022, SOHR reported mutual rocket and heavy machine gun fire between GoS forces and anti-GoS armed groups of the Fath al-Mubin Operations Room.<sup>849</sup> In late July 2022, hostilities between GoS forces and Russia and anti-GoS armed groups escalated also in north-eastern Latakia governorate, with anti-GoS armed groups bombing GoS-controlled areas in Kabbana and Jabal al-Turkman region.<sup>850</sup> In mid-August 2022, SOHR reported exchanges of shelling and heavy machine-gun fire between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups along the Kabbana frontline in northern Latakia's Jabal al-Akrad region.<sup>851</sup>

### *Infighting among anti-GoS armed groups*

According to the Carter Center, between October and December 2021, a military operation by HTS targeting rival anti-GoS armed groups was reported in northern Latakia governorate.<sup>852</sup> The hostilities broke out on 25 October 2021 between HTS and two jihadist groups, Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah,<sup>853</sup> consisting for the most part of foreign fighters.<sup>854</sup> The goal of the operation was reportedly to extend HTS's control over the areas with alleged HAD and ISIL presence in northern Latakia and western Idlib countryside.<sup>855</sup> The hostilities ended on 27 October 2021, when, both, Jund al-Sham and Jund Allah members had withdrawn<sup>856</sup> their positions and HTS took over the areas controlled by these groups in the Jabal al-Turkman region<sup>857</sup> and returned to the frontlines between GoS and anti-GoS armed groups in Latakia governorate<sup>858</sup>. However, the International Crisis Group reports that the crackdown on jihadist groups in eastern Latakia and western Idlib governorates continued also in November 2021, with Jund Allah (still) as the primary target.<sup>859</sup> According to Al-Monitor, a security settlement between HTS and Jund Allah was announced on 7 November 2021. In accord with this settlement, Jund Allah members were to disarm and participate in a Sharia training course supervised by ETIM/TIP (for further information on ETIM/TIP, see section [2.1.2.](#)), after which they are allowed to reside in HTS-controlled areas as civilians.<sup>860</sup>

### *Israeli airstrikes*

According to the International Crisis Group, Israeli missile strikes against 'Iran-linked targets' took place on 5 May 2021 in rural Latakia (and Hama) governorates, killing one civilian.<sup>861</sup> According to the UNCOI, two Israeli air strikes hit the port in Latakia during the reporting period

<sup>849</sup> SOHR, De-escalation zone / Regime forces and Al-Fateh Al-Mubin factions trade fire on Jabal Al-Akrad and Sahl Al-Ghab frontlines, 14 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>850</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian escalation risks all-out conflict involving Turkey, Russia, Iran, 1 August 2022, [url](#); SOHR, With over 180 shells Factions shell 25 positions in regime areas in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and Lattakia, 22 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>851</sup> SOHR, Renewed bombardment / Al-Fath Al-Mubin rebels and regime forces exchange fire on frontlines of Jabal Al-Zawiyah, Sahl Al-Ghab and Jabal Al-Krad, 14 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>852</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>853</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October-December 2021, [url](#), p. 5; COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>854</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>855</sup> The Syrian Observer, Shishani Leaves and HTS Attacks Whoever Remains, 27 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>856</sup> According to the Syrian Observer, Jund al-Sham members moved to ETIM/TIP-controlled areas in rural Idlib governorate. The Syrian Observer, Shishani Leaves and HTS Attacks Whoever Remains, 27 October 2021, [url](#); Jund Allah members were relocated to (SNA-controlled) Afrin. COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>857</sup> COAR Global, Syria Update, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>858</sup> Enab Baladi, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham driving out foreign factions, why?, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>859</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Syria, November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>860</sup> Al-Monitor, HTS makes rival jihadis in Syria's Idlib take Sharia courses, give up weapons, 20 November 2021, [url](#)

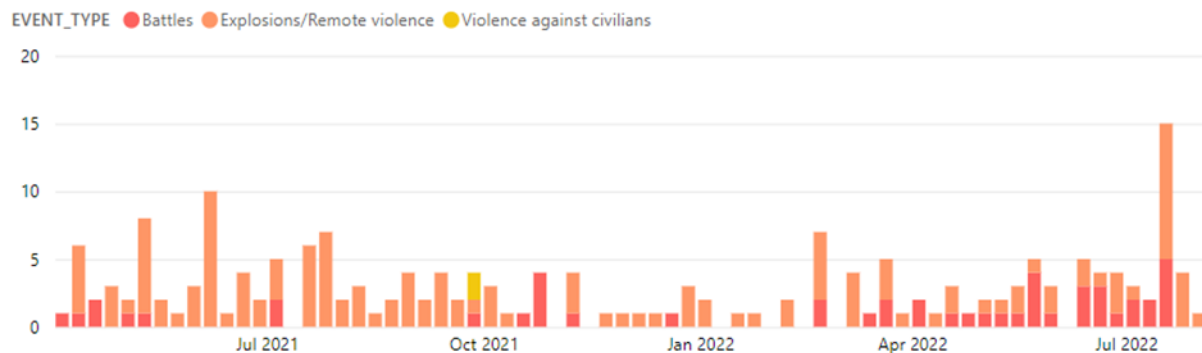
<sup>861</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2021, [url](#)

between July and December 2021.<sup>862</sup> These attacks took place on 7 and 28 December 2021.<sup>863</sup> According to the Guardian, the attack on 7 December targeted an Iranian arms shipment while the origin of ‘arms and munitions’ targeted in the 28 December attack was uncertain.<sup>864</sup> The International Crisis Group reports that two GoS affiliated militia members were killed in the later attack.<sup>865</sup> No civilian casualties were reported.

On 20 July 2022, Russian forces shot down two drones over Hmeimin Air Base. No casualties or damage were reported.<sup>866</sup>

### (b) Security incidents

During the reference period, there were 192 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Latakia governorate, of whom 49 were coded as battles, 141 explosions/remote violence and 2 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>867</sup>



**Figure 16. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Latakia governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>868</sup>**

<sup>862</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 5

<sup>863</sup> Guardian (The), Israeli airstrike sets port of Latakia ablaze, says Syrian media, 28 December 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>864</sup> Guardian (The), Israeli airstrike sets port of Latakia ablaze, says Syrian media, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>865</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>866</sup> New Arab (The), Russia says it shot down two drones over Hmeimim base in Syria, 21 July 2022, [url](#); Reuters, Russian forces in Syria shot down two drones aimed at air base - Interfax, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>867</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>868</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



| District     | Battles   | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Al-Hafa      | 40        | 102             | -                          |
| Al-Qardaha   | -         | 3               | -                          |
| Jablah       | 1         | 2               | -                          |
| Latakia      | 8         | 34              | 2                          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>49</b> | <b>141</b>      | <b>2</b>                   |

**Figure 17. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Latakia governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>869</sup>**

Around 74% of all security incidents documented by ACLED in Latakia governorate during the reference period were recorded in Al-Hafa district (see Figure 17).

<sup>869</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

### (c) Civilian fatalities

In 2021, SNHR recorded two civilian fatalities in Latakia governorate (both documented in August 2021)<sup>870</sup>, while for the first seven months of 2022 no civilian fatalities were documented.<sup>871</sup>

### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA), in the year 2021 several (2-3) attacks on healthcare were reported in Latakia governorate. SSA did not provide additional details on these attacks.<sup>872</sup> Between January and March 2022, WHO did not report any attacks on healthcare in Latakia governorate.<sup>873</sup> The extent of conflict-related infrastructure damage in Latakia governorate is discussed further in [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to Mine Action Review report published in September 2021, Latakia governorate has experienced attacks with cluster munitions since 2012.<sup>874</sup> According to the Carter Center report published in March 2022, explosive munitions have been used mainly in the northern parts of Latakia governorate,<sup>875</sup> and the governorate is contaminated by 3 000-9 250 UXO.<sup>876</sup> According

<sup>870</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>871</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>872</sup> WHO/ Health Cluster, Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care. Syrian Arab Republic. Annual Report 2021, 3 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>873</sup> WHO/ Health Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Attacks on health care in Syria, 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>874</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

<sup>875</sup> Estimation based on the map in Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20 [map]

<sup>876</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 20



to Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of two people in Latakia governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.<sup>877</sup>

#### **(e) Displacement and return**

UNOCHA stated that the number of IDPs in Latakia governorate was 449 317 (as of February 2022).<sup>878</sup> According to UNOCHA, approximately 7 000 IDPs were newly displaced in Latakia governorate in 2021. Of these, around 5 000 were displaced within Latakia governorate while displacements to Tartous (800) and Hama (200) were also registered. Around 6 000 IDPs from other governorates were displaced to Latakia. Significant numbers of arrivals from Aleppo (2 000), Hama (900), Homs (900), Tartous (800), Rural Damascus (400), Damascus (400) and Dar'a (200) were registered.<sup>879</sup>

Between January and June 2022, 3 339 IDPs were displaced from Latakia, of whom 2 330 were displaced within the governorate. In addition, 2 655 IDPs were displaced to Latakia from other governorates. UNOCHA estimates that, during the first half of 2022, access to services and livelihoods was the main incentive for these and other IDP movements within Syria.<sup>880</sup>

According to UNOCHA, 16 IDPs returned to their homes located in Latakia governorate in 2021, all of them were those displaced within Latakia governorate.<sup>881</sup> In January 2022, approx. 1 600 IDPs returned to their homes in Latakia governorate, of whom all (1 600) were originally displaced within the governorate, while 200 IDPs returned from Latakia to other governorates.<sup>882</sup> UNOCHA does not provide information on the factors determining these returns.<sup>883</sup> Between February and May 2022, no returns to Latakia governorate were reported.<sup>884</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>878</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>879</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>880</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements (June 2022), 5 August 2022, [url](#)

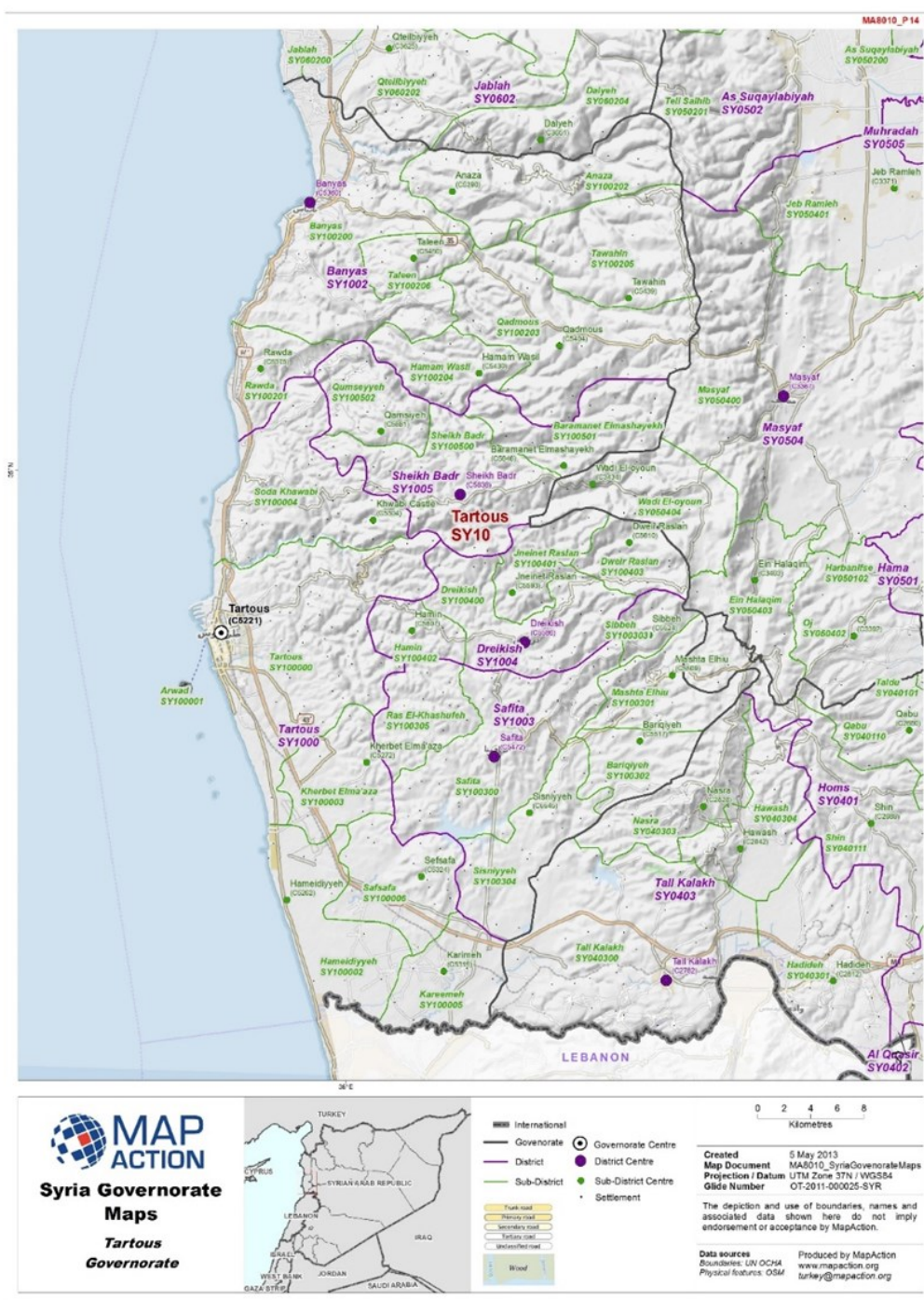
<sup>881</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>882</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>883</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (January 2022), 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>884</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (February 2022), 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (March 2022), 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (April 2022), 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns (May 2022), 13 July 2022, [url](#)

## 2.5. Tartous governorate



Map 11: © MapAction, Tartous governorate map<sup>885</sup>

<sup>885</sup> MapAction, Syria Governorate Maps – Tartous Governorate, last updated on 29 July 2019, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

### 2.5.1. General description of the governorate

Tartous and Latakia governorates form the coastal region of Syria. Tartous governorate borders the Mediterranean Sea in the west, Latakia governorate in the north, the governorates of Hama and Homs in the east, and Lebanon in the south.<sup>886</sup> It consists of five administrative districts: Baniyas, Dreikish, Safita, Sheikh Badr and Tartous City,<sup>887</sup> which are in turn subdivided into 27 sub-districts.<sup>888</sup> The governorate is considered a 'regime stronghold' and referred to as an 'island of stability'.<sup>889</sup>

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Tartous governorate in 2021 to be 1 171 802.<sup>890</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Tartous governorate to be 943 100.<sup>891</sup>

In a 2018 publication, the share of Alawites in Tartous City was estimated to be 80 %.<sup>892</sup>

In 2017, Syria and Russia signed a 49-year lease agreement, allowing an automatic renewal for another 25 years for the development and modernisation of a Russian permanent naval base (first established in 1971)<sup>893</sup> in the port of Tartous – the 'only navy facility the Kremlin possesses outside the former Soviet Union',<sup>894</sup> and which grants Russia a 'symbolic "power projection" into the Mediterranean Sea',<sup>895</sup> the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>896</sup> According to a news report of September 2021, a 'sizable' naval contingent is based at the port supporting Russian air and ground operations in Syria.<sup>897</sup> For example, it was reported in June 2021, that the Russian military conducted naval manoeuvres off the coast of Tartous governorate, including the 'search for enemy submarines and repelling air attacks'.<sup>898</sup>

### 2.5.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The governorate saw violent incidents in the earlier years of the conflict, especially in 2011 and 2013 when there were 'violent clashes in the Sunni-majority city of Baniyas', and in 2016 when ISIL targeted Tartous city in a number of separate bomb attacks, killing almost 100 people.<sup>899</sup> According to section 2.5.3.1 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#)

<sup>886</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Tartous governorate, January 2016, [url](#)

<sup>887</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profiles, June 2014, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>888</sup> UNHCR, UNHCR Syria / Tartous FO, End of year 2017 / Factsheet, January – December 2017, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>889</sup> Haider, S., Kinship Ties in Safe Areas During the Syrian Conflict: The Case of Tartous, MED, 12 May 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>890</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>891</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>892</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>893</sup> RIAC, Turkish and Russian Approaches to Security in the Eastern Mediterranean, 10 November 2020, [url](#). For more detailed information and analysis see Kjellen, J. and Lund, A., From Tartous to Tobruk, The Return of Russian Sea Power in the Eastern Mediterranean, FOI, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>894</sup> VOA, Russia Expands Military Facilities in Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>895</sup> McDermott, R., Moscow plans enhanced military basing in Syria, Jamestown Foundation, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>896</sup> ISW, Jennifer Cafarella, Testimony before US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism, "10 years of war: examining the ongoing conflict in Syria", 15 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>897</sup> RFE/RL, Putin, Assad Meet For First Time in Over A Year, 14 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>898</sup> Syrian Documentation Center, Russian military exercises on the Syrian coasts, 30 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>899</sup> Reuters, Bombs kill nearly 150 in Syrian government-held cities: monitor, 23 May 2016, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria's war: Blasts hit Tartous, Homs, Hasaka, 6 September 2016, [url](#)

there were two security incidences recorded in 2019, whilst only one security incident ('violence against civilians') was recorded between 1 January 2020 and 31 March 2021 – see section 2.5.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

During the reference period, the whole of Tartous governorate was under GoS control.<sup>900</sup>

For a detailed background overview of the conflict preceding March 2020 please consult section 2.5.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

#### **(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups**

Very limited specific information was found on the SAA and its affiliated armed groups among the sources consulted within time constraints. For deployments of the SAA in Tartous governorate as of May 2021 see section 2.5.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to the sources interviewed by the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), the Syrian president's brother Maher al-Assad, who is commander of the SAA's 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division,<sup>901</sup> controls the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartous, whose official and unofficial ports have been considered a hotbed for smuggling of illegal goods into and out of Syria, which in turn are used to finance militias under GoS control.<sup>902</sup>

#### **(b) Russia**

Whilst the presence of Russian naval and airforce was noted,<sup>903</sup> very limited additional information published within the referencing period for this report stating the composition, strength and additional locations of Russian forces in Tartous governorate could be found among the sources consulted within time constraints of this report. For such information as of May 2021 see section 2.5.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Russia had one stationing site in Tartous governorate.<sup>904</sup>

In February 2022 it was reported that six large assault ships by the Russian Navy<sup>905</sup> had arrived at the port of Tartous, whose location was considered the 'logistical center of the Russian Navy'.<sup>906</sup>

<sup>900</sup> See the maps in Jusoor for Studies, Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [map], 24 December 2021, [url](#); UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>901</sup> Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>902</sup> OCCRP, Assad regime implicated in massive Captagon bust, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>903</sup> For example VOA, Russia Expands Military Facilities in Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Russian Naval Ships Arrive at Syria's Tartus, 5 February 2022, [url](#); MEE, Russia's defence minister arrives in Syria ahead of naval drills, 15 February 2022, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>904</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>905</sup> SOHR, Russian Naval Ships Arrive at Syria's Tartus, 5 February 2022, [url](#); MEE, Russia's defence minister arrives in Syria ahead of naval drills, 15 February 2022, [url](#); SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>906</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3



### (c) Anti-GoS armed groups

According to an international security organisation and an expert at Omran Center for Strategic Studies, both interviewed in October 2020, anti-GoS groups were not present in the governorate of Tartous.<sup>907</sup> No further information on the presence of anti-GoS armed groups was found during the reference period.

## 2.5.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

Two Israeli airstrikes have been documented in the reporting period.<sup>908</sup>

On 3 November 2021, Israel's military targeted Tartous City with airstrikes aiming to hit Iran-controlled arms depots,<sup>909</sup> whilst injuring two soldiers.<sup>910</sup> On 2 July 2022, Israeli airstrikes south of Tartous, near the town of al-Hamidiyah, hit former poultry farms reportedly now used by Lebanon's Hezbollah,<sup>911</sup> wounding two civilians.<sup>912</sup>

### (b) Security incidents

During the reference period, there were six security incidents recorded by ACLED in Tartous governorate, of whom one was coded as battle, three incidents of remote violence and 2 of violence against civilians (see Figure 18).

| District     | Battles  | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|----------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Banyas       | -        | 1               | -                          |
| Safita       | -        | -               | 2                          |
| Tartous      | 1        | 2               | -                          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>3</b>        | <b>2</b>                   |

<sup>907</sup> DIS, Syria – security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Tartous, Latakia and Quneitra [original sources: International security organisation (p. 40) and Omran (p. 52), 18 December 2020, [url](#), p. 40 and 52]

<sup>908</sup> SOHR, SOHR: Syria says Israel struck near Homs, Tartus in the third alleged attack in 2 weeks, 10 November 2021, [url](#);

MEE, Israel strike on Syria hits poultry farms, wounds two civilians, ministry says, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>909</sup> SOHR, SOHR: Syria says Israel struck near Homs, Tartus in the third alleged attack in 2 weeks, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>910</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch - Syria, November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>911</sup> MEE, Israel strike on Syria hits poultry farms, wounds two civilians, ministry says, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>912</sup> Al Jazeera, Syria says Israeli strike on Tartous coast wounds two civilians, 2 July 2022, [url](#)

**Figure 18: Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Tartous governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>913</sup>**

Within the time constraints and during the reference period for this report, illustrative security incidents targeting or impacting civilians could not be found among the sources consulted beyond those relating to the Israeli airstrike wounding two civilians in July 2022 and reported on further above.

**(c) Civilian fatalities**

SNHR did not record any civilian fatalities in Tartous either in 2021<sup>914</sup> or the first seven months of 2022.<sup>915</sup>

**(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

According to Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, in all governorates, with the exception of Tartous governorate, cluster munitions have been extensively used since 2012.<sup>916</sup> The same

<sup>913</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>914</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>915</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13; SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>916</sup> Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Syria impact, last updated: 15 November 2021, [url](#)



source did not record any civilian casualties (injured or killed) linked to four explosive incidents in the first quarter of 2021.<sup>917</sup>

### **(e) Displacement and return**

In 2021, UNOCHA recorded in Tartous governorate approximately 1 000 IDP movements from the governorate, 3 000 IDP movements within the governorate, and 4 000 IDP movements to the governorate.<sup>918</sup> UNOCHA showed that, as of August 2021, there were 182 297 IDPs in Tartous governorate, who were also classified as ‘vulnerable residents’.<sup>919</sup>

In 2022, UNOCHA reported 85 IDP departures from Tartous governorate in January,<sup>920</sup> 70 in February,<sup>921</sup> 65 in March<sup>922</sup> and 114 in April 2022<sup>923</sup>.

As regards returns, UNOCHA in 2021 recorded for Tartous governorate approximately 1 000 IDP returnee movements from the governorate, and no IDP returnee movements within the governorate nor to the governorate.<sup>924</sup> In 2022, UNOCHA reported no spontaneous returns to the governorate from locations within Tartous and outside in January,<sup>925</sup> February,<sup>926</sup> March<sup>927</sup> or April 2022.<sup>928</sup>

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<sup>917</sup> Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, Syrian Arab Republic: Explosive Hazard Risks Governorate Profile, May 2021, [url](#), Estimated # of civilians killed & injured per year [Open source data on explosive incidents since 2015] and Estimated # of explosive incidents by governorate, district & sub-district

<sup>918</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>919</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 104

<sup>920</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>921</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>922</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>923</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>924</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

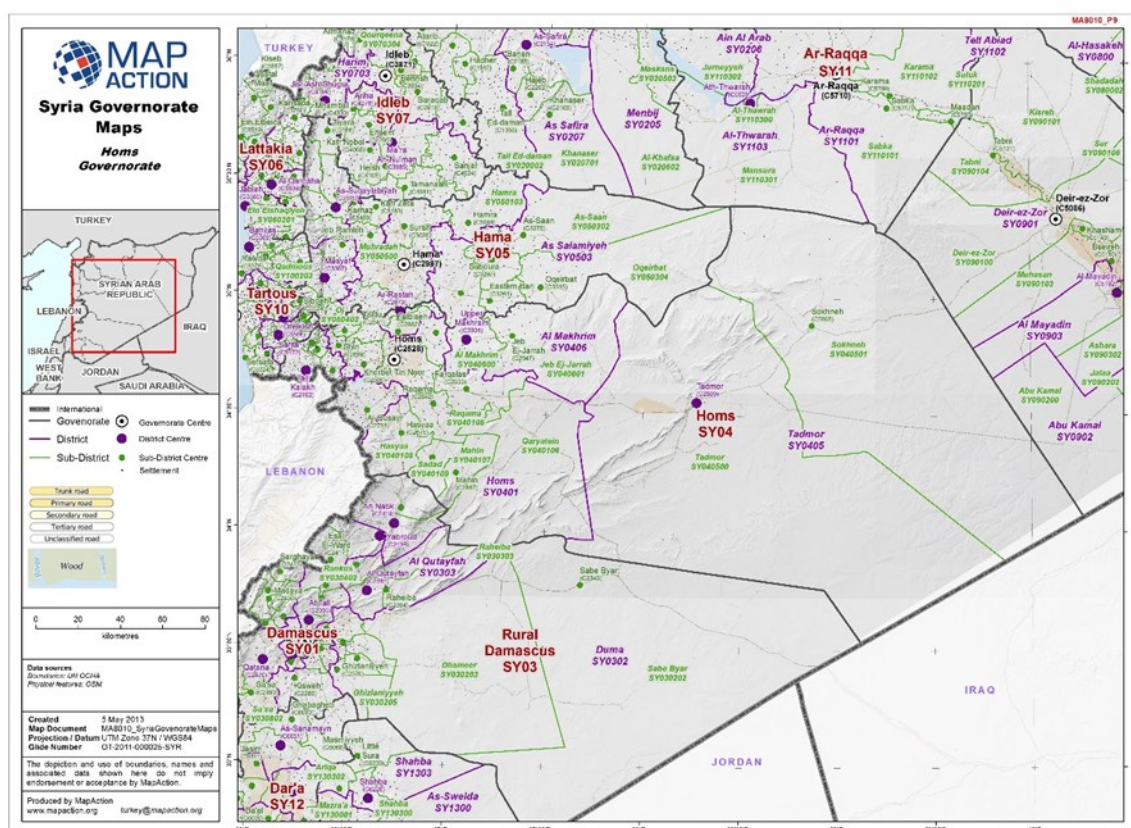
<sup>925</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>926</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>927</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>928</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

## 2.6. Homs governorate



Map 12: © MapAction, Homs governorate map<sup>929</sup>

### 2.6.1. General description of the governorate

Homs governorate is located in central Syria and has borders with Iraq to the east and Lebanon to the west. It has internal borders with Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, Hama, Tartous, and Rural Damascus governorates.<sup>930</sup> The Syrian E-Government website stated that Homs governorate shares an international border with Jordan to the east as well.<sup>931</sup> UNOCHA mentioned in a February 2022 report that Homs governorate comprised six administrative districts: Homs, Al-Makhrim, Al-Qusayr, Ar-Rastan, Tadmor (Palmyra) and Tall Kalakh.<sup>932</sup> Homs was the largest governorate in Syria in terms of surface, and the third in terms of population, as of May 2014. The capital of the governorate is Homs city which is also the central city of Homs district.<sup>933</sup>

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Homs governorate in 2021 to be 1 790 376.<sup>934</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Homs

<sup>929</sup> MapAction, Homs Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>930</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

<sup>931</sup> Syria, E-Government, سورية [About Syria], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>932</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 102

<sup>933</sup> UN Habitat and SDC, City Profile – Homs: Multi Sector Assessment, May 2014, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>934</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

governorate to be 1 520 596.<sup>935</sup> With regards to the capital of the governorate, the CIA estimated that the population of Homs city was 1 398 000 in June 2022.<sup>936</sup> For more information on the ethnic and religious composition of Homs population, see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

In 2015, Homs City was reported to be one of the country's most important industrial centres. Reportedly, Syria's largest oil refinery stood there, and the city was also a 'hub of an important road and rail network' linking the country's main towns and cities.<sup>937</sup> Homs was also reported to have a strategic importance for GoS because it connected the capital Damascus with coastal GoS strongholds.<sup>938</sup> In 2019, it was reported that Homs governorate had two oil fields (Hayan and Jazal) as well as seven gas fields.<sup>939</sup> Furthermore, in June 2022, the first gas well in a gas field in Zumlat al-Muhr, which was reportedly discovered in late 2021, was inaugurated in Homs governorate.<sup>940</sup>

## 2.6.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The city of Homs was among the most impacted cities in the war. Its old part suffered a two-year-long siege till it became accessible again in May 2014.<sup>941</sup> Sectarian violence and forced displacement occurred there in 2011 and only few neighbourhoods maintained their mixed sectarian elements such as Al-Waer, Ikrima, and Id-Dikhar.<sup>942</sup> In May 2017, the SAA captured the totality of Homs city and hundreds of rebels and their family members were evacuated.<sup>943</sup>

In early 2018, the SAA launched a military operation in northern rural Homs<sup>944</sup> which forced the rebel groups in the region to either negotiate their exit to northern Syria or to reconcile with the GoS.<sup>945</sup> The GoS forces seized the last rebel enclave in Homs on 15 May 2018,<sup>946</sup> and buses evacuated rebels and their families from the region to northern Syria.<sup>947</sup> For more information on the background of the conflict in Homs governorate up until April 2021, see the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

<sup>935</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>936</sup> US, CIA, World Factbook, Syria, last updated: 7 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>937</sup> BBC News, Homs: Syrian revolution's fallen 'capital', 9 December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>938</sup> Reuters, Battles intensify in Syria's strategic city of Homs, 8 July 2013, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), Decoder:

The Battle for Khaldiyyeh, 30 July 2013, [url](#)

<sup>939</sup> BBC Arabic, الثروات الموجودة في مناطق سيطرة الأكراد شرق سوريا [Resources in the Kurds-controlled areas in eastern Syria], 7 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>940</sup> COAR, Recent Tensions Highlight the Enduring Syrian Refugee Crisis, 13 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>941</sup> UN Habitat and SDC, City Profile – Homs: Multi Sector Assessment, May 2014, [url](#), pp. 3, 4

<sup>942</sup> Saleh, M., حوار مع محمد (أبو علي) صالح: الطائفية ومجزرة الساعة في حمص [Dialogue with Muhammad (Abu Ali) Saleh: Sectarianism and the Clock Massacre in Homs], 14 June 2019, [url](#); Muhammad Saleh is a Marxist Syrian writer and activist.

<sup>943</sup> Reuters, Syrian rebels leave last opposition district in Homs, 21 May 2017, [url](#); France24, Assad regime regains total control of Syrian city of Homs, 21 May 2017, [url](#)

<sup>944</sup> AA, Assad begins attacks to retake rebel-held areas in Homs, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>945</sup> Enab Baladi, After Daraa, seeds of unrest in Homs, 24 August 2021, [url](#); RFE/RL, Syrian Rebels Accept Russian-Brokered Surrender Deal In Homs Enclave, 3 May 2018, [url](#); VOA, Syrian Government Seizes Last Rebel Enclave in Homs, 15 May 2018, [url](#); AP News, Syrian government forces seize last rebel enclave in Homs, 15 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>946</sup> AP News, Syrian government forces seize last rebel enclave in Homs, 15 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>947</sup> Homs News, بانوراما الأحداث التي مرت بها حمص عام 2018 [Panorama of the main events that Homs witnessed in 2018], 31 December 2018, [url](#); Syria Direct, Rebel forces and civilians begin evacuating besieged Homs countryside: 'We don't want another Ghouta', 7 May 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Rebels begin evacuation of Syria's last besieged enclave, 7 May 2018, [url](#)

In a map produced by the UN, as of December 2021 the majority of Homs governorate was shown to be under GoS control, with some ISIL presence in the east of the governorate.<sup>948</sup> The map further shows a so-called US-declared 55-km exclusion zone<sup>949</sup> stretching between the southeast of the governorate and neighbouring Rural Damascus governorate around Tanf,<sup>950</sup> controlled by US troops and Mughawir al-Thawra (MaT),<sup>951</sup> a rebel group<sup>952</sup> consisting of former Syrian military officers.<sup>953</sup>

According to a Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS, the GoS had control of towns in eastern parts of the governorate, including Tadmor and Al-Sukhna. The old city of Homs was controlled by different GoS intelligence services. Furthermore, in northern Homs governorate, GoS forces were in control of government buildings and police stations, while former rebel fighters who had reconciled with the government were in control of the rest of that area and the cities.<sup>954</sup> The Lebanese Hezbollah controlled the area in and around Al-Qusayr city, southwest of Homs city.<sup>955</sup>

In March 2022, an analysis published by MEI reported that Iran controlled parts of the border along Homs governorate to the east.<sup>956</sup> Outside of the urban areas and towns in the Badia<sup>957</sup> desert, ISIL was present, according to DIS sources. The group reportedly operated northeast of Tadmor, around Abu Rajmin, which included regions 30 to 50 km east of Homs city.<sup>958</sup> Below is a description of the actors present on the ground in Homs governorate and their places of deployment where information is available.

#### **(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups**

For deployments of the SAA in Homs governorate as of May 2021 see section 2.6.2 of the previous [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

In February 2021, it was reported that the SAA had ‘fixed military posts’ manned by the 18<sup>th</sup> Division, the 11<sup>th</sup> Division-Tanks, the Badia National Defense, Military Security Shield Forces, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division’s Security Office in Al-Sukhna, where the Iranian Baqir Brigade and the

<sup>948</sup> UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>949</sup> UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>950</sup> Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>951</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 64

<sup>952</sup> Edwards, M., and Al-Homsi, O., Jordan returns refugees to desolate Syrian border camp, rights groups cry foul, TNH, 16 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>953</sup> WINEP, D., The Future of al-Tanf Garrison in Syria, WINEP, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>954</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), pp. 27-28

<sup>955</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 27; Enab Baladi, Eight years under Hezbollah’s rule: al-Qusayr today, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>956</sup> Hassan, M. and Al-Ahmed, S., Iran’s growing presence in Syria’s al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>957</sup> ‘Parts of rural Homs, eastern Hama, southern Aleppo, southern Raqqah, and western and southern Deir ez-Zor [...] are collectively known as the Badia’. Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>958</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 28



Quick Reaction Force, both affiliated with the Badia Security Branch functioning under the Military Security in Tadmor city, were reportedly present too.<sup>959</sup> In August 2021, Enab Baladi reported that GoS had increased the number of military troops and equipment in the city of Homs and northern rural Homs.<sup>960</sup>

A security analyst for an NGO working in GoS-held areas stated, in a February 2022 report, that Military Intelligence in northern Homs had a 'robust presence' in Talbiseh and Rastan.<sup>961</sup> In March 2022, due to a major operation against ISIL cells,<sup>962</sup> the GoS dispatched reinforcements from its Special Forces and the Desert Commandos Regiment to eastern rural Homs, in particular to Tadmor and Al-Sukhna. In support of the operation, Iranian militias too sent 'huge military reinforcements' there. This included the dispatch of 'large numbers' of the Afghan Fatemiyoun<sup>963</sup> militia and the Iraqi militia Al-Nujaba from Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa and Hama governorates. Russia also sent major reinforcements from the NDF militias in Hama to Tadmor in March 2022.<sup>964</sup> Reportedly, the Zainabiyoun militia, the Iraqi Hezbollah and the 47<sup>th</sup> Regiment as well as Division 17 participated in the operation in the area's Jabal Ma'moor region.<sup>965</sup>

The presence of NDF was reported in the eastern countryside of Homs governorate.<sup>966</sup>

Russian forces and the Russian-backed Syrian 5<sup>th</sup> Corps<sup>967</sup> started withdrawing or regrouping from some positions in Homs governorate in early 2022.<sup>968</sup> The large Mahin depot for military arms east of Homs city was turned over to the Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias in April 2022, after the Russian forces and the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps withdrew to the military airport in Tadmor. In mid-April, they withdrew from there too and turned the military airport over to Iranian backed militias.<sup>969</sup> Also, an Enab Baladi article published in March 2022 indicated that the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps had a presence in the Tadmor desert.<sup>970</sup>

Furthermore, a May 2022 Baladi News article indicated that dozens of Iranian militias were operating in Homs governorate, particularly in Tadmor and its surroundings. According to the article, this region was 'practically completely under Iranian control'.<sup>971</sup> The Fatemiyoun Brigade, together with GoS forces and other pro-Iranian militias, reportedly held the Tiyas

<sup>959</sup> Enab Baladi, Al-Sukhna predominated by security chaos as regime and Iranian forces grapple with IS, 20 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>960</sup> Enab Baladi, After Daraa, seeds of unrest in Homs, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>961</sup> Hall, N., Rescuing Aid in Syria, CSIS, 15 February 2022, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>962</sup> Baladi News, خسائر كبيرة لقوات النظام في حمص [Heavy losses for the regime forces in Homs], 10 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>963</sup> MEMO, Iran sends military reinforcements to Syria's Homs, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>964</sup> MEMO, Iran sends military reinforcements to Syria's Homs, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>965</sup> Baladi News, خسائر كبيرة لقوات النظام في حمص [Heavy losses for the regime forces in Homs], 10 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>966</sup> For example, Baladi News, هجوم جديد يستهدف قوات النظام بريف حمص.. تكبدت خسائر مادية وبشرية.. [Human and material loss: another attack on regime forces in Homs countryside], 24 December 2021, [url](#); Baladi News, تحت أنظار الطائرات الروسية.. هجوم مسلح يخلف خسائر بصوف ميليشيا "الدفاع الوطني" شرق حمص [Under the gaze of Russian airplanes: armed attack causes losses in the ranks of the 'National Defense' militia east of Homs], 15 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>967</sup> MEMO, Russia, Iran-backed militias clash in Syria's Palmyra, 5 May 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Homs: Hezbollah joins recruitment market, Fifth Corps most preferred by needy youth, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>968</sup> Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine - Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>969</sup> Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine - Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>970</sup> Enab Baladi, Homs: Hezbollah joins recruitment market, Fifth Corps most preferred by needy youth, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>971</sup> Baladi News, حمص.. خسائر لـ "حزب الله" واشتباكات بين الحرس الثوري و"الدفاع الوطني" [Homs: Hezbollah's losses and clashes between the IRGC and the National Defense Forces], 4 May 2022, [url](#)

airbase (T4 airbase).<sup>972</sup> Furthermore, Afghan and Iraqi militias under IRGC command reportedly controlled the road connecting Deir Ez-Zor and Homs, while the road between Homs city and Tadmor was controlled by the 4<sup>th</sup> Division of the SAA.<sup>973</sup> The presence of Russian-backed private security companies in Homs governorate was noted in the reference period, without additional details.<sup>974</sup>

### (b) Lebanese Hezbollah

A Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS in April 2022 reported that the Lebanese Hezbollah controlled the area in and around Al-Qusayr city, southwest of Homs city.<sup>975</sup> In late March 2022, it was reported that the IRGC had seized the Zumlat al-Muhr gas field in the desert in Homs from GoS. Reportedly then, Hezbollah, on orders of the IRGC dispatched its forces to the gas field<sup>976</sup> to turn it into a military base.<sup>977</sup>

### (c) ISIL

ISIL maintained pockets in Homs governorate.<sup>978</sup> ISIL cells were reportedly present in the Syrian Badia region,<sup>979</sup> 'primarily in the central Badia desert in Homs'<sup>980</sup> where they extended through the eastern countryside of Homs and Hama and reached the rural areas of Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa.<sup>981</sup> From there, it continued to launch attacks in the named governorates.<sup>982</sup> In July 2022, the UN Security Council reported that ISIL had mounted 'sporadic attacks' in Syria, which were focused on a number of Syrian governorates, including the eastern part of Homs

<sup>972</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (2-8 October 2021), 13 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>973</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>974</sup> Waters, G. The Central Syria ISIS Insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>975</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>976</sup> COAR, Recent Tensions Highlight the Enduring Syrian Refugee Crisis, 13 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>977</sup> Ayn al-Furat, حزب الله اللبناني ينشر عناصره في حفل زملة المهر ببادية حمص بأوامر من الحرس الثوري الإيراني [The Lebanese Hezbollah dispatches its forces to the Zumlat al-Muhr field in the Badia of Homs, on orders of the IRGC], March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>978</sup> Baladi News, تكبدت خسائر مادية وبشرية.. هجوم جديد يستهدف قوات النظام بريف حمص [Human and material loss: another attack on regime forces in Homs countryside], 24 December 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I October-December 2021, 28 March 2021, [url](#), p. 13; UN Security Council, Fourteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2022/63, 28 January 2022, [url](#), para. 29; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>979</sup> Baladi News, تكبدت خسائر مادية وبشرية.. هجوم جديد يستهدف قوات النظام بريف حمص [Human and material loss: another attack on regime forces in Homs countryside], 24 December 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I October-December 2021, 28 March 2021, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>980</sup> UN Security Council, Fourteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2022/63], 28 January 2022, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>981</sup> Baladi News, صفحات موالية تتعي 7 من قوات النظام قتلوا في حماة وحمص [7 regime forces, including an officer, killed in Hama and Homs according to local sources], 8 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>982</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 11; UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) 1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2022/83, 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 36



governorate, ‘utilizing insurgent tactics’.<sup>983</sup> According to a January 2022 UN Secretary General report, the hideouts in the desert were used ‘for training, possibly for regional operations or even to revive an external operations capability’.<sup>984</sup> According to the July 2022 UN Security Council report, some of its Member States believed that ISIL had taken up its ‘training activities that had been previously curtailed, especially in the Badiya desert’.<sup>985</sup>

In July 2022, the International Crisis Group reported that ISIL activity had remained low in the governorate in early 2022, although the group, having come under ‘increased pressure’, had shifted to a ‘defensive stance, relying on mines, other explosive devices and harassing fire to slow regime patrols and keep them out of the Badia’s remotest parts’. The source further elaborated that the group had reached capabilities comparable to those in 2019 despite the experienced challenges. ISIL cells had further carried out 10 to 15 monthly attacks on GoS forces, the majority of which were carried out in Deir Ez-Zor and eastern Homs governorate. According to the International Crisis Group this trend had continued into 2022, but with ISIL’s position having become ‘slightly stronger’ than in 2019. Moreover, the group had penetrated southern rural Homs since the end of 2021 close to the town of Mheen and was starting to gradually carry out operations there.<sup>986</sup>

#### **(d) Anti-GoS armed groups**

An August 2021 Enab Baladi article reported that the al-Tawhid Army was one of the major factions of rural Homs governorate and that its members have had their headquarters in the city of Talbiseh. They were the only faction to maintain its military formation after reaching a settlement in early 2018 with GoS under Russian guarantees. Russian security clearances allowed the group’s members to possess weapons. Reportedly, the GoS, however, started attempts to dissolve the group by causing some to join the conflict in Libya as mercenaries and by imprisoning many of the group’s leaders. According to the same source, members of the group, who were still in the region, were operating via loosely organised sleeper cells in GoS-held areas, from where they were targeting officers of the GoS and security elements in the area.<sup>987</sup> Sources indicated the presence of the anti-GoS armed group ‘Saraya 2011’ in Homs governorate, who claimed to have killed two officers of GoS forces in the second half of 2021.<sup>988</sup> For additional information on anti-GoS groups as of May 2021 see section 2.6.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

<sup>983</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>984</sup> UN Security Council, Fourteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2022/63], 28 January 2022, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>985</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>986</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>987</sup> Enab Baladi, After Daraa, seeds of unrest in Homs, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>988</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review I July Through September 2021, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 10; Enab Baladi, فصیل مسلح یثبنی قتل عنصر من قوات النظام في ريف حمص [An armed faction claims the killing of a member of the regime forces in Homs], 12 August 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, After Daraa, seeds of unrest in Homs, 24 August 2021, [url](#)

## 2.6.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

During the reference period for this report, the security situation in Homs governorate remained stable, with a decrease of security incidents in urban centres.<sup>989</sup> Attacks on and by militias and ISIL took place in the Badia desert region.<sup>990</sup> According to an April 2021 article by the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), ‘ungoverned spaces’, like in the Homs desert, had emerged due to the ‘complexity of the security landscape’ in the country.<sup>991</sup> In mid-April 2021, a major GoS operation against ISIL hideouts started in eastern Homs. Forces of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, NDF and Syrian private military contractors, supported by Russian airstrikes, seized Kawm, a strategic town at the Highway to Raqqa, from ISIL. Subsequently, the area, previously ‘heavily populated’ by ISIL cells, was emptied from ISIL activity. From June until autumn 2021, GoS proceeded via smaller operations stepwise into the mountains north of Tadmor.<sup>992</sup>

In March 2022, another major operation in the Badia region of eastern rural Homs against ISIL hideouts was carried out by Russian and Iranian forces<sup>993</sup> and the GoS, particularly in Tadmor and Al-Sukhna.<sup>994</sup>

In May 2022, fighting between pro-Iranian militias and Russian forces was reported in this area as well.<sup>995</sup> Furthermore, military areas and sites which belong to Iranian forces and Iran-affiliated militias who operate in Homs governorate were reportedly targeted by Israeli airstrikes.<sup>996</sup> In the northern part of Homs governorate, in particular around Rastan city, the security situation was described as ‘complicated’ due to the presence of former GoS armed groups,<sup>997</sup> many members of which have reconciled with the GoS.<sup>998</sup> Shelling between anti-GoS forces and GoS-forces was frequent in the area.<sup>999</sup> Moreover, sources stated that kidnappings occurred in several Syrian governorates, including Homs governorate.<sup>1000</sup> Reportedly, former anti-GoS groups have committed abductions and extortions of

<sup>989</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 25; Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Syria Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 7, [source: Austrian Embassy in Damascus] 24 January 2022, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>990</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Syrië [Country of origin information report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>991</sup> GIGA, Not a Storm in a Teacup: The Islamic State after the Caliphate, April 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>992</sup> Waters, G. The Central Syria ISIS Insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>993</sup> Baladi News, خسائر كبيرة لقوات النظام في حمص [Heavy losses for the regime forces in Homs], 10 March 2022, [url](#);

<sup>994</sup> MEMO, Iran sends military reinforcements to Syria's Homs, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>995</sup> MEMO, Russia, Iran-backed militias clash in Syria's Palmyra, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>996</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, November 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>997</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation and international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), pp. 25, 27

<sup>998</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>999</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>1000</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Syrië [Country of origin information report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 17



businessmen on the roads in the northern Homs area, towards Rastan city and on the way to Talbiseh city.<sup>1001</sup>

An international security organisation interviewed by DIS in its May 2022 report stated that it had not documented any security incidents caused by the Hezbollah in the area in and around Al-Qusayr city since August 2021.<sup>1002</sup>

### *ISIL activities*

ISIL was active in the eastern part of Homs governorate in the reference period, where it carried out attacks<sup>1003</sup> on units and convoys of the SAA,<sup>1004</sup> SAA-affiliated forces<sup>1005</sup> and civilians.<sup>1006</sup> While in June 2021, almost daily clashes between ISIL and GoS forces or militia forces had reportedly occurred for months in the Badia region,<sup>1007</sup> the UN Secretary General reported in January 2022 that the number of ISIL attacks had decreased.<sup>1008</sup> However, according to an international security organisation interviewed by DIS, the first quarter of 2022 saw an increase in ISIL attacks in eastern Homs governorate, particularly in the central desert of Homs governorate in March 2022,<sup>1009</sup> which resulted in the abovementioned military intervention by the GoS and affiliated forces.<sup>1010</sup>

Russian forces carried out air strikes against ISIL hideouts in eastern Homs in the reference period.<sup>1011</sup> In October 2021, Russian airstrikes, in collaboration with GoS forces, targeted ISIL

<sup>1001</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>1002</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: International security organisation interviewed by DIS], May 2022, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>1003</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/890, 21 October 2021, [url](#), para. 9; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 9; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1004</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Syria Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 7, [source: Austrian Embassy in Damascus] 24 January 2022, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 35; SOHR, ISIS ambush kills and injures regime members in Homs desert, 10 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1005</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (11 December 2021–7 January 2022), 13 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attacks positions of regime forces and affiliated militias in eastern Homs, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1006</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>1007</sup> Baladi News, صباط.. صفحات موالية تتعني 7 من قوات النظام قتلوا في حماة وحمص, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1008</sup> UN Security Council, Fourteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2022/63, 28 January 2022, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>1009</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview - Middle East (5 - 11 March 2022), 17 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1010</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>1011</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, June 2022, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 10; SOHR, 20 Russian airstrikes hit ISIS hideouts in Al-Raqqa and Homs deserts amid escalation in ISIS activity, 26 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Russian jets target ISIS hideouts in Al-Sokhnah desert in eastern Homs countryside, 11 April 2022, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview - Middle East (19 - 25 March 2022), 31 March 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Russian airstrikes hit ISIS

hideouts in the area around Al-Sukhna on the road between Deir Ez-Zor and Homs.<sup>1012</sup>

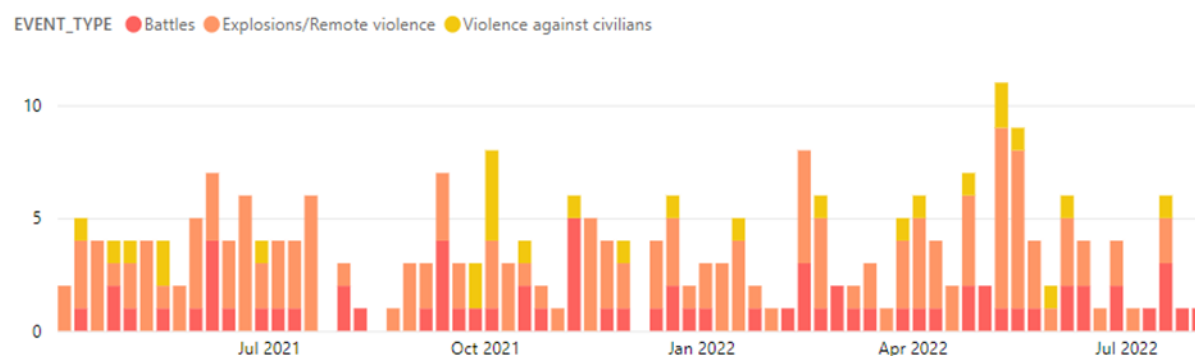
Reportedly, Russian air strikes against ISIL targets were frequent in the first week of March 2022 and were followed by a series of daily air strikes in collaboration with SAA air force in mid-March in eastern Homs for a week.<sup>1013</sup>

### *Israeli airstrikes*

In June 2021, Israeli airstrikes hit several military targets in central Syria, including in Homs governorate.<sup>1014</sup> Israeli airstrikes on Homs governorate were moreover documented from July to November 2021.<sup>1015</sup>

## **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period, there were 256 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Homs governorate, of whom 72 were coded as battles, 157 explosions/remote violence and 27 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1016</sup>



**Figure 16: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Homs governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>1017</sup>**

hideouts in Palmyra desert, east of Homs, 31 March 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Four Russian fighter jets strike ISIS positions in Homs and Deir Ezzor, 16 November 2021, [url](#); Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 26 April 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1012</sup> Al-Monitor, Russia ramps up strikes on Islamic State in Syrian desert, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1013</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1014</sup> MEE, Syria: Israeli air strikes reportedly kill 11 pro-government fighters, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1015</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, November 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (2-8 October 2021), 13 October 2021, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (9-15 October 2021), 21 October 2021, [url](#); Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes, 11 October 2021, [url](#), p. 11; International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, July 2021, [url](#); ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (17-23 July 2021), 23 July 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1016</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1017</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



| District     | Battles   | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Al Makhrim   | -         | 5               | 3                          |
| Al Qusayr    | 1         | 4               | 2                          |
| Ar Rastan    | 2         | 2               | 7                          |
| Homs         | 7         | 18              | 9                          |
| Tadmor       | 59        | 127             | 6                          |
| Tall Kalakh  | 3         | 1               | -                          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>72</b> | <b>157</b>      | <b>27</b>                  |

**Figure 20: Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Homs governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>1018</sup>**

Around 75 % of all security incidents documented in Homs governorate during the reference period were recorded in Tadmor district (see Figure 20).

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Homs governorate during the reference period for this report included the following:

- On 6 April 2021, 60 civilians and NDF fighters were ambushed by ISIL fighters near the Tuwayan Dam along the border between Homs and Hama. Reportedly, ‘most if not all of them had been captured alive’<sup>1019</sup> and the majority was later freed in exchange for detained ISIL family members.<sup>1020</sup>
- On 12 June 2021, a landmine left behind by ISIL in the area around Jabal Abu Rajmin, north of Tadmor, reportedly exploded killing two civilians and injuring another.<sup>1021</sup>

<sup>1018</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1019</sup> Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1020</sup> Waters, G. and Winter, C., Islamic State Under-Reporting in Central Syria: Misdirection, Misinformation, or Miscommunication?, MEI, 2 September 2021, [url](#); Waters, G. The Central Syria ISIS Insurgency in 2021, January 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1021</sup> SANA, Two civilians martyred and another wounded in a mine explosion in Palmyra countryside, 12 June 2021, [url](#)

- In early October 2021, Israeli airstrikes targeted the Tiyas airbase (T4 airbase).<sup>1022</sup>
- On 20 October 2021, the US base in Al-Tanf was targeted by a weaponized drone.<sup>1023</sup> The attack was reportedly carried out by Iran-affiliated forces.<sup>1024</sup>
- On 19 November 2021, the explosion of a landmine, reportedly left behind by ISIL members in a residential area in Tadmor district, killed two children and injured two others.<sup>1025</sup>
- In January and March 2022, military buses were attacked by ISIL near Tadmor leading to casualties among the soldiers.<sup>1026</sup>
- On 5 May 2022, it was reported that the Russian-backed 5<sup>th</sup> Corps clashed with an IRGC-backed militia close to Tadmor city.<sup>1027</sup>
- On 1 June 2022, a woman was reportedly abducted, tortured and raped by forces affiliated with the NDF in northern Homs governorate.<sup>1028</sup>
- On 20 July 2022, it was reported that unidentified gunmen believed to be ISIL members attacked a vehicle between Al-Kom and Al-Tabiya villages in the countryside of eastern Homs.<sup>1029</sup> On 23 July 2022, it was reported that GoS checkpoints and other areas near the Al-Hail oil field in the countryside of eastern Homs were attacked by ISIL forces.<sup>1030</sup>

### (c) Civilian fatalities

| Month    | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| January  | 5         | -         |
| February | 2         | 1         |
| March    | 3         | 2         |
| April    | 2         | 2         |
| May      | 1         | 3         |

<sup>1022</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview – Middle East (2-8 October 2021), 13 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1023</sup> SANA, Multiple explosions rock US base at al-Tanf area in Homs countryside, 21 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1024</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1025</sup> SANA, Two children martyred in landmine blast in Palmyra, 19 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1026</sup> ANI, 13 soldiers killed in bus ambush in Syria's Homs: State media, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1027</sup> MEMO, Russia, Iran-backed militias clash in Syria's Palmyra, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1028</sup> Shaam Network, "الشبكة السورية" تدنن قيام قوات الأسد باختطاف سيدة من حمص وتعذيبها واغتصابها [Syrian Network condemns kidnapping, torturing and raping of woman in Homs by Assad's forces], 10 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1029</sup> SOHR, ISIS attack | Casualties among Al-Nugabaa Iraqi militias in the Syrian desert, 20 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1030</sup> SOHR, ISIS offensive | Regime soldiers killed and injured in attack on their checkpoints and posts east of Homs, 23 July 2022, [url](#)



| Month        | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| June         | -         | 3         |
| July         | 1         | 3         |
| August       | -         |           |
| September    | 1         |           |
| October      | 4         |           |
| November     | 8         |           |
| December     | 1         |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>28</b> | <b>14</b> |

**Figure 7: Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Homs governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 28 civilian fatalities<sup>1031</sup> in Homs governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 14 civilian fatalities.<sup>1032</sup>

<sup>1031</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1032</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13; SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January

#### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

According to an international security organization interviewed by DIS, a large part of the city of Homs has been destroyed by the conflict. As of April 2022, the organization estimated that approximately 30 to 40 % 'of the pre-war city' was destroyed.<sup>1033</sup> Based on the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Shelter Cluster assessed that in Homs governorate, 9.22 % of the overall population was living in damaged buildings.<sup>1034</sup> In a May 2021 news article, Reuters stated that the 'city centre and several neighbourhoods were almost entirely destroyed after years of air strikes and barrel bombs, and still lie in ruin and deserted'.<sup>1035</sup> Most of the destruction was reportedly concentrated in the old neighbourhoods of Homs city (Al-Khalidiyah, Bab Al-Seba'a, Bab Al-Draib, Al-Bayadah, and Al-Hamidiyah), but also in some newer neighbourhoods (Al-Qusour, Jurat Al-Shayyah, and Al-Qarabees).<sup>1036</sup>

As of July 2021, 651 buildings were reported to be damaged in the city of Tadmor (45 completely, 112 severely and 444 partially destroyed).<sup>1037</sup> The destruction caused by past years' conflict had reportedly also affected educational buildings in Tadmor.<sup>1038</sup> In Al-Qaryatayn town, 525 buildings were allegedly damaged (79 completely, 190 severely and 256 partially destroyed) as of July 2021.<sup>1039</sup> As of July 2022, most of Rastan's neighbourhoods were reported to be still in ruins, with 'costs of restoring homes [...] far too expensive for most residents'.<sup>1040</sup>

In February 2022, UNOCHA noted that explosive ordnance contamination remained prevalent in regions particularly affected by the conflict, including in Homs governorate.<sup>1041</sup> A September 2021 article by Syria's public international news organization SANA reporting on the death of a family due to a landmine explosion in Tadmor stated that mines and explosive devices laid by terrorist organizations in villages, towns, and agricultural areas in the run-up to their defeat in the region were particularly complex to locate and defuse.<sup>1042</sup> In a 2022 report on UXO in

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2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1033</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Security and Socioeconomic Situation in Homs Governorate [source: international security organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>1034</sup> Shelter Cluster/UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI Sector. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1035</sup> Reuters, Homs, former rebel stronghold, prepares to vote, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1036</sup> Enab Baladi, With no hope or wish to return, Syrians sell destroyed properties in Homs, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1037</sup> Enab Baladi, With no hope or wish to return, Syrians sell destroyed properties in Homs, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1038</sup> SANA, Department of Education in Homs Rehabilitate school in Palmyra, 22 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1039</sup> Enab Baladi, With no hope or wish to return, Syrians sell destroyed properties in Homs, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1040</sup> Syria Report (The), Demolished Properties and Exaggerated Returnee Numbers in Rural Homs, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1041</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1042</sup> SANA, A man and his wife and daughter martyred in mine explosion west of Palmyra, 9 September 2021, [url](#)



Syria, the Carter Center assumed that there are 1 200 to 3 500 or 5 250 to 15 500<sup>1043</sup> unexploded ordnance in Homs governorate.<sup>1044</sup>

### **(e) Displacement and return**

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that the IDP population in Homs governorate was 303 971, of which about 4 500 lived in camps.<sup>1045</sup> In 2021, UNOCHA recorded approximately 2 040 IDP movements from Homs governorate, 40 IDP movements to the governorate as well as 961 movements within the governorate.<sup>1046</sup> In 2022, UNOCHA reported 155 IDP departures from and 61 IDP arrivals to Homs governorate in January,<sup>1047</sup> 155 departures and 55 arrivals in February,<sup>1048</sup> 150 departures and no arrivals in March,<sup>1049</sup> 130 departures and 25 arrivals in April,<sup>1050</sup> and 10 IDP movements within the governorate as well as 190 departures and 45 arrivals to the governorate in May 2022.<sup>1051</sup>

As regards returns, in 2021 UNOCHA recorded approximately 11 000 returns within Homs governorate, 1 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from the governorate and 5 000 IDP returnee movements to the governorate.<sup>1052</sup> In 2022, UNOCHA recorded 138 returns within, approximately 8 spontaneous IDP returns from and 471 returns to the governorate in January,<sup>1053</sup> 141 returns within, 5 returns from and 487 to the governorate in February,<sup>1054</sup> 75 returns within, 6 returns from and 723 to the governorate in March,<sup>1055</sup> 213 returns within, 98 returns from and 482 returns to the governorate in April,<sup>1056</sup> and 240 returns within, 6 returns from and 695 returns to the governorate in May.<sup>1057</sup>

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<sup>1043</sup> Please note that the Carter Center presents two different ranges for the amount of UXO contamination in Homs governorate.

<sup>1044</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 16, 24

<sup>1045</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1046</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1047</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1048</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1049</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1050</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1051</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1052</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1053</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

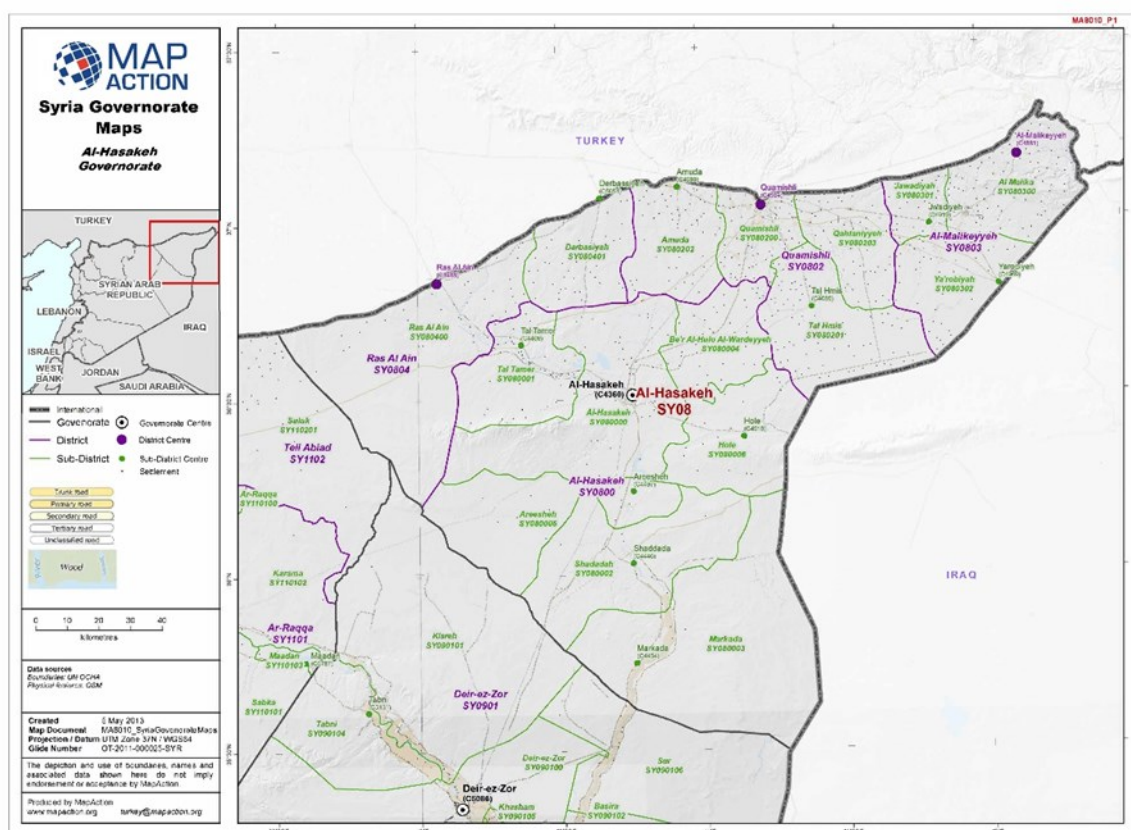
<sup>1054</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1055</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns. March 2022, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1056</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1057</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

## 2.7. Hasaka governorate



Map 13: © MapAction, Hasaka governorate<sup>1058</sup>

### 2.7.1. General description of the governorate

Al-Hasakah governorate (hereafter 'Hasaka' governorate) is located in the north-eastern corner of Syria, bordering Turkey to the north, Iraq to the east and Syrian Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor governorates to the west and south-west respectively. Its capital, Hasaka, is located in the middle of the governorate, on the intersection of the Khabour river and the road from Qamishli (bordering Turkey to the north) towards Deir-Ez Zor.<sup>1059</sup> There are four main districts in the governorate: Hasaka, Ras al-Ayn, Qamishli, and al-Malikiya, divided into, in total, 16 sub-districts, and a large number of small towns and villages.<sup>1060</sup>

Population estimates for 2021 issued by the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that Hasaka governorate had 1 865 169 inhabitants.<sup>1061</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Hasaka governorate to be of 1 148 643 inhabitants.<sup>1062</sup>

<sup>1058</sup> MapAction, Al-Hasakeh governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1059</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, 2017, al Hasakeh Governorate, [url](#)

<sup>1060</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, 2017, al Hasakeh City, [url](#)

<sup>1061</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1062</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

Information on Hasaka's ethnic structure, as well as its strategic importance for Syria's wheat and oil production can be found in an earlier issue of this report: [EUAA, Syria Security Situation, Country of Origin Information Report, July 2021](#), pp. 157-159.

## 2.7.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the reporting period, Hasaka governorate was mainly under the control of the Kurdish-led SDF.<sup>1063</sup> Their allies in the US-led Coalition against ISIL had presence in the governorate.<sup>1064</sup> The GoS maintained its own enclaves or 'security zones' inside the SDF-controlled cities of Hasaka and Qamishli, while the GoS forces also control Qamishli airport.<sup>1065</sup> In addition, the GoS forces and their Russian allies were present in the Syrian-Turkish border and along the frontlines between the SDF-controlled areas and the Turkish-controlled area in northern Hasaka governorate.<sup>1066</sup> According to Jusoor for Studies, there has also been a stationing point for Iranian forces in GoS-controlled Hasaka (city) at the turn of the year 2021/22.<sup>1067</sup>

Since the military incursion in October 2019 dubbed Operation Peace Spring<sup>1068</sup>, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and the Turkish-backed Syrian armed groups operating under the umbrella of the so-called 'Syrian National Army' (SNA) have been in control of a territory roughly delimited by the Syrian-Turkish border in the north, the M4 highway in the south, administrative border between Raqqqa and Hasaka governorates in the west and the Khabur river in the east. This area includes the town of Ras al-Ayn (*Serê Kaniyê* in Kurdish) and its surroundings.<sup>1069</sup> Along with an adjoining territory of roughly equal size in northern Raqqqa governorate (see Chapter [2.8 Raqqqa governorate](#)), this area constitutes the so-called Operation Peace Spring area.<sup>1070</sup>

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<sup>1063</sup> Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1064</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

<sup>1065</sup> International Crisis Group, The SDF Seeks a Path Toward Durable Stability in North East Syria, 25 November 2020, [url](#); Mehchy Z. et al., Assessing control and power dynamics in Syria, Chatham House, November 2020, [url](#), p. 10; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>1066</sup> Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1067</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1068</sup> For further information on the October 2019 Turkish incursion, see EUAA, Syria - Security Situation. May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1069</sup> Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The State of the Syrian National Army, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1070</sup> Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, European University Institute, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), pp. 5-6

### (a) Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

Hasaka governorate is mainly under the control of the Autonomous Administration of North and East of Syria (hereafter 'Autonomous Administration', AANES) (see also Section [1.4.3 Syrian Democratic Forces](#)), with a unified military force, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)<sup>1071</sup> and a political assembly, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC).<sup>1072</sup> The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), have a dominant role in the SDF<sup>1073</sup> and the SDC.<sup>1074</sup> In this administrative context, Hasaka governorate is also called Jazeera (in Kurdish, *Cizire*) and it has been one of the 'cantons'<sup>1075</sup> or one of the 'regions'<sup>1076</sup> (since 2018) under the Autonomous Administration.

### (b) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS maintains its own enclaves or 'security zones' inside the SDF-controlled cities of Hasaka and Qamishli.<sup>1077</sup> GoS forces were also stationed on the Syrian Turkish border and on the internal border separating the 'Operation Peace Spring' area from the areas controlled by the SDF in Hasaka governorate<sup>1078</sup>, including around the frontline town of Tal Tamr.<sup>1079</sup> Elements of the SAA's 4<sup>th</sup> Division were reported to control the largest military base in the governorate - the Tartab Regiment -, located in the southwest part of Qamishli.<sup>1080</sup>

### (c) The US-led Coalition against ISIL

According to Fabrice Balanche, US troops were present in Hasaka towns of Rmelan and Shaddada and controlled the crossroads between the M4 highway and the Amuda-Hasaka road and the road between Rmelan and the Fish Khabour border crossing with Iraq.<sup>1081</sup> In July 2021, the SOHR reported that large reinforcements have entered the base in Shaddada.<sup>1082</sup> Media reports from April 2022 confirmed the expansion of the Shaddada military base, which now reportedly has the largest US military presence in all of Syria.<sup>1083</sup> According to Jusoor for

<sup>1071</sup> ECFR, MENA armed groups, Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria), n. d., [url](#); RIC, Beyond the Frontlines, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>1072</sup> RIC, Beyond the Frontlines, 19 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 31-32

<sup>1073</sup> Haenni, P. & Guesnay, A., Surviving the Aftermath of Islamic State: The Syrian Kurdish Movement's Resilience Strategy, European University Institute, 17 February 2020, [url](#), p. 1, fn 2

<sup>1074</sup> Netjes R. & van Veen, E., Henchman, Rebel, Democrat, Terrorist. The YPG/PYD during the Syrian conflict, Clingendael, April 2021, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>1075</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>1076</sup> RIC, Beyond the Frontlines, 19 December 2019, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1077</sup> Duch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, June 2021, [url](#), p. 25; International Crisis Group, The SDF Seeks a Path Toward Durable Stability in North East Syria, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1078</sup> Based on reading of the map in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22

<sup>1079</sup> Enab Baladi, Three sides blamed; Who bombs northern Aleppo?, 12 June 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), Four killed in 'rare' clash between Syrian regime troops, Kurdish forces: monitor, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1080</sup> Hassan, M. and al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1081</sup> Balanche, F., The Fragile Status Quo in Northeast Syria, WINEP, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1082</sup> SOHR, [url](#) [With the aim of establishing a new base, the "international coalition" brings large military and logistical reinforcements to northeastern Syria], 24 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1083</sup> Syrian Observer (The), How are U.S. Bases Distributed in Northeastern Syria, 22 April 2022, [url](#)



Studies, the US-led Coalition had a total of 17 stationing points in Hasaka governorate at the turn of the year 2021/22.<sup>1084</sup>

#### **(d) Russia**

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia had a total of 16 stationing points in Hasaka at the turn of the year 2021/22.<sup>1085</sup> Russian forces were present in several military bases in the border zones between Syria and Turkey as well as between the areas controlled by the SDF and the Operation Peace Spring area, respectively.<sup>1086</sup> According to earlier reporting by Fabrice Balanche, they had been stationed alongside the GoS forces since October 2019 and, since May 2020, the traffic along the M4 highway between Ain Issa and Tal Tamr had been restricted to convoys with Russian escorts and no SDF units or local civilians were allowed to use this section of the highway on their own.<sup>1087</sup>

According to a news report from July 2022, Russian ground patrols further expanded to areas in the countryside of Qamishli<sup>1088</sup>, following the deployment of warplanes and helicopters near Qamishli airport and the launch of reconnaissance flights in the same area a month earlier.<sup>1089</sup>

#### **(e) Iran**

According to Jusoor for Studies, Iran had one stationing point in Hasaka at the turn of the year 2021/22.<sup>1090</sup> According to two experts at the MEI, as of March 2022 the Iranian military presence was concentrated in the southeast of the governorate, particularly around the military base at Tartab Regiment, at Qamishli airport, and as part of the Military Intelligence branch in Hasaka city which Iran reportedly controls.<sup>1091</sup>

#### **(f) Turkey and affiliated armed groups**

Turkey and SNA forces controlled the territory roughly delimited by the Syrian–Turkish border in the north, the M4 highway in the south, administrative border between Raqqqa and Hasaka governorates in the west and the Khabur river in the east. This area includes the town of Ras al-Ayn (Serê Kaniyê) and its surroundings.<sup>1092</sup>

<sup>1084</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1085</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1086</sup> Based on reading of maps in Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

<sup>1087</sup> Balanche, F., The Fragile Status Quo in Northeast Syria, WINEP, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1088</sup> NPA, Russian forces patrol areas of Syria's Qamishli for first time, 30 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1089</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Russia deploys jets to US-held regions in Syria's East, 29 May 2022, [url](#); Daily Sabah, Russian forces conduct air patrols in Syria's Tal Rifaat area, 4 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1090</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1091</sup> Hassan, M./ al-Ahmed, Samer, Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1092</sup> Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, The stumbling blocks facing Turkey's new operation plan in Syria, 30 May 2022, [url](#)

The town of Ras al-Ayn, the main population centre of the eastern half of Operation Peace Spring area, was controlled mainly by two Turkish-backed armed groups, Sultan Murad Division and Hamza Division, both operating under the official SNA umbrella.<sup>1093</sup>

In February 2022, four other SNA groups, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Jaysh al-Sharqiya, the 20<sup>th</sup> Division, and Suqur al-Sham, announced the formation of the Liberation and Construction Movement (LCM). Its representatives claim to command 7 000 fighters across Aleppo and Afrin and between Ras al-Ayn (Hasaka) and Tal Abyad (Raqqah), operating within the SNA umbrella.<sup>1094</sup> According to researcher Khayrallah al-Hilu, Turkey has placed the local administration in both Ras al-Ayn and Tal Abyad under the administrative supervision of Şanlıurfa province in November 2019.<sup>1095</sup> Şanlıurfa is a province of the Republic of Turkey. According to Jusoor for Studies, Turkey had a total of four stationing points in Hasaka at the turn of the year 2021/22.<sup>1096</sup>

### (g) ISIL

International Crisis Group noted in a July 2022 report that, while ISIL has concentrated its attacks in Deir-Ez Zor, the group is also present in the south and east of Hasaka governorate<sup>1097</sup>, confirming assessments by the US Department of Defense (USDOD)<sup>1098</sup> and the Rojava Information Center<sup>1099</sup>. According to a report to the UN Security Council from July 2022, '[ISIL] [a]ctivities were concentrated in Dayr al-Zawr, southern Raqqah and Hasakah, eastern Homs and southwestern Dar'a and Suwayda' Governorates.'<sup>1100</sup> The Shaddadi countryside which is located at the boundaries between Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorates was assessed by some SDF commanders to serve as an ISIL storehouse for weapons and supplies.<sup>1101</sup>

In January 2022, ISIL was able to conduct a large-scale attack on al-Sina'a prison in Hasaka (city).<sup>1102</sup>

<sup>1093</sup> Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, European University Institute, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), p. 11.; STJ, Syria: Crops Looted, Lands Seized in "Peace Spring" Territories, 11 March 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1094</sup> Hauch, L., Syria's eastern factions unite in the Liberation and Construction Movement: A conversation with the leadership, MEI, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1095</sup> Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, European University Institute, 14 January 2021 [first published in Arabic on 21 December 2020], [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1096</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1097</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1098</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1099</sup> RIC, Annual Sleeper Cell Report for North and East Syria, February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1100</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 15 July 2022, S/2022/547, [url](#), para. 43, p. 12

<sup>1101</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1102</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 20



## 2.7.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

#### *The conflict between the SDF and Turkish-backed armed groups*

According to the UNCOI, the overall security situation deteriorated in the territories under SDF-control during the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021<sup>1103</sup> and life remained insecure during the second half of 2021 (1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021).<sup>1104</sup>

For the period between July and December 2021, the UNCOI stated that armed clashes in and around the city of Tal Tamr led casualties and displacement of civilians living in the area.<sup>1105</sup> In August 2021, the Turkish military reportedly intensified its artillery, drone and conventional air strikes in areas west of Qamishli, in Ras al-Ayn, and in areas close to Abu Rasayn and Tal Tamr, resulting in the deaths of both military personnel and civilians.<sup>1106</sup> Clashes between Turkish-backed forces and the SDF continued throughout September 2021, notably near Tal Tamr<sup>1107</sup> and public hints from the Turkish government at an imminent ground offensive into northern Syria<sup>1108</sup> have been met with joint military manoeuvres and exercises by the Russian military and SDF fighters across Raqqqa and Hasaka.<sup>1109</sup>

In December 2021, Turkish forces shelled rural Tal Tamr<sup>1110</sup>, forcing residents of villages in the area to flee and evacuate the front lines.<sup>1111</sup>

While no further ground offensive took place in 2021, Turkey launched an air campaign in early February 2022 against targets in northern Syria and northern Iraq.<sup>1112</sup> Jusoor for Studies registered a new military escalation on part of Turkey against SDF and YPG targets in that same areas in April 2022.<sup>1113</sup> For its reporting period of April to May 2022, the UN Security Council reported ‘increased hostilities [...] in the northern part of the country’, particularly in the Abu Rasayn area and in the Tal Tamr subdistrict of Hasaka.<sup>1114</sup>

<sup>1103</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>1104</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>1105</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>1106</sup> Kurdistan 24, Turkish drone targets vehicle near northern Syrian town of Qamishlo: Source, 22 August 2021, [url](#); al-Monitor, Syrian Kurdish parties feel abandoned by US in wake of Turkish-backed attack, 8 September 2021, [url](#); SOHR, [بقتل 20 قتيلاً وجرحاً بينهم قياديين من “قسد” بقصف طائرة مسيرة تركية على مقر عسكري في ريف الحسكة](#), 20 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1107</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1108</sup> Reuters, Turkey says it will do “what is necessary” after Syria attacks, 13 October 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Turkey’s parliament votes to extend mandate for troops in Iraq, Syria, 26 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1109</sup> Enab Baladi, SDF look to Russia for support against Turkey, 10 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1110</sup> SOHR, Killing two SDF members/ Turkish forces renew shelling on Al-Hasakah along with clashes on frontlines, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1111</sup> COAR, Syria Update, Cross-Line Convoy Sets up Debate on Early Recovery and Cross-Border Quid Pro Quo, 20 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1112</sup> France 24, Turkey strikes Kurd targets in Iraq, Syria, 2 February 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, Turkey’s recent bombardment amounts to declaration of war: Mazloun Abdi, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1113</sup> Jusoor for Studies, New military escalation by Turkey against the PKK in Syria: Causes and effects, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1114</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General, 16 June 2022, S/2022/492, [url](#), para. 4

According to a May 2022 report by iMMAP, 'Turkish forces and Turkish backed groups are frequently bombing villages around Turkish controlled [Operation Peace Spring] area. They also frequently target SDF commanders, vehicles, and social figures with drones. These attacks left many casualties and increased in 2022, also in areas that have witnessed relatively little violence in past years, such as Qamishli.'<sup>1115</sup>

### *Fighting between the SDF and GoS forces*

After the GoS-backed, NDF reportedly killed one Asayish officer in Qamishli in April 2021<sup>1116</sup>, clashes broke out between the two sides that lasted for several days, resulting in both military and civilian casualties.<sup>1117</sup> According to an anonymous source from inside the SDF, Russia was asked to mediate between the two parties, which led to the NDF retreating from the Tayy and Halako neighbourhoods<sup>1118</sup> and the patrolling of Russian military units in the area to guarantee the truce.<sup>1119</sup> Tensions between the SDF and GoS-forces escalated again in March 2022, when clashes in Tal Tamr reportedly left two SAA soldiers and two SDF-militiamen dead. Both Syrian state news and a SDF spokesperson confirmed the incident, but disagreed over the progression of events.<sup>1120</sup>

In April 2022, the SDF confiscated several governmental administrative offices in GoS-controlled neighbourhoods in Qamishli and Hasaka (city) and closed a highway leading to Qamishli airport, effectively putting the area under siege.<sup>1121</sup> While the security forces who entered the neighbourhoods pulled back again after two days, they maintained a blockade of goods and reportedly prevented entry of wheat, food, and fuel.<sup>1122</sup> Eventually, the siege was lifted after a total of 20 days when the two parties came to reach a diplomatic solution.<sup>1123</sup>

### *Ras al-Ayn (Operation 'Peace Spring') area*

During the reference period, clashes among different armed factions of the SNA escalated throughout northern Syria where the SNA holds territory<sup>1124</sup>, also affecting Ras al-Ayn area but reportedly not having led to any civilian casualties there.<sup>1125</sup>

<sup>1115</sup> iMMAP, Progress, Northeast Syria. Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1116</sup> Rojava Information Center, via Twitter @RojavaIC, 20 April 2021, [url](#); Rûdaw, One dead in clashes between Rojava and Syrian regime-backed forces in Qamishli, 21 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1117</sup> Rûdaw, At least two children killed in Qamishli clashes: medical source, 22 April 2021, [url](#); NPA, Child killed, 2 civilians wounded by pro-Syrian government NDF's bullets in Qamishli, 22 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1118</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian government, Kurdish forces end dispute in Qamishli, 30 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1119</sup> NPA, Russian, Asayish Forces Patrol Qamishli's Al-Tai Neighborhood Amid Return Of Residents, 28 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1120</sup> France 24, 4 dead in rare Syria-Kurdish clash: monitor, 1 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1121</sup> Reuters, U.S.-backed Kurds tighten siege of Syrian army-run enclaves in northeast, 14 April 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, SDF seizes six state buildings in Qamishli, 14 April 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Tit-for-Tat siege in Sheikh Maqsood and Qamishli between SDF and the Syrian regime: causes and scenarios, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1122</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian Kurdish-led forces withdraw from regime zones in Qamishli, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1123</sup> SOHR, Preliminary agreement I Regime forces agree with Asayish to lift blockade on Al-Sheikh Maqsood and Al-Ashrafieh neighbourhoods in Aleppo in return for lifting siege on Al-Hasakah and Al-Qamishli, 28 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1124</sup> Al-Monitor, Factional infighting escalates in northern Syria, 19 April 2022, [url](#); New Arab (The), الاشتباكات بين فصائل الجيش الوطني "تتزايد خلال رمضان في الشمال السوري" [Clashes between the "National Army" factions are increasing from Ramadan in northern Syria], 7 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1125</sup> New Arab (The), الاشتباكات بين فصائل الجيش الوطني "تتزايد خلال رمضان في الشمال السوري" [Clashes between the "National Army" factions are increasing from Ramadan in northern Syria], 7 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Peace Spring



According to UNCOI's report covering the second half of 2021, people in the Ras al-Ayn area 'continued to live amid fear of shelling and improvised explosive devices', although the region 'experienced a relatively calm period' compared with neighbouring northern Aleppo.<sup>1126</sup>

### *General opposition to the SDF's rule*

In May 2021, several protests erupted in several SDF-controlled areas, including Hasaka (city), against the AANES after it had raised fuel prices in light of an accelerating economic crisis<sup>1127</sup>, following a similar move by Damascus in the GoS-controlled territories.<sup>1128</sup> According to estimates of the SADC, demonstrations were held in 15 protest points in various regions and villages across Hasaka.<sup>1129</sup> The SDF reportedly shot five protesters in the city of al-Shaddada.<sup>1130</sup>

### *ISIL insurgency*

During the period from June to July 2021, the UN Security Council documented continuing ISIL attacks across Hasaka governorate leading to both military casualties as well as destruction of energy infrastructure.<sup>1131</sup> In January 2022, ISIL militants attacked the al-Sina'a detention centre in Hasaka (city) in what turned out to be the largest attack carried out by ISIL since its territorial defeat in 2019.<sup>1132</sup> They managed to storm the prison, free some of the inmates and hold their position inside the building for several days before the SDF, with military support from the US-led Coalition against ISIL, eventually recaptured the place.<sup>1133</sup> According to the SDF, the fighting caused at least 200 deaths among the inmates and 27 deaths of its own fighters. Further, it led to the temporary displacement of about 45 000 inhabitants of the neighbourhoods near the detention centre.<sup>1134</sup> Estimates on the number of escaped ISIL prisoners reportedly varied between several hundred and a 'low double'-digit number.<sup>1135</sup>

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areas | New armed clashes with RPGs in Ras al-Ayn (Sere Kaniye), 10 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Factional infighting | Al-Hamza Division member killed in Ras Al-Ain city (Sere Kaniye), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1126</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 74

<sup>1127</sup> New Arab (The), Fuel price hike sparks deadly Syria Kurd protests, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1128</sup> France 24, Damascus hikes fuel prices by more than 50 percent, 16 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1129</sup> SADC, SADC statement on the wave of public demonstrations in Al-Hasakah and the suppression by the Syrian Democratic Forces, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1130</sup> Etana, Syria Military Brief: Northeast Syria, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1131</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2021/735], 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 9

<sup>1132</sup> New York Times (The), U.S. Allies Retake Control of Prison in Syria, Subduing ISIS Fighters, 30 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1133</sup> New York Times (The), Kurdish-Led Forces End Prison Siege, Defeating ISIS Fighters, 26 January 2022, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, IS Prison Raid, Biggest Attack since '19, Displaces 45,000, 31 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1134</sup> Reuters, UNICEF says fears grow over fate of 850 children in besieged Syrian prison, 25 January 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syria: Qamishli Flash Update 2: Displacement from Al-Hasakeh (as of 27 January 2022), 27 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1135</sup> Hassan, M. and Al-Ahmed, S., A closer look at the ISIS attack on Syria's al-Sina Prison, MEI, 14 February 2022, [url](#); COAR, IS Prison Raid, Biggest Attack since '19, Displaces 45,000, 31 January 2022, [url](#)

Covering the months February and March 2022, the UN Security Council noted ISIL carried out 'sporadic attacks, including on civilians' in areas including Hasaka governorate.<sup>1136</sup> During April and June 2022, SDF operations against ISIL were carried out including in Hasaka governorate.<sup>1137</sup>

### *Security situation in al-Hol camp*

In late March and the beginning of April 2021, the SDF conducted a two-week-long security operation in al-Hol camp that, according to the SDF's own account, led to the arrest of 125 suspected ISIL affiliated individuals, including six senior leaders of the group.<sup>1138</sup> Preceding the SDF's raid, a deteriorating security situation existed inside al-Hol camp, resulting in an increase of violence and more than 40 reported killings since the beginning of 2021.<sup>1139</sup> According to the SDF's own account, the security situation in al-Hol stabilized in the following weeks.<sup>1140</sup>

In July 2021, the SDF released 82 families, 229 women and children in total, from al-Hol camp.<sup>1141</sup> Reportedly, most were in detention for familial relationships with (suspected) ISIL members.<sup>1142</sup>

In March 2022, the SDF and Asayish forces, in coordination with the US-led Coalition against ISIL, conducted several raids in al-Hol, securing weapons, ammunition and tunnels.<sup>1143</sup>

However, only two weeks after, ISIL militants from within the camp reportedly managed to stage an attack on its guards, resulting in the destruction of tents and deaths of both combatants and civilians. According to one report, the SDF were said to be expecting an attempted take-over of al-Hol after ISIL's earlier attack on al-Sina'a prison in January.<sup>1144</sup>

By the end of June 2022, al-Hol reportedly witnessed 25 murders since the beginning of the year.<sup>1145</sup>

## **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period, there were 1 671 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Hasaka governorate, of whom 285 were coded as battles, 810 explosions/remote violence and 576 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1146</sup>

<sup>1136</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>1137</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022, 29 July 2022, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>1138</sup> VOA, Crackdown at Syria's al-Hol Camp Nets Senior Islamic State Operative, 2 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1139</sup> UNICEF, Two children killed in al-Hol camp in Syria, statement from Bo Viktor Nylund, UNICEF Representative in Syria, 24 March 2021, [url](#); Asharq al-Awsat, حملة أمنية في مخيم الهول بعد تصاعد الاغتيالات [Security campaign in Al-Hol camp after the escalation of assassinations], 30 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1140</sup> SDF - Coordination & Military Ops Center, via Twitter @cmoc\_sdf, 10 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1141</sup> Rudaw, 82 Syrian families leave Al-Hol camp towards their areas in Raqqa, 16 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1142</sup> Al-Monitor, More women prisoners linked to Islamic State released from al-Hol camp, 31 July 2021, [url](#)

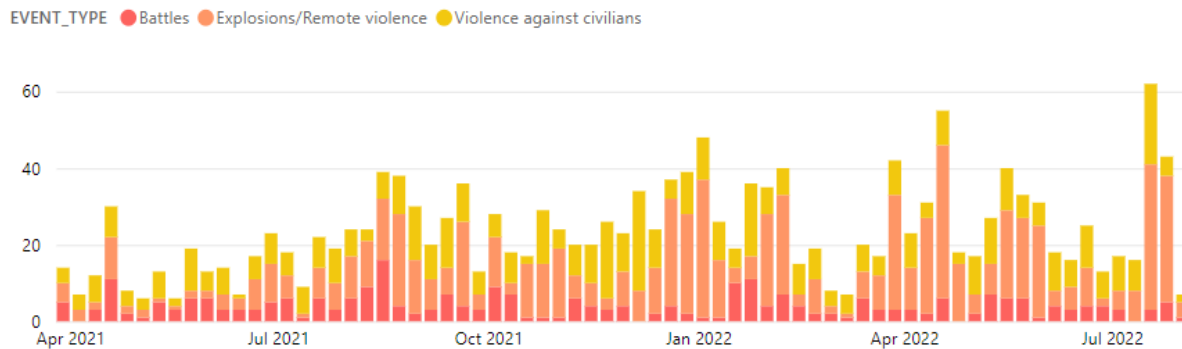
<sup>1143</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Kurdish Forces Launch Massive Raids in Syria's Al-Hol Camp, 14 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1144</sup> Syria.tv, تمرد لخلايا "داعش". اشتباكات عنيفة وأبناء عن قتل وجرحى في مخيم الهول [A rebellion by ISIS cells. Violent clashes and reports of dead and wounded in al-Hol camp], 29 March 2022, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, Syrian Minister Asserts Syria's 'Right' to Access International Climate Funds, 4 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1145</sup> ANHA, ISF: A decapitated woman found in Al-Hol camp, 25 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1146</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)





**Figure 22. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hasaka governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>1147</sup>**

Most security incidents were recorded in Hasaka and Ras Al Ain districts during the reporting period. Incidents of violence against civilians were significantly higher Hasaka district as compared with the other districts of the governorate (see Figure 23 below).

| District     | Battles    | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Hasaka       | 167        | 416             | 405                        |
| Malikeyyeh   | 4          | 21              | 32                         |
| Qamishli     | 26         | 29              | 65                         |
| Ras Al Ain   | 88         | 344             | 74                         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>285</b> | <b>810</b>      | <b>576</b>                 |

**Figure 23. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Hasaka governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>1148</sup>**

<sup>1147</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1148</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

## Illustrative security incidents

- On 2 April 2021, the SDF declared an end to a five-day raid in al-Hol camp. 125 suspects on extremism were said to be arrested.<sup>1149</sup>
- On 27 April 2021, Russia deployed its military police to Qamishli<sup>1150</sup> after clashes between the Asayish and the NDF lasted for days.<sup>1151</sup>
- On 18 May 2021, SDF personnel reportedly opened fire on demonstrators who protested against rising fuel prices, killing at least one civilian in al-Shaddadi.<sup>1152</sup>
- On 18 August 2021, Turkish troops and Turkey-backed Syrian forces shelled the area of Abu Rassine (Navçeya Ebû Rasên), killing, according to the SDF, two civilians and wounding 15 people.<sup>1153</sup>
- On 21 January 2022, ISIL fighters launched a large-scale attack on al-Sina'a prison in the Ghuwayran neighbourhood in Hasaka (city)<sup>1154</sup> that lasted for over a week and ended with several hundred persons having been killed after SDF forces ended the siege and regained control over the prison on 30 January 2022.<sup>1155</sup>
- On 2 February 2022, Turkey's armed forces have launched air raids targeting YPG positions in the district of al-Malikiya (Dêrik) as part of their Winter Eagle (Kış Kartalı)<sup>1156</sup> operation.<sup>1157</sup> According to SOHR, at least four persons were killed when two rockets hit a civilian power plant near the district's centre of the same name.<sup>1158</sup>
- On 8 February 2022, guards of the al-Hol refugee camp under the SDF command opened fire on its residents, resulting in one fatality and five injuries, when a group of women and children attacked the security forces. One member of the security forces was also injured.<sup>1159</sup>
- On 29 March 2022, ISIL members exchanged fire with Asayish forces at the al-Hol refugee camp, involving automatic rifles and rocket propelled grenades. According to SOHR, two civilians and one ISIL fighter were killed. Ten civilians were injured.<sup>1160</sup>
- On 22 July 2022 an airstrike by the TAF reportedly killed three SDF members near Qamishli, including a deputy commander.<sup>1161</sup>

<sup>1149</sup> AP News, Syrian Kurdish forces end sweep in camp housing IS families, 2 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1150</sup> AP News, Russian military intervenes to halt clashes in Syrian city, 27 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1151</sup> AP News, Clashes between Kurdish, government forces kill 1 in Syria, 21 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1152</sup> SNHR, Two civilians shot dead by SDF in al Shaddadi city in Hasaka suburbs on May 18, [url](#); SOHR, Rise of fuel prices/ Popular protest in Autonomous Administration-held areas against the new decision, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1153</sup> AP News, Shelling in northern Syria kills 5; at least 15 wounded, 18 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1154</sup> New York Times (The), ISIS Fighters Attack Syria Prison to Free Fellow Jihadists, 21 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Ghuwayran attack latest updates/ ISIS members cremated bodies of hostages in stove of the prison's kitchen, 5 February, [url](#)

<sup>1155</sup> New York Times (The), U.S. Allies Retake Control of Prison in Syria, Subduing ISIS Fighters, 30 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1156</sup> Turkish Ministry of National Defense, Derik, Sincar ve Karacak Bölgelerine İcra Edilen Kış Kartalı Hava Harekâtı Hakkında Açıklama [Statement on the Winter Eagle Air Operation to Derik, Sinjar and Karacak Regions], 1 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1157</sup> Reuters, Turkish warplanes attack Kurdish fighters in Iraq, Syria, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1158</sup> AP News, Turkish jets target Kurdish positions in Iraq, Syria; 4 die, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1159</sup> New York Times (The), Violence Erupts at Syrian Camp for ISIS Families, Leaving a Child Dead, 9 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1160</sup> AP News, Clashes in Syrian camp housing IS families kill at least 3, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1161</sup> Washington Kurdish Institute, Kurdistan's Weekly Brief, 26 July 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, SDF commander vows to avenge fighters killed in drone strike, 24 July 2022, [url](#)



(c) Civilian fatalities

| Month        | SNHR 2021  | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|------------|-----------|
| January      | 25         | 9         |
| February     | 17         | 3         |
| March        | 31         | 5         |
| April        | 12         | 21        |
| May          | 12         | 7         |
| June         | 6          | 10        |
| July         | 13         | 8         |
| August       | 13         |           |
| September    | 9          |           |
| October      | 2          |           |
| November     | 7          |           |
| December     | 7          |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>154</b> | <b>63</b> |

**Figure 24. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Hasaka governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 154 civilian fatalities<sup>1162</sup> in Hasaka governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 63 civilian fatalities (see Figure 24).<sup>1163</sup>

#### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

UNESCWA estimates the cost of physical capital loss of Hasaka governorate between 2011 and 2018 at around USD 1.3 billion (1.6 % of all the damage inflicted on Syrian physical capital).<sup>1164</sup> Based on the Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Shelter Cluster assessed that in Hasaka governorate, 85.41 % of the overall population<sup>1165</sup> was living in damaged buildings.<sup>1166</sup>

According to Mine Action Review and the Carter Center, the Hasaka governorate is largely contaminated with improvised mines and other improvised devices, mainly because retreating ISIL fighters planted booby traps before territory was retaken from SDF.<sup>1167</sup> The contamination

<sup>1162</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1163</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1164</sup> UNESCWA/University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 2020, 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 51

<sup>1165</sup> The source assessed a total of 33 171 households country-wide. The data are representative on sub-district level for total population and on district level for population groups (confidence level is 95% and margin of error is 10%). Shelter Cluster/UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI Sector. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1166</sup> Shelter Cluster/UNHCR, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter/NFI Sector. Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1167</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23; Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 378



causes heavy damage to civilians.<sup>1168</sup> The Carter Center assumes that there are 1 500 to 4 500 unexploded ordnance in the Hasaka governorate.<sup>1169</sup>

Mine Action Review notes that international and national demining organisations as well as commercial companies have taken part in demining activities in areas under SDF control in north-east Syria.<sup>1170</sup> Furthermore, according to the Carter Center, the SDF also clears unexploded ordnance in those territories.<sup>1171</sup>

Regarding contamination, Hasaka (city), Shaddadi, Tal Tamr, and Ras al-Ayn remain the governorate's most severely affected districts, according to a report by iMMAP.<sup>1172</sup> From September 2021 to April 2022, the report lists 372 deaths and 144 injuries in connection with landmine incidents for Hasaka governorate.<sup>1173</sup>

### **(e) Displacement and return**

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that the IDP population in Hasaka governorate was 120 246.<sup>1174</sup> In 2021, UNOCHA recorded approximately 1 000 IDP movements from Hasaka governorate, 400 IDP movements to the governorate as well as 13 000 movements within the governorate.<sup>1175</sup>

In the first half of 2022, IDP departures from Hasaka governorate amounted to 2 501, displacements within the governorate amounted to 2 162, and IDP arrivals to the governorate amounted to 3 415.<sup>1176</sup>

For 2021, UNOCHA's registered about 4 000 IDP returnee movements from Hasaka governorate, 765 IDP returnee movements within the governorate, and around 1 100 returnee movements to the governorate.<sup>1177</sup>

In the first half of 2022, IDP returns to Hasaka governorate amounted to 384 (, IDP returns within the governorate amounted to 262, and IDP returns from the governorate amounted to 1 036.<sup>1178</sup>

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<sup>1168</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 270, 378

<sup>1169</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1170</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 379

<sup>1171</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1172</sup> iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1173</sup> iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1174</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

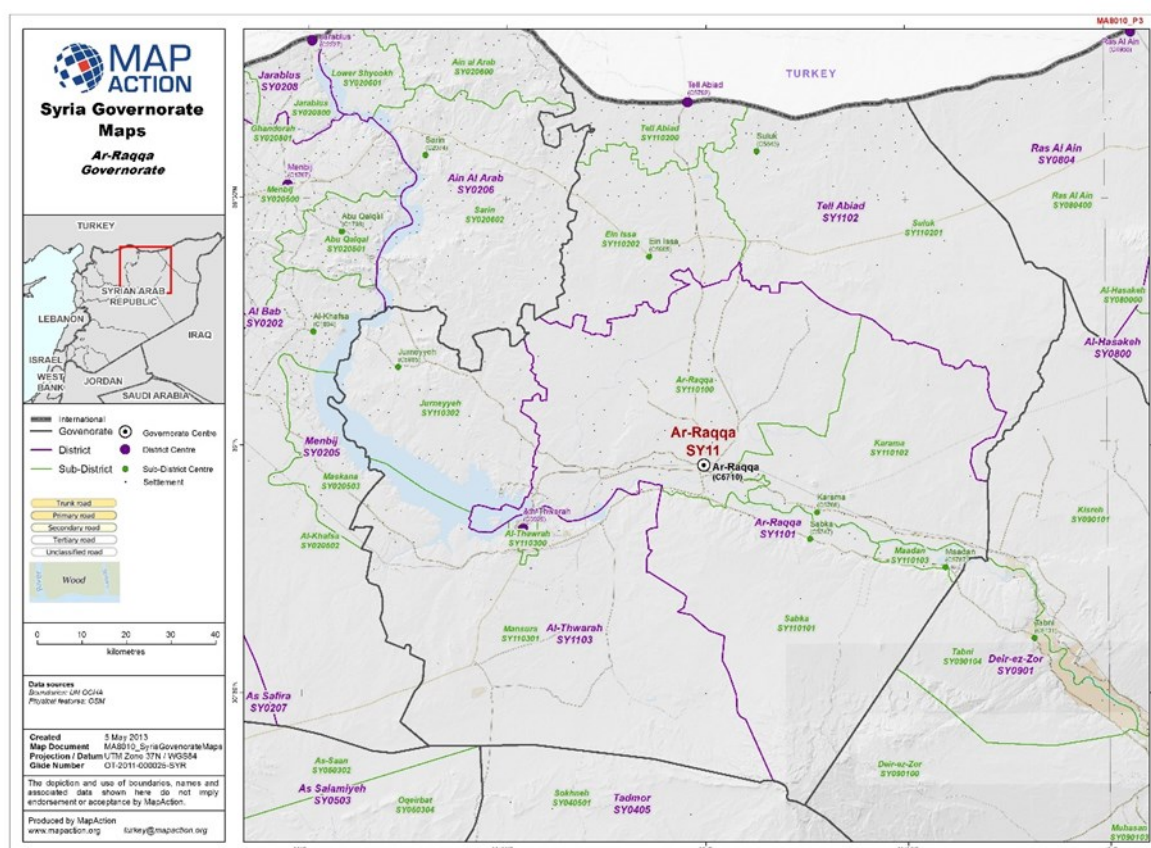
<sup>1175</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1176</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1177</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (as of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1178</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous

## 2.8. Raqqa governorate



Map 14: © MapAction, Raqqa governorate<sup>1179</sup>

### 2.8.1. General description of the governorate

Ar-Raqqa (hereafter 'Raqqa') governorate is located in the north-central part of Syria. The governorate has international borders with Turkey to the north, and borders to the west with Aleppo governorate, to the east with Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zor governorates and to the south with Hama and Homs governorates.<sup>1180</sup> The governorate is divided in three districts with its respective capitals: Raqqa (Raqqa city), al-Thawra (Tabqa), and Tal Abyad.<sup>1181</sup>

Returns, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1179</sup> MapAction, Ar Raqqa Governorate [map], 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1180</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1181</sup> The district of Raqqa further divided into sub-districts of Raqqa, Karama, Maadan and Sabka; Tal Abyad into sub-districts of Tal Abyad, Ayn Issa and Suluk; and al-Thawra into sub-districts of al-Thawra, Jurneyyeh and Mansura. See, also: UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 15

The Syrian Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of Raqqa governorate at 940 333 in 2021.<sup>1182</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Raqqa governorate to be of 773 026 inhabitants.<sup>1183</sup>

According to an analysis published by MEI, ethnic Arabs affiliated to local tribes form 90 % of Raqqa's population, while the remaining 10 % consist of other ethnic groups, including Kurds, Turkmen, Circassians and Armenians. The majority of Raqqa's Arab population are Sunni Muslims. The great majority of Raqqa's population and resources are located in areas controlled by the SDF.<sup>1184</sup>

## 2.8.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The central parts of Raqqa governorate are under the control of the Kurdish-led SDF. The GoS and its allies control the southern parts of the governorate.<sup>1185</sup> As the result of the Turkish military incursion in October 2019, the GoS forces and/or their Russian allies have been present along the main roads<sup>1186</sup> in the SDF-controlled areas and in the frontlines<sup>1187</sup> separating the SDF-controlled parts of Raqqa from the Turkish-controlled area in northern Raqqa governorate. Since October 2019, the TAF and the Turkish-backed Syrian armed groups operating under the umbrella of the SNA have been in control of most of the territory north of M4 highway in northern Raqqa governorate, including the border town of Tal Abyad and its surroundings and the sub-district of Suluk.<sup>1188</sup> Along with an adjoining territory of roughly equal size in northern Hasaka governorate (see Section [2.7.1](#)), this area constitutes the so-called Operation Peace Spring area.<sup>1189</sup>

The Russian military does not hold territory, but individual stationing posts from which its forces conduct joint patrols with either Turkish troops or the SDF.<sup>1190</sup>

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<sup>1182</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1183</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1184</sup> Dukhan, H. et al., The Kin Who Count: Mapping Raqqa's Tribal Topology, MEI, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1185</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), Appendices A (p. 22) and B (p. 23); Jusoor for Studies, Map of Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1186</sup> IMMAP, Thematic Report 6, Operation Peace Spring and Potential Turkish Intervention Scenarios, October 2021, [url](#), p. 18; Jusoor for Studies, Map of Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1187</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. i

<sup>1188</sup> Based on reading of maps in Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22

<sup>1189</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22

<sup>1190</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. i

### (a) Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

SDF controls the central parts of the governorate<sup>1191</sup> including Raqqa city<sup>1192</sup>, and governs this territory with the aid of affiliated local councils such as the Raqqa civil council.<sup>1193</sup> In July 2022, GoS forces have reportedly further reinforced their presence in the governorate's countryside by sending in additional personnel and heavy military equipment after having coordinated the move with the SDF and Russia.<sup>1194</sup>

### (b) The US-led Coalition against ISIL

The USDOD does not release fixed locations of single military sites, but instead marks vaguely its areas of operations in Northeast Syria, which it calls 'the Eastern Syria Security Area—which includes parts of Hasaka and Deir Ez-Zor governorates east of the Euphrates River'<sup>1195</sup> and does not show any presence in Raqqa governorate.<sup>1196</sup> Also, Jusoor for Studies does not include any stationing points by the US-led Coalition for Raqqa governorate at the turn of the year 2021/22.<sup>1197</sup> According to an opposition website's article from April 2022, the US-led Coalition in Northeast Syria does, in fact, confine its presence to the governorates Hasaka and Deir-Ez Zor.<sup>1198</sup>

However, in May 2022, there were news reports of a US military return to bases in Northeast Syria from which they had withdrawn in 2019<sup>1199</sup>, including the 17<sup>th</sup> Division base north of Raqqa (city) and the airbase at Tabqa.<sup>1200</sup>

### (c) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

As already stated above, the GoS and its allies control the southern parts of Raqqa governorate and are also present in the SDF-controlled parts of the governorate (the main roads and the frontlines between the SDF-controlled and the Turkish-controlled areas).<sup>1201</sup> Beginning in June 2022, the SAA had sent additional troops to Raqqa's borders with

<sup>1191</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), Appendices A (p. 22) and B (p. 23); Jusoor for Studies, Map of Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1192</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. i

<sup>1193</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>1194</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Forces Deploy Quality Weapons in SDF Areas, 8 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1195</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publically released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 64

<sup>1196</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publically released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

<sup>1197</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1198</sup> Syrian Observer (The), A spokesman for the Syrian Tribes and Clans Council revealed to Nedaa Post the distribution of U.S. bases in northeastern Syria, 22 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1199</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Potential for US forces return to locations they vacated in 2019 in Aleppo, Raqqa, 17 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1200</sup> Syria Direct, Military and civilian sources: US forces redeploy to former positions in northeastern Syria, 31 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1201</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), Appendices A (p. 22) and B (p. 23); Jusoor for Studies, Map of Military Control in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22



Turkey.<sup>1202</sup> As of July 2022, GoS forces, including the 93 Brigade, were stationed around the Ain Issa frontline.<sup>1203</sup>

According to the USDOD's first quarterly report of 2022, the SAA was present roughly along the 42 Highway south of Raqqa (city), which leads west out of the governorate, and controls a section of the M4 highway on the southern edge of Lake Assad.<sup>1204</sup> An earlier published, but more detailed map by the International Crisis Group paints a similar picture, only adding a small insular area of political control within the SDF-controlled territory south of Tabqa<sup>1205</sup>, which is the Tabqa military air base that the GoS holds control over since October 2019, although the city itself is under SDF control.<sup>1206</sup>

#### **(d) Russia**

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia had a total of seven military sites in Raqqa governorate: six north of the city of Raqqa (with three in the border area between Turkish-controlled and SDF-controlled areas and one immediately north of the city) and one further south in Tabqa.<sup>1207</sup> In its 2022's first quarterly report, the USDOD notes two Russian bases; one at Ain Issa and one south of Raqqa (city) bordering different areas of territorial control between the SDF, the GoS and Iran-aligned militias.<sup>1208</sup>

#### **(e) Iran**

According to a map published by the Atlantic Council and charting the influence of Iran and its militias in Syria in 2020, Iranian-backed armed groups were in control the town of Resafa in southern Raqqa governorate and had influence in the Euphrates river valley in the eastern part of the governorate, near the administrative border between Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor and on the main roads in GoS-controlled parts of the governorate. In addition, Iranian-backed armed groups were depicted to have a pocket of influence in Ain Issa area, bordering the Operation Peace Spring area controlled by Turkey and its affiliates.<sup>1209</sup> According to an MEE analysis, Iran has provided support to tribal militias in Raqqa governorate in order to gain influence in the governorate.<sup>1210</sup>

According to Jusoor for Studies, Iranian Forces had a total of 15 stationing points in Raqqa at the turn of the year 2021/22, mostly situated in GoS-controlled areas with the exception of three, which are positioned in mostly SDF-controlled territory around Tabqa.<sup>1211</sup>

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<sup>1202</sup> Reuters, Syrian, Russian forces boosted after Turkey signals operation, officials say, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1203</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Forces Deploy Quality Weapons in SDF Areas, 8 July 2022, [url](#); Syria Direct, Allied with Damascus, SDF prepares for Turkish operation in northern Syria, [url](#)

<sup>1204</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

<sup>1205</sup> International Crisis Group, Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>1206</sup> VOA, Rebuilding Efforts Continue in Syria's Former IS Stronghold, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1207</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1208</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 67

<sup>1209</sup> Saban, N., Factbox: Iranian influence and presence in Syria, Atlantic Council, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1210</sup> Dukhan, H./Alhamad, A., Iran's Growing Network of Influence among Eastern Syrian Tribes, WINEP/ Fikra Forum, 6 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1211</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

### (f) Turkey and affiliated armed groups

In February 2022, four SNA groups, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Jaysh al-Sharqiya, the 20<sup>th</sup> Division, and Suqur al-Sham, announced the formation of the Liberation and Construction Movement (LCM). Its representatives claim to command 7 000 fighters across Aleppo and Afrin and between Ras al-Ayn (Hasaka) and Tal Abyad (Raqqa), operating within the SNA umbrella. The LCM is said to maintain ‘a particularly strong presence in the [Operation] Peace Spring area’, more so in its western parts, ‘where it controls the vital Tufaha crossing that connects it with SDF-held parts of Raqqa province.’<sup>1212</sup>

According to a map by Jusoor for Studies displaying foreign military points in Syria at the turn of the year 2021/22, Turkey has a total of ten stationing sites in Raqqa, all of which are located in the Operation Peace Spring area.<sup>1213</sup>

### (g) ISIL

For its 2021 report, the Rojava Information Center described ISIL’s influence, while most of its attacks took place in Deir-Ez Zor, ‘to run north well into’ Raqqa and Hasaka governorates.<sup>1214</sup> According the USDOD’s report from May 2022, ISIL ‘retained a smaller, but still active presence in the northern Raqqa and Hasaka governorates’, compared with its stronger presence in Central Syria’s desert.<sup>1215</sup>

Senior SDF security officers shared information with the International Crisis Group in May 2021, according to which ISIL had recently conducted attacks in both SDF- and GoS-controlled areas of the governorate.<sup>1216</sup> ISIL cells were reported by International Crisis Group to operate in rural areas of Kabash and Hazima in northern Raqqa province.<sup>1217</sup>

In a more recent report by the International Crisis Group, the authors conclude that Raqqa’s residents are at ‘high risk of ISIL recruitment’<sup>1218</sup>, but attacks by the militants were comparatively lower in Raqqa than in other governorates since at least the beginning of 2021.<sup>1219</sup> According to the report, ‘[ISIL] keeps a low profile in Raqqa, where the SDF is stronger and where it fears provoking a US-led Coalition against ISIL return, though it still uses the province as a conduit for smuggling of people, goods and weapons.’<sup>1220</sup>

<sup>1212</sup> Hauch, L., Syria’s eastern factions unite in the Liberation and Construction Movement: A conversation with the leadership, MEI, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1213</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1214</sup> RiC, Annual Sleeper Cell Report 2021, February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1215</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publically released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1216</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa’s Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 17-18

<sup>1217</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>1218</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. ii

<sup>1219</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1220</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20



## 2.8.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

According to the UNCOI, the overall security situation deteriorated in the territories under SDF-control during the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021<sup>1221</sup> and life remained insecure during the second half of 2021 (1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021).<sup>1222</sup>

*The conflict between the SDF and Turkish-backed armed groups Turkish (proxy) forces*

For the second half of 2021, the UNCOI documented continued fighting in and around the city of Ain Issa, 'leading to deaths, injuries and ongoing displacement among civilians living close to the front lines inside territory controlled by the [SDF]'.<sup>1223</sup> SNA and SDF were reportedly frequently involved in mutual shelling and skirmishes along the line of control near Ain Issa in Raqqa<sup>1224</sup>, which at times resulted in civilian casualties.<sup>1225</sup> Between October and November 2021, the UN Security Council registered mutual shelling and clashes particularly in Ain Issa.<sup>1226</sup>

In January 2022, the Turkish military reportedly carried out a retaliatory operation, killing 22 members of the YPG and PKK<sup>1227</sup>, after an earlier explosion at a border post at Tal Abyad in Turkish-controlled northern Raqqa governorate killed three Turkish soldiers.<sup>1228</sup> The SDF denied involvement in the attack.<sup>1229</sup> In February 2022, non-specified areas in Raqqa were targeted by Turkey's 'Winter Eagle' military operation against Kurdish forces by air, although to a lesser degree than areas in Hasaka (See [2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population, Hasaka](#)).<sup>1230</sup>

During the first quarter of 2022, the Carter Center recorded an increase in conflict events in Raqqa governorate, documenting 37 clashes and aerial bombardments.<sup>1231</sup> In a report by the UN Security Council covering April and May 2022, it documented 'an increase in shelling, drone strikes and rocket attacks' in parts of Raqqa.<sup>1232</sup>

<sup>1221</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>1222</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>1223</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 96

<sup>1224</sup> Hoffman, M. and Makovsky, A., Northern Syria Security Dynamics and the Refugee Crisis, CAP, 26 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1225</sup> STJ, Ain Issa: A Father, His Three Children, Killed in an Artillery Attack by the Elite Army, 8 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1226</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2021/1029], 15 December 2021, [url](#), para. 4

<sup>1227</sup> Syria.tv, سوريا: عملياتنا العسكرية سوف تتصاعد في سوريا [Turkish Defense Minister: Our military operations will escalate in Syria], 12 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1228</sup> Al-Arabiya, Three Turkish soldiers killed on Syria border, 8 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1229</sup> ANHA, Youssef identifies 3 main goals behind Turkey's allegations of being attacked by SDF, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1230</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Turkey Expands Strikes on SDF in Northern Syria, 3 February 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch (Syria), February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1231</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>1232</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 21

### *General opposition to the SDF's rule*

In January 2022, a protest against fuel and bread shortages in al-Suwaydiyah with approximately 100 participants left at least three civilians wounded, after SDF personnel opened fire on the crowd. The SDF also imposed a curfew in the village, conducted raids, and reportedly arrested more than 46 people.<sup>1233</sup> In light of these events, the AANES was said to have dismissed dozens of its own employees who participated in the protests and arrested several people in western Raqqa.<sup>1234</sup>

For March 2022, ACLED observed an almost threefold increase of abductions by the SDF in Hasaka and Raqqa governorates, 'driven by acts of forced conscription', according to the source.<sup>1235</sup>

### *ISIL insurgency*

According to observations and interviews by the International Crisis Group with civil society representatives from May 2021, the threat of unexploded mines from the battle against ISIL has overall receded in Raqqa governorate. However, "[...] intermittent ISIS attacks continue, including by improvised explosive devices, hit-and-run assaults and assassinations in both the city and the governorate at large, especially in the eastern al-Karama sub-district, a former ISIS stronghold."<sup>1236</sup>

However, most of ISIL's attacks in Raqqa governorate were said to have targeted security forces in GoS-controlled areas in the south, likely because of its proximity to a strong ISIL presence in neighbouring Homs and Hama governorates, where it had seemingly regained strength.<sup>1237</sup>

In October 2021, the SDF conducted several security operations throughout northeast Syria, including Raqqa (city), in cooperation with the US-led International Coalition against ISIL. Two active leaders of an active ISIL cell were said to be arrested in Raqqa city.<sup>1238</sup>

Following the attack on al-Sina'a prison in Hasaka (see [2.7.3 2.7.3Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population](#)), the SDF and the PYD militia reportedly arrested about 50 suspects in raids in SDF-controlled Raqqa city and al-Jarniyah in January 2022. The arrested were said to be transferred to Ayed prison in Tabqa, west of Raqqa (city).<sup>1239</sup> Similar arrests reportedly took place in the eastern countryside of Raqqa.<sup>1240</sup> During April and June 2022,

<sup>1233</sup> Syria.tv, "جرحى برصاص "قسد" خلال احتجاجات على أزمة المحروقات في الرقة" [Wounded by "SDF" bullets during protests against the fuel crisis in Raqqa], 10 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1234</sup> Syria.tv, "الإدارة الذاتية" تفصل موظفين لمشاركتهم باحتجاجات غربي الرقة" ["Autonomous Administration" dismisses employees for their participation in protests west of Raqqa], 12 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1235</sup> ACLED, Regional Overview: Middle East (26 March – 1 April 2022), 7 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1236</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1237</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1238</sup> NPA, SDF, Coalition Arrested 57 ISIS Members In Syria's Northeast In A Month, 2 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1239</sup> Syria News Agency, "قسد" تطلق حملة اعتقالات في دير الزور وأخرى في الرقة تسفر عن اعتقال 50 شخصاً" ["SDF" launches a campaign of arrests in Deir ez-Zor and another in Raqqa, which results in the arrest of 50 people], 27 January 2022, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, HRW Report Highlights Human Rights Risks. Is Nexus the Solution?, 7 February 2022, [url](#)

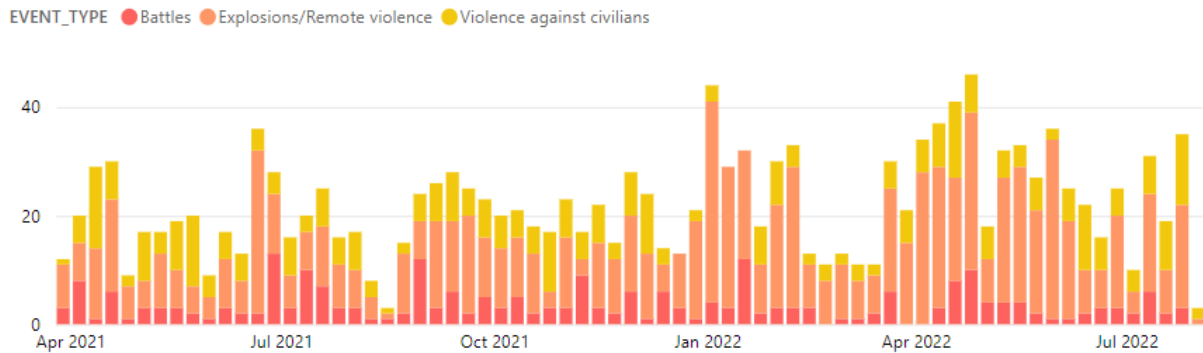
<sup>1240</sup> NPA, SDF Arrests 27 People Suspected Of Belonging To ISIS In Syria's Raqqa, 31 January 2022, [url](#)



SDF operations against ISIL were carried out including in Raqqa governorate.<sup>1241</sup> Regarding the first half of 2022, the UN Security Council documented a concentration of ‘sporadic attacks [...] utilizing insurgent tactics’ in north-eastern Syria including Raqqa governorate.<sup>1242</sup>

### (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 1 561 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Raqqa governorate, of whom 254 were coded as battles, 912 explosions/remote violence and 395 incidents of violence against civilians.



**Figure 25. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Raqqa governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>1243</sup>**

Security incidents were recorded in all districts of the governorate. Most security incidents were recorded in Tall Abyad district, which also had the highest number of remote violence incidents. The largest number of incidents of violence against civilians was recorded in Raqqa district (see Figure 26).

| District    | Battles | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|-------------|---------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Raqqa       | 110     | 128             | 245                        |
| Ath-Thawrah | 51      | 209             | 66                         |

<sup>1241</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022, 29 July 2022, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>1242</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, para. 43, p. 12

<sup>1243</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

| District     | Battles    | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Tall Abyad   | 93         | 575             | 84                         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>254</b> | <b>912</b>      | <b>395</b>                 |

**Figure 26. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Raqqqa governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>1244</sup>**

### Illustrative security incidents

- In April 2021, clashes that initiated in Qamishli (Hasaka) between the SDF and the GoS-backed NDF spilled over to Ain Issa countryside.<sup>1245</sup>
- In September 2021, STJ reported on the death of four civilians, including three children, after their house near Ain Issa was hit by a strike following an exchange of artillery fire between SDF and Jaysh al-Nukhba (Elite Army), an SNA-affiliated armed group.<sup>1246</sup>
- On 3 February 2022, Turkey's armed forces have apparently expanded their Winter Eagle (Kış Kartalı)<sup>1247</sup> operation to targets in Raqqqa governorate, reportedly conducting around 10 air raids on separate targets in both Hasaka and Raqqqa.<sup>1248</sup> No information could be found regarding potential casualties.
- On 1 June 2022, at least three people were killed and 10 more injured when a rocket hit Tal Abyad. The SDF denied responsibility for the attack.<sup>1249</sup>
- On 20 June 2022, ISIL attacked a bus on a highway connecting Raqqqa with Homs in the area of Jabal al-Bishri, killing at least 13 people, most of which were GoS soldiers. The Syrian Ministry of Defence and SOHR conflicted over whether it was a civilian or a military bus.<sup>1250</sup>

<sup>1244</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1245</sup> Enab Baladi, Fresh clashes in al-Qamishli: Who is to benefit, and how will they affect the region's future?, 27 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1246</sup> STJ, Ain Issa: A Father, His Three Children, Killed in an Artillery Attack by the Elite Army, 8 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1247</sup> Turkish Ministry of National Defense, Derik, Sincar ve Karacak Bölgelerine İcra Edilen Kış Kartalı Hava Harekâtı Hakkında Açıklama [Statement on the Winter Eagle Air Operation to Derik, Sinjar and Karacak Regions], 1 February, [url](#)

<sup>1248</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Turkey Expands Strikes on SDF in Northern Syria, [url](#)

<sup>1249</sup> AP News, Rocket attack in rebel-held Syrian town kills at least 3, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1250</sup> Reuters, Islamic State claims responsibility for attack that killed 13 in Syria's Raqqqa, 20 June 2022, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, At least 13 killed in northern Syria bus attack, 20 June 2022, [url](#); SOHR, ISIS attack | 15 regime soldiers killed in Al-Raqqah desert, 20 June 2022, [url](#)



- On 29 July 2022, four Asayish members were killed when reportedly a Turkish drone hit their car in the area of Ain Issa.<sup>1251</sup>

**(c) Civilian fatalities**

| Month        | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| January      | 5         | 1         |
| February     | 4         | 4         |
| March        | 7         | 6         |
| April        | 14        | 2         |
| May          | 8         | 1         |
| June         | 2         | 7         |
| July         | 4         | 3         |
| August       | 15        |           |
| September    | 9         |           |
| October      | 3         |           |
| November     | 2         |           |
| December     | 2         |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>75</b> | <b>24</b> |

**Figure 27. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Raqqa governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 75 civilian fatalities<sup>1252</sup> in Raqqa governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 24 civilian fatalities (see Figure 27).<sup>1253</sup>

#### **(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

According to February 2022 estimates by local officials, 30 % of the governorate's capital, Raqqa city, remains destroyed.<sup>1254</sup> UNESCWA reports the damage to physical capital of Raqqa governorate at around 6.7 billion USD (8.3 % of all the damage inflicted on Syrian physical capital) between 2011 and 2018, noting the US-led Coalition's bombing campaign against ISIL in 2017 'destroyed the entire urban system' in the governorate.<sup>1255</sup>

According to reports from Mine Action Review and the Carter Center, Raqqa governorate is heavily contaminated with mines causing damage to civilians, mainly because retreating ISIL forces left behind improvised mines and other improvised devices.<sup>1256</sup> Overall, the Carter Center estimates in its 2021 report the number of unexploded devices in Raqqa governorate between 1 750 to 5 750.<sup>1257</sup> According to COAR, the city of Raqqa is particularly affected.<sup>1258</sup>

<sup>1251</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Dozens of Bodies Found in Mass Grave in Northern Syria, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1252</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1253</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1254</sup> VOA/Associated Press, Poverty, Fear Drive Exodus from Syria's One-time IS Capital, 22 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1255</sup> UNESCWA/University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 2020, 23 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 50-51

<sup>1256</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23; Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 270, 378

<sup>1257</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1258</sup> COAR, Demining in Ar-Raqqa, 27 February 2022, [url](#), p. 1





Regarding contamination, Raqqa city remains the governorate's most severely affected district, according to a report by iMMAP. From September 2021 to April 2022, the report lists 194 deaths and 148 injuries in connection with landmine incidents for Raqqa governorate.<sup>1259</sup>

#### **(e) Displacement and return**

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that the IDP population in Raqqa governorate was 114 860.<sup>1260</sup> In 2021, UNOCHA recorded approximately 143 IDP movements from Raqqa governorate, 9 IDP movements within the governorate as well as 817 movements to the governorate.<sup>1261</sup> In the first half of 2022, there were 157 IDP departures from Raqqa governorate, 134 displacements within the governorate, and 208 IDP arrivals to the governorate.<sup>1262</sup>

For 2021, UNOCHA's registered about 1 400 IDP returnee movements to Raqqa governorate, 705 IDP returnee movements within, and about 500 returnee movements from the governorate.<sup>1263</sup>

In the first half of 2022, IDP returns to Raqqa governorate amounted to 20, no IDP returns within the governorate, and 1 284 IDP returns from the governorate.<sup>1264</sup>

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<sup>1259</sup> iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-13

<sup>1260</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1261</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

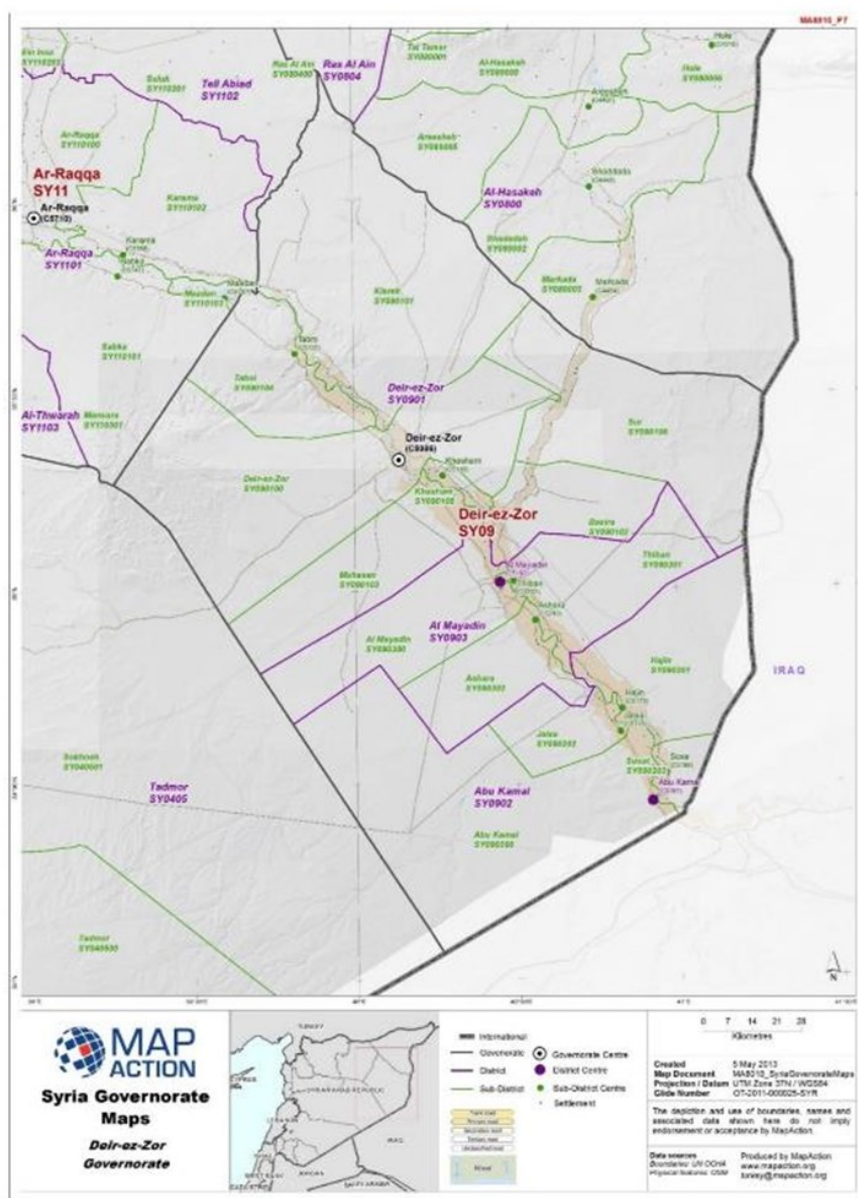
<sup>1262</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1263</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (as of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1264</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)



## 2.9. Deir Ez-Zor governorate



Map 15: © MapAction, Deir Ez-Zor governorate map<sup>1265</sup>

### 2.9.1. General description of the governorate

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is located in eastern Syria. The governorate has an international border with Iraq to the east, and internal borders to with Homs to the south, with Raqqa to the west and with Hasaka to the north. The Euphrates River passes through the governorate,

<sup>1265</sup> MapAction, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

dividing it into two parts (see Map 15)<sup>1266</sup>, also known as al-Shamiya and al-Jazeera.<sup>1267</sup>

Administratively, Deir Ez-Zor is divided into three districts: Deir Ez-Zor, al-Mayadin, and al-Bukamal (alternatively Abu Kamal, Abu Kamal), and into 14 sub districts.<sup>1268</sup>

The Central Statistics Bureau of Syria estimated that the population of Deir Ez-Zor governorate was 1 266 561 in 2021.<sup>1269</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Deir Ez-Zor governorate to be of 1 107 720 inhabitants.<sup>1270</sup>

The SDF-controlled areas to the east of the Euphrates River are believed to currently host about 70 % of the governorate's total population.<sup>1271</sup>

## 2.9.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Deir Ez-Zor governorate is roughly divided into two areas of control. The western part of the governorate – that is, mainly the areas west of the Euphrates River – is controlled by the GoS and its Iranian and Russian allies. This area covers the major cities (Deir Ez-Zor city, al-Mayadin and al-Bukamal) and the logistical route connecting GoS-controlled areas to the Syrian-Iraqi border. The eastern part of the governorate – most of the areas east of the Euphrates River – is controlled by the Kurdish-led SDF.<sup>1272</sup>

While Jusoor Studies, by the end of 2021, still assumed a presence of the US-led Coalition against ISIL forces at al-Bukamal<sup>1273</sup>, other experts stated in March 2022 that 'Iran now controls the al-Bukamal crossing and the entire border separating the Deir Ez-Zor Governorate from Iraq'.<sup>1274</sup> However, there seems to have been an agreement between the GoS and the SDF to establish a corridor between its each controlled areas to enable the SDF access to the border crossing with Iraq.<sup>1275</sup>

### (a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

The GoS forces – consisting mostly of the SAA formations and the NDF – control the western part of Deir Ez-Zor governorate with the help of Iranian-backed armed groups and Russia.<sup>1276</sup>

<sup>1266</sup> MapAction, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1267</sup> SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1268</sup> The district of Deir Ez-Zor is further divided into sub-districts of Deir ez-Zor, Busayra, Khasham, Kisreh, Muhasan, Sur and Tabi; Abu Kamal into sub-districts of Abu Kamal, Hajin, Jalaa and Susat; and al-Mayadin into sub-districts of al-Mayadin, Ashara and Thiban (See: UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas, Syrian Arab Republic, January 2017, [url](#), p. 13)

<sup>1269</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1270</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1271</sup> SACD, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1272</sup> Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1273</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1274</sup> Hassan, M./ al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1275</sup> Jusoor for Studies, SDF to open the 'al-Baghuz – al-Bukamal' Crossing. Motives and potential risks, 20 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1276</sup> Koontz, K. & Waters, G., Between the Coalition, ISIS, and Assad: Courting the Tribes of Deir ez-Zor, MEI, 3 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 4–5

According to Oula Alrifai and Ali Alleile, Syria experts at the WINEP<sup>1277</sup>, the GoS-controlled western parts of Deir Ez-Zor governorate can be divided into two ‘spheres of influence’. The SAA is in control of the northern part of this area, ‘run’ by the 4th Division and the 5th Corps.<sup>1278</sup>

### **(b) Iran and Iran-backed armed groups**

Iranian forces and other Iranian-affiliated armed groups are present in eastern Syria where they provide support for other GoS-affiliated forces<sup>1279</sup>, operate smuggling routes along the Iraqi-Syrian border<sup>1280</sup>, and allegedly work to antagonize the local population against the SDF and the US-led Coalition against ISIL.<sup>1281</sup> The southern part of GoS-controlled Deir Ez-Zor governorate, including the cities of al-Mayadin and al-Bukamal, is ‘increasingly dominated’ by the Iranian-backed armed groups<sup>1282</sup> and continued to be so recently.<sup>1283</sup> According to an article by the Washington Post from January 2022, Iran-backed armed groups are more successful in recruiting members than the GoS’ own security forces, while also providing more benefits to its members.<sup>1284</sup>

Omar Abu Layla, a specialist on affairs in Deir Ez-Zor at the WINEP<sup>1285</sup>, describes the IRGC as ‘the administrative, military, and financial nucleus of the Iranian-backed militias in Deir Ezzor governorate’<sup>1286</sup>, whose largest headquarters in eastern Syria are based near the al-Assad Hospital in southern Deir Ez-Zor. In addition to the militias associated with the IRGC, Iran also backs Afghan and Pakistani Shia forces and militias comprised solely of Syrian recruits.<sup>1287</sup> Between the years 2021/22, Jusoor for Studies counted a total of 27 ‘places of Iranian military points’ in Deir Ez-Zor, all of which are located in GoS-controlled territory.<sup>1288</sup>

### **(c) Russia**

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia had 10 military sites in GoS-controlled Deir Ez-Zor by the turn of the year 2021/22, most of them in the Euphrates river valley.<sup>1289</sup> According to Alrifai and Alleile, Russian forces operating in Deir Ez-Zor governorate have pursued to ‘secure

<sup>1277</sup> See: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Experts (Oula A. Alrifai), n.d., [url](#); WINEP, Experts (Ali Alleile), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1278</sup> Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1279</sup> Saban, N., Factbox: Iranian presence in Syria’s Deir ez-Zor province, Atlantic Council, 18 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1280</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, Iran-backed Militias Use Vegetable Trucks to Smuggle Weapons into Syria, 6 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1281</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2022, [publicly released on] 17 May 2022, [url](#), p. 71

<sup>1282</sup> Alrifai, O. A. & Alleile A., Russian-Iranian Tensions in Deir al-Zour, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 4 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1283</sup> Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1284</sup> Washington Post (The), Iran is putting down roots in eastern Syria, outcompeting Assad’s regime in signing up fighters, 28 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1285</sup> See: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Experts (Omar Abu Layla), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1286</sup> Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1287</sup> Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#); The source says Afghan but mentions both the Fatemiyoun and the Zainabiyoun Brigade; the first is said to be Afghan, the latter Pakistani. See: Jamestown Foundation (The), The Shia Fatemiyoun Brigade: Iran’s Prospective Proxy Militia in Afghanistan, 26 March 2021, [url](#); Jamestown Foundation (The), The Zainabiyoun Brigade: A Pakistani Shiite Militia Amid the Syrian Conflict, 27 May 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1288</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1289</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)



strategic sites', including the Deir Ez-Zor military airport.<sup>1290</sup> Significant Russian presence in al-Mayadin district as well as control over areas of Deir Ez-Zor city was also reported.<sup>1291</sup>

#### **(d) Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**

According to Fabrice Balanche, the SDF controls the internal border between the GoS-controlled western part and the SDF-controlled eastern part of Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>1292</sup> In the eastern part of the governorate, the SDF's control over the international border between Syria and Iraq began to crumble, when, according to a report from March 2022, Iran took control over the al-Bukamal crossing 'and the entire border separating the Deir Ez-Zor Governorate from Iraq'.<sup>1293</sup> A WINEP analysis claimed that the eastern Deir Ez-Zor governorate can be considered as an administrative hinterland for the SDF which focused mainly on Hasaka governorate. ISIL has reportedly benefitted from this lack of local control and support for the SDF in Deir Ez-Zor as well as from the October 2019 Turkish military incursion, which forced the SDF to relocate its forces closer to Turkish border.<sup>1294</sup>

Recently, the SDF have increasingly been challenged in Deir Ez-Zor, either by popular unrest<sup>1295</sup> or by ISIL attacks.<sup>1296</sup>

#### **(e) The US-led Coalition against ISIL**

The US-led Coalition against ISIL has reportedly reinforced its presence in Deir Ez-Zor during the referenced period of this report<sup>1297</sup>, guarding particularly the both strategically important al-Omar oil field and the Tabiya (Conoco)<sup>1298</sup> gas plant.<sup>1299</sup> According to a map in the USDOD's July 2022 report, its forces are displayed along the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, in the vicinity of the governorate's capital, Deir Ez-Zor city.<sup>1300</sup> According to Jusoor for Studies, the US-led Coalition forces had a total of nine stationing sites Deir Ez-Zor governorate by the turn of the year 2021/22.<sup>1301</sup>

<sup>1290</sup> Alrifai, O. A./ Alleile A., Russian-Iranian Tensions in Deir al-Zour, WINEP, 4 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1291</sup> SADC, Deir ez-Zor sees few options as widely rejected 'reconciliation' starts, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1292</sup> Balanche F., The Assad Regime Has Failed to Restore Full Sovereignty Over Syria, WINEP, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1293</sup> Hassan, M./ al-Ahmed, S., Iran's growing presence in Syria's al-Hasakah poses a direct threat to US forces, MEI, 24 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1294</sup> Zelin, A. Y. & Knights, M., The Islamic State's Resurgence in the COVID Era?, WINEP, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1295</sup> Enab Baladi, Arabs look for missing representation in SDF-controlled areas, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1296</sup> NPA, ISIS, Government Outlets Claim Responsibility For Attacks In Syria's Deir Ez-Zor, 19 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1297</sup> NPA, US Fighting Vehicles Drive To Syria's Deir Ez-Zor, 6 December 2021, [url](#); MEMO, US beefs up military presence in Syria oil fields, 8 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1298</sup> The gas field is located in Tabiya, on the outskirts of Deir ez-Zor (city), but was named after the US company which discovered the site and built a processing plant there. See: Reuters, U.S.-backed forces capture big gas field in Syria's Deir al-Zor: senior commander, 23 September 2017, [url](#);

It has been fought over in the past, even after ISIL's territorial defeat. See: New York Times (The), How a 4-Hour Battle Between Russian Mercenaries and U.S. Commandos Unfolded in Syria, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1299</sup> Asharq al-Awsat, US Forces Conduct Drills in Bases Attacked by Iran, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1300</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022, 29 July 2022, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>1301</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022 [Map], 27 December 2021, [url](#)

## (f) ISIL

The Rojava Information Center concluded in its report covering the year 2021, that ‘the vast majority of ISIS attacks took place in the relatively unstable, Arab-majority region of Deir Ez-Zor.’ And ‘[t]hough officially under SDF control, the security situation in Deir Ez-Zor remains precarious.’<sup>1302</sup> In the second half of 2021, according to the UNCOI, ISIL activity contributed to a particularly volatile security situation in Deir Ez-Zor, ‘with continuous Da’esh attacks and counter-terrorism operations in response.’<sup>1303</sup>

According to a report by the International Crisis Group from July 2022, ISIL’s reach in Deir Ez-Zor has recently increased, frightening residents and thereby making it harder for ISIL’s adversaries to gather intelligence from the local population.<sup>1304</sup> Most of ISIL’s attacks in the governorate since late 2021 have taken place in Deir Ez-Zor’s western (GoS-controlled) countryside.<sup>1305</sup> Reporting on the first half of 2022, the UN Security Council noted that ISIL continued to concentrate its attack in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, among other areas.<sup>1306</sup>

### 2.9.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

According to the UNCOI, the overall security situation deteriorated in the territories under SDF-control during the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021<sup>1307</sup> and life remained insecure during the second half of 2021 (1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021).<sup>1308</sup>

In May 2022, Deir Ez-Zor governorate also witnessed airstrikes near the town of Masyaf on what is believed to be a base for Iranian and Iran-affiliated militias<sup>1309</sup> and near al-Bukamal on a convoy by the IRGC<sup>1310</sup>, both assumed to be conducted by the Israeli military.

#### *Infighting among GoS forces*

In May 2021, members of the NDF reportedly clashed with members of Liwa al-Quds in Deir Ez-Zor city.<sup>1311</sup> In another incident, different factions within the NDF clashed with each other, causing several injuries and temporarily cut off the city from its western countryside.<sup>1312</sup>

<sup>1302</sup> RiC, Annual Slepper Cell Report 2021, February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1303</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 95

<sup>1304</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. ii

<sup>1305</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1306</sup> UN Security Council, Fifteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2022/576], 26 July 2022, [url](#), para 28

<sup>1307</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>1308</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>1309</sup> Times of Israel (The), Syria says airstrikes target area where Iran-backed forces known to operate, 7 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1310</sup> NPA, Airstrikes Hit IRGC Convoy East Of Syria’s Deir Ez-Zor, 21 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1311</sup> Deir ez-Zor 24, Clash between militias in Deir Ezzor requires intervention by Republican Guard, n. d., [url](#)

<sup>1312</sup> The Euphrates Post, استنفار في دير الزور وعزلها عن ريفها الغربي بعد خلافات بين عناصر ميليشيا “الدفاع الوطني” [Alert in Deir ez-Zor; isolated from its western countryside after disputes between members of the “National Defense” militia], 7 May 2021, [url](#);



In the same month, a SAA major general has been arrested by the military police, reportedly due to his personal differences with Iranian militias in Deir Ez-Zor.<sup>1313</sup>

### *General opposition to the SDF's rule*

Preceding an already strained relationship between the SDF and Arab tribes, described as 'hostile' by COAR<sup>1314</sup>, protests erupted in May 2021 across the SDF-controlled areas in northeast Syria, triggered mainly by a decision of the AANES to raise fuel prices. In Deir Ez-Zor city, protesters took to the streets in the governorate's capital and blocked roads in the countryside.<sup>1315</sup> Similar protests over rising commodity prices took place again in March<sup>1316</sup> and April 2022, when protesters again blocked roads in Deir Ez-Zor's countryside.<sup>1317</sup> However, unlike in Hasaka governorate, there seemingly have been no violent crackdowns by security forces or reports of casualties.

Protests against SDF recruitment campaigns were also reported in December 2021.<sup>1318</sup> In the same month, violent protests erupted in the city of Busayra<sup>1319</sup> in Deir Ez-Zor's eastern countryside after reports of mass arrests and alleged executions of local men at the hands of the SDF.<sup>1320</sup> Days prior, several SDF bases in Busayra have been attacked by ISIL.<sup>1321</sup>

### *ISIL insurgency*

In April and May 2021, there have been numerous killings in Deir Ez-Zor, often attributed to ISIL-activity<sup>1322</sup>: for example, in one instance, unknown gunmen on motor bikes killed a religious official from Deir Ez-Zor's Civil Council in the western countryside<sup>1323</sup> and, in another incident, a SDF leader was shot and killed by unknown gunmen on motorbikes in the

<sup>1313</sup> Al-Hal Net, *عدم رضاها عنه*. «الميليشيات الإيرانية» تعتقل أعلى رتبة عسكرية للقوات الحكومية في دير الزور [Not being satisfied with him, "Iranian militias" arrest the highest military rank of government forces in Deir ez-Zor], 11 May 2021, [url](#); Zaman al-Wasl, *تواصل مع الأميركيين.. النظام يعتقل رئيس اللجنة الأمنية والعسكرية في دير الزور* [Communicated with the Americans. The regime arrests the head of the security and military committee in Deir ez-Zor], 9 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1314</sup> COAR, *Northeast Syria Social Tensions and Stability Monitoring: April Update*, 28 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1315</sup> Al-Hurra, *غليان شعبي "ولغز" وراء مضاعفة أسعار المحروقات* [Eastern Syria. Popular upheaval and a "mystery" behind the doubling of fuel prices], 18 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1316</sup> SOHR, *Renewed protests in SDF-held areas/ Residents demand improvement of living conditions in Deir Ezzor countryside*, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1317</sup> Kurdistan 24, *Protesters in Syria's Deir al-Zor demand better living conditions from the Kurdish-led administration*, 24 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, *Renewed protests in SDF-held areas/ Protestors call for improving living conditions west of Deir Ezzor*, 24 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1318</sup> New Arab (The), *تجدد المظاهرات ضد "قسد" احتجاجاً على التجنيد الإجباري* [Renewed demonstrations against the "SDF" in protest against the forced conscription], 7 December 2021, [url](#); Jesr Press, *مظاهرات في ريف دير الزور احتجاجاً على انتشار الفساد وقطان الطحين* [Demonstrations in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor protesting the spread of corruption and the loss of flour], 4 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1319</sup> Sada al-Sharqieh, via Twitter @Sada\_AlSharqieh, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1320</sup> Al-Monitor, *Pentagon: Four Islamic State fighters killed in nighttime Syria raid*, 13 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, *Al-Busayrah security campaign targets "arm dealers and ISIS affiliates", while death toll jumps to four*, 13 December 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, *إنزال جوي لـ"قسد" بدعم من التحالف يخلف ثلاثة قتلى وعدداً من المعتقلين شرقي دير الزور* [An airdrop of "SDF" with the support of the coalition leaves three dead and a number of detainees east of Deir Ezzor], 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1321</sup> NPA, *ISIS Claims Responsibility For Attacks On SDF Headquarters In Syria's Deir Ez-Zor*, 12 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1322</sup> UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General [S/2021/583]*, 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>1323</sup> NPA, *Unidentified Individuals Assassinated Cleric In Syria's Deir Ez-Zor*, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

governorate's East.<sup>1324</sup> The Asayish conducted several raids targeting ISIL, focusing on both Deir Ez-Zor's northern and northeastern countryside<sup>1325</sup>, as well as its eastern<sup>1326</sup> and northwestern<sup>1327</sup> countryside.

In June 2021, ISIL militants reportedly established temporary checkpoints in the eastern countryside of Deir Ez-Zor, stopping civilians and enforcing radical Islamic.<sup>1328</sup> The governorate's eastern countryside is considered to be the area where the SDF's authority is weakest, according to COAR.<sup>1329</sup>

In December 2021, Deir Ez-Zor's eastern countryside became the focal point of clashes between the SDF and ISIL militants, when several attacks by ISIL on SDF bases in Busayra<sup>1330</sup> prompted a joint military operation between the SDF and the US-led Coalition against ISIL reportedly resulting in both military and civilian casualties.<sup>1331</sup> In the same month, ISIL militants attacked the SDF-controlled Subaihan oil field<sup>1332</sup> and were likely behind an IED-attack targeting a bus carrying workers on their way back from the GoS-controlled Kharata oil field.<sup>1333</sup>

At the turn of the year 2021/22, ISIL cells reportedly carried out an average of 10 to 15 attacks on GoS forces per month, many of them in rural western Deir Ez-Zor.<sup>1334</sup>

A general trend of ISIL gaining ground in Deir Ez-Zor either by staging attacks on the SDF and civilians, by imposing taxes on the local population or by kidnapping and exacting ransom from people could be observed by the turn of the year 2021/22.<sup>1335</sup>

In February 2022, following an attempted jailbreak in Hasaka (see section 2.7.3), ISIL conducted a string of attacks in the SDF-controlled areas of Deir Ez-Zor.<sup>1336</sup> In April 2022, ISIL militants reportedly attacked the GoS-controlled Kharata oil field in the governorate's southwest<sup>1337</sup> in what appeared to be part of a larger campaign against GoS targets in the

<sup>1324</sup> Rûdaw, Unknown gunmen assassinate SDF leader in Deir ez-Zor, 4 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1325</sup> Rûdaw, 14 ISIS suspects arrested in new Deir ez-Zor operation, 12 May 2021, [url](#); ANHA, Second operation by SDF in Wadi Al-Ajeej in less than month, what for?, 11 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1326</sup> NPA, الأسايش تنفذ عمليتين أمنيتين بريفي الحسكة ودير الزور [The Asayish carry out two security operations in the countryside of Hasaka and Deir Ezzor], 31 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1327</sup> SDF Press Center, Our Forces Dismantle Daesh Terrorist Cells In Deir Ezzor Western Countryside, 24 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1328</sup> SY 24, "حسبة داعش" تظهر مجدداً وتهدد الأهالي بالقتل [Deir ez-Zor. "Daesh Hesba" reappears and threatens the people with death], 9 June 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Islamic State revives religious police in northeast Syria, 21 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1329</sup> COAR, Syria Update, Bye, Bye Badia: IS Challenges SDF in Bid for Wider Relevance, 28 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1330</sup> NPA, ISIS Claims Responsibility for Attacks On SDF Headquarters In Syria's Deir Ez-Zor, 12 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1331</sup> Al-Monitor, Pentagon: Four Islamic State fighters killed in nighttime Syria raid, 13 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Al-Busayrah security campaign targets "arm dealers and ISIS affiliates", while death toll jumps to four, 13 December 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, إنزال جوي لـ "قصد" بدعم من التحالف يخلف ثلاثة قتلى وعدداً من المعتقلين شرقي دير الزور [An airdrop of "SDF" with the support of the coalition leaves three dead and a number of detainees east of Deir Ezzor], 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1332</sup> Al-Monitor, Islamic State cells impose levy on oil investors in northeastern Syria, 29 December 2021, [url](#); Baladi News, "داعش" يتنظيم "داعش" يهاجم حقلاً نفطياً في دير الزور [ISIS raids an oil field in Deir ez-Zor], 16 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1333</sup> Al-Monitor, Oil workers killed in Islamic State attack in Syria, 3 December 2021, [url](#); Asharq al-Awsat, مقتل 10 عمال حقلاً نفطياً بهجوم شمال شرقي سوريا [10 oil field workers killed in northeastern Syria attack], 3 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1334</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1335</sup> Al-Monitor, Islamic State ramps up activities in eastern Syria, 6 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1336</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 26, fn 133

<sup>1337</sup> Euphrates Post (The), "تنظيم الدولة" يهاجم حقلاً نفطياً غربياً في دير الزور [ISIS attacks an oil field west of Deir Ezzor], 6 April 2022, [url](#); al-Badia 24, via Twitter @ALBADIA24, 7 April 2022, [url](#)



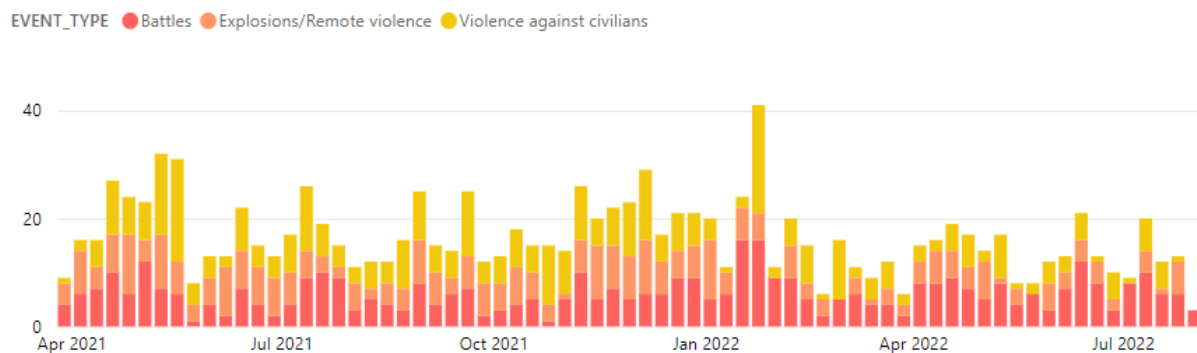
South of Deir Ez-Zor and areas across its neighbouring governorates.<sup>1338</sup>

For the first half of 2022, the UN Security Council registered a concentration of ISIL activities in Deir E z-Zor governorate among other areas in Syria. It described them at ‘sporadic attacks [...] utilizing insurgent tactics.’<sup>1339</sup>

Most of ISIL-related activity documented by the Carter Center in the first half of 2022 was recorded in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>1340</sup> According to International Crisis Group July 2022 report, SDF-raids backed by airpower from the US-led Coalition ‘often cause harm to civilians, including wrongful arrests, due to faulty intelligence.’<sup>1341</sup> In that same report, the authors conclude that, because of the militants’ ability to easily cross SDF- and GoS-controlled areas and ‘[d]espite regular arrests and killings of ISIS fighters, security in Deir al-Zor in 2021 and 2022 was the same or worse than in 2020.’<sup>1342</sup>

## (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 1 177 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, of whom 437 were battles, 338 explosive/remote violence and 402 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1343</sup>



**Figure 28. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>1344</sup>**

<sup>1338</sup> Al-Monitor, Islamic State escalates attacks in Syrian desert, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1339</sup> UN Security Council, Thirtieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2610 (2021) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022 [url](#), para. 43

<sup>1340</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 16; Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April-June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1341</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1342</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>1343</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1344</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

| District     | Battles    | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Albu Kamal   | 67         | 62              | 52                         |
| Al Mayadin   | 97         | 61              | 98                         |
| Deir Ez-Zor  | 273        | 215             | 252                        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>437</b> | <b>338</b>      | <b>402</b>                 |

**Figure 29. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Deir Ez-Zor governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>1345</sup>**

Security incidents were recorded in all districts, but significant higher numbers were documented in Deir Ez-Zor district (see Figure 29).

### Illustrative security incidents

- On 17 April 2021, unknown attackers shot and killed two Syrian aid workers in SDF-controlled Busayra<sup>1346</sup> According to COAR, it is believed to be the first incident in which aid workers have been targeted in the area.<sup>1347</sup>
- On 27 June 2021, the US Air Force carried out airstrikes against two sites used for ammunition storage and logistical purposes by (Iran-affiliated) Iraqi militias Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada along the Syrian-Iraqi border.<sup>1348</sup> In an apparent retaliation attack, US troops in the vicinity of al-Omar oil field came under fire from artillery rounds the next day.<sup>1349</sup>
- On 18 July 2021, a US drone strike destroyed a truck by Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, shortly after it crossed the border to Syria. SOHR reported that the driver was killed.<sup>1350</sup>
- On 8 November 2021, the Asayish, with the support of the US-led Coalition, reportedly thwarted a plan by an ISIL cell to attack Hasaka's Sina'a prison by raiding a hide-out in the countryside north of Deir Ez-Zor (city).<sup>1351</sup> The next day, retaliation attacks followed, when

<sup>1345</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1346</sup> UNOCHA, Press Release: United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Imran Riza, condemns killing of two aid workers in Deir-Ez-Zor, Syria, 18 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1347</sup> COAR, Syria Update, Quamishli Clashes Bring Arab-Kurd Tensions to the Surface, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1348</sup> New York Times (The), U.S. Carries Out Airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, 27 June 2021 (updated 28 August 2021), [url](#); USDOD, Statement by the Department of Defense (Immediate Release), 27 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1349</sup> Reuters, U.S. troops come under fire in Syria after strikes against Iran-backed militias, 29 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1350</sup> AP News, Militia officials: US drone destroys militia truck in Syria, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1351</sup> NPA, Asayish Thwarts ISIS Attack On Prison In Syria's Hasakah, 9 November 2021, [url](#)



ISIL militants attacked the SDF headquarters in Busayra and several other bases throughout the SDF-controlled areas.<sup>1352</sup>

- On 2 December 2021, 10 workers of the GoS-controlled Kharata oil field were killed in an IED attack on a transport bus.<sup>1353</sup> State media called it a 'terrorist attack' and blamed ISIL for it.<sup>1354</sup>
- On 13 December 2021, the SDF stated to have killed five suspected ISIL militants during a raid in Busayra, on the east bank of the Euphrates River. Reportedly, the raid was conducted as a joint operation with the US-led Coalition against ISIL. SOHR said that two of those killed were executed after being captured.<sup>1355</sup> Meanwhile, state media reported that several civilians were supposedly kidnapped in Busayra by US forces.<sup>1356</sup>
- On 7 April 2022, artillery hit a base housing US troops, injuring two members of the US-led Coalition against ISIL. SOHR reported that five rockets in total were fired from positions where Iran-backed militias were based.<sup>1357</sup>
- On 28 April 2022, ISIL militants attacked a former SDF spokesman's home in Abu Khashab, killing him and six other people. According to media reports, the gunmen arrived on motorcycles and opened fire as their targets gathered for Iftar, the fast-breaking meal during Ramadan.<sup>1358</sup>

### (c) Civilian fatalities

| Month    | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| January  | 23        | 8         |
| February | 22        | 6         |
| March    | 14        | 14        |
| April    | 16        | 12        |
| May      | 17        | 13        |
| June     | 8         | 12        |

<sup>1352</sup> VOA, IS Cells in NE Syria Retaliate for Foiled Prison-Break Plot, 9 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1353</sup> AP News, Report: 10 oil workers killed in attack on bus in Syria, 2 December 2021, [url](#)

SANA, Ten workers of al-Kharata oil file martyred in a terrorist attack in Deir Ezzor, 2 December 2021, [url](#)<sup>1355</sup> AP News, US-backed Syria forces say 5 IS suspects killed in raid, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1355</sup> AP News, US-backed Syria forces say 5 IS suspects killed in raid, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1356</sup> Reuters, Syria state media say U.S. forces 'kidnapped civilians' near Deir al-Zor, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1357</sup> AP News, Attack in east Syria injures 2 US-led coalition members, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1358</sup> AP News, Suspected IS militants kill 7 Syrians at Ramadan iftar meal, 28 April 2022, [url](#)

| Month        | SNHR 2021  | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|------------|-----------|
| July         | 21         | 7         |
| August       | 8          |           |
| September    | 20         |           |
| October      | 13         |           |
| November     | 16         |           |
| December     | 23         |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>201</b> | <b>72</b> |

**Figure 30. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Deir Ez-Zor governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 201 civilian fatalities<sup>1359</sup> in Deir Ez-Zor governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 72 civilian fatalities.<sup>1360</sup>

<sup>1359</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1360</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101



#### **(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

UNESCWA estimates the physical capital loss of Deir Ez-Zor governorate around USD 5.5 billion (6.8 % of all the damage inflicted on Syrian physical capital) between 2011–2018 and explains the amount of damage by noting that between 2014 and 2017 intense hit-and-run clashes between the GoS forces and ISIL took place.<sup>1361</sup>

In March 2022 the Carter Center published a report mapping unexploded ordnance in Syria between December 2012 and May 2021. According to the report, around 39 951 explosive munitions were used in this period in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, contributing to 'UXO contamination' of between 4 000 – 12 000.<sup>1362</sup>

Regarding explosive ordnance contamination, Deir Ez-Zor is considered one of Syria's most affected governorates, according to a report by iMMAP. However, as the report notes, the situation in Deir Ez-Zor is more difficult to assess due to 'access issues in the south and east of the governorate'. From September 2021 to April 2022, the report lists 392 deaths and 232 injuries in connection with landmine incidents for Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>1363</sup>

Mine Action Review reports that international and national demining organisations as well as commercial companies have taken part in demining activities in areas under SDF control in north-east Syria. The company Tetra Tech 'focused on critical infrastructure such as healthcare, schools, water and electricity'.<sup>1364</sup> According to the Carter Center, the SDF is also involved in the clearance of unexploded ordnance in the areas under its control.<sup>1365</sup>

#### **(e) Displacement and return**

UNOCHA stated in a February 2022 report that the IDP population in Deir Ez-Zor governorate was 39 274.<sup>1366</sup> In 2021, UNOCHA recorded approximately 1 000 IDP movements from Deir Ez-Zor governorate, 2 000 IDP movements within the governorate as well as 700 movements towards it.<sup>1367</sup> In the first half of 2022, there were 1 510 IDP departures from Deir Ez-Zor governorate, 1 363 displacements within the governorate amounted), and IDP arrivals to the governorate amounted to 1 564.<sup>1368</sup>

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Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1361</sup> UNESCWA/University of St Andrews, Syria at War; Eight Years On, 2020, 23 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 50-51

<sup>1362</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications, December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1363</sup> iMMAP, Progress, Challenges and Forecast of Humanitarian Mine Action, 31 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 9, 13

<sup>1364</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing the Mines 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 379

<sup>1365</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and its Implications. December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1366</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1367</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1368</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements,

For 2021, UNOCHA's registered about 8 000 IDP returnee movements to Deir Ez-Zor governorate and 3 000 IDP returnee movements within.<sup>1369</sup> In the first half of 2022, there were 6 673 IDP returns to Deir Ez-Zor governorate, 4 914 IDP returns within the governorate and 4 927 IDP returns from the governorate.<sup>1370</sup>

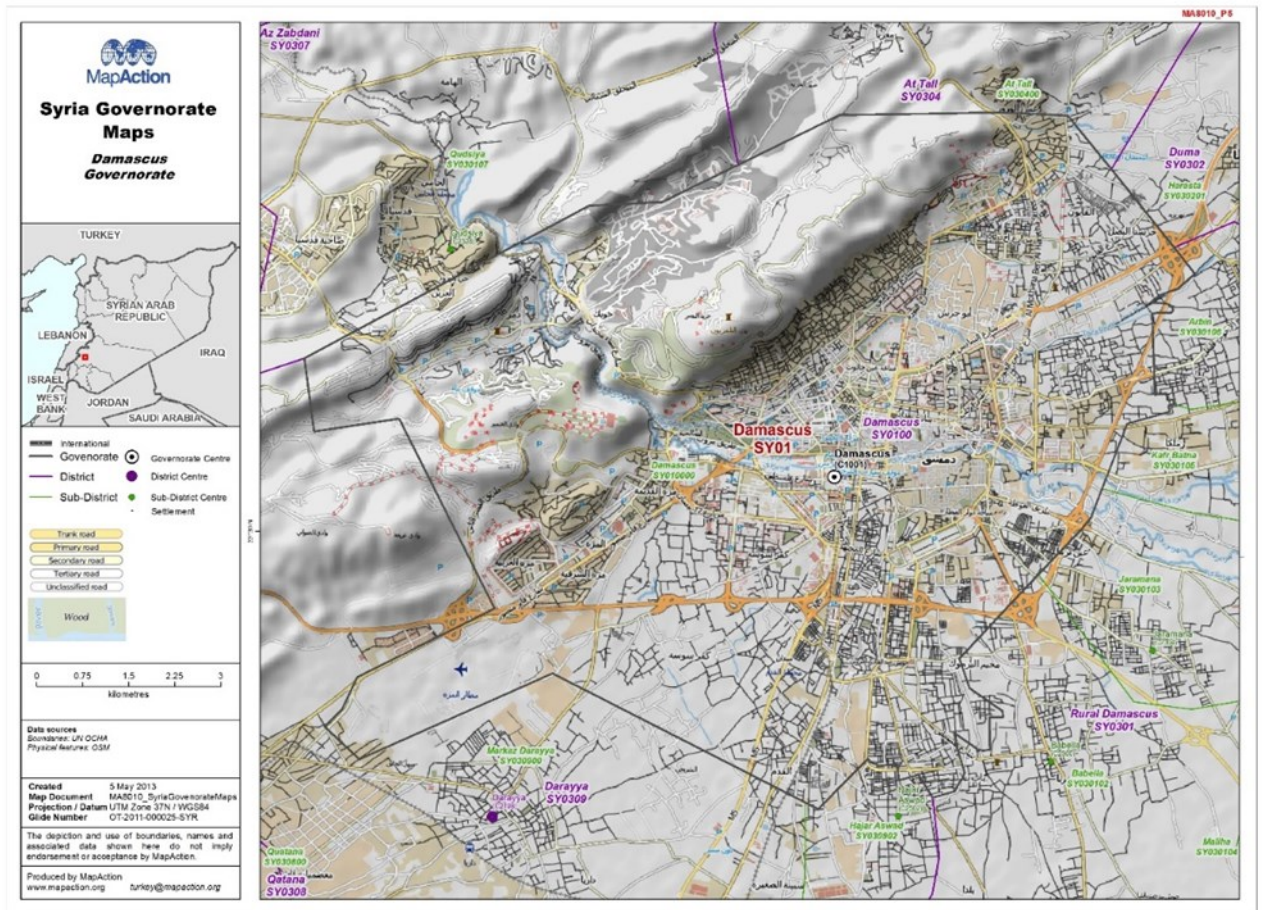
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March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1369</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (as of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1370</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns, June 2022, 5 August 2022, [url](#)

## 2.10. Damascus governorate



Map 16: © MapAction, Damascus governorate<sup>1371</sup>

### 2.10.1. General description of the governorate

Damascus governorate, which includes Syria's capital, is located in the south-western part of the country and is completely surrounded by Rural Damascus (Rif Damashq) governorate. The governorate is divided into two districts, Damascus city and Yarmouk. Damascus city itself comprises 15 sub-district-level areas: Barzeh, Qaboun, Jobar, Al-Shaghour, Al-Midan, Al-Qadam, Kafr Sousa, Dummar, Al-Mazzeh, Rukn Al-Din, Al-Salihyah, Al-Mouhajrin, Saroujah, Al-Qanawat, and Old Damascus.<sup>1372</sup>

The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the city's population at 2 103 405 as of mid-2021.<sup>1373</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Damascus governorate to be 1 828 845.<sup>1374</sup>

<sup>1371</sup> UNOCHA, Syria sub-districts maps [maps], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1372</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, Governorates profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>1373</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1374</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

National government and administrative institutions, including large military and security services establishments, are centred in Damascus.<sup>1375</sup> A wide peripheral boulevard surrounds Damascus city, flanked by 'wide avenues that create ruptures in the urban space'. Balanche refers to this urban planning as part of the GoS's anti-insurgency strategy, through which it 'likely sought to optimize the movement of armored vehicles'.<sup>1376</sup>

Major highways connect Damascus with major cities as well as with the capitals of neighbouring countries.<sup>1377</sup> Damascus International Airport is situated 30 km south-east of central Damascus.<sup>1378</sup>

For information on the ethnic and religious composition of Damascus governorate see the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Socio-economic situation: Damascus city \(August 2022\)](#).

## 2.10.2. Conflict background and armed actors

Maps published by several sources indicated that the GoS and affiliated groups were in control of Damascus governorate throughout the reference period of this report.<sup>1379</sup>

The GoS special forces were able to defend the capital during the entire war, and while Sunni rebels captured the suburbs in the early stages of the conflict, they were never able to advance towards the central districts. The Al-Midan neighbourhood was briefly occupied by the rebel Free Syrian Army in 2012, but GoS forces soon regained control. It was noted that, while Al-Midan is a predominantly Sunni neighbourhood, it is mostly inhabited by upper- and middle-class families who apparently did not side with the rebels.<sup>1380</sup>

The Carter Center emphasised that the conflict inside Damascus city mainly played out in opposition-held areas, including the Jobar, Qaboun, Tishreen, and Barzeh neighbourhoods that were connected to eastern Ghouta, the opposition's stronghold. The southern neighbourhoods of Yarmouk Camp and Tadamoun also frequently experienced conflict activity.<sup>1381</sup> The GoS forces, backed by Iran and Russia, regained complete control of the capital in 2018.<sup>1382</sup> Since then, the Damascus area has been characterised by a 'relative absence of anti-regime activities'.<sup>1383</sup> Over 2018<sup>1384</sup> and 2019<sup>1385</sup>, the GoS removed security barriers that had been erected between neighbourhoods in proportion 'to the security

<sup>1375</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Damascus, last updated 12 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1376</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>1377</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Damascus, last updated 12 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1378</sup> Damascus International Airport, Maps of Damascus airport, 2021 (n.d.), [url](#)

<sup>1379</sup> Based on reading of the following maps: Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); Carter Center (The), *The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics | January-March 2022*, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 2; UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022*, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, *Map of military control in Syria: End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022*, 24 December 2021, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1380</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>1381</sup> Carter Center (The), *Explosive Munitions in Syria - Report 2 - Damascus City and Rural Damascus Governorate*, January 2020, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1382</sup> SOHR, *Soldier killed in rare Damascus bombing*, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1383</sup> Haid, H., *Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus*, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1384</sup> Enab Baladi, *Damascus checkpoints are being removed... Has Syria become "safe"?!* , 27 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1385</sup> Denmark, DIS, *Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus*, [source: Syria Direct], October 2020, [url](#), p. 35



conditions of each area and its proximity to the security centres and intelligence branches'.<sup>1386</sup> The GoS has since sought to present Damascus city as a 'haven of calm' within Syria, although this view has been contested by Haid Haid,<sup>1387</sup> a Syrian columnist and consulting fellow with Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa programme, who pointed to recurring attacks on members of the security forces in the city.<sup>1388</sup> Most notably, it was reported that an IED attack on a bus with employees of the Military Housing Corporation killed 14 people in October 2021.<sup>1389</sup>

#### **(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups**

The SAA's First<sup>1390</sup> and Fifth Corps<sup>1391</sup>, as well as its Republican Guard<sup>1392</sup> reportedly had their headquarters in the capital. The Fourth Armoured Division, comprising four brigades (38, 40, 41, and 42) and led by Maher al-Assad, has the mission 'to secure Damascus and protect the regime from any significant threats', particularly from within.<sup>1393</sup> As of September 2021, it was reported to operate two supply and repair points in the military section of Damascus airport and at Mezzeh military airport.<sup>1394</sup>

#### **(b) Iran and Iran-backed armed groups**

A map published by Jusoor for Studies shows multiple Hezbollah and Iranian bases as being located in the Damascus area.<sup>1395</sup> In the governorate, as of late 2019, Hezbollah was surveilling the Shiite al-Shaghour neighbourhood, the vicinity of the Umayyad Mosque, and the Sayyidah Ruqayya shrine area where the Hezbollah headquarters is located. The area around the Sayyidah Ruqayya shrine has been described as a 'closed security area' where Shia militias of various nationalities are deployed 'to protect Shia pilgrims at the shrine and the Bab al-Saghir cemetery'.<sup>1396</sup>

#### **(c) Anti-GoS armed groups**

While sources interviewed by the DIS in August and September 2020 stated that ISIL and other opposition groups no longer had a presence in Damascus governorate,<sup>1397</sup> a February 2022 report of the UN Security Council noted that ISIL had an 'active presence' in Damascus

<sup>1386</sup> Enab Baladi, Damascus checkpoints are being removed... Has Syria become "safe"?!, 27 June 2018, [url](#)

<sup>1387</sup> Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1388</sup> Chatham House, Haid Haid, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1389</sup> COAR, Deadly Bus Blast Evinces Security Risks in Damascus and Beyond, 25 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1390</sup> Al-Khanadeq, القوات البرية السورية: سر من أسرار الانتصار [Syrian ground forces – a secret for victory], 26 November 2021, [url](#); Suwayda 24, البلاد جنوب الأول للفيلق جديد قائد [New commander of the 1st Corps in the south of the country... Changes in the Syrian army], 30 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1391</sup> Al-Khanadeq, القوات البرية السورية: سر من أسرار الانتصار [Syrian ground forces – a secret for victory], 26 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1392</sup> Waters, G., Understanding Syria's Military Deployments in Idlib, International Review, 10 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1393</sup> Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1394</sup> Alghadawi, A., The Fourth Division: Syria's parallel army, MEI, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1395</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of the military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1396</sup> Ezzi, M., Lebanese Hezbollah's Experience in Syria [source: journalist Raed al-Salhani], EUI, 13 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>1397</sup> Denmark, DIS, Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus, [sources: Syria Direct; Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)], October 2020, [url](#), pp. 35, 52

Two deadly high-profile attacks on GoS security personnel were claimed by the armed insurgent factions Hurras al-Din, an al-Qaida loyalist group,<sup>1400</sup> and a little-known group named Saraya Qasioun.<sup>1401</sup> The latter group has been active since 2019 and was reported to have been carrying out a ‘low-level insurgency in and around Damascus’. While Saraya Qasioun has claimed attacks targeting GoS forces, COAR noted that some doubted the group’s capability to stage such attacks, pointing to local sources alleging in 2021 that some of these attacks were ‘inside jobs’<sup>1402</sup> perpetrated between GoS officers.<sup>1403</sup> Sources interviewed by the DIS in August 2020 even questioned the existence of opposition cells in Damascus<sup>1404</sup> and of Saraya Qasioun specifically.<sup>1405</sup>

**(a) Security trends during the reporting period**

While it was noted that attacks had become rare inside Damascus governorate since the GoS recaptured the surrounding countryside in 2018,<sup>1406</sup> during the reference period there were several reported incidents targeting officials or supporters of the GoS. These included three deadly bombings of military buses in August 2021,<sup>1407</sup> October 2021,<sup>1408</sup> and February 2022<sup>1409</sup> and an IED attack on a non-civilian individual in April 2022.<sup>1410</sup> One of the incidents was an attack in Masaken al-Haras, an area that is predominantly inhabited by Alawite members of the GoS military and security establishment and their families and is known for its tight security.<sup>1411</sup> Though attacks often went unclaimed, Haid assessed that it was likely that former

<sup>1411</sup> COAR, Hurras al-Din Lays Claim to Deadly Damascus Bus Blast, 9 August 2021, url

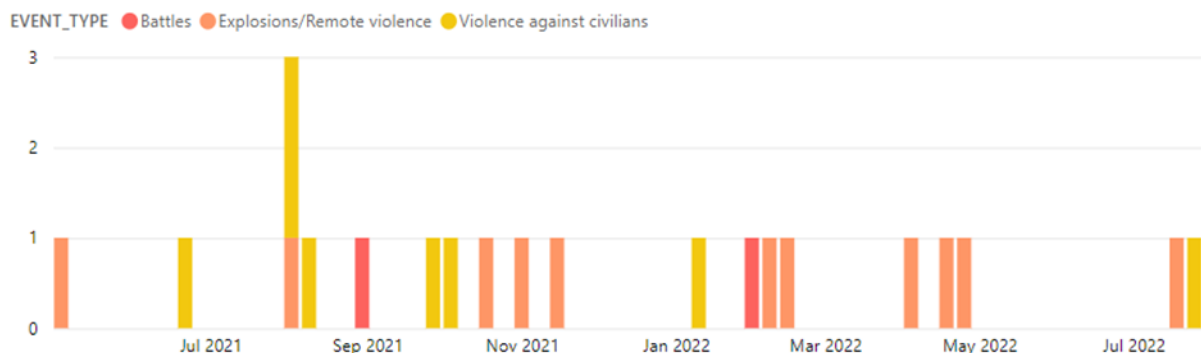
rebels (i.e. individuals with the ‘motives, skills, and resources to carry out attacks’) were behind some of the incidents reported in Damascus city and its surroundings.<sup>1412</sup>

In September 2021, ISIL claimed responsibility for destroying a gas pipeline supplying the Deir Ali and Tishreen power plants, as well as two power pylons. The group referred to the attack as being part of a new ‘economic war’ against the GoS.<sup>1413</sup>

Moreover, several strikes by Israeli forces were recorded during the reference period, targeting locations at or near Damascus International Airport<sup>1414</sup> including military posts and warehouses of GoS forces, Iranian troops or Iran-backed militias.<sup>1415</sup>

### (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period there were 21 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Damascus governorate, of whom 2 were coded as battles, 11 explosions/remote violence and 8 incidents of violence against civilians. All security incidents were recorded in Damascus city.



**Figure 31: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Damascus governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>1416</sup>**

Very few security incidents were recorded in Damascus governorate during the reference period for this report. These include the following:

- On 4 August 2021, a bus transporting Syrian military personnel detonated at the entrance of Masaken al-Haras (Guards’ residences) near Mashru’a Dummar in Damascus city. The driver was reportedly killed, and three other persons were injured. While the state-run news agency SANA stated that the explosion had been caused by

<sup>1412</sup> Haid, H., Assad’s fake narrative of a ‘safe’ Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1413</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 14, footnote 58

<sup>1414</sup> SOHR, After suspension of attacks for more than a month | Israeli strikes hit military sites in Damascus and middle of Syria, 8 June 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Israeli missiles hitting vicinity of Damascus airport kill four regime fighters and civil servant, 23 May 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Israeli attack on Damascus airport | Runway and control tower sustain damage and air flights transported to Aleppo airport, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1415</sup> SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1416</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

a short circuit that ignited the fuel tank of the bus,<sup>1417</sup> COAR noted that Hurras al-Din, an al-Qaida loyalist group, had claimed responsibility for the incident.<sup>1418</sup>

- On 20 October 2021, two IEDs planted on a military bus in Damascus city killed 14 people and injured several others, SANA reported.<sup>1419</sup> All victims were reported to have been employees of the Military Housing Corporation. The insurgent group Saraya Qasioun claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>1420</sup> It was noted that this was the deadliest attack in the capital since March 2017.<sup>1421</sup>
- On 15 February 2022, an SAA soldier was killed and more than 10 others were wounded when an IED planted in a military transport bus detonated in the Al-Barakma area of Damascus city.<sup>1422</sup>
- On 24 February 2022, rocket fire from Israeli forces hit posts and weapons storages of Iran-backed militias near Damascus International Airport and air-defence systems south of Damascus city, killing seven people, including two GoS soldiers, two Syrians linked to Hezbollah, and three members of Iran-backed militias.<sup>1423</sup>
- In July 2022, the Washington Post reported with reference to the Syrian state news agency SANA that three Syrian soldiers were killed and seven others injured in Israeli air strikes on Damascus. The death toll later rose to five, according to the Jordanian state television.<sup>1424</sup>

<sup>1417</sup> SANA, A military bus explosion in Damascus causes martyrdom of the driver and injury of three others, 4 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1418</sup> COAR, Hurras al-Din Lays Claim to Deadly Damascus Bus Blast, 9 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1419</sup> SANA, 14 martyrs in terrorist attack on military bus, Damascus-video, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1420</sup> COAR, Deadly Bus Blast Evinces Security Risks in Damascus and Beyond, 25 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1421</sup> DW, Deadly twin bus blasts rock Syria, 20 October 2021, [url](#); BBC News, Syria war: Deadly bomb blasts hit military bus in Damascus, 20 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1422</sup> SOHR, Soldier killed in rare Damascus bombing, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1423</sup> SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1424</sup> Washington Post (The), Russian and Israeli planes hit Syria in separate strikes, kill at least 10, 22 July 2022, [url](#)



### (c) Civilian fatalities

In 2021, SNHR recorded one civilian fatality (documented in January 2021)<sup>1425</sup> in Damascus governorate, while in the first seven months of 2022 it recorded three civilian fatalities (two in May 2022 and one in June 2022).<sup>1426</sup>

### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

In a report published in 2020, UNESCWA and the University of St Andrews (United Kingdom) stated that Damascus governorate sustained about 3 % of the total damage to physical capital in Syria.<sup>1427</sup> Yarmouk refugee camp was affected by severe property damage during the conflict years. As of March 2021, UNRWA noted that the basic infrastructure of the Yarmouk refugee camp remained heavily damaged.<sup>1428</sup>

The Carter Center reported that between December 2012 and May 2021, 31 744 explosives were deployed in Damascus city.<sup>1429</sup> The source estimated that the use of explosives resulted in a contamination of the city by 3 000–9 500 pieces of UXO.<sup>1430</sup> While it was noted that UXO

<sup>1425</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1426</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1427</sup> UNESCWA and University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 51; The source defines loss to physical capital as including 'private and public construction and equipment, such as housing stock, schools, hospitals and factories, and power, water, sanitation, transport and communications infrastructure'. UNESCWA and University of St Andrews, Syria at War: Eight Years On, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 49

<sup>1428</sup> UNRWA, Yarmouk (unofficial camp), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1429</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications: December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1430</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications: December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

clearance efforts by GoS and Russian forces largely went unreported,<sup>1431</sup> the Carter Center pointed to the specific risks a substantial presence of UXO poses in the densely populated Damascus area.<sup>1432</sup> Furthermore, in a September 2021 report, Mine Action Review indicated that Damascus governorate was one of 13 governorates that had experienced use of cluster munitions since 2012.<sup>1433</sup>

In May 2022, four civilians died under a collapsing building in the Jobar neighbourhood of Damascus city. The building had previously been shelled by the GoS and Russian air forces.<sup>1434</sup>

### **(e) Displacement and return**

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 609 682 IDPs.<sup>1435</sup> In 2021, UNOCHA in Damascus governorate recorded approximately 1 000 IDP movements from the governorate and 398 IDP movements to the governorate.<sup>1436</sup>

In 2022, UNOCHA reported 80 IDP departures from and 7 IDP arrivals to Damascus governorate in January,<sup>1437</sup> 65 departures and 20 arrivals in February,<sup>1438</sup> 255 departures in March,<sup>1439</sup> 133 departures and 27 arrivals in April,<sup>1440</sup> and 139 departures and 8 arrivals in May.<sup>1441</sup>

As regards returns, in 2021 UNOCHA recorded for Damascus governorate approximately 11 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from the governorate and some 2 000 IDP returnee movements to the governorate.<sup>1442</sup> In 2022, UNOCHA recorded 53 spontaneous IDP returns from and 197 returns to the governorate in January,<sup>1443</sup> 382 returns from and 307 to the governorate in February,<sup>1444</sup> some 1 800 returns from and 221 returns to the governorate in March,<sup>1445</sup> and 276 returns from the governorate in April,<sup>1446</sup> and 160 returns from the governorate in May.<sup>1447</sup>

Information on reasons for displacement and return movements from or to Damascus governorate could not be identified within the time constraints of this report.

<sup>1431</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 181

<sup>1432</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications: December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1433</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

<sup>1434</sup> SOHR, Following previous airstrikes | Four civilians die under collapsing building in Jobar, 23 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1435</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1436</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1437</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1438</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1439</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1440</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1441</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1442</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1443</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1444</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

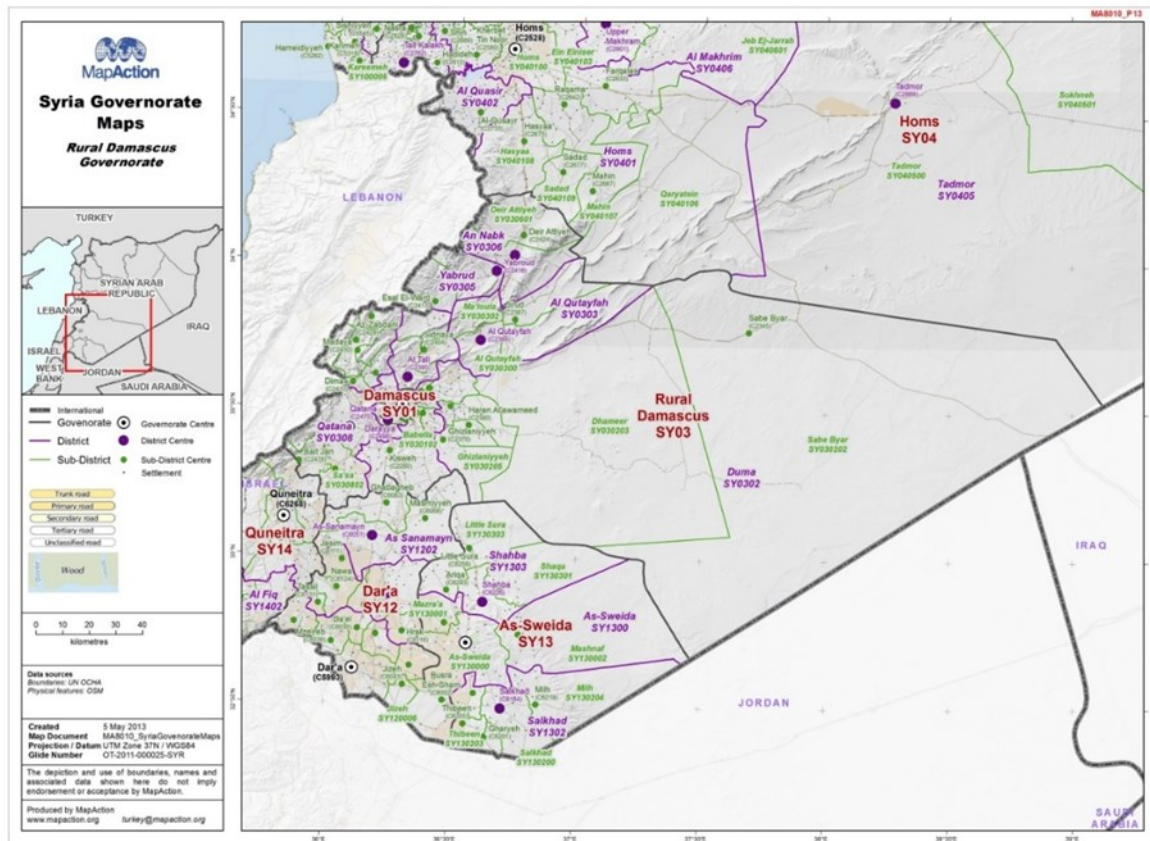
<sup>1445</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1446</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1447</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)



## 2.11. Rural Damascus



Map 17. MapAction, Rural Damascus governorate<sup>1448</sup>

### 2.11.1. General description of the governorate

Rural Damascus (*Rif Dimashq* in Arabic) is a largely agricultural governorate surrounding Damascus city.<sup>1449</sup> It is located in the south-western part of Syria and has international borders with Jordan and Iraq to the south and east and Lebanon to the west. Internally, it borders Homs governorate to the north and Quneitra, Dara'a and Sweida governorates to the south.<sup>1450</sup>

The governorate comprises nine administrative districts: Rural Damascus, Douma (Duma), Al Qutayfah, An Nabk, Yabroud (Yabrud), At Tall, Az-Zabadani, Darayya, and Qatana. The governorate's territory is further subdivided into a total of 36 subdistricts.<sup>1451</sup> Moreover, the governorate comprises 28 towns and 190 villages. Large parts of Damascus city's environs that

<sup>1448</sup> Mapaction, Syria 2013-2015, Rural Damascus Governorate [map], last updated:29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1449</sup> REACH, Rural Damascus Governorate, April 2018, Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria (HSOS), April 2018, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1450</sup> UNCS and UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#)

<sup>1451</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 103-104

fall under the administration of Rural Damascus governorate are integrated with the capital's urban landscape in contiguous built-up areas.<sup>1452</sup>

The territory administrated by Rural Damascus governorate includes a largely suburban area named Eastern Ghouta bordering Damascus city to the east<sup>1453</sup> that comprises 22 communities,<sup>1454</sup> including Douma, Harasta, Arbin, Misraba and Jisrein.<sup>1455</sup> To the southwest of the capital, there is an area called Western Ghouta that comprises Darayya and Moadamiya.<sup>1456</sup>

The Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that the governorate's population at 3 371 987 as of mid-2021.<sup>1457</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Rural Damascus governorate to be 3 026 227.<sup>1458</sup> According to a map provided by Fabrice Balanche in 2018, the western areas of Rural Damascus governorate were mostly inhabited by Sunni Arabs. In the areas surrounding the capital, there were some communities of Druze<sup>1459</sup> and Christians.<sup>1460</sup> Twelver Shia Muslims were present around Damascus city,<sup>1461</sup> notably in Sayyida Zainab, a Shiite-dominated town<sup>1462</sup> located south of the capital<sup>1463</sup> that is characterised by 'a dense population mix of Sunni Syrians, Iraqis and groups of Shia from Foua, Kefraya, al-Nubl and al-Zahraa'.<sup>1464</sup> The eastern parts of the governorate were inhabited by Bedouins.<sup>1465</sup>

According to Balanche (2018), some lower-ranking GoS officials were residing in the small Druze/Christian towns in the Damascus suburbs (Jaramana, Jdeidat Artouz, and Sahnaya).<sup>1466</sup> Meanwhile, conservative Sunni populations inhabited localities in the Ghouta area<sup>1467</sup> such as Douma,<sup>1468</sup> Zamalka, Daraya,<sup>1469</sup> Qudsaya,<sup>1470</sup> and the three 'southern Damascus towns' (Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahm).<sup>1471</sup>

<sup>1452</sup> Abdin, Y., The fragility of community security in Damascus and its environs, in: International Review of the Red Cross, Issue 99, No. 3, 2017, [url](#), p. 900

<sup>1453</sup> REACH, Syrian Cities Damage Atlas, 16 March 2019, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1454</sup> Al Jazeera, Inside Syria: How life goes on in a besieged town, 24 May 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1455</sup> REACH, Syrian Cities Damage Atlas, 16 March 2019, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1456</sup> Al Jazeera, Inside Syria: How life goes on in a besieged town, 24 May 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1457</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1458</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1459</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. Xiii

<sup>1460</sup> USDOS, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4; Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. Xiii

<sup>1461</sup> USDOS, 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>1462</sup> NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#); Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 17;

<sup>1463</sup> NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1464</sup> Salaam Times, Afghan militiamen involved in escalating drug war in Syria, 30 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1465</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. Xiii

<sup>1466</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>1467</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>1468</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32; Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1469</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War, WINEP, 2018, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>1470</sup> Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>1471</sup> Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 17



## 2.11.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The GoS recaptured Rural Damascus governorate in 2018,<sup>1472</sup> defeating the armed opposition in Eastern Ghouta<sup>1473</sup> in a Russian-supported<sup>1474</sup> military offensive launched between February and April 2018,<sup>1475</sup> during which GoS forces used chemical weapons against Douma city,<sup>1476</sup> the largest opposition stronghold in the vicinity of the capital from 2011 to 2018. According to one estimate, 70 % of the local infrastructure of Eastern Ghouta was destroyed.<sup>1477</sup> In towns like Douma, Zabadani,<sup>1478</sup> Darayya<sup>1479</sup> and Hajar al-Aswad<sup>1480</sup> most of the population was displaced.<sup>1481</sup> For more information on the conflict background in Rural Damascus governorate, see section 2.11.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

Maps published by several sources indicated that, throughout the reference period of this report, the GoS and affiliated groups were controlling all of the governorate's territory except for a zone in its easternmost section.<sup>1482</sup> This so-called US-declared 55-km exclusion zone<sup>1483</sup> around Tanf (the zone also extends into Homs governorate)<sup>1484</sup> was being controlled by US troops and MaT.<sup>1485</sup> As of March 2022, an estimated 200 US forces were garrisoned at At-Tanf.<sup>1486</sup>

### (a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

At the time of writing, specific information on SAA deployments in Idlib governorate during the reference period could not be found. Information on particular SAA formations and units deployed in the governorate (before April 2021) is available in previous reports: [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Security situation \(May 2020\)](#).

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<sup>1472</sup> Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1473</sup> International Crisis Group, Lessons from the Syrian State's Return to the South, 25 February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1474</sup> SADC, Before Mariupol, there was Douma: How Russia's tactics of targeting civilians were transplanted from Syria to Ukraine, 6 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1475</sup> International Crisis Group, Lessons from the Syrian State's Return to the South, 25 February 2019, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1476</sup> SNHR, The Syrian Regime's Chemical Attacks on Khan Sheikhoun and Douma Remain with No Accountability for Five Years, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1477</sup> Al Ra'i, N., Facets of Syrian Regime Authority in Eastern Ghouta, EUI, 23 August 2019, [url](#), p. 1-2

<sup>1478</sup> Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1479</sup> SADC, UN report on Syrian returnees leaves too much out to be useful, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1480</sup> Syria Report (The), Returnee Numbers Remain Very Low in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad as Looting Continues, 8 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1481</sup> Ezzi, M., Post-Reconciliation Rural Damascus: Are Local Communities Still Represented?, EUI, 27 November 2020, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1482</sup> Based on reading of the following maps: Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics | January-March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 2; UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Map of military control in Syria: End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 24 December 2021, [url](#); Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1483</sup> UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1484</sup> Liveuamap, Syria, as of 21 July 2022, [url](#); UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021[Map], January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1485</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 64

<sup>1486</sup> USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 64

As of December 2021, SAA's Fourth Armored Division reportedly withdrew from its positions in Eastern Ghouta, which were taken over the Military Security service.<sup>1487</sup>

More recent information regarding the presence of the SAA and affiliated armed groups in the governorate could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

### **(b) Russia**

A map published by Jusoor for Studies in January 2021 showed several Russian bases as being located in the governorate, including in Douma, near Damascus airport and to the west of Damascus city.<sup>1488</sup>

### **(c) Iran and Iran-backed militias**

According to a local source quoted by Kurdish media network North Press Agency (NPA) in June 2022, the Damascus region is one of three Syrian regions that are of interest to Iran.<sup>1489</sup> A map published by Jusoor for Studies in January 2021 showed multiple Iranian bases/posts as being clustered in the surroundings of Damascus city.<sup>1490</sup> Bases or posts run by Lebanese Hezbollah were shown in Sayyida Zainab, at locations north of Damascus city, in Al-Dumayr, and along the Lebanese border, amongst others. Moreover, the map showed that there were several Iranian and Hezbollah bases/posts along the internal border with Quneitra governorate in the southwest.<sup>1491</sup>

In Sayyida Zainab, where an absence of GoS institutions allowed Iranian institutions to expand,<sup>1492</sup> there were 'Iranian, Afghan, Pakistani, Iraqi and Lebanese Hizbullah militia elements', each with their own sectors, a local newspaper editor told Salaam Times<sup>1493</sup> in May 2022.<sup>1494</sup> As of late 2019, Hezbollah maintained a direct presence in the town, running intelligence centres, operations rooms, prisons and weapons armouries. In addition, dozens of local Shia militias with close links to Hezbollah were based in the town.<sup>1495</sup> In December 2021, it was reported that the adjacent Al-Bahdaliya area (Babila district) also saw a presence of Iran-backed militias and their families.<sup>1496</sup>

Moreover, as of January 2022, the IRGC and Iran-backed militias were reported to be almost exclusively in control of Al-Dimas military airbase west of Damascus city.<sup>1497</sup>

<sup>1487</sup> NPA, Government-Backed Armored Division Withdraws From Rif Dimashq, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1488</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of the military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1489</sup> NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1490</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of the military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1491</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Map of the military bases and posts of foreign forces in Syria, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1492</sup> NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1493</sup> Salaam Times is a news website sponsored by the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM). See [url](#)

<sup>1494</sup> Salaam Times, Afghan militiamen involved in escalating drug war in Syria, 30 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1495</sup> Ezzi, M., Lebanese Hezbollah's Experience in Syria [source: journalist Raed al-Salhani], EUI, 13 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1496</sup> SOHR, Iran increases presence south Damascus | Afghan families of Iranian proxies leave Palmyra and head to Sayyida Zainab area, 21 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1497</sup> SOHR, SOHR: Hezbollah Expands Old Military Base in Syria, 3 January 2022, [url](#)



#### (d) Anti-GoS armed groups

Sources interviewed by the DIS in August and September 2020 stated that ISIL and other opposition groups no longer had a presence in Rural Damascus governorate.<sup>1498</sup> However, a year later, ISIL claimed an attack on a major gas pipeline southeast of Damascus city in September 2021<sup>1499</sup> and two bombings near Kisweh (south of Damascus city) in May 2022.<sup>1500</sup>

The anti-GoS armed group Saraya Qasioun was reported in previous years to be active in and around Damascus.<sup>1501</sup> Its activity and even existence was doubted by several sources.<sup>1502</sup> During the reporting period, no further information on this group was found.

For further information on past activities of anti-GoS armed groups in Rural Damascus governorate, see section 2.11.2 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

### 2.11.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

Security incidents recorded over the reporting period included multiple cases of assassinations and assassination attempts targeting members of GoS military forces and GoS-affiliated militias,<sup>1503</sup> at least one instance of assassination of a former opposition commander,<sup>1504</sup> attacks involving IEDs,<sup>1505</sup> several attacks by unknown gunmen on SAA checkpoints,<sup>1506</sup> and several instances of civilians being killed in infighting between members of GoS forces,<sup>1507</sup> community disputes,<sup>1508</sup> and gang-related crime.<sup>1509</sup> COAR reported that, between May 2021 and May 2022,

<sup>1498</sup> Denmark, DIS, Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus, [sources: Syria Direct; Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)], October 2020, [url](#), pp. 35, 52

<sup>1499</sup> AFP, IS claims Syria gas pipeline attack, 18 September 2021

<sup>1500</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>1501</sup> COAR, Deadly Bus Blast Evinces Security Risks in Damascus and Beyond, 25 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1502</sup> Denmark, DIS, Security and socio-economic situation in the governorates of Damascus and Rural Damascus, [source: Syria Direct], October 2020, [url](#), p. 35; COAR, Deadly Bus Blast Evinces Security Risks in Damascus and Beyond, 25 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1503</sup> SOHR, Western Rif Dimashq | Member of 4th Division stabbed to death in Muadamiyat al-Sham, 20 May 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Reef Dimashq | Regime force lieutenant killed by unknown gunmen in military checkpoint at Lebanese-Syrian borders, 6 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Attempted assassination | Regime-backed militia leader targeted in Rif Dimashq, 9 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Two separate attempted assassinations | Unknown gunmen try to kill leaders of 4th Division and military security local militia in west Damascus, 5 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Fourth crime in Rif Dimashq since early 2022 | Failed assassination attempt of a "political security" volunteer in eastern Ghouta, 12 January 2022, [url](#); Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1504</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Most prominent military opposition commander shot dead in Jabal Al-Sheikh, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1505</sup> Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#); NPA, Two IED Blasts In Syria's Rif Dimashq Leave Four Casualties, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1506</sup> SOHR, Motor bike attack | Tensions rise in western reef Dimashq after targeting regime forces checkpoint with grenade, 12 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Anti-regime attack | Gunmen open fire on regime checkpoint in Qudsaya, Rif Dimashq, while regime forces amass troops and block the area's entrances, 15 June 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Armed attack | Two members of the 4th Division killed in western Qalamoun, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1507</sup> SOHR, Armed clashes | Child killed and four injured by gunfire and grenade explosions during infighting between two NDF members in western Qalamoun in Rif Dimashq, 26 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1508</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Dispute over a bread basket killed civilian in western Rif Dimashq, 10 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Growing security chaos in regime-held areas | Family clashes leave injuries in Rif Dimashq, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1509</sup> SOHR, For ransom | Young man killed by a gang in horrific crime in Reef Dimashq, 7 September 2021, [url](#)

several explosions were reported inside Damascus city and its vicinity.<sup>1510</sup> Haid Haid observed that between April and June 2022, 16 attacks had been reported in and around Damascus, resulting in the deaths of 13 persons affiliated with the GoS. Places in Rural Damascus governorate that witnessed attacks included Qatana, Kisweh, Beit Jinn and Al Worood, Beit Sahm, Hudjara, and Fer Yaboos, Hawsh Nasri, Qudsaya and Sbeneh.<sup>1511</sup>

As Haid pointed out, pro-GoS media outlets refrained from reporting on every incident and tended instead 'to downplay the uptick in violence'. Moreover, GoS-supported media 'generally portrayed the targets as civilians', whereas independent news sources reported that the majority of the casualties were GoS fighters or combatants.<sup>1512</sup>

The reported incidents included two bombings in the countryside of Kisweh (in Deir Khabiye)<sup>1513</sup> for which ISIL claimed responsibility.<sup>1514</sup> The other attacks recorded in the second quarter of 2022 went unclaimed, Haid assessed that it was likely that former rebels (i.e. individuals with the 'motives, skills, and resources to carry out attacks') were behind some of these reported incidents, although it was also possible that some incidents were 'inside jobs' between pro-GoS groups (especially when these involved shootings).<sup>1515</sup> An instance of deadly infighting between pro-Iranian militiamen reportedly took place in Sayyida Zainab in early May 2022.<sup>1516</sup> Further reports analysing security trends, especially outside the second quarter of 2022, could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

Airstrikes and missile attacks by Israeli forces on targets in Rural Damascus governorate were reported during the reference period.<sup>1517</sup> These strikes included attacks targeting locations at or near Damascus International Airport,<sup>1518</sup> including military posts and warehouses of GoS forces, Iranian troops or Iran-backed militias.<sup>1519</sup> In addition, the Air-Defence Battalion in Al-Dumayr<sup>1520</sup> (northeast of Damascus city)<sup>1521</sup> and the Zakia area (south of Damascus city)<sup>1522</sup> were attacked.

<sup>1510</sup> COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1511</sup> Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1512</sup> Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1513</sup> Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1514</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>1515</sup> Haid, H., Assad's fake narrative of a 'safe' Damascus, Arab News, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1516</sup> NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran's Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1517</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, April 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, August 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, January 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1518</sup> SOHR, After suspension of attacks for more than a month | Israeli strikes hit military sites in Damascus and middle of Syria, 8 June 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update | Israeli missiles hitting vicinity of Damascus airport kill four regime fighters and civil servant, 23 May 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Israeli attack on Damascus airport | Runway and control tower sustain damage and air flights transported to Aleppo airport, 10 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1519</sup> SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1520</sup> SOHR, After suspension of attacks for more than a month | Israeli strikes hit military sites in Damascus and middle of Syria, 8 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1521</sup> TV 7 Israel News, Syria alleges overnight IDF airstrikes, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

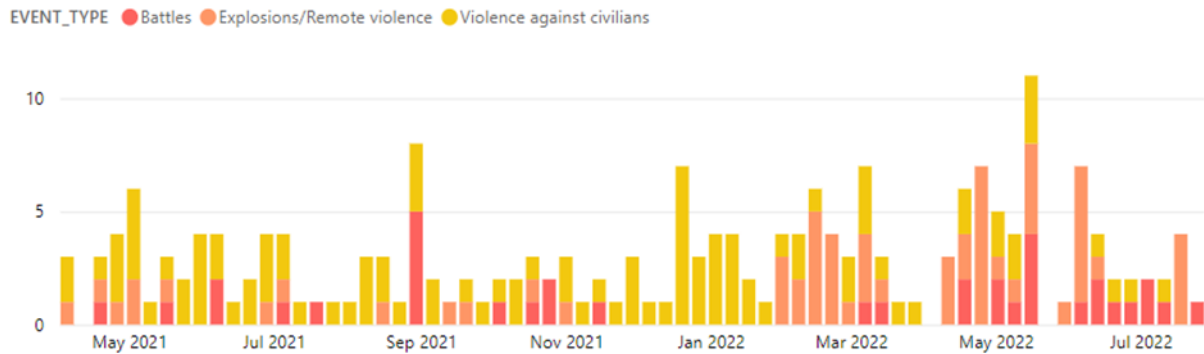
<sup>1522</sup> Ynetnews, Israel strikes south of Damascus, Syrian state media reports, 17 February 2022, [url](#)



Several persons, including GoS soldiers, allied militia fighters and IRGC members were reportedly killed in these attacks.<sup>1523</sup>

### (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period there were 202 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Rural Damascus governorate, of whom 36 were battles, 62 explosions/remote violence and 104 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1524</sup>



**Figure 32: Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Rural Damascus governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>1525</sup>**

| District    | Battles | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|-------------|---------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Al Qutayfah | 1       | 2               | 1                          |
| An Nabk     | -       | 2               | -                          |
| At Tall     | 3       | -               | 87                         |
| Az-Zabadani | 4       | 4               | 1                          |
| Darayya     | 1       | 1               | 1                          |

<sup>1523</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, June 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, February 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, March 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch – Syria, May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1524</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1525</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

| District       | Battles   | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|----------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Duma           | 14        | 24              | 5                          |
| Qatana         | 4         | 4               | 2                          |
| Rural Damascus | 8         | 23              | 6                          |
| Yabroud        | 1         | 2               | 1                          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>36</b> | <b>62</b>       | <b>104</b>                 |

**Figure 33: Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Rural Damascus governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>1526</sup>**

Most security incidents recorded by ACLED during the reporting period in Rural Damascus were coded as violence against civilians, the highest number being documented in At-Tall district (see Figure 33). However, most incidents of violence against civilians documented in At-Tall concerned information released on deaths of civilians under torture in GoS prisons. Most cases reported referred to civilians who have been under arrest for multiple years.

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Rural Damascus governorate during the reference period for this report includes the following:

- On 6 July 2021, clashes near the town of Kfer Yaboos, allegedly between GoS soldiers and a group of smugglers, resulted in the death of an army officer while leaving four other GoS soldiers injured, according to the opposition website Sowt Al-Asima.<sup>1527</sup>
- On 24 February 2022, rocket fire from Israeli forces hit posts and weapons storages of Iran-backed militias near Damascus International Airport and air-defence systems in Kisweh and Sayyida Zainab south of Damascus city, killing seven people, including two GoS soldiers, two Syrians linked to Hezbollah, and three members of Iran-backed militias.<sup>1528</sup>
- On 7 March 2022, two IRGC colonels were killed in an Israeli missile attack targeting the outskirts of Damascus city, the IRGC reported.<sup>1529</sup>

<sup>1526</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1527</sup> Sowt Al-Asima, Officer killed, Four Regime Soldiers Injured in Rural Damascus, The Syrian Observer, 7 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1528</sup> SOHR, Israeli attacks in 2022 | 33 targets destroyed and nearly 70 people killed and wounded in 12 attacks so far, 15 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1529</sup> Al Arabiya, Iran says IRGC members killed in Israeli missile strike in Syria, vows revenge, 9 March 2022, [url](#)



- In early May 2022, seven people, among them a 12-year old child, were killed in Sayyida Zainab during infighting between Iran-backed militants due to disputes over money issues.<sup>1530</sup>
- On 16 May 2022, two IEDs exploded in the Deir Khabiyeh area<sup>1531</sup> of the Kisweh countryside,<sup>1532</sup> killing two persons and injuring one<sup>1533</sup> or two others.<sup>1534</sup> As COAR assessed, those killed were ‘members of local militia committees affiliated with the Fourth Division’.<sup>1535</sup> ISIL claimed responsibility for these attacks.<sup>1536</sup>
- On 7 July 2022, unidentified gunmen targeted a checkpoint in Assal Al-Ward town in western Qalamoun, killing two members of the SAA 4<sup>th</sup> Division, SOHR reported.<sup>1537</sup>

### (c) Civilian fatalities

| Month    | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| January  | -         | -         |
| February | 2         | 67        |
| March    | 1         | 2         |
| April    | 1         | -         |
| May      | 1         | 2         |
| June     | -         | 4         |
| July     | 2         | 5         |
| August   | -         |           |

<sup>1530</sup> NPA, Sayyidah Zaynab In Damascus; Heart Of Iran’s Expansionist Project In Syria, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1531</sup> NPA, Two IED Blasts In Syria’s Rif Dimashq Leave Four Casualties, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1532</sup> COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1533</sup> COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1534</sup> NPA, Two IED Blasts In Syria’s Rif Dimashq Leave Four Casualties, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1535</sup> COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1536</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/492, 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 5; COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1537</sup> SOHR, Armed attack | Two members of the 4th Division killed in western Qalamoun, 7 July 2022, [url](#)

| Month        | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| September    | 2         |           |
| October      | 2         |           |
| November     | -         |           |
| December     | 2         |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>80</b> |

**Figure 34: Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Rural Damascus governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 13 civilian fatalities<sup>1538</sup> in Rural Damascus governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 80 civilian fatalities (see Figure 34).<sup>1539</sup> Most of the civilian fatalities were documented by SNHR in February 2022, when GoS released death

<sup>1538</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1539</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9



notifications for persons arrested in previous years who have died in custody. Most of them were originally from Deir al-Asafir town.<sup>1540</sup>

#### **(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

No information on infrastructure damage arising from conflict activities during the reference period could be found within the time constraints of this report. For information on destructions caused by the conflict that ended in Rural Damascus in April 2018 and the (lack of) reconstruction of damaged infrastructure up to March 2021, see section 2.11.3 of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(July 2021\)](#).

A Syrian economist interviewed in November 2021 by Al-Mashareq, a news website sponsored by the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), estimated that in Rural Damascus only around 10 % of the debris resulting from the war had been cleared, ‘despite government decisions and decrees on the removal of rubble and cracked buildings in preparation for the reconstruction process’.<sup>1541</sup>

The Carter Center reported that, between December 2012 and May 2021, 153 042 explosive munitions were deployed in Rural Damascus governorate and that the governorate showed a ‘heavy distribution’ of explosive munitions use, with 82.8 % of such munitions in Damascus and Rural Damascus concentrated in the latter area. The source estimated that the use of explosives resulted in a contamination of the governorate by 15 250–46 000 pieces of UXO,<sup>1542</sup> although the Mine Action Review noted that UXO clearance efforts by GoS and Russian forces largely went unreported.<sup>1543</sup> Furthermore, in a September 2021 report, Mine Action Review indicated that Rural Damascus was one of 13 governorates that had experienced use of cluster munitions since 2012.<sup>1544</sup> In February 2022, the UN Secretary-General reported that mine clearance operations supported by UNMAS had started in Western Ghouta in what was referred to as the ‘first humanitarian mine action clearance activities in a government-controlled area’ in Syria.<sup>1545</sup> As of end of March 2022, the same source reported that a total of 372 000 m<sup>2</sup> had been cleared of mines since the beginning of the operations.<sup>1546</sup>

During the reporting period, a number of civilians (including children) were killed in explosions caused by landmines or munitions remnants, including in Douma city,<sup>1547</sup> Deir al-Asafir (also

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<sup>1540</sup> SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1541</sup> Al-Mashareq, Neglect, rampant corruption afflict regime-controlled Syria, 15 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1542</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications: December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1543</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 181

<sup>1544</sup> Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 178

<sup>1545</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/135, 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 30

<sup>1546</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2022/330, 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 38

<sup>1547</sup> SOHR, Old ordnance | Child killed in landmine explosion nearby Douma city in Rif Dimashq, 31 May 2022, [url](#)

Eastern Ghouta),<sup>1548</sup> Jaramana,<sup>1549</sup> Az-Zabadani,<sup>1550</sup> Harasta city,<sup>1551</sup> and Yabroud Balkalmon in the north-western part of the governorate.<sup>1552</sup> Moreover, in April 2022 two people died when a building in Daraya collapsed, likely as a result of indirect damage caused by nearby bombardment during the war.<sup>1553</sup>

### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 1 115 922 IDPs in the governorate.<sup>1554</sup> In 2021, UNOCHA in Rural Damascus governorate recorded approximately 3 150 IDP movements from the governorate, 846 IDP movements inside the governorate, and 150 IDP movements to the governorate.<sup>1555</sup>

In 2022, UNOCHA reported 645 IDP departures from and 6 IDP arrivals to Rural Damascus governorate in January,<sup>1556</sup> 381 departures and no arrivals in February,<sup>1557</sup> 577 departures and no arrivals in March,<sup>1558</sup> 754 departures and 55 arrivals in April,<sup>1559</sup> and 348 departures and 74 arrivals to the governorate.<sup>1560</sup>

As regards returns, in 2021 UNOCHA recorded for Rural Damascus governorate approximately 8 000 spontaneous IDP returnee movements from the governorate, 21 000 IDP return movements inside the governorate, and 1 000 IDP returnee movements to the governorate.<sup>1561</sup> In 2022, UNOCHA recorded approximately 500 spontaneous IDP returns from and 500 returns to the governorate in January,<sup>1562</sup> around 500 returns from and 200 to the governorate in February,<sup>1563</sup> some 640 returns from and 1 640 returns to the governorate in March,<sup>1564</sup> 200 returns from and 200 returns to the governorate in April,<sup>1565</sup> and 400 returns from and 100 returns to the governorate in May.<sup>1566</sup>

In December 2021, the GoS allowed residents of Hajar al-Aswad to return to their homes upon receiving approval from the governorate's authorities.<sup>1567</sup> However, according to the Syria Report, as of early March 2022 only 40 families had been able to return to the 'nearly deserted

<sup>1548</sup> SOHR, War ordnance | Child killed in explosion in Rif Dimashq, 7 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1549</sup> PRC, Palestinian Refugee Child Killed by Explosive Ordnance in Syria Displacement Camp, 25 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1550</sup> SOHR, Old ordnance | Child killed and another injured in landmine explosion in Rif Dimashq, 20 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1551</sup> SOHR, Second case in 24 hours | Landmine explosion kills civilian in Rif Dimashq, 21 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1552</sup> SOHR, War remnants | Shell explosion kills three civilians including woman in Rif Dimashq, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1553</sup> Syria Report (The), Building Collapses in Darayya After Indirect Damage from Prior Bombing, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1554</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1555</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1556</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1557</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1558</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements March 2022, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1559</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1560</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1561</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021, 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1562</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns January 2022, 24 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1563</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns February 2022, 11 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1564</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns March 2022, 9 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1565</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns April 2022, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1566</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Spontaneous Returns May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1567</sup> SADC, UN report on Syrian returnees leaves too much out to be useful, 12 January 2022, [url](#)





town', 'as rubble still covers large areas of the town and basic public services remain absent'.<sup>1568</sup>  
A Syrian economist interviewed by Al-Mashareq news website in November 2021 indeed explained that the limited clearance of debris from the war in Rural Damascus governorate contributed to the small number of persons returning to war-affected areas and has in fact 'caused dozens of families to move to other areas'.<sup>1569</sup>

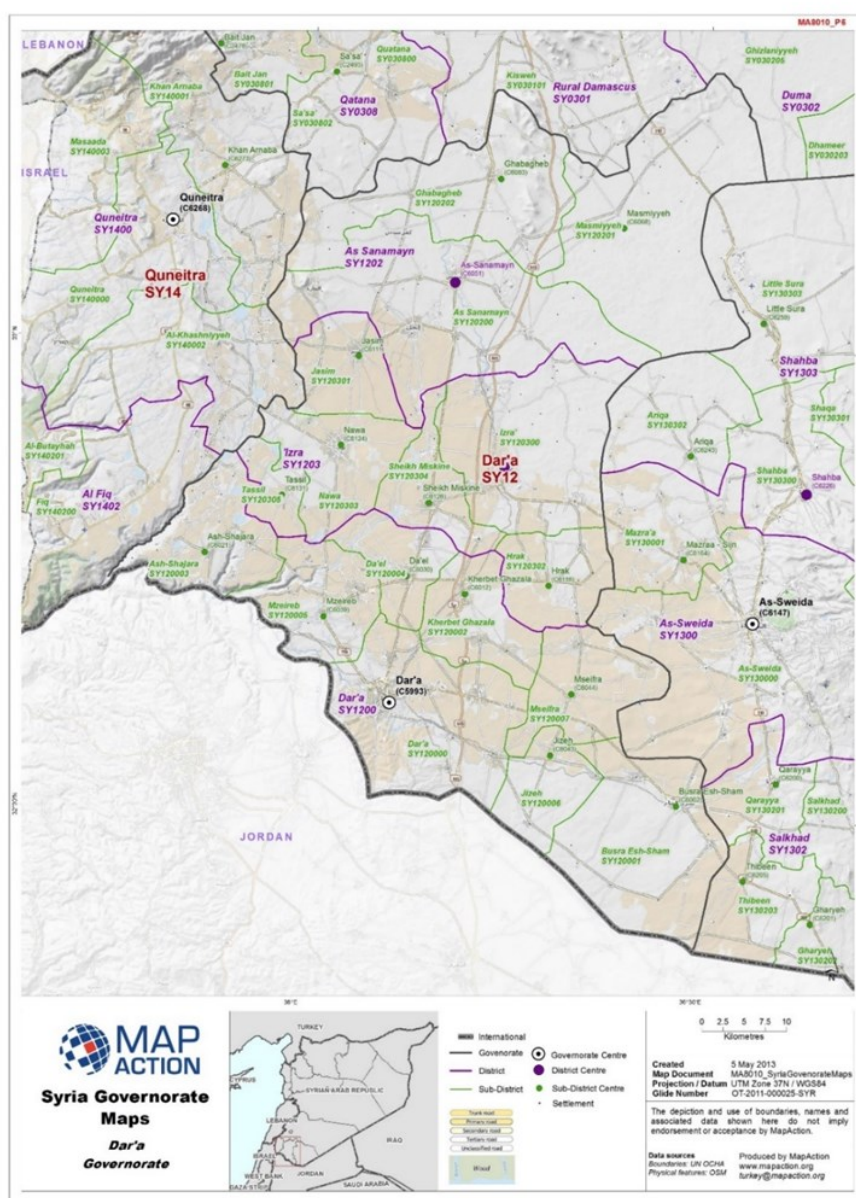
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<sup>1568</sup> Syria Report (The), Returnee Numbers Remain Very Low in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad as Looting Continues, 8 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1569</sup> Al-Mashareq, Neglect, rampant corruption afflict regime-controlled Syria, 15 November 2021, [url](#)



## 2.12. Dar'a governorate



Map 18: © MapAction, Dar'a governorate<sup>1570</sup>

### 2.12.1. General description of the governorate

Dar'a governorate is located in the southern part of Syria, below Damascus, sharing borders with the governorates of Quneitra to the west, Rural Damascus to the north, Sweida to the east and an international border with Jordan to its south. Dar'a governorate is comprised of

<sup>1570</sup> MapAction, Dar'a governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

the three administrative districts of Dar'a, Izra' and As-Sanamayn.<sup>1571</sup> Each district is subdivided further into sub-districts:

- Dar'a district: Dar'a, Jizeh, Bushra Esh-Sham, Mseifra, Kherbet Ghazala, Da'eel, Mzeireb, Ash Shajara, Dar'a City is the governorate capital;
- As Sanamayn district: As Sanamayn [includes district capital], Ghabagheb, Massimiyyeh;
- Izra' district: Izra', Hrak, Sheikh Miskine, Nawa [district capital is Nawa town], Jassim, Tassil.<sup>1572</sup>

According to 2022 estimates by UNOCHA, the population of Dar'a governorate was 1 025 484 inhabitants.<sup>1573</sup> The last official estimations of the Syrian Bureau of Statistics from 2021 numbered the population of Dar'a approximately 966 430.<sup>1574</sup>

Dar'a governorate is strategically important as a transit route between Syria, Jordan, and Gulf states, because of the border to the Golan Heights.<sup>1575</sup> The M5 highway passes through the governorate connecting Damascus to Jordan, and leads northwards connecting Aleppo to the north.<sup>1576</sup>

In recent years drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased in the south of Syria<sup>1577</sup>, including in Dar'a governorate. COAR concludes in its July 2022 report that 'Dar'a governorate can be understood both as a key drug production region and as the main thoroughfare for the transit of Syrian [...] narcotics into Jordan, and from there, towards the Gulf.'<sup>1578</sup>

## 2.12.2. Conflict background and armed actors

The governorate of Dar'a, where the first protests against the Assad government began in 2011,<sup>1579</sup> played a significant role in the conflict as an opposition stronghold.<sup>1580</sup> In 2018 however, the GoS was able to regain control over the area with the support of Russia through a combination of military campaigns,<sup>1581</sup> and reconciliation agreements with opposition

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<sup>1571</sup> Based on UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Reference Map, 17 January 2013, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Atlas. Syrian Arab Republic, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1572</sup> UNOCHA, Dar'a Governorate Reference Map, December 2015, [url](#); Alternative spellings can be found in: Integrity Research and Consultancy, Research Summary Report: Local Governance in Dara'a Governorate, August 2014, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1573</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1574</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1575</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>1576</sup> UNOCHA, Dar'a Governorate Reference Map, December 2015, [url](#)

<sup>1577</sup> Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1578</sup> COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1579</sup> Integrity Research and Consultancy, Research Summary Report: Local Governance in Dara'a Governorate, August 2014, [url](#), p. 6; UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>1580</sup> Guardian (The), Syria: Assad shells former opposition stronghold Deraa, 29 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1581</sup> COAR, Southwestern Dar'a: Needs Oriented Strategic Area Profile (NOSAP), September 2019, [url](#), p. 12; COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

factions.<sup>1582</sup> During the negotiations, the GoS-affiliated Security Committee represented the interests of the government<sup>1583</sup>, while locals were represented by negotiation committees, consisting of ‘opposition figures, former rebel leaders and local notables’. Two major committees were established in Tafas and Dar’a al-Balad.<sup>1584</sup> The latter was known as the Central Committee of Dar’a (DCC).<sup>1585</sup> Since 2018, the governorate was hence nominally under the control of the GoS<sup>1586</sup>, while its control in certain parts of the governorate, such as Tafas<sup>1587</sup> and Dar’a al-Balad, was limited by the de facto semi-autonomy, allowing locals to take care of ‘local affairs and to continue to manifest opposition’.<sup>1588</sup> The influence of the GoS was limited in 2018 by the acceptance to have restrictions on its presence of military and security forces from ‘the areas that participated in the negotiations’,<sup>1589</sup> including Dar’a al-Balad and Tafas.<sup>1590</sup>

In the western part of the governorate, where negotiations and agreements took place in Tafas and ‘its surrounding areas’, large numbers of former rebels were reported to have rejected the agreement and stayed unreconciled ‘or have signed contracts to join the ranks of the regime’s military and security forces as an ostensible tactic to guarantee security, continue possessing their light weapons and remain in their localities’.<sup>1591</sup>

Over the years, the demands of locals asked for in the agreements of 2018 have not been met in the eyes of the Daarawi population. From June 2019 onwards, through 2020 as well as 2021, the governorate’s strategic geographical location<sup>1592</sup> combined with a ‘weak regime control’ in the south<sup>1593</sup> led to an increase of assassinations, clashes and overall insecurity.<sup>1594</sup> Foreign actors expanded their influence in the area, particularly Israel at the armistice line with

<sup>1582</sup> Syria Direct, Months into new Daraa settlement, assassinations continue unabated, 29 December 2021, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1583</sup> Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime’s control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1584</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 2, fn. 2

<sup>1585</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1586</sup> Based on reading of maps in UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#) [Annex II: Estimated areas of influence, January 2022], p. 22; Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria [Map], 1 July 2022, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1587</sup> Asia Times, Assad’s strategy in southern Syria fated to fail, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1588</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1589</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Jabassini: Regime Negotiates Deployment of Eighth Brigade in Daraa al-Balad, 30 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1590</sup> Asia Times, Assad’s strategy in southern Syria fated to fail, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1591</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1592</sup> SOHR, Daraa in one year: security chaos, overlapping interests and hidden conflict... people suffer the scourge of external and internal interventions, 25 June 2020, [url](#); Tokmajyan, A., How Southern Syria Has Been Transformed Into a Regional Powder Keg, Carnegie Middle East Center, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1593</sup> Tokmajyan, A., How Southern Syria Has Been Transformed Into a Regional Powder Keg, Carnegie Middle East Center, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1594</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Insecurity In Southern Syria: Tracking Daraa, Quneitra and Suwayda (January – February 2021), ORSAM, March 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2; SOHR, Daraa in one year: security chaos, overlapping interests and hidden conflict... people suffer the scourge of external and internal interventions, 25 June 2020, [url](#); Syria Direct, Months into new Daraa settlement, assassinations continue unabated, 29 December 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11



the Golan Heights, as well as Iran and Russia, who engaged in ‘an indirect competition for influence in the region’.<sup>1595</sup>

Further information on the conflict background and actors in Dar’a is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

#### **(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups**

As of August 2021, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was present in ‘Daraa city, Daraa western countryside, al-Yarmouk Basin’.<sup>1596</sup> According to Syria Direct, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division had a limited presence in the governorate after the settlement agreements in September 2021, while increasing its presence again in mid-May 2022 by opening recruiting offices.<sup>1597</sup>

The Tiger Forces<sup>1598</sup> were reported in August 2021 to be present in Dar’a city and having weapons, armoury and artillery to their use, while having excellent relations to Russia and good ties to Iran.<sup>1599</sup>

As of August 2021, the Air Force Intelligence and Military Security Branch were present throughout the governorate, using light and medium weapons and fostering excellent ties to Iran, while balancing good relations with Russia. The NDF as well as the Local Defense Forces<sup>1600</sup> were reported to be primarily present in the northern and western countryside while being in possession of light and medium weapons.<sup>1601</sup>

COAR reported that the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, Hezbollah, and the Military Intelligence within Dar’a governorate were deeply involved in drug production as well as drug trafficking, especially concerning Captagon.<sup>1602</sup>

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<sup>1595</sup> SOHR, Daraa in one year: security chaos, overlapping interests and hidden conflict... people suffer the scourge of external and internal interventions, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1596</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1597</sup> Syria Direct, Southern Syria’s drug war: Jordan’s options ‘limited’ as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1598</sup> The Tiger forces were described in 2018 as a ‘Syrian Air Intelligence-affiliated militia fighting for the Syrian government and backed by Russia.’ While in 2019, the militia was reportedly integrated in the SAA as the 25<sup>th</sup> Special Task Forces Division. Waters, G., The Tiger Forces - Pro-Assad Fighters Backed By Russia, MEI, October 2018, [url](#), p. 4/Summary; Waters, G., The 25<sup>th</sup> Division: Syria’s Tiger Forces get Rebranded. International Review, 20 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1599</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1600</sup> The Local Defense Forces (LDF) are the largest Iran-backed armed forces within Syria. They consist of different militias and are integrated in the SAA. In 2020, they reportedly consisted of 50 000 fighters.

Navvar, S., Factbox: Iranian influence and presence in Syria, Atlantic Council, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

Despite its integration into the SAA in 2017 the LDF remained lead by and dependent on Iran.

Enab Baladi, The Syrian Army: Between Russian control and Iranian infiltration, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1601</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1602</sup> COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria’s Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-9

## (b) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia operated four security and military points within the governorate at the end of 2021.<sup>1603</sup> In August 2021, the STJ noted that the Russian Military Police had posts in Dar'a city as well as Izra' and Busra al-Sham and did 'conduct patrols in the rest of the province'.<sup>1604</sup> A May 2022 report of the Turkey-based think tank ORSAM stated that there were no military bases or camps under direct Russian control in the south of Syria.<sup>1605</sup>

According to some sources Russia decreased its troops in the south since February 2022<sup>1606</sup>, were they had a rather strong presence in the last years of the conflict. Included in the withdrawal were 'mercenaries affiliated with the Wagner company' as well as '200 soldiers from the pro-Russian 5<sup>th</sup> Division'.<sup>1607</sup> These reports remained unconfirmed.<sup>1608</sup>

For a long time, the Russian forces in Dar'a were perceived as a mediator by the former anti-GoS opposition. However this perception was challenged in the siege of Dar'a al-Balad in June and July 2021, when Russian troops were said to have a leading role in the siege.<sup>1609</sup> Russia also played a major role as a main mediator in the settling of the siege of Dar'a al-Balad.<sup>1610</sup> COAR argued that the developments in the governorate, especially the siege of Dar'a al-Balad, indicated a shift in Russia's approach in the south from a conciliatory role towards a more aggressive stance.<sup>1611</sup>

The Russian-backed 5<sup>th</sup> Corps of the SAA composed of the reconciled former opposition armed groups and fighters was created to prevent 'security vacuums' in Dar'a and contain Iranian influence in the area.<sup>1612</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps in Dar'a had a large presence in the eastern rural parts of Dar'a, as the main influential armed actor.<sup>1613</sup> It had its main stronghold in Busra al-Sham<sup>1614</sup> and controlled in August 2021 also the town Ma'araba according to STJ.<sup>1615</sup> It coordinated with Russia exclusively<sup>1616</sup> and remained hostile to Iran and the GoS.<sup>1617</sup> However, in October 2021 local media outlets reported on the dismantling of the

<sup>1603</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1604</sup> STJ, Syria: A Timeline of the Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 27 August 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1605</sup> Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1606</sup> Enab Baladi, [دراعا، سوريا جنوبية تتركز نقاط تخطي روسيا](#) [Dar'a...Russia evacuates outposts in southern Syria], 24 May 2022, [url](#); Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1607</sup> Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1608</sup> Prasad, H., Blog: Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Complicates the Situation in Syria, Carter Center (The), 7 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1609</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1610</sup> STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 6-11

<sup>1611</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1612</sup> COAR, Southwestern Dar'a: Needs Oriented Strategic Area Profile (NOSAP), September 2019, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>1613</sup> COAR, Security Archipelago: Security Fragmentation in Dar'a Governorate, 3 December 2019, [url](#), p. 12; STJ, Syria: A Timeline of the Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 27 August 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1614</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1615</sup> STJ, Syria: A Timeline of the Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 27 August 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1616</sup> COAR, Security Archipelago: Security Fragmentation in Dar'a Governorate, 3 December 2019, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1617</sup> Haid, H., Russia maintains grip on Syria despite Ukraine commitments, Arab News, 17 June 2022, [url](#)



8<sup>th</sup> Brigade<sup>1618</sup> and its far-reaching integration into the Military Security branch.<sup>1619</sup> COAR reported on 8 November 2021, that the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to be dissolved in the countryside and integrated into military structures, while it would remain in the city of Busra al-Sham.<sup>1620</sup>

According to Syria Direct as of June 2022, the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade is now affiliated with the Military Intelligence Division 238, located in Sweida.<sup>1621</sup>

### (c) Iran and Iranian-backed armed groups

According to Jusoor for Studies, Iranian-affiliated forces and Hezbollah operated 22 military and security points within the Dar'a governorate, at the end of 2021.<sup>1622</sup> Sources interviewed by Syria Direct indicated the presence of Iran and Hezbollah in Dar'a, especially in the western countryside close to the Golan heights and the Jordanian border.<sup>1623</sup> Hezbollah presence was further reported in the al-Lajat area in southern Dar'a countryside<sup>1624</sup>, on the Dar'a-Damascus highway, and in the eastern and western countryside.<sup>1625</sup> Hezbollah was reportedly involved in drug production and trafficking in Dar'a governorate,<sup>1626</sup> which led to protests among the population.<sup>1627</sup>

Several reports assume that Iranian(-backed) forces would try to fill the void left in case of a decreasing Russian presence in the south of Syria.<sup>1628</sup> In May 2022 Ahram Online reported information from a defected Syrian army officer that the number of military points controlled by Iranian-affiliated militias in the south more than doubled to a number of approximately 150 in the last two years.<sup>1629</sup> This information could not be corroborated.

<sup>1618</sup> Syrian Observer (The)/Al-Souria Net, Russia Ceases Financial Support to Daraa Eighth Brigade, 14 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1619</sup> Horan Free League, [الرياح مهب](#) "في اللواء: الثامن اللواء في قيادي" [A commander in the Eighth Brigade: The Brigade is in 'the wind' and the files of its members are in the Military Intelligence Directorate], 11 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1620</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1621</sup> Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1622</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1623</sup> Syria Direct, Months into new Daraa settlement, assassinations continue unabated, 29 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1624</sup> Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1625</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1626</sup> Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7; COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1627</sup> NPA, People In Syria's Daraa Take To Street Against Iran, 15 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1628</sup> Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7; Syria Direct, Amid war in Ukraine, Russia withdraws and Iran expands in Syria, 4 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1629</sup> Ahram Online, Russian withdrawal threats to Syria, 28 May 2022, [url](#)

## (d) ISIL

ISIL reportedly still has a presence<sup>1630</sup> in Dar'a with activities especially taking place in the southwest of the governorate<sup>1631</sup> and the presence of sleeper cells in the governorate.<sup>1632</sup> According to the International Crisis Group, cells are not necessarily connected to the overall network in Syria, but could be 'remnants of a historically isolated ISIS affiliate that controlled parts of the Yarmouk river basin at the intersection of the Syrian, Israeli and Jordanian borders'.<sup>1633</sup> According to a report of the UN Security Council, one member state shared estimations of more than 300 fighters within Dar'a 'in addition to sleeper cells located around the Hawran mountains'.<sup>1634</sup> ISIL-linked groups reportedly conducted a number of assassinations within Dar'a in 2022, including the killing of the DCC member Musab al-Bardan<sup>1635</sup>, which entailed a number of retaliation killings.<sup>1636</sup>

## 2.12.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

The security situation in Dar'a governorate deteriorated during the reporting period,<sup>1637</sup> while the security control remained fragmented with GoS having 'only tenuous control'.<sup>1638</sup>

During the reporting period high numbers of assassinations and attacks on individuals were reported.<sup>1639</sup> While most of the conflict incidents, attacks and assassinations targeting 'GoS officials and former opposition fighters' with local influence were reportedly conducted by

<sup>1630</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1, fn. 2; UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>1631</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para. 43

<sup>1632</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Dismantling Networks of Resistance and the Reconfiguration of Order in Southern Syria, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1633</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1, fn. 2

<sup>1634</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 36

<sup>1635</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1636</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1637</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 19; Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#); Al-Jabassini, Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>1638</sup> Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>1639</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7; New Arab (The), Former Baath official, relatives killed in southern Syria: reports, 28 June 2022, [url](#)



‘unidentified armed actors’, GoS officials and former opposition members accuse each other of perpetrating the attacks.<sup>1640</sup> In the period running up to the presidential elections in May 2021 assassinations and killings attempts rose.<sup>1641</sup> The Carter Center counted up to 123 attacks on GoS-members and former opposition members in Dar’a in the second quarter of 2021.<sup>1642</sup> The overall increase in violence was accompanied by the refusal of several communities to participate in the elections.<sup>1643</sup> In Tafas, Dar’a al-Balad and Busra al-Sham no voting took place as a way of protest against the GoS<sup>1644</sup> and to emphasize the wish of semi-autonomy in the governorate.<sup>1645</sup>

### *Siege of Dar’a al-Balad and other locations*

As part of the reconciliation agreements concluded in communities in Dar’a in 2018, some former opposition fighters were allowed to defer military conscription, keep light weapons and hence ‘allowed to remain active’.<sup>1646</sup> In the aftermath of the presidential elections in May 2021 and in an attempt to restore its security grip and its influence over the area<sup>1647</sup>, the GoS demanded the surrender of ‘light personal weapons’<sup>1648</sup>, which the Central Committee of Dar’a (DCC) rejected<sup>1649</sup>, as well as the transfer of wanted individuals.<sup>1650</sup> In reaction, the GoS-forces on 24 June 2021 started to blockade roads and supply routes to Dar’a al-Balad<sup>1651</sup>, a neighbourhood of Dar’a city where reconciled opposition groups have been in partial control.<sup>1652</sup> The resulting siege of the area that restricted the supply of food and electricity,<sup>1653</sup> lasted for ten weeks while the GoS increased pressure by military shelling.<sup>1654</sup> With only the

<sup>1640</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 10; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1641</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 11; Reuters, Syria’s Assad wins 4th term with 95% of vote, in election the West calls fraudulent, 28 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1642</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 7-9

<sup>1643</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1644</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1645</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1646</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>1647</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1648</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>1649</sup> The Central Committee of Dar’a is ‘a group composed of former opposition fighters negotiating with Russia and the GoS about local governance grievances’, Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1650</sup> Al- Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 8; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 21

<sup>1651</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 21; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1652</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 5 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1653</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 23; Al Bawaba, Assad Regime Imposes Full Siege on Daraa, 28 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1654</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 24

Saraya entry to the neighbourhood being partially open since 12 August 2021<sup>1655</sup>, people had to bear 'invasive security checks'<sup>1656</sup>, pay bribes to access and leave the area and had only very limited access to food, water and electricity.<sup>1657</sup> The only medical centre consisting of one makeshift clinic was damaged during the shelling and was closed and declared inoperable on 27 July 2021.<sup>1658</sup> Shelling as well as a ground offensive by the GoS-forces started at the end of July 2021 when local opposition groups refused to agree to the conditions demanded by the GoS.<sup>1659</sup>

The DCC and the GoS-affiliated Security Committee reached a first agreement to end the siege of Dar'a al-Balad on 24 July.<sup>1660</sup> The agreement 'collapsed' on 27 July 2021, leading to a ground offensive and renewed shelling of the besieged area by the GoS and its affiliated forces such as Hezbollah and other militias.<sup>1661</sup> The UNCOI reported the usage of 'improvised rocket-assisted munitions as well as other unguided rocket artillery' by the GoS-affiliated forces, which are reported to be 'highly inaccurate'.<sup>1662</sup> Furthermore, fighting between local forces and GoS-forces broke out in numerous towns and villages in the governorate, including al-Yadoudah, Umm al-Miadin, Tafas, al-Karak and Nawa, resulting in several deaths.<sup>1663</sup> Various towns became targets for GoS-shelling.<sup>1664</sup>

GoS and the DCC signed another agreement in early September 2021.<sup>1665</sup> In this agreement the complete surrender of weapons, the establishment of nine GoS-operated checkpoints within Dar'a al-Balad, status settling for wanted individuals, the postponement of military services for draft evaders, as well as the presence of GoS-forces in specified locations within Dar'a al-Balad, were stipulated.<sup>1666</sup> Furthermore, about 70 opposition figures had to resettle with their families to areas in northern Syria, which are not controlled by the GoS.<sup>1667</sup> The siege and violence accompanying it were the 'largest and deadliest confrontation in the governorate since the 2018 takeover'.<sup>1668</sup> In October 2021, STJ published a list of more than 40 names of

<sup>1655</sup> UNOCHA, Syria. Dara'a Flash Update 3, Hostilities in Dara'a Governorate, As of 23 August 2021, 23 August 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 28

<sup>1656</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 01 July 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1657</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 23

<sup>1658</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>1659</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 24

<sup>1660</sup> STJ, Syria: A Timeline of the Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 27 August 2021, [url](#), pp. 7-9

In the agreement the GoS-Security Committee and the Central Committee of Dar'a stipulated the surrender of some 70 personal weapons (instead of the demanded 200), the establishment of renewed status settlement processes for individuals in the governorate, and the setup of three GoS-checkpoints operated by the Military security and former opposition members together. COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1661</sup> STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1662</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 27

<sup>1663</sup> STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1664</sup> UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 02, 27 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2; STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1665</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), paras. 5, 32

<sup>1666</sup> STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>1667</sup> SADC, Did Daraa mark the end of reconciliation agreements in Syria?, 8 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1668</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 9



locals, mostly civilians, killed in the siege.<sup>1669</sup> GoS-forces established checkpoints in the reconciled areas, including Dar'a al-Balad and other towns and communities in the governorate.<sup>1670</sup> The developments thus left more GoS-forces present in the governorate, with the exception of the south-eastern part, which is a stronghold of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>1671</sup>

In the village of al-Yadoudah, in the northwest of Dar'a al-Balad local fighters attacked GoS-checkpoints on 27 July 2021, reportedly in support of the besieged people in Dar'a al-Balad. On 29 July 2021, the GoS responded with the shelling of areas in al-Yadoudah, resulting in several casualties.<sup>1672</sup> Following disagreements concerning the transfer of weapons by local forces to the GoS, the town of Jasim was also besieged, with its main roads blocked and shelling of residential areas according to Enab Baladi.<sup>1673</sup>

The agreement reached in Dar'a al-Balad was in similar forms replicated in agreements and status settlement processes in other restive towns in the governorate.<sup>1674</sup> According to Enab Baladi the agreement was first replicated in al-Yadoudah in the western part of Dar'a.<sup>1675</sup> Starting with Jasim more towns and areas in the north reconciled and 'the regime forces settled the security status of hundreds of people from the Daraa northern countryside, with the city of al-Sanamayn being the last to join the settlements with the regime.'<sup>1676</sup>

In November 2021, UNOCHA reported that agreements were reached in approximately 51 communities across the governorate and that one quarter of these were met in the sub-district of al-Shajarah.<sup>1677</sup> Hundreds of residents and members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade reportedly made use of the settlement processes during the initial time of status settlement activities in the governorate, which ended on 25 October and continued in a smaller scale in bigger cities in Dar'a.<sup>1678</sup> Reports mentioned by the UNCOI estimated that more than 12 000 people from Dar'a governorate reconciled through those processes and approximately 1 700 weapons were surrendered.<sup>1679</sup>

Although many reconciliation agreements were already met and violent incidents decreased significantly in September 2021<sup>1680</sup>, there were different incidents like temporary road blockades to the towns al-Sura, al-Jizah and Alma as well as al-Hrak city resulting from the negotiation process between 14 and 21 October 2021.<sup>1681</sup> Moreover, weeks after the agreed

<sup>1669</sup> STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 13-14

<sup>1670</sup> Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1671</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 10; Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1672</sup> Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1673</sup> Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1674</sup> STJ, Syria: The 75-Day Siege of Daraa al-Balad, 26 October 2021, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1675</sup> Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1676</sup> Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1677</sup> UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1678</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1679</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 20

<sup>1680</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1681</sup> UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 2

establishment of nine GoS-operated security checkpoints in Dar'a al-Balad, the GoS dissolved three of those.<sup>1682</sup> The increase in tensions in 2022 led to the GoS 'tightening security' in proximity to the governorate capital including reinforcement of troops.<sup>1683</sup>

On 22 July 2022, GoS-forces reportedly 'clashed with former opposition leaders known for their affiliation to ISIL in al-Yadoudah'.<sup>1684</sup> At the end of July 2022, the GoS demanded the surrender of wanted people from Dar'a governorate, which was refused by the population. On 27 July 2022, GoS-troops encircled and cut off the town of Tafas and started shelling Tafas as well as the town of al-Yadoudah. One day later a ceasefire-deal was reached between representatives of Tafas and the GoS,<sup>1685</sup> which collapsed shortly after.<sup>1686</sup> In the agreement, the negotiating parties agreed on the surrender of the wanted individuals and the withdrawal of the GoS-forces from the town after searching certain houses. The situation remained tense, with the town being cut off by road blockades and shelled by GoS-forces for more than two weeks. As of 15 August 2022,<sup>1687</sup> the situation had somewhat stabilised amid reports of a preliminary agreement being reached between the parties.<sup>1688</sup>

#### *Continuing tensions, assassinations, and attacks*

Despite the settlement agreements insecurity prevailed in Dar'a.<sup>1689</sup> In 2021, Dar'a had the highest proportion of homicides in all of Syria, with 115 out of a total of 414, according to an EUI report.<sup>1690</sup> The Horan Free League, a local pro-opposition media platform, reported on an overall of 637 killings in 2021, with a peak in July (106) and August (90), but quite constant levels between 59 and 67 cases each in the months of September until December 2021. Accordingly, almost half of the victims were reported to be civilians.<sup>1691</sup>

According to the Carter Center, the overall conflict incidents decreased in the months following the reconciliation agreements of September 2021, while reports on 'attacks on former opposition fighters doubled from the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter'.<sup>1692</sup> Following this increase of violence between opposition groups and pro-GoS forces in Dar'a al-Balad, tensions were rising in communities all over the governorate in November and December 2021 with 'numerous reported improvised explosive device attacks and instances of targeted or retaliatory killings on both sides'.<sup>1693</sup> The UN Security Council reported in December 2021 and January 2022 on

<sup>1682</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1683</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1684</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 25 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1685</sup> New Arab (The), As violence proliferates in Syria's south, cracks appear in regime-held areas, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1686</sup> Asia Times, Assad's strategy in southern Syria fated to fail, 11 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1687</sup> NPA, Calm in Syria's Daraa Following Reports Of Agreement, 15 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1688</sup> NPA, Preliminary Deal Between Government, Locals West Of Syria's Daraa, 13 August 2022, [url](#); NPA, Calm in Syria's Daraa Following Reports Of Agreement, 15 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1689</sup> New Arab (The), Former Baath official, relatives killed in southern Syria: reports, 28 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1690</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1691</sup> Horan Free League, سقوط التسوية - تقرير حقوقي [The Fall of the settlement – A human rights report], 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1692</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-10

<sup>1693</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 33



‘targeted killings of civilians and former members of non-State armed opposition groups’.<sup>1694</sup> Syria Direct reported in December 2021 that the highest number of a purported escalation of assassinations took place in western Dar’a countryside.<sup>1695</sup>

Covering the second half of 2021, the UNCOI noted that the course of action of the assailants targeting opposition members was ‘consistent with previously identified patterns of targeted killings’, whereby ‘victims were shot with small arms by individuals riding motorcycles or other vehicles.’<sup>1696</sup> During the period from February to May 2022, the UN Security Council reported further continuing violence in the overall south-western region of Syria, consisting of ‘improvised explosive device attacks’, gunfights, assassinations, kidnappings, as well as clashes of limited extend.<sup>1697</sup> The New Arab reported that violence escalated in April 2022, when reportedly more than 50 people were assassinated. The targets were primarily ‘civilians or former-opposition fighters given amnesty by the regime’ while 20 casualties were reportedly GoS-affiliates.<sup>1698</sup>

Furthermore, the Carter Center reported on increasing attacks on former opposition members as well as GoS-soldiers during the first half of 2022, documenting 171 attacks during this period, with a peak in April 2022. Most of the targets of unclaimed attacks were ‘officials and soldiers associated with various GoS armed groups.’<sup>1699</sup> In March<sup>1700</sup> and April<sup>1701</sup> 2022, the GoS deployed additional forces to the region in response to the exacerbating security situation.<sup>1702</sup> According to Etana, the GoS increased pressure primarily on former opposition strongholds in Jasim and Dar’a al-Balad in March 2022, while threatening with another military escalation.<sup>1703</sup>

#### *Drug smuggling and increase of criminal activities, including kidnappings*

The security situation was further aggravated by the prevalence of drugs.<sup>1704</sup> According to New Lines Institute, Captagon manufacturing sites are located in various GoS-held territories,

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<sup>1694</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), [S/2022/135], 21 February 2022, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>1695</sup> Syria Direct, Months into new Daraa settlement, assassinations continue unabated, 29 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1696</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 33

<sup>1697</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>1698</sup> New Arab (The), 51 killed in Syria’s Daraa province in April as violence escalates, 2 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1699</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>1700</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1701</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – South Syria – 12 May 2022, 12 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1702</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – South Syria – 12 May 2022, 12 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1703</sup> Etana Syria: Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 April 2022, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1704</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 7-8

including Dar'a.<sup>1705</sup> Routes through Dar'a as well as Sweida are used to smuggle Captagon to Jordan and further to the Gulf states.<sup>1706</sup> GoS-forces, especially the 4<sup>th</sup> Division are reportedly linked to the drug trafficking assisted by Hezbollah.<sup>1707</sup> The Military Intelligence was reported to be an important actor in production and transport as well.<sup>1708</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Division, Hezbollah and the Military Intelligence were relying on local actors to carry out the drug trafficking. In Dar'a these actors consist primarily of 'rebels turned regime collaborators'<sup>1709</sup> that are often backed by a local militia.<sup>1710</sup> An EUI report pointed out that individuals, who have been prompted to refrain from their drug smuggling activities, were killed in Dar'a.<sup>1711</sup> According to Syria Direct, individuals involved in drug trafficking were increasingly targeted in southern Syria since May 2022, while it is unclear who is conducting this supposed campaign.<sup>1712</sup> A COAR report cited the case of an unnamed group that has been facing attacks because of its involvement in drug trafficking.<sup>1713</sup>

In general, Al-Jabassini reported increasing criminal activities like '[t]heft, homicide, robbery, mugging, and profit kidnapping (especially of children)' at the beginning of 2022.<sup>1714</sup> Gangs were conducting kidnappings for ransom in the governorate. On 2 November 2021 for example, an eight-year-old boy was abducted on his way home from school and held for three months until his family paid an enormous ransom for his release in February 2022. During this time, he was reportedly mistreated and tortured.<sup>1715</sup>

### *Tribal and cross-border conflicts*

Tribes also clash in some incidents, for example on 25 June 2021, when the tribes of al-Zoubi and al-Kiwan clashed in Tafas over the alleged killing of a member of the Kiwan tribe.<sup>1716</sup> In addition, tensions between residents of Dar'a and neighbouring Sweida prevailed in the reporting period.<sup>1717</sup> for further information see section [2.14.3](#).

<sup>1705</sup> New Lines Institute, Intelligence Briefing – The Captagon Threat – A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, April 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1706</sup> Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1707</sup> New Lines Institute, Intelligence Briefing – The Captagon Threat – A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, April 2022, [url](#), pp. 17, 19; Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7; Syria Direct, Who is assassinating suspected drug traffickers in southern Syria?, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1708</sup> COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), pp. 8-9

<sup>1709</sup> Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1710</sup> COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1711</sup> Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1712</sup> Syria Direct, Who is assassinating suspected drug traffickers in southern Syria?, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1713</sup> COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1714</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1715</sup> BBC News, Syria: Kidnapped boy released after video of beating sparks outcry, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

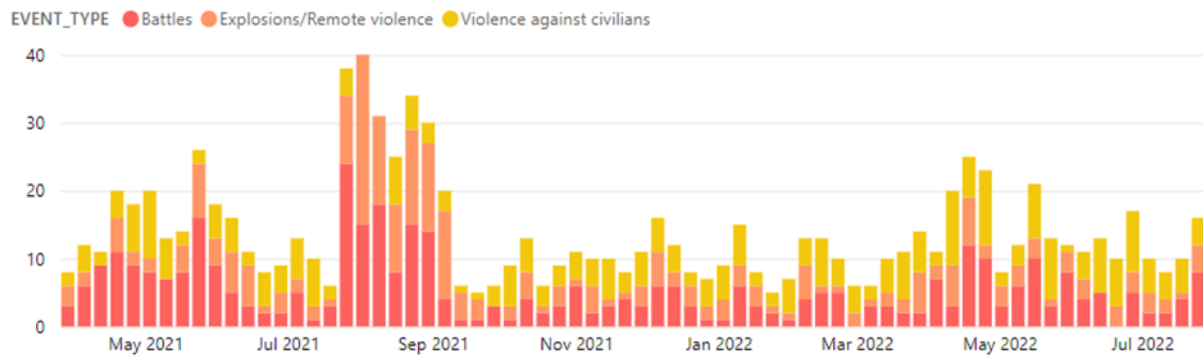
<sup>1716</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 01 July 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1717</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 14



## (b) Security incidents

During the reporting period, there were 965 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Dar'a governorate, of whom 383 were coded as battles, 268 explosions/remote violence and 314 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1718</sup>



**Figure 35. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dar'a governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>1719</sup>**

| District     | Battles    | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| As-Sanamayn  | 29         | 20              | 28                         |
| Dar'a        | 248        | 189             | 176                        |
| Izra         | 106        | 59              | 110                        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>383</b> | <b>268</b>      | <b>314</b>                 |

**Figure 36. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Dar'a governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>1720</sup>**

Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with the highest number being documented in Dar'a and Izra districts. As-Sanamayn recorded significantly lower number of security incidents than the other two districts (see Figure 36).

<sup>1718</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1719</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1720</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

## Illustrative security incidents

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Dar'a governorate in 2021 and 2022 included the following:

- On 29 July 2021, unknown individuals attacked areas close to the Dar'a National Hospital, damaging it and killing a child running errands. As a result of the damage, it was declared partially inoperable.<sup>1721</sup>
- A woman was hit and killed by GoS-shelling in her home in Tafas on 26 August 2021.<sup>1722</sup>
- Two civilians were killed in shelling of Dar'a al-Balad conducted by GoS-forces on 29 August 2021, while one woman was killed by pro-GoS-shelling on the village of Masakin Jalin.<sup>1723</sup>
- Two teachers died in shelling on Nawa, which happened shortly after an IED-attack that left some GoS-forces dead earlier on 29 November 2021.<sup>1724</sup>
- On 20 October 2021, armed individuals attacked a GoS-checkpoint, resulting in one person 'injured by a stray bullet'.<sup>1725</sup>
- On 30 October 2021, the explosion of a landmine killed two boys and one girl near Kutaybah.<sup>1726</sup>
- On 10 February 2022, unknown assailants attacked the car of a Dar'a Central Committee member, killing him and another person.<sup>1727</sup>
- On 9 April 2022, two armed unknown perpetrators attacked an UNRWA health clinic in Dar'a refugee camp with a grenade and firearms. Nobody was wounded and only limited damage was recorded.<sup>1728</sup>
- On 11 June 2022, 11 farmers, the majority being children and women, died through the explosion of a remnant landmine, while on their way to work. Another 28 people were injured.<sup>1729</sup>
- On 29 June 2022, former secretary-general of the Baath Party branch in Dar'a, Kamal al-Atmeh, and four of his relatives were killed in their house by unknown attackers.<sup>1730</sup>

<sup>1721</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>1722</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>1723</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>1724</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 34

<sup>1725</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1726</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2021/1029], 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>1727</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian regime vs. IS: Game of death in Daraa, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1728</sup> European Commission, ECHO DailyFlash Updates, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1729</sup> AOAV, 11 agricultural labourers killed, 34 injured in landmine explosion, Daraa Governorate, Syria, 14 June 2022, [url](#); SOHR, SOHR: 11 killed in Syria landmine explosion, 14 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1730</sup> New Arab (The), Former Baath official, relatives killed in southern Syria: reports, 28 June 2022, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The)/Al-Modon, Daraa: Assassination of Baath Party Branch Secretary and his Family, 29 June 2022, [url](#)



### (c) Civilian fatalities

| Month        | SNHR 2021  | SNHR 2022  |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| January      | 13         | 15         |
| February     | 13         | 20         |
| March        | 18         | 16         |
| April        | 18         | 26         |
| May          | 24         | 21         |
| June         | 17         | 32         |
| July         | 31         | 16         |
| August       | 14         |            |
| September    | 14         |            |
| October      | 7          |            |
| November     | 23         |            |
| December     | 11         |            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>203</b> | <b>146</b> |

**Figure 37. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Dar'a governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 203 civilian fatalities<sup>1731</sup> in Dar'a governorate, while in the first seven months of 2022 it recorded 146 civilian fatalities.<sup>1732</sup>

#### **(d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war**

According to UNOCHA, during the shelling and siege in 2021 an estimated 18 000 people were affected by fighting causing damage to approximately 1 198 'residential buildings' in Dar'a al-Balad. During the course of fighting, those buildings were severely damaged while 7 % of the buildings were completely destroyed. The neighbourhoods of Alabbasiah and Ghernata were most affected by the damage.<sup>1733</sup> This destruction added to the difficult situation around housing and accommodations with 15 % of housing in Dar'a governorate being already declared destroyed or unfit to live in.<sup>1734</sup> Based on the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Shelter Cluster assessed that in Dar'a governorate, 22.6 % of the population live in damaged buildings.<sup>1735</sup> During the shelling in 2021, the Dar'a National Hospital in Dar'a al-Balad was damaged.<sup>1736</sup> After several years of conflict, only two hospitals in the governorate are fully functioning.<sup>1737</sup> The Health Cluster Whole of Syria provided

<sup>1731</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1732</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1733</sup> UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1734</sup> UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1735</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1736</sup> UNOCHA, Syria. Dara'a Flash Update, Hostilities in Dara'a Governorate, As of 2 August 2021, 3 August 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 02, 27 September 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1737</sup> WHO, Health sector Syria hub update for Southern Syria (Dara'a, Quneitra, Sweida), 5 May 2022, [url](#), p. 15



information on attacks on health care within Syria. While not specifying the targets of attacks, they registered nine attacks within Dar'a governorate between January 2021 and March 2022.<sup>1738</sup>

Different actors in the conflict have used explosive munition and ordnances including landmines, especially in 'areas that have witnessed military operations.'<sup>1739</sup> According to a Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of 238 people in Dar'a governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.<sup>1740</sup> The Carter Center estimated in a March 2022 report that there were between 7 750 and 23 500 unexploded ordnances in the governorate, after the estimated use of 78 031 explosive munitions during conflict in the area. The area around Dar'a city was especially estimated to be contaminated by explosive remnants.<sup>1741</sup>

According to the European Commission ECHO Flash Update, 18 children were killed or injured by explosive remnants in the governorate of Dar'a from the beginning of 2022 until 16 June 2022.<sup>1742</sup>

### **(e) Displacement and return**

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 103 155 IDPs in the governorate.<sup>1743</sup> From January to December 2021, UNOCHA recorded 43 055 IDP movements in Dar'a governorate, with a peak of 42 673 movements in August.<sup>1744</sup> This correlates with the time of the siege and shelling in Dar'a al-Balad, where two thirds of the inhabitants of Dar'a al-Balad<sup>1745</sup>, approximately 38 000 people, fled the escalation of violence. This number includes 1 400 IDPs who had been living in shelters in Dar'a city, as well as 3 000 Palestinian refugees.<sup>1746</sup> Almost all IDP movements (43 000) recorded by UNOCHA in 2021 took place within the governorate.<sup>1747</sup>

In 2022, the numbers show increased IDP movements in May, and report 508 recorded IDP movements,<sup>1748</sup> 330 of which took place within the governorate itself.<sup>1749</sup> According to Etana,

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<sup>1738</sup> Health Cluster Whole of Syria, Attacks on healthcare in Syria 1 Jan – 31 March 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1739</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria: 11 killed by landmine explosion should draw attention to combating mines urgency, 12 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1740</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1741</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), pp. 15-16

<sup>1742</sup> European Commission, ECHO Daily Flash Updates, European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 16 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1743</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1744</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016

<sup>1745</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1746</sup> UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>1747</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1748</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016

<sup>1749</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in: Table\_Origin\_vs\_Departure

the continuing insecurity in the south of Syria leads young people to leave the region in high numbers.<sup>1750</sup> Sources, contacted by Al-Jabassini, indicated that approximately 8 000 to 10 000 people fled Dar'a and Syria altogether, between June and December 2021,<sup>1751</sup> reportedly driven primarily by security and economic concerns.<sup>1752</sup>

The UNOCHA data on IDPs spontaneous returns shows that throughout 2021, 17 517 return movements were recorded in Dar'a, with a peak of 15 367 movements in September 2021<sup>1753</sup>, when violence declined in several communities in the governorate. Hence, most of these movements took place primarily inside the governorate itself, with 17 000 movements.<sup>1754</sup>

Although the majority of IDPs resulted from the siege of Dar'a al-Balad was able to return after the new settlement agreement, the houses of as many as 3 700 persons are estimated to be destroyed to a degree that was preventing their return. Those people were still hosted by friends or family as of November 2021.<sup>1755</sup> The contamination by explosive hazards was another reported major reason for people being hesitant or unable to return to their homes.<sup>1756</sup>

According to Etana, approximately 200 civilians were able to return to their homes in Lajat in the east of Dar'a governorate in May 2021. According to the same source, the residents were displaced by Hezbollah,<sup>1757</sup> while Enab Baladi reported that the families had fled ISIL-attacks.<sup>1758</sup> Reportedly the returnees' homes had been seized by Hezbollah<sup>1759</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> Division<sup>1760</sup> and their return was negotiated by 'former opposition and Russia', especially with the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade being involved.<sup>1761</sup> Etana reported that five families who had perceived permission by the Military Intelligence returned to their homes in al-Tayf in the Lajat region in October 2021, while 30 other families were denied the return.<sup>1762</sup>

In 2022, the return numbers were peaking as high as 634 in February and 585 in May.<sup>1763</sup>

<sup>1750</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria: Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 April 2022, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1751</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1752</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 7-8; NPA, Expatriates from Syria's Daraa Fear Returning Home, 1 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1753</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016

<sup>1754</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1755</sup> UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1756</sup> UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 02, 27 September 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Syria, Humanitarian Situation in Dar'a Governorate – Situation Reports No. 03, 19 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1757</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1758</sup> Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1759</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1760</sup> Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

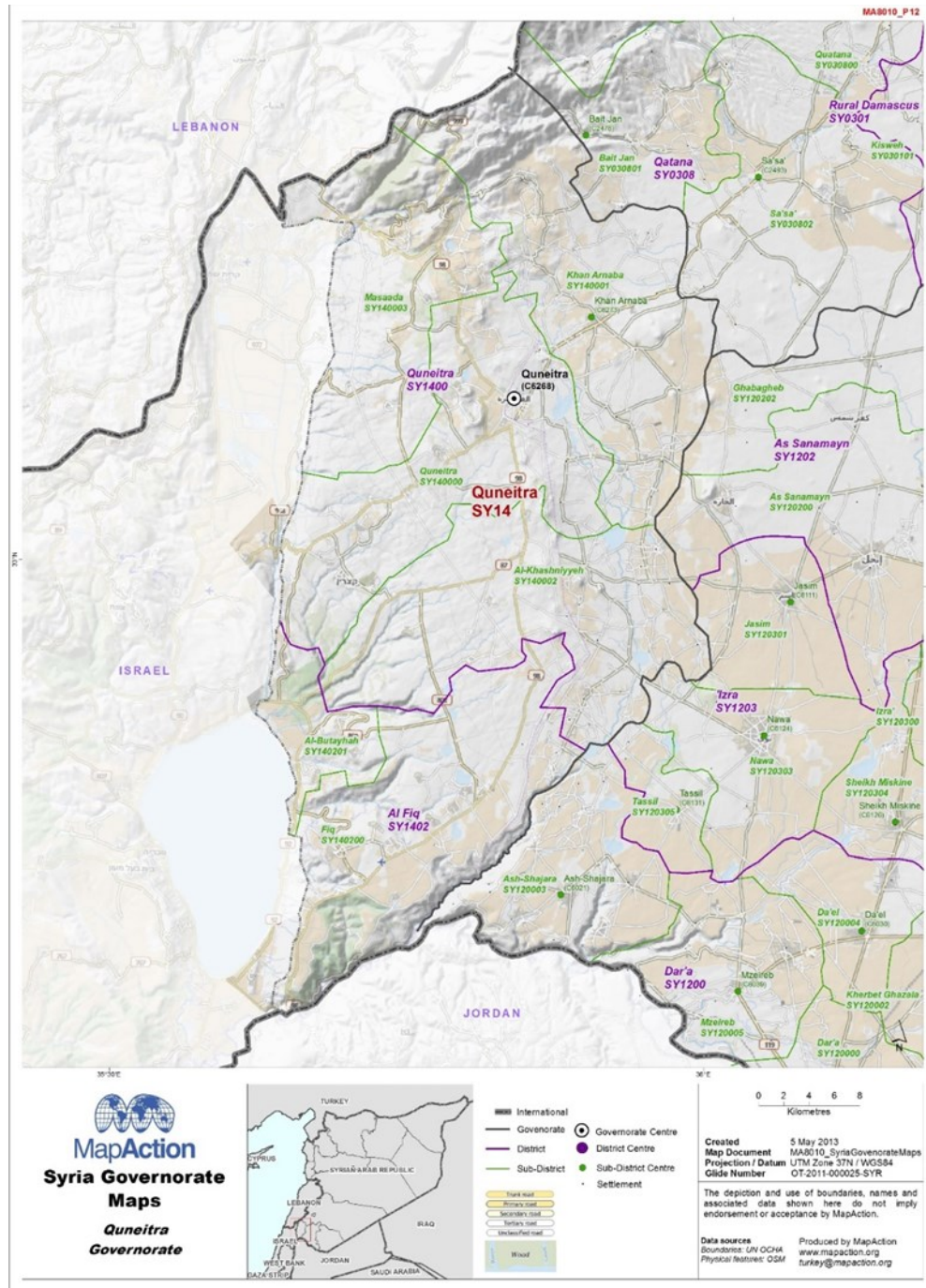
<sup>1761</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 31 May 2021, 31 May 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Families from Daraa countryside return home after three years of displacement, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1762</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1763</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016



## 2.13. Quneitra governorate



Map 19: © MapAction, Quneitra governorate<sup>1764</sup>

<sup>1764</sup> MapAction, Syria Governorate Maps – Quneitra Governorate, last updated 29 July 2016, [url](http://www.mapaction.org)

### 2.13.1. General description of the governorate

The governorate of Quneitra is situated in southern Syria, 70 km from Damascus<sup>1765</sup>, and borders Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel.<sup>1766</sup> The governorate is divided into two districts: the district of Quneitra, which comprises the sub-districts of Quneitra, Masaada, Khan Arnaba and al-Khashniyyeh, of which large parts are under Israeli control or administered by UNDOF (UN Disengagement Observer Forces). Especially Masaada is almost entirely under Israeli or UNDOF administration. The second district, al-Fiq, is divided into the sub-districts of Fiq and Al-Butayhah, with the latter being completely under Israeli control, while only a small part of Fiq is still under Syrian control.<sup>1767</sup> The city of Quneitra remained abandoned after it was destroyed by Israel in 1974 and is part of the demilitarised buffer zone between Syria and Israel under the supervision of UNDOF.<sup>1768</sup> The new provincial administrative centre is Madinat al-Baath (Baath city).<sup>1769</sup>

According to 2022 estimates by UNOCHA, the population of Quneitra governorate consisted of 113 165 inhabitants.<sup>1770</sup> The last official estimations of the Syrian Bureau of Statistics from 2021, number the population of Quneitra on approximately 123 790.<sup>1771</sup>

### 2.13.2. Conflict background and armed actors

GoS-control has been contested in Quneitra between 2013 and 2018 by different armed GoS-opposition forces including the FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra.<sup>1772</sup> In August 2018, GoS-forces regained control over areas formerly held by armed groups as well as by ISIL.<sup>1773</sup> The retrieval of control was realised through intense fighting<sup>1774</sup> during a 'Russian-backed offensive', and a withdrawal agreement negotiated with the armed opposition forces. In October 2018 the temporarily closed Quneitra crossing was reopened<sup>1775</sup> for UNDOF-Observers.<sup>1776</sup> In a map produced by the UN, as of December 2021, the whole Syrian controlled part of Quneitra governorate appeared to be under GoS control. UNDOF was present in the demilitarised area between Quneitra governorate and the Golan Heights.<sup>1777</sup> As of July 2022, Liveuamap confirms this status.<sup>1778</sup>

<sup>1765</sup> Jamestown Foundation (The), The Battle for al-Quneitra, the 'Gateway to Damascus', in: Terrorism Monitor Volume 12, Issue 5, 6 March 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1766</sup> Based on UNOCHA, Quneitra Governorate Reference Map, 1 February 2016, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>1767</sup> Based on UNOCHA, Quneitra Governorate Reference Map, 1 February 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1768</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, Al-Qunaytirah, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1769</sup> Reuters, Syrian insurgents attack government-held town near Israel, 20 November 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1770</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1771</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1772</sup> DW, Syrian rebels announce seizure of Golan Heights border crossing, 27 August 2014, [url](#); ICRC, Syria: Emergency relief for thousands displaced by fighting in Quneitra, 15 September 2014, [url](#)

<sup>1773</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019. Syrian Arab Republic, March 2019, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1774</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019. Syrian Arab Republic, March 2019, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1775</sup> Reuters, Explainer – What is the significance of the Golan Heights, 21 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1776</sup> BBC News, Golan Heights profile, 25 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>1777</sup> UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1778</sup> Liveuamap, Syria, 29 July 2022, [url](#)



Further information on the conflict background and actors in Quneitra is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

#### **(a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated groups**

The Military Security branch sitting in Sasa, Rural Damascus was reportedly also involved in Quneitra.<sup>1779</sup> According to a report by Suhail al-Ghazi from March 2021, the Fourth Division as well as the Military Security branch were ‘attempting to expand into Quneitra governorate to give cover for the entry of Iranian forces to enter into the province [...]’.<sup>1780</sup> As of November 2021, the SAA Brigade 90 was present in several locations in Quneitra.<sup>1781</sup>

As reported by the UN Secretary-General in March 2022, UNDOF observed ‘the continued presence’ of the Syrian Armed Forces in the separation area, engaged in clearance of unexploded ordnance and training as well as staffing checkpoints.<sup>1782</sup> In one incident on 8 June 2022, the Israeli Defense Forces destroyed a checkpoint built by the SAA in the demilitarised zone, close to the village of al-Malgah.<sup>1783</sup>

#### **(b) Russia**

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia operated in the end of 2021 two stationing points within the governorate.<sup>1784</sup> A May 2022 report of the Turkey-based think tank ORSAM stated that there were no military bases or camps under direct Russian control in the south of Syria and as a result the Russian presence was hard to measure.<sup>1785</sup> According to Etana, there was one Russian military location close to the town of al-Kom, affiliated with the 90<sup>th</sup> Brigade, close to the highway to Damascus in March 2022.<sup>1786</sup>

#### **(c) Iran and Iranian-backed armed groups**

Ahram Online reported in May 2022 on information from an officer who has defected from the SAA that the number of military points controlled by Iranian-affiliated militias in the south more than doubled to a number of approximately 150 in the last two years.<sup>1787</sup> This information could not be corroborated. According to COAR, the presence of Iranian-backed forces in Quneitra, as well as a ‘weaker state security presence’ left the governorate more volatile than other

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<sup>1779</sup> Syria Direct, ‘Expelling the usurper’: Legal avenues to retake homes stolen by Hezbollah in Quneitra thwarted by security concerns, 17 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1780</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Insecurity in Southern Syria: Tracking Daraa, Quneitra and Suweyda (January – February 2021), ORSAM, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>1781</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 4 November 2021, 4 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1782</sup> UN Security Council, United Nations Disengagement Observer Force – Report of the Secretary General [S/2022/247], 18 March 2022, [url](#), para. 14

<sup>1783</sup> Times of Israel (The), Israeli tanks said to destroy Syrian army outpost built in Golan demilitarized zone, 8 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1784</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1785</sup> Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1786</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1787</sup> Ahram Online, Russian withdrawal threats to Syria, 28 May 2022, [url](#)

areas.<sup>1788</sup> Jusoor for Studies assessed that Iranian-affiliated forces and Hezbollah operated 19 security and military points within the governorate at the end of 2021.<sup>1789</sup>

#### (d) Israel

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) carried out airstrikes, particularly against (pro-)Iranian forces and Hezbollah,<sup>1790</sup> as well as surface-to-surface attacks on targets close to the ceasefire-line.<sup>1791</sup>

#### (e) ISIL

According to the International Crisis Group, ISIL still has some cells within Quneitra and ‘occasionally claimed attacks’ in the governorate. However, those cells, as well as in Dar’a governorate, would not need to be connected to the overall Syria network, but could be ‘remnants of a historically isolated ISIS affiliate that controlled parts of the Yarmouk river basin at the intersection of the Syrian, Israeli and Jordanian borders.’<sup>1792</sup>

### 2.13.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

According to the Carter Center, reports on increasing violence in Dar’a as well as Sweida and Quneitra accumulated in the run-up to the May 2021 presidential elections resulting in a surge in tensions and attacks by unidentified armed actors on GoS-officials and former opposition fighters.<sup>1793</sup> An attack on a GoS-affiliated security checkpoint (reports differ whether the post was operated by an Iranian militia<sup>1794</sup>, military security<sup>1795</sup>, or military<sup>1796</sup>) close to the towns of Jaba and Umm Batnah,<sup>1797</sup> by an unidentified armed group<sup>1798</sup> killed four people.<sup>1799</sup> In reaction, GoS-affiliated forces, according to different reports including Syrian Military Intelligence

<sup>1788</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1789</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1790</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#), see August 2021, May 2022; Times of Israel (The), Syria says IDF chopper bombs site near border, 1 injured, in rare daytime strike, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1791</sup> Times of Israel (The), Israeli tanks said to fire into Syria, wounding shepherds who approached border, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1792</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 1, fn. 2

<sup>1793</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1794</sup> Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1795</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>1796</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1797</sup> SOHR, قوات النظام تحاصر بلدة قرب الجولان المحتل بريف القنيطرة وسط مفاوضات بين وجهاء البلدة وضباط النظام

[Regime forces besiege a town near the occupied Golan in the Quneitra countryside, amid negotiations between the town’s notables and the regime’s officers], 1 May 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22; COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1798</sup> Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>1799</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)



forces<sup>1800</sup> and Hezbollah troops<sup>1801</sup>, encircled the town of Umm Batnah<sup>1802</sup> and started shelling the area on 1 May 2021.<sup>1803</sup> The ensuing siege, was the first recorded in the governorate since its recapture by the GoS in 2018. The confrontation lasted until 15 May 2021 and led to the temporary displacement of residents from the town during the shelling.<sup>1804</sup> As condition to the end of the siege '30 former opposition fighters and their families' had to transfer to northwest Syria.<sup>1805</sup> GoS justified the transfer with the allegation of the concerned being involved in 'terroristic activities'.<sup>1806</sup> According to reports, Russia brokered the agreement<sup>1807</sup>, while Enab Baladi spoke of mediation from the Quneitra Reconciliation Committee as well as the Dar'a Central Committee.<sup>1808</sup>

Attacks and assassination attempts on individuals, especially GoS-affiliates and Hezbollah members were recorded in the reporting period. Suhail Al-Ghazi<sup>1809</sup> reported that 12 people were killed in these incidents between April and June 2021, among them four civilians and two children. On 23 April 2021, two children were killed in a bombing attack targeting their father, who was reported to be a former rebel who joined the military security.<sup>1810</sup> On 21 April 2021, armed individuals killed two members of the Air Force Intelligence, while they were on patrol in Ghadeer al-Bustan.<sup>1811</sup> On 31 August 2021, two civilians died because of the explosion of an IED in Jubata al-Khashab, without claims for responsibility.<sup>1812</sup> For the period between February and May 2022, the UN Security Council reported continuing security threats, including assassinations, shootings, 'limited-scale clashes', as well as 'improvised explosive device attacks' in the southern governorates of Dar'a, Sweida and Quneitra.<sup>1813</sup>

The opposition newspaper Zaman al-Wasl reported attacks on Hezbollah-affiliated individuals in mid-2022. One prominent figure of the GoS, reportedly close to Iranian forces in the region, who is also said to be involved in drug trafficking, was killed on 6 July 2022 by the IDF.<sup>1814</sup> In June 2022, one former FSA member, who reportedly joined Hezbollah in 2018, was killed by

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<sup>1800</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1801</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1802</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1803</sup> Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 May 2021, 3 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1804</sup> Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1805</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1806</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, 'Settlement Agreement' Displaces 150 Syrians to Al-Bab in the North, 21 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1807</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, 'Settlement Agreement' Displaces 150 Syrians to Al-Bab in the North, 21 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1808</sup> Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1809</sup> Suhail al-Ghazi is a research assistant at the ORSAM Center for Middle Eastern Studies and a non-resident fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy.

<sup>1810</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1811</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 May 2021, 3 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1812</sup> Al-Monitor, Two killed in southern Syria explosion, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1813</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 26 ; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>1814</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Syrian militant killed in alleged Israeli drone strike in Quneitra – report, 6 July 2022, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Assassinations Target Iranian Militiamen in Quneitra, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

an IED ‘planted by unknown assailants in the village of al-Asbah’.<sup>1815</sup> Furthermore, according to the article one Hezbollah-member was killed on 12 July 2022<sup>1816</sup> by unidentified gunmen on the road connecting Jaba and Umm Batnah.<sup>1817</sup> Syria Direct reported in July 2022 that he was involved in drug trafficking in the south, seeing the assassination as one in a row of attacks on individuals involved in smuggling in the governorates of Dar’a, Sweida and Quneitra.<sup>1818</sup>

### *Israeli attacks*

During the reporting period, airstrikes by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) on targets connected to GoS and Iranian-backed forces<sup>1819</sup>, as well as attacks by tank fire and snipers in an attempt to contain Hezbollah’s forces close to its borders<sup>1820</sup> were reported. On 10 May 2021 for example, the IDF struck a target in the village of Hader<sup>1821</sup> where – according to The Times of Israel – there is a stronghold of GoS-forces as well as Iran and Hezbollah forces.<sup>1822</sup> The wounded person was officially declared to be a civilian, while SOHR reported him to be a member of Hezbollah.<sup>1823</sup> Furthermore, Israeli tanks conducted attacks on different targets, destroying one SAA-outpost close to the village of al-Maalqah, within the demilitarized zone in June 2022.<sup>1824</sup> In another incident in August 2022, Israeli tank fire targeted the Syrian side, injuring two persons. Different sources disagreed whether those two were shepherds or Hezbollah-affiliates.<sup>1825</sup> According to New Lines Institute, Captagon manufacturing sides are located in different GoS-held territories, including Quneitra.<sup>1826</sup> GoS-forces, especially the 4<sup>th</sup> Division and Hezbollah are allegedly linked to the drug trafficking.<sup>1827</sup>

### **(b) Security incidents**

During the reporting period, there were 58 security incidents recorded by ACLED in Quneitra governorate, of whom 14 were coded as battles, 39 explosions/remote violence and 5

<sup>1815</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Assassinations Target Iranian Militiamen in Quneitra, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1816</sup> Syria Direct, Who is assassinating suspected drug traffickers in southern Syria?, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1817</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Assassinations Target Iranian Militiamen in Quneitra, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1818</sup> Syria Direct, Who is assassinating suspected drug traffickers in southern Syria?, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1819</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Times of Israel (The), Syria says IDF chopper bombs site near border, 1 injured, in rare daytime strike, 10 May 2021, [url](#); Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1820</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Syrian militant killed in alleged Israeli drone strike in Quneitra – report, 6 July 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/49/77], 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>1821</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Times of Israel (The), Syria says IDF chopper bombs site near border, 1 injured, in rare daytime strike, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1822</sup> Times of Israel (The), Syria says IDF chopper bombs site near border, 1 injured, in rare daytime strike, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1823</sup> SOHR, 2021 – Israel attacks Syria on nearly 20 occasions, destroying over 70 targets and killing nearly 130 people, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1824</sup> Times of Israel (The), Israeli tanks said to destroy Syrian army outpost built in Golan demilitarized zone, 8 June 2022, [url](#)

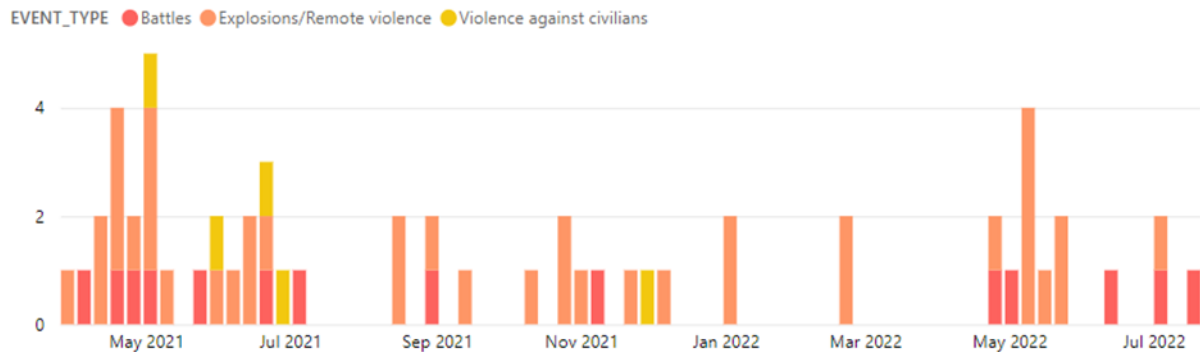
<sup>1825</sup> Times of Israel (The), Israeli tanks said to fire into Syria, wounding shepherds who approached border, 12 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1826</sup> New Lines Institute, Intelligence Briefing – The Captagon Threat – A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, April 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1827</sup> New Lines Institute, Intelligence Briefing – The Captagon Threat – A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, April 2022, [url](#), pp. 17, 19



incidents of violence against civilians. All security incidents were recorded in the district of Quneitra.<sup>1828</sup>



**Figure 38. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Quneitra governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>1829</sup>**

### Illustrative security incidents

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Quneitra governorate in 2021 and 2022 included the following:

- On 20 April 2021, ISIL members claimed the killing of two fighters of the 112<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the town of Ghadeer al-Bustan.<sup>1830</sup>
- On 1 May 2021, unknown gunmen attacked GoS-affiliates at a checkpoint in proximity to Umm Batnah,<sup>1831</sup> killing four of the operating forces.<sup>1832</sup>
- On 3 May 2021, a retired Air Force Intelligence brigadier general was shot dead by unknown armed individuals<sup>1833</sup> in the town of Girgis.<sup>1834</sup>
- On 4 June 2021, a Hezbollah member was killed in his car by an IED near al-Muallaqa, while his wife was wounded.<sup>1835</sup>

<sup>1828</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1829</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1830</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1831</sup> Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 22

<sup>1832</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1833</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1834</sup> Baladi, القنيطرة في متقاعدا ضابطا يغتالون مجهولون [Unidentified assailants assassinate a retired officer in Quneitra], 3 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1835</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

- On 25 June 2021, one man was killed and two boys wounded when an IED, attached to their car exploded in the town of Girgis.<sup>1836</sup> On 16 October 2021, an Israeli sniper reportedly shot a former Druze lawmaker in a village close to the Golan Heights.<sup>1837</sup>
- On 6 July 2022, a Syrian soldier was killed by an Israeli airstrike in the town of Hader.<sup>1838</sup>
- On 9 July 2022, SOHR reported on two GoS soldiers that were shot dead by unidentified gunmen, while on route on public roads. One incident took place in proximity to al-Jabaliyah, the other one between the two towns of al-Qurkas and al-Qusaibah.<sup>1839</sup>
- On 22 July 2022, SOHR reported that unidentified assailants killed one member of the Military Security, while targeting his brother, a commander of the Military Intel in Mumtanah.<sup>1840</sup>

### (c) Civilian fatalities

| Month    | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| January  | -         | -         |
| February | -         | 1         |
| March    | 2         | -         |
| April    | 5         | -         |
| May      | -         | -         |
| June     | -         | -         |
| July     | -         | -         |
| August   | -         |           |

<sup>1836</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2021/735], 18 August 2021, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>1837</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1838</sup> Times of Israel (The), Syrian soldier said killed in Israeli drone strike near Golan border, 6 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1839</sup> SOHR, New assassination – Unidentified gunmen shoot regime soldier dead in Al-Qonaitara, 9 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1840</sup> SOHR, Security vacuum – Brother of commandor of military intelligence branch killed in armed attack on headquarters in al-Quneitra countryside, 22 July 2022, [url](#)



| Month        | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| September    | 2         |           |
| October      | -         |           |
| November     | 1         |           |
| December     | -         |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>1</b>  |

**Figure 39. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Quneitra governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 10 civilian fatalities<sup>1841</sup> in Quneitra governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented one civilian fatality<sup>1842</sup> (see Figure 39).

<sup>1841</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1842</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9

#### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Based on the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Global Shelter Cluster assessed that in Quneitra governorate, 15.07 % of the assessed shelter consisted of damaged buildings.<sup>1843</sup>

Even though Quneitra was spared from large-scale fighting compared to other areas of Syria, the governorate witnessed its 'own internal tensions between armed factions and GoS armed groups' as well as Israeli missiles targeting Iranian-backed and Hezbollah locations. These also led to explosive remnants like airstrike munition, as well as landmines and IEDs resulting from land-based operations.<sup>1844</sup> In its 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, UNOCHA listed Quneitra as one of the governorates with areas contaminated with explosive ordnance.<sup>1845</sup>

The Carter Center estimated in March 2022 that of about 11 802 explosive munitions used in the governorate, approximately 100 – 300 still pose a threat to the civil population as UXO.<sup>1846</sup> According to a Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of three people in Quneitra governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.<sup>1847</sup>

#### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 3 752 IDPs in the governorate.<sup>1848</sup> From January to December 2021, UNOCHA did not record any IDP movements to or from Quneitra governorate and only 68 IDP movements within the governorate.<sup>1849</sup> According to the UNOCHA dataset up to four movements each within April and May 2022 were recorded within the governorate itself.<sup>1850</sup> Etana highlighted that the continuing insecurity in the south leads young people in increasing numbers to leave the region.<sup>1851</sup> The events in Umm Batnah in April and May 2021 resulted in the temporary displacement of residents from the town during the shelling<sup>1852</sup> as well as in the evacuation of 30 families, approximately 150 persons, from Umm Batnah to al-Bab in the northwest of Syria, which is under control of SNA factions.<sup>1853</sup> According to an article by Syria Direct, Hezbollah and affiliated forces seized

<sup>1843</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1844</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>1845</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1846</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1847</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria's Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1848</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1849</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: IDP Movements Overview, Jan - Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1850</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Dara Apr-2022, 17 June 2022, [url](#), in: Table\_Origin\_vs\_Departure; UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in: Table\_Origin\_vs\_Departure

<sup>1851</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria: Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 April 2022, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1852</sup> Enab Baladi, To end tension in Quneitra, families and former opposition fighters deported to northern Syria, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1853</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, 'Settlement Agreement' Displaces 150 Syrians to Al-Bab in the North, 21 May 2021, [url](#); MEMO, Assad regime evicts 30 families from southern Syria, 24 May 2021, [url](#)



approximately 25 houses of displaced persons that at least in parts wanted to return under Russian-brokered settlement agreements in 2018. The affected families are still not able to return to their homes. The seizure was justified with security reasons because of the close proximity to the Israeli border.<sup>1854</sup>

In 2021, UNOCHA recorded 4 800 returns of the overall 8 902 returns to Quneitra, around half of which came from Rural Damascus governorate, and 1 000 return movements within the governorate itself.<sup>1855</sup> During the first half of 2022, low number of return movements were recorded, such as 38 in March 2022<sup>1856</sup> and 29 in May 2022 (all within the governorate<sup>1857</sup>).<sup>1858</sup>

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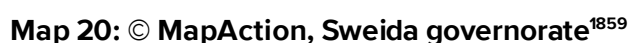
<sup>1854</sup> Syria Direct, 'Expelling the usurper': Legal avenues to retake homes stolen by Hezbollah in Quneitra thwarted by security concerns, 17 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1855</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1856</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return Data Mar-2022, 20 May 2022, [url](#), in: Table\_Origin\_vs\_Departure

<sup>1857</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return Data Mar-2022, 20 May 2022, [url](#), in: Table\_Origin\_vs\_Departure

<sup>1858</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP movements and IDP spontaneous return movements Data May 2022, 14 July 2022, [url](#), in the sheet: Summarysince2016



### 2.14.1. General description of the governorate

The governorate of Sweida is located in the southern part of Syria and has borders with the governorates of Dar'a and Rural Damascus and an international border with Jordan to its south. Sweida governorate comprises three districts: As-Sweida, Shahba and Salkhad, which each have subdistricts.<sup>1860</sup>

The Syrian Bureau of Statistics estimated that the population in the governorate of Sweida in 2021 was 540 409.<sup>1861</sup> In a February 2022 report, UNOCHA estimated the population of Sweida governorate to be of 380 050 inhabitants.<sup>1862</sup> The Druze community makes up 91 % of

<sup>1859</sup> MapAction, Sweida Governorate, 29 July 2016, [url](#)

<sup>1860</sup> Based on UNOCHA, As Sweida Governorate Reference Map, December 2015, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – Governorates Profile (June 2014), 6 August 2014, [url](#), pp. 9, 40

<sup>1861</sup> Syria, Central Bureau of Statistics, Estimate of the population in Syria by governorates, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1862</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23.

the governorate's total population. Other groups present as of 2018 included Christians (3 %) and Sunni Muslims (6 %), who have Bedouin roots.<sup>1863</sup>

The societal structure of the governorate was described as 'semitribal family community' by Nowras Aziz, a France-based journalist of Sweida origin. He further explains that therefore the use of weapons is not an expedient measure in dispute resolution and that '[a]ny confrontation with any member of the Suwayda families will lead to a confrontation between villages and areas'.<sup>1864</sup> Often so called *sulh* (reconciliation) delegations, consisting of local notables, are necessary to solve a conflict.<sup>1865</sup> Because of the increasing insecurity and absence of the GoS, Sweida residents increasingly turn towards tribal law to settle disputes.<sup>1866</sup>

Factors such as the geographical proximity to Jordan, the limited GoS-control, the considerable influence of armed gangs and high crime rate in the governorate have contributed in making Sweida one of Syria's smuggling hotspots.<sup>1867</sup> In recent years drug production and cross-border drug trafficking increased since the GoS' recapture of southern Syria in general<sup>1868</sup>, including in Sweida governorate.<sup>1869</sup>

## 2.14.2. Conflict background and armed actors

During the conflict, the governorate of Sweida has officially remained under GoS control. However, much of its military and civil authority comes from political and military factions within the governorate, preoccupied with defending it from outside attackers.<sup>1870</sup> Historically, the GoS has not exercised its power directly in Sweida, having mainly relied on local armed factions sponsored by intelligence agencies and security branches.<sup>1871</sup> Those armed factions sometimes receive security cards from the GoS that enable its owners to move freely throughout the governorate. In return, they are supposed to keep the area under control and fulfill other orders in the interest of the GoS.<sup>1872</sup>

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<sup>1863</sup> Zaidan, Taim, Sweida: Conflict Dynamics and the Role of Civil Society, Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, 6 January 2020, [url](#), p. 4. The report cites the Decision Support Office in Sweida Province as a source for these percentages.

<sup>1864</sup> Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1865</sup> Al-Jabassini, Abdullah; Ezzi, Maen, Tribal 'Sulh' and the Politics of Persuasion in Volatile Southern Syria, EUI, 22 March 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1866</sup> Al-Monitor, Violence on rise in Syria's Suwayda, 17 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1867</sup> Daher, Joseph; Ahmad, Nizar; Taha, Salwan, Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>1868</sup> Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1869</sup> COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1870</sup> Syria Direct, At least 150 people killed in devastating IS ground offensive, suicide attacks on Suwayda province, 25 July 2018, [url](#); Syria Direct, The state of Syria's south: A month-long reporting series from Syria Direct, 11 September 2017, [url](#)

<sup>1871</sup> Syria Direct, In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#); MEI, Kidnappings, cross-border clashes threaten increasingly fragile status quo in Syria's south, 20 May 2020, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1872</sup> New Arab (The), Suweida gang leader confesses to working for Syrian military intelligence, 22 July 2021, [url](#); Syria Direct, In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

As of July 2022, Sweida governorate was formally under GoS-control,<sup>1873</sup> while various sources point out the chaotic character of the fragmented security control in Sweida governorate.<sup>1874</sup>

Further information on the conflict background and actors in Sweida is available in the [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security Situation \(July 2021\)](#), [EUAA COI Report: Syria - Security situation \(May 2020\)](#) and [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

#### (a) Syrian Arab Army and affiliated armed groups

As of December 2021, Sweida governorate continued to remain under the formal control of the SAA, including its affiliated foreign troops such as Russia and Iran.<sup>1875</sup> In August 2021, the 15<sup>th</sup> Division was reported to be present in the southeast of the governorate.<sup>1876</sup> According to Syria Direct, the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, located in Busra al-Sham, Dar'a, now is affiliated with the Military Intelligence Division 238, located in Sweida.<sup>1877</sup> The Military Intelligence in Sweida is according to COAR deeply involved in drug trafficking.<sup>1878</sup> Enab Baladi reported in July 2022 that different GoS-affiliated militias were present in the governorate, including the NDF.<sup>1879</sup>

#### (b) Russia

According to Jusoor for Studies, Russia operated in the end of 2021 nine security and military points within the governorate.<sup>1880</sup> Russian delegations were trying to play a role as mediators in the reporting period of 2021, because of the proximity to the Russian-backed 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, having a major stronghold in Busra al-Sham on the eastern border in the Dar'a governorate. However, as COAR pointed out, Russia is lacking 'direct relations with important stakeholders in As-Sweida' and is distrusted by the Druze majority.<sup>1881</sup> According to some sources Russia decreased its troops in the south since February 2022<sup>1882</sup>, although these reports remain unconfirmed.

<sup>1873</sup> Based on reading of maps in Liveuamap, Syria, 29 July 2022, [url](#); UN, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2021, January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1874</sup> Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnapping sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 7 October 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Violence on rise in Syria's Suwayda, 17 February 2022, [url](#); Daher, J.; Ahmad, N.; Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1875</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1876</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1877</sup> Syria Direct, Southern Syria's drug war: Jordan's options 'limited' as Iran expands, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1878</sup> COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1879</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, "Wait for the next": Iran warns As-Suwayda residents as 'next' can exceed reprisals, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1880</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1881</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 26 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1882</sup> Enab Baladi, سوريا جنوبية تتركز نقاط تخلي روسيا.. درعا [Dar'a...Russia evacuates outposts in southern Syria], 24 May 2022, [url](#); Haşıl, H., Policy Brief 216 - The Ukraine Crisis And Russian Forces In Syria, Orsam, June 2022, [url](#), p. 7



### (c) Iran and Iranian-backed armed groups

According to Jusoor for Studies, by the end of 2021, Iranian-affiliated forces and Hezbollah operated eight stationing points within the governorate.<sup>1883</sup> The Lebanese Hezbollah is reported to be involved in cross-border drug trafficking.<sup>1884</sup> The NDF were present in Sweida and are linked to Iran,<sup>1885</sup> with whom they foster excellent relations.<sup>1886</sup> According to Nowras Aziz, a journalist of Sweida origin, there were no Iranian-held positions in the eastern area of the governorate.<sup>1887</sup>

### (d) ISIL

The UN Security Council reported in February and July 2022 on an 'active presence'<sup>1888</sup> and activities<sup>1889</sup> of ISIL in Sweida governorate. In a map of July 2022 Etana indicated that ISIL activity areas were within Sweida governorate.<sup>1890</sup> According to Nowras Aziz, as of August 2021 no ISIL members were present in the eastern area of the governorate.<sup>1891</sup>

### (e) Factions, militias and gangs

New armed groups involved in criminal activities such as kidnappings, emerged during the reporting period.<sup>1892</sup> According to a report by Nizar Ahmad, from the European University Institute, gangs and armed groups are often named after the town or village 'they operate' in.<sup>1893</sup>

One of the local factions backed by the Military Intelligence<sup>1894</sup> is the so-called Falhout/Falahout-group, after its leader Raji Falhout/Falahout.<sup>1895</sup> It is also known as the al-Fajr movement.<sup>1896</sup> According to Suhail al-Ghazi, it splintered from the Rajjal al-Karama

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<sup>1883</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Foreign Forces Points in Syria End of 2021 and Beginning of 2022, 27 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1884</sup> Enab Baladi, Syria's As-Suwayda: drug trafficking stop on road from Lebanon to Jordan, 25 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1885</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1886</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Shaban, N., Policy Brief 186: Daraa Fragile Security Disrupted By Foreign Actors Amid The Emergence Of New Powers, ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1887</sup> Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1888</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 3 February 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/83], 3 February 2022, [url](#), para. 36

<sup>1889</sup> UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 July 2022 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2022/547], 15 July 2022, [url](#), para 43

<sup>1890</sup> Etana Syria, Military Control Across Syria – July 2022, July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1891</sup> Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1892</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1893</sup> Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1894</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1895</sup> Syria Direct, In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1896</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Recap: Suweida Revolts Against Corruption, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

movement.<sup>1897</sup> It has its main stronghold in the town of Atil, north of As-Sweida city, where they are in possession of various ‘light and medium weapons as well as vehicles equipped with machine guns and ammunition depots’. According to media reports the gang consists of 30 members and is infamous for cutting of the main road connecting As-Sweida with Damascus<sup>1898</sup>, and being involved in criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, kidnapping and burglary.<sup>1899</sup>

Other factions/gang operating during the reporting period included:

- The Falhout gang which was reportedly situated close by in Qanawat and suspected by locals of being affiliated with Russian forces. It reportedly had a strength of 50 people<sup>1900</sup> In July 2022, the gang was dissolved following clashes with other local armed factions (see section [2.14.2](#))
- The gang of Fadia al-Andari, in the northeast of the governorate, which is affiliated with the Military Intelligence, has its main stronghold and its arms and equipment in the village of al-Taiba.<sup>1901</sup>
- In the capital As-Sweida many gangs are affiliated with the security branches. Among them the Mizhar group which is reported to carry out kidnappings for ransom.<sup>1902</sup>
- A group of 50 operates in southern Syria and is reportedly affiliated to Hezbollah. It possessed light and medium weapons as well as armed cars. Its stronghold is Salkhad. Enab Baladi also alleges that the group is involved in drug trafficking.<sup>1903</sup>

Local armed groups were founded in attempts to ‘counter those gangs and maintain the security of As-Suwayda and its civilian residents.’<sup>1904</sup> The Rajjal al-Karama movement (‘Men of Dignity’) was established as a local Druze defence force independent from the GoS in 2012.<sup>1905</sup> According to Suhail al-Ghazi ‘the movement turned from an opposition movement towards a neutral stand and focuses on attempts to establish some kind of security and protection for Sweida residents’.<sup>1906</sup> It reportedly plays an important role in the security situation in the

<sup>1897</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1898</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1899</sup> New Arab (The), Suweida gang leader confesses to working for Syrian military intelligence, 22 July 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1900</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1901</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1902</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1903</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1904</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1905</sup> Rollins, T., Kidnappings, cross-border clashes threaten increasingly fragile status quo in Syria’s south, MEI, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1906</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 8



region.<sup>1907</sup> Enab Baladi reported in October 2021 that the group would consist of up to 2 000 fighters.<sup>1908</sup> There were some reports on tensions between the Men of Dignity movement and the Falhout group.<sup>1909</sup>

In July 2021 a new Druze political party emerged, called al-Liwa Party<sup>1910</sup> /Syrian Brigade Party, which, according to its own account, opposes the GoS and Hezbollah.<sup>1911</sup> The armed wing of this party was called the Anti-Terrorism Force (ATF) and consisted primarily of Druze fighters from the region. It says its foundation was based on the aim to provide security for the population in the face of increasing violence and of the neglect and mistreatment of Sweida by the GoS. The declared goal of the armed unit is to fight gangs and criminal groups, especially if funded and backed in their crimes by the GoS. Furthermore, it wants to limit the Iranian influence.<sup>1912</sup> According to Suhail al-Ghazi, the armed wing consisted of approximately 40 individuals in August 2021<sup>1913</sup>, while in October 2021 Enab Baladi cited unconfirmed information that the group would consist of up to 1 000 fighters.<sup>1914</sup> Enab Baladi reported rising tensions between the ATF, which by then claimed to be supported by the US-backed MaT group,<sup>1915</sup> and the GoS-backed groups.<sup>1916</sup> ATF was reportedly disbanded in June 2022 after its commander had died following clashes with GoS forces and affiliated local groups.<sup>1917</sup> (see section 2.14.2 for further information)

### 2.14.3. Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### (a) Security trends during the reporting period

In Sweida governorate 'lawlessness, chaos and rampant criminal and political violence' were impacting security situation during the reporting period. Local armed factions and criminal gangs were reportedly trying to establish their own areas of influence at the expense of the GoS.<sup>1918</sup> Reporting on the period between February and May 2022, the UN Security Council stated that continuing security threats in the governorate of Dar'a, Quneitra and Sweida

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<sup>1907</sup> New Arab (The), Suweida gang leader confesses to working for Syrian military intelligence, 22 July 2021, [url](#); COAR, Smugglers and Security Agents: Fragmentation and Decentralisation in Southern Syria's Captagon Networks, July 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1908</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1909</sup> Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1910</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1911</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1912</sup> Al-Monitor, New Druze political party, military faction take shape in Suwayda, 18 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1913</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1914</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria's As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1915</sup> Enab Baladi, "Wait for the next": Iran warns As-Suwayda residents as 'next' can exceed reprisals, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1916</sup> Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1917</sup> Syria Direct, In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1918</sup> Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

included ‘improvised explosive attacks, targeted killings, exchanges of fire’ as well as clashes of limited extent and kidnappings. Parties involved included GoS forces and affiliated militias, former members of anti-Gos armed groups, ISIL and unidentified elements.<sup>1919</sup>

### *Fighting between local forces and GoS-forces*

The Carter Center reported increasing violence including in Sweida governorate, accumulating in the run-up to the May 2021 presidential elections, resulting in a surge in tensions and attacks by unidentified armed actors on GoS-officials and former opposition fighters.<sup>1920</sup> Furthermore, it reported an increase in violence in Sweida during the second half of 2021, consisting especially of violence related to armed groups.<sup>1921</sup> Al-Monitor connected the increasing violence to the lack of rule of law within the governorate.<sup>1922</sup> Local disputes at times evolved to clashes between various armed groups and forces, sometimes including GoS-forces,<sup>1923</sup> or even the civilian population.<sup>1924</sup> For example, tensions between the ATF and pro-GoS NDF led to multiple confrontations between the two parties, including clashes on 10 August 2021 in Al-Raha that were resolved through pressure exercised by the residents of the area. However, another flare-up led to the establishment of a GoS checkpoint close to the village of al-Harisa.<sup>1925</sup> In December 2021, the International Crisis Group reported troop reinforcements in Sweida, as well as armed conflicts between local forces and GoS-troops in Sweida city.<sup>1926</sup>

Two major gangs that controlled parts of the road connecting Damascus and Sweida were dispersed in 2021.<sup>1927</sup> One gang from Shahba, which was affiliated with Air Force Intelligence<sup>1928</sup> left the city in July 2021 because of pressure by the ‘local community’, when it had lost popular support by killing a popular activist.<sup>1929</sup> In contrast, COAR reported that the driving force in the eviction of the gang were ‘the city’s most prominent families’ motivated by the killing of three civilians.<sup>1930</sup> Furthermore, according to a EUI report of March 2022 one

<sup>1919</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), para. 26; UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021) [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>1920</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1921</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, October Through December 2021, 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1922</sup> Al-Monitor, Violence on rise in Syria’s Suwayda, 17 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1923</sup> Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1924</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1925</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, July Through September 2021, [url](#), pp. 9-10; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review, April through June 2021, 30 June 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1926</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1927</sup> Suwayda24, انتفاضة شعبية ضد العصابات الإجرامية في شهباء.. التفاصيل منذ بدايتها [A popular uprising against criminal gangs in Shahba. Details from its beginning], 18 July 2021, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1928</sup> Enab Baladi, Multiple conflicting forces on the ground portend possible clash in Syria’s As-Suwayda, 3 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1929</sup> Suwayda24, انتفاضة شعبية ضد العصابات الإجرامية في شهباء.. التفاصيل منذ بدايتها [A popular uprising against criminal gangs in Shahba. Details from its beginning], 18 July 2021, [url](#); COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1930</sup> COAR, Syria Update, 26 July 2021, [url](#)



gang having its stronghold in Ariqa got dissolved by GoS-forces, after it has been urged by the GoS to halt kidnappings, but failed to do so.<sup>1931</sup>

Increasing tensions between local armed groups and GoS forces led to confrontations during the first half of 2022.<sup>1932</sup> Clashes between GoS-forces and local armed groups occurred in the first months of 2022, resulting from local groups targeting checkpoints.<sup>1933</sup> For example in Sweida city, local factions in March 2022 took over a GoS-checkpoint by force. GoS-troops regained control over the checkpoint shortly.<sup>1934</sup>

According to the Carter Center, clashes between the ATF and GoS-affiliated groups occurred on a regular basis, especially with the NDF in the villages of al-Raha and al-Harisa.<sup>1935</sup> On 8 June 2022, clashes broke out between the ATF and forces of the Military Intelligence Directorate supported by Iran, Hezbollah,<sup>1936</sup> and GoS-affiliated militias<sup>1937</sup> in the village of Khazma. This led to the death of a number of members<sup>1938</sup> as well as of the ATF commander, while his forces were dispersed and its members fled to areas in the desert.<sup>1939</sup> The group was reportedly disbanded as of July 2022.<sup>1940</sup>

#### *Criminal gang activities, including drug trafficking and kidnapping for ransom*

An increase in assassinations, kidnappings and attacks ‘targeting the headquarters of local factions, dignitaries and political and human rights activists’ in the governorate in 2021, was reported especially since August 2021.<sup>1941</sup> Suwayda24, a Syrian local news agency, published reports that indicated that 134 individuals were killed in 2021 in violent incidents. According to the report 35 civilians were killed by known assailants for reasons such as personal disputes, revenge or theft, while 27 civilians were killed under unclear circumstances. Furthermore, three civilians were killed by branches of the intelligence services, three by the Military

<sup>1931</sup> Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1932</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 12-13; Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>1933</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, [url](#), p. 13; Enab Baladi, فصائل محلية تزيل حاجزًا للنظام وسط السويداء والآخر يعود بتعزيزات [Local factions remove a barrier of the regime in the center of Sweida city, the latter returns with reinforcements], 16 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1934</sup> Enab Baladi, فصائل محلية تزيل حاجزًا للنظام وسط السويداء والآخر يعود بتعزيزات [Local factions remove a barrier of the regime in the center of Sweida city, the latter returns with reinforcements], 16 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1935</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1936</sup> Enab Baladi, “Wait for the next”: Iran warns As-Suwayda residents as ‘next’ can exceed reprisals, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1937</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>1938</sup> Suwayda24, هل انتهت قوة مكافحة الإرهاب ؟ [Is the Anti-Terror Force over?], 9 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1939</sup> Syria Direct, In Suwayda, ‘organized gangs’ serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts, 15 June 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, “Wait for the next”: Iran warns As-Suwayda residents as ‘next’ can exceed reprisals, 5 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1940</sup> Carter Center (The), Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, April – June 2022, [url](#), p. 12;

<sup>1941</sup> Jusoor for Studies, Policing as-Suwayda As A Key Pretext By The Regime And Its Allies For Further Intervention In The Governorate, 15 September 2019, [url](#)

Intelligence, two by the ATF.<sup>1942</sup> In the first half of 2022, Suwayda24 counted at least 85 killed persons.<sup>1943</sup>

Several sources reported on cases of abduction and kidnapping for ransom during the reporting period.<sup>1944</sup> Since 2018, kidnappings for ransom became a major security threat for residents within Sweida. Especially 'wealthy persons and businessmen, whether Druze or from other governorates' seem to be targeted, but not exclusively. Armed groups and gangs, of which several are backed by the GoS, increasingly operated in this field to generate income.<sup>1945</sup> In some cases, those gangs and groups received security passes issued by the GoS that enable them 'to cross checkpoints and postpone [their] mandatory military service.'<sup>1946</sup> A report published in March 2022 by EUI mentions estimations of 500 kidnapped persons in Sweida governorate from 2018 until 2021, amounting to approximately 10 persons per month kidnapped for ransom. Reportedly, torture of kidnapped persons is common and there are cases in which the [non-Druze] victims were killed, after the families were not able to pay the ransom.<sup>1947</sup> According to Suwayda24, 140 civilians were kidnapped in 2021. This number includes kidnappings, coercive detention and arbitrary arrests.<sup>1948</sup>

Kidnappings and criminal activities of gangs linked GoS forces, were also reported during the first quarter of 2022.<sup>1949</sup> Suwayda24 reported in July 2022 that the Military Security branch-affiliated<sup>1950</sup> Falhout-gang kidnapped two citizens of Shahba, resulting in parts of the population protesting against the kidnapping by conducting retaliation-takings of citizens from Attil, where the leader of the gang stems from, as well as blocking the road connecting the town to Damascus for several days.<sup>1951</sup> On 26 July 2022, the Rajjal al-Karama movement attacked and took over the headquarter of the Falhout-gang in Attil, killing or arresting all gang-members present. The leader, Raji Falhout apparently was warned and went into hiding.<sup>1952</sup> The movement found supplies for drug production as well as GoS-issued ID cards

<sup>1942</sup> Suwayda24, [ارتقاع العنف ضد المدنيين خلال 2021.. ارتفاع العنف ضد المدنيين](#) [Sweida: 134 people killed during 2021... an increase of violence against civilians], 1 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1943</sup> Suwayda24, [السويداء: 29 قتيلاً في الشهر الأول 2022](#) [Sweida: 29 people killed in the first month 2022], 2 February 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: قتلان وأربعة مصابين في فبراير شباط 2022](#) [Sweida: Two killed and four injured in February 2022], 1 March 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [10 أشخاص بين قتيل وجريح في السويداء خلال آذار 2022](#) [10 people killed or injured in Sweida during March 2022], 2 April 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: مقتل 16 مدنياً في شهر نيسان الفائت](#) [Sweida: 16 civilians killed in April], 2 May 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: مقتل 25 شخصاً في السويداء خلال أيار الماضي](#) [25 people killed in Sweida during May], 1 June 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: رصد العنف: 8 قتل الشهر الماضي في السويداء](#) [Monitoring violence: 8 people killed last month in Sweida], 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1944</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020) [S/2021/583], 17 June 2021, [url](#), para. 6; Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#); Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Violence on rise in Syria's Suwayda, 17 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1945</sup> Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1946</sup> Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1947</sup> Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>1948</sup> Suwayda24, [السويداء: 140 مدنياً تعرضوا لمذبحة في الاعتقال للخطف](#) [Sweida: 140 civilians were kidnapped and arrested in 2021], 2 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1949</sup> Carter Center (The), The Quarterly Review on Syrian Military and Security Dynamics, January – March 2022, 13 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 12-13

<sup>1950</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Recap: Suweida Revolts Against Corruption, 29 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1951</sup> Suwayda24, [السويداء: الغضب.. مغلقة السويداء](#) [Sweida is closed...Anger escalates from military security gangs], 24 July 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, [السويداء: غضب شعبي ينفجر ضد جماعات الأمن العسكري](#) [Sweida: Popular anger erupts against military security groups], 23 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1952</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Recap: Suweida Revolts Against Corruption, 29 July 2022, [url](#)



proving the ‘affiliation with the regime’s security forces’, while the GoS denied any connection to the gang.<sup>1953</sup> International Crisis Group reported that 17 persons were killed and dozens wounded during the confrontation.<sup>1954</sup> Most of the killed persons were reportedly members of the Falhout-gang, while the rest belonged to the Rajjal al-Karama movement.<sup>1955</sup>

#### *Tensions among local groups in Qurayya and cross-border with Dar’a residents*

Tensions were reportedly rising between Dar’a and Sweida due to ‘land disputes and mutual kidnappings.’<sup>1956</sup> In April 2021, according to local media, tensions refaced between Druze local forces in Qurayya, and Bedouins, who are accused by the population to have supported the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade in clashes with local armed groups in the past year. Reportedly, Russian representatives tried without success to mediate between the factions and establish a way of return for displaced Bedouins.<sup>1957</sup> Clashes between the two groups broke out several times throughout the reporting period.<sup>1958</sup> On 29 June 2022, they resulted in three persons killed and numerous Bedouins displaced to neighbouring Dar’a.<sup>1959</sup> According to Etana Syria, kidnappings conducted by the Bedouins additionally aggravate the situation and trigger retributive kidnappings and clashes.<sup>1960</sup>

Furthermore, cross governorate border kidnappings increased in 2021, leading to a rise in tensions.<sup>1961</sup> In June 2021 for example, a group from Sweida kidnapped a Dar’a resident from the town Busr al-Harir in the Dar’a governorate and demanded ransom from his family. Since the responsible gang did not release the victim, his family kidnapped numerous people from Sweida in return.<sup>1962</sup> In July 2021, a farmer from the village was kidnapped and brought to Dar’a. In return, his family and local armed groups abducted around 10 Dar’a residents. Reportedly, all abductees of the latter events were released at the end of September.<sup>1963</sup>

#### **(b) Security incidents**

According to ACLED data, there were 82 security incidents recorded in Sweida governorate, of whom 36 were coded as battles, 11 explosions/remote violence and 35 incidents of violence against civilians.<sup>1964</sup>

<sup>1953</sup> New Arab (The), As violence proliferates in Syria’s south, cracks appear in regime-held areas, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1954</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisiswatch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1955</sup> Al Arabiya News, At least 17 dead in rare clashes in Syria’s Sweida, 28 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1956</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1957</sup> Suwayda24, روسيا تلعب دوراً مختاراً “الحارة مختار” في الجيران بين خلاف لحل [Russia plays the role of ‘Mukhtar al-Hara’ in order to resolve dispute between neighbours in Sweida], 13 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1958</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – South Syria – 12 May 2022, 12 May 2022, [url](#); Suwayda24, القرية مزارعي على جديد اعتداء، [New attack on farmers of the villages...Who is obstructing the solution to the crisis?], 25 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1959</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

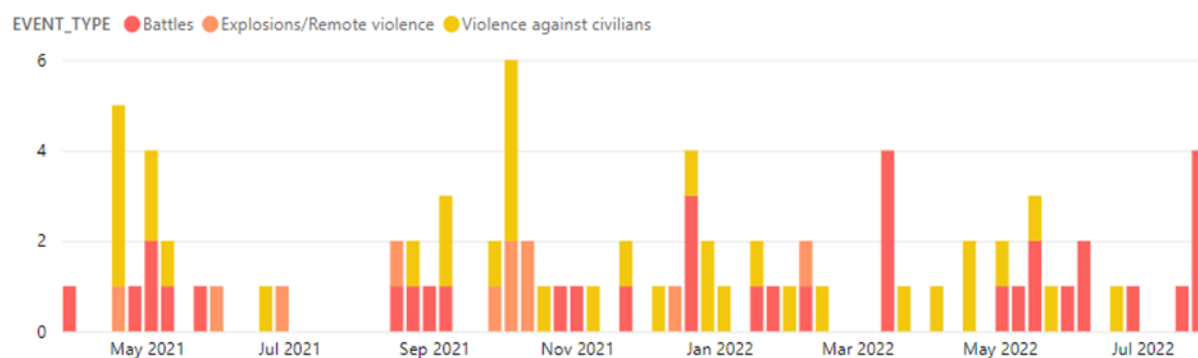
<sup>1960</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief – South Syria – 12 May 2022, 12 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1961</sup> Ahmad, N., Kidnapping for Ransom: Gangs Threaten Civil Peace in Sweida, EUI, 15 March 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>1962</sup> Al-Ghazi, S., Policy Brief 184: Insecurity In Southern Syria: The Case Of Quneitra And Suwayda (April – June 2021), ORSAM, August 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1963</sup> Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 07 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1964</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)



**Figure 40. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Sweida governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022, based on ACLED data<sup>1965</sup>**

| District     | Battles   | Remote violence | Violence against civilians |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Sweida       | 28        | 6               | 26                         |
| Salkhad      | 5         | 1               | 1                          |
| Shahba       | 3         | 4               | 8                          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>11</b>       | <b>35</b>                  |

**Figure 41. Security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians in Sweida governorate between 1 April 2021 and 1 August 2022. Breakdown by district based on ACLED data<sup>1966</sup>**

Most security incidents documented by ACLED took place in Sweida district (see Figure 41).

### Illustrative security incidents

A non-exhaustive list of security incidents that were reported to have taken place in Sweida governorate in 2021 and 2022 included the following:

- In May 2021, a 75-year-old resident of Dar'a was kidnapped in Sweida while on his way to sell his products. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of approximately 7 000 USD.<sup>1967</sup>

<sup>1965</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1966</sup> EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (12 August 2022), [url](#)

<sup>1967</sup> Enab Baladi, السويداء، ارتفاع حالات الخطف يثير مخاوف أهالي [Sweida: A rise in kidnappings raises fears among the people], 3 October 2021, [url](#)

- In July 2021, a farmer was kidnapped and transferred to Dar'a governorate, while working on his land near the village of Samma.<sup>1968</sup>
- On 27 January 2022, Jordanian soldiers reported the killing of at least 27 armed smugglers who crossed the border from Sweida in an attempt to traffick large quantities of amphetamines. Several other smugglers were able to flee back to Syria.<sup>1969</sup>
- On 11 February 2022, GoS-soldiers shot a civilian at a checkpoint in al-Shahba city.<sup>1970</sup>
- On 21 April 2022, two individuals were shot under unclear circumstances near the village Kharba.<sup>1971</sup>
- On 6 June 2022, the Falhout-gang kidnapped the Sweida police chief as well as the head of the Criminal Security Branch in Sweida, using a roadblock close to the town of Salim.<sup>1972</sup>

### (c) Civilian fatalities

| Month    | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| January  | 1         | -         |
| February | -         | -         |
| March    | 1         | 1         |
| April    | 2         | 7         |
| May      | -         | 8         |
| June     | -         | 4         |
| July     | 1         | 3         |

<sup>1968</sup> Enab Baladi, Rise in kidnappings sparks fear among people of As-Suwayda, 7 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>1969</sup> Reuters, Jordan says 27 drug smugglers killed at border with Syria, 27 January 2022, [url](#); Daher, J., Ahmad, N., Taha, S., Smuggling between Syria and Lebanon, and from Syria to Jordan: The Evolution and Delegation of a Practice, EUI, 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1970</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/330], 19 April 2022, [url](#), p. 22; SOHR, Al-Suwayda – Regime soldiers shoot young man at a checkpoint in Al-Shahba city, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1971</sup> Zaman al-Wasl, السويداء: غامضة بطروف شخصين مقتل. "خربا" في غامضة بطروف شخصين مقتل. [Sweida, two people were killed under mysterious circumstances in Kharba], 22 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1972</sup> Syrian Observer (The)/Al-Modon, Suweida: Kidnapping of Head of Criminal Security Branch and Police Chief, 6 June 2022, [url](#)

| Month        | SNHR 2021 | SNHR 2022 |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| August       | 1         |           |
| September    | -         |           |
| October      | 3         |           |
| November     | 1         |           |
| December     | 3         |           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>23</b> |

**Figure 42. Civilian fatalities as a result of armed conflict in Sweida governorate in 2021 and first seven months of 2022. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data**

In 2021, SNHR recorded 13 civilian fatalities<sup>1973</sup> in Sweida governorate while in the first seven months of 2022 it documented 23 civilian fatalities<sup>1974</sup> (see Figure 42).

<sup>1973</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 113 Civilians, Including 36 Children, Six Women, and Three Victims Due to Torture, in January 2021, 1 February 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 138 Civilians, Including 23 Children, 11 Women, and 14 Victims Due to Torture, in February 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 177 Civilians, Including 28 Children, 35 Women, One Medical Worker, and 9 Victims Due to Torture, in March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 96 Civilians, Including 15 Children, 11 Women, and Nine Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in May 2021, 1 June 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 723 Civilians in Syria in the First Half of 2021, 1 July 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 129 Civilians, Including 44 Children, 17 Women, and 10 Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in July 2021, 1 August 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 94 Civilians, Including 32 Children, 10 Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in August 2021, 1 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 23 Children, Nine Women, and Eight Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in September 2021, 1 October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 84 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Four Women, and Seven Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in October 2021, 1 November 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 86 Civilians, Including 16 Children, Eight Women, and Six Victims Due to Torture, in Syria in November 2021, 1 December 2021, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>1974</sup> Based on data extracted from monthly reports on civilian fatalities published by SNHR. See: SNHR, 69 Civilians, Including 18 Children, Four Women and Eight Victims Due to Torture, Killed in Syria in January 2022, 1 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 161 Civilians, Including 28 Children, Six Women and 66 Victims Due to Torture, Documented Killed in Syria in February 2022, 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 67 Civilians, Including 20 Children, Three Women, and Seven Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Killed in Syria in March 2022, 1 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women, and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022, 1 May 2022, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 78 Civilians, Including 14 Children, 11 Women, and Eight Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in May 2022, 1 June 2022, [url](#), p. 8; SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, 86 Civilians, Including 21 Children, Eight Women, and Five Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in July 2022, 1 August 2022, [url](#), p. 9



#### (d) Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war

Even though Sweida was spared from large-scale fighting compared to other areas of Syria and hence avoided extensive damage in the conflict<sup>1975</sup>, the governorate witnessed its ‘own internal tensions between armed factions and GoS armed groups’, in which explosive munition gets commonly used.<sup>1976</sup> Based on the UN Syria Multi-sector Needs Assessment of 2021, the Global Shelter Cluster assessed that in Sweida governorate, 4.59 % of the residents lived in damaged buildings<sup>1977</sup>, a significant increase from 0,7 % in the same assessment in 2020.<sup>1978</sup> The Health Cluster Whole of Syria While counted three attacks against healthcare in Sweida governorate between January 2021 and March 2022, without providing additional information.<sup>1979</sup>

The internal tensions and attacks left explosive remnants such as landmines and IEDs behind. UXOs still gets used in internal disputes and conflicts to date.<sup>1980</sup> The Carter Center estimated that from about 2 101 munitions used in the governorate, approximately 200 – 625 pose a threat to the civil population as unexploded ordnance.<sup>1981</sup> According to a Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report published in April 2021, landmines have claimed the lives of three people in Quneitra governorate between March 2011 and March 2021.<sup>1982</sup> According to Suwayda24, at least eight civilians died in 2021 due to explosions of remnants of war within the governorate in 2021. Most of the victims were reportedly children.<sup>1983</sup>

#### (e) Displacement and return

According to UNOCHA, as of January 2022 there were 71 313 IDPs in the governorate.<sup>1984</sup> From January to December 2021, UNOCHA recorded 19 IDP movements from Sweida governorate. In early 2022, IDP movements increased, from nine in January 2022 (21 in February; 68 in March) to 56 in April 2022, with a sharp increase to 546 in May 2022. The source did not provide information on the reason for displacement.<sup>1985</sup> Etana reported that the continuing insecurity in the south of Syria is driving young people out of the region and to leave Syria in increasing numbers.<sup>1986</sup> Clashes between residents of the two governorates of Dar’a and Sweida also caused IDP movements. For example, on 29 June 2022, clashes

<sup>1975</sup> Arab Weekly (The), Rising discontent in Syria’s Daraa, Sweida reflects simmering woes, 16 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1976</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>1977</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1978</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, Syrian Arab Republic: Whole of Syria Shelter and NFI Sector Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1979</sup> Health Cluster Whole of Syria, Attacks on healthcare in Syria 1 Jan – 31 March 2022, 5 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1980</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>1981</sup> Carter Center (The), A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications December 2012 – May 2021, March 2022, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1982</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Syria’s Landmines: Silent Killing, April 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>1983</sup> Suwayda24, ارتفاع العنف ضد المدنيين.. 134 قتيلاً خلال 2021 [Sweida: 134 people killed during 2021... an increase of violence against civilians], 1 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1984</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>1985</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic – IDP Movements May 2022, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1986</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 03 March 2022, 3 March 2022, [url](#); Etana Syria: Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 06 April 2022, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

erupted between Bedouins and Druze armed groups within Sweida, which resulted in three persons being killed and numerous Bedouins being displaced to neighbouring Dar'a.<sup>1987</sup>

The UNOCHA data on IDP spontaneous returnees for 2021 shows that there were 176 IDPS return movements to Sweida governorate, around 400 IDP return movements from the governorate and 144 IDP return movements within the governorate.<sup>1988</sup> In 2022, 156 returns to the governorate were recorded (53 in February, nine in April, 94 in May) until May.<sup>1989</sup>

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<sup>1987</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – 1 July 2022, 1 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1988</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Spontaneous IDP Returnee Movements Overview, Jan – Dec 2021 (As of 31 December 2021), 21 March 2022, [url](#)

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## Annex II: Terms of Reference

The research should cover the period between April 2021 – July 2022. Background information and older trends should be kept very brief and crosslinked as much as possible with previous EUAA COI reports published, such as [Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and [Security situation \(May 2020\)](#). Significant changes to the justice system in GoS-controlled areas and SDF-controlled areas should be addressed under the respective actor. The aim of including the sections on the justice system is to provide a limited update on these topics, which were previously covered in the EUAA COI Report [Actors \(December 2019\)](#).

### ☐ General description of the security situation

#### ▪ Overview of the conflict

- Political developments
- International involvement
- Recent security trends and armed confrontations during the reference period

#### ▪ Actors in conflict

- Brief description and capacity
- Presence and areas of control/influence of the different actors
- Type of weapons and tactics used

#### ▪ Overview of the security situation

- Security incidents
- Civilian casualties
- Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
- Conflict-induced displacement and return

### ☐ Security situation and conflict impact on civilians by governorates

The below structure is to be replicated for each governorate.

- General description of the governorate
- Actors involved in the conflict during the reference period
- Recent security trends
- Impact of the security situation on the civilian population
  - Security incidents
  - Civilian casualties
  - Conflict-related infrastructure damage and explosive remnants of war
  - Conflict-induced displacement and return (indicate the reason for displacement/return or lack of such info.)





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