

# Syria Update

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

## Syrian Tycoon Khodr Ali Taher Disappears with Contradictory Reports Regarding His Fate

WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW

### India to Donate 30,000 Tonnes of Wheat to Syria

The donation goes part-way in covering immediate needs, but a large shortfall remains. Pg 6

### Government Shelling Kills Four Children in Northwest Syria

Civilian casualties are a grim reminder that the conflict is far from completely frozen. Pg 6

### Iranian Forces Deploy in Central Syria after Russian Withdrawal

The deployments suggest growing Iranian influence amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Pg 7

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SNC reforms unlikely to result in renewed relevance for fractious opposition coalition. Pg 7

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Services may offer better connectivity, but risk surveillance. Pg 8

### New Tax Rates Trigger Protests by Shop Owners in Quamishli City

Merchants in Quamishli City closed their shops demanding improved economic and living conditions. Pg 8

### Suspected IS Attack Kills Five Syrian National Army Members

The attack is the largest in the region since the beginning of 2022. Pg 9

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*Khodr Ali Taher, a prominent tycoon closely linked to the regime who enriched himself during the war, has disappeared following the detention of three of his relatives. Image courtesy of The Levant News.*



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.

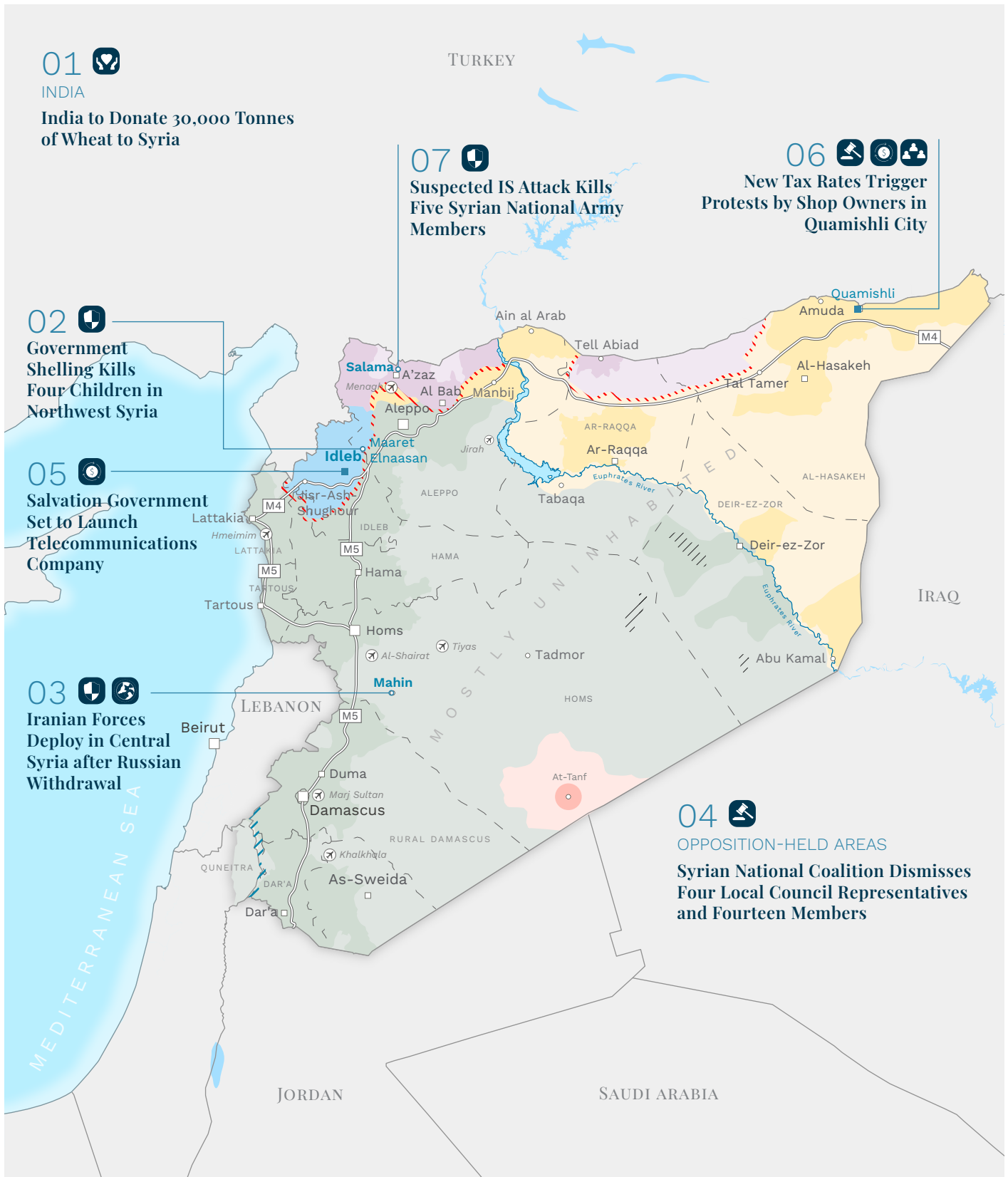
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**The following is a brief synopsis of  
the *In-Depth Analysis* section:**

On 5 April, contradictory media reports emerged regarding the fate of the Syrian tycoon Khodr Ali Taher, who disappeared after the Syrian Government detained three of his relatives in Damascus. While it is too early to know Taher's fate and the reasons behind his sudden absence, the Syrian Government's routine crackdowns on its business elite serve as a reminder of its dominance over business and society. Such relationships will shape the national economy and contracting environment for the foreseeable future. On the whole, aid actors have struggled to understand the Syrian war economy, but there is time yet to adjust contracting practices to ensure early recovery funding and area-based approaches do not entrench and enrich Syria's wartime economic elite.

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

- 01 On 4 April, Indian news sources reported that the country would donate 30,000 tonnes of wheat and 10,000 tonnes of rice to Syria. The donation, while sorely needed, merely delays the inevitable confrontation with an expected shortfall of 2 million tonnes of wheat estimated by the Food and Agriculture Organisation for the 2021/2022 season.
- 02 On 4 April, four children were killed by Government of Syria shelling on the town of Maaret Elnaasan, Idleb Governorate. Opposition-controlled areas continue to be subject to shelling and airstrikes despite the March 2020 ceasefire, with predictable patterns of retaliation and the constant risk of escalation.
- 03 In early April, media sources reported the deployment of additional Iran-backed forces to the Mahin military warehouse in eastern Homs Governorate. The spread of Iranian militias has coincided with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, suggesting that Iran is moving in to replace Russian resources that are being redirected to its war.
- 04 Four local council representatives serving Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor, and Idleb governorates will be replaced as part of an apparent initiative to repurpose the political opposition body, the Syrian National Coalition. This effort is the latest attempt to overcome the kind of internal political differences that have distinguished the SNC since the earliest days of the conflict.
- 05 On 18 March, images began circulating on social media announcing the upcoming launch of "Syria Phone", a mobile telecommunications company in Idleb. Better connectivity is sorely needed in Idleb; nevertheless, there is a significant risk that the network could be used for surveillance amid an increasingly authoritarian environment.
- 06 On 5 April, shop owners organised a sit-in in front of the municipality building in the central market of Quamishli City to protest tax increases. While protests are generally more common in Arab-majority areas, these protests in Kurdish-majority Quamishli are notable in demonstrating cross-community discontent with the Autonomous Administration's policies.
- 07 On 6 April, five members of the opposition Syrian National Army were killed in a suspected Islamic State (IS) attack in Salama, north of Azaz in Aleppo Governorate. IS continues to demonstrate its ability to launch attacks across Syria, far from its main areas of operations in the central and eastern desert.



01

INDIA

India to Donate 30,000 Tonnes of Wheat to Syria

07

Suspected IS Attack Kills Five Syrian National Army Members

06

New Tax Rates Trigger Protests by Shop Owners in Quamishli City

02

Government Shelling Kills Four Children in Northwest Syria

05

Salvation Government Set to Launch Telecommunications Company

03

Iranian Forces Deploy in Central Syria after Russian Withdrawal

04

OPPOSITION-HELD AREAS  
Syrian National Coalition Dismisses Four Local Council Representatives and Fourteen Members

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

**O**n 5 March, contradictory media reports emerged regarding the fate of the Syrian tycoon Khodr Ali Taher, one of Syria's most prominent figures and a divisive conflict entrepreneur, who disappeared following the detention of three of his relatives in Damascus, among them his brother-in-law and confidant Iyad al-Ra'i. Some reports (dubiously) suggested that Taher fled the country with 3 billion USD, fearing detention, while others claim that his sudden absence from public view was coordinated with President Bashar al-Assad and his inner circle. This is not the first time a major Syrian business figure has disappeared from public life, and it is unlikely to be the last major shake-up within Syria's elite business community. Aid actors would do well to follow closely as public disclosures bring to light more detail concerning Taher's business interests, which reflect the networks of profit and power that make up the Syrian war economy and often overlap with contracting issues that are now major concerns for the aid response.

Taher is a prominent intermediary and contractor for the Syrian Arab Army's Fourth Division, which is led by Maher al-Assad, the brother of Bashar al-Assad. Known as the "prince of the borders", Taher has established several companies that allegedly launder money collected illicitly at crossline checkpoints and border crossings and through looting. Through his Assad regime links, Taher has invested in multiple sectors including construction, security and protection, telecommunications, media, and tourism. In 2020, the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) added him and some of his companies to the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List pursuant to Syria sanctions authorities (see: [Syria Update 5 October 2020](#)).

### Routine crackdowns — Anti-corruption or showing dominance?

Given the deeply secretive nature of the Syrian regime, it is difficult to know the real reasons behind Taher's disappearance. However, the detention of his relatives, who have been deeply involved in Taher's businesses, could be read as part of the Syrian Government's efforts to present itself as the champion of anti-corruption. In December 2019, the Syrian Government pressured the loyalist businessman Muhammad Hamsho to settle a case filed against him by the Ministry of Education,

*The Syrian Government's bold actions towards its loyalist businessmen, including the president's cousin, send a clear message that no one, no matter how fundamental, is indispensable.*

following which Hamsho paid more than 90 billion SYP (about 100 million USD at the time). In August 2019, the Syrian Government cracked down on and seized the assets of President Bashar al-Assad's cousin, Rami Makhlof, who was arguably the country's most prominent business figure, reportedly controlling 60 percent of the Syrian economy before the Syria uprising started in 2011 (see: [Syria Update 29 August-4 September 2019](#)). The move against Makhlof was justified by the Government as a precautionary measure aimed at ensuring that the money owed to the country's telecommunications authority was paid. Makhlof has since then been in a state of semi-occlusion, having disappeared from public view except for rare — and to many Syrians, puzzling — video statements proclaiming his own generosity and persecution by the Syrian regime.

The seriousness of the Syrian Government's efforts in combating corruption is questionable. Since its previous clampdowns on both Hamsho and Makhlof, little has been reported about the judicial merits of their cases. While Hamsho succumbed to government pressure, allowing him to maintain limited influence, Makhlof was completely pushed out of the scene and has reportedly been stripped of his fortune. It is too early to tell whether Taher's fate will be similar to that of Hamsho or Makhlof. Nevertheless, the Syrian Government's bold actions towards its loyalist businessmen, including the president's cousin, send a clear message that no one, no matter how fundamental, is indispensable. In doing so, the Government not only promotes an image of fighting corruption, but also reminds its loyalists and opponents alike that the state's prestige will be protected even at a high cost.

### A contracting minefield

The crackdown on Taher draws attention to the complexities inherent to high-stakes business in Syria, including commercial enterprises that operate with regime sanction and pose inherent risks to aid actors seeking local contractors. Among Taher's business in-

terests are tourism and transport companies, an advertising firm, money transfer, and Emma Tel, a telecom that has positioned itself as an alternative to the overtly regime-linked Syriatel. Aid actors routinely procure goods and services in these sectors, and without careful due diligence and sophisticated know-your-customer practices, they risk creating linkages to actors like the sanctioned Taher. The risks inherent to such contracting only multiply with the shift toward early recovery and area-based approaches within the aid response, although mitigations are available. Ultimately, Taher is representative of Syria's wartime economic elite, who aim to solidify their conflict fortunes by pivoting toward conventional business and sectors that will thrive in the post-conflict and transitional stages. Aid actors should not expect to fundamentally change Syria, but if they are to avoid enriching its most malign figures, they must begin by understanding them and how they operate within a maze of shell companies and inter-linked businesses.

## WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW



## 01 INDIA

## India to Donate 30,000 Tonnes of Wheat to Syria

On 4 April, Indian news [sources](#) reported that the country would donate 30,000 tonnes of wheat and 10,000 tonnes of rice to Syria as part of a 190,000 tonne donation to the World Food Programme (WFP) for distribution to conflict-affected countries in need. According to the report, WFP has estimated Syria requires 65,000 tonnes of wheat and 28,000 tonnes of rice to cover short-term, urgent needs. India is one of Syria's largest rice suppliers, and has [previously](#) donated several shipments of rice to the country.

### Half empty or half full?

The donation, while sorely needed, merely delays the inevitable confrontation with an expected shortfall of 2 million tonnes of wheat estimated by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for the 2021/2022 season (see: [Syria Update 10 January 2022](#)). Russia's [pledge](#) to supply one million tonnes of wheat last year remains unfulfilled, as the fallout from its invasion of Ukraine has led to [challenges](#) in securing payments and transport. Global wheat prices have [spiked](#) to their highest level since 2008 amid limited supply, making securing stocks on open markets prohibitively expensive for Syria's cash-strapped state. Syria's domestic wheat production is expected to be poor once again this year, as the area cultivated for and planted with wheat has declined to historically low levels (see: [Syria Update 21 March 2022](#)). Amid soaring prices and restricted supply, Syrians continue to suffer from food insecurity, with the most recent WFP situation [report](#) estimating 12.4 million people to be food insecure, and 1.3 million severely food insecure. Short-term humanitarian interventions to avert the most severe hunger will be necessary. In the long term, with climate-related stress on water supplies and conflict-related destruction and degradation of infrastructure (see: [Syria Update 4 April 2022](#)), donors and aid actors should look to building resilience in Syria's agriculture sector through the refurbishment of food production and agricultural infrastructure, supporting sustainable water management policies and appropriate cropping where possible.



## 02 MAARET ELNAASAN, IDLEB GOVERNORATE

## Government Shelling Kills Four Children in Northwest Syria

On 4 April, four children were [killed](#) by Government of Syria shelling on the town of Maaret Elnaasan, northeastern Idleb Governorate. The children were killed while [returning](#) from their school on the outskirts of the town, which falls under Salvation Government territory and sits on the border with Government-held Aleppo Governorate. In response to the shelling, local opposition forces [targeted](#) military sites belonging to the Government of Syria and militias linked to Russia in Idleb and Aleppo governorates.

### Caught in the crossfire

Opposition-controlled areas in northwest Syria continue to be subject to shelling and airstrikes, despite the March 2020 ceasefire (see: [Syria Update 9 March 2020](#)), with predictable patterns of retaliation and the constant risk of escalation. Maaret Elnaasan was also struck by Russian and Government of Syria forces last week, reportedly targeting Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) positions (see: [Syria Update 4 April 2022](#)), while in February, Government of Syria [shelling](#) of the town killed six members of one family. With Idleb under the control of groups considered by Damascus and Moscow to be terrorists, the line between civilian and military targets is often blurred, and their readiness to employ violence to demoralise residents of opposition areas (see: [Syria Update 10 January 2022](#)) leaves civilians regularly caught in the crossfire. Violence in the region is likely to continue, putting at risk civilians and aid implementers.

*With Idleb under the control of groups considered by Damascus and Moscow to be terrorists, the line between civilian and military targets is often blurred, leaving civilians regularly caught in the crossfire.*



### 03 MAHIN, HOMS GOVERNORATE

## Iranian Forces Deploy in Central Syria after Russian Withdrawal

In early April, media sources [reported](#) the deployment of additional Iranian and Iran-backed forces, including the pro-Iran Syrian Arab Army Fourth Division led by Maher al-Assad, to the Mahin military warehouse in eastern Homs Governorate, as Russian and Russia-backed forces, including the Syrian Arab Army Fifth Brigade, withdrew to Palmyra military airport. Iran-aligned forces have recently strengthened their presence in around 120 sites [throughout](#) Syria, with its areas of influence [stretching](#) from the Lebanese border to eastern Homs Governorate.

### Shifting sands?

The spread of Iranian militias has coincided with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, suggesting that Iran is moving in to replace Russian resources that are being redirected to its war (see: [Crisis in Ukraine: Impacts for Syria](#)). Although both countries have intervened to support President Bashar al-Assad in Syria's civil war, Russia and Iran have often been at odds inside the country and have [competed](#) for influence and investment opportunities. Iran has recently held high-level [meetings](#) with Damascus, seeking to bolster economic cooperation and strengthen the two countries' strategic partnership. Opportunities for Iran to invest in Syria may only grow if, as expected, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal is revived and sanctions on Iran are removed. Iran is looking to entrench itself in Syria, to recoup the costs of its military investment as well as provide transit routes across the so-called "Shia Crescent" that links Iran to its proxy Hezbollah in Lebanon via Iraq and Syria. Aid actors working across Syria should monitor Iranian military presence, particularly near the south, which is likely to draw Israeli [airstrikes](#).

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### 04 OPPOSITION-HELD AREAS

## Syrian National Coalition Dismisses Four Local Council Representatives and Fourteen Members

Four local council representatives serving Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Deir-ez-Zor, and Idleb governorates will be [replaced](#) as part of an apparent initiative to repurpose the political opposition body, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC). In addition, no less than fourteen individuals have also had their membership of the SNC [terminated](#). In response, the Free Patriotic Rally party [withdrew](#) from the SNC, citing what it perceives as the coalition's wayward strategic leadership and insensitivity to the Syrian opposition movement. SNC [statements](#) subsequent to the event explain that a range of planned amendments to the coalition's organisational governance and membership systems will be undertaken in consultation with the public and SNC membership groups.

### Hollow reforms

This effort is by no means novel, and serves as but the latest attempt to overcome the kind of internal political differences which have distinguished the SNC since the earliest days of conflict in Syria. Last month, the SNC reportedly [formed](#) a small committee to develop reforms which might help reinvigorate the coalition's faltering performance amongst its domestic constituencies and on the international stage. Over the years, the views of dominant forces within the coalition have caused the allegiance of current, former, and prospective coalition members to waver, reducing the organisation's legitimacy amongst the political opposition and detracting from its overarching sense of purpose. Making little to no meaningful contribution in international political fora, side-lined by other domestic actors across Syria's northern governorates, and weakened by its own maladministration, the SNC stands to fall into further irrelevance absent greater solidarity and reform. If the past decade is any indication, however, neither is a likely outcome of the current reform process, and particularly at a time when the current political landscape refuses to bestow the SNC with any renewed importance.



05 IDLEB, IDLEB GOVERNORATE

## Salvation Government Set to Launch Telecommunications Company

On 18 March, [images](#) began circulating on social media announcing the upcoming launch of “Syria Phone”, a mobile telecommunications company in Idleb. The company is [reportedly](#) the work of a partnership with the Salvation Government and an unnamed “private investor”. Sources close to the Salvation Government said services are expected to launch in mid-April, though pro-opposition Syria TV claimed it would take several months more due to technical issues. Social media users raised [concerns](#) that the network may be used for surveillance by the Salvation Government and that the “private investor” may be a “new Rami Makhlof”, the previously powerful tycoon who owned Syriatel, Syria’s largest mobile network operator.

### Connectivity: a lucrative commodity

Better connectivity is sorely needed in Idleb, and establishing a network partially owned by the Salvation Government may provide much needed revenue. Since HTS [dismantled](#) Syrian telecommunications infrastructure in 2019 amid security concerns, residents of Idleb have largely depended on patchy coverage from Turkish cellular networks, located along the border as well as around Turkish military bases, reporting high prices and poor service. Should the new operator succeed in establishing its own network of cell towers, it could offer significantly improved services in the region, and contribute to HTS leader al-Jolani’s recent ‘pivot’ to services (see: [Syria Update 4 April 2022](#)). Nevertheless, given the lack of competition, there are no guarantees that the services will prove any more affordable for ordinary people. The company may instead serve as a lucrative rent extractor for the as-yet unnamed “private investor” and the Salvation Government itself (see also: [Syria Update 28 February 2022](#)). Furthermore, there is a significant risk that the network could be used for surveillance amid the increasingly authoritarian environment in Idleb. Aid actors and local residents should act cautiously: the necessity of using state-linked telecoms in Syria has left implementers with few meaningful mitigation measures. An HTS-linked provider in northern Syria would create nearly identical concerns.

06 QUAMISHLI CITY,  
AL-HASAKEH GOVERNORATE

## New Tax Rates Trigger Protests by Shop Owners in Quamishli City

On 5 April, Arab and Kurdish shop owners organised a [sit-in](#) in front of the municipality building in the central market of Quamishli City to protest tax increases of around 70 percent. The protesters also [blocked the road](#) leading to the municipality and closed their stores in the al-Alam commercial complex in an effort to attract attention to their demands. Merchants demanded that the Autonomous Administration (AA) reduce taxes and improve economic and living conditions in Quamishli City, caused by poor economic policies, the high prices of imports, and weak purchasing power. The sudden tax increase surprised merchants, as neither the municipality nor AA authorities issued any official decision or announced the changes on their official media platforms.

### At whose expense?

While protests are generally more common in Arab-majority areas, these protests in Kurdish-majority Quamishli are notable in demonstrating cross-community discontent with the AA’s policies. This is neither the first – nor likely the last time – that residents of Northeast Syria vocally object to AA policies. In January, protests erupted in Al-Hasakeh for two days in response to an increase in prices and the AA’s monopoly of food commodities (see: [Syria Update 24 January 2022](#)). In March, residents of Deir-ez-Zor northern countryside protested the AA cancelling fuel distribution (see: [Syria Update 7 March 2022](#)), or lack thereof. Difficult economic conditions and unresponsive governance will likely lead to future protests in northeast Syria. Aid actors in the region should be wary of contributing to upholding dubious governance systems and press the AA to govern inclusively and responsively.

*Difficult economic conditions and unresponsive governance will likely lead to future protests in northeast Syria.*





07 SALAMA, ALEPPO GOVERNORATE

## Suspected IS Attack Kills Five Syrian National Army Members

On 6 April, five members of the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA) were killed when as-yet unidentified assailants opened fire from a van at a checkpoint in Salama, north of Azaz in Aleppo Governorate. Among the dead was a commander in the SNA's Third Legion, Muhammad Hamdo Barbouri. The SNA clashed with the group and reportedly managed to kill or capture some, later issuing a statement accusing the Islamic State (IS) of carrying out the attack. The attack was the largest in the area this year.

### Continued threats to stability

IS continues to demonstrate its ability to launch attacks and cause disruption across Syria, far from its main areas of operations in the central and eastern desert. While IS attacks usually target Government of Syria or Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) areas, it has nonetheless increased activities in areas controlled by Turkish-backed factions since 2020. IS attacks remain opportunistic, targeting all actors in Syria and generally intending to sow chaos and instability. It is unclear as of yet whether the group will see a resurgence under its new leader (see: [Syria Update 21 March 2022](#)) or if Russia limiting its airstrikes to divert resources to Ukraine will give it more space to operate (see: [Syria Update 14 March 2022](#)). The security situation in northwest Syria remains unstable, with multiple bombings that target SNA actors, varyingly attributed to IS, the SDF, and the Government of Syria. Aid actors should be prepared for the continued threat of attacks and instability.

## 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.

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### Will a New Process Begin in Syria?

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**What does it say?** The report cites government sources suggesting that Turkey is considering reopening discussions with the Government of Syria, though the Government of Syria denied any contacts had been made.

**Reading between the lines:** Dealing with the Government of Syria could help Turkey manage two of its thorniest issues: the presence of a large population of Syrian refugees within Turkish borders and the perceived threat from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Syrian affiliate the People's Defence Units (YPG). Nevertheless, overcoming the mutual hostility between Ankara and Damascus will be an uphill battle.

**Source:** Hürriyet  
**Language:** Turkish  
**Date:** 4 April 2022

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### French court says opposition spokesperson can face war crimes charges

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**What does it say?** A court in France dismissed attempts by Islam Alloush, former leader of Jaish al-Islam, to have war crimes and torture charges against him thrown out – thus paving the way for his prosecution.

**Reading between the lines:** It has been rare for European courts to bring charges against Syrian opposition figures; most trials of Syrian violators in European courts have been against former officers in either the Syrian Arab army or the security apparatuses. If further appeals fail, Alloush could become the first individual to be tried for war crimes committed while a member of an opposition faction.

**Source:** Middle East Eye  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 5 April 2022

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### The Captagon Threat: A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities

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**What does it say?** This report is a comprehensive study of the Captagon issue in Syria, and it argues convincingly that the issue poses challenges not only for the Middle East, but for Europe and Africa, and US interests.

**Reading between the lines:** COAR has previously reported on the Captagon trade (see: [The Syrian Economy at War: Captagon, Hashish, and the Syrian Narco-State](#)). While prone to sensationalist coverage, the Syrian Captagon trade is unquestionably a major issue for the region and a driver of conflict, with the scale of its negative impacts rivalled only by its complexity.

**Source:** New Lines Institute  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** April 2022

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### Only 45 Psychiatrists in Syrian Regime-controlled Areas

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**What does it say?** The Director of Ibn Sina psychiatric hospital in Damascus claimed that only 45 psychiatrists remain in Government of Syria-controlled areas, against an estimated need of 10,000.

**Reading between the lines:** After a decade of conflict, humanitarian crisis, and suffering, the need for psycho-social support in Syria has never been greater; donors should note that this is a particular area of need.

**Source:** Enab Baladi  
**Language:** Arabic  
**Date:** 5 April 2022

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### HTS explores rapprochement with Turkey-backed factions in north Syria

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**What does it say?** Sources within rebel factions are reporting that talks between HTS and Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (TFSA) factions are gathering momentum, heralding the possibility of extended cooperation and even integration into a single civil-military structure across northwest Syria.

**Reading between the lines:** Impediments to such rapprochement are great. While HTS may benefit from such a merger to delist itself as an international terrorist organisation, it has shown little willingness to share power with other actors.

**Source:** Al-Monitor  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 31 March 2022

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### How Russia Evades Sanctions via Syrian Loan Schemes

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**What does it say?** Moscow is using conditional, and unfavourable, loans extended to the Government of Syria in order to evade sanctions and enrich oligarchs.

**Reading between the lines:** Beggars can't be choosers: Syria has few other options for accessing external finance, which Russia is using to its advantage in order to recoup the costs of its intervention in the country.

**Source:** New Lines Magazine  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 5 April 2022

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### Luna al-Shebel: Many Syrian Volunteers Expressed Their Desire to Fight with Russia

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**What does it say?** In an interview with BBC News, Special Adviser to the Syrian Presidency Luna al-Shebel claimed that Russia had made no formal request for Syrian volunteers to aid in its invasion of Ukraine. She also accused the Syrian opposition of not representing the Syrian 'identity' in the Geneva Constitutional Committee.

**Reading between the lines:** While the US government has reported that small numbers of Syrian recruits have arrived in Russia to train, it is unclear whether they will be sent to Ukraine to fight. Nevertheless, Syrians who lack livelihood opportunities at home remain vulnerable to the predation of Russian mercenary companies and may see dangerous deployments in other areas of conflict.

**Source:** BBC  
**Language:** Arabic  
**Date:** 1 April 2022

The Wartime and Post-Conflict Syria project (WPCS) is funded by the European Union and implemented through a partnership between the European University Institute (Middle East Directions Programme) and the Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR). WPCS will provide operational and strategic analysis to policymakers and programmers concerning prospects, challenges, trends, and policy options with respect to a mid-conflict and post-conflict Syria. WPCS also aims to stimulate new approaches and policy responses to the Syrian conflict through a regular dialogue between researchers, policymakers and donors, and implementers, as well as to build a new network of Syrian researchers who will contribute to research informing international policy and practice related to their country.

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