



# Security situation in North and East Syria before the downfall of the Assad government



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This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service or the Swedish Migration Agency.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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## Executive summary

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Prior to the collapse of the Assad government in Syria, the security situation in the Kurdish-controlled areas of northern and eastern Syria, governed by the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES), from January 2024 to 14 November 2024, was characterised by localised instability and regional differences. Areas such as Raqqa have been relatively stable during the reporting period, supported by a robust Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) presence. In contrast, Deir Ezzour has experienced heightened insecurity due to IS activity, tribal tensions, and the influence of Iranian-backed militias, which have since withdrawn following the recent transition of power in Syria.

Leading up to the recent transition of power in Syria, control of Aleppo Governorate was divided among armed opposition groups, the former Government of Syria (GoS), and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Following the late November offensive in Aleppo Governorate led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which resulted in the opposition forces taking control of Aleppo city and the eventual downfall of the Assad government, the SDF withdrew from the Tell Rifaat enclave in northern Aleppo. This territory is now under the control of the Syrian National Army (SNA). Although the long-term effects of the current transition of power in Syria remain unclear, this advance has significantly shifted the balance of power in northern Aleppo, further destabilizing the security landscape in northern Syria.

IS activity increased throughout 2024, particularly in Deir Ezzour, where sleeper cells have carried out frequent attacks on SDF positions, oil infrastructure, and civilians. These incidents often involve extortion under the guise of religious tax collection, and have increased significantly from the previous year. In addition, tribal conflicts, sometimes involving Iranian-backed groups, have resulted in significant casualties and displacement, particularly in areas along the Euphrates River. Turkish cross-border operations, including drone strikes and shelling, also contribute to the security issues in border areas such as Ayn Issa, Tell Tamer, and Manbij.

Movement within DAANES-controlled areas was generally possible during the day, although night-time travel, particularly in parts of Deir Ezzour, remained hazardous due to security threats. Checkpoints maintained by the SDF also affect mobility, with stricter controls in some areas. The overall situation reflects the continued fragility of security and stability in northern and eastern Syria.

## Table of contents

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<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>1. Background</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>2. Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES)</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>3. Main actors</b> .....	<b>13</b>
3.1 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) .....	13
3.2 Government of Syria (GoS) .....	14
3.3 Syrian National Army (SNA) .....	15
3.4 Islamic State (IS).....	16
<b>4. International involvement in North and East Syria</b> .....	<b>19</b>
4.1 U.S.-led international coalition .....	19
4.2 Russia .....	20
4.3 Türkiye .....	21
4.4 Iran .....	22
<b>5. Security situation in North and East Syria</b> .....	<b>24</b>
5.1 Aleppo governorate .....	24
5.1.1 Geography and demography .....	24
5.1.2 Actors and territorial control .....	24
5.1.3 Recent security trends .....	26
5.2 Hasakah governorate .....	30
5.2.1 Geography and demography .....	30
5.2.2 Actors and territorial control .....	31
5.2.3 Recent security trends .....	32
5.3 Raqqa governorate .....	36
5.3.1 Geography and demography .....	36
5.3.2 Actors and territorial control .....	37

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

5.3.3 Recent security trends .....	37
5.4 Deir Ezzour governorate .....	41
5.4.1 Geography and demography .....	41
5.4.2 Actors and territorial control .....	42
5.4.3 Recent security trends .....	43
<b>6. Freedom of movement .....</b>	<b>51</b>
6.1 General freedom of movement.....	51
6.1.1 Regional variations and specific challenges.....	52
6.1.2 Specific groups and restrictions.....	53
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Annex 1: Rojava Information Center (RIC) Query Response .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Annex 2: Query Response Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Annex 3: Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) Query response .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Annex 4: Meeting minutes .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Annex 5: Terms of reference.....</b>	<b>162</b>

## Introduction

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This report provides an overview of the developments in the general security situation and freedom of movement in the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria (NES) between 1 January 2024 and late November 2024 and the impact on the civilian population prior to the downfall of the Assad government. It also provides an overview of the actors and international stakeholders influencing the security developments in the region during the reporting period and the period preceding the current transition of power.

The report is written in accordance with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) COI Report Methodology and has undergone internal peer reviews within the Danish Immigration Service and the Swedish Migration Agency.<sup>1</sup>

The report is based on information from written sources and data collected through in-person and online meetings with sources in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and in Europe as well as written sources and data collected through online meetings with sources in Syria. The majority of the meetings were conducted during a joint fact-finding mission undertaken by the Danish Immigration Service and the Swedish Migration Agency to the KRI between 7 and 12 October 2024.

During the mission, the delegation gathered information on the topics addressed in this report. The purpose of the report is to provide updated information on the issues relevant for the processing of asylum cases. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the report were drawn up by the DIS in consultation with the Secretariat of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board. The ToR is included in the end of the report (Annex IV).

The report is a synthesis of the information obtained from oral and written sources and does not include all details and nuances provided by the sources. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The individual sources should not be held accountable for the content of the report.

Prior to, during, and following the fact-finding mission to KRI, meetings were held with 16 sources, comprising journalists, human rights organisations, and academics. These meetings were conducted both online and in person. All consulted sources were selected based on their expertise in the topics covered in this report. The sources were informed about the purpose of the meetings and that their statements would be included in a public report. Some sources requested varying degrees of anonymity. Additionally, three further sources provided written contributions regarding the topics covered in the report. These contributions have been attached as annexes to the report (Annexes 1, 2, and 3).

Meeting minutes have been drafted from each meeting. These were forwarded to each source for approval, providing the source an opportunity to amend, comment, or correct statements so that the minutes reflect the information shared most accurately. All sources approved their statements. The meeting minutes are attached as an annex to this report (Annex 4).

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<sup>1</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), *Country of Origin (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2022, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

In the interests of transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes have been assigned consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referencing the statements of the sources in the footnotes. During the meetings, sources also discussed topics not included in the terms of reference (ToR). When such topics could be relevant for asylum cases, the information was included in the minutes but not addressed in the report. This also applies to information provided in the written contributions from three sources regarding topics not included in the ToR, which has been included as part of their contribution in an annex (Annex 5) but is not addressed in the report.

In this report, we have used conflict data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). ACLED collects data on political violence, but also on selected political events that do not necessarily involve violence.

Its statistics are based on data from international, national, and local news sources, but are supplemented by reports from international bodies and civil society organisations. ACLED also uses social media sampling and data from local partners.

In the study of political violence, the event/incident is the primary object of study. In ACLED's terms, incidents involve an actor - such as a named rebel group, state force or unidentified armed group - committing politically motivated violence. However, incidents do not necessarily result in deaths; for example, sexual violence, abductions, and injuries are also reported as incidents. Each incident is linked to a specific place and day and is recorded as a separate event - even if a battle lasts for several days.

It is also important to note that the documentation of an event or incident does not fully capture the severity or magnitude of each occurrence. The recorded information provides insights but may not comprehensively reflect the broader human impact or the scale of violence involved in individual cases.

Another important aspect related to the number of deaths is that ACLED does not distinguish civilian casualties from other conflict-related deaths. While they focus on civilians as targets in their incident reporting, they cannot provide a comprehensive picture of civilian casualties. This is because their incidents are categorised by actor, target, and modus operandi, but each category can include civilian casualties. We have used data from three of these categories:

- battles
- violence against civilians
- explosions/remote violence.

Battles are a violent clash between two politically organised armed actors at a given time and place.

Violence against civilians includes incidents in which an organised armed actor deliberately directs violence against civilians. In this context, civilians are understood to be non-combatants and unarmed. It includes, inter alia, armed attacks against civilians, involuntary abductions, arbitrary arrests, and various forms of sexual violence.

Explosions and remote violence include suicide bombs, mines, improvised explosive devices and chemical weapons. Incidents involving both civilian targets and combatants are included in

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

this category. Thus, suicide attacks against civilians using only explosives are included - while complex attacks against civilian targets using both firearms and suicide bombs are included in the category of violence against civilians.

It should be noted that the security situation in Syria, including in North and East Syria, may be subject to change, and the information provided may therefore become out of date. This was the case following the recent developments related to the significant offensive launched in late 2024, during the drafting of this report. While the long-term consequences remain uncertain, these developments have had a significant short-term impact on the territory under the control of various parties involved in the Syrian conflict, as well as the broader security situation. It is therefore essential to monitor the issues addressed in this report on a regular basis and update them as necessary.

The research and editing of this report was finalised on 15 January 2025. The report can be accessed from the website of DIS, [www.us.dk](http://www.us.dk), and on the website belonging to the Swedish Migration Agency, [migrationsverket.se](http://migrationsverket.se). It is available to all stakeholders working within the field of refugee status determination as well as to the general public.



## Abbreviations

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<b>COI</b>	Country of Origin Information
<b>DAANES</b>	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
<b>DIS</b>	Danish Immigration Service
<b>EASO</b>	European Asylum Support Office
<b>EUAA</b>	European Union Agency for Asylum
<b>GoS</b>	Government of Syria
<b>HPG</b>	People's Defence Forces
<b>HRE</b>	Afrin Liberation Forces
<b>HTS</b>	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
<b>IS</b>	Islamic State
<b>KRI</b>	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
<b>MMC</b>	Manbij Military Council
<b>NES</b>	North and East Syria
<b>PKK</b>	Kurdistan Workers' Party
<b>PYD</b>	Democratic Union Party
<b>RYM</b>	Revolutionary Youth Movement
<b>SAA</b>	Syrian Arab Army
<b>SDC</b>	Syrian Democratic Council
<b>SDF</b>	Syrian Democratic Forces
<b>SNA</b>	Syrian National Army
<b>SNHR</b>	Syrian Network for Human Rights
<b>STJ</b>	Syrians for Truth and Justice
<b>YPG</b>	People's Protection Units
<b>YPJ</b>	Women's Protection Units

## Glossary

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<b>DAANES</b>	A non-state government actor under the effective control of the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Although the DAANES is officially separate from the PKK, they are closely linked ideologically.
<b>IS</b>	A jihadist group that gained control over parts of the country between 2013 and 2019. Although it lost most of its territory, IS remains active through insurgent operations and sleeper cells.
<b>GoS</b>	The Government of Syria (GoS), led by former President Bashar al-Assad, was the ruling authority in Syria. It operated through centralized institutions, including the military and security services, and was engaged in conflict with various opposition groups since 2011.
<b>HTS</b>	A jihadist group that was primarily active in northwestern Syria, including Idlib. Formed in 2017, HTS emerged from a merger of factions, including Jabhat al-Nusra, a former al-Qaeda affiliate. It controlled territory through a governance body, the Salvation Government, and operated independently of other opposition groups. HTS has become the dominant actor in the current transitional government following the downfall of Bashar al-Assad
<b>North and East Syria</b>	Areas in northern and eastern Syria controlled by the DAANES.
<b>PYD</b>	The dominant political actor of the DAANES. A Kurdish political party established in 2003 by the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The military wings of the PYD are the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), which are key components of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).
<b>SDF</b>	The main military force of the DAANES comprised of several armed groups. The military wings of the PYD, YPG and YPJ, are key components of the Syrian Democratic Forces
<b>SNA</b>	A coalition of over 35 armed opposition factions active in northern Syria, established in 2017 by the Syrian Interim Government. Supported by Türkiye, the SNA operates in areas secured through Turkish-backed military operations but lacks centralized leadership, with individual factions maintaining independent command structures.

## 1. Background

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In July 2012, the former Syrian government (GoS) tactically withdrew from northern Syria to redeploy its forces against the armed Syrian opposition in the Damascus-Aleppo corridor<sup>2</sup> and Kurdish forces assumed control of the Kurdish-majority areas in northern Syria.<sup>3</sup> This also included control over the mixed areas of Hasakah governorate, which are mainly populated by Kurds and Arabs.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequently, a civilian administration was established, which has since undergone several name changes.<sup>5</sup> The most recent of these occurred in December 2023 with the adoption of a Social Contract, resulting in the current designation of the administration as the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES).<sup>6</sup>

The Kurdish forces significantly expanded their area of control between 2015 and 2018.<sup>7</sup> During this period, they extended their presence well beyond the Kurdish-majority areas with the assistance of the U.S.-led coalition. They also captured the most significant oil fields in Syria and almost all territory formerly controlled by the Islamic State (IS) east of the Euphrates River.<sup>8</sup>

Until late 2024, the DAANES exercised authority over an ethnically diverse region comprising approximately 25% to 30% of Syria's territory.<sup>9</sup> This region encompassed the majority of Hasakah and Raqqa governorates, the eastern part of the Deir Ezzour governorate, as well as certain parts of the Aleppo governorate.<sup>10</sup> Following the recent developments related to the significant offensive launched by HTS, which took control of Aleppo city, the SDF withdrew its forces from the Tall Rifaat enclave.<sup>11</sup> These areas are currently under the control of HTS-led transitional government and the Turkish-backed SNA, respectively.<sup>12</sup> However, when HTS

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<sup>2</sup> Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 91; Holmes, A. A., *Statelet of Survivors*, 2024, pp. 40-41; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 159; DIIS, *Mosaics of Power: Fragmentation of the Syrian state since 2011*, 2018, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>3</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p.8; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 159

<sup>4</sup> EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 159; Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018, [url](#), p. 59;

<sup>5</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p.8

<sup>6</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p.8; Kurdistan24, *New administration name adopted for local administration in northeast Syria*, 13 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 159 - 160

<sup>8</sup> EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 159 - 160

<sup>9</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p.8; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 12; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 14; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation 2024*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>10</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p.8; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 30; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 28; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 22

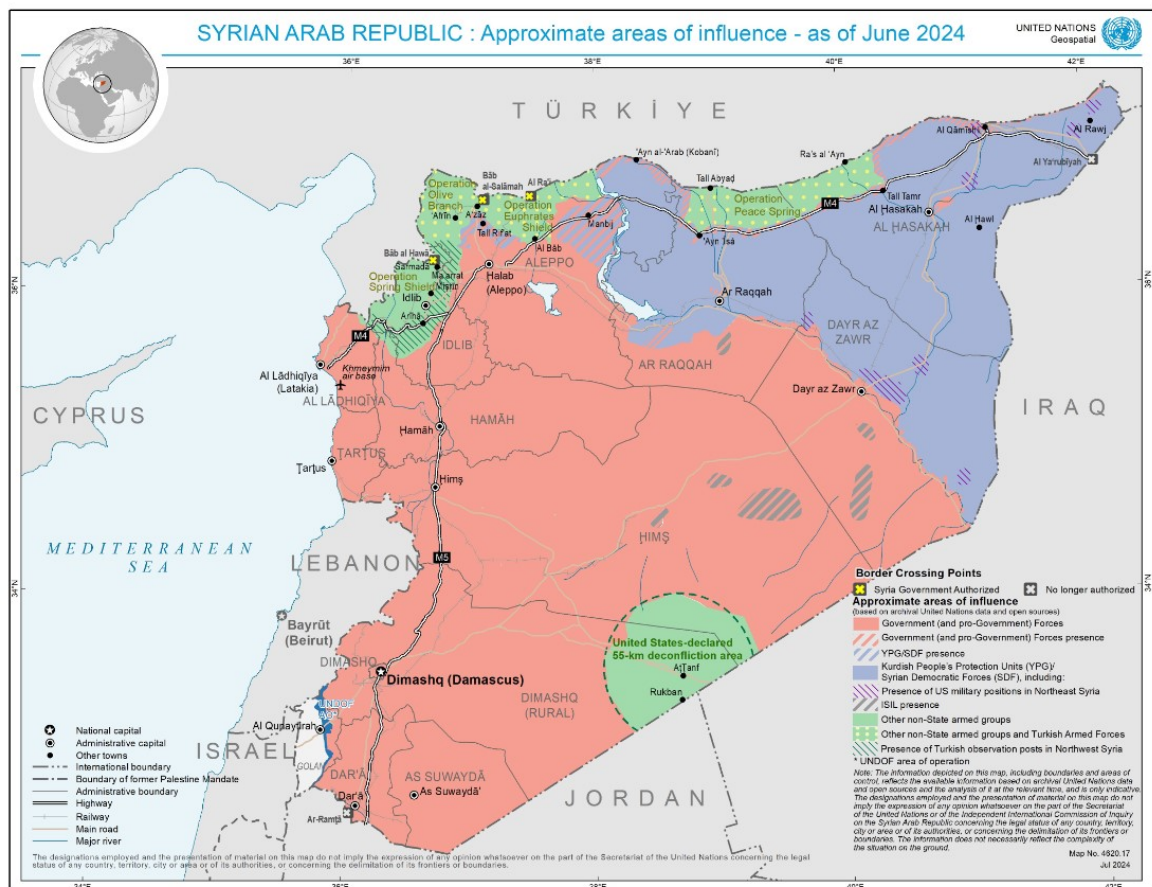
<sup>11</sup> Kurdistan24, *Kurdish civilians flee as Syrian conflict escalates in Aleppo, Tall Rifat*, 3 December 2024, [url](#); Shafaq News, *Kurdish forces withdraw from Aleppo as violence intensifies in Northern Syria*, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> The Guardian, *Who controls what territory in Syria?*, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

assumed control of Aleppo city, they allowed the SDF to maintain control of the Kurdish areas of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh.<sup>13</sup>

The security of the remaining territories controlled by the DAANES is primarily managed by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the internal security forces (ISF), also known as the Asayish.<sup>14</sup> Although some diplomatic relations have been established with other countries, neither the former Syrian government nor the opposition, nor any foreign state or international organization, has formally recognized its autonomy.<sup>15</sup> The term North and East Syria (NES) is used in this report to describe the territory governed by the DAANES.



*Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024, ©UN Geospatial<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>13</sup> Rudaw, *SDF says has deals with HTS, to send a delegation to Damascus*, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p.8; DIIS, *Mosaics of Power: Fragmentation of the Syrian state since 2011*, 2018, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>15</sup> European University Institute, *The Political Economy of North and East Syria*, 2019, [url](#), p.2; ECFR, *Syrian Democratic Forces*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> UN Geospatial, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024 [Map]*, July 2024, [url](#)

## 2. Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES)

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The DAANES is a non-state governance actor,<sup>17</sup> structured into seven administrative cantons: Jazire, Euphrates, Manbij, Deir Ezzour, Tabqa, Raqqa and Afrin.<sup>18</sup> Despite Afrin being classified as an administrative region of the DAANES, it remained effectively under the control of factions within the SNA.<sup>19</sup> The administrative region of Jazire is broadly comparable to Hasakah Governorate.<sup>20</sup>

Until late November 2024, civilian authorities affiliated to the DAANES controlled the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh north of Aleppo city, the town of Tall Rifaat and several towns and villages in the Tall Rifaat enclave.<sup>21</sup> The SDF has since withdrawn from the Tall Rifaat enclave, but maintains control of the Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo city following an agreement with the HTS, which assumed overall control of the city in connection with the offensive in late 2024.<sup>22</sup>

Each regional administration is organized into three main councils: Legislative, Executive, and Judicial.<sup>23</sup> These councils manage four administrative subdivisions: Canton, District, Sub-District, and Commune. The Communes serve as the foundational and lowest level of civil administration within neighborhoods. Each level of administration includes ten local committees.<sup>24</sup>

The SDC is the executive body and political leadership of the DAANES. It is a confederation of multi-ethnic political parties, associations, civil society organisations, and local activists in Syria, which is dominated by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD; Partiya Yetkîye Demokrat), the political wing of the People's Protection Units (YPG: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel) and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ: Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> USDoS, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria*, 23 April 2024, [url](#); Representations of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria in Europe, *What is the DAANES?*, n.d., [url](#); ICG: 6

<sup>18</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 9;

<sup>19</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 61

<sup>20</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p.9

<sup>21</sup> STJ, *Aleppo: Syrian Government Forces Block Essential Supplies to Kurdish Neighbourhoods*, 5 april 2024, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> The Guardian, *Who controls what territory in Syria?*, 3 December 2024, [url](#); Rudaw, *SDF says has deals with HTS, to send a delegation to Damascus*, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> Representations of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria in Europe, *What is the DAANES?*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> Representations of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria in Europe, *What is the DAANES?*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 9; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 14; Syrian Democratic Council U.S. Mission, *Fact Sheet – The Syrian Democratic council*, n.d., [url](#); EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 24; EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 29

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

The SDC is described by Allsop and van Wilgenburg as the "political wing" of the SDF.<sup>26</sup> It was responsible for the establishment of administrative councils and governance in non-Kurdish majority areas, such as Manbij and Raqqa, captured during the SDF's campaign against IS.<sup>27</sup>

The PYD was established in Syria in 2003 as a Syrian branch of the The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan: PKK), which had maintained a significant presence in the regions of Kobane and Afrin until its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was expelled from Syria in 1998.<sup>28</sup> While the DAANES operates with a high degree of autonomy, its ideologies and organizational structures are strongly influenced by those of the PKK, with multiple former and current PKK members holding prominent roles within the DAANES' military and civilian administrations.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 96; EASO, Syria: *Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>27</sup> Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 96

<sup>28</sup> Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 61

<sup>29</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 29

### 3. Main actors

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This chapter provides an introductory overview of the key actors controlling territory and involved in the conflict in northeastern Syria during the reporting period and prior to the recent transition of power in Syria. The actors discussed include the SDF, the GoS, the SNA, and IS. However, it should be noted that this overview does not claim to provide a comprehensive account of their activities.

#### 3.1 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The SDF was established in October 2015, following Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict. It is a Kurdish-led, multi-ethnic coalition comprising several armed groups, including the YPG and the YPJ.<sup>30</sup> The SDF was established as an alliance between the YPG/J and various groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) from the Euphrates Volcano joint operations room.<sup>31</sup>

From 2019, the majority of SDF personnel were of Arab ethnicity.<sup>32</sup> Its current operational structure also consists of groups with Kurdish, Assyrian/Syriac and Armenian backgrounds.<sup>33</sup> The latest data from the IISS indicates that the SDF comprises approximately 50,000 military personnel.<sup>34</sup> However, a different source has previously indicated that the SDF consists of more than 100,000 fighters.<sup>35</sup> Prior to the downfall of the Assad government, the SDF assumed military control over the region governed by the DAANES, which encompassed Hasakah, eastern Deir Ezzour, and sections of Raqqa and Aleppo governorates.<sup>36</sup>

The YPG is the dominant actor of the SDF and largely exercises control over its leadership.<sup>37</sup> It was founded in 2012 as the military wing of the PYD by veterans of the PKK.<sup>38</sup> Among them was the current SDF commander-in-chief, Mazloum Abdi.<sup>39</sup> Prior to the formal establishment of the YPJ in 2013, there were units in the YPG made up entirely of women.<sup>40</sup>

The SDF has been the US's primary ground force partner in the fight against IS.<sup>41</sup> It has a capable military force, intelligence service and police force, which collectively make it an effective actor for conducting counter-terrorism operations.<sup>42</sup> From 2014 to 2017, IS held

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<sup>30</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 24; ECFR, *Syrian Democratic Forces*, n.d., [url](#); A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 14

<sup>31</sup> Holmes, A. A., *Statelet of Survivors*, 2024, p. 50; Hawar News Network, *Euphrates Volcano... Kurdish-Arab force and successful experience that led to formation of SDF*, 15 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> Holmes, A. A., *Statelet of Survivors*, 2024, p. 50

<sup>33</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>34</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2024*, 13 February 2024, [url](#), p. 388

<sup>35</sup> Politico, *There are 13 Guantanamo in the Syrian Desert*, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>37</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>38</sup> ECFR, *Syrian Democratic Forces*, n.d., [url](#); EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>39</sup> ECFR, *Syrian Democratic Forces*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Holmes, A. A., *Statelet of Survivors*, 2024, p. 44

<sup>41</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>42</sup> Dino Krause: 26

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

considerable territory in northeast Syria but the SDF, supported by the U.S.-led coalition, drove them out and assumed control of IS territories.<sup>43</sup> The SDF remains a partner of the U.S., which has provided them with training and equipment, and coalition forces continue to support SDF counterinsurgency operations against IS in the DAANES-controlled areas.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to its status as a U.S. partner, the SDF had established a collaborative relationship with the GoS and Iran in some areas, particularly in the Hasakah governorate.<sup>45</sup> However, this did not apply to Deir Ezzour, where the SDF has engaged in armed clashes with tribal militias supported by the GoS and Iran.<sup>46</sup> The Turkish government has designated the SDF, the YPG and the YPJ as terrorist organisations, on the assertion that they constitute official Syrian Kurdish branches of the Turkish Kurdish rebel group, the PKK.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.2 Government of Syria (GoS)

Prior to the downfall of the Assad government, the GoS armed forces were divided into the following main branches: the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), which includes the Republican Guard; the Naval Forces; the Air Forces; the Air Defence Forces; and pro-government militias such as the National Defence Forces (NDF) and the Local Defence Forces (LDF). The LDF, an auxiliary force established by Iran, was deployed throughout Syrian cities and governorates, with a particular focus on rural areas of Aleppo Governorate.<sup>48</sup>

The latest figures from the IISS indicate that prior to the downfall of the Assad government the size of the regular GoS armed forces was 169,000 active military personnel.<sup>49</sup> This figure included 130,000 active personnel in the SAA, 4,000 in the Navy, 15,000 in the Air Forces and 20,000 in the Air Defence Forces.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the latest data from the IISS indicates that prior to the downfall of the Assad government the combined strength of pro-government militias and gendarmeries stood at 100,000.<sup>51</sup> This figure consisted of approximately 50,000 under the NDF and a further 50,000 with various armed groups aligned with the GoS, including Afghan, Iraqi, Pakistani and sectarian organisations.<sup>52</sup> However, following recent developments related to the HTS offensive and the downfall of the Assad government in December 2024, the strength and capacity of forces affiliated to the former government of Syria is unclear.

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<sup>43</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>44</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 46; US Government, *Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2024 – March 31, 2024*, 30 April 2024, [url](#); p. 24; US Government, *Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2024 – September 30, 2024*, 29 October 2024, [url](#), p. 33; ECFR, *Syrian Democratic Forces*, n.d., [url](#); Dino Krause: 26

<sup>45</sup> TWI, *Iran is Attempting to Push the United States out of Syria via Hasaka Province*, 8 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> Dino Krause: 26

<sup>47</sup> Al Jazeera, *Who are the Syrian Democratic Forces?*, 15 October 2019, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 14; ICG: 28

<sup>48</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>49</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2024*, 13 February 2024, [url](#), p. 386

<sup>50</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2024*, 13 February 2024, [url](#), p. 386

<sup>51</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2024*, 13 February 2024, [url](#), p. 387

<sup>52</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2024*, 13 February 2024, [url](#), p. 387



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Until late 2024, the GoS, with the support of Iran, pro-Iranian militias, and Russian forces, maintained control over approximately two-thirds of the country. This encompassed Damascus and its surrounding areas, the southern regions, the central governorate of Homs, the coastal regions, as well as portions of Raqqa, Deir Ezzour, Idlib, and Hama governorates.<sup>53</sup> Following the collapse of the Assad government in late 2024, the HTS-led transitional government has assumed control of the majority of Syrian territory previously under the authority of the GoS.<sup>54</sup>

Prior to the downfall of the Assad government, the GoS maintained a presence in the Hasakah Governorate as part of the security coordination with Kurdish forces, which began in 2012. At that time, the GoS withdrew from the majority of the governorate, allowing Kurdish forces to gain greater autonomy in the region.<sup>55</sup> The GoS maintained a limited presence in specific enclaves in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, which have been designated as 'security squares' (in Arabic: *Al-Morab'at Al-Amniya*), as well as in an unspecified number of villages south of Qamishli.<sup>56</sup> Russian and Iranian-backed forces are also present in these areas.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, until recently, the GoS and its Russian allies maintained a presence along the Syrian-Turkish border and the frontlines between the DAANES-controlled areas and the areas of northern Syria controlled by Türkiye.<sup>58</sup> In 2022, the GoS reinforced its presence in SDF-held areas by deploying additional military personnel to eastern Aleppo and Ain Issa in northern Raqqa.<sup>59</sup> The relationship between the GoS and the SDF in the DAANES-controlled areas was characterised by limited coordination in terms of security and governance, along with intermittent episodes of tension.<sup>60</sup>

### 3.3 Syrian National Army (SNA)

The SNA is a broad coalition of non-state armed groups operational in the northern region of the country. These groups were established in areas that were created as a result of Turkish-backed military operations in northern Syria between 2016 and 2019.<sup>61</sup>

Following the former Syrian government's recapture of opposition-held territories in southern and central Syria in 2018, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) disbanded in those regions. In northern

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<sup>53</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>54</sup> Al Jazeera, *Syria war live tracker: Maps and charts*, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 8-11; EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 40; Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: “Security Squares” manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 8-11, 34; Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: “Security Squares” manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, August 2023, [url](#), p. 14; Alexander McKeever: 16

<sup>57</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 103

<sup>58</sup> UN Geospatial, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024* [Map], July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>60</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 40; DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 33; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 105 EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 105; Enab Baladi, *SDF seizes six state buildings in Qamishli*, 14 April 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: “Security Squares” manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation 2024*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 30

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

and northwestern Syria, where opposition forces still maintained control, former FSA factions integrated into the SNA after 2018.<sup>62</sup> By 2022, the FSA had ceased to function as a unified armed faction.<sup>63</sup>

The SNA was established in December 2017 by the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), an opposition group operating out of Türkiye and Turkish-held areas in northern Syria.<sup>64</sup> It was established by consolidating various rebel groups and factions active in Afrin and northern Aleppo governorate under a unified framework. However, the individual groups retained their own structures and command hierarchies within the broader SNA framework.<sup>65</sup>

This structural model has resulted in persistent internal competition, as well as periodic mergers and divisions among the factions. While the SNA serves as an overarching entity for multiple armed opposition groups, it lacks a centralized leadership structure, with each faction maintaining its own leader and operating independently.<sup>66</sup> The SNA is currently comprised of over 35 distinct factions,<sup>67</sup> with the latest estimates from the IISS indicating a total of approximately 70,000 fighters.<sup>68</sup>

The SNA exercised control over two areas along the Turkish-Syrian border. The first of these extends from Jarabulus to Afrin in Aleppo governorate. This area was established through the execution of Turkish military operations designated Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch.<sup>69</sup> The second area of control spans between Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ayn in Raqqa and Hasakah governorates. This area forms part of the Operation Peace Spring zone.<sup>70</sup> In connection with the HTS-led offensive in late 2024, the SNA has since assumed control of the Tell Rifaat enclave and Manbij.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.4 Islamic State (IS)

IS originated from Al Qaeda in Iraq and several smaller Iraqi Sunni insurgent groups. Leveraging the Syrian civil war and power vacuums, the group secured significant territorial gains in both Syria and Iraq by late 2014.<sup>72</sup> However, IS's territorial control was terminated in March 2019, when the SDF captured its final stronghold in Baghouz, Deir Ezzour.<sup>73</sup>

Since 2019, the organisational structure of IS in Syria has undergone significant changes. During the caliphate period from 2014 to 2018, IS in Iraq and Syria maintained a hierarchical model,

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<sup>62</sup> DIS, *Syria – Recruitment to Opposition Groups*, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>63</sup> DIS, *Syria – Recruitment to Opposition Groups*, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>64</sup> DIS, *Syria – Recruitment to Opposition Groups*, December 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>65</sup> DIS, *Syria – Recruitment to Opposition Groups*, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>66</sup> DIS, *Syria – Recruitment to Opposition Groups*, December 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>67</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation 2024*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>68</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 2024*, 13 February 2024, [url](#), p. 388

<sup>69</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>70</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>71</sup> Kurdistan24, *Kurdish civilians flee as Syrian conflict escalates in Aleppo, Tall Rifat*, 3 December 2024, [url](#); The Guardian, *Who controls what territory in Syria?*, 3 December 2024, [url](#); Rudaw, *SNA militants take Manbij city from Kurdish forces*, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>73</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 59

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

overseeing other provinces elsewhere directly. However, between 2018 and 2019, an internal restructuring introduced regional offices to manage the various IS provinces globally, creating a more decentralized framework. While the caliph and the central leadership remain based in Syria, the Syrian and Iraqi IS branches now maintain a status comparable to that of IS provinces located other places in the world.<sup>74</sup>

Despite losing its territory, ISIL adapted its strategy by transitioning into an insurgency. It established sleeper cells, concealed weapons, and moved fighters to support zones across Syria.<sup>75</sup> It has also been able to establish training centres in the central Badia region.<sup>76</sup> Although IS does not currently control any territory in Syria and has no overt presence in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Syria,<sup>77</sup> it is present in every governorate and in every major urban area in the Kurdish-controlled parts of northeastern Syria, both Arab and Kurdish.<sup>78</sup>

IS has also been able to establish a presence in most rural areas.<sup>79</sup> The activities of IS across the governorates and cities in the northeast can be broken down into three main categories: violent attacks, financial activities, and human smuggling.<sup>80</sup>

The U.S. government's estimate of IS fighters in Iraq and Syria rose from 1,255 in January 2024 to 2,500 in April 2024, while a January 2024 UN estimate suggested between 3,000 and 5,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq.<sup>81</sup> However, these are provisional figures and it is uncertain whether the increase in IS activity across northeast Syria signals a notable growth in IS capabilities or is connected to a reduction in the SDF's strength.<sup>82</sup> Gregory Waters has indicated that circumstantial evidence suggests that IS has rebuilt its militant force over the past two to three years, thereby enhancing its attack capabilities.<sup>83</sup>

Two to three years ago, IS sleeper cells in Syria were small (four to five members) and highly compartmentalized, with no contact between cells in different governorates, such as Raqqa, Deir Ezzour, or Hasakah.<sup>84</sup> This strategy minimized risks, as captured fighters could not expose other cells.<sup>85</sup> Higher-ranking leaders had broader contacts within the organisation; however, the

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<sup>74</sup> Dino Krause: 9

<sup>75</sup> DIS, *Islamic State in Syria*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 6; Dino Krause: 11

<sup>76</sup> Dino Krause: 4

<sup>77</sup> Dino Krause: 6; Gregory Waters: 1 US government, *Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress April 1, 2024 – June 30, 2024*, 1 August 2024, [url](#), p. 11; US Government, *Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2024 – March 31, 2024*, 30 April 2024, [url](#); p. 10

<sup>78</sup> Gregory Waters: 1, 3

<sup>79</sup> Gregory Waters: 1

<sup>80</sup> Gregory Waters: 4

<sup>81</sup> UNSC, *Letter dated 23 January 2024 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*, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 12; Dino Krause: 3, 7

<sup>82</sup> Dino Krause: 25

<sup>83</sup> Gregory Waters: 6

<sup>84</sup> Gregory Waters: 7; Dino Krause 12

<sup>85</sup> Gregory Waters 7; Dino Krause 12

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

structure limited communication to reduce vulnerabilities.<sup>86</sup> It is unclear whether this approach remains in place today.<sup>87</sup>

IS leadership has become more localised over the past two and a half years, shifting from centralised control in the northwest, directing operations in the northeast to command chains based close to their areas of operation.<sup>88</sup> IS leaders rely more on face-to-face communication, particularly in Raqqa and the north and east of Syria, although some leaders remain in Aleppo to manage external activities outside Syria.<sup>89</sup>

IS attacks in the Kurdish-controlled areas of north and east Syria were generally carried out by small groups of fighters, typically belonging to cells of 4 to 8 members, who, for example, attack a checkpoint and then retreat.<sup>90</sup> Despite significant leadership losses, IS activity increased in early 2024, suggesting resilience in the northeast command chain. The capture of younger leaders reflects a generational shift in the command structure, although its impact remains uncertain.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Gregory Waters: 7; Dino Krause: 12

<sup>87</sup> Gregory Waters: 7:

<sup>88</sup> Gregory Waters: 8

<sup>89</sup> Gregory Waters: 9

<sup>90</sup> Dino Krause: 5

<sup>91</sup> Gregory Waters: 9,10; Dino Krause: 1

## 4. International involvement in North and East Syria

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### 4.1 U.S.-led international coalition

The Global Coalition against IS was established in 2014 with the objective of addressing the threat posed by IS in Iraq and Syria. Since September 2014, the U.S.-led coalition has conducted military operations in Syria targeting IS and other groups. These operations have been conducted without the consent of the former Syrian government.<sup>92</sup>

In October 2019, the United States initiated the withdrawal of its military personnel from the northern Syrian border with Türkiye, allowing the Turkish government to proceed with its planned military operation against the SDF.<sup>93</sup> By late October, the U.S.-led coalition had withdrawn from almost all its bases in Raqqa and Aleppo governorates.<sup>94</sup> By December 2019, the United States had finalised its military withdrawal from northeastern Syria, establishing a more stable presence of approximately 600 troops elsewhere in the country following a repositioning and reduction of forces.<sup>95</sup>

According to the EUAA, approximately 900 U.S. personnel were deployed in northeastern Syria.<sup>96</sup> However, in December 2024, the U.S. Department of Defence announced that there were approximately 2,000 U.S. troops deployed to Syria.<sup>97</sup> The U.S. is leading a joint task force comprising 25 countries, with the objective of continuing to combat IS and supporting the SDF and other local partners in maintaining the territorial defeat of IS.<sup>98</sup> However, Jusoor For Studies has indicated that these forces also prevented the former Syrian government and its allies, particularly Iran, from assuming control of areas currently under SDF control, where the majority of coalition forces are based.

By mid-2024, the U.S.-led Coalition had operational control of 17 military bases and 15 outposts across Syria, predominantly located in the areas controlled by the DAANES.<sup>99</sup> These included installations at the Conoco gas field and the Al-Omar oil field.<sup>100</sup> U.S. forces stationed in Syria have been the subject of attacks from Iran-backed groups, in turn, prompting a series of counterattacks. This pattern of retaliatory action has been observed on multiple occasions during the first months of 2024.<sup>101</sup> Since February 2024, Iran-aligned militias have largely

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<sup>92</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>93</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>94</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>95</sup> Reuters, *Exclusive: U.S. military completes pullback from northeast Syria*, Esper says, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>97</sup> DoD, *DOD Announces 2,000 Troops in Syria, Department Prepared for Government Shutdown*, 19 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>98</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>99</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>100</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>101</sup> US Government, *Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress January 1, 2024 – March 31, 2024*, 30 April 2024, [url](#); p. 12

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

refrained from launching attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces in Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. However, there was an exception in April, when UAV and rocket attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria were attributed to Iranian-backed militias.<sup>102</sup>

### 4.2 Russia

In 2015, Russia initiated a military intervention in Syria at the request of the former Syrian government. The objective was to provide support for the former government's efforts against the former opposition and IS during the Syrian conflict.<sup>103</sup> The deployment of Russian forces in Syria was subject to the terms of a bilateral agreement concluded in August 2015.<sup>104</sup> Russia's intervention was widely regarded as a decisive factor in influencing the course of the Syrian conflict in favour of the former Syrian government prior to the downfall of the Assad government.<sup>105</sup>

Between mid-2023 and mid-2024, Russia increased its military presence in Syria, adding nine new positions to the 105 it already held. This expansion signalled a change of strategy following a reduction in Russian deployments during the initial stages of the Ukraine conflict.<sup>106</sup> Prior to the downfall of the Assad government, Russia maintained a military presence in Syria comprising of 21 bases and 93 outposts. The locations of these bases and outposts included the following governorates: 14 in Hasakah, 12 in Aleppo, and eight each in Raqqa and Deir Ezzour.<sup>107</sup>

There were considerable discrepancies in the estimates of the size of Russian troops in Syria, with figures ranging from 4,000 to 60,000. The Russian government has stated that 63,000 troops have served in Syria, but the precise number currently stationed in the country remains uncertain.<sup>108</sup> Jusoor For Studies has stated that prior to the downfall of the Assad government, Russia continued to maintain a military advantage over Iranian forces in Syria. Russian military sites were equipped with a range of weaponry and superior aerial and reconnaissance assets.<sup>109</sup> Following the collapse of the Assad government, the Russian military initiated a withdrawal of its assets and personnel.<sup>110</sup> However, Russia has not withdrawn completely and maintains a limited presence in Syria, leading analysts to speculate about the nature of Russia's relationship with the HTS-led transitional government.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> US government, *Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress April 1, 2024 – June 30, 2024*, 1 August 2024, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>103</sup> Al Jazeera, *Russia carries out first air strikes in Syria*, 30 September 2015, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *What has Russia gained from five years of fighting in Syria?*, 1 October 2020, [url](#); EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>104</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>105</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>106</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>108</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>109</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>110</sup> BBC, *Russia moving equipment at Syrian bases, satellite images show*, 18 December 2024, [url](#); CNN, *Russian military has begun large-scale withdrawal from Syria, US and Western officials say*, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>111</sup> Reuters, *Exclusive: Russia pulling back but not out of Syria, sources say*, 15 December 2024, [url](#); DW, *Russian military: Moving from Syria to Libya?*, 18 December 2024, [url](#); European Interest, *Despite Europe's displeasure Russia is*

## 4.3 Türkiye

Since 2011, Türkiye has been actively engaged in the Syrian conflict, providing support to former opposition groups with the objective of removing Bashar al-Assad from power. These groups included factions affiliated with the FSA, as well as various Islamist groups.<sup>112</sup> Türkiye's primary objective in Syria has been to prevent the YPG from establishing an autonomous region along its southern border, which the Turkish government considers a significant threat to its national security.<sup>113</sup>

This concern has been further exacerbated by the U.S. decision to form a partnership with the SDF in 2014, providing them with enhanced military and financial resources. This alliance between the U.S. and the YPG has been a significant source of contention between the U.S. and Türkiye.<sup>114</sup>

Türkiye has maintained a military presence in northern Syria, particularly in the Aleppo governorate, since 2016. This followed two military operations: Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch.<sup>115</sup> In 2016, Türkiye initiated Operation Euphrates Shield in concert with former opposition groups to neutralise IS and impede the YPG's territorial expansion in northern Aleppo. The operation resulted in the capture of strategic locations, including al-Bab, Jarabulus, and several surrounding towns.<sup>116</sup>

In January 2018, Türkiye, along with allied local armed groups, launched Operation Olive Branch against the Kurdish-held Afrin district in the Aleppo governorate. By March 2018, Turkish forces gained full control off Afrin.<sup>117</sup> Following the US withdrawal of troops from northeastern Syria on 9 October 2019, Türkiye initiated Operation Peace Spring, targeting Kurdish-held territories. The objective was to clear YPG and ISIL elements along the border and establish a 32-km-wide "safe zone". The operation was supported by approximately 14,000 fighters from the SNA.<sup>118</sup> This area is predominantly designated as a military zone, with approximately 50 military installations under the control of the Turkish military. These installations encompass a range of facilities, including larger bases and frontline positions held by Turkish commando units.<sup>119</sup>

As of mid-2024, the Turkish military maintained 12 bases and 114 outposts across Syria, including 58 in Aleppo governorate and 10 in Raqqa governorate. Turkish forces conducted ground and aerial reconnaissance using drones from these positions, enabling them to target both former government and SDF positions.<sup>120</sup>

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*to keep its military presence in Syria*, 23 December 2024, [url](#); BBC, *Syrians hope for a future without Russia, but it may not be easy*, 13 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>113</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>114</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>115</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>116</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>117</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>118</sup> EASO, *Syria: Actors*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>119</sup> Alexander Mckeever: 20

<sup>120</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

## 4.4 Iran

Prior to the collapse of the Assad government, Iran maintained the largest foreign military presence in Syria, despite a reduction in the number of military positions under Iranian and Iranian-backed militia control.<sup>121</sup> Iran's strategy in Syria has been twofold: firstly, to ensure the survival of the Assad government; secondly, to position Syria as a key partner in its resistance axis against Israel.<sup>122</sup> In addition to exerting influence over the former Syrian government, Iran also extended its reach at the local level by providing support to Shia communities and other minorities, particularly in the western part of Deir Ezzour governorate, which it considered its primary area of influence.<sup>123</sup>

The Iranian government, primarily through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), was actively supporting the former Syrian government and recruiting Shia fighters from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq to fight in Syria. It is estimated that hundreds of IRGC officers have served as military advisers in the country.<sup>124</sup> As of mid-2024, Iran had maintained 52 military bases and 477 outposts across all 14 Syrian governorates. The number of sites in Aleppo governorate was 117, in Deir Ezzour governorate 77, in Raqqa governorate 14, and in Hasakah governorate eight.<sup>125</sup>

Iranian positions in Syria could be broadly classified into two main categories. The first comprised positions held by Iran-backed militias under the direct command of the IRGC's Quds Force, comprising Syrian and foreign fighters from several countries.<sup>126</sup> The second category represented positions that are controlled by Hezbollah and its local affiliates. These also operated with the support and oversight of the IRGC, either directly or indirectly.<sup>127</sup>

The majority of these sites lacked the capacity to conduct independent military operations for a number of reasons. These include the absence of an air force, air defence systems and the necessary military and logistical infrastructure for large-scale operations.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, the constant redeployment of forces to evade Israeli and Coalition airstrikes has resulted in a significant reduction in their combat readiness. Additionally, these sites relied heavily on a network of cross-border militias.<sup>129</sup> Iran commenced an evacuation of military personnel and officials from Syria in early December 2024.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>122</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>123</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>124</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>125</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>126</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

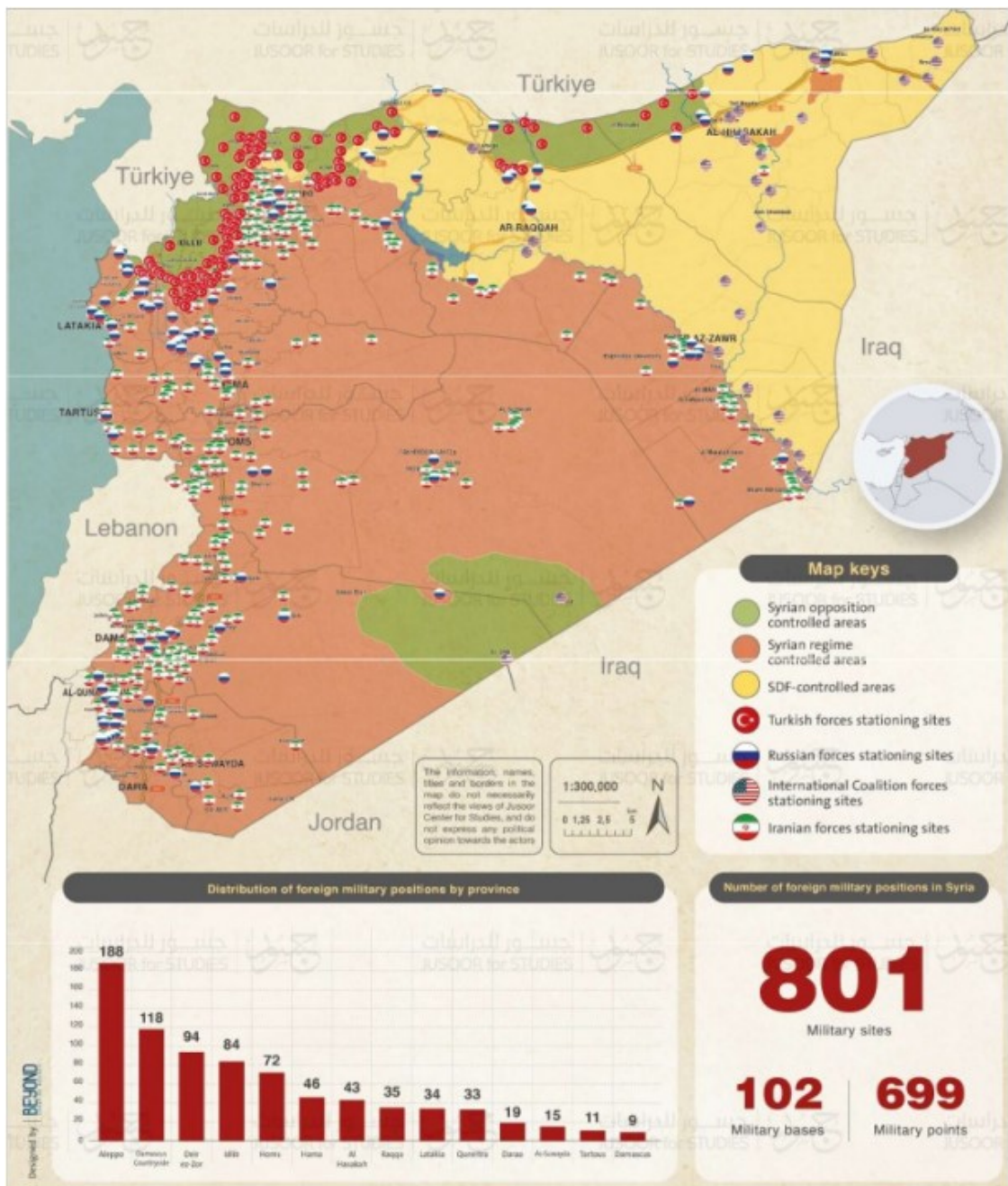
<sup>128</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>129</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>130</sup> New York times, *Iran Begins to Evacuate Military Officials and Personnel From Syria*, 6 December 2024, [url](#)



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT



Map 2: Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, mid-2024, ©Jusoor for Studies<sup>131</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

## 5. Security situation in North and East Syria

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### 5.1 Aleppo governorate

Following the recent developments in Syria, the conflict dynamics, territorial control, and consequently the security situation in the Kurdish areas of Aleppo have shifted significantly.<sup>132</sup> The information on the security situation presented below is primarily focused on events and developments that occurred prior to 27 November 2024.

#### 5.1.1 Geography and demography

Aleppo Governorate, situated in northern Syria, shares a northern border with Türkiye and is adjacent to the governorates of Idlib to the west, Hama to the south, and Raqqa to the east. It is divided into eight districts: Jebel Saman, Afrin (Efrin), A'zaz (Azaz), Al-Bab, Manbij (Menbij), Jarablus, Ain Al Arab (Kobane), and As-Safira, with the city of Aleppo serving as its capital. The governorate is connected by the M5 and M4 highways, linking Aleppo with Damascus and western Syria.<sup>133</sup> According to UNOCHA, as of July 2023, Aleppo Governorate had an estimated population of 4,749,350, including 1,641,306 internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>134</sup>

Before the conflict, Aleppo governorate was predominantly Sunni, with minorities including Christians, Kurds, Armenians, Turkmen, and Shia Muslims, the latter concentrated in rural areas and parts of Aleppo city. In 2012, Aleppo city had 2.5 million residents, with 500,000 living in the predominantly Kurdish neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh, described as a "Kurdish city within the city."<sup>135</sup>

#### 5.1.2 Actors and territorial control

On 27 November 2024 former rebel forces, led by HTS launched a major offensive in Syria's northwestern Aleppo province. At the time of writing, the HTS fighters had progressed from their base in the countryside to the outskirts of Aleppo, and assumed control of the city of Aleppo.<sup>136</sup> However, the Kurdish neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh remained under the control of the SDF following an agreement with HTS.<sup>137</sup> At the same time, SNA forces,

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<sup>132</sup> See Associated Press (AP), *What to know about sudden rebel gains in Syria's 13-year war and why it matters*, 2 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> EUAA, *Syria - Security Situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 60, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2024: Syrian Arab Republic*, 3 March 2024, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>135</sup> EASO, *Syria – Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 81

<sup>136</sup> The Guardian, *Assault on Aleppo: who are the Syrian rebels HTS and why are they advancing?*, 2 December 2024, [url](#); The Guardian, *Who controls what territory in Syria?*, 3 December 2024, [url](#); Rudaw, *SDF says has deals with HTS, to send a delegation to Damascus*, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>137</sup> The Guardian, *Who controls what territory in Syria?*, 3 December 2024, [url](#); Kurdistan24, *Kurdish civilians flee as Syrian conflict escalates in Aleppo, Tall Rifat*, 3 December 2024, [url](#); Shafaq News, *Kurdish forces withdraw from Aleppo as violence intensifies in Northern Syria*, 2 December 2024, [url](#); Rudaw, *SDF says working to evacuate its people from Tal Rifaat*, 2 December 2024, [url](#); The Guardian, *Who controls what territory in Syria?*, 3 December 2024, [url](#); Rudaw, *SDF says has deals with HTS, to send a delegation to Damascus*, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

who were part of the HTS-led operation,<sup>138</sup> advanced in the northeastern countryside of Aleppo, eventually taking full control of the Tell Rifaat enclave from the SDF before entering Manbij and assuming control of it following intense clashes with the SDF.<sup>139</sup> There are reports of continued fighting between the SDF and the SNA following a U.S.-brokered ceasefire in the Manbij area.<sup>140</sup>

Prior to these developments, the territorial control of Aleppo Governorate was more or less static,<sup>141</sup> split between former opposition armed groups, the former Syrian government, and the SDF/YPG.<sup>142</sup> Multiple foreign military forces, including Iranian, Russian, and Turkish troops, maintained operational sites throughout the governorate, including in areas controlled by Kurdish forces.<sup>143</sup>

Until 27 November 2024, the Kurdish forces held several areas in Aleppo, including Tell Rifaat, where there was a strong presence of the YPG and the YPJ, but also a presence of GoS and pro-government forces. In addition, the SDF/YPG controlled the areas of Manbij and Ain Al Arab (Kobane)<sup>144</sup>. The primary security force for the area of Manbij was the Manbij Military Council, which was an entity under the SDF.<sup>145</sup> However, according to Fabrice Balanche, Manbij was jointly controlled by the SDF and the GoS during the reporting period. Furthermore, the SDF controlled the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo city, which it currently maintains.<sup>146</sup>

Some sources stated that Aleppo served as a vital economic hub for trade, benefiting all actors operating in the region. This dynamic fosters limited cooperation among various groups, such as the use of unofficial crossings between the SDF and the GoS to facilitate commerce, with both sides keen to preserve these arrangements. However, tensions occasionally arise as different actors seek to push boundaries to gain a competitive advantage in trade.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> NPA, *SNA announces launch of “Dawn of Freedom” offensive in Aleppo*, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> NPA, *Thousands of Afrin IDPs stranded in northern Syria, besieged by SNA*, 2 December 2024, [url](#); Rudaw, *SDF says working to evacuate its people from Tal Rifaat*, 2 December 2024, [url](#); Live Universal Awareness Map (Liveuamap), *Syria*, 2 December 2024, [url](#); MEMO, *Turkish proxies fight US-armed Kurds in north Syria*, 12 December 2024, [url](#); NPA, *Fierce clashes erupt as Turkish-backed SNA factions attack Syria’s Manbij*, 8 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>140</sup> Reuters, *Ceasefire between Turkey and US-backed rebels extended, State Dept says*, 17 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>141</sup> AP, *What to know about sudden rebel gains in Syria’s 13-year war and why it matters*, 30 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>142</sup> UN Geospatial, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024* [Map], July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>143</sup> Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria*, Mid-2024, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> ACAPS, *Northern Syria: key crises to watch*, 4 August 2023, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>145</sup> Institute for the Study of War (ISW), *The Syrian Democratic Forces’ Arab Coalition is Crumbling, Creating Opportunities for ISIS, Iran, and Turkey*, 15 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: “Security Squares” manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023, [url](#); Rudaw, *SDF says has deals with HTS, to send a delegation to Damascus*, 12 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>147</sup> ICG: 9; A Syrian-Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 6

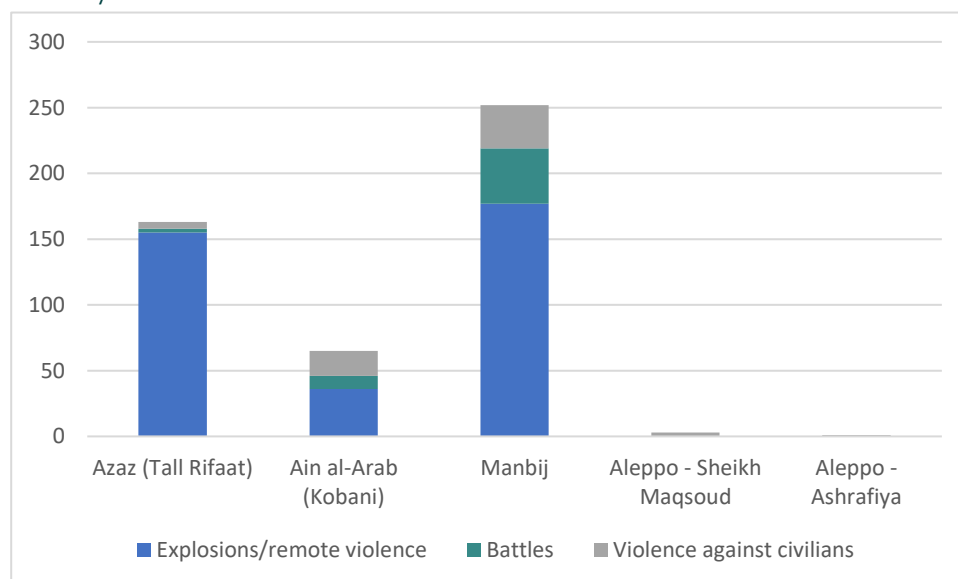
## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### 5.1.3 Recent security trends

#### 5.1.3.1 ACLED security events in Kurdish controlled areas in Aleppo

The figure below is based on ACLED-data and aims to give an understanding of the level of violence in the Kurdish controlled areas of Aleppo governorate during the reference period 1 January to 15 November 2024. The types of incidents presented are *explosions/remote violence, battles, and violence against civilians*.<sup>148</sup> As mentioned previously, Aleppo Governorate was divided in various spheres of influence split among various actors whose spheres often overlapped.<sup>149</sup> The areas presented below are a rough division of the areas under Kurdish control in Aleppo and should not be considered as exact areas of control (it should be noted that some of the areas presented below are no longer under Kurdish control), but rather a point of reference in order to illustrate the violence that occurred during the reference period in this region, based on ACLED's data.

Figure 1: Security Incidents in areas under Kurdish control in Aleppo Governorate, 1 January – 15 November 2024



Source: Data from ACLED compiled by DIS/Lifos<sup>150</sup>

There has been a total of 484 incidents (out of total 2,689 incidents for the whole governorate) in the Kurdish areas of Aleppo during the reference period, with Tell Rifaat and Manbij being the areas where most of the violence took place (total 415 incidents in Manbij and Tell Rifaat). Most of the incidents reported are categorized as explosions/remote violence (368 incidents), mostly in the form of shelling/artillery/missile attacks, and most of the incidents are attributed to the Turkish military forces (351 incidents). Regarding battles, 55 incidents of the type battles

<sup>148</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), *Codebook*, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>149</sup> UN Geospatial, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024* [Map], July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>150</sup> ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, January-15 November 2024 (data extracted 2024-11-16), [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

have been reported, most of which took place in Manbij and Ain al-Arab (Kobane). According to ACLED's data, the battles have dominantly been armed clashes between various Turkish-backed factions and Kurdish forces in the areas. There were 61 incidents of violence against civilians, most of which were cases of abduction attributed to the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM). The few incidents that were documented in the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh were violence against civilians in the form of abductions linked to the RYM.<sup>151</sup>

### *5.1.3.2 Security situation in the Kurdish controlled areas of Aleppo and impact on civilians*

During the reporting period and until the recent developments (January-November 2024), Aleppo governorate remained a focal point for complex and multi-layered security challenges, shaped by overlapping control among various actors and persistent fighting. For years Türkiye's military operations in northern Syria (Euphrates Shield 2016-2017, Olive Branch 2018, Peace Spring 2019, Spring Shield 2020) have caused considerable humanitarian consequences, including civilian casualties and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals.<sup>152</sup> Simultaneously, tensions and ongoing clashes between the Turkish-backed SNA and the SDF in Aleppo have been, according to observers, a significant driver of regional instability, characterized by intermittent escalations and periods of heightened conflict between the two actors.<sup>153</sup>

According to an assessment by a Syrian-Kurdish journalist, Türkiye, Russia, and the former Syrian government shared a strategic interest in forcing the SDF to withdraw from Manbij, though this had not occurred during the reporting period.<sup>154</sup> According to several sources, the areas of Manbij and Kobane are strategically significant for Türkiye, as these areas form a critical junction between the Euphrates Shield and Operation Peace Spring area.<sup>155</sup>

### *Clashes between the SDF and the Turkish-backed SNA*

During the reporting period, clashes between SDF and SNA, concentrated along the frontlines near Manbij, Tell Rifaat, and the Afrin countryside, primarily involved artillery shelling and small-scale incursions.<sup>156</sup> In Tell Rifaat, the fighting was primarily recurring between YPG-aligned forces, including the Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE) who was the dominant power in this area, and Turkish-backed SNA groups<sup>157 158</sup>, and featured frequent small-unit engagements,

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<sup>151</sup> ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, January-15 November 2024 (data extracted 2024-11-16), [url](#)

<sup>152</sup> ACAPS, *Northern Syria: key crises to watch*, 4 August 2023, [url](#), p. 3, 9

<sup>153</sup> NPA, *Syrian Democratic Forces Kill 17 Pro-Turkey Fighters in Aleppo's Manbij Countryside*, 26 November 2024, [url](#); Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – October 2024*, 13 November 2024, [url](#); Fabrice Balanche: 20; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 23; Alexander McKeever: 1

<sup>154</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 22, 23

<sup>155</sup> Fabrice Blanche: 24; An organization promoting human rights: 6

<sup>156</sup> The Syrian Observer, *To Hinder Damascus-Ankara Rapprochement: SDF Ignites Turkish Occupation Fronts North of Aleppo*, 23 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>157</sup> SNA-aligned groups such as Sultan Murad division, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Faylaq al-Sham, al-Jabha al-Shamiya, 50th division, the Levant Front, Liwaa al-Shamal, al-Shamat and al-Hamza division. ICG: 1

<sup>158</sup> According to Alexander McKeever's recent observations, there has been one particular SNA group called al-Quwa al-Moushtaraka (Joint Force), affiliated with al-Hamza brigade, carrying out more offensive attacks on SDF/HRE. This group employs a brigade that seems to have partial Central Asian members (Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgys). This brigade

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

artillery exchanges, and incursions across frontlines, especially on the northern border of the Tell Rifaat enclave, which previously adjoined SNA- and Turkish-controlled areas.<sup>159</sup>

In northern Aleppo and its surrounding areas, and along the northern Tell Rifaat frontline, the majority of civilians have been displaced due to ongoing fighting. According to Jusoor For Studies, the region can best be described as a military zone and a designated humanitarian zone.<sup>160</sup> The situation in Manbij was similar to the situation in Tell Rifaat during the reporting period, with regular clashes between the SDF-affiliated Manbij Military Council and SNA forces, especially in northern Manbij in the Sarjul Valley. Moreover, both the SDF and SNA attempted incursions across the frontlines in Tell Rifaat and Manbij during the reporting period.<sup>161</sup>

According to Fabrice Balanche, Russian airstrikes deterred an SNA attempt to invade Manbij in March.<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, in September the SNA mobilized for a large-scale attack on both Tell Rifaat and Manbij, though these plans did not materialize at that time.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, the SDF conducted infiltration attacks on SNA positions, most recently in November 2024 when SDF launched an extensive attack on SNA in northeast Aleppo.<sup>164</sup>

According to a representative from a human right's organization, Manbij was the area most heavily impacted by clashes along the frontlines between the SDF and SNA groups.<sup>165</sup> There was also a consistent presence of Turkish drones in this region.<sup>166</sup> During the reporting period, Turkish forces continued shelling areas in rural Manbij and Kobane.<sup>167</sup> However, Fabrice Balanche maintained that the city of Kobane and its surrounding villages remained relatively secure, serving as a stronghold for the PYD. Nevertheless, the area faced a persistent threat from Türkiye, prompting many residents to leave Kobane out of concern over a potential Turkish incursion.<sup>168</sup> According to the researcher Alexander McKeever, the events impacting the security situation in Kobane consisted almost entirely of Turkish drone attacks. The most prominent attacks on civilian political targets have occurred in Kobane.<sup>169</sup>

According to several sources, despite regular clashes in the Kurdish controlled areas of Aleppo, civilian casualties were reportedly minimal as these confrontations primarily affect combatants

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appears to have been active on the frontlines in Afrin against the SDF/HRE for some time, which was confirmed in October 2024. Individuals involved with the brigade had been in Idlib prior to Afrin. Alexander McKeever: 2

<sup>159</sup> Jusoor for Studies: 5

<sup>160</sup> Jusoor for Studies: 8

<sup>161</sup> Local NGO worker from NES: 25; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 23; ICG: 2; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 3

<sup>162</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 25

<sup>163</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 23; NPA, *SDF thwarts infiltration attempt by SNA in Syria's Manbij*, 11 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> The Syrian Observer, *SDF Attack on National Army Threatens to Ignite Fronts*, 26 November 2024, [url](#)

<sup>165</sup> An organization promoting human rights: 6

<sup>166</sup> Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 8

<sup>167</sup> SJAC: 19; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 2; An organization promoting human rights: 6

<sup>168</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 27

<sup>169</sup> Alexander McKeever: 4

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

near the frontlines,<sup>170</sup> since many of these frontline areas are effectively military zones.<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, due to the nature of the fighting between SDF and SNA-groups and Türkiye in this region, civilians face hard living conditions and many civilians have been displaced.<sup>172</sup>

Türkiye has also occasionally supported Arab tribal groups, some of which have recently launched attacks on Manbij. These groups, formed under the names of tribes from Deir Ezzour, Manbij, and other Arab-majority regions within Turkish-controlled areas of northern Syria, have carried out multiple assaults along the contact lines in Manbij, particularly amid the heightened tensions in Deir Ezzour during 2023 and 2024.<sup>173</sup> The human rights organization Syrians for Truth and Justice also mentioned this occurrence in Manbij, more specifically a coordinated attack between SNA-groups and Arab tribes in September, causing displacement of civilians.<sup>174</sup>

### IS insurgency

IS presence in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate is primarily centered around Manbij, and there was no IS activity in the Tel Rifaat enclave or Kobane.<sup>175</sup> According to sources, Manbij city is an Arab-majority town where IS occasionally conducts attacks in the form of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). The most recent IS attack in Manbij occurred between February and April 2024.<sup>176</sup> In total there have been six registered attacks by IS in the Kurdish-controlled parts of Aleppo in the first nine and half months of 2024.<sup>177</sup> These attacks have been small-scale shootings targeting vehicles and checkpoints belonging to the SDF. Overall, this area is not a focal point for IS operations in Syria.<sup>178</sup> On occasion, bombings are carried out by SNA under the guise of IS to avoid accountability.<sup>179</sup> According to Gregory Waters, IS has maintained a long-standing presence in Manbij, a critical crossing point linking northeastern and northwestern Syria. This strategic location suggests that IS likely developed an infrastructure to exploit existing smuggling routes or establish new ones for transporting goods and people.<sup>180</sup>

### Tension between the SDF and the GoS

The relationship between the former Syrian government forces and the SDF in this area was characterized by limited cooperation. However, the GoS regularly closed roads leading to the Kurdish neighborhoods in Aleppo (Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh). These sieges were often

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<sup>170</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 26; Syrians for Truth and Justice: 4; Alexander McKeever: 7; A Syrian-Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 4

<sup>171</sup> Jusoor for Studies: 8

<sup>172</sup> Jusoor for Studies: 7

<sup>173</sup> Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 22

<sup>174</sup> STJ: 4

<sup>175</sup> Gregory Waters: 19, 21; Alexander McKeever: 6

<sup>176</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 24;

<sup>177</sup> Dino Krause: 13

<sup>178</sup> Dino Krause: 14; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 13; Gregory Waters: 19

<sup>179</sup> Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 13

<sup>180</sup> Gregory Waters: 19, 20

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

linked to sieges imposed by the SDF on the security squares controlled by the former government in Hasakah and Qamishli.<sup>181</sup> This occasionally occurred in Tell Rifaat as well.<sup>182</sup>

### HTS

HTS and the SDF did not share direct frontlines during the reporting period, and no clashes have occurred between the two groups in the first nine months of 2024 (this does not include the latest developments).<sup>183</sup> The last recorded confrontation involving HTS took place in September 2023 during its incursion into Afrin and Azaz. This conflict was against pro-Turkish militias and occurred outside the Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate.<sup>184</sup>

### Protests in Manbij

Since early October 2024, several sources have stated that widespread anti-SDF protests in Manbij city and its surrounding rural areas in Aleppo Governorate took place. These demonstrations, coupled with a general strike across the region, were sparked by opposition to the Autonomous Administration's 'Education Authority' enforcing its mandatory school curriculum in local schools. Furthermore, several civilians were arrested/detained for participation in the anti-SDF popular protests that objected to the school curriculums imposed by the SDF in its territories. These arrests were concentrated in Manbij city in rural Aleppo governorate.<sup>185</sup>

## 5.2 Hasakah governorate

### 5.2.1 Geography and demography

The Hasakah Governorate is located in northeastern Syria.<sup>186</sup> The governorate shares borders with Raqqqa Governorate to the west and Deir Ezzour Governorate to the southwest.<sup>187</sup> Additionally, it has international borders with Türkiye to the north and Iraq to the south. The governorate is organised into four main districts: Hasaka, Qamishli, Ras Al Ain, and Al-Malikeyyeh (Al-Malikiyah).<sup>188</sup>

As of July 2023, UNOCHA estimated the population of Hasakah Governorate at 1,431,461 people, comprising 1,078,796 permanent residents and 342,701 IDPs.<sup>189</sup> The Hasakah Governorate has a primarily Kurdish ethnic composition.<sup>190</sup> Areas north of Hasakah city, such as Qamishli and Al-Malikeyyeh (Derik), are predominantly Kurdish, while others, like Ras al-Ayn,

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<sup>181</sup> A Syrian-Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 6; Alexander McKeever: 5; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 21

<sup>182</sup> An organization promoting human rights: 8; STJ: 3

<sup>183</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 23; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 27; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 12; STJ: 6

<sup>184</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 23; STJ: 6; Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria*, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

<sup>185</sup> SNHR: 20, 22; SJAC: 5; ICG 6, 7; Syrian-Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 5

<sup>186</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 100

<sup>187</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 100

<sup>188</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 100

<sup>189</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2024: Syrian Arab Republic*, 3 March 2024, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>190</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018, [url](#), pp. 52-56



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

feature a mixed population comprising Kurdish and Arab communities.<sup>191</sup> By contrast, the southern part of the governorate is predominantly Arab.<sup>192</sup> The Tell Tamer region, situated within the governorate, is home to a considerable Christian population, comprising Assyrians and Armenians, in addition to a Yazidi community.<sup>193</sup> In the cities of Qamishli and Hasakah, districts are divided along ethnic lines, with the Kurdish population forming the majority in Qamishli but a minority in Hasakah.<sup>194</sup>

### 5.2.2 Actors and territorial control

The SDF exercises control over the majority of Hasakah Governorate.<sup>195</sup> However, prior to the current transition of power the former government maintained a presence in certain areas of the governorate, including the security squares located in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli.<sup>196</sup> Turkish forces and allied Turkish-backed SNA groups currently control a narrow stretch of territory along the border with Türkiye. This area, commonly known as the Operation Peace Spring area, is approximately 120 kilometres in length and 32 kilometres in depth. It extends from Ras al-Ayn in Hasakah Governorate to Tal Abyad in Raqqa Governorate.<sup>197</sup> There are a number of SNA factions currently active in this area, including Al-Jabha Al-Shamiya, the Sultan Murad Division, the Mutasim Division, Jaysh Al-Islam and the Al-Hamza Division.<sup>198</sup>

The foreign military presence in Hasakah Governorate included Russian positions at Qamishli airport and a base near Tell Tamer, in addition to U.S. bases situated near Hasakah city centre, Tal Baydar, Shaddady, Malikeyyeh, and the Kharab Al-Jir/Rmelan airbase.<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, Iranian forces have established posts and training centres in the vicinity of Qamishli prior to the withdrawal of Iranian forces from Syria.<sup>200</sup> Additionally, it has been reported that Lebanese Hezbollah has operated a recruitment office in the Hasakah security square.<sup>201</sup>

IS maintains long-established networks in Hasakah, facilitated by the Al-Hol camp and the Shaddady countryside, which serve as a key transit route for smuggling and operational activities.<sup>202</sup> While IS activity in southern Hasakah is less frequent than in Deir Ezzour, the area still experiences several attacks per month, particularly along the north-south road linking Shaddady to Deir Ezzour and near Al-Hol.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>192</sup> Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's Civil War*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>193</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 104

<sup>194</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2023, [url](#), p. 104

<sup>195</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 8-11; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 101

<sup>196</sup> DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 8-11; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p.101; Alexander McKeever: 16; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 14

<sup>197</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 101

<sup>198</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 101

<sup>199</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 103

<sup>200</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 103; New York times, *Iran Begins to Evacuate Military Officials and Personnel From Syria*, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>201</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 103

<sup>202</sup> Gregory Waters: 25

<sup>203</sup> Alexander McKeever: 14

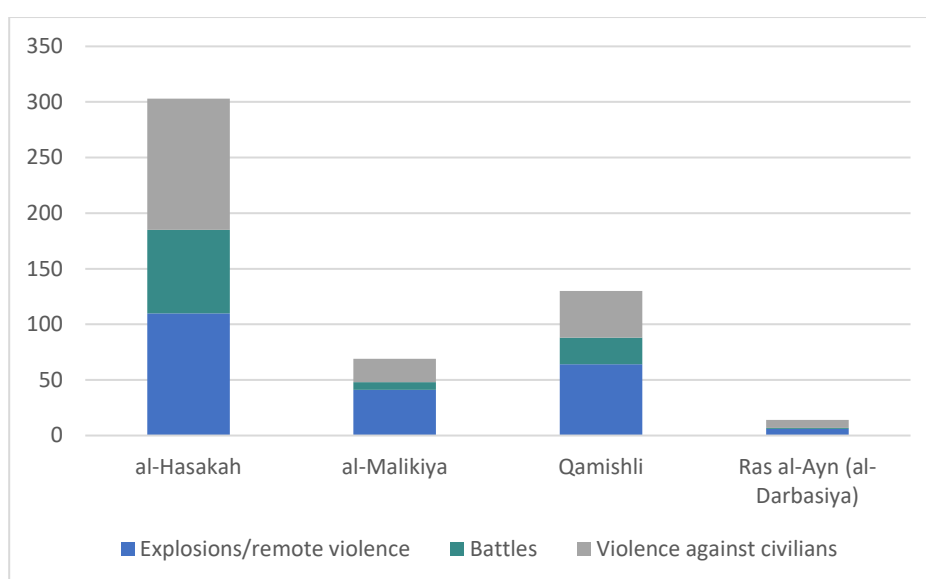
## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### 5.2.3 Recent security trends

#### 5.2.3.1 ACLED security events in the Kurdish controlled areas of Hasakah

The figure below is based on ACLED-data and aims to give an understanding of the level of violence in the Kurdish controlled areas of Hasakah governorate during the reference period 1 January to 15 November 2024. The types of incidents presented are *explosions/remote violence, battles, and violence against civilians*.<sup>204</sup> Only the al-Darbasiya subdistrict of Ras al-Ain district is included below, as the remainder of Ras al-Ain falls outside Kurdish control.

Figure 2: Security Incidents in areas under Kurdish control in Hasakah Governorate, 1 January – 15 November 2024



Source: Data from ACLED compiled by DIS/Lifos<sup>205</sup>

In total there were 516 incidents (out of total 595 incidents) in the Kurdish controlled areas of Hasakah governorate during the reference period. Most of the incidents were explosions remote violence (221 incidents), most of which were air/drone strikes conducted by Turkish forces. Violence against civilians is the second biggest event type (188 incidents) with the majority attributed to Kurdish forces, mostly being cases of arrests/detention during raids. Battles in Hasakah were mostly armed clashes between different armed groups operating in the area (no specific trend). The most affected district was al-Hasakah with 303 documented incidents, according to ACLED's data, out of which were 110 explosions/remote violence, 118 violence against civilians, and 75 battles. Looking closer at al-Hasakah district, most of the incidents occurred in the subdistricts of al-Hasakah (81 incidents, the majority were violence against civilians), Tel Tamer (73 incidents, the majority were explosions/remote violence), al-

<sup>204</sup> ACLED, *Codebook*, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>205</sup> ACLED, *Data Export Tool, January-15 November 2024*, (data extracted 2024-11-16), [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Shaddady (56 incidents, the majority explosions/remote violence), and al-Hol (55 incidents, the majority violence against civilians). Al-Malikeyyeh district was largely affected by explosions/remote violence, more specifically air/drone strikes by Turkish forces (35 out of 41 incidents), and much less battles (7 incidents) and violence against civilians (21 incidents) compared to the other districts. Similarly, the majority of the incidents in Qamishli were explosions/remote violence in the form of air/drone attacks by Turkish forces (53 out of 64 incidents). Again, the incidents of violence against civilians were largely forced disappearances by Kurdish forces. In Ras al-Ain (al-Darbasiya) all incidents (14 incidents) were conducted by Turkish forces and/or Turkish-backed forces.<sup>206</sup>

### *5.2.3.2 Security situation in the Kurdish controlled areas of Hasakah and impact on civilians*

The Kurdish-controlled areas of Hasakah governorate are under military control of the SDF and remain relatively stable in terms of governance,<sup>207</sup> with Hasakah city hosting a significant displaced population, who have relocated from areas affected by Turkish air strikes or conflict.<sup>208</sup> Complaints over forced recruitment by the SDF and inadequate service provision have sparked demonstrations, particularly in the areas of Amuda and Qamishli.<sup>209</sup> In these cases, the SDF has responded with arbitrary arrests and use of lethal force.<sup>210</sup>

The security situation in Hasakah varies across the governorate. The Tell Tamer and Ras al-Ayn frontlines in northwestern Hasakah (the eastern part of the SNA- and Türkiye-controlled Operation Peace Spring area) exhibit comparable dynamics to those observed on the northern frontlines in Raqqa and Aleppo prior to the HTS offensive in late 2024.<sup>211</sup>

### *Clashes between the SDF and the Turkish-backed SNA*

The SDF and Turkish-backed SNA engage in intermittent clashes along the northwestern frontlines of Hasakah governorate, particularly near Tell Tamer and Ras al-Ayn.<sup>212</sup> These conflicts entail periodic exchanges of small arms fire, artillery shelling, and sporadic incursions.<sup>213</sup> While clashes in this area are less frequent than near the frontlines in Aleppo and Raqqa,<sup>214</sup> and rarely result in significant civilian casualties, they have displaced a considerable portion of the population and rendered many villages uninhabitable.<sup>215</sup> Schools in affected areas have been repurposed as accommodations for displaced persons.<sup>216</sup>

The intensity of the clashes is contingent upon the prevailing political situation and the military objectives of the Turkish forces, which are often aligned with developments in northern Iraq,

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<sup>206</sup> ACLED, Data Export Tool, January-15 November 2024 (data extracted 2024-11-16), [url](#)

<sup>207</sup> An organisation promoting human rights: 12; ICG: 29

<sup>208</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 10-14

<sup>209</sup> SJAC 13, 14; ICG: 30

<sup>210</sup> SJAC 13, 14; ICG: 30

<sup>211</sup> Alexander McKeever: 15; STJ: 10; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 11

<sup>212</sup> Alexander McKeever: 15; Fabrice Balanche: 17; STJ: 10, 13-14; A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 11; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 29; SNHR: 1

<sup>213</sup> Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 11; Heybar Othman (journalist): 5,6; An organisation promoting human rights: 17

<sup>214</sup> Alexander McKeever: 15; STJ: 10; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 28

<sup>215</sup> Heybar Othman (journalist): 17; Fabrice Balanche: 7; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 29

<sup>216</sup> Heybar Othman (journalist): 17

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

where Türkiye is engaged in operations against the PKK.<sup>217</sup> Furthermore, the Turkish military regularly conducts air and drone strikes in the region, resulting in casualties among both military personnel and civilians.<sup>218</sup> These strikes frequently affect infrastructure, increasing the vulnerability of civilians residing near the frontlines, particularly during harvest seasons due to the presence of mined trenches in agricultural land.<sup>219</sup>

The security situation in Hasakah governorate is characterised by sustained Turkish drone and artillery strikes, as well as air strikes.<sup>220</sup> These operations, concentrated along the northern border near Qamishli, Amuda, and Al-Malikeyeh (Derik), primarily target SDF-affiliated personnel and PKK-linked figures.<sup>221</sup> However, there is regular collateral damage, with strikes hitting civilian vehicles, markets, and residential areas.<sup>222</sup> In recent cases, Turkish strikes have resulted in multiple civilian casualties, including women and children.<sup>223</sup>

Türkiye has expanded its bombing operations in northern Syria from targeting military targets within 10 kilometres of the Turkish-Syrian border to deeper strikes in Hasakah (and also Aleppo and Raqqa), and is now targeting civilian infrastructure such as oil refineries and power plants in order to disrupt the PKK's sources of funding.<sup>224</sup>

Turkish bombardments have had a significant impact on critical infrastructure.<sup>225</sup> In addition, the Allouk water station, which came under Turkish control in 2019, was a vital source of water for Hasakah. Its inoperability has resulted in a prolonged water crisis in the region.<sup>226</sup> Furthermore, power stations and oil facilities have also been heavily damaged, which has

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<sup>217</sup> A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 5; STJ: 11; ICG: 28

<sup>218</sup> Alexander McKeever: 18, 19; An organisation promoting human rights: 15-17; A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 11, 12; Jusoor For Studies: 13, 14; STJ: 12; SJAC: 16, 17; SOHR, *In different areas stretching for 500 kilometres along border strip | Turkish aircraft attacks 25 vital institutions, destroying many of them*, 25 October 2024, [url](#); STJ; "As If an Earthquake Had Struck": *Turkish Airstrikes Are Killing Life in Northeast Syria*, 25 June 2024, [url](#); HRW, *Türkiye's Strikes Wreak Havoc on Northeast Syria*, 9 February 2024, [url](#); SOHR, *Turkish military escalation in 24 hours | 27 civilians killed in 45 drone attacks in N and E Syria*, 24 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> SJAC: 16, 17; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 6-8; Alexander McKeever: 19; ICG: 25-27; A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 12,13; Heybar Othman (journalist): 2-4; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 25, 27, 29; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 14; Heybar Othman (journalist): 1,6

<sup>220</sup> SJAC: 17; Fabrice Balanche:13, 16; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 27; Alexander McKeever: 18 An Organisation promoting human rights: 15; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 12; STJ: 8; NPA, *Turkish airstrikes target 89 sites in NE Syria in 2024*, 17 January 2024, [url](#); SOHR, *In different areas stretching for 500 kilometres along border strip | Turkish aircraft attacks 25 vital institutions, destroying many of them*, 25 October 2024, [url](#);

<sup>221</sup> SJAC: 17; Fabrice Balanche: 13, 16; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 27; Alexander McKeever: 18; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 16; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 12,13; Heybar Othman (journalist): 1; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 9; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 13; NPA, *Turkish airstrikes target 89 sites in NE Syria in 2024*, 17 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>222</sup> SJAC 16; Fabrice Balanche: 16; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 27; Jusoor For Studies: 13; An organisation promoting human rights: 16; SOHR, *In different areas stretching for 500 kilometres along border strip | Turkish aircraft attacks 25 vital institutions, destroying many of them*, 25 October 2024, [url](#);

<sup>223</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 27; Alexander McKeever: 18; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 6, 16; STJ: 10

<sup>224</sup> Diwan, *Why Turkey's Syria Policy May Be About to Change*, 5 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>225</sup> ICG: 25; SJAC: 16; Alexander McKeever: 19; Heybar Othman (journalist): 1,2; STJ: 8; HRW, *Türkiye's Strikes Wreak Havoc on Northeast Syria*, 9 February 2024, [url](#); SOHR, *In different areas stretching for 500 kilometres along border strip | Turkish aircraft attacks 25 vital institutions, destroying many of them*, 25 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>226</sup> A local NGO worker from northeast Syria: 7; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 15; Hoshang Hasan: 14; SJAC: 22; HRW, *Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Disrupt Water, Electricity*, 26 October 2023, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

resulted in a significant reduction in revenue for the DAANES.<sup>227</sup> This, in turn, has led to fuel and water shortages, as well as rising local prices.<sup>228</sup> These sustained attacks have had a severe impact on the region's economy, limiting the DAANES's ability to maintain services.<sup>229</sup>

### IS insurgency

Although the intensity of IS activity in the majority of Hasakah is less pronounced than in Deir Ezzour, the presence of sleeper cells persists in rural areas and on the periphery of urban settlements, particularly in the southern part of the governorate.<sup>230</sup> IS has been able to conduct violent incursions in Hasakah and Qamishli, and the SDF has conducted a series of targeted operations to disrupt the activities of these cells, resulting in numerous arrests in Hasakah and Qamishli, as well as villages in the vicinity of Shaddady.<sup>231</sup>

Hasakah city itself, divided between Kurdish-controlled northern areas and Arab-majority southern suburbs, experiences distinct security dynamics. While the northern parts are more stable, the southern areas remain vulnerable to occasional IS infiltration.<sup>232</sup> In southern Hasakah, the situation is similar to that in Deir Ezzour in terms of IS activity. This is largely along the road that runs north-south from Shadaddy to Deir Ezzour.<sup>233</sup>

IS has primarily focused its attacks on officials affiliated with the DAANES and the SDF.<sup>234</sup> However, the group has also targeted civilians, including small business owners, individuals with opposing views to those of IS, oil trucks, and SAA personnel in the security squares of Hasakah and Qamishli.<sup>235</sup>

The Al-Hol camp remains a focal point of IS influence in Hasakah.<sup>236</sup> Internally, the camp is characterised by extremist ideology and violence, with IS-affiliated women enforcing strict control over its population.<sup>237</sup> Weapons and money are smuggled into the camp, enabling

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<sup>227</sup> ICG: 25; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 8

<sup>228</sup> ICG: 27; Alexander McKeever: 19

<sup>229</sup> ICG 27

<sup>230</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 18; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 11; Alexander McKeever: 14; Sherwan Yousef: 17; Dino Krause: 21; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 27; An organisation promoting human rights: 18; Gregory Waters: 24; Hoshang Hasan: 16; STJ: 15

<sup>231</sup> Alexander McKeever: 17; Dino Krause: 22; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 26; Dino Krause: 22; An organisation promoting human rights: 13; Gregory Waters: 26; A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 7; SJAC: 35; Enab Baladi, *Islamic State claims operation in Qamishli center for first time since 2019*, 18 February 2024, [url](#); NPA, *SDF captures 34 ISIS members in two months*, 7 September 2024, [url](#); NPA, *SDF arrests 4 ISIS members in Syria's Hasakah*, 23 August 2024, [url](#); SOHR, *Security operation | SDF special units arrest individual accused of "funding families of ISIS members" inhabiting camps in Al-Hasakah city*, 18 October 2024, [url](#); Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – October 2024*, 5 November 2024, [url](#);

<sup>232</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 12

<sup>233</sup> Alexander McKeever: 14

<sup>234</sup> A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 8; Sherwan Yousef: 17; Hoshang Hasan: 15; STJ: 15; Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – September 2024*, 14 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>235</sup> A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 8; Hoshang Hasan: 15; An NGO operating in Northeast Syria: 30

<sup>236</sup> A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 12; Enab Baladi, *Islamic State claims operation in Qamishli center for first time since 2019*, 18 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>237</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 19; Dino Krause: 27-29; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 26-28

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

continued unrest and attempts to liberate detained IS members.<sup>238</sup> While the camp's remote location limits its immediate impact on surrounding areas, there have been reports of insurgent activity on the road leading to the camp, which creates tension in the area.<sup>239</sup>

### Tension between the SDF and the GoS

Tensions between the SDF and the former government's forces periodically escalated around the GoS-controlled security squares in Hasakah city and Qamishli.<sup>240</sup> These disputes sometimes resulted in SDF blockades preventing food, water and fuel from entering the security squares.<sup>241</sup> There have been reports of civilian casualties, although these incidents rarely escalated into direct conflict.<sup>242</sup> There have also been reports of intra-factional fighting between groups allied to the GoS in the security square of Hasakah in late 2023 and 2024.<sup>243</sup>

## 5.3 Raqqa governorate

### 5.3.1 Geography and demography

The Raqqa Governorate is situated in north-central Syria, with the Aleppo Governorate to the west, the Hasakah and Deir Ezzour Governorates to the east, the Hama and Homs Governorates to the south, and Türkiye to the north.<sup>244</sup> The governorate is subdivided into three administrative districts: Raqqa, Al-Thawra, and Tell Abyad, with Raqqa city designated as its capital.<sup>245</sup>

As of July 2023, UNOCHA estimated the population of Raqqa Governorate at 847,132, including 152,955 IDPs.<sup>246</sup> Approximately 90% of Raqqa's population are ethnic Arabs associated with local tribes, while the remaining 10% comprises other ethnic groups, including Kurds, Turkmens, Circassians, and Armenians. The majority of the Arab population adheres to Sunni Islam. The majority of Raqqa's population and resources are situated in areas under the control of the SDF.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Dino Krause: 31-32; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 31-32; Gregory Waters: 32; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 9; Jusoor For Studies: 10

<sup>239</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 19; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 33; Alexander McKeever: 14; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 29; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 18, 19; STJ: 16

<sup>240</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 30; Enab Baladi, Northern Syria: "Security Squares" manage SDF and regime interests, 9 October 2023, [url](#); Enab Baladi, After al-Hasakah, SDF lifts siege on security square in Qamishli, 15 August 2024, [url](#); SOHR, *Amid high alert | Internal Security Forces "Asayish" impose siege on security square in Al-Hasakah city*, 7 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>241</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 30; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 10; A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 10; Jusoor For Studies: 12; Enab Baladi, After al-Hasakah, SDF lifts siege on security square in Qamishli, 15 August 2024, [url](#); SOHR, *Amid high alert | Internal Security Forces "Asayish" impose siege on security square in Al-Hasakah city*, 7 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>242</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 30,21; Jusoor For Studies: 11

<sup>243</sup> SJAC: 15; SOHR, *Amid unknown fate of the commander of "NDF" | Regime forces take control of security zone in Al-Hasakah city*, 22 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>244</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 101

<sup>245</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 111

<sup>246</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2024: Syrian Arab Republic*, 3 March 2024, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>247</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 159

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### 5.3.2 Actors and territorial control

The central areas of Raqqa governorate are under the control of the SDF, while the southern regions were, until recently, under the control of the former Syrian government and its allies.<sup>248</sup> The GoS forces, in collaboration with Russian troops, maintained a presence along the frontlines, which separated SDF-controlled areas from the Operation Peace Spring zone in the northern part of the governorate under the control of the SNA and Türkiye.<sup>249</sup> After the recent developments and shifts in territorial control in November and December 2024, the SDF has advanced deeper into the southern areas of Raqqa.<sup>250</sup>

The northern part of the governorate was predominantly under the control of the Turkish armed forces and the SNA, belonging to the area known as Operation Peace Spring.<sup>251</sup> The Turkish zone of influence, 120 kilometres long and 32 kilometres deep, stretched from Tell Abyad in the west to Ras al-Ayn in the east. It is bordered by Türkiye in the north and the M4 motorway in the south.<sup>252</sup>

The Operation Peace Spring area was the base of operations for several factions of the SNA, including the 20th Division, Faylaq Al-Majd, Ahrar Al-Sharqiya, and the Al-Hamza Division. Military police affiliated with Türkiye operated sub-branches in cities under the control of the SNA and oversaw the management of detention facilities and prisons, notably in Tell Abyad.<sup>253</sup>

IS cells were more active in the southern parts of Raqqa controlled by the former government, as well as in Deir Ezzour.<sup>254</sup> Despite the decline in IS control since 2017, the group still maintained a presence in Raqqa's rural, eastern and southern regions.<sup>255</sup> The IS presence in the Kurdish controlled areas of Raqqa governorate remained quite robust, albeit less significant than in Deir Ezzour or southern Hasakah.<sup>256</sup> IS insurgent activity persisted in Raqqa city and in the area between the city and Tel Samen.<sup>257</sup>

### 5.3.3 Recent security trends

#### 5.3.3.1 ACLED security events in Kurdish controlled areas in Raqqa

The figure below is based on ACLED-data and aims to give an understanding of the level of violence in the Kurdish controlled areas of Raqqa governorate during the reference period 1 January to 15 November 2024. The types of incidents presented are *explosions/remote*

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<sup>248</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 159; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 112

<sup>249</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 113

<sup>250</sup> TWI, *Supporting the SDF in Post-Assad Syria*, 13 December 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Syria war live tracker: Maps and charts*, 13 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>251</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p.113

<sup>252</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p.113

<sup>253</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p.113

<sup>254</sup> Dino Krause: 15; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 24; Fabrice Balanche: 9; ICG: 23; Sherwan Yousef (Journalist): 29

<sup>255</sup> Hoshang Hasan: 21; An organisation promoting human rights: 20; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 1

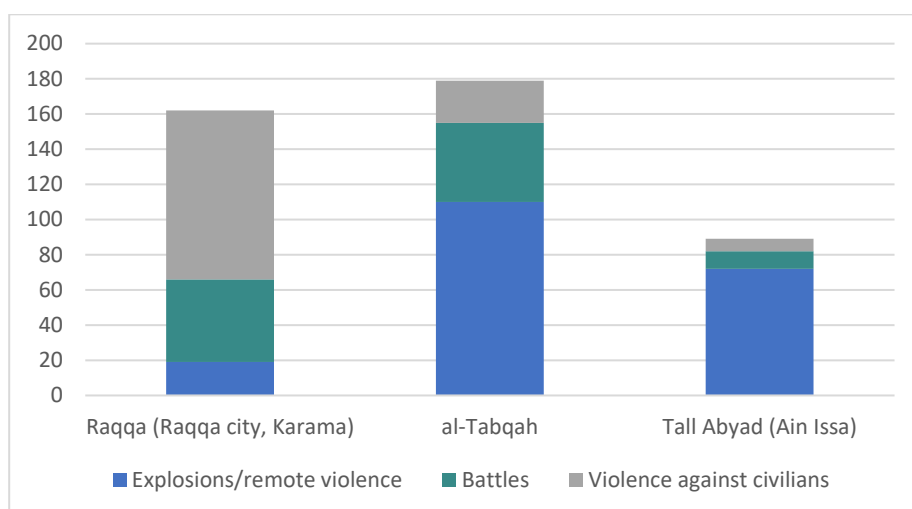
<sup>256</sup> Gregory Waters: 22; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 24

<sup>257</sup> Alexander Mxckeever: 21

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

*violence, battles, and violence against civilians.*<sup>258</sup> With the larger part of the governorate being under Kurdish control, only a small area in the south is controlled by the GoS, in addition to the Operation Peace Spring area in the north which is entirely under the control of Turkish forces/Turkish-backed groups,<sup>259</sup> these areas are not represented in the figure below.

Figure 3: Security Incidents in areas under Kurdish control in Raqqa Governorate, 1 January – 15 November 2024



Source: Data from ACLED compiled by DIS/Lifos<sup>260</sup>

In total the Kurdish controlled areas of Raqqa have experienced 430 incidents (out of total 550 incidents for the whole governorate) during the reference period, where most of the incidents took place in al-Tabqah and Raqqa (341 incidents). There is an extensive variation in the type of incidents that are dominant in the different Kurdish areas in this governorate. In Raqqa city and Karama, most of the incidents reported were cases of violence against civilians (96 incidents) mostly attributed to the SDF or Asayish detaining civilians during raids and at checkpoints. A considerable amount of the incidents in this area has also been battles (47 incidents), all of which were armed clashes mostly between SDF and different armed groups (often unidentified by ACLED), tribal disputes, and IS-activity.

The majority of incidents reported in al-Tabqah were explosions/remote violence (110 incidents), mainly in the form of air/drone strikes conducted by Russian forces targeting IS in the region. There were 45 incidents of battles reported in al-Tabqah, these were all armed clashes, most of which were IS attacking SDF or GoS positions. Explosions/remote violence

<sup>258</sup> ACLED, *Codebook*, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>259</sup> United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Syrian Arab Republic: *Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024, July 2024*, [url](#)

<sup>260</sup> ACLED, Data Export Tool, January-15 November 2024 (data extracted 2024-11-16), [url](#)



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

made the majority of the incidents in Tell Abyad (Ayn Issa) (72 incidents), a larger part of which were shelling/artillery/missile attacks attributed to Turkish forces.<sup>261</sup>

### *5.3.3.2 Security situation in the Kurdish controlled areas of Raqqa and impact on civilians*

According to several interviewed sources, the Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqa governorate are relatively stable compared to other regions of North and East Syria, such as Deir Ezzour or Aleppo.<sup>262</sup> The city of Raqqa, which functions as the administrative capital, remains comparatively secure due to the strong presence of the SDF and their control over key infrastructure.<sup>263</sup> Nevertheless, there have been accounts of civilian fatalities and injuries resulting from instances where SDF patrols resorted to the use lethal force against civilians, including in Raqqa city.<sup>264</sup>

### *Clashes between SDF and the Turkish-backed SNA*

A primary security concern in the areas controlled by the SDF pertains to attacks by Turkish military forces and SNA groups with ties to Türkiye.<sup>265</sup> The northern rural parts of the governorate are situated in close proximity to the frontlines between SDF-controlled areas and the SNA/Türkiye-controlled Operation Peace Spring area.<sup>266</sup> The most intense fighting is taking place in areas such as Ain Issa, Tell Abyad, and parts of the M4 road.<sup>267</sup>

There have been no reports of any notable clashes or bombardments by Turkish forces in Raqqa city itself in recent years.<sup>268</sup> However, the northern and rural areas of the governorate continue to experience a higher prevalence of this type of security incident, particularly along the frontlines with Türkiye and the Turkish-backed SNA forces.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, January-15 November 2024 (data extracted 2024-11-16), [url](#)

<sup>262</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 4; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 15; A local NGO worker from North and East Syria: 20; Heybar Othman: 24; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 19;; Sherwan Yousef: 27; An organisation promoting human rights: 20

<sup>263</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 4,5

<sup>264</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 114; SJAC: 1; SNHR, *Man named Abdul Muhsin al-Asman killed, his brother injured, by SDF gunfire in Raqqa city*, May 27, 2024, 28 May 2024, [url](#); SNHR, *68 Civilian Deaths, Including 13 Children and Three Women as well as Nine Deaths due to Torture, Documented in Syria in April 2024*, 1 May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>265</sup> SJAC: 2, 16, 31-33; Fabrice Balanche: 8; A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 25; Hoshang Hasan: 20; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 16, 19-20; Alexander Mckeever: 21, 22; Gregory Waters: 22, 23

<sup>266</sup> Heybar Othman (Journalist): 6, 24; Fabrice Balanche: 4,7; Jusoor For Studies: 15, 16; STJ: 18; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 17; Alexander Mckeever: 20; Hoshang Hasan: 22

<sup>267</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 6-8; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 16, 17; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 28; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 2, 16-17; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 21; Alexander Mckeever: 20; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 28; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 22; Heybar Othman (journalist): 6, 24; STJ: 18,20

<sup>268</sup> A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 20; Alexander Mckeever: 20; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 21; Heybar Othman: 24

<sup>269</sup> Jusoor For Studies: 15, 16; RIC: 1; SJAC: 16; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 2, 16-17; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 21; Alexander Mckeever: 20; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 21; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 28; Heybar Othman: 6

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Areas such as Ayn Issa, Tell Abyad, and sections of the M4 road remain subject to shelling, drone strikes, and intermittent clashes between the SDF and SNA.<sup>270</sup> EUAA reported an escalation in Turkish attacks in mid-January 2024.<sup>271</sup> However, according to ICG, the frequency of shelling and clashes between the SDF and the Turkish-backed SNA in northern Raqqa has decreased since 2020.<sup>272</sup> In a related development, an organisation promoting human rights has indicated a decline in the number of confrontations between the SDF and SNA in the vicinity of the frontline city of Ayn Issa, as of October 2024.<sup>273</sup>

It has been reported that civilians utilising smuggling routes across frontlines in Syria have been targeted. The SDF and the SNA have reportedly employed military firepower against civilians attempting to traverse the border between DAANES-controlled areas and those under the control of the SNA and Türkiye.<sup>274</sup>

Raqqa remained one of the governorates most severely impacted by the presence of unexploded ordnance.<sup>275</sup> The detonation of landmines resulted in a considerable number of civilian casualties, including fatalities, in the northern rural areas of Raqqa, as well as in the eastern parts of the governorate.<sup>276</sup>

The impact of these incidents on civilian life and the region's infrastructure is significant and detrimental, resulting in civilian casualties and displacement.<sup>277</sup> Consequently, while Raqqa city remains relatively secure, the northern areas are experiencing security concerns, prompting residents to relocate.<sup>278</sup>

### Islamic State insurgency

In addition to attacks by Turkish forces and SNA groups supported by Türkiye, the continued presence of IS sleeper cells in Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqa remained a security concern during the reporting period.<sup>279</sup> Their primary activities involve extortion, targeting SDF personnel, and occasional attacks on security checkpoints and detention facilities.<sup>280</sup> The group's tactics include targeted killings, bombings, and prison breaks. Notably, IS has attempted

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<sup>270</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 6-8; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 16,17; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 28; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 2, 16-17; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 21; Alexander McKeever: 20; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 28; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 22; Heybar Othman (journalist): 6, 24; STJ: 18, 20; Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – October 2024*, 13 November 2024, [url](#); Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – September 2024*, 14 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>271</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 114

<sup>272</sup> ICG: 22

<sup>273</sup> An organisation promoting human rights: 21

<sup>274</sup> Jusoor For Studies: 17

<sup>275</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>276</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>277</sup> Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 5, 6; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 22; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>278</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 4, 8; A Syrian Arab Journalist From Enab Baladi: 28;

<sup>279</sup> SJAC: 2, 16, 31-33; Fabrice Balanche: 8, A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 25; Hoshang Hasan: 20; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 16, 19-20; Alexander McKeever: 21, 22; Gregory Waters: 22, 23

<sup>280</sup> Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 29; An organisation promoting human rights: 20; Alexander McKeever: 22, 23; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 20; Heybar Othman (journalist): 26; Dino Krause: 16

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

several prison escapes, including major incident in March and September 2024, where IS members managed to break out of the central prison in Raqqa.<sup>281</sup>

IS attacks on SDF forces are predominantly concentrated in the smaller villages and towns situated to the north and northeast of Raqqa city. These attacks are primarily directed towards SDF/Asayish checkpoints and vehicles.<sup>282</sup> The SDF forces conducted a series of operations targeting IS cells within the DAANES-controlled areas of Raqqa. These operations resulted in the apprehension and neutralisation of multiple IS members.<sup>283</sup>

While the primary targets of the IS in Raqqa are the SDF,<sup>284</sup> IS attacks on civilians in Raqqa mirror patterns observed in Deir Ezzour and Hasakah, targeting small-scale entrepreneurs such as shopkeepers and farmers in rural regions.<sup>285</sup> However, the frequency of such attacks in the Raqqa area remains relatively low, and IS extortion in Raqqa city is not as widespread as it once was.<sup>286</sup>

### Tension between the SDF and the GoS

There have been no reported confrontations between former Syrian government forces and the SDF in Raqqa. The interaction between the two in this area was characterised by minimal collaboration, largely influenced by the Syrian army's deployment and patrol activities near the border with Türkiye, along with the Russian military presence in Tell Tamer.<sup>287</sup> However, according to Sherwan Yousef, small "resistance" groups affiliated with the former Syrian government, which opposed both the Americans and the SDF, have attempted to destabilise security in Raqqa by planting booby-trapped bombs in public areas. Despite these activities, their influence remained minimal prior to the downfall of the former government.<sup>288</sup>

## 5.4 Deir Ezzour governorate

### 5.4.1 Geography and demography

Situated in the north and eastern areas of Syria the Dier Ezzour governorate borders Iraq to the East and Hasakah governorate to the north, Raqqa governorate to the west and Homs

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<sup>281</sup> Heybar Othman (journalist): 26; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 29; Alexander Mckeever: 22; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 20; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 114-15; Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – September 2024*, 14 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>282</sup> Dino Krause: 16

<sup>283</sup> US government, *Operation Inherent Resolve And Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress April 1, 2024 – June 30, 2024*, 1 August 2024, [url](#), p. 29; Rudaw, *SDF kills one in ISIS cell raid in Raqqa*, 28 July 2024, [url](#); NPA, *SDF announces killing ISIS financier in Syria's Raqqa*, 24 March 2024, [url](#); NPA, *SDF, CTG arrest senior ISIS leader in Syria's Raqqa*, 8 September 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – October 2024*, 13 November 2024, [url](#); Etana Syria, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – September 2024*, 14 October 2024, [url](#); NPA, *SDF captures 34 ISIS members in two months*, 7 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>284</sup> A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 20; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 21; Heybar Othman (journalist): 26; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 114-15

<sup>285</sup> Dino Krause: 17; Heybar Othman (journalist): 36

<sup>286</sup> Dino Krause: 17; An organisation promoting human rights: 20; Gregory Waters: 22

<sup>287</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 18

<sup>288</sup> Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 26

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

governorate to the south.<sup>289</sup> The governorate is subdivided into three administrative districts Deir Ezzour, Al-Mayadin, and Al Bukamal (Abu Kamal), with Deir Ezzour city designated as its capital. Most major urban settlements, villages, and towns are located along the Euphrates River as well as along the Al-Khabour River which runs north to south in the governorate and is a tributary river to the Euphrates River.<sup>290</sup>

As of July 2023, UNOCHA estimated the population of Deir Ezzour governorate at 1,200,181 including 166,041 IDPs.<sup>291</sup> The inhabitants of Deir Ezzour governorate have been described as ‘overwhelmingly’ Sunni Arab and the local society characterized by a large ethnic, religious and sectarian homogeneity.<sup>292</sup>

### 5.4.2 Actors and territorial control

Prior to the fall of the Assad government in Syria in early December 2024, Deir Ezzour governorate was almost completely split in half in terms of areas of control. DAANES-authorities and the SDF controlled the eastern parts of the governorate and the former government controlled the areas west of the Euphrates River. Until December 2024, the GoS also controlled a narrow stretch of territory on the eastern bank of Euphrates River, commonly referred to as the “seven villages”. In early December 2024, this was still a contested area, with heavy clashes ongoing between pro-government militias and the SDF.<sup>293</sup> Iranian-backed militias withdrew from the seven villages, Salhiya, Tabia, Hatla, Khesham, Marrat, Mazloum, and Husseiniya during the same period.<sup>294</sup>

In early December, GoS forces and Iranian backed militias withdrew from the cities of Deir Ezzour and Al Bukamal (Abu Kamal), on the western bank of the Euphrates River allowing the SDF to gain control of these cities.<sup>295</sup> In early December 2024, the SDF took control of these cities for a brief period, but subsequently withdrew due to protests from the local Arab population and armed clashes between the SDF and the HTS-led Military Operations Department (MOD).<sup>296</sup> Since the HTS-led MOD assumed control of Deir Ezzour city, several

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<sup>289</sup> United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic: *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>290</sup> United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic: *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>291</sup> UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2024: Syrian Arab Republic*, 3 March 2024, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>292</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 201

<sup>293</sup> United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic: *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, September 2024, [url](#); EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), pp. 120-121; Etana Syria, *North-West Offensive Update #3*, 3 December 2024, 3 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>294</sup> CEI, Wladimir Wilgenburg, *Eastern Syria After Assad*, 10 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>295</sup> Etana Syria, *Syria Update #6: 6 December 2024*, 6 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>296</sup> Times of Israel, *Jihadist rebels capture eastern Syria’s Deir Ezzor from US-backed, Kurdish-led force*, 11 december 2024, [url](#); Syria Direct, *Protests and SDF defections: Discontent simmers in eastern Deir e-Zor*, 13 December 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

members of Arab descent and commanding officers of the SDF-affiliated Deir Ezzour Military Council have defected from the SDF.<sup>297</sup>

There are several anti-SDF tribal militias operating in the governorate, including the Aghedat Lions Battalion and the recently established Arab Tribal and Clan Forces (ATCF). Both of these have had an active presence in the parts of Deir Ezzour governorate controlled by DAANES. These groups have entrenched themselves as a bona fide resistance movement to the SDF, and until the fall of the Assad government, they were supported and supplied by the GoS and Iran. These aforementioned groups launched continued attacks against SDF and villages in DAANES-controlled areas on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River.<sup>298</sup>

The Islamic state has a significant presence across Deir Ezzour governorate but holds no true territorial control over territory in DAANES-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour governorate and is essentially composed of sleeper cells with an active presence in the areas.<sup>299</sup>

### 5.4.3 Recent security trends

#### 5.4.3.1 ACLED security events in Kurdish controlled areas in Deir Ezzour governorate

The figure below is based on ACLED-data and aims to give an understanding of the level of violence in the Kurdish controlled areas of Deir Ezzour governorate during the reference period 1 January to 15 November 2024. The types of incidents presented are *explosions/remote violence, battles, and violence against civilians*.<sup>300</sup> Deir Ezzour governorate was divided along the Euphrates River, with the SDF controlling areas east of the river and the GoS and its allies holding territories to the west.<sup>301</sup> However, it remains difficult to distinguish exactly what areas/villages belong to what sphere along the contact line, therefore the areas in the figure below are just a rough estimation of the areas under Kurdish control in the governorate.

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<sup>297</sup> Syria Direct, *Protests and SDF defections: Discontent simmers in eastern Deir e-Zor*, 13 December 2024, [url](#); Institute for the Study of war, *Iran Update*, December 16 2024, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>298</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), pp. 120-121

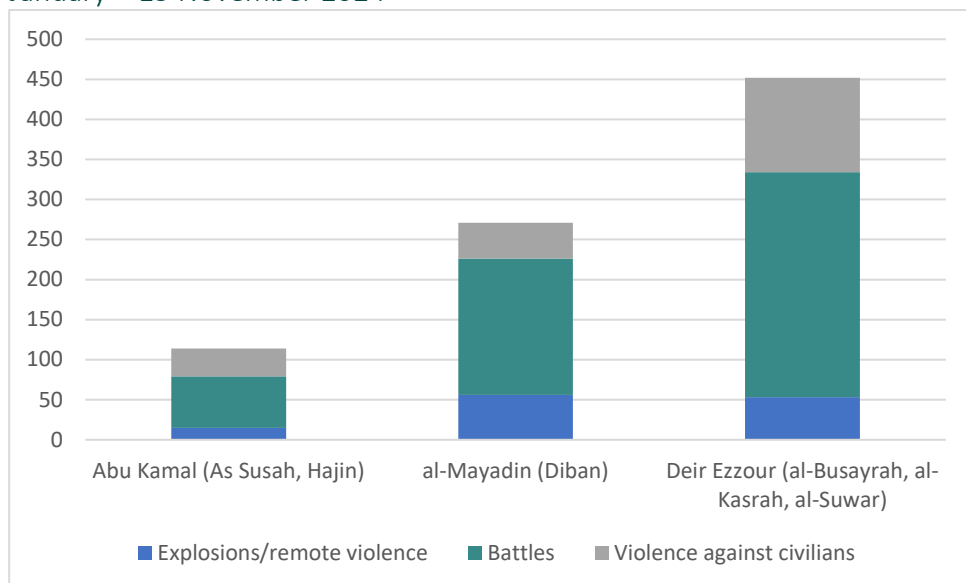
<sup>299</sup> Gregory Waters: 1, 3

<sup>300</sup> ACLED, *Codebook*, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>301</sup> United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic: *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, September 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Figure 4: Security Incidents in areas under Kurdish control in Deir Ezzour Governorate, 1 January – 15 November 2024



Source: Data from ACLED compiled by DIS/Lifos<sup>302</sup>

During the reference period the Kurdish areas in Deir Ezzour were subjected to 837 incidents (out of total 1 733 incidents in the entire governorate), according to ACLED's data. The most dominant type of incident in Deir Ezzour during the reporting period were battles. A substantial part of these battles were categorized as armed clashes between different tribal militias and the SDF, but there were also clashes reported between GoS-forces and the SDF, and armed clashes between IS and the SDF. The data also showed cases of inter-tribal clashes in the area. The area where the majority of the incidents took place is the Deir Ezzour district, mainly the sub-districts of al-Busayrah, al-Kasrah, and al-Suwar (452 incidents). In these areas 282 battles took place during the reporting period, and a significant number of incidents of violence against civilians (118 incidents). The larger part of these incidents were attributed to the SDF detaining civilians, and IS-attacks on civilians. Regarding incidents of explosions/remote violence in the Kurdish areas of Deir Ezzour there were a variety of incidents (air/drone attacks, IED, shelling, etc.) in this category and mostly involving GoS forces and pro-government militias and IS.<sup>303</sup>

### 5.4.3.2 Security situation in the Kurdish controlled areas of Deir Ezzour Governorate and impact on civilians

#### Clashes between SDF and Arab-tribes

The Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour Governorate have witnessed frequent and ongoing-armed clashes and attacks throughout 2024 between Arab tribal militias the SDF under DAANES-control, which has contributed to fragile and fragmented security situation in the area.

<sup>302</sup> ACLED, *Data Export Tool, January-15 November 2024*, (data extracted 2024-11-16), [url](#)

<sup>303</sup> ACLED, *Data Export Tool, January-15 November 2024*, (data extracted 2024-11-16), [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

The frequent and ongoing clashes between Arab tribal groups and SDF have resulted in civilian casualties and displacement of civilians particularly in towns and villages along the Euphrates River.<sup>304</sup> The ongoing conflict in Deir Ezzour was sustained by a multitude of factors e.g. the control of oil fields in DAANES-administered areas, the positioning of Iranian militias in territories held by the former government on the western bank of the Euphrates River directly opposite SDF-controlled areas on the eastern bank and the presence of the International Coalition forces against the IS presence in the area.<sup>305</sup>

Armed attacks by Arab tribal militias typically consist of smaller units, between 30-40 individuals, conducting cross-river raids and small-scale attacks using light weapons from areas on the western bank of the Euphrates areas controlled by the former government into SDF-controlled areas on the eastern bank of the Euphrates.<sup>306</sup>

Arab tribal militias primarily conduct guerrilla-style attacks against SDF assets, including vehicles, patrols, and checkpoints. Occasionally, they target civilians suspected of informing for the SDF. While there have been instances of these militias attacking civilians associated with the DAANES, analyst Alexander McKeever noted that, as of October 2024, no such incidents had been reported.<sup>307</sup> Fabrice Balanche stated that most clashes between the SDF and Arab Tribal militias occur at night, where the SDF also withdraw to their barracks, leave their checkpoints and stop conducting patrols.<sup>308</sup>

Sources interviewed for this report had various estimations of the number of casualties from the continued fighting between the SDF and Arab tribal militias between January and October 2024, with some sources estimating 100 casualties, while others estimated 64 casualties including 27 civilians as a result of the fighting.<sup>309</sup> The journalist Sherwan Yousef stated that there had been a total of 70 clashes between Arab tribal militias and the SDF in Deir Ezzour between January and October of 2024 resulting in approximately 37 civilian casualties and most prevalent in the areas surrounding Al-Sohail, Busayra, and Ghranij.<sup>310</sup>

The frequent clashes which have been ongoing between the SDF and Arab tribal militias throughout 2024, experienced a particular uptick in clashes in August 2024, when Arab tribal forces launched a major armed attack on SDF positions in the towns of Dhiban, Abu Hamam, Al-Khushkieh, Shuaitat, Al-Latwa and Granij and further down river towards the villages of Baghouz, which in turn forced the SDF to temporarily withdraw from the areas before regaining control of the affected areas. The clashes persisted for about three weeks in August of 2024

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<sup>304</sup> SNHR: 1, 9, 12-13; SJAC: 9-12, 25, 28-29; RIC: 4; Fabrice Balanche: 31; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 12-14; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 13; An organization promoting human rights: 23; A Syrian-Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 16, 18; Sherwan Yousef (Journalist): 4, 21; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 5, 7-8; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 31-32; Haybar Othman (journalist): 21, 23; Jusoor For Studies: 3, 19; STJ: 22

<sup>305</sup> An organisation promoting Human rights: 22

<sup>306</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 8

<sup>307</sup> Alexander McKeever: 11

<sup>308</sup> Fabrice Blanche: 36

<sup>309</sup> Hoshang Hasan (Journalist): 8; ICG: 16

<sup>310</sup> Sherwan Yousef (journalist):

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

and were concluded with an agreement which included the cessation of SDF sieges and GoS-Controlled security squares in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli in return for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Deir Ezzour. The clashes resulted in casualties and fatalities on both sides. Artillery fire between SDF, Arab tribal militias and GoS-units from both sides of the Euphrates River resulted in displacement of civilians from villages in both SDF-controlled areas and in GoS-controlled areas west of the Euphrates River.<sup>311</sup> Civilians were displaced from the villages of Diban, Abu Hammam, Al-Kishkiyah, Al-Dahlah, and a number of other villages in the area.<sup>312</sup>

In late September 2024, a renewed insurgency and incursion into DAANES-controlled areas by Arab tribal militias took place, which targeted SDF positions. With the help of US-led coalition support, the SDF was able to manage and contain the cross-river infiltration. The targets of such smaller cross-river incursions by Arab tribal militias are typically SDF-military units, personnel and checkpoints.<sup>313</sup>

The continued violent attacks and shelling and the sporadic uptick in violent clashes throughout 2024 between the SDF and Arab tribal militias is a continuation of hostilities between the SDF and Arab tribal militias which broke out in August 2023. Those clashes broke out when SDF arrested Ahmed Al-Khabil (Abu Khawla), the leader of the Deir Ezzour Military Council, which chiefly consisted of local Arab tribal members, on fears that he would switch his allegiances to side with the GoS and Iran and drive SDF out of areas controlled by the Deir Ezzour Military Council on the eastern banks of the Euphrates River.<sup>314</sup>

Reports of SDF's indiscriminate response and further civilian casualties as a result of the uprisings lead to a large increase in the amount of Arab tribal forces joining the rebellion against the SDF in 2023. Particular when Aghedat tribal leader Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Hefel and his men of the Aghedat tribe, joined the uprising against the SDF particularly in the towns of Dhiban, Al-Shuhail, Al-Busayrah.<sup>315</sup>

The former government and Iran have been instigating Arab tribes against the SDF for a number of years in an attempt to undermine the SDF, in part by providing substantial weaponry and equipment. Coupled with support from GoS and Iranian-backed forces, from government-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour Governorate, this has increased the tribes' capabilities to an

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<sup>311</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 124; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 12; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 15; STJ: 24; SNHR: 12; SJAC: 26; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 14; Alexander McKeever: 10, 12; ICG: 15; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 16; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 5, 7; Heybar Othman (Journalist): 23; STJ: 24; RIC: 2-5; Jusoor For Studies: 19; IGC 8

<sup>312</sup> SJAC: 28

<sup>313</sup> Alexander McKeever: 10-12; SJAC: 29

<sup>314</sup> STJ:22; EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 123; Heybar Othman (Journalist): 15-16; A Syrian Human rights organization: 1-2; ICG: 12; Alexander McKeever: 9

<sup>315</sup> EUAA, *Syria – Security Situation*, October 2024, [url](#), p. 123; Heybar Othman(Journalist): 15-16; ICG: 12



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

extent and led to the increase in clashes between Arab tribal forces and the SDF since August 2023.<sup>316</sup>

Longstanding grievances between the Arab tribes and DAANES-administration have persisted for years and stem in part from an unequal allocation of economic resources, particularly oil revenues from refineries in the areas to the local Arab majority population and a lack of political representation in DAANES-controlled areas in the eyes of these population groups.<sup>317</sup>

Most tribes in the Deir Ezzour area have aligned themselves with Abu Khawla in opposition to SDF and DAANES authorities, while other tribal leaders in the area have expressed solidarity with the SDF and participated in the fight against Abu Khawla's affiliated tribal militias and Iranian militias, Hizbollah and GoS. Notably, the majority of SDF casualties have been individuals of Arab descent. The clashes cannot exclusively be seen as an Arab uprising against the Kurds, rather the confrontations can be seen as clashes between the SDF and specific Arab groups and tribal militias in Deir Ezour. It is worth noticing that not all members of the Aghedat tribe are engaged in conflict with the SDF. Ibrahim Al-Hefels cousin, Sheikh Hefel Al-Hefel has a positive relationship with the SDF. Similarly tribes in the western part of the governorate, as well as tribes from Afar, Baghouz and Susa in the eastern part of the governorate or in the following towns of Markada, Al-Sour, Hajin, Al-Sousah, Al-Sha'fah, Al-Baghouz and several adjoining villages have not rebelled against the SDF.<sup>318</sup>

According to ICG, the dynamics in the Deir Ezzour governorate created an environment for external actors to intervene and create tension and instability. The primary aim of this tribal insurgency, including the former government's and Iran's main intention, was prior to the downfall of the Assad government, essentially to regain control over the resources in the region.<sup>319</sup>

### IS insurgency

On a general level and across DAANES-controlled areas in north and east Syria, IS activity across the governorates and cities in the northeast encompassed all three aspects of its operations: violent attacks, financial activities, and human smuggling. IS attacks occurred multiple times a week, while in comparison; SDF counter-IS operations were conducted multiple times a month. The first half of 2024 was particularly violent, with twice as many attacks during this period as in all of 2023. While the level of violence has since decreased, it remains elevated. In the spring of 2024, the SDF conducted several counter-IS operations, resulting in the capture of low- and mid-level IS command officials. IS has been able to maintain a high level of violence despite the number of counter-operations conducted by the SDF.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> ICG: 11, 15

<sup>317</sup> ICG: 10

<sup>318</sup> A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 3-5; Heybar Othman (journalist): 18-20;

<sup>319</sup> ICG: 11, 14

<sup>320</sup> Gregory Waters: 4

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

In 2024 increased IS activity and attacks have taken place in Deir Ezzour, where sleeper cells have carried out frequent attacks on SDF positions, oil infrastructure civilian officials of the DAANES-administration and civilians.<sup>321</sup> These incidents often involve extortion under the guise of religious tax collection, and have increased significantly from 2023.<sup>322</sup>

Deir Ezzour has been the region most profoundly impacted by IS violence. A substantial escalation in attacks in this area has been observed, with IS attacks against the SDF in Deir Ezzour having increased considerably in 2024 compared to 2023. The number of attacks against the SDF in 2024 was 168, while the number of IS-initiated attacks against the SDF in 2023 was 64. These attacks were predominantly characterised by so-called hit-and-run tactics employing light weaponry, in addition to a limited number of attacks utilising rocket-propelled grenades against SDF checkpoints, and a few cases of rocket attacks on houses belonging to members of the SDF. While the primary targets of IS attacks in Deir Ezzour province are the SDF, according to the Syrian Human Rights Organisation, IS activities rarely led to civilian casualties in Deir Ezzour's DAANES-controlled regions in the first 10 months of 2024.<sup>323</sup>

Contrary to other sources, an NGO operating in North and East Syria stated that IS attacks have decreased in Deir Ezzour compared to previous years, with IS shifting its focus to extortion under the guise of religious (zakat) tax collection.<sup>324</sup>

Dino Krause assessed that IS attacks in Syria tend to be underreported,<sup>325</sup> and according to Jusoor for Studies, it is specifically the number of IS attacks in DAANES-controlled areas in Deir Ezzour that are underreported, and the total number of attacks is unknown. This is because IS does not claim all their attacks against the SDF in DAANES-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour Governorate.<sup>326</sup>

In the five towns of Shuhayl, Busayra, Diban, Zire and Wajes in the areas of DAANES control in central Deir Ezzour governorate, there is a significant presence of IS, which is reported to exercise authority as a shadow government. IS takes control of the villages during the night, despite the absence of an official administrative structure. The IS presence in these towns consists of nighttime patrols, extortion, intimidation of the civilian population, and greater freedom of movement for IS. DAANES security forces do not enter these towns at night to conduct counter-IS operations.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Dino Krause: 18-19; Alexander Mckeever: 8; A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 7; Gregory Waters: 4, 14, 27, 31; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 14-15; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 23; RIC 6; SNHR: 4, 10; SJAC 30, 34; Fabrice Balanche: 3; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 5; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 4, 16, 18; An organization promoting human rights: 1, 25-27; Heybar Othman (journalist): 10, 13; Jusoor For Studies: 21-25

<sup>322</sup> ICG: 18; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 14; Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 20; Hoshang Hasan: 9; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 34; Fabrice Balanche: 37-38; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim(journalist): 5; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 18; Heybar Othman (journalist): 10

<sup>323</sup> Dino Krause: 18-19; Fabrice Balanche: 37; A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 8; ICG: 17; Hoshang Hasan: 10

<sup>324</sup> An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 34

<sup>325</sup> Dino Krause: 1

<sup>326</sup> Jusoor For Studies: 25

<sup>327</sup> Gregory Waters: 11; Heybar Othman:11; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 4

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Three of the abovementioned towns have had a significant IS presence since 2021, which has now expanded to two more towns since 2022. IS does not have territorial control or permanent checkpoints in Deir Ezzour, but it is very dangerous to travel in the area at night, according to Gregory Waters.<sup>328</sup> The strength of IS, combined with the SDF's lack of capacity in this area, means that IS has nearly free rein to do as they please with the population—whether that involves extortion, recruitment, or simply existing alongside a population that is too intimidated to cooperate with authorities in relation to countering IS.<sup>329</sup>

Deir Ezzour is the area with the highest level of all three of the most prevalent aspects of IS activity i.e. violent attacks, financial activities, and human smuggling. There was regular smuggling across the Euphrates River to areas controlled by the former Syrian government, linking IS activities in the northeast with central Syria. Recruitment for IS occurs in Deir Ezzour, as does outreach to former IS fighters in the region. However, it remains unclear how successful IS has been in recruiting new adult members with no previous affiliation to the group.<sup>330</sup>

There are recent reports of IS 'safe houses' in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour, which the group used for political and religious indoctrination before sending individuals to military training camps. This represents a new development in the Deir Ezzour area and is a trend that, until recently, only occurred in parts of Syria controlled by the Syrian government.<sup>331</sup>

There are regular attacks against Kurdish security forces and threats of violence toward the local population. Targeted assassinations still occur, but not as frequently as in the past. This fragile security situation makes it difficult for NGOs to operate in the area and for services to be provided to local populations in the affected area.<sup>332</sup>

There is an essential lack of SDF presence in the DAANES-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour. There are towns in Deir Ezzour where an SDF security presence exists at the perimeter, monitoring entry and exit, but there is a lack of a permanent interior security presence. This situation has allowed IS cells to persist and grow, and sometimes intermingle and reorganize themselves together with the remainder of local tribal insurgency.<sup>333</sup>

Local sources describe the situation as one of reduced SDF security presence and fewer security operations conducted against IS by the SDF, alongside a simultaneous increase in IS attacks on SDF security forces. SDF counter-IS operations are as of the fall of 2024 not increasing at the same rate as operations conducted by IS. This is due to The SDF's withdrawal

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<sup>328</sup> Gregory Waters: 12

<sup>329</sup> Gregory Waters: 13

<sup>330</sup> Gregory Waters: 14

<sup>331</sup> Gregory Waters: 15

<sup>332</sup> Gregory Waters: 16

<sup>333</sup> Gregory Waters: 17

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

from several towns in the Deir Ezzour Governorate in connection with the 'tribal insurgency' in the autumn of 2023 and reestablished itself with a slightly reduced footprint in the area.<sup>334</sup>

IS has been able to increase its presence and the number of its attacks in Deir Ezzour for a number of reasons. IS has been able to take advantage of Turkish attacks in other areas of DAANES-controlled northeastern Syria closer to the Turkish border, which has forced the SDF to divert manpower and resources from Deir Ezzour to counter this development. The former Syrian government and Iran have supported the tribal insurgency in Deir Ezzour, which has further forced the SDF to divert resources. This has enabled IS to expand its presence and increase the frequency of its attacks in the area.<sup>335</sup> According to Dino Krause's assessment this could indicate that the SDF is struggling to maintain the pace of counter-IS operations in Deir Ezzour.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Gregory Waters: 18

<sup>335</sup> Heybar Othman (journalist): 13; Dino Krause 20

<sup>336</sup> Dino Krause 20

## 6. Freedom of movement

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The movement of individuals within DAANES-controlled areas of Syria was influenced by a number of factors, including administrative requirements, social norms and security incidents during the reporting period. While the ability for residents to travel and relocate in the areas controlled by DAANES was not entirely impeded, a number of factors did exist which presented difficulties for individuals intending to travel or relocate.<sup>337</sup>

These include military conscription, the prevalence of checkpoints, the lack of adequate infrastructure and security incidents, which affect not only civilians in general but also specific groups such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), males of conscription age and those travelling to and from insecure areas such as Deir Ezzour.<sup>338</sup> However, the short- and long-term implications of the recent transition of power in Syria, with regard to civilians' ability to move between the various areas currently controlled by DAANES, remain uncertain.

### 6.1 General freedom of movement

The residents of DAANES-controlled areas have generally been able to travel between the areas of Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir Ezzour.<sup>339</sup> Public transportation in the form of minibuses was available. However, private cars were often preferred, as public transportation options are irregular and of poor quality.<sup>340</sup> Furthermore, fuel shortages are a general constraint on movement in the DAANES-controlled areas of Syria.<sup>341</sup>

Checkpoints, which are predominantly managed by the SDF, are widely distributed and situated at city entrances and major intersections, as well as along the routes connecting Amuda, Qamishli, Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir Ezzour.<sup>342</sup> While individuals passing through checkpoints in areas controlled by the DAANES are typically not subjected to inspections during the daytime, they may be subjected to such procedures at night.<sup>343</sup>

The SDF conducts comprehensive checks at its checkpoints on people entering the DAANES-controlled areas from areas of Syria controlled by the former government.<sup>344</sup> All individuals are

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<sup>337</sup> RIC: 13; SNHR 15; SJAC 36

<sup>338</sup> RIC: 13; SNHR: 15; SJAC: 36; Fabrice Balanche: 42, 43; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 34; A Local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 29, 32; A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 9; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 24, 25; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 36; Jusoor For Studies: 30; STJ: 30; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 24, 25; An organization promoting human rights: 28-30; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 35; A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 9

<sup>339</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 42,43; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 34, 37; Hoshang Hasan: 24

<sup>340</sup> SJAC: 41; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 36; Jusoor For Studies: 30; STJ: 34; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 31

<sup>341</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 49

<sup>342</sup> SJAC: 37; STJ: 35; Sherwan Yousef (Journalist): 32, 33; A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 13; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 36, 38; Fabrice Balanche: 46; SJAC: 37; An organisation promoting human rights: 31

<sup>343</sup> A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 12

<sup>344</sup> SNHR: 15

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

required to present a valid form of identification and proof of residency in the area. Men in the conscription age must also present their military booklet.<sup>345</sup>

### 6.1.1 Regional variations and specific challenges

#### 6.1.1.1 Deir Ezzour

Deir Ezzour is the most precarious area in NES, with significant threats, deriving from increased IS activity, tribal conflicts, and an unstable security situation, especially after dark when the SDF exercises less effective military control over this area.<sup>346</sup> STJ has indicated that there are typically more restrictions in place regarding travel from the Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour to the other areas in north and east Syria under DAANES control.<sup>347</sup>

Additionally, there are a greater number of checkpoints situated between the Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour and the other DAANES-controlled regions of north and east Syria. This is largely attributable to the prevailing security situation in Deir Ezzour, which is less stable than in other DAANES-controlled areas such as Raqqa.<sup>348</sup>

There have been reports of frequent harassment, bribery and extortion of civilians at checkpoints in Deir Ezzour.<sup>349</sup> However, it is often unclear who is responsible for these incidents.<sup>350</sup> The SJAC has documented a number of cases in which the SDF opened fire on civilians who refused to comply with inspection procedures.<sup>351</sup> The security situation in Deir Ezzour makes it dangerous for DAANES employees to travel on roads in the area. They are considered agents for the PKK by IS, which targets them. Additionally, Arab militias backed by the former Syrian government in the region may also attack DAANES employees.<sup>352</sup>

Poor infrastructure in Deir Ezzour further complicates movement in this area, prolonging travel times and increasing exposure to security incidents that occur on the roads such as killings, kidnappings, robberies and IEDs.<sup>353</sup> Furthermore, reports indicate that oil trucks have been subject to frequent attacks in Deir Ezzour,<sup>354</sup> and the southern route between Hasakah and Deir Ezzour is considered particularly exposed.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 9

<sup>346</sup> RIC: 13; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 29; SJAC: 37; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 38

<sup>347</sup> STJ: 37

<sup>348</sup> STJ: 37

<sup>349</sup> SJAC: 37; Fabrice Balanche: 46

<sup>350</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 46

<sup>351</sup> SJAC: 37-40

<sup>352</sup> Sherwan Yousef (journalist): 35

<sup>353</sup> An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 35,37; SJAC: 41

<sup>354</sup> NPA, *ISIS militants attack oil tankers in Deir Ezzour*, 28 August 2024, [url](#); SOHR, *New attack ISIS members attack oil truck and threat drivers to kill them in northern Deir Ezzour countryside*, 7 November 2024, [url](#); NPA, *Gunmen attack oil tankers in Deir ez-Zor*, 26 November 2024, [url](#); Enab Baladi, *For Security Reasons, drivers abandon oil transportation in Deir Ezzour*, 27 August 2024, [url](#); A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 24

<sup>355</sup> Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 36; Sherwan Youssef (journalist): 31; A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 24

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### 6.1.1.2 Hasakah and Raqqa

The M4 road between Hasakah and Raqqa, situated along the frontlines of Operation Peace Spring, is subject to frequent shelling and security incidents.<sup>356</sup> However, the situation on the route between Hasakah and Raqqa is comparatively stable in comparison to the route between Hasakah and Deir Ezzour, situated to the south, as there are less security incidents on this route.<sup>357</sup> Similarly, the occurrence of corruption or extortion at SDF checkpoints in Hasakah and Raqqa is infrequent in comparison with Deir Ezzour.<sup>358</sup> However, instances of extortion and bribery are pervasive along the routes traversing DAANES-controlled areas between cities.<sup>359</sup>

Although there have been some improvements to the infrastructure in the area,<sup>360</sup> it remains the case that there are a number of security issues related to movement when travelling in these areas, including the possibility of IS attacks, shelling and Turkish drone strikes on these roads, as well as instances of kidnapping, extortion and bribery.<sup>361</sup>

### 6.1.1.3 Aleppo

Following recent developments related to the major HTS offensive that took control of Aleppo and the recent transition of power, it is unclear whether it is currently possible for civilians to travel between these areas in Aleppo and the areas of northern and eastern Syria currently controlled by DAANES. Until recently, while certain restrictions were in place, individuals were able to travel to and from the Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo, such as Ashrafiyeh, Sheikh Maqsoud, as well as the Tal Rifaat enclave, to the remaining DAANES-controlled areas.<sup>362</sup>

However, this has been a complex process due to the necessity of crossing territory that was controlled by the former government, and may have included the payment of bribes.<sup>363</sup> It was only possible for individuals to travel to and from these areas when there were no ongoing security operations.<sup>364</sup>

## 6.1.2 Specific groups and restrictions

### 6.1.2.1 Men of conscription Age

Men of the conscription age range typically encounter greater challenges when attempting to move between the various areas under Kurdish control in north and east Syria. This is largely attributed to the heightened risk of conscription to the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty by the

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<sup>356</sup> Jusoor For Studies: 30; STJ: 33

<sup>357</sup> An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 36; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 36

<sup>358</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 46

<sup>359</sup> ICG: 33

<sup>360</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 48; STJ: 33

<sup>361</sup> A Syrian Arab journalist from Enab Baladi: 24; Sherwan Yousef: 30; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 36; Jusoor For Studies: 30; ICG: 33; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 36; NPA, *Unidentified gunmen attack 5 oil tankers in Raqqa*, 3 November 2024, [url](#); SOHR, *Military escalation Turkish forces and their proxies fire artillery shells on positions in Al-Raqqah countryside*, 25 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>362</sup> Jusoor For Studies: 28; STJ: 30; Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 24; A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 9; An organisation promoting human rights: 28; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 35; Fabrice Balanche: 40

<sup>363</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 40; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim: 35;

<sup>364</sup> Jusoor For Studies: 28

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Kurdish authorities,<sup>365</sup> as well as the risk of being targeted by IS.<sup>366</sup> Men in this age bracket are required to present their military booklet at checkpoints operated by the Kurdish authorities, and individuals who have failed to report for duty are detained for the purpose of conscription.<sup>367</sup>

Men of the conscription age range from the areas under Kurdish control in Aleppo, face significant challenges when attempting to travel to the other areas under Kurdish control in NES. This is due to the necessity of traversing territory under the control of the Syrian government, which may result in arbitrary detention or conscription into the Syrian Arab Army.<sup>368</sup> The same applies to individuals who have been mobilised as reservists, individuals associated with the YPG/PYD, as well as individuals with outstanding security issues with the GoS.<sup>369</sup>

Students from North and East Syria attending university in areas of Syria under the former government's control are an exception to the general circumstances. They are able to travel between the areas of Syria under Kurdish control and the areas controlled by the former government, as they are exempt from performing military service.<sup>370</sup>

### 6.1.2.1 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

A Syrian human rights organisation has indicated that travel between the different areas controlled by the DAANES does not require prior permission.<sup>371</sup> However, IDPs and people from areas outside the control of the DAANES require sponsors and the necessary documentation to settle and travel between the various areas under DAANES' control.<sup>372</sup> Some sources indicated that this was also the case for people originating from Arab majority areas controlled by the DAANES, such as Deir Ezzour and Raqqa, as well as the areas of Aleppo formerly under Kurdish control.<sup>373</sup>

Those lacking the requisite documentation often encounter difficulties at checkpoints, which restricts their ability to travel between the different areas in NES.<sup>374</sup> Individuals displaced to SDF controlled areas require a local sponsor in order to obtain the displaced ID card issued by the DAANES. This is particularly the case for ethnic Arabs from the areas of Deir Ezzour controlled by the former Syrian government and Iranian-backed militias prior to the transition of power in

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<sup>365</sup> A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 25, 26; An organisation promoting human rights: 30; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 39; DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>366</sup> A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 25

<sup>367</sup> A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 25; An organisation promoting human rights: 30; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist):39; Fabrice Balanche: 42; DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>368</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 41, 44; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 34, 35; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 25; SNHR: 15

<sup>369</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 41; A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 28

<sup>370</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 45

<sup>371</sup> A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 10

<sup>372</sup> An organization promoting human rights: 29; Jusoor For Studies: 32; A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi: 23; Hoshang Hasan: 27; An NGO operating in North and East Syria: 38

<sup>373</sup> Jusoor For Studies: 28; STJ: 31, 32

<sup>374</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 44, 47



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Syria. The majority of these people are able to find a sponsor relatively easily, as many have relatives who can sponsor them or are from the same tribe or clan.<sup>375</sup>

The DAANES has stated that the reason for this procedure is twofold: firstly, to address security concerns, and secondly, to facilitate the vetting and tracking of newcomers who wish to take up residence in SDF-held areas.<sup>376</sup>

### *6.1.2.2 Women and Children*

While there are no formal restrictions on women's movement in the areas controlled by DAANES, social and cultural norms often necessitate male accompaniment, particularly in conservative areas such as Deir Ezzour.<sup>377</sup> Women traveling in niqabs are subject to inspections to prevent men from evading detection.<sup>378</sup>

It is possible for women and children to travel between the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria and other areas of Syria formerly under the control of the Syrian government.<sup>379</sup> However, the Tell Rifaat enclave represented a distinct case, and while it was possible for women and children to travel out of this area while it was under Kurdish control, they would be required to pay bribes to do so.<sup>380</sup>

### *6.1.2.3 Ethnic groups*

It has been reported that individuals from Arab majority areas, such as Raqqa or Deir Ezzour, are required to obtain a permit from the DAANES authorities, as well as a sponsor, before they can settle in Kurdish majority areas, such as Hasakah.<sup>381</sup> In contrast, Kurds attempting to travel to areas of Deir Ezzour under the control of militias with ties to the former Syrian government and Iran may encounter difficulties at checkpoints.<sup>382</sup>

Meanwhile, a Syrian Human Rights Organisation has indicated that discrimination against ethnic Arabs at checkpoints controlled by the DAANES is uncommon. This is due to the SDF exercising caution to ensure that ethnic Arabs are treated on equal terms, in an effort to avoid inciting unrest against the DAANES. However, at checkpoints in Deir Ezzour, SDF members affiliated with specific Arab clans may mistreat individuals from rival clans.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> A Local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 33

<sup>376</sup> A Local NGO worker from Northeast Syria: 33

<sup>377</sup> STJ: 36

<sup>378</sup> A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 12

<sup>379</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 44; Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim (journalist): 35; Jusoor For Studies: 28

<sup>380</sup> Fabrice Balanche: 40

<sup>381</sup> Jusoor For Studies: 29;STJ: 31

<sup>382</sup> Hoshang Hasan (journalist): 26

<sup>383</sup> A Syrian Human Rights Organisation: 11

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## Annex 1: Rojava Information Center (RIC) Query Response

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### RIC, Security situation in North and East Syria written response, 12 October 2024

*Have there been any recent clashes between the SDF and the Syrian National Army/Türkiye?*

1. The direct clashes between the SDF and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army factions are currently confined to the north and west of Manbij, in addition to the Tel Tamir frontlines. In Tel Tamir and Ain Issa, the Turkish army continues artillery and missile shelling operations.

#### *Clashes in Deir Ezzour*

2. On August 6th 2024, militias linked to the Government of Syria (GoS) and Iran-backed militias operating in GoS territory commenced with an offensive operation against the DAANES-governed side of Deir ez-Zor.
3. The conflict persisted for approximately three weeks. Initial reports indicated that the militias had gained control of several villages, but these attempts were quickly countered by the SDF.
4. On August 9th the GoS and Iran-backed militias shelled al-Dahla and Jadeed Bakara resulting in the death of 11 civilians, including 5 children. Consequently, a considerable number of residents left their homes. During the fighting, a number of meetings were held between representatives of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the government of Syria (GoS), and the Russian Federation.
5. On August 13th, an agreement regarding Deir ez-Zor was reached. The agreement included a cessation of the SDF's siege on GoS-controlled areas in Heseke and Qamishlo, the release of prisoners on both sides, and an immediate cessation of hostilities in Deir ez-Zor. However, the following day saw Iran-backed militias conduct artillery bombardment on a US military base situated in al-Ozba, in close proximity to the Conoco oil field.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

6. The security situation in Deir ez-Zor is tense, with the majority of ISIS sleeper cell attacks occurring there and regular fighting across the Euphrates river, which divides DAANES-governed territory from that of the GoS.
7. Iran-backed militias have a great deal of political and military control on the GoS side of the river, in and around the city of Deir ez-Zor. During the fighting, long-term instability in Deir ez-Zor risks a sleeper cell activity spike: as [noted](#) by CJTF-OIR, ISIS has previously attempted to exploit clashes in Deir ez-Zor to conduct covert sleeper cell attacks.

*Have there been any recent clashes between IS and the SDF in the DAANES-controlled parts of Syria?*

8. Between January and September 2024, the RIC recorded 194 ISIS sleeper cell attacks in the DAANES-controlled parts of NES. Our monthly sleeper cell reports document the locations, numbers and types of attack. The September report documents 23 IS sleeper cell attacks across NES.<sup>384</sup>
9. Sleeper cell activity in Deir ez-Zor targets oil investors and tankers, extorts money from local residents by demanding payment of taxes ('zakat') under the threat of harm and targets SDF military positions and vehicles.
10. These attacks reflect the persistent efforts of ISIS to reassert influence over the region's oil industry—a critical resource for financing their operations. Despite the group's weakened presence, they continue to launch violent assaults to extract money and maintain control over economic lifelines. ISIS also continues its campaign of

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<sup>384</sup> Rojava Information Center, *January Sleeper Cell report – Third Phase of Hol Camp Operation Begins*, 5 March 2024, [url](#); Rojava Information Center, *February Sleeper Cell Report - ISIS attacks up, Turkiye targets YPG/YPJ veterans*, 6 March 2024, [url](#); Rojava Information Center, *March Sleeper Cell Report – Moscow attack puts international spotlight on ISIS' enduring threat*, 4 April 2024, [url](#); Rojava Information Center, *April Sleeper Cell report – SDF Commander in Chief Criticizes Coalitions "Diminished Focus"*, 10 May 2024, [url](#); Rojava Information Center, *May Sleeper Cell report – ISIS Ramps up Attacks on Oil Targets*, 9 June 2024, [url](#); Rojava Information Center, *June Sleeper Cell Report – Successful raids and ongoing attacks in Deir ez-Zor*, 8 July 2024, [url](#); Rojava Information Center, *July Sleeper Cell Report – Increased ISIS Attacks Amid DAANES' Efforts to Stabilize Security Tensions in the Region and Reconciliation Forum for Releasing Prisoners*, 8 August 2024, [url](#); Rojava Information Center, *August Sleeper Cell Report – Attack in Germany brings international attention to ISIS' activity*, 9 September 2024, [url](#); Rojava Information Center, *September Sleeper Cell Report – SDF Raid Campaigns in Raqqa amid ongoing ISIS activity*, 14 October 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

intimidation against the local population, in particular those who work closely with the DAANES.

*Are there civilian casualties, and if so to what extent?*

11. According to RIC sleeper cell data, between January and September 2024, ISIS attacks resulted in 25 civilian casualties and 16 civilians injured.
12. According to RIC sleeper cell data, between January and September 2024, ISIS attacks resulted in 25 civilian casualties and 16 civilians injured.

*Is it possible to travel freely between the different regions under DAANES-control?*

13. It is possible to travel during the day, but caution is needed when traveling at night in the eastern and northern countryside of Deir Ezzor due to ISIS sleeper cell activity.

## Annex 2: Query Response Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)

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### SNHR, written response, 21 October 2024

*General security situation in in the DAANES-controlled parts of Syria since January 2024*

1. Since the start of 2024, there have been reports of recurring clashes between SDF and Arab tribal forces in Deir Ez-Zour Governorate, with the most recent clashes taking place in August 2024. These clashes have resulted in civilian casualties, as well as material damage caused by the indiscriminate bombing.
2. Meanwhile, there have been reciprocal bombings by the SNA and the SDF from time to time. These skirmishes have been concentrated on the dividing lines separating these two groups' territories in eastern and northern rural Aleppo Governorate.
3. Additionally, SNHR has recorded continued clashes between US-led International Coalition forces and Iranian militias throughout 2024. These clashes have been concentrated in Deir Ez-Zour Governorate near the oil fields and Coalition bases to the east of the Euphrates Shield.
4. Moreover, residents of the region, especially in Deir Ez-Zour Governorate, have noticed a significant increase in the spread of IS cells in the area in 2024. These cells have been carrying out killings and assassinations regularly.
5. There has also been a noticeable rise in revenge acts among local tribes, as arms have been widely available to civilians. These phenomena are particularly prevalent in the areas separating the GoS forces and the SDF along the Euphrates River in rural Deir Ez-Zour.

*Clashes between the SDF and the Syrian National Army/Türkiye*

6. There have been no major rounds of clashes between the SDF and the Syrian National Army/Türkiye recently. Rather, there have been some occasional light gunfire. Most recently, the SDF fired a shell at al-Mahsanli village in the rural areas of Jarablos city in eastern rural Aleppo Governorate on October 16, 2024, following by light gunfire between the two sides.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

7. SDF-SNA clashes are taking place on the dividing lines in the villages that are administratively a part of Afrin City in northern rural Aleppo Governorate and Jarablous city in eastern rural Aleppo Governorate.

### *Clashes between the SDF and the Arab tribes in Deir Ezzour*

8. SNHR has been recording intermittent reciprocal gunfire. The most recent clash that devolved into full combat was in August 2024.
9. SDF-Arab tribes clashes are taking place in the villages along the Euphrates River in northern and eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour Governorate.

### *Clashes between IS and the SDF in the DAANES-controlled parts of Syria?*

10. The most recent operation by ISIS cells took place on October 15, 2024, when they targeted oil tankers, which resulted in the killing of an SDF fighter.
11. SDF-IS clashes are concentrated in the badiya 'desert' region of Deir Ez-Zour and some villages in the governorate where IS cells can be found.

### *Civilian casualties*

12. From August 6 to August 13, 2024, the villages and towns along both banks of the Euphrates River in eastern rural Deir Ez-Zour saw some military escalation and continuous reciprocal attacks between the tribal forces, supported by GoS forces and Iranian militias on one side, and the SDF on the other. This occurred after the tribal forces launched a large-scale attack on SDF military headquarters in these areas, which originated from a GoS-held area. Thereafter, the two sides carried out reciprocal bombings using heavy weaponry (artillery, rocket launchers, and heavy machine guns). SNHR documented the killing of at least 17 civilians in this incident, including eight children and six women, and at least 34 others were injured, as a result of the indiscriminate attacks that involved the use of heavy weapons and the crossfire in the area. More particularly, ground GoS attacks resulted in killing of 11 civilians, including six children and four women. This happened when the GoS forces bombed al-Dahla town. Additionally, a woman was killed in a regime attack on Abu Hamam town (both al-Dahla and Abu Hamam are under the control of the SDF).
13. On the other hand, similar attacks by the SDF on the GoS-held al-Boulayl town killed two civilians, a woman and a girl. Three more civilians, including one child, were killed in the crossfire and shelling between the two sides. as SNHR was unable to accurately assign responsibility for these killings.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

14. On Wednesday, October 16, 2024, an SDF rocket launcher fired multiple rockets at the al-Mahsanli village in the rural areas of Jarablos City in eastern rural Aleppo Governorate. One of the rockets struck al-Mahsanli School during school hours, injuring six civilians – four children and two women. The attack also partially destroyed the school's outer fence and moderately damaged the school itself. The area targeted is under the control of the SNA.

### *Freedom of movement*

15. It is possible to travel freely between the different regions under DAANES-control. However, a challenging factor in this regard is the strict checks conducted by the SDF at their checkpoints on people coming from GoS-held areas, particularly young men who are usually taken for conscription in training camps.

### *Human Rights Violations*

16. Syrian Democratic Forces/Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (SDF/DAANES) continued conducting arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance, and carrying out campaigns of mass raids and detentions, targeting civilians under the pretext of fighting ISIS, with some of these arrest campaigns backed by US-led Coalition helicopters.
17. SNHR has also documented arrests/detentions of civilians over accusations of working with the Syrian National Army (SNA).
18. SNHR has additionally documented arrests/detention of civilians for conscription (i.e. Obligatory Self-Defence Duty), with these detainees taken to SDF military training and recruitment camps, which are concentrated in SDF-controlled areas of Aleppo Governorate.
19. Moreover, SNHR has documented arrests/detentions of individuals over accusations of working with the Arab tribal forces, which involved in some cases the destroying or burning down of the detainees' houses. These arrests were concentrated in Deir Ez-Zour Governorate. Other arrests involved members of Kurdish parties over voicing criticism of the living situation and corruption in SDF-held areas.
20. Furthermore, a number of civilians were arrested/detained for participation in the anti-SDF popular protests that objected to the school curriculums imposed by the SDF in its territories. These arrests were concentrated in Manbij city in rural Aleppo governorate.
21. Meanwhile, the SDF also continued abducting children with the objective of recruiting them for military training, with these children being sent to military training camps. The parents and families of these conscripted children are not allowed to contact them, with the SDF also refusing to disclose their fate.



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

22. Since the start of October 2024, SNHR has recorded anti-SDF popular protests in Manbij city in rural Aleppo Governorate, accompanied with a general strike across Manbij city and its rural areas. This was in objection to the 'Education Authority' of the SDF's Autonomous Administration enforcing the mandatory implementation of its own school curriculum in the city's schools.

## Annex 3: Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) Query response

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SJAC, online meeting, 2 October 2024 and written contribution, 30 October 2024

*Developments to the general security situation and violence against civilians*

### *Aleppo*

1. Throughout 2024, civilians in Aleppo experienced consistent indiscriminate violence, which originated from areas jointly controlled by the SDF and Syrian government forces, resulting in numerous civilian fatalities and injuries.
2. Civilian casualties were also documented in February, when a motorcycle explosion injured three civilians, among them children.<sup>385</sup>
3. In April, one civilian was killed and another injured when a guided missile fired from areas jointly controlled by Syrian government forces and the SDF.<sup>386</sup>
4. In May, another civilian was killed and a child injured as a result of artillery shelling originating from jointly controlled areas.<sup>387</sup> Following this, it was reported that a man and child were moderately injured as a result of mortar and rocket shelling originating from jointly controlled areas that targeted the village of Sheikh Nasser.<sup>388</sup>
5. In September 2024, four children were injured in Jarablus after pro-government forces and SDF fired heavy artillery.<sup>389</sup> The same month, a general strike also took place in Manbij in protest of SDF policies, which included ongoing rights violations and arbitrary arrests.<sup>390</sup>
6. There have not been any recent clashes between the Syrian government and the SDF in the Aleppo area.

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<sup>385</sup>Baladi News, *Aleppo: The National Army Arrests a Cell within the SDF*, 29 October 2024, [url](#)

<sup>386</sup>The Syria Civil Defense Telegram, *Civilian Death and Other Injuries*, 28 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>387</sup>The Syria Civil Defense Telegram, *Civilian Death and Child Injured*, 4 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>388</sup>The Syria Civil Defense Telegram, *Man and Child Moderately Injured*, 9 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>389</sup>Jarablus Press, *Four Children Injured*, 7 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>390</sup>Syria TV, *General Strike in Manbij to Protest Against SDF Policy in City Administration*, 18 September 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### Raqqa

7. In July 2024, a young man was reportedly killed in the countryside of Raqqa by two men, who were part of the SDF, after fighting between two tribes broke out. After the young man's death, security forces affiliated with the SDF withdrew from the village and two houses were burned.<sup>391</sup> Towards the end of July, the SDF carried out raids allegedly supported by the US-led International Coalition that resulted in the deaths of two individuals and the arrest of another in the rural areas of Raqqa.<sup>392</sup>
8. In August, members of the SDF violently assaulted staff at the National Hospital and damaged equipment following the death of one of their members during surgery,<sup>393</sup> demonstrating how the SDF sometimes engages in retributive acts against the civilian population, according to the SJAC's assessment. One month later, SDF arrested young individuals in Raqqa who were attempting to cross into areas controlled by the Syrian National Army (SNA) north of Raqqa. The arrests were made during a raid in the Hweijeh Al-Sawafi camp in the Raqqa countryside, where two young men were detained on charges of belonging to ISIS.<sup>394</sup> In the same month, an elderly woman from Tal Abyad was killed by an SDF sniper while crossing from areas controlled by the SNA for medical treatment.<sup>395</sup> Seven people were also reportedly arrested by the SDF after a dispute broke out with SDF members, and the individuals were taken to an unknown location.<sup>396</sup>

### Deir Ezzour

9. In Deir Ezzour, tensions between the SDF and civilians resulted in civilian casualties in May. For example, when SDF members fired at a vehicle that refused to stop at a checkpoint in Darnaj, two children were killed.
10. Civilian casualties continued into June 2024 as well. For example, a young man was killed in late June by the SDF during a raid and arrest operation in the countryside of Deir Ezzour. Local news reported that a man from the town of Darnaj was killed by SDF personnel in Al-Jaradi, with two different reasons surrounding his death. The first was that he died under torture, while the second stated that the young man

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<sup>391</sup> Syria TV, *Following a Tribal Dispute, A Young Man was Killed by Two Members of the SDF in Raqqa* 7 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>392</sup> Syria TV, *Two Killed and One Arrested in a Raid by SDF in Rural Raqqa* 28 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>393</sup> Syria TV, *SDF Assault Raqqa National Hospital Staff*, 4 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>394</sup> Syria TV, *Targeting Young Men, SDF Launches Arrest Campaign in Raqqa*, 16 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>395</sup> Syria TV, *Elderly Woman Killed by SDF Bullets North of Raqqa*, 18 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>396</sup> Syria TV, *Security Campaign in the Countryside of Hasakah Ignites Protests*, 25 September 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

was shot directly by SDF forces during the raid.<sup>397</sup> Near the banks of the Euphrates river towards the end of July, which serves as the dividing line between the Syrian government forces and the SDF, a seven-year-old girl was also killed by gunfire from the SDF and her parents injured.<sup>398</sup> SJAC documenters interviewed a family member of the young girl and were informed that a sniper bullet pierced her head from behind as she and her family members attempted to escape gunfire.

11. In July, dozens of residents in Deir Ezzour staged protests, calling for the release of detainees held by the SDF. The SDF responded with a raid campaign, targeting demonstrators through one of its patrols.<sup>399</sup> Raids continued to the end of July, when a vehicle driven by a military leader of the SDF was attacked.<sup>400</sup> Then, in August 2024 multiple individuals were injured while one man was killed when the SDF attempted an arrest in western Deir Ezzour. The SDF was attempting to arrest the individuals on charges of involvement in smuggling, and tensions rose following the incident, with fears of potential clashes between the SDF and residents.<sup>401</sup> The SDF also raided a house in the city of Al-Busayrah, resulting in the death of a nurse.<sup>402</sup>
12. In September, a young man was crossing the Euphrates River when he was killed by a sniper from the SDF. It is reported that the man was coming from the town of Al-Duwair, under government control, towards the town of Granij under the control of the SDF.<sup>403</sup>

### Hasakah

13. In July, members and the head of the Kurdish National Council were arrested in Qamishli, and the SDF used violence to forcibly disperse a demonstration that was organized in response. Arrest campaigns were also carried out that targeted activists, journalists, and minors.<sup>404</sup> In Amuda, SDF also fired gunshots to end a demonstration in which residents were protesting the ongoing military trench digging. Local news sources note that criticism of the SDF has been growing due to

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<sup>397</sup> Syria TV, *A Young Man Killed in Deir Ezzour During an SDF Raid*, 9 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>398</sup> Syria TV, *A Child Killed and Her Parents Injured*, 30 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>399</sup> Syria TV, *Demonstration in Deir Ezzour Demanding Release of Detainees, and the SDF Responds with Raids*, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>400</sup> Syria TV, *SDF Surrounds a Town in Deir Ezzour and Launches a Campaign of Raids and Arrests*, 31 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>401</sup> Syria TV, *One Person Killed and Two Others Wounded by SDF Bullets in Deir Ezzour*, 6 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>402</sup> Syria TV, *Nurse Killed in SDF and International Coalition Raid*, 23 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>403</sup> Syria TV, *Young Man Killed by Sniper from SDF While Swimming in Euphrates River*, 21 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>404</sup> Syria TV, *SDF Arrests Head and Members of Kurdish National Council*, 1 July 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

excessive spending on trench digging as opposed to essential services, in addition to the violations against activists and journalists under SDF control.<sup>405</sup>

14. Towards the end of September, SDF launched a security campaign in Al-Hasakeh's countryside, searching 17 villages for weapons but confiscating only hunting guns. Residents accused SDF of stealing gold jewelry and money, which led to protests that SDF responded to with live ammunition.<sup>406</sup>
15. Earlier this year there was fighting between different groups affiliated with the Syrian government, which took place in the security square in Al-Hasakeh.

### *Recent clashes between the SDF and the Syrian National Army/Türkiye*

16. Another threat to civilians in AANES-controlled areas, especially the northern areas of Aleppo, Al-Raqqah, and Al-Hasakeh governorates, are Turkish attacks, which have been ongoing since Türkiye's incursion into northeast Syria in 2019 as tensions between the SDF and Türkiye still exist, especially in the border areas. Turkish shelling and drone attacks in northeast Syria have targeted members of the SDF and affiliated security forces, but also resulted in civilian casualties. These attacks also often targeted vital civilian infrastructure as well, including water treatment facilities, causing further damage for the local civilian population.
17. There has been an increase in Turkish drone attacks and airstrikes in 2024, which target critical infrastructure, as well as SDF personnel.

### *Aleppo*

18. Clashes between the SDF and Türkiye were common in 2024, with reports of consistent exchanges of fire and acts of indiscriminate violence. On January 5th, for example, Turkish artillery targeted SDF positions in the villages of Deir Jamal, Maraanaaz, Kafr Naya, and Biloniyah in the northern Aleppo countryside.<sup>407</sup> Ten days later, the SDF and the SNA exchanged fire on the fronts of Manbij,<sup>408</sup> while intense Turkish artillery shelling targeted SDF positions south of Azaz.<sup>409</sup> On January 20th, rocket fire from the SDF targeted the vicinity of the town of Dabiq in northern

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<sup>405</sup> Syria TV, *Tension Between People of Al-Hasakeh and the SDF Due to Military Trenches*, 10 July, [url](#)

<sup>406</sup> Syria TV, *Security Campaign in Rural Al-Hasakeh Ignites Protests*, 25 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>407</sup> NABD, *Turkish Artillery Shelling Targeted SDF Positions*, 6 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>408</sup> Manbij News, *Violent Bombardment Between SDF and Turkish Army*, 15 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>409</sup> Azaz Network News, *Heavy Turkish Artillery Shelling*, 17 January 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Aleppo countryside,<sup>410</sup> and intense artillery and rocket fire occurred the next day between the SDF and Turkish bases on the Karabajli-Dandania.<sup>411</sup> Mutual shelling continued on January 30th between the SDF and Turkish forces, with the SDF targeting the vicinity of the National Hospital and the village of Sejraz west of Azaz, as well as the Kuwait al-Rahma camp in Afrin. In response, Turkish forces shelled the surroundings of Tal Rifaat in northern Aleppo countryside, including Maranaz, al-Malikiyah, and Shwargha in the Shirn district of Afrin.<sup>412</sup>

19. In March, a woman was killed and three children injured due to shelling by the SDF on the village of Tal Mald.<sup>413</sup> In Al-Samouqa village, located near SDF-controlled Al-Shahba (Aleppo governorate), Turkish shelling in May seriously injured two children, one of whom later died from his injuries.<sup>414</sup> Shelling continued in May, when artillery fire from the SDF targeted the city of Azaz in northern Aleppo.<sup>415</sup> Turkish forces continued shelling positions of the Manbij Military Council, affiliated with the SDF, in the rural areas of Manbij.<sup>416</sup> Meanwhile, in June another civilian was killed, and several others were injured due to a rocket attack by the SDF targeting the Kuwait Al-Rahma camp.<sup>417</sup>
20. In August, the SNA continued to shell positions of the SDF in the Tal Rifaat area.<sup>418</sup> On August 9th specifically, a child was killed and others were injured due to the shelling by the SDF on the village of Al-Halwanji in the countryside of Jarablus.<sup>419</sup> In September, a civilian woman was injured as a result of artillery shelling by SDF on the village of Abla in the Al-Bab area,<sup>420</sup> and clashes again erupted in October 2024 between the SNA and the SDF in the Kafr Khashir area in northern Aleppo, coinciding with Turkish artillery shelling targeting militia positions in the region.<sup>421</sup>

### Hasakah

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<sup>410</sup> Alternative Atarib Media Center, *Missile Attack from SDF Targets Northern Aleppo Countryside*, 20 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>411</sup> Facebook, *Intense Artillery and Missile Shelling Between SDF and Turkish Bases*, 21 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>412</sup> Al Marsad Media Network, *Missile Attack Targets Azaz Countryside*, 30 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>413</sup> The Syria Civil Defense Facebook, *Missile Bombardment Originating From the Joint Control Areas*, 30 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>414</sup> The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *Human Rights Violations in Syria - May 2024*, 20 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>415</sup> Media Office in Binnish, *Artillery Shelling by SDF Forces Target Azaz*, 19 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>416</sup> Awwsat, *Türkiye Re-Escalates Against SDF in Northwestern Syria*, 24 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>417</sup> Facebook, *A Martyr and Several Injuries Due to SDF Bombing Targeting Kuwait Al-Rahma Camp*, 16 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>418</sup> Independent Sham Media Center, *The National Army Forces Continue to Shell SDF in Tal Rifaat*, 7 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>419</sup> Editor's News Network, *A Child Killed and Others Injured*, 9 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>420</sup> DCRN, *Civilian Woman Wounded as a Result of SDF Artillery*, 10 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>421</sup> Syrian News Agency, *Urgent: Clashes Between the National Army and SDF (Oct. 5, 2024)*, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

21. Clashes between the SDF and Turkish forces have also resulted in civilian casualties and greatly disrupted city infrastructure. Specifically, residents of Al-Hasakeh have no access to running water or consistent electricity due to Turkish actions. Residents in Al-Hasakeh reported that Turkish shelling of electrical plants/towers in December 2023 caused extensive power outages for Al-Hasakeh city and the surrounding areas which have persisted throughout April. Al-Hasakeh city residents also had no access to running water in April, as Türkiye and Turkish-backed factions control the flow of water to Al-Hasakeh city, and this current cutoff began in 2023. The lack of water and electricity forces residents to pay large amounts of money each month to meet their basic needs through alternative and expensive means, such as generators and drinking water purchased from water tanker trucks. In April, Turkish-supported factions also attacked the Al-Saida fuel station in Al-Qahtaniyah, one of the largest fuel stations in the northeast, causing a large shortage of fuel and driving up transportation costs for civilians.<sup>422</sup>
22. In terms of clashes, Turkish artillery, rockets, and aerial strikes targeted SDF positions in northeastern Syria in January 2024. Drone attacks hit a power station in Derbasiyeh in the Al-Hasakeh countryside, resulting in injuries to a worker. The strikes also hit a site known as a "wedding hall" in Derbasiyeh, the power station in Qamishli, six sites in the Rmeilan field and Tal Adas field, the industrial area, the Court of Justice area in Qamishli, a police station for land transport, and a site adjacent to the Qamishli municipality. Sources noted that some of the sites hit in Qamishli are under overlapping control between the SDF and the Syrian government.<sup>423</sup>
23. In late May and early June, SJAC documenters noted some increase in the level of Turkish military activity, with a series of drone attacks that killed civilians and SDF-affiliated military personnel in Al-Qamishli and Amuda. Turkey likely ordered these attacks in response to the AANES' plans to proceed with municipal elections in summer 2024, which were later cancelled.<sup>424</sup> In May, Turkish drones targeted SDF positions at least eight times, intensifying military operations against SDF installations in the region.<sup>425</sup> Turkish forces also shelled a military point in the countryside of Al-Hasakeh, escalating tensions in the area.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024*, 20 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>423</sup> The New Arab, *Turkish Army Continues its Bombing of SDF Areas in Northern Syria for the Third Day*, 15 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>424</sup> The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *Human Rights Violations in Syria - June 2024*, July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>425</sup> Nudem, *New Turkish Bombing Targets North and East Syria*, 31 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>426</sup> Syria News, *Two SDF Members Killed in a Turkish Bombing Targeting Military Point*, 1 June 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

24. In August, documenters noted more Turkish attacks than usual. A Turkish drone reportedly killed a civilian woman and her son near Al-Qamishli's Heart and Eye Hospital in late August.<sup>427</sup>

### *Recent clashes between the SDF and the Arab tribes in Deir Ezzour*

25. Violent clashes occurred between SDF forces and Arab tribes in Deir Ezzour throughout 2024, resulting in many casualties. In February 2024, local news reported that the SDF shelled the city of Al-Mayadeen. The SDF brought in military reinforcements to areas of contact with the National Defense and Iranian militias in Al-Mayadeen and shelled government positions several times.
26. Violent clashes increased in August and September 2024, resulting in many civilian casualties. In August, the most significant violations in Deir Ezzour governorate were a series of armed clashes between the SDF and fighters from prominent Arab tribes in the area, who were supported by the Syrian government forces and groups loyal to it. These events represent the largest clashes between the SDF and pro-government tribal fighters since August 2023. Reportedly at the urging of Ibrahim Al-Hefel, the pro-government leader of the prominent Akedat tribe, tribal fighters targeted SDF-controlled villages of Abu Hammam, Diban, and Al-Latwa beginning on August 6th. In response to the attacks by pro-government tribal fighters in Deir Ezzour, the SDF imposed a blockade on areas controlled by the government in Al-Hasakeh and Qamishli cities to prevent the entry and exit of cars and people from the area, in addition to implementing a curfew.<sup>428</sup> To conceal the blockade, the SDF attacked journalists to prevent them from reporting on the situation.<sup>429</sup>
27. By mid-August, local media reported that at least 18 civilians had been killed in the fighting in Deir Ezzour, many from shelling by heavy weapons. In one incident, the pro-government tribal fighters' shelling of civilian homes in Al-Dahlah and Jadeed Bakkarah villages on August 9th killed 12 people, including multiple women and children. Though the deadliest fighting ended in mid-August, SJAC notes that tension and small clashes between the SDF and the government-backed fighters continued throughout August.
28. Along with the high number of civilian casualties, the fighting caused profound consequences for civilians in Deir Ezzour governorate, according to SJAC. The

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<sup>427</sup> North Press Agency, *Turkish Raid Targets a Woman and Her Son*, 28 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>428</sup> Syria TV, *SDF Imposes Blockade on Syrian Forces in Al-Hasakeh*, 7 August 2024, [url](#)

<sup>429</sup> Syria TV, *SDF Attacks Journalists to Hide its Siege of Civilians in Al-Hasakeh*, 16 August 2024, [url](#)



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

ongoing clashes caused damage to homes and displaced civilians from Diban, Abu Hammam, Al-Kishkiyah, Al-Dahlah, and several other villages. Water stations in Abu Hammam and Al-Sahba were rendered out of service due to the shelling as well. Retaliatory military action from the SDF also impacted civilians in government-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour governorate (on the western side of the Euphrates), with three children reportedly injured in Boqrus from SDF shelling.

29. In September, clashes continued between SDF forces and the Tribal Forces in several areas.<sup>430</sup> A vehicle of the SDF opened fire on a young man from the town of Diban, resulting in his immediate death. The young man, Khalil Al-Aboud Al-Mohammad Al-Mezar, was 33 years old and a civilian that had no recorded affiliation to any armed group.

### *Recent clashes between IS and the SDF in the DAANES-controlled parts of Syria*

30. One of the SDF's primary objectives in the areas it controls is combating ISIS, which continued to demonstrate its presence via multiple attacks in June. ISIS activity continues to pose a major threat to civilians in both SDF-controlled and government-controlled territory, according to SJAC. Several attacks in SDF-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour governorate this month killed SDF members, employees of local AANES institutions, and civilians. Attacks occur regularly in SDF-controlled parts of Al-Hasakeh and Al-Raqqah governorates as well.<sup>431</sup> These attacks are usually carried out by unknown gunmen on motorcycles, and they typically target patrols or military points but have not yet reached the level of large-scale clashes. The U.S.-led Coalition, which partners with the SDF in operations to defeat ISIS, announced that ISIS has carried out 153 attacks in the first half of 2024 in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, the U.S.-led coalition, in cooperation with the Syrian Democratic Forces and other partners, carried out 59 operations resulting in the killing of 14 ISIS elements and the arrest of 92 others.<sup>432</sup>

### *Raqqah*

31. In response to these ongoing attacks, SDF regularly launch security operations in its territory, one of which it conducted near Al-Karama agricultural area in Al-Raqqah in

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<sup>430</sup> Shaam Network, Renewed Clashes and Mutual Shelling Deepens Suffering of Civilians in Deir Ezzour, 7 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>431</sup> The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *Human Rights Violations in Syria - June 2024*, 24 July 2024, [url](#)

<sup>432</sup> The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *Human Rights Violations in Syria - July 2024*, 3 September 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

August. The SDF reportedly raided homes and arrested 15 alleged ISIS-affiliated individuals in Al-Hasakeh city in October 2024 as well.

32. In September, ISIS released a claim on its official media platforms, stating that it executed two people in Al-Raqqa governorate, claiming that these individuals were “spies” for the SDF. According to local media reports, ISIS posted videos depicting the executions and the bodies, along with the written claim about the attack.<sup>433</sup>
33. IS has left a number of unexploded incendiary devices and mines in homes and graves in the area around Raqqa, which have resulted in civilian casualties.

### *Deir Ezzour*

34. In July 2024, several ISIS attacks in SDF-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour governorate targeted SDF members, civilians, and oil tanker trucks belonging to the Autonomous Administration. Subsequently in August 2024, ISIS attacks in SDF-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour governorate this month primarily targeted SDF members, such as one IED attack that injured two SDF members in Al-Jarhi.

### *Al-Hasakeh*

35. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the SDF announced a “special and large-scale operation in the outskirts of Al-Hasakeh city,” which resulted in the arrest of approximately 38 individuals accused of belonging to ISIS. The media center of the SDF announced that the individuals arrested were planning “various terrorist operations against the city’s residents.” Activists reported that raids were carried out and that there were arbitrary arrests.<sup>434</sup>

### *Freedom of movement between the different regions under DAANES-control*

36. Generally, the ability to travel freely between different areas under DAANES control is limited and varies between cities and from time to time, depending on security concerns and the ongoing above-mentioned conflict-related violence. This is particularly true in Deir Ezzour Governorate, where checkpoints and military

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<sup>433</sup> Syria TV, *ISIS Announces the Killing of Eight Members of Regime Support Militias in in Homs Desert*, 8 September 2024, [url](#)

<sup>434</sup> Shaam Network, *Widespread Raids and Arrests, SDF Announces Implementation of Security Operation in Al-Hasakeh*, 20 April 2024, [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

operations often hinder freedom of movement and impact the daily lives of residents. It is important to note that when travel is restricted and roads are closed, civilians are more susceptible to violence and security threats in SJACs assessment.

37. According to SJAC documenters on the ground, SDF checkpoints are widespread in the area, and members present at the checkpoints frequently harass civilians that pass through them. If civilians respond to this treatment, verbal and physical clashes can ensue, and it is not uncommon for civilians (including children) to be killed in this violence in SJAC's assesment.<sup>435</sup> SJAC tracked at least four cases in April and May of 2024 alone, of which, SDF forces opinion fire on civilians passing checkpoints when they refused to cooperate with the checkpoints members.
38. On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, SDF armed men open fired on three civilians at an SDF checkpoint in the town of Al-Jarthi, east of Deir Ezzour. The three men moved to hospital later.<sup>436</sup>
39. On 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2024, and SDF checkpoint killed a civilian on Abu Hamam checkpoint in Deir Ezzour.<sup>437</sup> On April 18<sup>th</sup>, one man killed and a second injured when SDF soldiers opened fire on them as they refused to stop at the checkpoint.<sup>438</sup>
40. May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, SDF checkpoint opened fire on a man who refused to stop at a checkpoint, resulted in killing two children and injuring number of civilians near a checkpoint in town of Daranj, in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzour.<sup>439</sup>
41. There is a risk of IEDs on the roads between Hasakah and Deir Ezzour. There is public transportation between Raqqa, Hasakah and Tabqa, but the condition of the roads are very bad. It is also necessary to travel on the roads by day rather than night to avoid attacks.

### *Human rights violations*

42. Despite ongoing political and military support from the United States and other western allies, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and other affiliated

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<sup>435</sup> The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, *Human Rights Violations in Syria - May 2024*, 20 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>436</sup> Open source informaiton availabnle [here](#).

<sup>437</sup> [The](#) Syrian Observatory for Human Rights: A young man was killed and another wanted by the SDF was injured by gunfire at a military checkpoint in the northern countryside of Deir Ezzor. [url](#)

<sup>438</sup> [The](#) Syrian Observatory for Human Rights: A young man was killed and another wanted by the SDF was injured by gunfire at a military checkpoint in the northern countryside of Deir Ezzor. [url](#)

<sup>439</sup> Syria TV: kills two children and injures others at "Daranj checkpoint" east of Deir Ezzor. [url](#)

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

military/security entities in the territory controlled by the Autonomous Administration of Northeast Syria (AANES) continue to engage in or cause acts of indiscriminate violence that result in rights violations against the population, creating an unstable security situation in the region and making the area unsafe. In terms of general developments, the SDF continues to crush civilian political dissent with violence in various cities, regularly dispersing protests with the use of gunfire. The SDF also continues to arbitrarily arrest civilians across its territory, conducting raids and arresting individuals on various charges, including opposition to the SDF. Individuals are also arrested due to alleged ISIS affiliation, and SJAC's assessment is that these charges are a pretext used to silence any critics who oppose arbitrary arrests or excessive use of violence during raids. After arrest, SJAC has documented that individuals in detention are subject to routine rights violations, including torture. Civilian deaths caused by the SDF were recorded by local media throughout the reporting period for various reasons, including killing individuals crossing from Syrian government-controlled areas, during attempted arrests, and in the course of raids.

### Disclaimer:

The information listed in this report is not the extent of human rights violations in the DAANES controlled territory but only some of the rights violations related to the scope of the report.

## Annex 4: Meeting minutes

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### Fabrice Balanche, associate professor and research director at the University of Lyon, Skype meeting, 25 September 2024

Fabrice Balanche is an associate professor and research director at the University of Lyon 2. He has conducted field studies, research and written books and articles about Syria, including the Kurdish areas of Syria.

#### *General security situation in NES*

1. There have been no major changes to the security situation in the areas of Syria controlled by DAANES since January 2024. However, at the local level, there is significant insecurity, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are facing difficulties in maintaining control, particularly in Deir Ezzour.
2. The last major battle between the SDF and Arab tribal militias in Deir Ezzour took place in September 2023. The source assessed that this is not due to the SDF becoming stronger relative to the tribal militias. Rather, it is because the SDF has allowed Arab tribes to manage specific areas of Deir Ezzour with high concentrations of tribal populations, tacitly accepting oil theft and smuggling conducted by Arab tribes in collaboration with the GoS to government-controlled areas in order to maintain social peace in these majority Arab tribal regions of Deir Ezzour Governorate.
3. Turkish drone and air strikes are a big security issued for the whole area under control. In addition to regular clashes on the frontlines where SNA and SDF areas of influence meet.

#### *Raqqa*

4. According to NGOs, the situation in Raqqa is quite stable. Raqqa is the official capital of North and East Syria, and the security situation in this area remains relatively stable due to the strong presence of the SDF. In 2022, it was possible to move around the streets of Raqqa at night. Areas outside Raqqa city, such as Tishreen and Masouriyah, are also fairly secure.
5. Since January 2024, there have been no reports of clashes in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqa Governorate.
6. In the north, the village of Ayn Issa is threatened by pro-Turkish forces. There are snipers and strikes in areas along the front lines between Tell Abyad and Ras Al-Ayn, also known as the Operation Peace Spring area, which is controlled by the SNA and Türkiye, so security in these areas is limited.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

7. There are limited clashes between the SDF and pro-Turkish forces in the Kurdish-controlled areas around Tell Abyad. Clashes are also occurring northwest of Tell Tamer and northeast of Ayn Issa, both located on the front line between the Operation Peace Spring area, controlled by the SNA and Türkiye, and the Kurdish-controlled areas. However, the rest of the region is largely uninhabited, with no villages, large cities, or population. Türkiye has also changed its strategy, now relying more on drone strikes targeting infrastructure, such as power plants and water stations, rather than depending on its Syrian National Army (SNA) proxy forces to conduct major attacks in the area.
8. Clashes in these areas mainly result in combatant casualties. Civilians try to avoid these zones, but traveling through them, particularly on the road between Kobane and Ayn Issa, can lead to civilian casualties. However, civilians generally avoid this area whenever possible.
9. The Islamic State (IS) is active in government-controlled areas in southern Raqqa Governorate, but not in the Kurdish-controlled areas of the governorate.

### *Hasakah*

10. Nearly 400,000 people live in Hasakah city, including a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other parts of North and East Syria, such as Kobane and Qamishli. The IDPs from these regions prefer to stay in Hasakah city due to fear of Turkish airstrikes.
11. NGOs are located in Hasakah and Raqqa. They were previously based in Amuda as well but relocated to Hasakah city due to threats of Turkish strikes.
12. Hasakah city is relatively secure, with no significant security incidents reported recently. However, the security situation remains fragile. The city is divided into two areas: Kurds in the north and Arabs in the south. Generally, it is better to live in the northern part of the city than in the southern Arab suburbs, where jihadist infiltration is possible.
13. The main socioeconomic issue in Hasakah city is the lack of water, primarily because Türkiye controls the water treatment stations. People with money and NGOs pay for water treatment. Although there are wells in the city, the water is salty and should not be consumed due to the risk of disease. However, residents, being poor, cannot afford clean water.
14. Hasakah city is relatively safe because it is far from the Turkish border, but IS has a presence throughout the city. The economic situation in the city has slightly improved due to the presence of NGOs. In the areas From Qamishli to Amuda, the population is predominantly Kurdish, and there is local-level security. However, this area is subjected to Turkish airstrikes on a regular and continued basis.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

15. Ordinary citizens do not face security-related issues in the Hasakah district of Hasakah governorate. Arab Sunnis do not face security-related issues in the Shaddady area, while Kurds generally avoid this area. The main security concern is the American military base near Shaddady, which has been attacked with rockets fired by IS or pro-Iranian militias. These attacks generally do not result in civilian casualties unless individuals are in the wrong place at the wrong time.
16. There have been Turkish drone strikes in the areas around Qamishli and Al Malikiyah. The strikes mainly target cars driven by YPG or PKK members but have also resulted in civilian casualties. Whether these strikes were intentional or accidental is unknown. Last year, there were three strikes in Qamishli that resulted in civilian casualties involving individuals who were clearly not affiliated with the YPG.
17. There are limited clashes between the SDF and pro-Turkish militias in the Kurdish-controlled areas surrounding Tell Abyad and Ras al-Ayn (the Operation Peace Spring area). These frontline clashes are characterized by exchanges of small arms fire and strikes, which generally do not involve civilian casualties but can affect farmers whose land is closer to the frontline. If civilians stay away from the front lines, they generally do not face any security-related issues.
18. Hasakah governorate is generally quiet regarding IS activity. Last year, there were a couple of incidents involving IS in the vicinity of Al-Hol and southeast of Shaddady and Sirwar. IS is primarily active in Deir Ezzour.
19. IS maintains control over the population inside the Al-Hol camp, and people who do not follow IS rules may be killed at night. Camp residents who are in deradicalization programs are generally moved to other camps. Al-Hol is located in a remote area, so there are not many people outside the camp, making the surrounding area relatively easy to control.

### *Aleppo*

20. There are frequent and ongoing clashes between pro-Turkish forces and the SDF in the Tall Rifaat enclave to the north of Aleppo. This area is very insecure, but it is unlikely that Turkey and the pro-Turkish forces will invade Shahba. This is because it is important for Russia, Iran, and the Syrian government to maintain this buffer zone between the pro-Turkish forces and Aleppo. Pro-Turkish forces will be closer to Aleppo if they manage to expel the SDF from the Tall Rifaat enclave, which would pose a threat to the security situation in Aleppo city.
21. The Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo province are very small, consisting of only a few hundred square kilometers. There is permanent insecurity on the frontlines and in the Tall Rifaat enclave between pro-Turkish forces and the SDF. People want to leave the enclave for

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

- Aleppo city, but are prevented from doing so by the Syrian government unless they can pay bribes that would allow them to enter government-controlled areas from the Tall Rifaat enclave.
22. It is difficult to obtain information about these areas, and there is no information regarding clashes between the YPG/SDF and the Syrian government in Aleppo governorate. There is also no information about increased patrolling or the buildup of troops in Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate.
  23. There have been no recent clashes between the SDF and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The most recent clash involving HTS occurred a year ago during the HTS incursion into Afrin and Azaz, where it was against the pro-Turkish militias in the area and took place outside the Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate.
  24. There has been a major development in the Manbij area, which is jointly controlled by the SDF and GoS forces due to pressure from pro-Turkish Syrian National Army (SNA) groups and Turkey, who have launched strikes in the region. According to Fabrice Balanche, Türkiye intends to take Manbij and Kobane to build a security belt. In response, Russia has attempted to broker a rapprochement between Turkey and the Syrian government. However, the Syrian government has shown little interest in these negotiations, according to Fabrice Balanche.
  25. When SNA groups tried to invade Manbij around six months ago, in March 2024, Russia responded with an airstrike.
  26. The clashes between the SDF and pro-Turkish SNA groups involve rockets and mortars that affect people in the immediate vicinity, but there is not much information regarding civilian casualties. On the frontlines in Manbij and Kobane, the clashes between the SDF and pro-Turkish SNA groups result in casualties among fighters. These casualties are confined to the areas around the frontlines, where there are not many civilians, and it is primarily combatants who are affected by the clashes.
  27. The city of Kobane and the surrounding villages are relatively secure, as this area is a stronghold of the PYD. However, the area is constantly under threat from Turkey. Many people have left Kobane due to fears of a Turkish incursion, as was the case in Tell Abyad, where the population had to flee and lost everything. There is also a lack of investment and confidence in the future in this area.
  28. A few months ago, there was a car bomb in Manbij, but the number of casualties was unknown to the source at the time of the interview. The frontlines between Kobane and Jarablus (the Euphrates Shield area, which is controlled by pro-Turkish SNA groups and Türkiye) are more secure because the Euphrates River is somewhat of a no-man's land. However, Turkish airstrikes on Kobane in 2022 resulted in civilian casualties, including children.



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

29. To the east of Kobane, on the road connecting Kobane and Ayn Issa along the frontline between the Kurdish-controlled SDF areas and Tell Abyad, the road is quite dangerous because snipers target drivers using it. People generally use an alternate, newer route through Raqqa, Tabqa, Sarin, and Kobane to avoid the road that connects Kobane and Ayn Issa, which lies on the frontline between the Kurdish-controlled areas and the SNA and Turkish-controlled Operation Peace Spring area.
30. There is no IS activity in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo province. IS is active in the Badhia desert in the Hama and Homs governorates, as well as in government-controlled areas of Raqqa and Deir Ezzour governorates.

### *Deir Ezzour*

31. The security situation in the Kurdish-controlled regions of Deir Ezzour is very fragmented and unstable. There are frequent clashes between Arab tribes and the SDF, as well as intra-tribal fighting among different Arab tribes and clans. There is no central authority because the SDF is unable to fully control the area. Each tribe or clan attempts to control the areas surrounding their villages, which results in clashes over resources such as water and access to infrastructure.
32. The area from Deir Ezzour city to the Al Bukamal crossing on the Iraqi border is a grey zone and is very dangerous. The SDF are present, but stay in their barracks most of the time. On the ground you do not know who is in charge of security. Armed people in civilian clothes are checking cars on the road. IS is still present and there are numerous clashes at night. The unstable security situation in these areas has resulted in a significant portion of the civilian population relocating to other regions.
33. There are no NGOs in the Kurdish-controlled areas between Deir Ezzour city and the Al Bukamal crossing, and access to medical assistance is very limited. Tribal members who remain in the villages controlled by their tribe are protected by it. However, these individuals may face issues if they attempt to leave their village and pass through checkpoints controlled by another tribe or militia. This poses a problem for people in need of medical assistance, such as pregnant women. There are hospitals in Al-Suwar and Shaddady, but accessing them is quite complicated due to the insecure roads.
34. In the Khabur Valley, between southern Hasakah and Deir Ezzour, and in the areas around Shaddady and Siwar, the situation is very bad due to a lack of water, which negatively affects agriculture. The resident population is predominantly poor Sunni Muslim Arabs. Only a few NGOs operate in the area due to the security situation, and the local population is generally opposed to the Kurds. This is also the area where people are most at risk from the Islamic

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

State. Isolated cars are attacked on the road, and it is better to travel in a convoy and during the day. Two Christian priests were killed on this road (Marqadeh), and SDF cars are often targeted. In 2022 two SDF conscripts who have been killed.

35. Most of the clashes between the SDF and the Arab tribes occur during the night. During the day, the SDF controls a number of checkpoints and conducts patrols, but after dark, they withdraw to the barracks and patrol outside their bases. At night, the security situation is fragile and unpredictable due to the lack of SDF patrols and security presence. In general, civilians tend to avoid going outside at night because of the precarious security situation.
36. There are checkpoints located at the entrance of each village, as well as at crossroads and bridges. On the main road, the checkpoint is controlled by the SDF, while other checkpoints are managed by individuals who do not wear uniforms and are thus unknown. They could be part of a local militia or a group affiliated with the SDF but not officially recognized by it. Checkpoints are a resource that these groups use to extort money and goods from civilians passing through.
37. The primary targets of IS attacks in Deir Ezzour province are the SDF. People with new cars are assumed to belong to the SDF and thus become primary targets for IS. IS is attempting to expel the Kurds and the SDF to retake control of the area. They have been unsuccessful so far but are reorganizing themselves to do so. IS threatens NGO workers and individuals suspected of collaborating with the SDF, extorting them for money. People who do not comply with this are targeted by IS. This type of extortion is primarily carried out by IS, as it is a major source of income for the group.
38. Civilians are also subjected to extortion by IS, and those who do not pay are targeted by the group. Women who refuse to wear a hijab and follow IS rules are afraid to be targeted, but Fabrice Balanche is unaware of specific examples of people being killed or injured. The area is very conservative, so women who refuse to wear a hijab are also targeted by their own families. The patriarchal power is ruling the area and maintain the social conservatism by force if needed.
39. The Euphrates River forms the border between the SDF and the Syrian government. However, there is a small area in the north of Deir Ezzour city where the northern bank is controlled by the Syrian government. This year, the number of clashes in this area has decreased. Such clashes are limited to the front lines.

### *Freedom of movement*

40. The Tall Rifaat enclave is a special case because you have to travel through government-controlled areas to reach the Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqa or Kobane, making travel

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

difficult. While it is possible for women and children to travel out of this area, they would have to pay bribes.

41. For men, it is much more difficult to travel out of the Tall Rifaat enclave, primarily because of the mandatory military service to the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). If a man has not performed military service, he will be caught by the government if he attempts to travel through areas controlled by the Syrian government. The same applies to reservists who have been called up, people affiliated with the YPG/YPD, or individuals with outstanding security issues with the Government of Syria. Some of these individuals can cross into different areas of the Tall Rifaat enclave if they travel with the special convoys operated by the YPG/SDF. There is an agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government that allows these official convoys to travel unhindered into Manbij from the Tall Rifaat enclave.
42. There are generally no issues traveling from Kobane to Raqqa or other parts of the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria. There is a high level of freedom of movement in these areas unless the individual has been called up for the mandatory Self-Defense Duty by the Kurdish authorities and is attempting to avoid it. In such cases, the individual will be caught at the checkpoints and sent to perform the Self-Defense Duty.
43. It is possible to travel between the Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqa, Hasakah, and Deir Ezzour, and there are public and private transportation options available. The road between Hasakah and Raqqa is secure, and it is safe to travel on this road at night. The main issue on this road is car accidents rather than security incidents.
44. Women and children can travel between the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria and other areas of Syria under the control of the Syrian government. There are buses from Raqqa and Qamishli to Damascus, and it is also possible to fly between Qamishli and Damascus. This is not the case for men wanted for military service in the Syrian Arab Army or reserve duty, as they will be arrested if they cross into areas controlled by the Syrian government.
45. Students from the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria who are studying for the Syrian government high school diploma or completing their secondary education travel to Aleppo and Deir Ezzour for this purpose. Upon completing their exams, they can attend university in Homs, Damascus, or Latakia. While at university, they can travel between Latakia and Qamishli for vacation without any problems because, as students, they are not obliged to perform military service.
46. There are SDF checkpoints located at crossroads and entrances to cities, but inside the cities, there are generally no checkpoints. Typically, there is no corruption or extortion at the SDF checkpoints in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqa and Hasakah. In Deir Ezzour, people have to pay money at the checkpoints, but it is often unclear whether the groups at these

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

checkpoints officially belong to the SDF. They are often not wearing uniforms, and it is therefore hard to identify which group they belong to.

47. Men wanted for mandatory Self-Defense Duty will be detained at checkpoints. IDPs face challenges at checkpoints due to a lack of documentation, which restricts their ability to move around. They need a sponsor to vouch for their identity at these checkpoints. Documents are required to travel between the various areas of the Kurdish-controlled parts of North and East Syria. This is why the Kurdish authorities want to issue IDs to IDPs.
48. the road network in the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria is quite good, with a new bridge connecting Raqqa to the south bank of the Euphrates. Additionally, the road between Hasakah and Raqqa has been widened, making travel easier. .
49. The M4 between Tell Tamer and Manbij is on the frontline between the SDF and pro-Turkish SNA group forces, and it cannot be used. Previously, it was possible to travel from Qamishli to Kobane in four hours; now, it is necessary to travel through Hasakah, Raqqa, Tabqa, and Kobane, which takes a day. Transportation is a challenge as it is irregular, and taking a taxi from Qamishli to Raqqa is quite expensive due to the lack of fuel. This fuel shortage generally restricts movement in the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria.

### Dino Krause, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Skype meeting, 26 September 2024

Dino Krause is a postdoc researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), where his research focuses on the dynamics of armed conflicts with jihadist non-state actors. In particular, he is interested in the role played by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda as the two leading transnational jihadist networks.

In his Postdoc project, Dino Krause investigates dynamics related to the de-escalation of armed conflicts with transnational jihadist actors. He specifically focuses on negotiations leading to ceasefires, humanitarian access in war-affected areas, prisoner releases, as well as how civil resistance campaigns can affect ongoing jihadist conflicts.

#### *IS capacity and activity in Kurdish controlled areas of North and East Syria*

1. IS initiated attacks in Syria generally tend to be underreported. However, there has been an increase in IS attacks across Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria in 2024. According to US Central Command, this is the first year since 2019 where there has been an increase in IS attacks compared to the previous year. Data from the ACLED database indicates a rise in armed clashes in the first nine and a half months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.
2. According to data from ACLED, there were 195 armed clashes involving IS in the first nine and half months of 2023, increasing to 387 in the first nine and half months 2024.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Artillery and missile attacks by IS rose from 6 to 13 from 2023 to 2024 in the same reporting period. According to these metrics, IS attacks in these areas have increased, with only one dimension decreasing significantly: the use of remote explosives. These dropped from 65 to 55, which in Dino Krause's assessment could indicate a change in strategy or mode of operations, as IS may be focusing on attacking these areas more directly rather than carrying out attacks from a safe distance. This does not suggest that IS is getting weaker but that they are adapting their tactics.

3. The quarterly report published by US Central Command for Operation Inherent Resolve significantly increased its estimate of the number of IS fighters in Iraq and Syria from 1,255 in January 2024 to 2,500 in April 2024. This increase was not explained further, and it is unclear whether the initial estimate was too low or if IS has been able to increase its number of fighters through recruitment in the reported period.
4. The same report stated that IS had established training centers in the central Badia region. Although IS has not held any territorial control in Syria since 2019, it has been able to relocate fighters to remote areas outside the reach of its enemies, such as the Syrian government, except for drone strikes. This also allows IS to gather larger numbers of fighters and grow in strength.
5. IS attacks in the Kurdish-controlled areas of north and east Syria are generally carried out by small groups of fighters typically belonging to cells of 4 to 8 members, which for instance attack a checkpoint and then retreat. According to Dino Krause, IS is aware that if they attempt to operate more openly and with larger numbers of fighters, reinforcements of Kurdish forces would attack them.
6. IS does not have an open presence in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Syria, and many of its targeted assassinations take place at night
7. The most recent UN estimate from January 2024 regarding the number of IS fighters is higher and suggests that IS consists of around 3,500 fighters in Iraq and Syria.
8. It is difficult to say much about the current leadership of IS, as several IS leaders have been killed since 2019, including the organization's supreme leader Al-Baghdadi. Very little is known about the new leader of IS, Abu Hafs al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, who was announced in the fall of 2023. However, there are no photos or biographical information on al-Qurashi. Some jihadism researchers assess that the actual new caliph of IS could be the leader of IS in Somalia. Most jihadism researchers, however, would disagree with this, as according to IS itself; its leader must be a descendant of the Quraysh tribe. It is more likely that the leader of IS is still in Syria.
9. IS's organizational structure in Syria has changed since 2019. During the caliphate era, IS in Iraq and Syria was responsible for directing the other provinces in a hierarchical manner. In 2018–2019, there was an internal reorganization that established regional offices responsible for the various IS provinces around the world, resulting in a flatter

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

organizational structure than before. The caliph and the highest decision-making body are still located in Syria, but the provinces of Syria and Iraq are now essentially on par with other IS provinces worldwide.

10. Previously, the Syrian and Iraqi branches of IS would send oil and tax money to IS groups in Africa and other parts of the world. Now, financing networks in central and eastern Africa are generating their own financial surplus and are sending money to Lebanon and Turkey, part of which is then funneled into Syria.
11. IS has sleeper cells throughout Syria, especially in the southern part of the country. However, the exact extent is difficult to gauge based on database research. In areas where IS is weak, its focus is on gathering weapons and money, as well as recruiting followers before conducting attacks openly. This was also their modus operandi prior to the establishment of the caliphate.
12. Two or three years ago, most IS sleeper cells in Syria were quite small, and the individual fighters had no contact with IS fighters in other provinces. For example, IS fighters in Raqqa would likely have no contact with IS fighters in Deir Ezzour or Hasakah. This was a risk diversification strategy. Further up the command chain, IS leaders had contact with other IS leaders in different parts of the organization, perhaps in the same region. The higher the leader's rank, the greater the contact with other leaders across Syria. This strategy was implemented toward the end of the caliphate to minimize damage to other cells when one cell was captured due to a lack of communication data between cells. Similarly, captured fighters are unable to disclose information about other cells.

### *Aleppo*

13. The Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo province are the Kurdish controlled regions of Syria with the lowest level of IS activity, according to ACLED data. Essentially, the situation in this area has not changed much between 2023 and 2024, and there have been six registered attacks by IS in the Kurdish-controlled parts of Aleppo in the first nine and half months of 2024.
14. These attacks have been small-scale shootings targeting vehicles and checkpoints belonging to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). There was also a case involving a judge who was shot but not killed by an IS member in Manbij. Overall, this area is not a focal point for IS operations in Syria, but it is possible—and likely—that there are sleeper cells that are not claiming further attacks, according to the Dino Krause's assessment.

### *Raqqa*

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

15. Compared to the situation in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo, the situation in Raqqa is somewhat different. At the provincial level, the number of IS attacks doubled from 2023 to 2024, but these attacks are primarily taking place in the Badia region outside the areas of Kurdish control in Raqqa governorates,.
16. The number of IS attacks on SDF forces decreased from 18 in in the first nine and half months of 2023 to 9 in the same period of 2024. These attacks primarily occur in small villages and towns to the north and northeast of Raqqa city, targeting SDF/Asayish checkpoints and vehicles.
17. IS attacks on civilians in Raqqa follow a similar trend to those in Deir Ezzour and Hasakah. Essentially, the civilians targeted by IS are small businessmen, such as shopkeepers and farmers in rural areas. In the Raqqa area, the number of these attacks is quite small. There are also several cases of IS attacks on civilians in areas controlled by the Syrian government on the west side of the Euphrates River, which borders the Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqa.

### *Deir Ezzour*

18. Deir Ezzour is the area in northeast Syria that is by far the most affected by IS violence. There has been a large increase in attacks in this area initiated by the Islamic State. There were 174 IS-initiated attacks in the first nine and half months of 2023 in all areas of Deir Ezzour governorate, including in both Kurdish controlled and government of Syria controlled areas of Deir Ezzour. The number of IS-initiated attacks in both GOS and Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour has increased to 338 in during the same period in 2024. This increase spans all types of armed attacks, including shootings, clashes, attacks against civilians, as well as remote explosives, IEDs, looting, and property damage. These attacks are occurring in both the Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour and the Badia region west of the Euphrates River.
19. IS attacks against the SDF in Deir Ezzour have increased significantly in 2024 compared to 2023. There were 168 attacks against the SDF in 2024, while there were 64 IS-initiated attacks against the SDF in 2023. These attacks were mostly carried out using light weaponry, along with a few attacks using rocket-propelled grenades at SDF checkpoints. There have even been a few cases of rocket attacks on houses belonging to members of the SDF.
20. The number of SDF counterinsurgency operations against IS actually decreased at the same time as the increase in IS-initiated attacks on SDF forces in Deir Ezzour. According to Dino Krause's assessment this could indicate that the SDF is struggling to maintain the pace of counter-IS operations in Deir Ezzour. Turkish airstrikes and attacks from pro-Iranian militias, combined with decreased support from the United States, have forced the SDF to conserve resources and manpower for counter-IS operations.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### *Hasakah*

21. IS activity in Hasakah was fairly low compared to 2023. The number of IS-initiated attacks decreased in the first nine and half months from 39 in 2023 to 25 in the first nine and half months of 2024. Most IS-initiated attacks in Hasakah were shootings directed at SDF vehicles or checkpoints, and there were few attacks against civilians in this area. A diesel tanker was attacked by gunfire, and an alleged PKK member was assaulted in Hasakah city. The Syrian Democratic Council office in Qamishli has also been attacked by IS, but there were no fatalities.
22. Hasakah is relatively calm, but this does not mean that IS is absent from the area. There have been quite a few arrests of IS cells in Hasakah in 2024. In addition, the Kurdish authorities announced that they arrested 40 individuals linked to financing IS in May 2024, which indicates that the level of IS activity should not be measured solely by the number of attacks, according to the assessment of Dino Krause.

### *Impact on Civilians*

23. IS targets farmers and shopkeepers in the Kurdish-controlled areas of northeast Syria to extort them for financial gain. IS disguises this extortion as collecting zakat (religious tax), a practice that also occurred during the caliphate, but it is essentially a form of organized crime. People who do not pay may be killed, and the same applies to those driving oil or diesel trucks in rural areas, who are sometimes stopped by IS for the purpose of extortion. This is a recurring pattern across different parts of the Kurdish-controlled areas of north and east Syria.
24. The other civilians targeted by IS in these areas are those accused of collaborating with the Kurdish authorities or former Kurdish fighters. Politically active locals engaged in civil councils who may have spoken out against IS are also targeted. There have also been one or two cases where IS has targeted demobilized IS fighters because they are seen as traitors.

### *SDF capacity to counter IS*

25. It is unclear whether IS' capacity has significantly increased or whether the increase in IS operations is linked to a weakening of the SDF. The estimations regarding recruitment by the UN and US Centcom are rough estimates that differ by thousands. Too little is known about the location of IS cells in Syria, the kind of weaponry they have access to, and their strategic rationale for underreporting attacks.
26. The SDF has a capable military force, intelligence service, and police force, making it an effective actor for conducting counter-terrorism operations. They also receive support



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

from the US. The problem is that they are fighting on multiple fronts. They must guard prisons containing tens of thousands of people, which is a drain on resources. Additionally, there is the continued bombardment by Türkiye and conflicts with tribal and Iranian militias in Deir Ezzour.

### *Al Hol camp*

27. The security situation in the Al Hol camp is very unstable, and the circulation of weapons within the camp is well known and documented. When the Kurdish authorities present the weapons seized in connection with raids, the amounts are generally quite large.
28. There are parts of the camp that are essentially no-go areas for the guards themselves, specifically the foreign sections used to house non-Syrians and Iraqis, which the authorities only enter in large groups. There are examples of Yazidi women being freed 10 years after capture, demonstrating how inaccessible parts of the camp are.
29. Petty crime is omnipresent, and IS ideology is still very prevalent in the camps. Al Hol has roughly 90% women and children, yet a considerable number of women in the camp still adhere to IS ideology. They have access to weapons and funding from abroad, which are used to exercise power within the camp. People who diverge from that ideology—such as women who do not veil themselves, listen to music, or openly speak out against the Islamic State—may be killed or severely injured.
30. The recently published report by Amnesty International has accused the Kurdish authorities of human rights violations in the camps, including enforced disappearances, gender-based violence, torture, and murder. These violations were also mentioned in the OIR Centcom report from 2024.
31. From a security perspective for the areas surrounding the Al-Hol camp smuggling operations are taking place in the heart of the Al Hol camp, which include the smuggling of weapons and money. There are also reports of Islamic State affiliates being smuggled out of the camps for bribes. Additionally, there are reports that the Kurdish guards do not conduct appropriate patrols in the camp because they are underpaid and lack discipline.
32. The number of attacks against the Kurdish guards in the camp has decreased significantly since 2022. However, this could be due to a reduced presence rather than indicative of an actual improvement, according to the assessment of Dino Krause. Prison escapes, such as the one in Hasakah in 2022, still occur. There was a large prison breakout in Ayn Issa in 2019 and another breakout in Aleppo in 2024, where twelve IS-affiliated individuals escaped from a detention facility.
33. The liberation of IS affiliates and members from Al Hol and other facilities remains a major short- and mid-term priority for IS, according to the assessment of Dino Krause.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

The population of the camp has decreased from an estimated 50,000 to an estimated 41,000 people. Repatriation from the camp is taking place, primarily to Syria and Iraq.

34. Reintegration programs in Syria are quite basic. Often, a tribal leader will vouch for a person and their family before they are returned to the community, but that is essentially the extent of the program. Neighbors then live door-to-door with people suspected of IS affiliation. Consequently, the released families face a high degree of marginalization in their return communities.
35. The unhindered smuggling in and out of the camp, combined with the presence of IS ideology among the inhabitants of the camp, means that it is highly likely there is a form of spillover. However, the general data regarding incidents involving Hasakah is quite low, despite the fact that Al Hol is located in Hasakah. This may be due to underreporting according to the sources' assessments.

### Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim, a Syrian-Kurdish Journalist based in Erbil, meeting in Erbil, 8 October 2024

#### *General security situation in DAANES-controlled North and East Syria*

1. The security situation in parts of northern and eastern Syria under Kurdish control is unstable due to several threats, the northern frontlines face regular bombardment from the Syrian National Army (SNA) and Türkiye, while the southern areas controlled by DAANES, such as southern Raqqa and Kurdish-controlled areas in Deir Ezzour are increasingly threatened by IS presence.
2. Turkish air and drone strikes generally target three main areas in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasakah: Manbij and its surrounding area, Ayn Issa and its surrounding area, and Tell Tamer. These areas are regularly attacked by Turkish forces, which also strike other locations from time to time.
3. IS activity is primarily concentrated along the banks of the Euphrates River. The western bank is controlled by the Syrian government, except for some areas near Raqqa, while the eastern bank is under the control of the SDF. Regular IS attacks occur in the eastern part of Deir Ezzour, as well as in the areas around Manbij, Raqqa, and Tabqa.

#### *Islamic State*

4. IS has a significant presence within the communities of Shadaddy and the Deir Ezzour governorate, driven by ideological, religious, ethnic, and financial factors, which IS uses to mobilize the population in these areas. As a result, two administrations exist in the eastern part of the Deir Ezzour governorate: one is the autonomous administration, and the other is IS shadow governance structures, which is particularly strong in the villages of Busayra, Diban, and Soheil.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

5. IS primarily targets oil trucks transporting crude oil from areas controlled by the autonomous administration to those controlled by the Syrian government and the SNA. IS also targets civilian oil investors who refuse to pay zakat tax to IS, as well as members of the SDF and civilian officials of the autonomous administration. IS frequently accuses civilian employees of the autonomous administration of being SDF spies or collaborators. In August 2024, IS members attacked a businessman working with oil investments with grenades in the town of Busayra.
6. Transportation on the roads from Hasakah to Raqqa and Kobane decreases significantly after dark, indicating the impact of the threats mentioned above on the civilian population. While moving short distances between villages in Kurdish areas is relatively safe, traveling to the ethnically mixed populated areas in the southern part of the Kurdish-controlled regions is dangerous, especially at night.

### *Deir Ezzour*

7. The security situation in Deir Ezzour has a greater impact on the civilian population compared to other areas in northern and eastern Syria under Kurdish control. This is due to threats from IS and attacks by Arab tribes backed by Iranian militias and military personnel.
8. The Iran-backed Arab tribal groups typically consist of thirty to forty fighters armed with light weapons, such as AK-47s and grenades, and carry out uncoordinated attacks against the SDF from the western bank of the Euphrates River, which is controlled by the Syrian government.
9. The security situation in Deir Ezzour is complex and characterized by the presence of many different actors and groups, whose affiliations are not always clear. Some attacks are initiated by IS, while others are carried out by groups backed by Türkiye, Iran, or the Syrian government. According to Mahmoud Sheikh's opinion the main aim of these actors is to destabilize the region and force an American withdrawal for North and east Syria.
10. It is not always clear which group has initiated a specific attack, but Mahmoud Sheikh Ibrahim assessed that IS is responsible for more attacks than other groups, based on their activity on social media, where they claim responsibility for certain incidents.
11. These armed groups mine the roads and carry out attacks using motorcycles with a driver and a shooter. Initially, these attacks primarily targeted one or two SDF soldiers on their way to work. However, in late September and early October 2024, the attacks have escalated, and as of October 2024 SDF convoys consisting of three or four vehicles are also being targeted.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

12. There are regular clashes between the Arab tribes and the SDF in Deir Ezzour. A major clash occurred in August 2024 around the village of Diban, during which the Arab tribes nearly reached the coalition base near the Al Omar oil field and Green Village. The Americans intervened, and the SDF sent reinforcements from Hasakah to push the Arab tribes back to the western bank of the Euphrates River in GoS-controlled areas.
13. Shelling, heavy machine gun fire, and mortar attacks have occurred across the Euphrates River between Syrian government forces and the SDF in 2024. The SDF also conducted an operation across the river in early September 2024, during which they kidnapped some members of the government forces.
14. The fighting in Deir Ezzour results in regular casualties among civilians. In August 2024, 11 civilians were killed in a mortar attack by Syrian government forces on the village of Al Dahalah. The mortar attacks are generally indiscriminate and often lead to civilian casualties.

### *Raqqa*

15. The security situation in Raqqa is more stable compared to Deir Ezzour. The situation in Raqqa has improved since it was liberated from the Islamic state in 2017, and the population has increased as people from other parts of Syria have relocated there. This population increase has also led to a rise in the number of IS affiliates in the area.
16. The main security threats in Raqqa come from IS and cells backed by the Syrian government or Türkiye, which plant bombs in the area. Clashes occur between the SDF and the SNA north of Raqqa in the areas surrounding Ayn al-Issa and along the M4 road. There are also clashes between the SDF and the SNA in the vicinity of Tell Abyad, which happen more frequently than those on the frontlines in Hasakah.
17. Ayn al-Issa and the Tell Abyad area (Operation Peace Spring Area) are the most affected regions in northern Raqqa due to clashes between the SDF and the SNA. Civilians in the Ayn al-Issa area are occasionally impacted by shelling from both the SDF and Türkiye across the border. Civilian casualties in this area are generally considered collateral damage from the fighting between the armed actors in the areas.
18. There have been clashes between the Syrian government forces and the SDF. The relationship between the Syrian government and the SDF in Raqqa is characterized by limited cooperation, primarily due to the Syrian army's presence and patrols along the border with Türkiye, as well as the Russian presence in Tell Tamer.
19. The coalition conducted two operations against IS in Raqqa last month, during which two IS leaders from Deir Ezzour were apprehended. IS is attempting to recruit young people between the ages of 16 and 18 in the Raqqa area. There have been reports in October 2024 regarding the abduction of 20 boys by IS, who were taken to the Bahdia desert for training.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

20. IS targets prisons in Raqqa to liberate its members. Recently, in August 2024 several foreign fighters escaped from a prison in Raqqa.

### *Aleppo*

21. The Syrian government occasionally imposes blockades on the Kurdish neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh in Aleppo. In response, the SDF imposes reciprocal tit-for-tat blockades on the Syrian government's security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli. These blockades have previously led to armed clashes between the SDF and Syrian government forces, but this has not been the case in 2024.
22. The main offensive activity from Türkiye in the Aleppo governorate occurs in the area surrounding Manbij and the Tell Rifaat enclave. Manbij is under SDF control but is geopolitically important due to its location along the M4 road. According to Mahmoud Sheikh, assessment Türkiye, the Syrian government, and Russia strategic objective is for the SDF to withdraw from Manbij, but so far, the SDF has not done so.
23. There are regular clashes between the SDF (Manbij Military Council) and the SNA north of Manbij in the Sarjul Valley. There are also regular clashes and shelling between the SNA and the SDF in the Tell Rifaat enclave. There have been instances of an increased concentration of SNA fighters near the Tell Rifaat enclave, who appeared to be preparing for a large-scale attack in this area. However, this has not materialized. This occurred most recently in September 2024. The clashes in Manbij and the Tell Rifaat enclave occasionally result in civilian casualties, and the civilian population has adapted to the ongoing conflict.
24. Manbij city is an Arab-majority town where IS occasionally conducts attacks in the form of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). The most recent IS attack on Manbij occurred between February and April 2024. IS is currently also active in the north of Manbij.

### *Hasakah*

25. The security situation in Hasakah varies depending on whether you are in the southern parts of the governorate or the northeastern region around Qamishli and Derik, which is primarily affected by Turkish strikes from across the border. Otherwise, the security situation in the northeastern areas is generally calm, and IS does not have a significant presence there.
26. There are generally no security incidents on the road north of Hasakah city. IS has a greater presence in the southern part of Hasakah, where it operates out of certain

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

neighborhoods. The SDF recently arrested three members of IS from this area who were filming Hasakah prison. The coalition base in Shaddady is regularly attacked by IS.

27. Qamishli and the main surrounding roads are regularly affected by Turkish drone and artillery strikes, which result in civilian casualties. In the first week of October 2024, two Turkish drone strikes hit a civilian car between the border to Iraq and Qamishli, resulting in several civilian casualties.
28. Clashes between the SDF and the SNA occasionally occur in the Hasakah governorate. Last month, the SDF conducted an attack against SNA forces, resulting in heavy casualties. However, Turkish artillery strikes from across the border are more prevalent than clashes between the SNA and the SDF.
29. The artillery and mortar strikes occasionally inflict civilian casualties in areas close to the frontlines of the areas controlled by Turkish-backed groups and Türkiye. As a consequence much of the civilian population has fled these areas. The trenches adjacent to the frontlines are mined, which sometimes results in casualties among shepherds during harvest season in the area.
30. There is sometimes tension surrounding the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli. Recently, the SDF imposed a blockade preventing food, water, and fuel from entering these areas. The blockade was lifted after seven hours. These kinds of blockades occur from time to time in Hasakah and Qamishli, and they sometimes lead to clashes between the SDF and Syrian government forces, which can result in civilian casualties.

### *Al Hol camp*

31. The prices for smuggling people out of Al Hol have increased dramatically. It costs around \$20,000 to smuggle a woman out of the camp and between \$5,000 and \$10,000 to smuggle a child out. People are smuggled out of the camp by drivers of the water trucks that enter and exit Al Hol camp. Recently in 2024, two women were smuggled out of the camp with their children and sent to Türkiye.
32. Mahmoud Sheikh is unaware of any examples where smuggling operations in and around the Al Hol camp have resulted in civilian casualties, but IS sometimes targets smugglers who defraud the women they smuggle out of the camp by taking their money and then do not or cannot smuggle them out of the camp.
33. The area outside the Al Hol camp is a sparsely populated desert close to the Iraqi border, and the violence inside the camp generally does not spill over into the surrounding inhabited areas. Some members of the surrounding population are also involved in the smuggling operations in and out of the camp.

### *Freedom of movement*

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

34. Civilians can generally travel between different areas under Kurdish control. However, traveling from the Kurdish-controlled parts of Aleppo to other areas under Kurdish control can be complicated. This is because some of the Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo are enclaves, such as Tall Rifaat, the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh and people traveling from these areas to Hasakah, Qamishli, or Raqqa must cross territory controlled by Syrian government forces.
35. Crossing government-controlled territory, in order to pass from Kurdish controlled enclaves in Aleppo to other Kurdish controlled areas in the northeast is generally not a problem for people who are not wanted by the Syrian government, such as women, children, and men above the age of conscription. However, men within the conscription age range cannot travel through these areas unless they pay a smuggler to facilitate their transport from the Kurdish-controlled parts of Aleppo to other areas under Kurdish control in North and East Syria. There are 19 Syrian government checkpoints between the Kurdish enclaves and the Kurdish controlled areas of North and East Syria.
36. The road between Manbij and Hasakah is open, as are the roads between Hasakah, Raqqa, and Qamishli. However, traveling along these roads at night can be dangerous. The road between Hasakah and Raqqa is mostly desert, and the autonomous administration has placed checkpoints every ten kilometers along this route. However, IS and criminal groups target oil trucks on this road. The southern road to Deir Ezzour is the most insecure.
37. Civilians can travel by bus between Raqqa, Tabqa, Hasakah, and Qamishli. There are also buses that run between Kobane and the Iraqi border every other day. The buses are cheap, and as there are many passengers onboard, these busses travel at night.
38. SDF checkpoints are prevalent in all areas controlled by the autonomous administration, but sometimes the SDF withdraws from checkpoints at night in Deir Ezzour to avoid being targeted by IS. This also occurs on the Khurafe road between Hasakah and Deir Ezzour, where IS occasionally attacks SDF convoys in the southern part of this road
39. Wanted individuals and men within the conscription age range cannot move necessarily freely in the areas of North and East Syria under Kurdish control. If a person avoiding mandatory Self-Defense Duty is apprehended at a checkpoint, he will be detained and sent to perform military service.

### A local NGO worker from Northeast Syria, online meeting, 9 October 2024

#### *General security situation in North and East Syria (NES)*

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

1. The Kurdish controlled areas in NES remain strictly under SDF control. The main security issue in the region is the Turkish drone attacks which have expanded beyond the 30 kilometers safe-zone established by Türkiye, to include areas at least 70 kilometers away from the Syrian-Turkish border, as far as al-Hol and Abd al-Aziz Mountain. Additionally the targets of these attacks have increasingly come to include SDF, Asayish (Internal Security Forces), government and administrative figures, not only PKK affiliated targets, such as PKK-linked elements who work alongside the SDF according to Turkish reports, as they used to focus on previously.
2. The Turkish attacks on the region has also included attacks on key infrastructure facilities such as power and water stations, most of which are located in Hasakah governorate.
3. Another important element related the general security situation in this region is the fighting between Iranian backed forces affiliated with the Syrian government and SDF forces in Deir Ezzour.
4. Increased IS activity, especially in Deir Ezzour is the third major security trend in the DAANES-region. Last month alone, in September 2024, IS conducted 22 attacks against the SDF, the Asayish (Internal security forces ISF) and people perceived to be working with the Self-administration governance institutions like local councils, communes and municipalities.

### *Hasakah*

5. In the northern parts of the governorate along the M4 highway, Turkish strikes remain the major security concern. According to the source's assessment this will go on until Türkiye reaches its objectives in the area or the US manages a de-escalation and a compromise between both sides, which is unlikely in the short to medium term despite some increasing talks about it by US officials. The US on the other hand have become an increasingly unreliable partner for self-administration due their unclear intentions in the region, which is pushing the Kurds to seek alternatives with the Russians and the regime. The alternative plan also is not making progress despite ongoing talks between Damascus and the Self-Administration due to the intransigence position of Damascus of granting any decentralized rights to the self-administration or allowing it to maintain its military and security forces.
6. In January 2024 Türkiye conducted a series of attacks on multiple locations and targets in the Hasakah province, many of which were vital infrastructure facilities. Among the targets was al-Suwaydiya power generation station which is the main power station



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

that provides power to the entire Hasakah region, and until this day the power has not yet been restored in some of the affected areas.

7. In the same series of attacks a water station was targeted, in addition projects that are funded and restored by international actors such as USAID. A power station in Darbasia was also targeted. This particular power station provides power to the Alouk water station which is the sole water source in Hasakah. Alouk is currently under the control of Turkish backed opposition groups.
8. Turkish targeting has also come to include oil stations. The self-administration relies heavily on oil revenues. Because of the Turkish attacks between 40-60% of the revenues have gone down.
9. During the year there has been some talks between Türkiye and the US, in which the US tried to persuade Türkiye to reduce its attacks on the region, especially those targeting governance efforts. There was some reduction in the amount of attacks, but it did not last for long and in May and June airstrikes were resumed to previous levels. In the beginning of October 2-3 attacks took place on the road between Hasakah and Qamishli where a senior YPJ commander was killed. In the same period ISF commanders were also targeted by Turkish strikes.
10. Tension that occurs in other areas between the SDF and the regime forces and its proxies, like for instance in Aleppo or Deir Ezzour, this tension is reflected in Hasakah city and Qamishli. This usually results in the SDF imposing blockades on the security squares in these two cities. Meaning blocking all kind of supplies that are intended to go to the government institutions inside the squares.
11. There is no major IS presence in the area, but there are sleeper cells that are able to move around, mainly near Qamishli but also in the south parts of the governorate near Tal Hamees and Shaddady.
12. The main focus of IS activity in Hasakah is focused on the camps and the prisons where IS members and prisoners are held. The majority of these camps and prisons are located in Hasakah. Some of these camps are seen by IS as safe zones for them, such as the al-Hol camp, where there have been cases of reversed smuggling meaning that people have been smuggled in to the camp.

### *Deir Ezzour*

13. The situation in Deir Ezzour is fragile, especially eastern rural parts of the governorate from Busayra to Baghouz where many the tribes are located, in addition to most of the

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

oil fields and oil facilities, which in turn has become a ground for dispute among tribes but also external actors like Iran and Damascus.

14. The dominance of Kurds in the self-administration has also created local grievances and tension between tribes and the SDF in the area, which in September last year resulted in major clashes between SDF and local tribes. Therefore Iran and the Syrian government have given support to some of the tribes, primarily the al-Hifal tribal family and its leader Ibrahim al-Hifal, in order to ignite the conflict between the tribes and SDF. The Syrian government and Iran are trying to push more tribes into joining the fight against SDF, but most tribes in the area are reluctant to do so, and still prefer the SDF to the Syrian government and Iran.
15. Clashes happened again in August 2024 between SDF and tribesmen backed by the Syrian government who came from the government controlled side of the Euphrates river in deir Ezzor governorate. The SDF was able to push them back and take control of the whole area but the fighting, which lasted for 24 hours resulted in 15 civilian casualties. During this attack, the SDF, with support of American airstrikes, for the first time conducted a counterattack on the government-controlled side of the Euphrates river. The SDF has now imposed strict security measures such as more check-points along the river and observation towers on the riverbank as a consequence of the attack. The situation remains unstable since the area is very hard to monitor and control, especially movement across the riverbank from government-controlled areas.
16. Due to the ongoing Turkish military drone and airstrikes in the northern parts of the DAANES areas, the SDF is focusing most of its military capabilities on those areas to the north. This impacts the SDF's fighting capability against IS, especially in Deir Ezzour. This means that IS is more capable of operating in Deir Ezzour, being able to move sleeper cells from the government controlled areas of the Badia desert to Deir Ezzour and also across the Iraqi border.
17. Additionally, the tension between tribes and the SDF and the deteriorating economic situation is creating a profitable environment for IS to recruit people and take advantage of people's vulnerabilities. IS uses the state of instability, bad economy and lack of employment opportunities against the self-administration by blaming them for the dire condition in the communities and thereby recruit more unemployed youth, who they pay between 50 – 100 USD to conduct an IED attack or an assassination.
18. IS is still able to collect taxes from people in Deir Ezzour, especially from those who have businesses. IS also targets, not only military and security branches but now also the self-administration government structures, such as local councils on a community level.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

19. IS conducted 22 attacks in NES in September and at least 70% of these attacks were in Deir Ezzour.

### *Raqqa*

20. Security wise Raqqa is the most stable area in NES. Being far away from the Turkish border the number of attacks on Raqqa city have decreased significantly.
21. The northern parts of the governorate are located on the frontlines between Kurdish controlled areas and areas controlled by Türkiye and SNA-groups. The Ayn Issa area along the M4, is considered a war zone and a high-security zone, with daily clashes and shelling between the SDF and SNA take place. There is also a presence of the Syrian army and Russian forces in that area, but no US presence.
22. These areas on the frontline are mostly desert areas, but there are some smaller and scattered villages and communities. These villages are at times hit by shelling, which can result in civilian casualties.
23. The main issue currently affecting Raqqa is the issue of drugs, both consumption and smuggling. Drugs are being smuggled from the government controlled areas other side of the Euphrates river, and as a result drug related crimes are increasing.
24. IS presence in the area is limited due to the increased security measure taken by the SDF. IS has also shifted their interest to other areas such as Deir Ezzour.

### *Aleppo*

25. The Tel Rifaat area is outside of the so called "US zone". There is a strong presence of Iranian backed groups and the SDF only operates in the eastern part of the area. The area is not officially under SDF control. In this area YPG and YPG linked groups are operating in that area and they engage in regular fighting with the SNA on the frontlines. These attacks are causing fatalities because both sides are conducting incursions across the frontline and there are tens of deaths on both sides. From time to time there are also civilian casualties due to the shelling.
26. If IS is present in this area they usually operate under a different name like for instance Hizb al-Tahrir and Huras al-Din in Idlib or other Islamist armed groups.
27. There has not been reports of clashes between HTS and SDF since they do not share frontlines.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### *Freedom of movement*

28. When it comes to entering Kurdish-controlled areas from Syrian government-controlled areas it can be difficult because people (not originally from SDF held areas) need to pay bribes to cross from one area of control to another. It is very common that people travel from NES to GoS areas if they do not fear security concerns with Damascus (for example youth at military conscription age)
29. Travelling through SDF-held areas is possible and quite easy. The area of concern would be the eastern rural Deir Ezzour, due to the security situation there, especially after dark, when SDF exercise less actual military control of the area.
30. There is a new road connecting Hasakah and Raqqa, which is called the New M4. One can reach Raqqa in 2,5 hours from Hasakah city and from there go to Tabqa and then all the way to Manbij and Kobane.
31. There are bus stations in the big cities in the region with mini-buses that travel back and forth to different areas (for example between Raqqa and Deir Ezzour).
32. People who could face problems at check-points are mainly young men who are wanted to perform the self-defense duty for the Kurdish Self Defense Forces. Ethnic Arabs from parts of Deir Ezzour controlled by the Syrian government are required to be issued with a so-called displaced ID card by the self-administration in order to live in SDF-held areas and move around in the areas held by SDF
33. Those individuals displaced to SDF areas need a local sponsor to obtain the displaced ID card by the Self-Administration, especially those in Deir Ezzour regions held by the regime and Iranian-militias. Most people don't have issues finding a sponsor because many have relatives in these areas who can sponsor them or are from the same tribe or clan. The Self-Administration says this procedure is due to security concerns and the need to vet and track newcomers who want to reside in SDF-held areas

### Alexander McKeever, This Week in Northern Syria, WhatsApp meeting, 11 October 2024

Alexander McKeever is a researcher/journalist based in New York. He writes the weekly newsletter, This Week in Northern Syria, covering recent events and dynamics in the regions of Syria controlled by the DAANES and the affiliated SDF, and by the Syrian Interim Government and the SNA under the auspices of Türkiye.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### *Aleppo*

1. The security situation in Aleppo is mainly dominated by the frontline activity between SDF and SDF aligned forces, and the SNA and Türkiye-backed forces. There are regular exchanges of attacks between these groups, in addition to raids carried out by HRE (Afrin Liberation Forces), who is a front group for the SDF operating in these areas.
2. According to Alexander's recent observations, there has been one particular SNA group called al-Quwa al-Moushtaraka (Joint Force), affiliated with al-Hamza brigade, carrying out more offensive attacks on SDF/HRE. This group employs a brigade that seems to have partial Central Asian members (Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Kyrgys). This brigade appears to have been active on the frontlines in Afrin against the SDF/HRE for some time, which was confirmed in October 2024. Individuals involved with the brigade had been in Idlib prior to Afrin.
3. Other key security developments in areas under Kurdish control in Aleppo are the Turkish drone strikes, which are a mix of military usage of loitering munitions and smaller drones, mostly focused on the frontlines. Targeted assassinations of key SDF figures are also taking place, which are carried out by Türkiye further away from the frontlines.
4. The events impacting the security situation in Kobani consists almost entirely of Turkish drone attacks and where. In Kobani there have been the highest profile attacks of civilian political targets.
5. In the Tel Rifaat enclave and Manbij there is a presence of regime forces and Iranian backed groups, but it is very hard to determine the extent of their presence in these areas. Occasionally, GoS forces would blockade check-points between these areas, nominally under SDF control, and this is mostly related to various political and military tensions between the Syrian government and SDF.
6. In Manbij there have been some occasional attacks claimed by IS. However, there is no IS-activity in the Tel Rifaat-region.
7. Civilian casualties happen occasionally but are relatively low compared to the amount of activities and incidents in these areas, and most oftenly civilians are not intentionally targeted in these areas.

### *Deir Ezzour*

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

8. IS insurgency has been a major security issue in Deir Ezzour, particularly affecting the central part of the government around the city of Busayrah.
9. The tribal alliances in the eastern parts of Deir Ezzour are also a great source of tension and instability. According to the source, the tribal uprising in 2023, characterized the security situation in Deir Ezzour. The unrest at the time was limited to branches of the Aqidat tribe, mainly al-Bakir and al-Hafel. Although the SDF regained control over the areas where the tribal insurrection took place, mostly around Diban to Hajin, scattered attacks continued and many of these militants moved across the Euphrates river to areas controlled by GoS. Alexander McKeever stresses the importance of differentiating between the tribal militias that the GoS created when they reentered the area in 2017, and tribal forces, such as Ibrahim al-Hafel's tribesmen who recently came to the area. The Syrian Government supported these tribal forces, and more so as October 2024 then during the flare-up in 2023.
10. In late September 2024 there was a renewed major tribal insurgency from across the river on SDF positions but the SDF together with the coalition's support managed to contain the infiltration.
11. The main targets of these insurgency attacks are almost entirely SDF targets; SDF vehicles, SDF patrols, SDF check-points. Occasionally insurgency attacks target civilians that they deem to be informers for the SDF. It also happens that Insurgents target civilians working for the DAANES-administration, however, there is no reports on such attacks happening recently, as of October 2024.
12. The smaller scale insurgent attacks that are attributed to tribal actors are typically just focused on security personnel. However, more large scale fighting across the river between the GoS forces and SDF have lead to civilian casualties, usually by mortars or rockets that are fired across the river. For instance, there was this incident in August during the most recent major flare-up, a civilian family was killed by artillery fire by GoS-forces, on the SDF-controlled side of the river. SDF responded by carrying out some limited cross-river raids into government- controlled areas – a type response that has typically been a rare occurrence, according to the source.
13. Another issue is the rocket and drone attacks on US military sites and bases in the region. Those are clearly from Iranian linked actors in Iraq or in Syria, and when the US responds to those, they will mainly target sites in Deir Ezzour.

*Hasakah*

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

14. The situation in Hasakah varies in different parts of the governorate. There is southern Hasakah where the situation blends into the one in Deir Ezzour in terms of IS activity. This is largely on the road that runs north-south from Shadaddy to Deir Ezzour. There is less frequent activity compared to Deir Ezzour, but still several IS-claimed attacks per month in this part of Hasakah. The road to al-Hol also sees some IS insurgent activities.
15. The Tel Tamar and Ras al-Ayn frontlines in north-western Hasakah (the eastern part of the SNA- and Türkiye-controlled Operation Peace Spring area) have similar dynamics to the frontlines in northern Aleppo, but could be considered less active. On these frontlines there are sporadic SDF-claimed raids and clashes in addition to Turkish shelling. Overall there is a lower population density in these areas and therefore we rarely see civilian casualties.
16. The GoS presence in Hasakah governorate includes the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli, a military base in the northeast of Hasakah city, a pocket including Qamishli airport and several dozen villages south and east of Qamishli. That occasionally leads to tension.
17. From time to time, in the southern neighborhoods of the city such as Geweran, the SDF carry out security campaigns often related to IS.
18. The area stretching from Hasakah city to Qamishli up to Derek is a hotspot for Turkish drone attacks, especially around Qamishli and sometimes in Amuda. These attacks mainly target SDF but occasionally civilian members of the DAANES-administration are being targeted as well. At times civilian activists in PYD related groups such as the women's organization and other political activists are also targeted by Turkish attacks. Nevertheless, the attacks are often carried out on open highways and therefore civilian casualties are relatively limited.
19. The effects of the Turkish attacks on the infrastructure that occurred in late 2023 and in January of 2024, are still palpable and frequently ongoing. The attacks targeted electrical grid, oil fields and the power plant in Swuydiya. Due to this, there have been some protests in Hasakah city because the DAANES-administration reduced the fuel allocation to bus and taxi drivers. Water supply has also been a major issue as a direct effect of these attacks on vital infrastructure.

### *Raqqa*

20. The security situation at the Ayn Issa frontline (bordering the western area of the Operation Peace Spring area) is very different from the one in Raqqa city. This part of the frontline is more active than the Tel Tamar frontline (located next to the eastern

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

part of the Operation Peace Spring area) in Hasakah governorate in terms of the fighting between SDF and Türkiye/SNA. The area is largely considered a military zone. Türkiye has about 50 military installations throughout the Operation Peace Spring area, some of which are larger bases and some are frontline positions with Turkish army commando units. The situation on this frontline consists of reciprocal shelling and artillery, and some SDF raids. There haven't been many drone attacks in this area.

21. There has been some IS insurgent activity in the areas around Raqqa city up to Tel Samen, however, it has been less intense than Deir Ezzour and southern Hasakah. According to the source, there is a notion of less IS-insurgency and rather more SDF-counterinsurgency raids, this year compared to last year. However, it is unclear whether this has to do with IS-attacks going unreported and the fact that local media tend to report more on SDF-raids. SDF-raids occur mostly in Raqqa city and around the Karamah area closer to the Deir Ezzour-border.
22. In September 2024 there was an IS-prison escape during a prison transfer from the Central prison to the Silo prison and several IS-prisoners escaped, allegedly by bribing security officials.
23. The attacks that have been claimed by IS have almost entirely been focused on SDF-targets.

### An organization promoting human rights, online meeting, 9 October 2024

#### *General security situation in DAANES/SDF controlled areas of NES*

1. The overall security situation in the Kurdish controlled areas of North and East Syria has worsened. This is due to Turkish air and drone strikes as well as an increase in IS operations and presence, especially in Kurdish controlled areas of Deir Ezzour combined with increasing attacks by Arab tribal militias, who are supported logistically by the GoS and Iran. Although there have been less Turkish air and drone strikes in 2024 compared to 2023 the drone strikes are still occurring on a frequent basis.
2. The decreasing security situation has led to more to civilians leaving Kurdish-controlled areas in north and east Syria.
3. The decreasing security situation has led to an increase in the amount of minors joining the SDF due to the relatively high wages that the organisation



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

pays in salary. Young people over 18 will tend to join the Asayish also for economic reasons. Both the SDF and Asayish pay wages that are relatively higher to what other employers in the region pay, which is a clear economic incentive to join these forces. The relatively high salary paid by the SDF and Asayish even incentivizes families to encourage their minor children to join the SDF and for young people over 18 to join the Asayish. Young people without family support networks, jobs or job prospects, or school dropouts around the age 15-16, are the ones that are most likely to join the SDF and the Asayish, if they are above 18. According to the source the PKK-affiliated Revolutionary Youth Movement, operating in Kurdish-controlled areas, are also recruiting among minors.

4. The Turkish air and drone attacks on civilian infrastructure has had a major impact on the populations living in Kurdish controlled areas in North and East Syria. The drone and airstrikes on power plants in the Kurdish-controlled areas has led to frequent power cuts, which has led to the local population building solar panels to generate power. Turkish air and drone strikes have also been destroying water wells, which has led to water shortages in certain areas and has prevented farmers from growing crops in certain areas.

### *Aleppo*

5. There is continuous and regular fighting, in the form of shelling and artillery fire between the SDF and SNA-groups across the frontlines separating the Kurdish-controlled area of Manbij, Tal Rifaat and Kobane with areas controlled by SNA-groups and Türkiye, particularly in the Tall Rifaat enclave. Over time the fighting on the frontlines increase and decrease in intensity, but it remains ongoing.
6. Manbij is the most affected areas in terms of clashes across the frontlines between SDF and SNA-groups. According to the assessment of the source, this is due to the Turkish strategy of overtaking the area and thus being able to connect the two Türkiye and SNA-controlled areas of the Euphrates Shield area with the Operation Peace Spring area, which the Manbij area sits right.
7. There are frequent Turkish drone attacks in the Kobane area under DAANES control.
8. The Syrian government has at times imposed a food embargo, in both late 2023 and early 2024, on the Kurdish-controlled Tall Rifaat enclave, preventing food supplies from entering the area.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

9. There is limited ability for civilians to cultivate their lands due to the fighting along the frontlines. Fires in agricultural fields also contributed the loss of the early wheat harvest in the summer of 2024.
10. Civilians living in areas close to the frontlines are impacted by continuous Turkish drones strikes in the area.
11. There is less presence of the Islamic State in Kurdish-controlled parts of Aleppo compared to other DAANES-controlled areas in north and east Syria. The source assessed that there might be active IS sleeper cells in Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate, but the source was not aware of any active IS operations in the areas.

### *Hasakah*

12. The Syrian Democratic Forces is in greater military control of Hasakah governorate compared to other DAANES-controlled areas in north and east Syria.
13. The SDF conducts frequent raids against Islamic State cells in neighborhoods in both Qamishli and Hasakah city.
14. According to the source, Türkiye has informants operating in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Hasakah, including in Hasakah city itself. Informants have provided info on SDF whereabouts in the region. To counter this the SDF has carried out arrest operations of informants mainly in 2022.
15. Turkish drone and airstrikes take place in a 35-kilometer zone stretching from the Turkish border into DAANES-controlled areas. Most of the Turkish drone and airstrikes happen around Qamishli and Hasakah city, as well as the areas around Amuda and Al Malikiyeh.
16. There is collateral damage from Turkish drone and airstrikes. For instance, targeted drone strikes have also happened in markets in DAANES-controlled area for instance in August 2024.
17. In the Kurdish-controlled areas of Hasakah governorate, there are exchanges of small arms fire and artillery on the frontlines to the Operation Peace Spring area, which is controlled by Türkiye and SNA groups.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

18. IS has a network of supporters in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, but does not have an active presence in these cities.
19. According to the source's assessment, the Islamic State has two operational goals. One is collect information on the prisons in DAANES-controlled areas to free their members from the prisons and the Al-Hol camp. The source also assessed that IS cells are preparing for strategic attacks to free their members from DAANES-controlled prisons in the Kurdish-controlled areas.

### *Raqqa*

20. In the Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqa governorate, there are no Turkish or GoS attacks. The area is more secure than other areas under Kurdish control, with the exception of the presence Islamic State cells. IS attacks are concentrated against security forces, prisons and checkpoints. IS is not targeting civilians in Raqqa. Al-Karamah in eastern Raqqa governorate has the largest presence of IS cells.
21. Recently, as of October 2024, there have been less clashes between the SDF and SNA in areas close to the frontline city of Ain Issa, which borders the Türkiye and SNA-controlled Operation Peace Spring area.

### *Deir Ezzour*

22. The ongoing conflict in Deir Ezzour is sustained by multiple factors: the presence of the International Coalition forces against the Islamic State, control of oil fields in Kurdish-administered areas, and the positioning of Iranian militias in government-held territories on the western bank of the Euphrates River, opposite Kurdish-controlled areas on the eastern bank.
23. There are frequent clashes and confrontation between the Arab tribes and the SDF in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour. Arab tribes in the Kurdish controlled areas of Deir Ezzour have allied themselves with Syrian government.
24. Iran has supported Arab militias, which have tried to capture territory from SDF by conducting cross-river attacks and by shelling SDF-controlled areas.
25. The Islamic state is conducting daily attacks against the SDF and Asayish in Deir Ezzour governorate. The SDF is the main target of IS attacks in the area. The IS

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

is taking advantage of the fighting between Arab militias and the SDF to launch its operations against the SDF.

26. Civilian casualties occur as collateral damage as a result of the fighting between the Arab tribes and the SDF as well as from Islamic State attacks, even if civilians aren't the direct target of these attacks. The clashes and attacks in the area has also led to forced displacement of civilians.

27. IS is resurging in Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour governorate due to the deteriorating economic situation. As a consequence of this the SDF is conducting more counterinsurgency operations against IS.

### *Freedom of movement*

28. It is possible to travel between the DAANES-controlled parts of Hasakah, Deir Ezzour, Raqqa and Aleppo for residents in these areas. Local residents in the Kurdish controlled areas travel to Hasakah and Qamishli for hospital treatment.

29. IDPs face more difficulty in traveling between various parts of DAANES-controlled areas. It is required for IDPs to have a sponsor in order to travel from one part of the Kurdish controlled areas to another.

30. Men of military age face restrictions to their movements if they have not completed mandatory self-defense duty for Kurdish self-administration. If they are detained by SDF they will be sent to do the mandatory self-defense duty.

31. The source was aware of anecdotal information pertaining to practice of paying bribes in order to pass through checkpoints from GoS-controlled areas into areas controlled by DAANES in north and east Syria. On the road from Amuda to Qamishli there are two checkpoints. Between Hasakah and Qamishli there are a minimum of three checkpoints and between Hasakah to Raqqa there are a minimum of five checkpoints.

## A Syrian Human Rights Organisation, Skype meeting, 28 October 2024

*The source has been monitoring and documenting violations (e.g. killings, abductions, torture etc.) against civilians conducted by different parties of the Syrian conflict since 2011. It has a well-established network of sources throughout Syria.*

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### *Security Situation in DAANES/SDF-Controlled Areas of Deir Ezzour Province*

1. The situation in Deir Ezzour, particularly in its eastern countryside, has significantly deteriorated following the arrest of Abu Khawla, a former chairman of the Deir Ezzour Military Council, an Arab component of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Abu Khawla faces accusations of conspiring to orchestrate a coup against the SDF and the American presence in the province in collaboration with Iranian elements.
2. His arrest sparked armed confrontations between the SDF and fighters loyal to Abu Khawla.
3. The hostilities in Deir Ezzour do not represent a conflict between the SDF and the Arab tribes in the province, nor can they be characterized as a Kurdish-Arab conflict, as some analysts have suggested. It is not an Arab uprising against the Kurds, as others have portrayed. Rather, these confrontations are a clash between the SDF and groups affiliated with Iranian militias and Hezbollah, with some involvement from the Syrian government (GoS).
4. Regarding the stance of the tribes, there have been conflicting positions among the Arab tribes in Deir Ezzour. While the majority have aligned with Abu Khawla in opposition to SDF control, some tribal leaders have expressed solidarity with the SDF and participated in the fight against Abu Khawla's affiliated groups and Iranian militias. Notably, the majority of SDF casualties have been Arab.
5. There have been no clashes or other forms of fighting between the SDF and the Syrian government (GoS) in the parts of Deir Ezzour province under DAANES control. Limited skirmishes have occurred between the GoS and SDF in the security square in Hasakah and near the airport.
6. Clashes have occurred between US forces and Iranian or Russian fighters in the eastern part of the Deir Ezzour countryside, specifically in seven villages located along the eastern banks of the Euphrates River near the Conoco base.
7. The Islamic State (IS) remains active in Deir Ezzour province, having conducted 225 attacks from the beginning of 2024 until the end of October 2024. IS has primarily targeted high-profile Arabs who cooperated with the SDF, attacked oil storage facilities, and utilized its small cells in DAANES to launch attacks in areas where Sharia law is not enforced (as defined by IS).
8. IS activities in 2024 rarely led to civilian casualties in DAANES-controlled regions of Deir Ezzour.

### *Freedom of Movement in Kurdish-Controlled Regions of North and East Syria*

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

9. Residents of DAANES/SDF-controlled areas are permitted to travel between the DAANES/SDF-controlled sections of Aleppo and other regions in North and East Syria, including parts of Hasakah, Deir Ezzour, and Raqqa. All individuals must present an identification document and proof of residency in the area. Men of military service age are also required to present their military book.
10. There is no necessity to apply for permission to move between provinces under DAANES control for residents of the area.
11. At checkpoints within DAANES territory, discrimination against Arabs is uncommon. The SDF exercises caution to ensure that Arabs are treated equitably alongside Kurds to avoid inciting unrest against DAANES. However, at checkpoints in Deir Ezzour, SDF members affiliated with specific Arab clans may mistreat individuals from rival clans.
12. Generally, individuals passing through checkpoints are not subjected to inspections during the day but may be checked at night. Women, particularly those wearing a niqab, are inspected by the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) to ensure that men are not concealing themselves behind the niqab.
13. From Qamishli to Raqqa, there are approximately 15 checkpoints at the entrances to cities and along the roads. Between West Deir Ezzour (Maamel area) and East Deir Ezzour (Al-Baghous), there are three to four checkpoints, and eight checkpoints exist from East Deir Ezzour to Raqqa.

### *General security situation in DAANES in 2024*

14. The SDF comprises both Arabs and Kurds, making it misleading to characterize arrests of Arabs by the SDF as indicative of a conflict between these groups. Some organisations are deliberately attempting to frame the security incidents in the area as part of a broader Arab-Kurdish conflict.
15. Ordinary citizens and activists who criticize DAANES are generally not arrested. Those who are detained typically include individuals engaging with external parties, such as Turkish or Iraqi authorities (particularly those affiliated with Barzani in the Kurdistan region of Iraq).
16. In 2024, there has been a decrease in civilian casualties and arrests within DAANES compared to the previous year. Furthermore, the occurrence of clashes between the SDF and the Turkish army along the borders has decreased in 2024 compared to 2023.

### **Gregory Waters, online meeting, 26 September 2024**

Gregory Waters is a Non-Resident Scholar at the Middle East Institute, a consultant for the International Crisis Group, and a research analyst at the Counter Extremism Project. His research focuses on the Syrian regime's security forces, primarily utilizing open source research to assess the capabilities and structure of the Syrian Arab Army and allied militias. He has also

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

written about and tracks the developments of the Islamic State in central Syria. Gregory also works as a research analyst at the Counter Extremism Project, where he writes reports primarily on Syrian and Iraqi extremist groups. He has previously been published by the Atlantic Council, Bellingcat, and open Democracy, and currently writes about Syria for the International Review.

### *Islamic State (IS) capacity in parts of North and East Syria under Kurdish control*

1. IS has a presence across every governorate in the Kurdish-controlled parts of North and East Syria, and in every major urban area, both Arab and Kurdish. IS also has the ability to establish a presence in most rural areas. While IS attacks are primarily concentrated in areas of Deir Ezzour governorate under Kurdish control, there have been regular attacks on and discovery and dismantling of IS cells in Manbij, the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, the Shaddady countryside, and in Raqqa city by Kurdish forces and its surrounding areas over the last two years, particularly in the past year.
2. IS presence in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli has been growing over the last two years, especially in Qamishli city, where their presence has become increasingly significant. In early September or August 2024, a five-man IS cell was captured in Qamishli city as they were attempting to build a car bomb.
3. IS has no true territorial control in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Syria and is essentially composed of sleeper cells made up of individuals who also have day jobs. An attempted IED attack for Newroz last year was planned by a local person working for an NGO.
4. IS activity across the governorates and cities in the northeast encompasses all three aspects of its operations: violent attacks, financial activities, and human smuggling. IS attacks occur multiple times a week, while Syrian Democratic Forces' (SDF) counter-IS operations are conducted multiple times a month. The first half of 2024 was particularly violent, with twice as many attacks during this period as in all of 2023. While the level of violence has since decreased, it remains elevated. In the spring of 2024, the SDF conducted several counter-IS operations, resulting in the capture of low- and mid-level IS command officials. IS has been able to maintain a high level of violence despite the number of counter-operations conducted by the SDF.
5. The level of violence does not fully reflect IS's capacity. At some point, the levels will naturally decrease, but this does not mean that IS has been pushed back. While IS attacks have increased across all areas of the northeast, most occur in Deir Ezzour.
6. Circumstantial evidence suggests that IS has been able to rebuild its manpower over the last two to three years, which has, in turn, increased its capability to conduct attacks. There is also the question of whether IS has been downplaying its activity in

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

the northeast to encourage a U.S. withdrawal from the area. The realization that a U.S. withdrawal is not imminent could explain the recent escalation in IS activity in the northeast, according to the assessment of Gregory Waters.

7. IS sleeper cells in North and East Syria generally consisted of four to five men around two years ago, and these cells were highly compartmentalized, as were their chains of command, to protect them from exposure and capture. Whether this remains the case is still unclear.
8. The announcement of IS leadership captures and killings over the last two and a half years indicates that IS leaders are now more localized, which differs from the previous dynamic where leadership was based in the northwest and directed fighters in the northeastern parts of Syria.
9. There have been instances where the claimed emir of Raqqa and the claimed emir of North and East Syria, as well as local financiers, have been captured. IS is increasingly relying on face-to-face interactions to exchange information, which forces its command chain to be based locally. However, some IS leaders remain based in Aleppo, focusing on activities outside Syria and requiring access to Turkey for smuggling or communication with external contacts.
10. There have been a substantial number of leadership kills and captures, but the IS command chain in the northeast appears resilient, as evidenced by the increased IS activity in the first half of 2024. The age and demographics of the captured IS leaders this year, mostly in their early to mid-twenties, indicate a generational shift in the IS command structure, with the current commanders being post-insurgency promotions. This may affect IS's capacity, though the impact is unclear at the moment.

### *Deir Ezzour*

11. There are five towns in Deir Ezzour (Shuhayl, Busayra, Diban, Zire, and Wajes) where the common narrative is that there is an IS shadow government, and that IS takes control during the night, although they do not have an administrative structure. The IS presence in these towns consists of nighttime patrols, extortion, intimidation of the civilian population, and greater freedom of movement for IS. Kurdish security forces do not enter these towns at night to conduct counter-IS operations.
12. Three of these towns have had a significant IS presence since 2021, which has now expanded to two more towns over the last two years. IS does not have territorial control or permanent checkpoints in Deir Ezzour, but it is very dangerous to travel at night. In mid-September 2024, there was an IS attack in Wajes, Deir Ezzour.
13. The strength of IS, combined with the SDF's lack of capacity in this area, means that IS has nearly free rein to do as they please with the population—whether that involves



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

extortion, recruitment, or simply existing alongside a population that is too intimidated to cooperate with authorities in relation to countering IS.

14. Deir Ezzour is the area with the highest level of all three aspects of IS activity. There is regular smuggling across the Euphrates River to areas controlled by the Syrian government, linking IS activities in the northeast with central Syria. Recruitment for IS occurs in Deir Ezzour, as does outreach to former IS fighters in the region. However, it is unclear how successful IS has been in recruiting new adult members with no previous affiliation to the group. It is also uncertain whether recruitment for IS takes place outside of Deir Ezzour.
15. There are recent reports of IS 'safe houses' in Kurdish-controlled Deir Ezzour, which the group uses for political and religious indoctrination before sending individuals to military training camps. This represents a new development in the Deir Ezzour area and is a trend that, until recently, only occurred in parts of Syria controlled by the Syrian government. This indicates the level of safety and security that IS has achieved in Deir Ezzour. Although there have been Kurdish battalions in IS in the past, there are currently no reports of IS outreach to Kurds. IS also exploits the ethnic tensions between Arabs and Kurds in its recruitment propaganda.
16. There are regular attacks against Kurdish security forces and threats of violence toward the local population. Targeted assassinations still occur, but not as frequently as in the past. However, it is unclear whether this is because IS cannot carry them out or because fewer people are willing to cooperate with the security forces. This situation makes it difficult for NGOs to operate in the area and for services to be provided to local populations in the affected area.
17. Essentially, there is a lack of SDF presence in the Deir Ezzour area. There are towns in Deir Ezzour where an SDF security presence exists at the perimeter, monitoring entry and exit, but there is a lack of a permanent interior security presence. This situation has allowed IS cells to persist and grow, and sometimes intermingle and reorganize themselves together with the remainder of local tribal insurgency.
18. The SDF withdrew from several towns in the Deir Ezzour province in connection with the 'tribal insurgency' in the autumn of 2023 and reestablished itself with a slightly different footprint in the area than in the past. Generally, the SDF will withdraw its physical presence from checkpoints in the area if they are under severe threat and are incapable of defending them properly. The SDF relies more on patrols than on a permanent physical presence. Local sources describe the situation as one of reduced SDF security presence and fewer security operations conducted against IS by the SDF, alongside a simultaneous increase in IS attacks on SDF security forces. SDF counter-IS operations are currently not increasing at the same rate as operations conducted by IS.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

19. The IS presence in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo province is primarily centered around Manbij. IS claims attacks in this area occur steadily, but at the same time, this is also the area where IS attacks are least frequent. There is a steady presence of IS in the region, but they are not always engaged in violent activity. This is one of the key aspects of IS's presence in North and East Syria. In Deir Ezzour, there is a lot of violence, which is not the case in other areas, such as Raqqa or Manbij, which have a similar dynamic.
20. IS has had a long-term presence in Manbij, and because this area is such an important crossing point, connecting the northeast with the northwest, one would expect IS to have established an infrastructure that enables it to use pre-existing smuggling routes or create its own for moving goods and people.
21. There have been no reports of IS activities in the area around Kobane. The issues facing Kobane are generally more related to PKK activity impacting the local population. The PKK's overt presence in the area, along with the deteriorating socioeconomic situation, has led to a significant population flight from the town, which is not attributable to IS.

### *Raqqa*

22. The IS presence in Kurdish controlled areas of Raqqa governorate is quite robust. The coalition and SDF conducted a raid in the Raqqa area in early September 2024, during which they captured an IS leadership figure. IS still conducts extortion in Raqqa city, although this is not as widespread as it once was. The Kurdish security forces are fearful of the IDP community from the informal camps in the countryside, as well as those in Mansour and the Tabqa area. The threat may be overstated, but it does present a security and administrative problem for the authorities.
23. There have been IS attacks on the road to Ayn Issa and in the city area. There were two attacks on the Asayish headquarters this year, as well as one in the Mansour countryside. A large population has recently returned to Raqqa, Mansour, and Tabqa from Al Hol, and the integration of these families will carry an increased risk of some of them rejoining IS and supporting IS activity in the area.

### *Hasakah*

24. The level of IS activity in Hasakah is a close third to that in Raqqa, but it certainly seems to be increasing recently, as of September 2024. In the months preceding the Sina'a prison attack in 2022, there was an increased level of overt IS activity in Hasakah. Before and since then, there have been multiple car bomb operations, both successful and unsuccessful.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

25. IS has had a presence in Hasakah for a long time and has maintained networks across Hasakah province for years, primarily due to the presence of the Al Hol camp. This network enables IS to smuggle women out of the camp, and there has been an increase in violent attacks in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli. According to security officials, IS uses the Shadaddy countryside as a key transit route.
26. The main change regarding IS activity in the area is its ability to conduct violent incursions into the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, rather than just smuggling operations. According to Gregory waters, there is no clear reversal of this trend.

### *Impact on civilian population*

27. IS assassinates aid workers and individuals connected to local non-military authorities. There are also regular claims that the SDF is killing and wounding civilians as collateral damage during its raids against IS, as well as mistakes made in connection with these operations, for instance in wrongfully targeting the individuals with no IS affiliation. Additionally, there are many reports of civilian casualties related to the SDF's response to the tribal insurgency in autumn 2023, including women and children killed during the SDF's besiegement of certain towns in Deir Ezzour. However, there have been no reports of civilian casualties inflicted by the SDF outside the Deir Ezzour area of operations.
28. According to Gregory Waters it is safe to assume that there have been civilian casualties in the fighting between IS and the SDF, but the extent of these casualties is difficult to pin down in actual quantifiable numbers. The most common targets of IS attacks are SDF security forces, particularly at checkpoints or during SDF-patrols. IS is also attempting to facilitate further prison breaks. Additionally, IS consistently engages with the civilian population, with extortion and intimidation being the most common forms of interaction. In recent years, more violence has been directed toward the civilian population; however, IS has now established a baseline level of intimidation, which means it does not have to kill local sheikhs, businessmen, and aid workers as frequently. However, such killings still occur. The attack in Hasakah last Kurdish New Year (Newroz in march 2024), was directed toward civilians, indicating that IS will still attempt mass casualty attacks when the opportunity arises according to Gregory waters assessment.
29. Outside of Deir Ezzour, it is relatively safe to travel from Raqqa to Hasakah, but there are still checkpoints. The real hindrance to civilian freedom of movement due to security issues is in Deir Ezzour, where there is a substantial amount of arrests and subsequent detention of local Arabs at checkpoints. There is no system with in the SDF-forces for processing detention cases, and individuals detained at checkpoints may remain in jail for a long time. This also occurs to a lesser extent in the Raqqa area.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

30. The IS insurgency certainly influences the behavior of women in areas where IS has a significant presence. IS affects the way women dress, as well as their ability to attend school and work for NGOs in five towns in Deir Ezzour governorate (Shuhayl, Busayra, Diban, Zire, and Wajes slocated south east of Deir Ezzour city on eastern bank of the Euphrates river) where IS has a significant presence. This influence can also be observed on an individual level in other parts of the northeast, especially in cases involving women from Al Hol who are found by IS and have been known to be intimidated by IS. One example involves a woman who was previously married to an IS fighter believed to be dead. The woman remarried, but her former husband was not dead and was able to enlist a local IS-cell to kill her. Women continue to play a significant role in IS, both as supporters within IS and as victims. This situation applies to both those inside and outside of Al Hol.
31. IS targets oil trucks traveling between SDF-held areas and government-controlled areas. As of now, this occurs roughly once a month in 2024. This does not significantly affect general access to oil, as there are hundreds of trucks transiting these areas every day.

### *Al Hol Camp and the impact of the IS insurgency and the level of conflict of in Northeast Syria*

32. The level of violence in Al Hol Camp has drastically improved following a three-part security operation conducted by the SDF over the last two years. There have been no documented or confirmed IS-linked murders in Al Hol Camp in 2024. However, it is unclear whether this improvement is solely due to improved security condition in the camp or because the *Hizba* has consolidated its control over the population, making the use of violence unnecessary for intimidating or influencing behavior.
33. Gregory Waters estimates IS attacks in areas surrounding the camp seem to be linked to attempts to spark riots and breakouts from the camp. There have been attacks on checkpoints in the area, including car bombs. IEDs and mines have been laid out on roads in the area, targeting indiscriminately. Additionally, there is activity related to the smuggling of weapons and people in the areas surrounding the camp. General crime and rampant smuggling of goods and people are pervasive in the area. NGOs and Kurdish security services are involved in addressing this issue.
34. Despite absence of murders in the camp this year, the *Hizba* is quite strong in the foreign annex. A reorganization of the camp has led to issues related to the provision of services in this part of the camp. The most extreme group of foreigners is, as of September 2024, located between the service center and the rest of the foreigners. As a result, women are unable to access services because they cannot travel through Camp 3. NGO workers are also attacked or subjected to stoning by IS affiliated detainees when they attempt to pass through this area, making the delivery of service

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

provisions very difficult. Medical assistance for women in the camp is very limited, as Hasakah hospital has ended its system of referrals for medical issues for individuals from the Al Hol camp.

35. Individuals who escape from Al Hol are housed in local communities, either permanently or while on their way to other parts of Syria, Türkiye, or Iraq. Attacks on the SDF outside of the camp are coming from cells that operate in Hasakah city or Shadaddy. Gregory waters assessed that these attacks seem to be linked to regional propaganda campaigns regarding the release of 'sisters' from the camp or are timed with operations in the camp.
36. There are documented cases of physical violence against women and children, as well as instances of child abduction. In the foreign annex, any male child over the age of 14 is placed in a detention facility by Kurdish security forces. There have been no reports of attacks on security forces inside the camp this year. This is primarily linked to the inability or unwillingness of the SDF to conduct raids in the camp.
37. The impact of the Al Hol camp on the security situation in the area is best described as a drain on resources. The security resources used to prevent several thousand probably devout IS members from revolting or breaking out of the Al-Hol camp limit the SDF's ability to monitor other areas. International NGO resources are also primarily focused on Al Hol, far more than in other areas of the northeast, resulting in a yearly degradation of every facet of life in the area. All areas of the northeast are economically destitute at the moment, which Gregory Waters assessment enhances the ability of actors in the region to conduct armed engagements and attacks across the region.
38. Issues related to drug crime are rampant and are increasingly worsening across all areas of the northeast. This has been linked to a general rise in criminality, which in turn has a negative impact on the security situation in the northeast and has resulted in thefts, robberies, and murders related to drug crime. The IS security issue in the Kurdish-controlled areas of the northeast is now compounded by drugs and criminality, as well as the resources that go into preventing women from breaking out of Al Hol and joining IS.
39. A form of methamphetamine is the most common drug in Raqqa, previously smuggled in by Iranian factions from Iran. Hashish and Captagon are also available, along with a range of other drugs in Hasakah. According to locals in Raqqa, the increase in drug-related crime has had a negative impact on the security situation. These issues are familiar in low-income neighborhoods in North America and Europe, but in northeast Syria, they are compounded by the presence of IS.
40. IS has also engaged with the drug trade as intermediaries and producers to finance its operations. Raqqa is the mostly affected city in the Kurdish controlled areas in the north east, as it is the largest population center in the area; however, the negative

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

impact of drug-related crime is prevalent as far north as Hasakah, Qamishli, and Amuda.

### *SDF capacity to counter IS*

41. SDF is still conducting counter-IS operations, but their ability to do so always comes back to intelligence gathering. In Deir Ezzour, the SDF's capacity for intelligence gathering has decreased, as their intelligence networks have weakened since the Arab tribal uprising in autumn 2023. The security forces still have the ability to conduct raids, which they do quite frequently. There has been a notable uptick in the number of captured versus killed IS leaders during SDF raids. However, it is unclear whether they are able to uncover IS networks.
42. Turkish bombing raids lead to a short pause in SDF activity and operations but do not have a long-term substantial impact on the SDF's capacity to conduct counter-IS operations. Contrary to the common narrative proposed by other regional analysts, that Turkish operations and drone strikes against the SDF inhibit their capacity to conduct counter-IS operations, but the rate at which the SDF conducts IS operations is also contingent upon political calculations on their part, according to Gregory Waters.

### Nanar Hawach, senior analyst, International Crisis Group (ICG), Skype meeting, 17 October 2024

As Senior Analyst for Syria, Nanar Hawach researches conflict dynamics, politics, governance and non-state actors in the country.

### *Aleppo*

1. In Aleppo, clashes between the SDF and various Turkish backed groups (such as Sultan Murad division, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, Faylaq al-Sham, al-Jabha al-Shamiya, 50th division, the Levant Front, Liwaa al-Shamal, al-Shamat and al-Hamza division take place on a regular basis and are more prevalent in Aleppo compared to other governorates.
2. The SDF controls a small territory in northern Aleppo, where they fight alongside Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE) in an effort to regain control of their former stronghold Afrin.
3. The fighting at the frontlines in northern Aleppo, has been going on for years, but intensified in July this year, as did the Turkish shelling of the areas controlled by SDF.
4. Clashes and shelling between SDF and Turkish backed groups, and Turkey, in northern Aleppo have killed over 120 people on both sides only this year, this includes civilians.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

5. IS retains a presence in Aleppo although small.
6. In addition to that, there are internal dynamics that affect the general security situation in Aleppo. A good example of that is the protests in Manbij recently, where people protested the new educational curriculum that the DAANES self-administration presented. This illustrates a polarization in this society, with a segment of the population rejecting the autonomous administration's governance. Furthermore, Nanar Hawach assessed that it could be seen as two conflicting ideologies that exist: there is the more secular left-wing, and on the other hand there is the more conservative. Moreover, this also highlights the limitations in the autonomous administration's governance capabilities in terms of its responsiveness to these internal dynamics and its ability to reform, especially considering it is a non-recognized non-state actor and its only pillar of safety is the US.
7. According to Nanar Hawach, the self-administration's way of dealing with this kind of unrest and protests in the areas under its control is through a security-based approach, meaning it tends to crack down on protests and increase its security presence, rather than being more agile.
8. Tension and some skirmishes between GoS forces and the SDF, occur from time to time in Aleppo, but they are very localized and often based on individual disputes. Sometimes the GoS imposes embargos on the Kurdish neighborhoods in Aleppo, which recently happened in August 2024.
9. Aleppo is an important economic hub in terms of trade, and every actor operating in this region benefits in one way or another from trading opportunities presented here. This in turn means that there is limited cooperation between actors, for instance there are unofficial crossings between SDF and GoS for this purpose, and neither part wants to ruin this. However, what we see sometimes is that different actors try to push boundaries in order to gain trade leverage.

### *Deir Ezzour*

10. The Arab tribes in northeast Syria, especially the ones in Deir Ezzour, have longstanding grievances with the Kurdish ruling. Despite being the majority population and the fact that they live in oil-rich areas, the tribes have less political representation. Arab dominated areas often suffer from unfair allocation of economic resources, for instance Deir Ezzour produces 50% of the AANES income, but only 16% of the budget is allocated to the region. Most of oil is sold to Kurdish areas of Hasakah, and outside the region, to Damascus, and KRI.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

11. The dynamics in the Deir Ezzour governorate creates an environment for external actors to intervene and create more tension and instability. For example, the GoS and Iran have for years been instigating Arab tribes against the SDF in order to undermine the SDF. The GoS has, with very persuasive methods, been able to penetrate Arab tribes, and together with Iran they have provided them substantial weapons and equipment, that have lifted the tribes' capabilities to some extent. In addition to that, the support they receive from the GoS forces and Iranian backed forces add to their capabilities. Due to this, there has been an increase of clashes between Arab tribes and the SDF, since the uprising in August 2023.
12. There are two main tribal leaders, Nawaf al-Bashir from the Bakara tribe, and Ibrahim al-Hafal from Aqidat tribe, who are important in this context. First there is Nawaf al-Bashir, leading the Bakir brigade, with a clearer link to Iran, and his militia is considered more as a pro-government militia. Then there is Ibrahim al-Hafal who leads Quwat Mouqatilin al-Aashayir. In al-Hafal's case, the SDF sort of lost his support after the uprising in August 2023, while Nawaf al-Bashir was always leaning more towards supporting the GoS and Iran. This uprising took place after the SDF arrested the head of SDF's local subgroup "Deir Ezzour Military Council", Ahmed al-Khbeil "Abu Khawla". According to Nanar Hawach, this has to do with what was mentioned earlier, the SDF's way of dealing with these issues using forceful security measures.
13. Depending on the situation, the SDF responds to threats in its areas of control, often by using security measures such as political prosecution, arbitrary arrests, forced conscription, and military crackdowns.
14. The primary aim of this tribal fighting, not to mention the GoS and Iran's main intention, is essentially to regain control over the resources in the region, and the conflict will most likely go on, at least as long as the external actors are fueling it, according to the assessment of Nanar Hawach.
15. The tribal militias try to push across the banks of the Euphrates river into SDF areas, which they managed to do a few months ago but were pushed back by the SDF with support of the US. This illustrates the tribes' capabilities very well as this would not have been possible just a year ago. It is important to note that in this particular conflict, the tribal militias consisting of tribesmen from the area, are leading the fighting against SDF, according to Nanar Hawach. The Iranian militias and the Iranian backed militias are also present in the areas west of the river, but the roles are differentiated between them and the tribal militias. For instance, the tribal militias do not attack US bases.
16. So far this year, clashes between tribal forces supported by the Syrian government and Iran, and the SDF have resulted in 64 casualties, including 27 civilians.



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

17. IS continues to pose a major threat in terms of insurgency. IS-attacks are mostly so called “hit-and-runs” with the aim to destabilize and intimidate. It mostly attacks members and commanders of the SDF. IS activity is very different from the tribal militias, because the latter is based on genuine grievances and marginalization, however both contribute to undermining and delegitimizing SDF’s dominance.
18. Civilians are systematically targeted by IS for recruitment and extortion. When civilians are being targeted by IS they are often suspected as SDF-informants. At least 60 member of SDF have been killed by IS this year.
19. The deteriorating economic situation in the region, specifically since 2020, has contributed to IS resurgence. Ultimately, IS benefits from the destabilization of the SDF. Arabs and IDPs tend to join IS, not for the ideology this time around, but rather as a source of income. This means that IS has a stable access to recruits. According to Nanar Hawach, in a poor and underdeveloped region such as Deir Ezzour, joining a militia or an extremist organization such as IS, is one of very few ways of making a living, and most importantly it provides access to profitable illicit businesses like smuggling.
20. There has also been an increase of internal clashes between tribes in Deir Ezzour, which cause a relatively high number of deaths each year. These clashes are based on family or clan disputes often rooted in rivalries. The SDF refrains from intervening as it doesn’t want to be seen as taking any tribe’s side. It is also customary to let the tribes settle their own feuds. The GoS on the other hand, takes advantage of these tensions between tribes to fuel rifts in order to destabilize and undermine the SDF.
21. In 2024, 81 people have been killed and 245 injured in northeast Syria in this type of violence. Most clashes between tribes occur in Deir Ezzour, then Raqqa, followed by Hasakah and then a small portion in Aleppo.

### *Raqqa*

22. Shelling and clashes between SDF and Turkish backed factions in northern Raqqa have decreased since 2020, most likely due to a shift of priorities. These areas are sparsely populated with no significant resources.
23. In Raqqa and Hasakah, there have been less IS-attacks, as these areas serve as an economic lifeline for the group. This means that the access to areas controlled by Turkish backed groups facilitates smuggling and money transports from abroad. IS is able to purchase weapons and other supplies through these smuggling routes. IDPs in Raqqa tend to join IS for a source of income.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

24. IS also extorts money from businesses, essentially oil investors, who are feeling forced to pay bribes to the group in order to avoid reprisals on their businesses. According to Nanar Hawach, there are fewer IS attacks in Raqqa because the region is economically beneficial to the group. This keeps the US's attention away from the area.

### *Hasakah*

25. The northern border between Hasakah and Türkiye continues to be subjected to Turkish shelling campaigns. Türkiye launched three waves of intense campaigns during October and December of 2023 and in January 2024, targeting critical infrastructure in cities near the border, including Qamishli. These attacks destroyed water and electricity stations, hospitals, and oil and gas facilities. Only in October 2023, the estimated revenue losses due to these attacks were up to 1 billion dollars. For a non-state actor like SDF in a poor country like Syria, this has a great impact on the autonomous administration's capabilities, its ability to govern, and its legitimacy according to the assessment of Nanar Hawach.

26. Another wave of attacks took place 23-27 October 2024, Turkey targeted infrastructure and military positions of the SDF, killing 17 civilians and injuring nearly 70. These strikes follow PKK's deadly attack in Ankara 23 October.

27. Following the Turkish attacks on vital infrastructure in late 2023 and early 2024, the autonomous administration was forced to import oil, and at the same time export gas and raising the local prices for gas and in general increasing charges for their services. This had a heavy impact on the population that suffers from lack of basic services.

28. The Turkish attacks are highly linked to the developments in northern Iraq where Türkiye is fighting the PKK. Each wave of attacks on northeast Syria is usually linked to something happening in Iraq since Türkiye sees the SDF and the PKK as equivalents. Apart from that, there is the direct and explicit Turkish threat of a military incursion in northeast Syria, which in a way threatens the autonomous administration's existence according to the assessment of Nanar Hawach.

29. Hasakah represents the most stable governorate under SDF-control in terms of governance, but there are still some internal issues and it DAANES-authorities tend to deal with them by repressive methods, very similar to the ones the Syrian government uses. According to Nanar Hawach's assesment, the more pressured the SDF becomes due to all the threats surrounding it (Türkiye, IS, tribes, economy, etc.) the more repressive it becomes towards the population.

30. For instance, after the Syrian government, the SDF was the actor who conducted the most arbitrary arrests in Syria in 2023. Over 600 people were reported arrested arbitrarily by the

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

SDF, many of which were under the pretext of fighting IS, tribal uprising, but also criticizing the living conditions. Forced recruitment is also very common and often justified under the pretext of fighting IS.

31. Casualties caused by the fighting between SDF and Turkish backed forces, and Turkish shelling in northern Hasakah were 42 fatalities, including 11 civilians and three unknown in the first 10 months of 2024. There have been 100 fatalities caused by the fighting between the SDF and Turkish backed forces, and Turkish shelling since October 2023.
32. Al-Hol is another major issue in the governorate and it poses a big threat. The camp is basically an Islamic “wilaya”. Islamic laws are being implemented and children as young as five are being trained as part of the “Cubs of the Caliphate”. IS seems to have the capacity to organize large scale attacks from al-Hol such as the escape attempt from al-Sinaa prison. At the same time the local authorities lack the manpower, resources, and knowledge to enforce security. Any escalation to the general security situation will risk the situation in al-Hol getting out of hand, as IS seems to take advantage of the instabilities in the region.

### *Freedom of movement*

33. Travelling at night is avoided due to the prevalence of kidnappings. Extortion and bribery is very common when travelling on the roads between cities in DAANES-controlled areas. It could be very hard for a person who are not familiar with the dynamics of this region to navigate in these areas when travelling because it can be very unsafe for someone who are not used to it.

## A Syrian Arab Journalist from Enab Baladi, online meeting, 14 October 2024

### *Aleppo*

1. The Kurdish controlled parts of the Aleppo province have experienced a decrease in the amount of IS attacks in 2024. This is mainly due to limited IS activity in the area. There has on the other hand, been an escalation in relation to clashes, drone strikes and bombardments from Türkiye in the area, which result in casualties among civilians and combatants. There was an alleged Turkish attack in the first week of October 2024. However, it has not been confirmed whether Türkiye was responsible.
2. There are repeated clashes between the Syrian National Army (SNA) and SDF in the Aleppo governorate, but these clashes have not had an impact on the territorial

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

control. The clashes generally take place in the area surrounding the Tell Rifaat enclave, and in the Afrin countryside. These areas are where the largest clashes take place, but there are also limited small-scale clashes between the SDF and the SNA in other areas of Aleppo.

3. Although the autonomous administration often issues statements about shooting down Turkish drones, the amount of drone strikes in the Kobane area was higher in 2023 than in 2024, according to the journalist.
4. The armed clashes between the SNA and the SDF rarely result in civilian casualties, as they take place in areas close to the frontline, where the presence of a civilian population is limited. However, the attacks by Turkish drones and the bombardments do occasionally result in civilian casualties. An official source from the autonomous administration made a statement regarding an attack that occurred around 10-11<sup>th</sup> of October 2024, and which resulted in civilian casualties.
5. There is currently a strike in Manbij because the local population is unhappy with the curriculum being imposed on the schools in the area, and the autonomous administration has sent SDF and Asayish reinforcements to the area to prevent this from escalating further. The situation is similar in Kobane.
6. There have been no recent clashes between the Syrian government and the SDF in the Aleppo area. The relationship between the Syrian government forces and the SDF in this area is characterised by limited cooperation. The Syrian government regularly closes roads leading the Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo (Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh). These sieges are often linked to sieges imposed by the SDF on the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli. The source is unaware of similar sieges imposed in the areas of the Aleppo countryside, where the Syrian Government and the SDF share control, such as Tall Rifaat, Ain al-Arab and Manbij.

### *Hasakah*

7. The current security situation in Hasakah is similar to the security situation in the Kurdish controlled parts of Aleppo. However, occasionally IS conducts operations in Hasakah city and Qamishli, such as IED attacks or attacks with silenced weapons targeting the Internal Security Forces (Asayish) and camp protection personnel. This is the first time that this has occurred since the attack on the prison in 2022, and IS activities in these cities increased from January to June, but has since then decreased.
8. IS generally targets civilian officials affiliated with the autonomous administration. IS has also targeted personnel from the Syrian Arab Army in the security squares of

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Hasakah and Qamishli. IS also targets civilians in Deir Ezzour, but this is not the case in Hasakah.

9. Most IS operations in Hasakah take place in the area surrounding the Al Hol camp, as well as remote rural areas. The main objective of the operations taking place around Al Hol is the liberation of IS-affiliated women from the camp.
10. There have been no clashes between the SDF and the Syrian government forces around the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli. However, in August 2024, the SDF recently imposed an embargo on them by closing the roads, which prevents food and fuel from entering the security squares. None of the journalist's correspondents were able to confirm whether or not the SDF imposed a similar embargo in the beginning of October 2024.
11. There are clashes between the SNA and the SDF on the frontlines in the rural parts of north and northwestern Hasakah. Hasakah city, Amuda and Qamishli are occasionally affected by Turkish air- or drone strikes. The airport in Qamishli was hit by a missile attack in the second week of October 2024, but it is unclear who was responsible for the attack.
12. According to the autonomous administration, the airstrikes often target civilians, but often times it is later apparent that the casualties in question were among the SDF or the YPG, and not civilians. Türkiye has also regularly targeted critical infrastructure, such as power and water stations in the beginning of 2024, which has cut off water and power to the area, and has led to civilian casualties. For example, the Turkish strikes have led to power outages in water wells located in Qamishli, which has led to the city's water supply being cut off.
13. The area around Derik/Al Malikiyeh is perhaps the area, which has been affected most by bombardment from Türkiye. These attacks primarily target the main roads between the different cities, and there is also limited IS activity in the rural parts of eastern Hasakah.

### *Deir Ezzour*

14. The amount of IS operations in Deir Ezzour is significantly higher than the other parts of Syria under Kurdish control. IS has a very free reign in the eastern rural areas of Deir Ezzour, where it primarily targets oil refineries and persons affiliated with the oil industry, who IS think should pay zakat-tax. IS also targets people, who they consider to be SDF-collaborators. If people from the oil industry refuse to pay the zakat-tax, IS will target their business by attacking their offices or trucks, but the journalist is unaware of

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

if people have been killed by IS for not paying zakat-tax. There was a recent case, in which a person in the oil industry was ordered to pay zakat to IS, but did not take it seriously. Ten days later unidentified individuals attacked his oil field with Molotov cocktails, as well as one of his cars. There was also an attack on the Sijan oil field in August 2024.

15. IS also regularly targets oil trucks in the Deir Ezzour area. According to the official IS newspaper Al-Naba, 51 trucks have been destroyed and 15 trucks have been emptied between 1 August 2023 and 15 August 2024. . On 13<sup>th</sup> October an oil truck was hijacked, and the driver was injured.
16. There are also Arab tribes who oppose the autonomous administration in the area, which has led to attacks on the SDF by Arab militias, some of who receive financial support from the Syrian government. These militias conduct attacks on the SDF from the western bank of the Euphrates River, which is controlled by the Syrian government. These attacks culminated on 7 August 2024.
17. The SDF responded to the attacks from Arab militias by imposing embargos on the government-controlled security enclaves in Hasakah and Qamishli, which led to a decrease in attacks on the SDF by Syrian government, supported Arab militias. The SDF is still being attacked, but due to the amount of actors in Deir Ezzour, it is often unclear whether it is IS or the Arab militias, who are responsible for the individual attacks.
18. The clashes between the different actors in Deir Ezzour often result in civilian casualties, but it is difficult to ascertain whether this is collateral damage or a targeted attack.

### *Raqqa*

19. The security situation in Raqqa is similar to the security situation in Hasakah. There are no Turkish bombardments in Raqqa, but the amount of armed clashes is higher than in Hasakah, but less than in Deir Ezzour. These armed clashes are primarily between IS and the SDF, and take place in remote rural areas of Raqqa.
20. IS primarily targets people affiliated with the SDF. The journalist was unaware of civilians being targeted by IS in Raqqa.
21. There are regular armed clashes and bombardments on the frontlines in the northern part of Raqqa. Artillery strikes and shelling cause civilian casualties in villages located in the vicinity of the frontlines. Raqqa city is not affected by these bombardments, and IS attacks in Raqqa city are very rare.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

22. There has been an influx of narcotics into Raqqa, which has led to an increase in crimes related to narcotics, such as killings and robbery. This has a negative effect on the security situation in Raqqa city.

### *Freedom of movement*

23. People from the areas under Kurdish control in Deir Ezzour and areas outside the control of the autonomous administration are unable to relocate permanently to Hasakah or other areas controlled by the autonomous administration unless they get a security permit issued by the Asayish internal security forces. To obtain this permit it is necessary for the person in question to have guarantor that is from the area.
24. It is possible to travel between Raqqa and Hasakah by car, but IS attacks do occur on the road. The roads between Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir Ezzour are generally dangerous, because they are remote, which enables IS to conduct hijackings on them. The road to Deir Ezzour is more dangerous than the road from Hasakah to Raqqa. Although the source has not observed random attacks on civilian villages and cities, three separate IS attacks on oil tankers were documented in October 2024.
25. Men in the military age generally have greater difficulty moving between the different areas under Kurdish control in north and east Syria, which is due to the risk of conscription by the Kurdish authorities, as well as the possibility of being targeted by IS. Security barriers and checkpoints are usually spread between villages and cities, making movement difficult for those who fail to report for service, as stopping them at a barrier will lead to their conscription for compulsory military service.
26. Travelling from Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafieh and the Tal Rifaat enclave to the other areas under Kurdish control is difficult for men in the conscription age range, as they have to cross territory controlled by the Syrian government, and may be detained arbitrarily or for military service in the Syrian Arab Army. They may also face conscription by the Kurdish authorities.
27. The amount of SDF checkpoints has increased in Deir Ezzour following the dissolution of the Deir Ezzour Military Council. There has been no increase or decrease in the amount of SDF checkpoints in Raqqa, but the amount of the checkpoints on the roads between the cities and towns in Hasakah has increased.
28. Civilians can travel between Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir Ezzour using minibuses.

## Sherwan Yousef, A Syrian-Kurdish journalist in North and East Syria and CEO of Defacto Magazine, WhatsApp, 8 October 2024 meeting

### *Developments security situation since January 2024*

1. Since the outbreak of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, around 10,000 refugees have fled to North and East Syria from Lebanon, and the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) is providing them with assistance.
2. There are still IS sleeper cells in Raqqa and Deir Ezzour. Recently, the SDF apprehended two IS sleeper cells. In addition to the fight against IS, Kurdish controlled areas experience regular shelling by Türkiye, as well as Arab tribes backed by Iran in Deir Ezzour. The U.S. is also sending a significant amount of weapons into Deir Ezzour.
3. Since 2019, Türkiye and Russia have had an agreement regarding joint patrols in Kobane. These joint patrols between Turkish and Russian forces in Kobane and Al-Darbasiyah have recently resumed. On the political side, the local administration was planning to hold municipal elections for local councils. However, these elections have been suspended twice and are now seem indefinitely postponed due to international pressure from the U.S., Turkey, and Europe, according to Sherwans Youseff's assessment.
4. Iran has attempted to create instability in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour, by backing Arab tribes in opposition to the SDF, who conduct regular shelling and drone attacks from the government controlled areas of the governorate on the Western Bank of the Euphrates river. The SDF, in cooperation with the U.S., is still fighting IS sleeper cells in Deir Ezzour. The US also supports the SDF in conflicts with militias backed by Iran in Deir Ezzour.
5. The attacks by Türkiye, Iranian backed militias and IS affect civilians and result in civilian casualties. In 2024, there have been 111 IS-initiated attacks across most parts of North and East Syria, including Hasakah and Raqqa, which have resulted in 55 civilian casualties. There have also been 29 artillery attacks initiated by Iranian-backed militias in Syrian government controlled areas of Deir Ezzour.
6. 503 locations across North and East Syria have been attacked by the Turkish army and the SNA in 2024, of which only 48 were SDF controlled positions. 79 civilians have been killed of which 14 were women 23 were children. These attacks include indiscriminate shelling with artillery, drone strikes and armed clashes between the SDF and the SNA.

### *Aleppo*



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

7. According to Sherwan Youssef, the SDF is not officially present in Manbij. This is due to an agreement between Russia and the U.S that lead to the SDF leaving the Manbij area. However, according to Türkiye, Manbij is controlled by the YPG, but officially Manbij area is controlled by the Manbij Military Council (MMC), which is affiliated with the SDF, and operates under their umbrella. Following a request from the Turkish government, an agreement has been reached with the international coalition to withdraw all elements and leaders of the from the area. The agreement also stipulates that only the elements of the MMC, which consists of the local population, should remain.
8. Manbij is located close to the frontlines between the SDF and the SNA. There is regular shelling in this area and the surrounding villages. There is also a consistent presence of Turkish drones in the region. The frontline area between Manbij and the Jarabulus district controlled by SNA and Türkiye is a contested area where clashes between the SDF and SNA are frequent.
9. There is also fighting between the YPG and the Afrin Resistance Group (HPE) one the one side against the SNA on the other side in the Tell Rifaat enclave in the northern part of the Aleppo governorate. The fighting in this area between Kurdish-backed groups and Turkish-backed groups is ongoing. The conflict consists of clashes between smaller units from the SDF and the SNA around the borders of the areas they control. Additionally, there is a regular presence of Turkish drones, as well as rocket and artillery attacks from both sides.
10. According to an agreement from 2019, the SDF was supposed to leave Kobane following the Turkish attacks. However, the SDF remains in Kobane and protects the area adjacent to the Turkish border to a certain extent. Officially, the Russians and the Syrian government control Kobane and the border with Türkiye. In addition to the joint patrols between Turkish and Russian forces, the area around Kobane is affected by regular Turkish drone strikes.
11. The civilians in Manbij, Kobane, and Jazire are dissatisfied with the American withdrawal from the area, which has resulted in the presence of Syrian government forces in Kobane and Manbij. There are few employment opportunities in Kobane, which in effect is a military zone. The situation in Manbij is different, as there is still trade with the government-controlled areas of Aleppo, as well as with Turkish-backed groups. However, the economic situation in Manbij is still not good.
12. Generally there are not many direct armed clashes between the Syrian government forces and the Kurdish-led groups in the Aleppo governorate. In general, HTS is not operating close to the Kurdish controlled areas.
13. The SDF and U.S. coalition forces sometimes conduct counter-IS operations in Aleppo, but IS generally does not have a significant presence in this area. Most IS activities occur in Deir Ezzour and Raqqa, and occasionally in Manbij. While there are individuals

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

in Manbij with connections to IS, the group does not maintain a clear or active presence there. There are IS cells in Manbij. On occasion, bombings are carried out by SNA under the guise of IS to avoid accountability.

### *Hasakah*

14. The Syrian government has a limited presence in the security square in Hasakah city, and sometimes the SDF and the Asayish impose a blockade on the security square, which inhibits the Syrians government's movement as well as the movement of supplies in and out of the security squares. The most recent example of this occurred on October 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 2024, when the SDF imposed a blockade on the area to prevent disturbances related to the anniversary of the October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023 attack by Hamas, as well as due to the fighting in Deir Ezzour between Arab tribes supported by the Syrian government and the SDF in August 2024. These blockades generally do not result in active fighting.
15. Although the security situation in Hasakah city is relatively safe, the conditions for civilians in the city are very poor. The main reason for this is that the Allouk water station in Serekaniye (Ras al-Ayn) has been targeted by Türkiye, which has led to a shortage of water and causing many civilians to leave Hasakah City.
16. The security situation between Qamishli and Derik is relatively safe, but there are occasional Turkish bombardments and drone strikes. For instance, there was a drone attack in the second week of October on individual cars in both Amuda and Qamishli. The situation in Amuda, Derik, and Qamishli is generally better than in other areas of northeast Syria. There is no active fighting in this area, but Turkish drone attacks do occur from time to time. Türkiye claims to be targeting the PKK, but these attacks result in civilian casualties. Recently, a woman and her child were killed in this type of attack in Hileileia, Qamishli.
17. IS is not very active in Hasakah, but there are IS cells in Tel Hamis, Tal Kocer, and Arab towns and villages in the Hasakah governorate. The Asayish sometimes arrest individuals in these regions. However, there are IS members in the prisons in Rumaylan and Derik. There is some IS activity in the area between Hasakah and Shaddady, but not much. On the other hand, IS is active between Shaddady and Deir Ezzour. Additionally, there is IS activity around Raqqa and Karama. IS targets SDF and Asayish checkpoints, as well as small business owners and oil trucks.
18. The presence of the Al-Hol camp generally has no effect on the area surrounding Al Hol, which is controlled by the Asayish and security forces. However, there are security related issues within the camp itself. IS-affiliated women provide IS and Sharia education to other women and children in the camp. The most recent operations by the coalition and SDF have uncovered weapons in the camp, but this generally does not affect the surrounding area.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

19. Although some NGO employees and members of the security forces have been involved in smuggling activities in and out of the camp, this does not have a significant effect on the security situation in the surrounding area. Smuggling was previously a major issue in the area but is now under control, according to the assessment of Sherwan Youseff.

### *Deir Ezzour*

20. There is a great deal of insecurity in Deir Ezzour due to the presence of many different groups in the area, including IS, Arab tribes backed by Iran and the Syrian government, and the SDF. There is also a high incidence of violent crime, robbery, and extortion, making it difficult for people from outside Deir Ezzour to travel there.
21. There has been a significant amount of fighting between Arab tribes supported by Iran, the Syrian government and the SDF in 2024, with nearly 70 clashes occurring between them. These clashes have resulted in civilian casualties, including seven men, 11 women and children. In total, around 37 civilians have been killed. This type of fighting is especially prevalent in the areas surrounding Soheil, Busayra, and Ghranij.
22. There are no direct clashes in Deir Ezzour between Iran, the Syrian government and the SDF. According to Sherwan Yousef, Iran, Türkiye, and the Syrian government want to extend their influence in North and East Syria, so they create proxies within the Arab tribes, who attack the SDF in their place. There was fighting between groups backed by the Syrian government and SDF in August 2024, as well as October and November 2023. There are also examples of Arab tribes being backed by Türkiye, and these groups recently attacked Manbij. Groups have been established under the names of the tribes of Deir Ezzour, Manbij and the Arab regions in the areas of Turkish control in northern Syria. These groups have conducted numerous attacks on the contact lines in Manbij, particularly during the heightened tensions in Deir Ezzour in 2023 and 2024.
23. IS attacks SDF and Asayish checkpoints in Deir Ezzour, as well as oil trucks, NGO workers, and civilians. The SDF and the coalition conducted 28 joint operations against IS in Deir Ezzour and Raqqa. Additionally, the SDF conducted 12 independent operations against IS, during which 11 civilians were killed in Deir Ezzour. IS uses the civilian population in these areas as human shields when the SDF conducts operations against them.
24. There are NGO offices operating in Qasera, and there is limited NGO activity in Deir Ezzour. This is because NGO-offices can be targeted by IS and other groups. On 18 September 2024, vehicles and members of the international ITF organisation, which specialises in mine clearance, were subjected to robbery and theft by an armed group in the countryside of the town of al-Shaddadi, situated to the south of Hasakah.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

### *Raqqa*

25. The security situation in Raqqa is better than in Deir Ezzour. There are still some IS sleeper cells in Qarama and Raqqa, but these groups are quite small, as the SDF, the Asayish, and the coalition have a strong security presence in the area. However, there have been instances of IS emirs hiding in Qarama, which is a relatively large city in rural Raqqa.
26. Small “resistance” groups affiliated with the Syrian government, which oppose the Americans and the SDF, also try to destabilize the security situation in Raqqa by placing booby-trapped bombs in public areas, but they do not have much influence.
27. The situation for civilians in Raqqa is generally good. It is comparable to the situation for civilians in the Jazire area of the Hasakah governorate and better than in most areas of northeast Syria.
28. The situation in the northern part of the Raqqa governorate is different due to the threat from Türkiye, especially in the villages close to the M4 and Ayn al-Issa. This town used to be the capital of the autonomous administration but is now almost completely empty of civilians. The villages near the M4, such as Tell Abyad, are affected by regular shelling from artillery and rockets; because of this, there is little or no civilian presence in this area.
29. There is a small amount of IS activity in Raqqa, but they do not pose a significant security threat. IS has been responsible for two or three bombings in Raqqa, as well as an attempted prison break in the central prison in Raqqa that took place in March 2024 using a tunnel from a rented house.

### *Freedom of movement*

30. Türkiye took control of an area stretching from Serekaniye/Ras al-Ayn to Tell Abyad in during the 2019 military campaign Operation Peace Spring. Prior to the Turkish military intervention, the M4 road between Hasakah and Qamishli was in very good condition. It took two or three hours to drive to Kobane from these areas. Because of this, it is no longer possible to pass through Ayn al-Issa when traveling from Hasakah or Qamishli to Kobane. Now, since the M4 is generally closed, it is necessary to travel from Hasakah to Raqqa and then from Raqqa to Kobane, which takes between seven and eight hours. There is sometimes IS activity on this route, and they attempt to attack oil trucks.
31. The road between Hasakah, Shaddady and Deir Ezzour is very dangerous, especially for people not from Deir Ezzour, while the security situation on the road from Hasakah to Raqqa is better. On 14 June, Alan Omar, 37, a resident of the Tal al-Hajar neighbourhood in the city of Hasakah, was the victim of a robbery while returning from

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

the southern Hasakah Dam Lake to his city via the "Petroleum Road", which is completely devoid of "Asayish" checkpoints. However, there is sometimes IS activity on these roads, resulting in the hijacking of oil trucks and the extortion of civilians for money. The road from Hasakah to Deir Ezzour is dangerous for civilians and NGO workers. These roads are long and remotely located, making it difficult for the Asayish to control them.

32. There are many Asayish and SDF checkpoints between Hasakah and Deir Ezzour. IS targets checkpoints in these areas during the night.
33. Groups affiliated with the Arab tribes in Deir Ezzour sometimes set up makeshift checkpoints along the roads between Shadaddy and Deir Ezzour. These are generally temporary, as the SDF cracks down on them. The checkpoints established by these groups frequently extort Arab NGO workers.
34. SDF checkpoints in Deir Ezzour check the identity of individuals traveling through them, as well as their potential links to IS, the Syrian government or Iran. Generally, civilians can pass through the SDF checkpoints unhindered.
35. Travelling on roads in Deir Ezzour can be difficult for employees of the autonomous administration, as they are targets for IS, who consider them agents for the PKK. The Arab militias backed by the Syrian government in the area can also target employees of the autonomous administration.
36. People typically travel using their own cars or minibuses. However, officials from the autonomous administration generally prefer using their own cars rather than public minibuses, which also contain other passengers.

### Hoshang Hasan, a Syrian-Kurdish journalist with North Press Agency, WhatsApp meeting, 12 October 2024

#### *Aleppo*

1. Manbij and Kobane are areas that have been under the Russian sphere of influence in northeast Syria since 2019, since the SDF, Russia and the Syrian government entered into a security agreement that allowed Russian and GoS presence in these areas. Joint patrols between Russian forces and Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) groups in these areas resumed in September 2024 after they have been stopped after a last wave of Turkish escalation earlier in 2024.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

2. Two main factors affect the security situation in Kurdish-controlled parts of the Aleppo governorate. The first is Turkish drone attacks in the Kobane area, and the second is clashes between SNA groups and the SDF in the rural areas surrounding Manbij. A village in this area was the target of an artillery attack in the second week of October, resulting in two civilian casualties.
3. The fighting between the SDF and the SNA is primarily concentrated on the frontlines and consists mainly of shelling and limited incursions by both sides, resulting in exchanges of small-arms fire. Shelling and artillery strikes occur regularly on the frontlines, periodically resulting in civilian casualties among inhabitants of nearby villages.
4. Syrian government forces have maintained a presence in North and East Syria since 2019 and are currently positioned on the border with Türkiye, as well as in Kobane, Amuda, Derik/Al Malikiyeh, and the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli. The relationship between Syrian government forces and the SDF in the Aleppo governorate is characterized by limited security cooperation regarding the border, and there are currently no clashes between the SDF and the Syrian Arab Army in this area.

### *Deir Ezzour*

5. Tribal militias backed by Syrian government forces and Iranian-backed militias regularly attack the SDF and international coalition bases on the eastern side of the Euphrates River in the Deir Ezzour governorate. The most recent large-scale attack occurred in August 2024, near the villages of Baghouz and Diban.
6. One of the major factions conducting these types of attacks on the SDF is the “Lions of Aghedat,” commanded by Daham al-Sultan. This faction is connected to Ibrahim al-Hefel and the Aghedat tribe, both of which have ties to the Syrian government and Iran. Iranian militia targets coalition bases regularly after October 7th in Gaza. On 12<sup>th</sup> October US-CENTCOM announced the target of Iranian militia headquarters in Deir Ezzour after they attacked US-Coalition forces.
7. There is also regular shelling on the frontlines along the Euphrates river between forces affiliated with the Syrian government and the SDF, which also results in civilian casualties. In August 2024, the villages of Al-Dahla and Jadeed Bakkarah were shelled by the Syrian government’s 4<sup>th</sup> Division, resulting in 11 civilian casualties.
8. Clashes between tribal militias backed by the Syrian government and Iran and the SDF have resulted in approximately 100 civilian casualties in 2024.
9. IS has sleeper cells throughout North and East Syria, and maintains a significant presence in Deir Ezzour, where it imposes zakat tax on the civilian population. IS may

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

target individuals who refuse to pay zakat. The method usually followed is that they send a threat via WhatsApp, and if the person does not respond, they may send him a written threat to his home or workplace, and if he does not pay them, his car or home will be targeted.

10. IS's primary target in the Deir Ezzour governorate is the SDF, as well as individuals working for the Autonomous Administration.

### *Hasakah*

11. The security situation in Tell Tamer is similar to that in Manbij and consists of regular shelling and limited incursions, which lead to exchanges of small-arms fire.
12. There are no clashes in the areas surrounding Qamishli, Derik/Al Malikiyeh, Amuda, and Darbasiyah, but Turkish drones are active in these areas. Qamishli was attacked by Turkish drones three or four times in September 2024, and Amuda was also recently attacked once or twice. Last time Amouda was targeted on 26 October 2024.
13. The primary targets of the Turkish drone strikes are military personnel with the SDF, YPG, or PKK, as well as civilians working for the Autonomous Administration and many civilian who may be close to the target location killed. However, these strikes also result in casualties among civilians with no affiliation to the Autonomous Administration or the SDF. Recently, a 20-year-old civilian man was killed in this type of attack.
14. The water supply from the Allouk water station has been cut, resulting in a considerable shortage of water in the Hasakah area over the last five years. Türkiye has used the cutting off of water supplies as a kind of another war.
15. IS primarily targets the SDF in Hasakah, but civilians who oppose IS ideology may also be targeted. Merchants may also be targeted for extortion.
16. IS conducted a large-scale attack on the Al Sina'a prison in 2022 and maintains a covert presence in the central part of Hasakah city in majority Arab neighborhoods.

### *Al Hol*

17. The security situation inside the Al Hol camp has improved slightly over the last two years, as the number of killings has decreased. There are around 42,000 people in the camp in total, including the foreign annex, as well as Syrian and Iraqi citizens. A number of Iraqi citizens have been repatriated to Iraq in 2024; however, a significant number of Iraqi citizens remain in the camp.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

18. Women affiliated with IS frequently attempt to escape the camp, and the number of successful escape attempts have recently increased. Smuggling networks facilitate the escapes of IS women and children by hiding them in water trucks and taking them to Hasakah city. From Hasakah city, the escapees are then taken to Tell Abyad and Serikaniyeh (The operation peace Spring area) before crossing into Türkiye, Idlib, or Jarablus (The Euphrates Shield area controlled by SNA-groups and Türkiye).
19. These activities generally do not impact the security situation in Hasakah, as the individuals escaping usually only transit through Hasakah before traveling on to their final destination.

### *Raqqa*

20. Raqqa city was previously an IS stronghold, and IS remains the main security concern in the area. An IS sleeper cell attacked an Asayish police station in the center of the city in the summer of 2023.
21. IS targets SDF military personnel and civilians working for the Autonomous Administration in Raqqa, as well as individuals who do not conform to IS ideology. In the eastern part of rural Raqqa, the situation is similar to that in Deir Ezzour. IS has a significant presence in this area and has imposed a zakat tax on the resident civilian population.
22. The frontline at Ayn Issa (bordering the western part of the Operation Peace Spring area) has been the most active frontline between the SDF and the SNA. The situation in this area is characterized by regular shelling and drone activity, as well as clashes on the ground, although these occur less frequently. There have been no reports of civilian casualties in this area lately, but in general, the shelling and clashes have resulted in a significant number of civilian casualties.
23. There have been no recent clashes between the Syrian government and the SDF in Raqqa.

### *Freedom of movement*

24. People are able to travel from Hasakah to Raqqa and to Aleppo. It is also possible to travel between Derik/Al Malikiyeh, Amuda, and Kobane. There are two roads to Kobane, but since one of these roads passes through Ayn Issa, it is necessary to take the longer route due to the security situation in the area.
25. Travelling to Deir Ezzour can be difficult due to IS sleeper cell activity on the roads.



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

26. Additionally, Kurds traveling to areas of Deir Ezzour controlled by militias supported by the Syrian government and Iran may be stopped at checkpoints. It is impossible for Kurds to travel to areas controlled by the SNA, such as Serekaniyeh, as they will be accused of being agents for the PKK or the SDF.
27. People from the areas of Deir Ezzour under government control who want to travel to the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria are required to have a sponsor/guarantor and obtain a residence permit. Without this document, it is not legally possible for this group to enter the areas under Kurdish administration.

### An NGO operating in North and East Syria, meeting in Erbil, 10 October 2024

#### *General security situation in North and East Syria (NES)*

23. The current security situation in the NE is the result of years of instability in this region. The predominant security issues in NES under Kurdish control are mainly the Turkish drone attacks, the tribal tensions in Deir Ezzour, including internal tribal tensions as well as disputes between tribes and the self-administration, and the instability that IS creates in al-Hol camp in Hasakah.
24. Drug smuggling is also increasingly becoming a great issue in this region.

#### *Hasakah*

25. There is a significant number of incidents occurring regularly in Hasakah that are attributed to unknown actors. These incidents vary from bombings and explosions, kidnappings, to robberies and killings etc.
26. IS is very active in al-Hol camp and their ideology is very present in the camp.
27. The security situation in Al-Hol camp and its surroundings is extremely unstable. The SDF is regularly conducting so-called “cleansing campaigns” in al-Hol camp and the surroundings in order to clear the area from weapons. These campaigns could last for weeks and recur whenever the SDF has information on renewed IS activities in the camp or in the area.
28. Robberies occur on the road to al-Hol camp. Even NGO’s working in the camp get occasionally robbed.
29. There are around 9-14 SDF checkpoints from Hasakah city to al-Hol camp. IS presence and activities in the camp is the cause of this constant high security alert among the SDF, which creates general tension in the entire area. The SDF’s capabilities in terms of fighting the IS-

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

ideology are limited and therefore the SDF focus more on the security aspects, i.e. increased security measures (checkpoints, “cleansing campaigns”, etc.) in the area.

30. There are reports of IS attacks targeting civilians in Hasakah. According to the sources, IS does not distinguish between SDF and civilians, because they view everyone who is against it as “infidels” (“kafer”).

### *Deir Ezzour*

31. The situation in Deir Ezzour is still highly affected by the tribal-SDF dispute that happened last year. In the beginning of 2024, the SDF were pushing to consolidate control over the areas along the Euphrates River, which forced the tribe leader Ibrahim al-Hafel and his clan to move to areas in Deir Ezzour controlled by the GoS. Since then there have been regular insurgencies by small groups of tribesmen who cross the river from GoS controlled areas to SDF areas. They clash with the SDF and then return. According to the NGO operating in North and east Syria, this is a way for Ibrahim al-Hafel to demonstrate that he is still present and capable.
32. Additionally, there are daily attacks inside SDF-controlled areas conducted by tribes affiliated with al-Hafel targeting the SDF.
33. The control of and access to these areas in Deir Ezzour is very much linked to its geography – its proximity to the Iraqi border. There is a significant presence of Iranian backed militias in areas in Deir Ezzour not controlled by the SDF. The al-Hafel clan receives support from the Iranians in terms of access to these areas in order to operate there, according to the NGO working in North and East Syria.
34. IS attacks have decreased in Deir Ezzour compared to previous years. Nowadays they focus mostly on extorting money from people, the so called “zakat” (Islamic obligatory charity). When it comes to people who fail to pay, IS will turn to the Islamic rule of law to determine the punishment depending on the situation and the person in question.

### *Freedom of movement*

35. Travelling in Deir Ezzour is very dangerous and there are many incidents occurring on the roads such as killings, kidnappings and robberies. In addition to that, the roads in Deir Ezzour are in very bad condition.
36. Many people travel between Hasakah and Raqqa using public transportation. The roads are more controlled and therefore there are less incidents happening compared to Deir Ezzour, but there is always the risk of Turkish drone attacks. Moving around in Hasakah Governorate, for instance between Hasakah city and Qamishli, is easy, i.e. kidnappings and robberies occur but not as often as in Deir Ezzour.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

37. In general, the roads in the areas controlled by DAANES are in very bad condition and the self-administration does not have enough resources to repair them. Consequently, the time it takes to travel in-between these areas is prolonged due to the bad roads, which in turn means a greater risk for those travelling.
38. The DAANES administration has recently opened several documentation centers where people can get ID-documents in order to be able to move around, especially for those who returned to the DAANES-areas and those who do not have any documents. A person from outside the Kurdish-controlled areas also need a sponsor to be able to enter these areas.

### Heybar Othman, Syrian-Kurdish journalist in North and East Syria, WhatsApp meeting, 10 October 2024

#### *General security situation*

1. The general security situation in North and East Syria (NES) varies from area to area. Many cities have remained relatively stable since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, including Derik, Ruymalan, Darbasiyah, Qamishli, and Amuda. These areas generally have not witnessed major military operations and were not exposed to significant destruction during the Syrian conflict. However, Turkish drone strikes occasionally target SDF leaders and Asayish (Internal Security Forces) Checkpoints in these regions. Turkish drones also target basic infrastructure in North and East Syria, such as oil stations, bakeries, water stations, power stations, and grain silos.
2. Türkiye began targeting critical infrastructure in 2023 and has continued to do so in 2024, focusing on waterworks, power stations, particularly in Kurdish-controlled areas of Hasakah governorate and gas and oil fields in northeast Syria. Power stations in the towns of Amuda, Qamishli and Al-Qahtaniyah (Tirbespiye) were targeted in the most recent attack on 23-26 October 2024. A bakery was targeted in the city of Amuda, the main bakery in Kobani and grain silos in the city of Qamishli. The Awda and Saida oil stations and the Al-Suwaydiyah factory were also targeted. According to DAANES statistics, around 30 vital sites, including basic infrastructure, have been subjected to Turkish bombing. In the latest attack, 15 civilians were killed and about 51 wounded. Seven of them were workers at the Suwaydiyah petrol station. Two members of the internal security forces and nine members of the Syrian Democratic Forces were also killed. Türkiye has conducted hundreds of attacks on gas and oil fields. A hospital and several grain silos in Kobane were hit by shelling from the Turkish side of the border. Schools and hospitals have also been struck in connection with drone, rocket and mortar attacks from the Turkish side.
3. In 2023, the Turkish forces initiated a series of sporadic bombing operations targeting border areas between Syria and Turkey. These attacks have been occurring approximately every six months. The majority of the attacks are conducted via drones, with some instances involving Turkish warplanes. This was evidenced by the bombing

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

of Turkish jets at the station in the village of Taqel Baqal, situated near the city of Malikiyah (Derik). During this incident, Issam Abdullah, a journalist with the Hawar Media Agency, was killed while filming the initial bombing of the station. However, the plane proceeded to bomb the power station once more.

4. The locations that are subject to bombardment are as follows: Malikiya (Derik), Ramilan, Al-Qahtaniya (Trabsbieh), Al-Qamishli, Amuda, Darbasiya, Kobani and Manbij.
5. Furthermore, there is ongoing heavy weaponry shelling along the frontlines between the Syrian Democratic Forces and the SNA. This is occurring in the areas of Abou Rasien (Zirgan) town, Tal Tamr, Ain Issa, the northern Manbij countryside, the Al-Shahba area around Aleppo, and in the vicinity of Afrin, including several villages and towns.
6. The most critical front lines between the SDF and the SNA are: the area around Abou Rasien (Zirgan), the northern part of Tal Tamr town, the northern part of Ain Issa, the M4 road between Tal Tamr and Ain Issa (approximately 120 km), the northern part of Manbij, The Tal Rifaat enclave, and southern Afrin. The aforementioned regions are subject to attacks by Turkish drones, and there is a regular exchange of heavy weapons and mortar shells between the SDF and SNA factions. The frontline between Zirgan and Tell Tamer spans about 800 kilometers, stretching from Ayn al Issa in the west to Tell Tamer in the east, bordering the Operation Peace Spring area.
7. The areas around Tell Tamer and Zirgan are heavily affected by regular shelling, rocket attacks, and small arms exchanges between the SDF and the SNA. Many civilians have left the area because, although these areas are controlled by the SDF, they are regularly attacked by the SNA and Türkiye, making it impossible for civilians to send their children to school. Schools in these areas, as well as in Hasakah, have been converted into IDP accommodations.
8. Another frontline in the Manbij area is about 30 kilometers long and is located between the Euphrates in the east and Areema village in the west. This area is also affected by regular shelling, rocket attacks, and mortar fire from both sides i.e. the SDF on one side and the SNA and Türkiye on the other side.
9. IS S has been increasing its presence in Deir Ezzour governorate, and the number of IS attacks in this area has risen compared to 2023. Both the U.S.-led coalition and the SDF have issued statements indicating that the number of IS attacks in 2024 has doubled compared to 2023.

### *Deir Ezzour*

10. IS cells frequently conduct attacks in the eastern countryside of the Deir Ezzour governorate in areas controlled by the SDF. IS has been linked to a number of operations, including the planting of explosive devices on main roads, assassinations of

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

SDF fighters and employees of DAANES institutions, and the targeting of local residents. They have also been responsible for attacks on small groups at SDF points and civil and service institutions affiliated with the Deir Ezzour Civil Council, utilising a hit-and-run tactic. In addition, demands have been made for money from workers in civil society organisations, oil well investors, and businessmen in the region. Zakat has also been demanded from farmers after the main crops have been collected.

11. The Islamic State is still active in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzour, in areas under the control of the SDF. This is especially the case in the towns of Al-Busayrah, Al-Shuhail, Dhiban and their affiliated villages. In addition, there are reports of activity along the Syrian-Iraqi border. IS is less active in the towns of Markada, Al-Sour, Al-Gharanij, Hajin, Al-Sousah, Al-Shafah, Al-Sousah and Al-Baghrouz.
12. It is also observed that the number of IS operations is less prevalent in the western countryside of Deir Ezzour in comparison to the more active hot spots in the eastern countryside. In summary, the majority of the operations conducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are concentrated in the towns of Al-Shuhail, Dhiban and Al-Busayrah, in addition to the Deir Ezzour desert on the Syrian-Iraqi border
13. IS has been able to increase its presence and the number of its attacks in Deir Ezzour for several reasons. Firstly, IS is taking advantage of Turkish attacks in other areas of Kurdish-controlled northeastern Syria closer to the Turkish border, which forced the SDF to divert manpower and resources from Deir Ezzour to counter the attacks coming from the border areas. Secondly, the Syrian government and the Iranians are supporting some Arab tribes in Deir Ezzour, who have launched numerous attacks on the SDF, further forcing the SDF to divert resources. This enables IS to expand its presence and increase the frequency of its attacks in the area.
14. North and East Syria is an ethnically diverse region, with many areas, such as Tabqa and Raqqa, inhabited exclusively by ethnic Arabs. This is also the case in Deir Ezzour. Some cities have a Kurdish majority, but the entire region is home to a variety of ethnic and religious groups, including Christians, Arabs, and Yazidis.
15. Ahmed Abu Hawler, the former head of the SDF-controlled Deir Ezzour Military Council, was arrested by the SDF in August 2023 at the American military base in Hasakah. This arrest prompted many uprisings across various cities and towns in Deir Ezzour, led by the members of the Aghdat tribe, which temporarily took control of three cities and seven to ten villages in the eastern part of Deir Ezzour governorate.
16. The majority of the uprisings occurred in areas where the Sons of the Aghdat tribe, led by Ibrahim Al-Hefel, are present, specifically in Dhiban, Al-Shuhail, Al-Busayrah, and approximately five villages on the eastern banks of the Euphrates River. The SDF did not respond to these actions, and this has become a regular occurrence, happening

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

- approximately once a month this year, resulting in clashes between Arab tribes and the SDF.
17. The SDF did not respond to these actions, and this has become a regular occurrence, happening approximately once a month this year, resulting in clashes between Arab tribes and the SDF.
  18. It should also be noted that not all members of the Aghedat tribe are engaged in conflict with the SDF. For example Sheikh Hefel Al Hefel, cousin of Ibrahim Al Hefel who is leading the armed opposition against the SDF, has a positive relationship with the SDF.
  19. Not all the Arab tribes in Deir Ezzour participated in these clashes against the SDF. This includes the tribes in the western part of the governorate, as well as tribes from Afar, Baghouz, and Susa in the eastern part. The majority of the SDF members are Arab, but the leadership is predominantly Kurdish. There were no rebellions against the SDF in the following towns: Markada, Al-Sour, Hajin, Al-Sousah, Al-Sha'fah, Al-Baghouz and several villages affiliated with them.
  20. Similarly, there were no noteworthy rebellions against the Syrian Democratic Forces in the western countryside of the city of Deir Ezzour.
  21. The Deir Ezzour Military Council operates more independently from the SDF than military Councils in Manbij and Raqqa. Arab tribal fighters in civilian clothes, backed by the Syrian government, conduct regular incursions against the SDF by crossing the Euphrates River from the government-controlled side. They also target critical infrastructure in the area. These incursions occurred more frequently in September 2024, but their frequency has decreased in October 2024.
  22. The underlying reason for the decrease in this type of incursions is the blockade imposed by the SDF and the Asayish on the government-controlled security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli. The SDF enforces these blockades when Arab tribes backed by Iran and the Syrian government conduct incursions across the Euphrates River. When these blockades are in place, it is impossible for civilians and goods to enter the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli. The latest blockade was imposed by the SDF three days ago, coinciding with the anniversary of the Hamas attacks.
  23. The clashes between the SDF and Arab tribes backed by Iran and the Syrian government result in civilian casualties among the IDP population in the Deir Ezzour area. At least 20 civilians were killed in the latest attack of this kind. There is also regular shelling from the government-controlled side of the river, which results in civilian casualties in the surrounding villages. On August 8, 2024, regime forces and pro-Iranian militias shelled the town of Dhiban and the Al-Latwa neighborhood, killing 2 civilians and wounding 5 others. On 9 August 2024, Syrian regime forces and pro-Iranian militias launched an artillery and mortar attack on the villages of Al-Dahla and

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Jadid Bakara, resulting in the deaths of 11 individuals and injuries to 5 others, according to an official statement from the SDF.

### *Raqqa*

24. Raqqa governorate is more stable than Deir Ezzour. The city of Raqqa is located more than 60 kilometers from the frontline in Ayn al Issa and the M4 road (the Operation Peace Spring area), and there are no clashes between the SDF and the SNA around Raqqa city itself. Clashes in Raqqa governorate generally occur on the frontlines around Ayn al Issa, but this frontline is calmer than those around Zirgan, Tell Tamer, and the areas around Manbij and Jarablus.
25. Heybar Othman is unaware of whether the clashes in Ayn al Issa have resulted in civilian casualties in 2024. Previously, these clashes resulted in multiple civilian casualties, including women and children.
26. IS has changed its tactics and conducts limited attacks in Raqqa using small arms weapons, focusing on the liberation of IS-affiliated women and fighters from prisons and camps, as well as primarily targeting the SDF and the Asayish. Five IS fighters recently escaped from a prison in Raqqa. IS generally does not attack civilians in Raqqa. In 2022, IS conducted a comprehensive attack on the prison in Hasakah to liberate more than 5,000 IS-affiliated prisoners. IS carries out regular attacks on prisons in Hasakah, as well as on bases belonging to the SDF and the Asayish in the western part of Raqqa.
27. The SDF prevented journalists from traveling to Deir Ezzour to make a documentary about the U.S. base in the Conoco oilfield. This was due to the unstable security situation in the Deir Ezzour governorate, which is affected by attacks from IS, as well as from Arab tribes backed by Iran and the Syrian government.
28. Traveling to Deir Ezzour is also dangerous for people who are not from the area, including foreigners and NGO workers. However, local Arabs are able to travel around Deir Ezzour. Christians and Kurds may face lethal risks if they attempt to travel in Deir Ezzour from attacks conducted by IS and Arab tribal militias. Nonetheless, people from Deir Ezzour can generally travel to Raqqa, Hasakah, and Qamishli, but they will be subject to security checks by the Asayish or the SDF to ensure that they are civilians. People from Deir Ezzour can travel to Hasakah only if they have a sponsor in Hasakah.
29. Traveling to Raqqa from Qamishli is generally safe, especially in comparison to traveling to Deir Ezzour. There are buses traveling between Qamishli, Hasakah, and Raqqa that civilians can use to travel between these cities. Traveling between Hasakah and Raqqa is also generally safe.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

30. SDF checkpoints are more prevalent in Deir Ezzour and along the road between Hasakah and Raqqa. There are over 25 SDF checkpoints on this road, established to counter attacks from criminal groups and IS. There are fewer SDF checkpoints around Derik, Ruymalan, Darbasiyah, Qamishli, and Amuda. These areas are close to the Turkish border, and Turkish drones and artillery have previously targeted SDF checkpoints in this region. There are also fewer SDF fighters in these areas, and SDF fighters generally position themselves further away from the checkpoints due to the threat from Turkish drones.
31. The situation regarding SDF checkpoints in Raqqa and Deir Ezzour is different. SDF fighters generally withdraw into the buildings of checkpoints during the night in Deir Ezzour due to the threat from IS. The number of checkpoints between Raqqa and Hasakah has not changed since 2022, and security along this road has increased due to the presence of these checkpoints.
32. Women and children can travel freely between Hasakah and Raqqa. The situation for women in Deir Ezzour is different due to cultural factors in terms of women only being able to travel with a male guardian. Most attacks by IS or Turkish drones target soldiers, while criminal groups rob men and women indiscriminately. This usually occurs between Hasakah and the Al Hol camp, and the number of armed robberies in this area has increased during 2024. The SDF has conducted operations against criminal gangs in the villages around Al Hol to prevent this type of crime.
33. IS has also imposed zakat tax on drivers of oil tankers and farmers in Deir Ezzour. The tax is usually between 200 and 300 USD, and people who do not pay the zakat may be killed, although this is not always the case. On 5 May 2024, an individual sustained injuries when ISIS elements threw a hand grenade at their residence in the town of Al-Hawajj in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzour.
34. In the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzour Governorate, as well as in Shadaddy City and Raqqa City, IS is demanding zakat from hundreds of farmers following the harvest season of major crops such as wheat and barley. Additionally, they are targeting well investors, oil tanker drivers, businessmen, and money transfer office owners.
35. Some residents of Deir Ezzour have been known to pay zakat and refrain from reporting IS members, citing concerns about potential retaliation and even fatal consequences. Some residents choose not to pay zakat. Those who do not pay zakat are subjected to assassinations or kidnappings, and cases of their homes being targeted with hand grenades or RPG shells by IS have been documented.
36. Similar cases also occur in Raqqa, where small business owners are targeted for extortion. However, it is not always clear whether IS or criminals are responsible for the extortion. In general, criminal groups engage in looting and robbery across all of northeast Syria, especially along the road between Hasakah and Al Hol, as well as in Deir Ezzour. Sometimes they target NGOs; for example in August 2024, an unknown



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

group blocked the road between Hasakah and Al Hol and robbed NGO workers from Save the Children. This also happened to the NGO MSF and an organization working in demining.

### Jusoor For Studies, online meeting, 27 September 2024

Jusoor for studies is an independent research institution focusing on the political, economic, and social dynamics affecting Syria and its neighbourhood.

#### *General security situation in DAANES/SDF controlled areas of NES*

1. Generally speaking the security situation in North and East Syria is characterized by active fighting between various military forces associated with a number of security incidents and persecution of civilians in the areas.
2. There are currently ongoing clashes between SNA and SDF across the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria.
3. The armed clashes between Arab tribes and SDF in Deir Ezzour governorate, which began in September 2023 are still ongoing.
4. Turkish forces continue to employ drones to target SDF-forces and high profile officials working for DAANES-administration in the Kurdish-controlled areas of north and east Syria.

#### *Security situation and movement in DAANES/SDF-controlled areas of Aleppo-province*

5. Areas controlled by SDF in Aleppo governorate are divided into two types of areas. Firstly, Manbij city and the rural areas surrounding it with full SDF presence and then the the rural northern parts of Aleppo governorates also under the control of SDF-forces. Secondly, there is the Tall Rifaat enclave, which almost completely controlled by the Afrin liberation Forces (HRE), which has an affiliation to the PKK and is allied with the SDF. HRE has a limited security cooperation with the GoS and Russia as well as Iranian militia that all have a presence in the Tall Rifaat enclave. The actors mentioned above have a joint operations room where military matters are coordinated.
6. There are ongoing clashes between the Syrian National Army (SNA) and the SDF and Afrin Liberation Forces with artillery being fired back and forth by

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

both sides. Military incursions by troops from both sides into each other's territory also happen frequently. The artillery shelling and incursions mostly happens on the northern frontline of the Tall Rifaat enclave, which borders SNA and Turkish-controlled areas.

7. Due to the nature of the fighting between SDF and SNA-groups and Türkiye the civilians face hard living conditions in the area due to the fighting and many civilians from the area has been displaced from the fighting.
8. In northern Aleppo and its surroundings and on the northern Tall Rifaat frontline most of the civilians living in these areas have been displaced due to the fighting. The area is best be described as a military zone. Frontline zones in DAANES-areas in north and east Syria are areas that extend 10-12 km beyond the frontlines. Civilians living in those areas are at risk of being targeted as a result of the fighting between the SDF and the SNA/Türkiye. Humanitarian organizations have acknowledged these zones in the DAANES-areas as humanitarian zones due to the areas proximity to the frontlines relative to other areas in North and East Syria under DAANES-control.

### *Security situation in DAANES/SDF-controlled parts of Hasakah-province*

9. There are clashes between the SDF and SNA-groups on the frontlines between the Operation Peace Spring area and the DAANES- controlled areas in the northwestern part of Hasakah Governorate.
10. There are three main security issues affecting the cities of Al-Hasakah and Qamishli. First, security incidents related to detention facilities and camps housing ISIS members and their families, the most prominent of which was the ISIS attack on the Al-Sinna prison in January 2022, and which lead to a large-scale prison break and allowing many ISIS members to successfully escape. The detention facilities and camps housing ISIS members or their families have been subjected to various attacks and security incidents for several years. These incidents range from attempts by ISIS members to break out or attack these facilities to their escape and flight to nearby civilian areas. The Al-Sinna prison has not been subjected to further attacks since the January 2022, but the instances of resistance and escapes by ISIS members have continued in various areas under SDF control. The most recent of these incidents involved the escape of ISIS prisoners in Raqqa on 29<sup>th</sup> august 2024.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

11. The second threat pertains to the potential for clashes between Syrian government forces and the SDF in what are referred to as the "security squares" in Al-Hasakah and Qamishli. According to the Jusoor Center for Studies, the last time actual clashes occurred between the SDF and government forces in and around the security squares was in August 2024.
12. The Security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli at times experience being closed of by the SDF for days, while the SDF have been conduct raids and lay siege to the security squares and preventing foodstuffs and supplies from entering the security squares. There are several reasons for these closures, often linked to strained relations with the Syrian government or attempts to pressure it during negotiations. These actions may include the Syrians government's Fourth Division besieging areas under the Autonomous Administration in the Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhoods in Aleppo. In other cases, the siege by the SDF is due to clashes or mutual kidnappings with pro-government militias within the security squares in the cities of Al-Hasakah and Qamishli.
13. The third security threat is the targeted drone- and airstrikes from the Turkish air force against the SDF and members of the Self-administration, which has an affiliation to the PKK. These targeted air- and drone strikes typically happen against vehicles belonging to the SDF or employees working for the Self-administration and the areas in and around Qamishli and Hasakah cities.
14. Jusoor for Studies has not confirmed civilian casualties from Turkish airstrikes through its monitoring but does not rule them out. It has documented casualties among DAANES employees since Turkey's aerial escalation in Syria began on 24 October 2024. One attack specifically resulted in the deaths of 5–6 workers and guards at an oil station linked to the SDF-led DAANES administration.

### *Security situation in DAANES/SDF-controlled areas of Raqqq-province*

15. Clashes between the SDF-force and the SNA only occur in the northern part of rural Raqqq governorate on the frontlines between the SNA and Türkiye-controlled Operation Peace Spring area. In the rest of Raqqq governorate under DAANES-control, there are no clashes between the SDF and SNA.
16. Shelling and rocket fire has resulted in civilian casualties for civilians living close to the Operation Peace Spring frontline. This is partially the case in areas

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

bordering the western part of the Operation peace spring Area close to Tall Abyad, where civilian villages have been shelled indiscriminately with mortar fire. A functioning school with attending students called the Al-Thawra Preparatory School in the Al-Thawra (formerly Al-Jalbah) village has also been targeted frequently by shelling. The village is located 12 km from Ain Al-Arous on the road to Ain Al-Arab. It is the closest village to the dividing line between the Peace Spring area and the eastern countryside of Ain Al-Arab. The village and its school are frequently subjected to shelling, with the most recent attack occurring in early November 2024.

17. Civilians have also been known to be targeted, when they have been using smuggling between areas across the frontlines within Syria. There have been examples of civilians being fired upon by both sides when they have used smuggling routes that have crossed the frontline between DAANES-controlled areas and areas controlled by the SNA and Türkiye.
18. There have also been cases in which agricultural farmland has been set on fire in DAANES-controlled areas close to the frontlines.

### *Security situation in DAANES/SDF-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour-province*

19. There are ongoing clashes between Arab tribes and the SDF in DAANES-controlled parts of Deir Ezzour Governorate. In August 2024, tribal militias attacked the SDF in a raid across the Euphrates river, which caused civilian fatalities on both side of the river in both DAANES-controlled areas and in government controlled areas.
20. The SDF have been known to conduct arrest campaigns among the local Arab majority population in Deir Ezzour. Coupled with the marginalization by the DAANES-authorities of the local Arab population and the corruption by the authorities this has all contributed to a deterioration of the security situation in the area.
21. In North East Syria in areas under DAANES-control IS has frequently target the SDF and GoS forces on both sides of the Euphrates river in Deir Ezzour Governorate.
22. Many attacks and incidents perpetrated against civilians are icommitted by IS, even if the attacks are reported as being perpetrated by anonymous attacker.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

23. IS has been focusing its attacks on SDF positions in DAANES-controlled areas. The most amount of IS attacks against both the SDF and civilians happen in DAANES-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour, then followed by the eastern Raqqa country side in Raqqa governorate and lastly in the southern part Hasakah-countryside.
24. IS typically conduct's insurgency attack against SDF positions and checkpoints in the abovementioned areas, but they do not engage in regular armed clashes with the SDF instead IS operate through insurgency style-attacks in the DAANES areas.
25. The number of IS attacks in DAANES-controlled areas in Deir Ezzour are underreported, and the total number of attacks is unknown. This is because IS do not claim all their attacks against the SDF in DAANES-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour Governorate. One cannot estimate the proper strength of the IS in the area, since IS attacks are underreported and not claimed by the IS.
26. According to the assessment of Jusoor for Studies, IS is conducting insurgency operations in the areas across north and east Syria. One of IS' main objectives in in the DAANES-controlled areas of Raqqa and Hasakah is the liberation of imprisoned relatives and fighters currently held in prisons in these areas.
27. The above mentioned strategy provides an idea of the Islamic State's intentions and movement in DAANES-controlled areas in Raqqa, Hasakah and Deir Ezzor Governorates according to the assessment of Jusoor For Studies.

### *Freedom of movement*

28. Travelling to and from the Kurdish-controlled areas in Aleppo is very restricted. Only the elderly and minors can travel freely between these areas, provided they are not on the wanted lists of the regime forces or SDF, as it is necessary to transit territory controlled by the Syrian government to reach the remaining areas in the north and east Syria controlled by DAANES. . Individuals can only travel when there are no ongoing security operations in these areas.
29. People with ID-documents proving that they are living or originate from Deir Ezzour can only travel to Hasakah city, if they have a sponsor from Hasakah that will vouch for or provide a guarantee for them. Without a sponsor, it is not possible from Arabs from Deir Ezzour to travel from Deir Ezzour to

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Hasakah or to other majority Kurdish areas such as Derik/Al-Malikiyah or Amuda for Dier Ezzor residents in DAANES-controlled areas.

30. It possible to travel on the road between Hasakah and Raqqa, but security incidents frequently occur on the roads between Hasakah and Raqqa, as well as the roads between Hasakah and Deir Ezzour. Most people transport themselves using private transportation and a smaller number of people use public transportation in the form of mini-busses.

### Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), online meeting, 23 September 2024

STJ is an organisation documenting human rights violations committed in Syria.

#### *General security situation in DAANES/SDF controlled areas of NES*

1. The most recent significant security developments in the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria have been three waves of Turkish air- and drone strikes in September and October 2023 and in January 2024.
2. There have also been armed attacks on SDF-forces conducted by pro-government Arab tribal militias in in the Kurdish-controlled parts of Deir Ezzour Governorate in September 2024.

#### *Security situation DAANES/SDF-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate*

3. The main security development in the Kurdish controlled areas of Aleppo have been the occasional blockades imposed by the Syrian government on the two SDF-controlled Kurdish neighborhoods Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo city and the Tall Rifaat enclave. These blockades have been conducted simultaneously to the attacks on SDF-forces in Deir Ezzour by pro-government militias. The blockades of supplies by the GoS often happen when there is tension between the SDF and the GoS in the security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli as part of a tit-for-tat strategy between the SDF and GoS.
4. Regular clashes occur on a weekly basis between the SDF and SNA-groups on the frontline between the DAANES-controlled area of Manbij and SNA-controlled areas. There are also weekly clashes between the SDF and SNA groups on the frontlines between the Operation Peace Spring Area, and areas controlled by the SDF. This is also the case for the border regions of the Tall

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Rifaat enclave. Civilian casualties in connection with clashes on the frontlines are not frequent, and it is mainly fighters that are killed in these clashes. This is because; the amount of civilians present in the areas surrounding the frontlines is limited. However, there has been displacement of civilians when SNA-groups attacked the Manbij area in coordination with Arab tribes and SNA factions in September 2023. the past.

5. Civilian casualties in the Kurdish controlled areas of Aleppo mostly occur in connection with Turkish drone strikes in the area, which result in significant damage.
6. There are no clashes between the SDF and IS in DAANES-controlled areas of Aleppo. There have also been no clashes between the SDF and the HTS in 2024, as there is no real frontline between the two parties. There were clashes between the SDF and HTS in September 2023 in Manbij, but not in the first nine months of 2024.

### *Security situation in DAANES/SDF-controlled parts of Hasakah governorate*

7. An unidentified amount of IS members tried to escape the Al Sina'a prison in Hasakah city in September 2024. IS militants previously attacked the prison in January 2022, and resulted in the escape of an unidentified number of IS inmates. At that time the prison contained approximately 1000 inmates, including IS commanders.
8. The road between Qamishli, Hasakah city and Raqqa is regularly attacked by Turkish drones, as is the countryside surrounding Hasakah city.
9. There have been attacks on oil facilities and Asayish police stations in the areas around Derik/Al Malikiyeh and Amuda during the last wave of Turkish air and drone strikes in January 2024. In total 64 locations were targeted by Turkish planes and drones. The attacks resulted in six civilian casualties, including two children.
10. There are regular clashes between the SDF and SNA-groups on the frontline of the SNA-controlled area of Operation Peace Spring and the SDF-controlled areas in Hasakah governorate. However, the clashes between the SDF and SNA-groups in the eastern part of the operation peace spring area are less frequent than clashes in the western part of Operation Peace Spring on the frontline to the Kurdish-controlled areas in Raqqa governorate.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

11. The intensity and frequency of the clashes between the SDF and SNA Turkish backed groups fluctuates depending on the political situation, according to the assessment of the Syrian for Truth and Justice (STJ).
12. The amount of clashes between the SDF and the SNA have generally decreased since the Turkish air and drone attacks in January 2024.
13. There are generally less civilian casualties in connection to the fighting on the frontlines between SDF and SNA-groups. Civilian casualties typically only occur when people are trying to smuggle themselves across the frontline from Kurdish-controlled areas and into SNA-controlled areas on their way to Türkiye.
14. Civilians outside the frontline areas in Hasakah governorate are not affected directly by the clashes on the frontlines between SDF and SNA-groups. However, there have been civilian casualties because of the Turkish air and drone strikes in Hasakah governorate.
15. There have been a couple of cases where IS has assassinated SDF-personnel or civilians employed by the DAANES administration. However, IS is generally not very active in Hasakah governorate due to the presence of SDF-forces and the U.S. military in the area. STJ is not aware of recent cases where civilians have been targeted by IS in Hasakah governorate.
16. Although security incidents occur regularly within the Al Hol camp, the presence of the camp itself does not have a significant impact on the security situation in the surrounding area of the Hasakah governorate. This is because the camp is remotely located far from the cities in the governorate.

### *Security situation in DAANES/SDF-controlled areas of Raqqqa governorate*

17. There have been at least two attacks on Asayish detention stations in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Raqqqa in 2024, which were committed by the IS. One of the attacks resulted in two civilian fatalities and a number of injuries to civilians that were in the area during the attack. The STJ is not aware of reports, where IS specifically targeted civilians in the DAANES-controlled parts of Raqqqa Governorate during the first nine months of 2024.
18. Armed clashes between SNA groups and the SDF occur regularly on the frontlines between the western part of the SNA-controlled Operation Peace



## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

Spring area around the Tall Abyad area. These clashes generally do not result in civilian casualties.

19. There have been no reports about clashes between the Syrian government forces and the SDF in Raqqa governorate in the first nine months of 2024.
20. There is frequent shelling, artillery and armed attacks by SNA-groups or Türkiye on the M4 main road connecting Hasakah city and Raqqa city, which is located in the immediate vicinity of frontlines of the Operation Peace Spring Area. This road is important for the transportation of goods, and these attacks inhibit the ability of civilians to travel using this road. According to the source's assessment, the attacks along the M4 road are ordered by Türkiye and executed by SNA-groups. STJ assessed that the objective of the Turkish/SNA attacks on this road is to prevent the movement of goods and people between the different areas under Kurdish control.
21. Russian military forces have occasionally escorted convoys of civilian vehicles on the M4 road, thus preventing them from attacks by SNA groups.

### *Security situation in DAANES/SDF-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour governorate*

22. There are regular clashes between the SDF and the Arab tribes in the areas of Deir Ezzour under DAANES-control. These clashes are a continuation of the major clashes that broke out between the tribe led by Ibrahim Al Hefel, other tribal groups and the SDF in 2023. Groups allied to Ibrahim Al Hefel and backed by Iran and the GoS conduct regular attacks against the SDF by crossing the Euphrates river, which divides the areas of Deir Ezzour controlled by the DAANES and the GoS.
23. The Al Hefel tribe attacks on the SDF in Deir Ezzour were framed as an Arab rebellion against the Kurdish authorities in 2024. However, according to the sources assessment, it is clear that the clashes and attacks on the SDF by the Arab tribes in 2024 have been backed by Iranian-backed militias and the GoS to create further instability in the areas of Deir Ezzour controlled by the DAANES.
24. Arab tribes have conducted incursions from into SDF territory from the areas of Deir Ezzour under the control of the GoS, and have attempted to capture SDF territory in August 2024. However, these attacks have been unsuccessful.

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

25. There has been less local public support for the tribal attacks against SDF in 2024 among the Arab population in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour compared to 2023.
26. The Arab tribes are divided in relation to support of the SDF. Some Arab tribes support the SDF, as they are not aligned with the Al Hefel tribe.
27. Civilians have been injured and killed by shelling from the GoS and tribal militias. by shelling conducted by the GoS and Arab tribal militias. Nine people have been killed or injured by artillery shelling in the DAANES-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour in August 2024.
28. IS has maintained a covert presence in the DAANES-controlled parts of Deir Ezzour governorate since it lost its remaining territorial control in 2019, and continues to conduct an insurgency against the SDF and the DAANES-authorities.
29. IS has attacked SDF and Asayish checkpoints in Kurdish controlled areas of Deir Ezzour. This has resulted in collateral casualties among civilians that happened to be in the areas, when the attacks occur.

### *Freedom of movement*

30. Civilians can generally move freely between the different areas under DAANES-control. For residents of these areas it is possible to travel and move between the various parts DAANES-controlled areas in Aleppo, Hasakah, Raqqa and Deir Ezzour governorates.
31. A person from Deir Ezzour would need permission from the DAANES-authorities to settle in Qamishli. A person from the Kurdish controlled areas of Raqqa would also require permission from the DAANES-authorities to settle in Qamishli.
32. People travelling from the DAANES-controlled Tall Rifaat enclave or the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqṣoud and Ashrafiyeh to the Kurdish controlled areas of Raqqa, Deir Ezzour and Hasakah need a permit to enter the areas under Kurdish control, as they travel through areas controlled by the GoS.
33. The condition of the roads is not good, and the road between Hasakah and Raqqa along the frontlines to the Operation Peace Spring Area is especially

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

bad due to regular shelling by SNA groups targeting civilians on this road. The roads in Deir Ezzour are also generally of poor quality, as the DAANES-authorities lack the means to improve the infrastructure in areas under their control. However, at the same time, a major bridge is currently being reconstructed in Raqqa.

34. Public transportation is available in Hasakah governorate, but mostly people travel by private cars, as it is of poor quality. There are a small number of companies offering public transportation between the different areas of Kurdish control in the form of small minibuses. The amount of companies offering public transportation has decreased in recent years.
35. There are SDF checkpoints in Hasakah governorate. The majority are located in the southern part of the governorate towards Deir Ezzour, which is partly due to the presence of alleged IS fighters in the area. There are more checkpoints between Hasakah city and Deir Ezzour than there are between Hasakah city and Qamishli. There are usually checkpoints at the entry points of most cities in the DAANES/SDF-controlled parts of north and east Syria.
36. There are no military or administrative restrictions on the freedom of movement of women in the areas under DAANES-control. However, some women may face social restrictions enforced by their families and local communities in relation to travelling freely. Women from the more socially conservative communities, such as in Deir Ezzour, are required to have a male chaperone to travel, and women from this area generally face greater difficulties when travelling due to social restrictions and the amount of checkpoints.
37. There are generally more restrictions in terms of travelling from the Kurdish controlled areas of Deir Ezzour to the other areas in north and east Syria controlled by DAANES, and there are more checkpoints located between the Kurdish controlled areas of Deir Ezzour and the other DAANES-controlled areas of north and east Syria. This is primarily due to the instability of the security situation in Deir Ezzour compared to other DAANES-controlled areas, such as Raqqa.

## Annex 5: Terms of reference

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### *Background*

- 1.1 Historical overview
- 1.2 Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES)
- 1.4 Conflict background and international involvement

### *Actors*

- 2.1 Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)
- 2.2 The Syrian National Army (SNA)
- 2.3 Islamic State (IS)
- 2.4 Government of Syria (GoS)

### *Security situation in DAANES-controlled areas at the provincial level*

- 3.1 Security situation in DAANES-controlled areas of Aleppo-province
  - 3.1.1 Geography and demography
  - 3.1.2 Territorial control
  - 3.1.3 Armed groups currently operating in Aleppo-province
  - 3.1.4 Clashes between Kurdish-led groups and Turkish-backed armed groups
  - 3.1.5 Islamic State insurgency
  - 3.1.6 Airstrikes
  - 3.1.7 Impact on civilian population
  - 3.1.8 Explosive hazards
- 3.2 Security situation in DAANES-controlled areas of Hasakah-province
  - 3.2.1 Geography and demography
  - 3.2.2 Territorial control
  - 3.2.3 Armed groups currently operating in Hasakah-province
  - 3.2.4 Clashes between Kurdish-led groups and Turkish-backed armed groups
  - 3.2.5 Islamic State insurgency
    - 3.2.5.1 Al Hol camp
  - 3.2.6 Airstrikes
  - 3.2.7 Impact on civilian population
  - 3.2.8 Explosive hazards
- 3.3 Security Situation in DAANES-controlled areas of Raqqa-province
  - 3.3.1 Geography and demography
  - 3.3.2 Territorial control

## SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTH AND EAST SYRIA BEFORE THE DOWNFALL OF THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT

- 3.3.3 Armed groups currently operating in Raqqa-province
- 3.3.4 Clashes between Kurdish-led groups and Turkish-backed armed groups
- 3.3.5 Islamic State insurgency
- 3.3.6 Airstrikes
- 3.3.7 Impact on civilian population
- 3.3.8 Explosive hazards
  
- 3.4 Security Situation in DAANES-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour-province
  - 3.4.1 Geography and demography
  - 3.4.2 Territorial control
  - 3.4.3 Armed groups currently operating in Deir Ezzour-province
  - 3.4.4 Clashes between Kurdish-led groups and Arab-tribes
  - 3.4.5 Clashes between Kurdish-led groups and GoS-forces
  - 3.4.6 Airstrikes
  - 3.4.7 Impact on civilian population
  - 3.4.8 Explosive hazards

### *Freedom of movement in DAANES-controlled areas at the provincial level*

- 4.1 Freedom of movement in DAANES-controlled areas of Aleppo
- 4.2 Freedom of movement in DAANES-controlled areas of Hasakah
- 4.3 Freedom of movement in DAANES-controlled areas of Raqqa
- 4.4 Freedom of movement in DAANES-controlled areas of Deir Ezzour