

Syria Update

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Syrian Minister Asserts Syria's 'Right' to Access International Climate Funds

WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW

Reports of RPG Use and Attempted Suicide Bombings at al-Hol

Repeat violence at al-Hol once again highlights the dangers of indifference to the fate of camp residents. [Pg 6](#)

Cuts to Smuggling Lines Trigger Bread Crisis in Rukban Camp

The suffering in the Rukban camp has long fallen on deaf ears, but more can be done at the conflict's current juncture. [Pg 6](#)

HTS Leader Visits Ariha and Jabal Al-Zawiya in Southern Idleb

In a bid to entrench itself in Idleb, HTS increases its involvement in governance and service provision. [Pg 7](#)

Jordan and Kurdish Security Forces Foil Drug Smuggling Operations

Heightened scrutiny at the Jordan-Syria border has given rise to new routes. [Pg 7](#)

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New laws bring Syria into line with international conventions, but whitewash decades of state-sanctioned human rights violations. [Pg 9](#)

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Social discontent in northeast Syria reflects deeper issues of poor governance and social inequalities. [Pg 10](#)

The current low level of the Euphrates River highlights Syria's water security crisis, exacerbated by environmental mismanagement, conflict-related destruction, the overexploitation of resources, and upstream damming by Turkey. Image courtesy of Norwegian Refugee Council.



WEEKLY SYRIA UPDATE DIGEST



Crisis in Ukraine: Impacts for Syria

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine risks upending the delicate status quo in Syria, another site of proxy conflict involving many of the same parties now at odds in Eastern Europe. This report explores the impacts that have already been felt in Syria, and it looks ahead to others that are still to come.

[READ MORE](#)



The Future of LGBTQ+ Syria and the Aid Response

LGBTQ+ Syrians face specific challenges, including healthcare disparities, legal discrimination, social prejudice, and the aid sector’s unpreparedness to meet resulting needs. This report explores regional case studies to identify programming opportunities and entry points to meet these needs and empower and support LGBTQ+ Syrians.

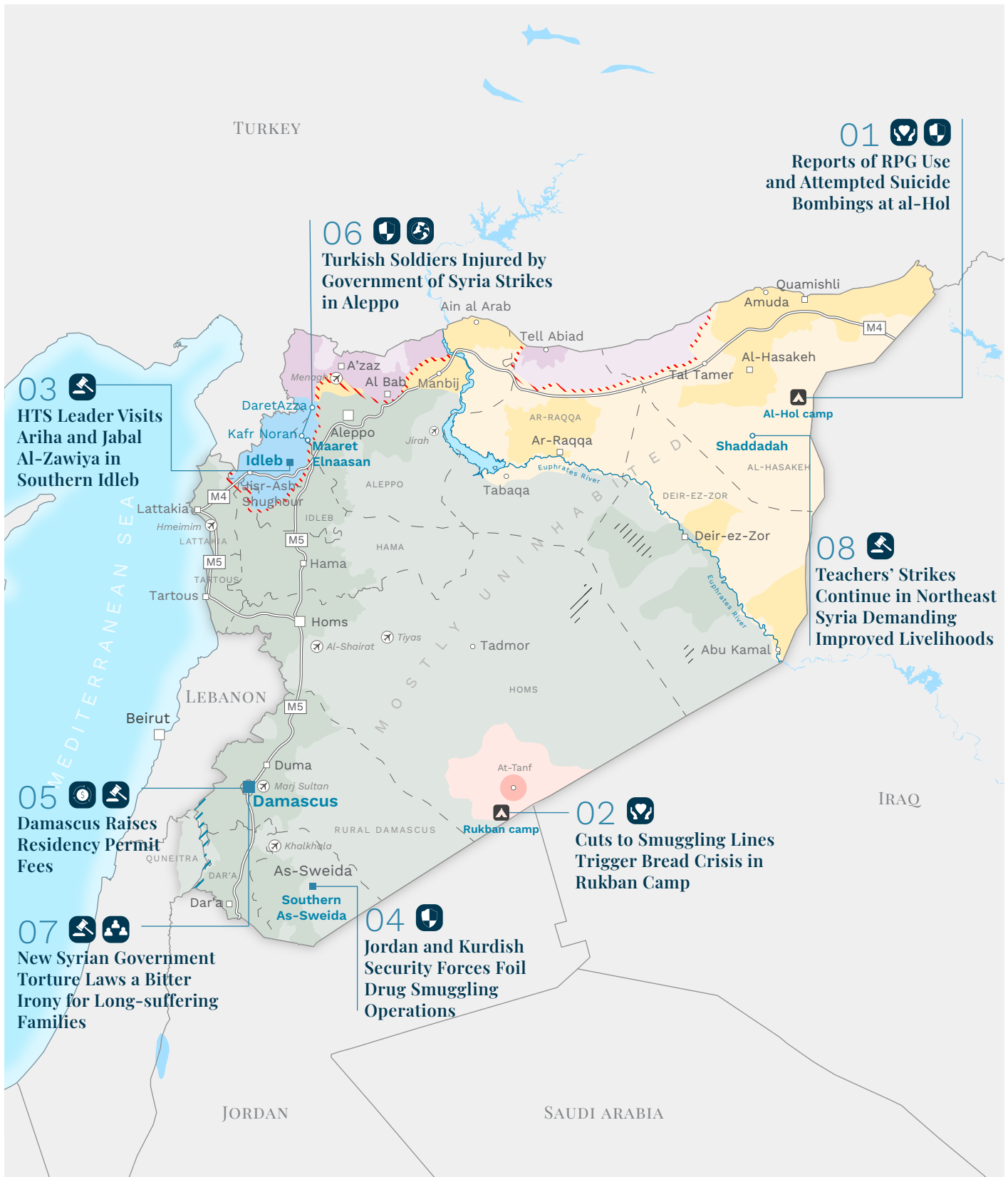
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The following is a brief synopsis of the *In-Depth Analysis* section:

During ministerial discussions at the Middle East and North Africa Climate Week 2022 (MENACW22) in the UAE, Syria’s Minister of Local Administration and Environment, Hussein Makhoul, asserted Syria’s “right” to access climate-focused international development funds. Syria is at the frontlines of the climate crisis, which is significantly impacting its water and food security, and is in dire need of infrastructure rehabilitation, sustainable water management policies, and efforts to combat desertification and irregular water extractions. While donors can and should mainstream climate resilience measures in their portfolios, they must be aware of the risk of “greenwashing” the Government of Syria through funding blank cheques for climate action.

The following is a brief synopsis of the *Whole-of-Syria Review*:

- 01 On 28 March, an SDF foot patrol in al-Hol was reportedly attacked by IS-linked militants; a woman and child were killed in the cross-fire, and SDF forces killed one attacker. Reports of repeat violence at al-Hol highlight once again the need for long-term solutions.
- 02 Prolonged cuts to smuggling lines into Syria’s Rukban camp have resulted in food and resource shortages in recent weeks. While parties to the conflict have long deflected responsibility for Rukban, new opportunities to chip away at the longstanding status quo may be possible.
- 03 On 24 March, HTS leader Abu Muhamad al-Jolani met with local public figures and dignitaries in the towns of Ariha and Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idlib. HTS’s shift from military to governance and service provision, as well as al-Jolani’s increased involvement in local politics, make it harder to draw a line between the group and its political wing, the Salvation Government.
- 04 On 27 March, Jordan thwarted a major drug smuggling operation from Syria, while on 22 March, Asayish forces announced the seizure of more than two million Captagon pills ready for export to Iraqi Kurdistan. The seizure in the northeast indicates smugglers are pursuing alternative routes in response to Jordan’s increased border security.
- 05 On 28 March, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad issued two new laws increasing fees for foreign residency and introducing new fees for salaries paid by foreign employers. Amid budgetary shortfalls, the new fees continue Damascus’s pursuit of fee-based governance and target one of the few remaining revenue streams for the Syrian state — control over its borders.
- 06 Multiple missile attacks by the Government of Syria injured five Turkish soldiers in northwest Syria, while Russia launched airstrikes in the region for the first time since its invasion of Ukraine. The timing of the Russian airstrikes may have been intended to pressure Turkey ahead of it hosting peace talks between Ukraine and Russia.
- 07 On 30 March, the Syrian Government issued a range of new criminal justice punishments targeting acts of torture, interrogation, and forced labour. The legislation represents a bitter irony for the thousands affected by the Government’s well-documented human rights abuses.
- 08 On 25 March, hundreds of teachers began a general strike in the city of Shaddadah in southern Al-Hasakeh Governorate. Social discontent in areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration speaks to broader issues of social inequality, poor governance, and local authorities’ lack of resources.



01 Reports of RPG Use and Attempted Suicide Bombings at al-Hol

06 Turkish Soldiers Injured by Government of Syria Strikes in Aleppo

03 HTS Leader Visits Ariha and Jabal Al-Zawiya in Southern Idleb

08 Teachers' Strikes Continue in Northeast Syria Demanding Improved Livelihoods

05 Damascus Raises Residency Permit Fees

02 Cuts to Smuggling Lines Trigger Bread Crisis in Rukban Camp

07 New Syrian Government Torture Laws a Bitter Irony for Long-suffering Families

04 Jordan and Kurdish Security Forces Foil Drug Smuggling Operations

Population Density

- Major city (750,000+)
 - City (100,000+)
 - Town (25,000+)
 - IDP Camp
 - Governorate
 - Military Airbase
- 100 km

Territorial Control

- LOW POPULATION DENSITY
- Government of Syria
 - Syrian Democratic Forces
 - Syrian National Army
 - US-Backed Opposition Groups
 - Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
 - Islamic State presence
 - Contested area
 - UN Disengagement Observer Force

Type Of Incident

- Humanitarian Issues
- Social
- Regional Intervention
- Security
- Economy
- Governance

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

During ministerial [discussions](#) at the [Middle East and North Africa Climate Week 2022](#) (MENACW22), which took place between March 28 and March 31 in the UAE, Syria's Minister of Local Administration and Environment, Hussein Makhoul, asserted Syria's "right" to access climate-focused international development funds. During the major regional climate event, Makhoul stressed that Syria continues to pursue measures to mitigate the effects of climate change and keep pace with the joint global efforts to confront it, despite the difficulties resulting from the "unilateral coercive measures" imposed by the West. Makhoul also met with the Regional Director and Representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for West Asia, Sami Dimassi, which resulted in a memorandum of understanding between both parties to frame cooperation.

Climate resilience is coming to the fore as a paramount concern for humanitarian and development aid to Syria, yet the country's track record on climate action is bleak. The Syrian Government's track record of instrumentalising foreign assistance is a cautionary tale for the risks of unrestricted funding, and Government policies have exacerbated climate vulnerability and increased food-security risks. While donors can and should mainstream climate resilience measures in their portfolios, they must be aware of the risk of "greenwashing" the Government of Syria through funding blank cheques for climate action.

Funding wheat or chaff?

Syria is at the frontlines of the climate crisis, which is significantly impacting water and food security amid rising humanitarian needs. These impacts have been aggravated by environmental mismanagement, conflict-related destruction, and the overexploitation of resources. Meanwhile, water insecurity has been aggravated by upstream damming in Turkey (see: [Syria Update 10 May 2021](#)). Syria was stricken by severe drought in the years preceding the conflict, which many argue intensified the [local grievances](#) that led to the 2011 protests. Since then, the conflict has significantly damaged Syria's water infrastructure, and recent droughts have resulted in Syria's worst year of wheat harvests on record (see: [Syria Update 10 January 2022](#)). These developments have only exacerbated the dire living conditions of Syrians, resulting in severe

While inclusive and environmentally sensitive recovery initiatives are sorely needed, the Government of Syria's controlling stake in their planning and execution raises significant red flags, despite a purported emphasis on pro-environment outcomes.

food insecurity and water shortages across the country, along with the loss of millions in income for the agricultural sector.

Justifiably, the Government of Syria has been part of international platforms to combat climate change, joining the [Paris Climate Agreement](#) in 2017. It has also undergone a capacity-building programme developed by the [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) with the aim of strengthening resilience and improving urban environments. International climate funds such as the Global Environment Facility Trust Fund (GEF) allow the UN to engage with the Government of Syria without the restrictions imposed by red lines. Without monitoring mechanisms and safeguards of the type that donors demand, it is unclear how such unrestricted funding is used by the Syrian Government. Support of this type is at acute risk of [diversion](#), and there is a high risk that contracting will benefit pro-Government clients, politically connected vendors, and loyalist communities. Indeed, in 2018, a basket of UN-funded climate programmes targeted communities that are not among Syria's neediest, but in Qadmous town and Sheikh Badr City in Tartous Governorate, part of a coastal region that is generally supportive of the Government of Syria.

Exclusive recovery?

The premise of the UAE climate event was to promote a [resilient recovery](#) from the COVID-19 pandemic that is "inclusive, just, and green". Such initiatives are often reliant on technical fixes and "smart solutions", emphasising vague values such as nature-based approaches without making commensurate commitments to key issues that continue to vex response actors in Syria. While inclusive and environmentally sensitive recovery initiatives are sorely needed, the Government of Syria's controlling stake in their planning and execution raises

significant red flags, despite a purported emphasis on pro-environment outcomes. Unrestricted access to international funding, including climate funds, therefore presents a heightened risk of perpetuating and indeed committing human rights abuses, including violations of housing, land, and property (HLP) rights, which are routinely neglected. Support for climate resilience must be conducted on principled grounds that also support inclusive recovery, or they will drive inequality.

Syria is in dire need of infrastructure rehabilitation, sustainable water management policies, appropriate cropping, and efforts to combat desertification and irregular water extraction. Programming to support the climate is therefore an urgent priority that may be addressed through early recovery programming centred on environmental sustainability and resilience. The donor community is taking note. In November 2021 (see: [Syria Update 6 December 2021](#)), US sanctions on Syria were tailored to allow the refurbishment of food production and agricultural infrastructure, which are often explicitly linked to resource management, in an effort to alleviate the widespread food insecurity facing the country. Doing so furnishes greater space for climate-sensitive early recovery and resilience initiatives in these sectors. As efforts such as these continue, they should be driven by the needs and concerns of those on the ground, rather than being used by the Government of Syria to reward clients.

WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW



01 AL-HOL CAMP,
AL-HASAKEH GOVERNORATE

Reports of RPG Use and Attempted Suicide Bombings at al-Hol

On 28 March, an SDF foot patrol in al-Hol was reportedly attacked by IS-linked militants. A woman and child were killed in the cross-fire, and SDF forces killed one attacker. Fires burned in the third and fourth sections of the camp, injuring a further ten children. Local media has linked the event to the arrest of an IS member who had earlier attempted a suicide bombing in the camp, suggesting the small arms assault was a response to the failed bombing. As ever, the attack reflects the SDF's long-standing inability to temper IS-linked violence in the camp, a phenomenon that has been on the rise for months and shows few signs of slowing. Worryingly, reports indicate that the attacker(s) used rocket-propelled grenades in areas outside of the notorious 'annex' reserved for identified extremists. Such weapons are hardly inconspicuous, and serve as a reminder of the apparent ease with which IS cells are able to smuggle weapons into the camp and destabilise its security.

Persistent dangers of response paralysis

Reports of repeat violence at al-Hol highlight once again the need for long-term solutions. The political and humanitarian imperatives are clear: if residents remain trapped in a cycle of humanitarian dependency, if they are effectively subject to internment with no prospect of release, if their reintegration is precluded by an absence of holistic support, and if they are continually exposed to the influences and effects of extremism, then their poverty will be aggravated and their extremist inclinations may harden. Both such consequences are well understood, but efforts to help redirect the futures of even the most accessible camp residents are woefully inadequate. A March 27 Iraqi Government announcement that it intends to repatriate Iraqi nationals

As ever, the attack reflects the SDF's long-standing inability to temper IS-linked violence in the camp, a phenomenon that has been on the rise for months and shows few signs of slowing.

from al-Hol is the most notable development in this area for some time. However, release mechanisms for Syrians at al-Hol and other camps under SDF control remain limited in scope and are seldom attached to genuine reintegration programmes (see: [Mapping and Assessing Release and Reintegration Models from NE Syria Camps](#)). Meanwhile, those ineligible for release are stuck in a haphazard criminal justice system that lacks both the resources and expertise to discharge its authority with any real continuity. Absent more coordinated support systems which meaningfully engage with local capacities for aid, development, and justice, the incubation of deadly violence, enduring poverty, and dangerous extremism will persist with regrettably predictable consequences for regional stability.



02 RUKBAN CAMP, HOMS GOVERNORATE

Cuts to Smuggling Lines Trigger Bread Crisis in Rukban Camp

Food shortages continued in Rukban camp last week after Syrian Government forces cut supply lines and roads leading into the camp in mid-March. Bakeries shuttered on 17 March and began resorting to using bran fodder and other homegrown solutions to produce bread. Rukban camp is located in a US-controlled 'deconfliction zone' along the Syrian-Iraqi-Jordanian border triangle, placing it effectively outside the purview of any single actor. Cross-line aid delivery via UN agencies has been prevented by authorities in Damascus since early 2019, causing residents to rely on smuggling from areas controlled by the Syrian Government for food, fuel, and other materials. On 30 March, a local media source reported that four families had exited the camp towards areas of Government of Syria control.

Leverage over languish

Damascus has long manipulated desperation in Rukban camp through a game of red light, green light with smugglers. While cuts to supply lines are common, the recent disruption has stretched on for longer than usual. Long a blind spot for aid actors due to the camp's geographical and political positioning, responding fully

to humanitarian needs in Rukban appears unlikely (see: [Syria Update 14 March 2022](#)). Prolonged resource shortages will pressure camp residents further, although they are unlikely to return to areas controlled by the Syrian Government, given safety concerns and the fact that many are the families of Maghawir al-Thawra fighters who are the local partners of US forces stationed at the nearby At-Tanf military outpost. Jordan has taken a hands-off approach to the camp, particularly given its desire for stable relations with Damascus. Amman may be willing to ensure better access from its side, but it will be hard-pressed to do so.



03 IDLEB

HTS Leader Visits Ariha and Jabal Al-Zawiya in Southern Idleb

On 24 March, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader Abu Muhamad al-Jolani [visited](#) the towns of Ariha and Jabal al-Zawiya in southern Idleb and met with local public figures and dignitaries. During the visit, al-Jolani discussed HTS's military role in protecting the "liberated areas" and stressed the need for an economic "renaissance" in the region, highlighting HTS's efforts to support the education and medical sectors as well as construct roads and sanitation networks in Idleb.

Al-Jolani wears many hats

Headlined by al-Jolani's increased involvement in local politics, HTS's pivot from military affairs to governance and service provision makes it harder to draw a line between the group and its political wing, the Salvation Government. In January, al-Jolani and Salvation Government Prime Minister Ali Keda publicly appeared together in the border city of Sarmada to inaugurate a two-mile road linking two towns in Idleb (see: [Syria Update 17 January 2022](#)). One month later, the two [visited](#) IDP camps to "check on the conditions of the displaced people", after which al-Jolani [donated](#) an estimated 1 million USD to provide heating to the families affected by winter weather conditions. By blurring the line between HTS and the Salvation Government, al-Jolani seeks to achieve his long-standing

goal of gaining political legitimacy (see: [Syria Update 14 March 2022](#)). This move may have severe ramifications for aid implementation in the region. Certainly, HTS exerts significant influence over many portions of the semi-technocratic Salvation Government; nevertheless, the latter enjoys some degree of independence. It has [been argued](#) that international funding for Idleb can challenge HTS's dominance, but such theories of change should be approached with caution, particularly given that HTS tolerates no political or military alternatives. International funds are crucial for Idleb's population of over 3 million people, of whom 1.9 million are IDPs. The cross-border mechanism teeters on the brink of lapsing this summer (see: [Syria Update 17 January 2022](#)). Donor agencies should use the intervening time to plan for possible alternatives. One needed innovation will be safeguards to protect against interference and ensure aid action does not inadvertently prop up the problematic actors it is meant to avoid.



04 SOUTHERN AS-SWEIDA

Jordan and Kurdish Security Forces Foil Drug Smuggling Operations

On 27 March, the Jordanian armed forces [announced](#) they had thwarted a drug-smuggling operation from Syria in which they seized more than one million captagon pills and a significant quantity of hashish, and forced smugglers to retreat into Syrian territory. Local media sources [reported clashes](#) near the Syrian-Jordanian border, south of As-Sweida Governorate, leading to the death of one person, who may have been among the smugglers. In northeast Syria on 22 March, the Kurdish Security Forces (Asayish) [announced](#) the seizure of more than two million captagon pills, which were ready for export through Iraqi Kurdistan.

One door closes, another opens

The recent drug trafficking operation into Jordan, the largest since the beginning of 2022, highlights a key impediment to full-fledged normalisation between the two countries. Since the beginning of the year, Jordan has frequently thwarted large-scale drug trafficking

operations from Syria. The issue of the Syrian-Jordanian border has received direct attention from Jordanian officials, including King Abdullah II himself, who has [noted](#) that organised smuggling from Syria threatens Jordan's national security. The Syrian Government remains silent amid indirect accusations of its involvement in drug trafficking, or at least its inability to curb Syria's major networks (see: [The Syrian Economy at War: Captagon, Hashish, and the Syrian Narco-State](#)). The major seizure of drugs in the northeast indicates smugglers are pursuing other routes to cope with Jordan's increasing securitisation of its borders. Looking ahead, questions remain over the extent of this shift, and how other neighbouring countries, such as Iraq, will respond. Iraq already has a highly securitised border with Syria as part of its counter-Islamic State efforts, and the threat of drug smuggling may render border security an even greater priority.



05 DAMASCUS

Damascus Raises Residency Permit Fees

On 28 March, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad [issued](#) two new laws increasing fees and taxes for foreign residency in Syria, as well as introducing new fees for salaries paid by foreign employers. Costs for residency permits have more than doubled, as have fees for exiting the country through land, sea, or airports. Holders of residency permits will also have to pay additional fees on salaries from foreign employers,

500,000 SYP (approximately 128.20 USD) per year if paid in SYP, or 200 USD if paid in a foreign currency. According to a [member](#) of the Syrian Parliament, the fees were increased due to inflation and the need to finance the budget amid a decline in exports, the loss of oil and gas reserves, and the loss of other strategic export crops in northeast Syria.

The goose that lays the golden eggs?

Amid economic freefall and budgetary shortfalls, the new fees appear to be an attempt to target one of the few remaining revenue streams for the Syrian state — control over its borders — and are a continuation of Damascus' pursuit of fee-based governance (see: [Syria in 2022: New Aid Approaches for an Evolving Crisis](#)). Passport fees, for example, have long been a key source of state revenue (see: [Syria Update 28 February 2022](#)), particularly targeting Syrians living abroad (see: [Syria Update 13 December 2021](#)). With the obliteration of the domestic tax base over a decade of conflict, foreigners (and those with foreign salaries) offer a lucrative source of revenue, particularly in much-needed foreign currencies. Aid actors should take note, as the new salary fees are likely targeted at such international aid organisations operating in Syria, who are among the few able to pay in foreign currencies.

With the obliteration of the domestic tax base over a decade of conflict, foreigners (and those with foreign salaries) offer a lucrative source of revenues, particularly in much-needed foreign currencies.

Fee Type	Previous Amount SYP(USD)	New Amount SYP(USD)
5-Year residency	90,000 (\$23.10)	300,000 (\$76.90)
3-Year residency	60,000 (\$15.40)	150,000 (\$38.50)
1-Year residency	30,000 (\$7.70)	75,000 (\$19.20)
Salary in SYP	N/A	500,000 (\$128.20)
Salary in foreign currency	N/A	\$200
Leaving through airport	5,000 (\$1.30)	15,000 (\$3.80)
Leaving through land/eaport	2,000 (\$0.50)	5,000 (\$1.30)
Per private car	10,000 (\$2.60)	20,000 (\$5.10)

USD approximated using the market exchange rate of 3,900 SYP to 1 USD at the time of writing.



06 DARET AZZA, KAFR NORAN,
MAARET ELNAASAN;
ALEPPO GOVERNORATE

Turkish Soldiers Injured by Government of Syria Strikes in Aleppo

On 27 March, Government of Syria forces targeted a Turkish military vehicle near Kafr Noran, Aleppo Governorate, with a missile attack, destroying the vehicle and injuring three Turkish soldiers. This was followed on 28 March by multiple Russian airstrikes on opposition areas under Turkish ‘influence’ in northwest Syria, along the border between Idleb and Aleppo governorates — the first Russian strikes in this area since its invasion of Ukraine. Two Turkish soldiers were injured by a Government of Syria rocket attack on a military base near Daret Azza, while Russian and Government of Syria airstrikes targeted HTS positions near Maaret Elnaasan, with no reported injuries. Notably, the strikes came just one day before the renewal of peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, held in Istanbul, Turkey.

Pieces on a larger chessboard

The timing of the Russian airstrikes may have been intended to pressure Turkey ahead of it hosting peace talks between Ukraine and Russia. Nevertheless, shelling across the frontlines between Government of Syria and Turkish-backed forces is not uncommon (see: [Syria Update 7 March 2022](#)). While Russian planes did not target Turkish positions directly, the strikes signal Russia’s continuing support for the Government of Syria against HTS and Turkish-backed opposition factions in northwest Syria. Turkey has attempted to position itself as peacemaker in Russia’s war with Ukraine, and is the only NATO member to have refused to impose sanctions against Russia, while continuing to supply arms to Ukraine. Further escalation in Aleppo is unlikely for now, particularly given Russia’s hesitance to push Turkey further into the NATO camp. Nonetheless, the strikes are a reminder that Russian and Turkish activities in Syria are connected to their interests elsewhere, and that a thaw in the frozen conflict between the two countries and their proxies in northwest Syria could be determined by the extent of their cooperation or conflict abroad.

While Russian planes did not target Turkish positions directly, the strikes signal Russia’s continuing support for the Government of Syria against HTS and Turkish-backed opposition factions in northwest Syria.



07 DAMASCUS

New Syrian Government Torture Laws a Bitter Irony for Long-suffering Families

On 30 March, the Syrian Government issued a range of new criminal justice punishments targeting acts of torture, interrogation, and forced labour. Law 16 introduces harsher sentences for these crimes and articulates the provisions under which punishments, including extended prison sentences and the death penalty, should be applied. With regard to torture, these provisions refer to “any act or omission resulting in severe physical or mental pain or suffering inflicted on a person... intimidation or coercion to perform an act...[and] discrimination of any kind”. Also with regard to torture and interrogation, the law now establishes criminal liability for “an employee or any person acting in an official capacity, and includes acts by a person or group in pursuit of personal, material, or political purposes”. Article 6 of Law 16 establishes that “appropriate compensation” should be provided to those who have been tortured.

The long road to accountability

Tens of thousands of people have been detained by the Syrian Government since 2011, a great many of whom are thought to have died in custody, and whose fates remain forefront in the minds of their families and Syrian civil rights groups. Harrowing accounts of torture, inhuman conditions, and extra-judicial killings in Government prisons are widespread, but there has been no accountability for these crimes, and all associated rights have been summarily disregarded by the state. It is inconceivable that such large-scale and systematic violations have not been authorised at the highest levels of the Syrian Government, yet with the exception of piecemeal information releases delivered at its own discretion, the Government has shown little pity for detainees and the missing, refusing to countenance the demands of those left behind either of its own accord or via ongoing political negotiations. That it would introduce legislation under which many of its members and commissioning officers would be imprisoned or put to death is a bitter irony for the thousands affected by the

Government's well-documented human rights abuses. Syrian civil society organisations and family associations such as the [Caesar Families Association](#) continue to shine a light on these practices, support their fellow citizens, and gather information in the hope of one day achieving truth and justice for the crimes committed by the state and other de facto authorities both before and throughout the war. Crucial to any semblance of peace and reconciliation in a future Syria, their efforts must not be ignored.



08 SHADDADAH, AL-HASAKEH
GOVERNORATE

Teachers' Strikes Continue in Northeast Syria Demanding Improved Livelihoods

On 25 March, hundreds of teachers [began](#) a general strike in the city of Shaddadah in southern Al-Hasakeh Governorate. Their demands included increasing their salaries and pegging them to the US dollar, activating their medical insurance, reinvigorating the role of teacher unions, and establishing pharmacies specifically for teachers. Moreover, teachers called on the Autonomous Administration to improve the educational process by providing students with textbooks and stationery as well as beverage and water allowances. Teachers' [strikes](#) with the same demands took place in north rural Deir-ez-Zor in mid-March. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) [reportedly](#) responded to similar strikes in Ar-Raqqa Governorate with a security campaign, raiding the homes of striking teachers and arresting them, while the Autonomous Administration Education Committee dismissed a number of teachers from their positions.

A symptom of wider malaise

Social discontent in areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration is not new, and it speaks to broader issues of social inequality, poor governance in Arab-majority areas, and local authorities' lack of resources to support the education sector. On 23 March, locals in Deir-ez-Zor [protested](#) against the poor economic conditions and the fragile state of security. In March 2021, teachers in rural Ar-Raqqa closed their schools and [took](#) to the streets protesting the Autono-

mous Administration's decision to draft teachers into the military. While the Autonomous Administration has frequently pledged to address the teachers' demands, its security campaigns following such protests reflect its lack of appetite to do so. The impact of deteriorating living conditions can be felt across northeast Syria. Yet, poorly governed and underdeveloped Arab-majority areas are more vulnerable to such conditions. Additionally, Arab residents are more prone to perceive the Autonomous Administration's policies as discriminatory (see: [Northeast Syria Social Tensions and Stability Monitoring Pilot Project](#)). This may explain the relative rarity of demonstrations in Kurdish populated areas. Aid actors must intensify their efforts to ensure fair distribution of projects across the region and create a mechanism by which the Arab population can enjoy meaningful political and social inclusion.

OPEN SOURCE ANNEX

Open Source Annex

The Open Source Annex highlights key media reports, research, and primary documents that are not examined in the Syria Update. For a continuously updated collection of such records, searchable by geography, theme, and conflict actor – and curated to meet the needs of decision-makers – please see COAR’s comprehensive online search platform [Alexandrina](#).

Note: These records are solely the responsibility of their creators. COAR does not necessarily endorse – or confirm – the viewpoints expressed by these sources.

Regime Security Patrols Expelled from As-Sweida

What does it say? The Men of Bravery Movement, an armed social movement founded in 2013 by As-Sweida’s most important figure, Sheikh Abu Fahd Waheed al-Balous, expelled Government security patrols after they arrested a member of a Druze Lebanese delegation visiting a funeral. Following pressure from Druze public figures, the Syrian Government released the detainee.

Reading between the lines: As-Sweida has witnessed regular public expressions of opposition to the Syrian Government and its policies, and an escalation into broader conflict is an ongoing risk.

Source: Syria TV
Language: Arabic
Date: 29 March 2020

Displaced Syrians in Idlib Hold Classes in Roman Ruins

What does it say? A displaced woman in Idlib turns a Roman archaeological site in the Deir Hassan area north of Idlib into an educational centre for women and children.

Reading between the lines: The living conditions of the residents of camps in Idlib continue to deteriorate alongside limited access to education. Although the basic renovation of the site is a creative use of surrounding infrastructure, it points to Idlib’s deteriorating living conditions and the need for large-scale educational reforms in the area.

Source: Al-Monitor
Language: English
Date: 28 March 2022

The Syrian Suspect Accused of Murdering a Lebanese Woman and Her Three Daughters Is Arrested

What does it say? An intelligence patrol in the Bekaa region arrested a Syrian man accused of participating in the murder of Basma Abbas and her three daughters in Ansar town, southern Lebanon.

Reading between the lines: A Lebanese citizen who was one of the perpetrators, was arrested first. The horrendous murder has shocked the Lebanese public, which is hoping the Lebanese judicial system will decide on the right penalty.

Source: National News Agency (NNA) Lebanon
Language: Arabic
Date: 27 March 2022

A Call for Action: Data on Unexploded Ordnance in Syria and Its Implications

What does it say? Updated data from the Carter Center on the scale and distribution of unexploded ordnance.

Reading between the lines: Unexploded ordnance remains an extensive nationwide problem. The Carter Center rightly highlights the need for renewed clearance efforts and for these to be viewed as a holistic activity that enables humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and community confidence-building outcomes.

Source: [The Carter Center](#)
Language: English
Date: March 2022

Protests in Rural Deir-ez-Zor Countryside Over the Dismissal of the Head of the Civil Council

What does it say? Autonomous Administration (AA) forces arrested participants in recent protests and raided the Al-Izba and Ma'izila areas in Deir-ez-Zor countryside. The latest protests in the area were triggered by the AA's dismissal of the Deir-ez-Zor Civil Council and its appointment of the head of the Future Syria Party.

Reading between the lines: Tensions between Arab and Kurdish residents in Northeast Syria continue to build. If the AA continues to exclude local Arab populations from decision-making processes while ignoring their grievances, clashes between the two groups will continue to occur.

Source: [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights](#)
Language: English
Date: 29 March 2020

500,000 Syrians Return to Syria due to Turkey's Safe Zone Efforts

What does it say? Turkey's Directorate of Migration Management, Savaş Ünlüto, stated that around 500,000 Syrians have returned to Turkey's 'Safe Zone' in Northeast Syria.

Reading between the lines: This development coincides with changes in policy toward Syrian refugees in Turkey in addition to a series of forced deportations. It is clear that Turkey is adamant about Syrians' departure and will probably continue to implement similar policies to do so.

Source: [The Daily Sabah](#)
Language: English
Date: 27 March 2022

Damascus Businessmen Alarmed by the Government's Economic Strategy

What does it say? According to local media reports, prominent businessmen are condemning the Government's economic strategies, and have issued memos of suggestions and complaints to Government institutions on various issues. This includes banning the import of non-essential commodities for six months to stabilise the exchange rate and opening trade flows with the northeast.

Reading between the lines: Syria's business elite has been an important backbone for the Government and has rarely, if ever, officially critiqued the Government's economic policies. Amid dire economic conditions in Syria, the Syrian Government must decide if it will take these suggestions into consideration or continue to damage its relationship with the business community.

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