

# Syria Update

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

## SDF Imposes Siege on Government of Syria Enclaves in Response to Siege of Sheikh Maqsoud

WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW

### DG ECHO-supported UNRWA Clinic in Dar'a Attacked

Unidentified individuals threw a grenade at the UNRWA clinic in Dar'a city amid chronic volatility in the governorate. [Pg 5](#)

### Iran-Backed Militias Bombard Coalition Base Near Al-Omar Oil Field

Four US service members sustain mild injuries in the first attack on Coalition forces since January. [Pg 5](#)

### Central Bank of Syria Adjusts Exchange and Interest Rates

Monetary policy aims to tackle inflation, but Syria's inflation problems run deeper than the currency. [Pg 6](#)

### The Salvation Government Issues General Amnesty for Petty Crimes

The amnesty is a pivot toward clemency, but only for petty crimes. [Pg 7](#)

### Israel Carries Out Airstrikes on Masyaf City in Eastern Hama

Pro-opposition media claim that airstrikes targeted IRGC and Hezbollah warehouses and research centres. [Pg 7](#)

### 45 Suicides Recorded in Government-Controlled Areas in 2022

The figures, almost certainly an undercount, speak to the trauma caused by conflict and dire living conditions, with little mental health support. [Pg 8](#)

Protesters gather in Sheikh Maqsoud, Aleppo, on 14 April, to demand an end to the siege, dismissing claims that food had been allowed into the neighbourhood. Image courtesy of Hawar News.





## 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.

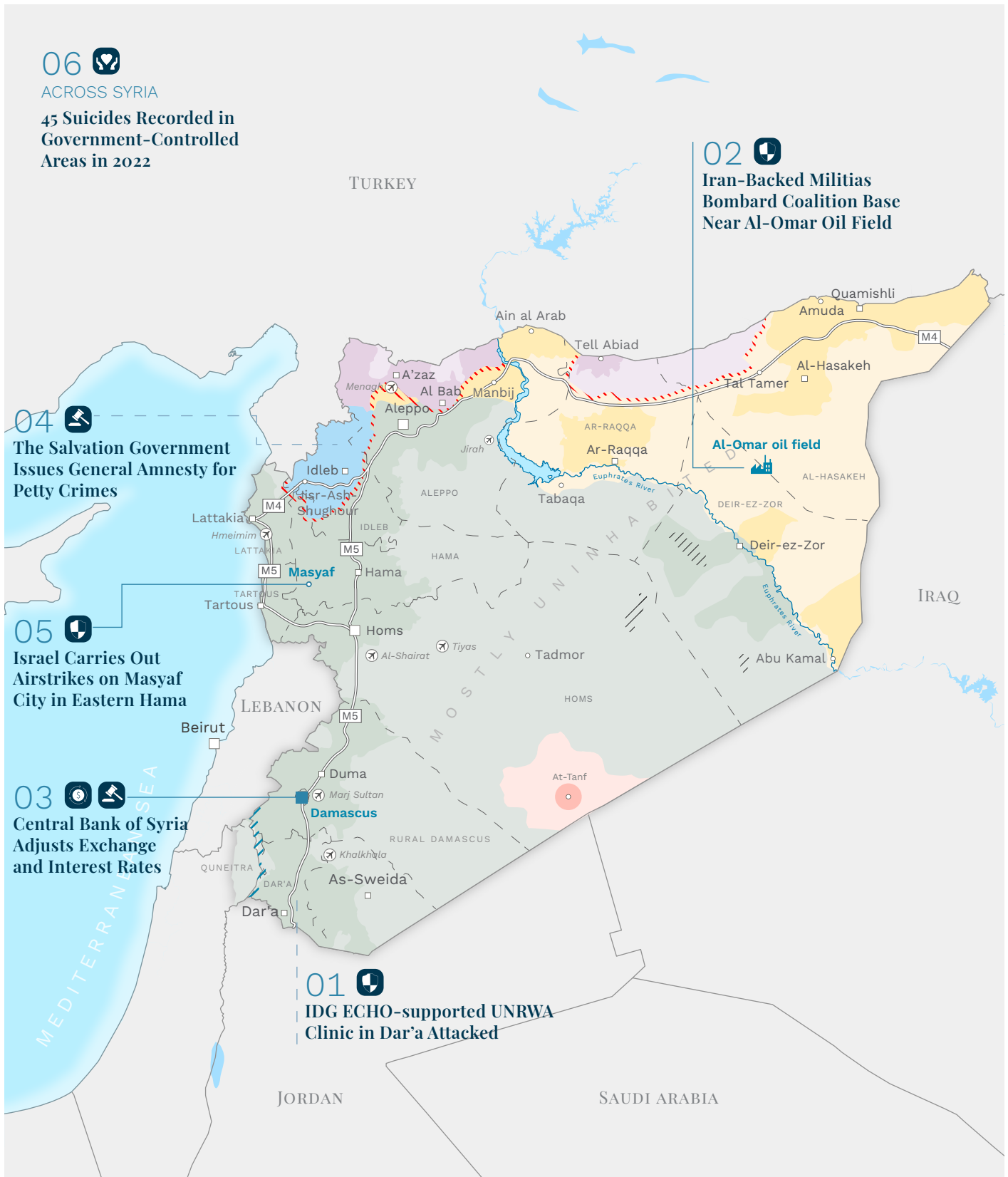
[READ MORE](#)

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

On 10 April, the Internal Security Forces (Asayish) of the Autonomous Administration imposed “security measures” on Government of Syria-controlled areas in Quamishli in response to Syrian Government forces blocking the entry of flour, fuel, and medical aid to the majority-Kurdish and Autonomous Administration-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods in Aleppo. The mutual sieges come after a month of increasing tensions between the Autonomous Administration and the Government of Syria. While it is unclear what sparked the initial siege, the current geopolitical environment has created space for greater posturing and prevarication, with the risk of further conflict.

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

- 01 On 9 April, two individuals threw a stun grenade and fired shots in the vicinity of a DG ECHO-supported United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) health clinic in Dar'a refugee camp. Although the incident did not directly target the donor-funded facility — or others nearby — it highlights the continuing risk of violent escalation in Dar'a, where localised insecurity is chronic.
- 02 On 7 April, Iran-backed militias conducted an indirect fire attack targeting the Green Village International Coalition base near al-Omar oil field, Deir-ez-Zor eastern countryside, resulting in minor injuries to four US service members. The strike highlights an increasingly fraught context, as the reduction of Russian presence in the region creates an opening for Iran and its proxies.
- 03 On 13 April, the Central Bank of Syria set the official exchange rate for the Syrian pound (SYP) at 2,814 SYP/USD, an increase from 2,512 SYP/USD, and announced it would raise the interest rate on deposits to 11 percent. Taken together, the rate adjustments are aimed at reducing inflationary pressures in the Syrian economy, though their overall impact is likely to be limited.
- 04 On 2 April, the Salvation Government in northwest Syria issued a general amnesty for certain crimes, excluding harder offences specified under Islamic Law. The news parallels a shift by the Salvation Government and its military arm, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, to present itself as a moderate governing institution amid poor local approval and international scrutiny.
- 05 On 9 April, Israel carried out airstrikes targeting Government-held positions near the city of Masyaf in Hama Governorate, northwestern Syria, without reported casualties. Israeli air attacks on Syria are likely to continue, and there is little to suggest that they will prompt wider response from the Syrian Government or its allies.
- 06 On 12 April, the Director of the General Authority for Forensic Medicine, Dr. Zaher Hajjo, stated that 45 suicide cases, among them 37 men and 8 women, were recorded in 2022 in Syrian Government areas. The phenomenon of suicide across Syria is a product of a decade-long war and speaks to broader issues of despair, dire living conditions, and a lack of mental and psychological support.



06

ACROSS SYRIA

45 Suicides Recorded in Government-Controlled Areas in 2022

02

Iran-Backed Militias Bombard Coalition Base Near Al-Omar Oil Field

04

The Salvation Government Issues General Amnesty for Petty Crimes

05

Israel Carries Out Airstrikes on Masyaf City in Eastern Hama

03

Central Bank of Syria Adjusts Exchange and Interest Rates

01

IDG ECHO-supported UNRWA Clinic in Dar'a Attacked

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

On 10 April, the Internal Security Forces (Asayish) of the Autonomous Administration imposed “security measures” on Government of Syria-controlled areas in Quamishli, following its [blockade](#) of bakeries in Quamishli and Al-Hasakeh since 9 April. The measures appear to be a response to Syrian Government forces’ [blocking](#) the entry of flour, fuel, and medical aid to the majority-Kurdish and Autonomous Administration-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods in Aleppo since March. All areas under effective siege are facing acute food shortages, while Russia has [intervened](#) in an attempt to mediate. The Government of Syria [denied](#) there is a siege of Sheikh Maqsoud, saying instead that it is preventing smuggling and the delivery of supplies to four unlicensed bakeries.

The mutual sieges come after a month of increasing tensions between the Autonomous Administration and the Government of Syria. On 1 March, a confrontation between the Government of Syria and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) near Tal Tamer in Al-Hasakeh Governorate led to two soldiers on each side being killed (see: [Syria Update 7 March 2022](#)). The two sides also engaged in clashes in Sheikh Maqsoud on 13 March, with one Government soldier killed. The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) also recently signalled greater openness to the Syrian opposition on the anniversary of the 2011 uprising (see: [Syria Update 21 March 2022](#)). While it is unclear what sparked the initial siege, the current geopolitical environment has created space for greater posturing and prevarication, with the risk of further conflict.

### Round two

Both sides have form for imposing sieges on enclaves within their territories in efforts to pressure the other. In early 2021, Sheikh Maqsoud and the Government enclaves of Quamishli and Al-Hasakeh were placed under siege for almost a month (see: [Syria Update 1 February](#)

[2021](#)) until an agreement was reached through Russian mediation. The sieges came weeks after tensions and confrontations had flared up between Asayish and Syrian Government forces, though outside factors such as discussions over the status of Ein Issa and the threat of a Turkish incursion also played a role (see: [Syria Update 7 December 2020](#)).

The siege of Sheikh Maqsoud can be seen against the backdrop of an emboldened SDC (see: [Syria Update 21 March 2022](#)). Turkey’s delicate relations with Russia as a result of the invasion of Ukraine and upcoming presidential election mean that further incursions into northern Syria are unlikely, while Russia’s pre-occupation with its invasion may leave the SDC with greater space for manoeuvre vis-à-vis Damascus. A rumoured sanctions waiver for northeast Syria has also bolstered the Kurdish political movement (see: [Syria Update 14 March 2022](#)). Strongly hostile to the idea of Kurdish autonomy but without the ability to bring the region to heel militarily, Damascus has likely turned to blockading Kurdish neighbourhoods to exert pressure on the SDC.

### As ever, civilians suffer

Amid the power plays between the Government of Syria and the SDF, civilians are caught in the middle, with their already difficult living conditions further exacerbated. The sieges and closures of bakeries have driven up the price of bread and prevented the free flow of humanitarian aid. There is little aid actors can do to alleviate such concerns, but they should take note that chronic hotspots affected by [regional geopolitics](#) are liable to see shifts owing to the upset caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (see: [Crisis in Ukraine: Impacts for Syria](#)). The largely Kurdish Sheikh Maqsoud enclave in Aleppo and Government of Syria security squares in Al-Hasakeh and Quamishli are prime examples. Kurdish-held Tell Refaat is another potential flashpoint, as are numerous communities along frontlines in northern Al-Hasakeh Governorate and Idleb.

## WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW



## 01 DAR'A GOVERNORATE

**DG ECHO-supported UNRWA Clinic in Dar'a Attacked**

On 9 April, two individuals threw a stun grenade (i.e., a non-explosive grenade) and fired shots in the vicinity of a DG ECHO-supported United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) health clinic in Dar'a refugee camp. There were no reported casualties, and damage to the infrastructure is limited. According to local sources, the incident did not target the clinic specifically but was a continuation of the battle for control over the area, which has seen friction between the Government of Syria's Military Security, which is highly influential locally, and local former opposition figures displeased with the influence of Syrian state security forces.

**High likelihood of future violence**

Although the incident did not directly target the donor-funded facility – or others nearby – it highlights the continuing risk of violent escalation in Dar'a, where localised insecurity is chronic. Dar'a Governorate recorded at least seven assassinations and assassination attempts in the week preceding the incident, targeting among them the secretary of the Ba'ath Party in Nawa, and a member of the Central Negotiations Committee in Dar'a al-Balad. Previous agreements between Damascus and local actors in Dar'a have failed to reduce tensions, and attacks and assassinations are rampant throughout the region (see: [Syria Update 28 February 2022](#)). Security unrest and the proliferation of weapons within community groups are likely an obstacle to aid actors in Dar'a in the long term. Humanitarian actors should expect such attacks to continue in various locations in Dar'a Governorate and other areas in the restive south of Syria.



## 02 AL-OMAR OIL FIELD, DEIR-EZ-ZOR

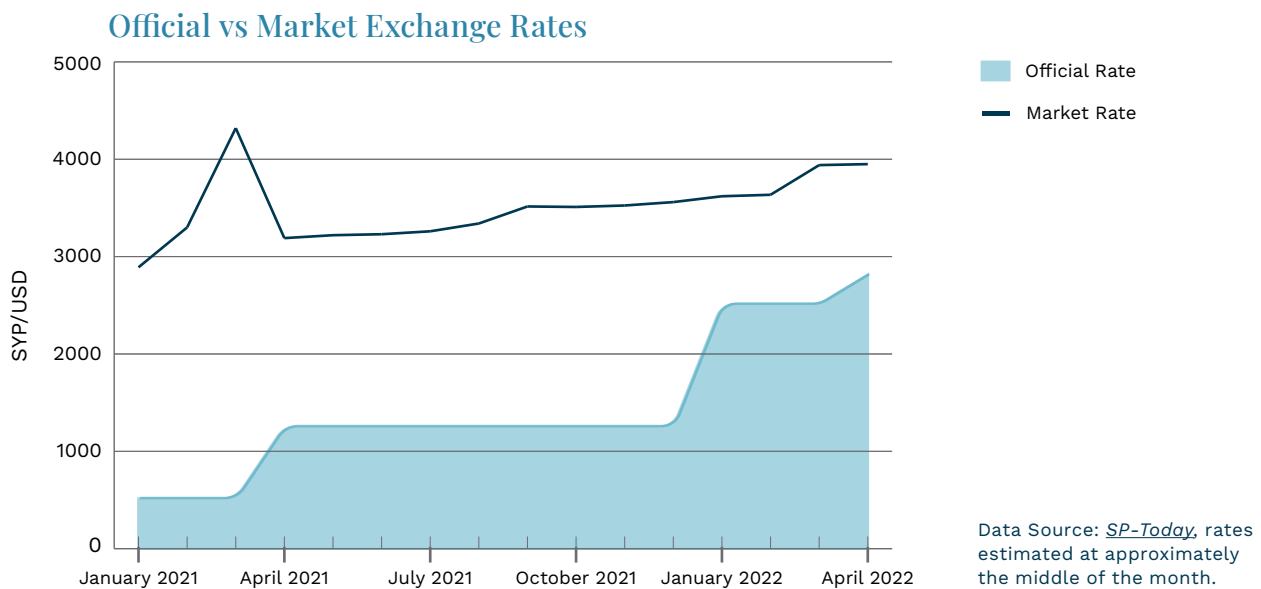
**Iran-Backed Militias Bombard Coalition Base Near Al-Omar Oil Field**

On 7 April, Iranian-backed militias conducted an indirect fire attack targeting the Green Village International Coalition base near Al-Omar oil field, Deir-ez-Zor eastern countryside. Four American servicemembers sustained minor injuries from two projectiles that struck the base, while other rounds reportedly caused explosions and fires at the oil field. The bombardment – which was fired from west of the Euphrates River – reportedly prompted retaliatory strikes by the Coalition against the positions of pro-Iranian militias near Al Mayadin and Quriyeh towns. No actor has claimed responsibility for the attack.

**A dangerous frontier**

While last week's strike was the first time since January that Iranian-affiliated forces have attacked Coalition forces in Syria, it comes on the heels of a thwarted drone attack on a Coalition base in Iraq and is likely to be followed by more tit-for-tat violence. The current moment is particularly fraught. With Russia reducing its presence in eastern Deir-ez-Zor, Iran-backed forces – already well positioned, with heavy presence on the ground and influence in the region – are likely to take advantage of the shift in the balance of power to extend theirs further (see: [Syria Update 11 April 2022](#)). They are thus likely to continue to harass SDF and Coalition forces with drone and indirect fire attacks across the line of contact to limit their freedom of action, provoking a low-intensity retaliatory cycle with no likely resolution in the foreseeable future.

**With Russia reducing its presence in eastern Deir-ez-Zor, Iran-backed forces – already well positioned, with heavy presence on the ground and influence in the region – are likely to take advantage of the shift in the balance of power to extend theirs further.**



### 03 DAMASCUS

## Central Bank of Syria Adjusts Exchange and Interest Rates

On 13 April, the Central Bank of Syria [set](#) the official exchange rate for the Syrian pound (SYP) at 2,814 SYP/USD, an increase from 2,512 SYP/USD. The Central Bank also announced it would [raise](#) the interest rate on deposits to 11 percent, expected to be [implemented](#) in August. The official exchange rate is used when calculating transfers of international organisations and transfers through Western Union. In its [press release](#), the Central Bank said the measures were due to the global economic situation and designed to encourage senders of remittances from foreign countries to do so through regular transfer networks.

### A concession to reality

Taken together, the rate adjustments are aimed at reducing inflationary pressures in the Syrian economy, though their overall impact is likely to be limited. Higher bank deposit rates should reduce overall demand in the economy and put downward pressure on prices, though with most Syrians having barely enough purchasing power to afford essentials such as food, the measure is unlikely to lead to significantly increased deposit rates. The official exchange rate

adjustment may increase remittance inflows through official channels, but the black market exchange rate is the most important for remittance recipients (see: [Syria Update 10 January 2022](#)). This rate remains higher than the state's new rate and, while relatively stable for the past year, has begun to deteriorate following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, monetary policy is no substitute for fiscal policy. Syria's high inflation and economic problems are largely supply-side, the result of sanctions, conflict-related destruction, and a cash-strapped state that is unable to invest in boosting production or import essential goods. High inflation and declining purchasing power will remain a reality for ordinary Syrians.

“Monetary policy is no substitute for fiscal policy. Syria's high inflation and economic problems are largely supply-side, the result of sanctions, conflict-related destruction, and a cash-strapped state that is unable to invest in boosting production or import essential goods.”



## 04 IDLEB GOVERNORATE

## The Salvation Government Issues General Amnesty for Petty Crimes

On 2 April, the Salvation Government (SG) in northwest Syria issued its first decree of 2022, granting a general amnesty for some criminal offences. The decree is set to be in effect until the end of the holy month of Ramadan and entails full and partial pardons for certain prison sentences and fines, excluding crimes enumerated by the Hudud legal conventions, for which punishments under Islamic law are mandatory and, according to tradition, fixed by God. Such crimes include kidnapping, armed robbery, drug promotion and trafficking, currency counterfeiting and promotion, and crimes that affect public security.

### Progress or placating?

Holiday time amnesties have been a long-time facet of Syrian politics but have seldom indicated progress on justice issues. Analysis has shown that the Syrian Government's use of amnesties serves a placating function, given that broader policies of securitisation and repression remain. It is likely that amnesties in Syria's northwest serve a similar function for the SG and its military counterpart, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). It is unlikely the amnesty will be applied universally, and ambiguous language within the decree itself leaves space for HTS to exclude its political opponents from benefiting from the pardon under the pretext of maintaining state security. The news also parallels a recent shift by HTS and its leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani to present HTS, and its SG counterparts, as a civic, service-providing institution in the northwest (see: Syria Update 4 April 2022). While the SG has issued amnesties in the past, progress on issues of arbitrary detention and violence against civilians on the part of HTS remains absent.

*It is unlikely the amnesty will be applied universally, and ambiguous language within the decree itself leaves space for HTS to exclude its political opponents from benefiting from the pardon under the pretext of maintaining state security.*



## 05 MASYAF, HAMA

## Israel Carries Out Airstrikes on Masyaf City in Eastern Hama

On 9 April, Israel carried out airstrikes targeting Government-held positions near the city of Masyaf in Hama Governorate, northwestern Syria, without reported casualties. The Syria Arab News Agency (SANA) said that Syrian air defences intercepted some of the missiles, adding that the strike was carried out from the direction of northern Lebanon. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that the strikes had targeted research centres and warehouses belonging to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Lebanon's Hezbollah. This is the eighth attack by Israel on Government of Syria targets so far this year, the most recent of which targeted military positions near Damascus on 7 March, killing two IRGC officers (see: Syria Update 14 March 2022).

### Is it new?

According to the Israeli newspaper "The Jerusalem Post", Israel has carried out more than 1,000 air strikes on targets in Syria since 2017. Although the raid does not come as a surprise, the location of the attack is notable, as it hosts the Government's Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC). Pro-opposition media raised speculation about their targets, recalling the June 2021 Israeli raid that targeted an auxiliary facility of the SSRC's military laboratory in Masyaf and killed Ayham Ismail, a military engineer assigned to the Masyaf complex. Similar to other Israeli strikes on Syria, the recent air raids emphasise that Tel Aviv is closely watching activities carried out by the Syria Arab Army and Iran-backed militias as part of its campaign to weaken them by selectively targeting their assets without entering a full-fledged war in Syria. Israeli air attacks on Syria are likely to continue and there is little to suggest that they will prompt wider response from the Syrian Government or its allies.



## 06 ACROSS SYRIA

### 45 Suicides Recorded in Government-Controlled Areas in 2022

On 12 April, the Director of the General Authority for Forensic Medicine, Dr. Zaher Hajjo, stated that 45 suicide cases, including 37 men and 8 women, were recorded in 2022 in Syrian Government-controlled areas. The age of those committing suicide varied between 13 and 73, with most of them between 40 and 50 years old. The statement came a week after the director of the Ibn Sina psychiatric hospital stated that there are only 45 qualified psychiatrists in Government of Syria-controlled areas, against a need of around 10,000.

#### Needless deaths of despair

The phenomenon of suicide across Syria is thought to be in part a consequence of the decade-long war, and it speaks to broader issues of despair, dire living conditions, and a lack of mental health and psychosocial support. While little is known about the suicide rate in the northeast, 246 suicide deaths and 1,748 attempts were recorded by Save the Children in the northwest during the last quarter of 2020. Alarming, almost one in five of all recorded suicide attempts and deaths were children. The chief reasons behind these figures are poverty, conflict-related violence, child marriage, and lack of education and employment opportunities. The figures reported by the Syrian Government are but the tip of the iceberg of the widespread psychological distress caused by the conflict and its ongoing consequences. In addition to delivering material aid, humanitarian actors should increase their efforts to support local and INGO programmes that focus on providing mental and psychological support for Syrians, particularly children.



## 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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### The women and children of Syria’s widow camps: Hardest to reach, most at risk

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**What does it say?** The report investigates the impacts of the Syrian war in so-called “widow camps,” home to tens of thousands of widows and other single women — including women who are divorced or whose husbands are missing — and their children, living in the 28 accessible camps across northwest Syria.

**Reading between the lines:** Women and children living in “widow camps” are among the most vulnerable groups in Syria, and it is important to shed light on their humanitarian dilemma. Some media platforms have, however, suggested that the report failed to follow ethical procedures by misquoting some of the interviewees — a reminder of the duty of care that researchers have towards their interlocutors.

**Source:** World Vision  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 11 April 2022

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### Iraq calls for closure of Syria’s Al Hol camp amid killing of young citizen

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**What does it say?** Iraq’s National Security Advisor, Qassem al-Araji, urged the rapid dismantling of al-Hol camp following news that an Iraqi man was shot dead, saying that “hate grows and terrorism thrives” from its continued operation.

**Reading between the lines:** There have been constant calls by NGOs to find a durable solution for al-Hol camp. This is among the few times where an Iraqi official has urged the international community to empty the camp, though given the difficulty of convincing Western and other states to repatriate their citizens, it may go unheard.

**Source:** The National News  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 11 April 2022

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### Syrian Mercenaries in Ukraine

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**What does it say?** This report uses social media, media reports, and online interviews to determine the extent of Syrians fighters’ recruitment for the war in Ukraine. It concludes that no formal recruitment has been observed in opposition-controlled areas, and that salaries offered to recruits range between 1500–2500 USD per month.

**Reading between the lines:** Rumours of Syrian mercenaries fighting in Ukraine, with both sides, have been rampant. While there is no concrete evidence of Syrian deployment to Ukraine yet, predatory recruitment by Russian mercenary companies is ongoing.

**Source:** RMTTeam  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** April 2022

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### They Took Everything: Confiscation of detainees' assets and funds in Syria

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**What does it say?** The report looks at how the Syrian Government uses the confiscation of assets as a source of revenue and a tool to punish detainees, estimating that assets of more than 1.5 billion USD have been seized.

**Reading between the lines:** Little has been said about how the Syrian Government further punishes detainees through confiscating their assets. With arbitrary detention and housing, land, and property violations a key concern of Western governments, this report and its findings are timely.

**Source:** Association of Detainees and the Missing at Sednaya Prison  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 8 April 2022

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### Jordan seizes 1.5 million Captagon pills from Syria

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**What does it say?** Jordanian Customs announced the confiscation of 1.5 million Captagon pills at the Jaber (Nassib) border crossing with Syria.

**Reading between the lines:** Drug smuggling from Syria has been a key stumbling block to rapprochement between Damascus and Amman. With large drug seizures becoming almost routine, and periodic border violence with smugglers, the issue looks set to remain.

**Source:** Enab Baladi  
**Language:** Arabic  
**Date:** 12 April 2022

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### Egyptian lawmaker calls for closer Syria ties

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**What does it say?** Lawmaker Mustafa Bakri called for Egypt to exchange official visits with Syria, following Bashar al-Assad's visit to the UAE.

**Reading between the lines:** While something of a fringe figure, Bakri's sentiments are likely shared by many in Egyptian political circles as efforts towards rapprochement with the Government of Syria continue throughout the region.

**Source:** Al-Monitor  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 8 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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