

# Syria Update

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

## Donors Defy Expectations with \$6.7bn Pledges at Brussels VI Conference

WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW

### US Announces Sanctions Waiver for Northern Syria

The move, which excludes Idleb Governorate and Afrin, aims to promote economic opportunities as part of its anti-Islamic State strategy. Pg 6

### Syrian President Bashar al-Assad Makes Unannounced Visit to Iran

The visit yielded a new credit line as both countries reaffirm commitment to their “strategic relationship.” Pg 6

### OPCW Report Inculpates Damascus for Limited Progress on Investigations

The report presents a marked shift in tone from the OPCW. Pg 7

### Seven Killed in Militia Clashes South of Damascus

Dispute between Iran-backed militias allegedly erupted over revenues from the narcotics trade. Pg 7

### Two Israeli Airstrikes Over Three Days Target Syria

Russia continues to turn a blind eye amid tensions with Israel over its invasion of Ukraine. Pg 8

### Syria Participates in Tourism Exhibition in Dubai

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### The US Treasury Designates Facilitation Network Supporting IS Members in Syria

IS continues to have global networks with an eye to the situation on the ground in Syria, particularly in Al-Hol camp. Pg 9

The roundtable discussion at the Brussels VI conference “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region”. Image courtesy of the European 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:

On 10 May, the European Commission announced that international donors pledged 6.7 billion USD during the Brussels VI conference. The pledges are an unanticipated increase from 2021, which saw a major reduction in funding, allaying fears of donor fatigue for at least another funding cycle. In effect, the pledges cement an early recovery pivot slowly taking root in Syria, yet the future of the cross-border mechanism remains up in the air. Donors seeking to scale up their early recovery support and close the widening gap between needs and funding must also pay heed to the risks of more complex programming modalities.

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

- 01 On 12 May, the United States Department of the Treasury announced the long-expected sanctions waiver for investments in opposition-controlled territories in northern Syria. The authorised licences should be interpreted as part of a broader initiative to turn away from the aid-based economy towards one that is locally driven and encouraged through private, foreign investment.
- 02 On 8 May, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visited Tehran and signed a new credit line, facilitating the export of much-needed fuel to Syria amid its ongoing energy crisis and signalling Tehran's continued support for its ally in Damascus.
- 03 On 13 May, Israeli airstrikes targeted the vicinity of Masyaf in Hama governorate, killing five and injuring seven. Recent tensions over Israel's criticism of Moscow's activities in Ukraine may complicate existing understandings between the two countries, by which Russia turns a blind eye to Israel's attacks on Syria.
- 04 On 8 May, clashes erupted between Iran-backed militias in the Sayyeda Zeinab area south of Damascus, leading to seven deaths. The civilian casualties are a grim reminder of the risks to ordinary Syrians resulting from unchecked foreign militia presence and their competition over involvement in narcotics trafficking.
- 05 A report by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on 3 May blamed the Syrian Government for stymying its chemical weapons investigations. While the OPCW typically abstains from referencing parties to the conflict, the recent report indicates a change in tone, possibly in an effort to regain trust among international backers.
- 06 Between 9 and 12 May, Syrian hotels, businesses, and tourism offices participated in the Arabian Travel Market exhibition in Dubai. The revival of Syria's tourism industry has been a recurring aim of the Syrian Government, though hopes for a return to pre-war tourist levels are unlikely to be achieved any time soon amid ongoing security concerns.
- 07 On 10 May, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, said that he plans to discuss the release of more detainees with Syrian officials when he visits Damascus later this month. The remark hints at possible progress in the "step for step" approach to finding a political solution to Syria's conflict.
- 08 On 9 May, the US sanctioned a network of five Islamic State (IS) members, which was involved in financing the group's activities. The designation serves as a reminder of IS's continued relevance, its ability to operate under the international financial system's radar as well as the need to find a durable solution for the camp in northeast Syria.

01

NORTHERN SYRIA

US Announces Sanctions Waiver for Northern Syria

02

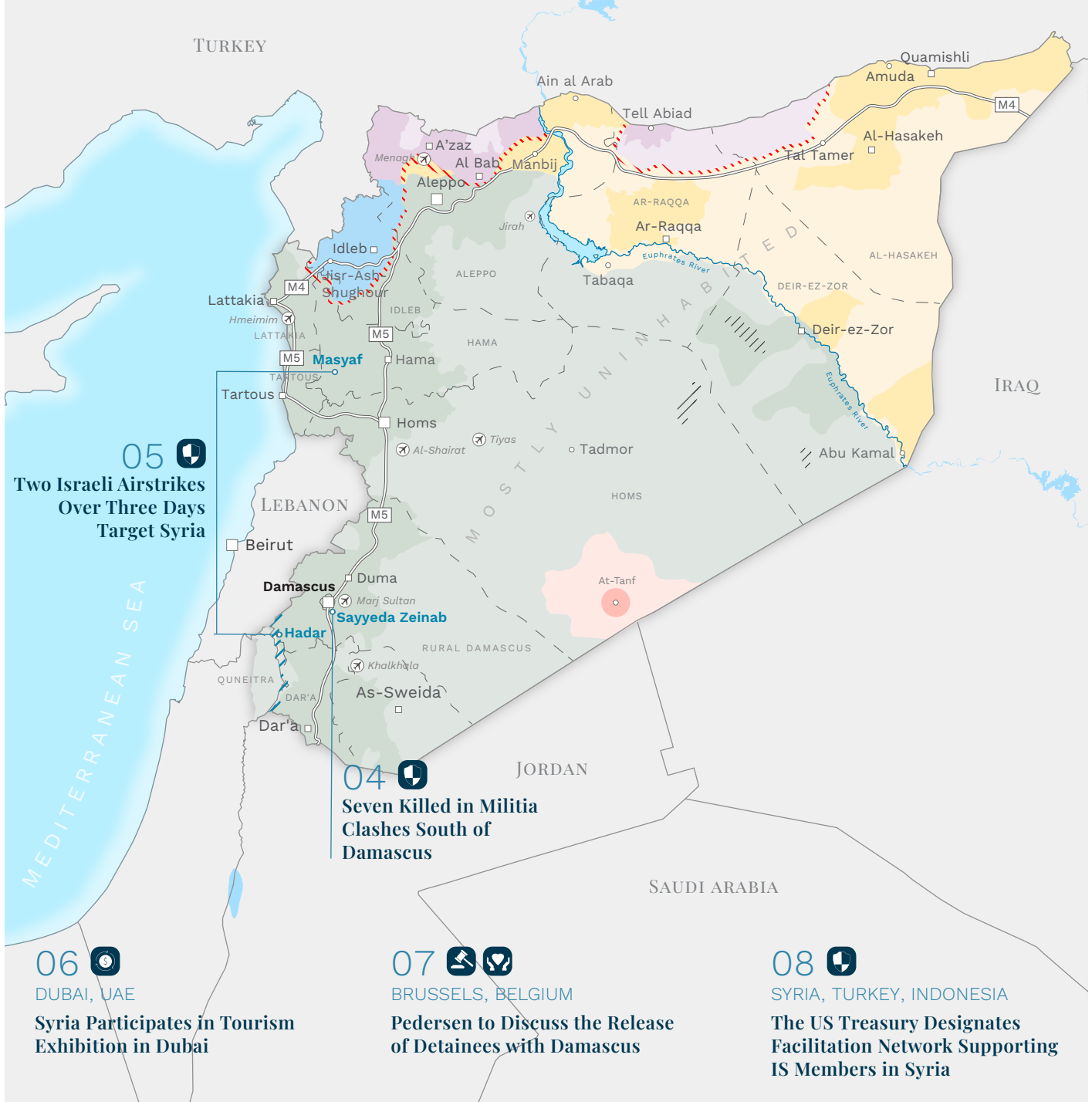
TEHRAN, IRAN

US Report Provides Limited Information on al-Assad Family Wealth

03

NEW YORK, UNITED STATES

OPCW Report Inculpates Damascus for Limited Progress on Investigations



05

LEBANON

Two Israeli Airstrikes Over Three Days Target Syria

04

JORDAN

Seven Killed in Militia Clashes South of Damascus

06

DUBAI, UAE

Syria Participates in Tourism Exhibition in Dubai

07

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Pedersen to Discuss the Release of Detainees with Damascus

08

SYRIA, TURKEY, INDONESIA

The US Treasury Designates Facilitation Network Supporting IS Members in Syria

Population Density

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

LOW POPULATION DENSITY

Territorial Control

- 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 10 May, the European Commission [announced](#) that international donors pledged 6.7 billion USD for relief assistance during the Brussels VI conference, the main organising vehicle for humanitarian funding for Syria. Donors committed 4.3 billion USD for 2022 and an additional 2.4 billion USD for 2023 and beyond. The pledges are a modest increase from 2021 and a major surprise, owing to fear among many analysts and aid actors that the conference would yet again result in a dramatic reduction in support due to donor fatigue, fading hope for a breakthrough in Syria's frozen conflict, and the competing emergency response in Ukraine (see: [Syria Update 6 April 2021](#)). The scale of the pledges allays those fears for at least another funding cycle.

In some respects, the conference marks a subtle pivot in the crisis response in Syria. The pledges cement an early recovery agenda that has long been in-train, despite hesitation and slow uptake by many donor governments. This is reflected in the current UN Humanitarian Response Plan, which designates [more than one quarter](#) of its resources for early recovery or resilience activities, including basic services and the water sector. Echoing the pivot away from emergency humanitarian assistance, the European Commission [emphasised](#) its aim of “boosting the real economy and creating new jobs.” Taken collectively and over time, the embrace of such approaches is a necessity for building community resilience and escaping a downward humanitarian spiral of rising need and decreasing funding. Without such an adaptation, the funding gap, humanitarian needs, and aid dependence are likely to worsen.

In other respects, the conference underscores challenges that have featured in previous years and which have long bedevilled aid implementation. Looming over Brussels VI was [concern over the future](#) of humanitarian access, seen most visibly in the pending renewal of the cross-border mechanism. In effect, the extension of the UN cross-border mandate — the aid lifeline to opposition-held northwest Syria — hinges on Russia, which has demanded an increase in cross-line convoys from Government of Syria-held territories, raising the stakes for [convoys expected](#) in May and June. Renewal is complicated by Russia's exclusion from the Brussels conference. Though Russia has never provided major humanitarian assistance to Syria, it is a key actor on the ground and has previously attended the Brussels

conference, but was disinclined from Brussels VI for lacking what EU High Representative Josep Borrell [has described](#) as “genuine interest” in world peace. Excluding Russia is a signal of unity on the part of Western states opposed to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but it risks antagonising Moscow at a time when its cooperation in the Security Council is needed.

### Refugees and return

Another concern is regional states' growing boldness on refugee issues, amid a climate of domestic political and financial pressures. Lebanese authorities used the conference to highlight the strain of refugee-hosting, while Egyptian officials [demanded](#) more support, according to state-aligned media. What makes such calls notable this year is the context, as regional states have in recent months pressured Western donors not only for monetary support, but also to treat return as a priority issue. In recent weeks, Turkey has reportedly initiated a plan to return up to 1 million Syria refugees, amid heightened scapegoating of Syrians as the country's [economic conditions worsen](#) (see: [Syria Update 9 May 2022](#)). Such pressures are likely to mount in major host countries as global inflation soars.

### In search of solutions

The Brussels conference has seemingly brought clarity on key issues, but long-term solutions remain lacking. For instance, heightened emphasis on resilience programming and sustainable livelihoods is notable, but it does not in itself address growing needs, especially in the near term. For instance, the World Food Programme has cautioned that Syrians are at a “breaking point” concerning worsening bread scarcity, and the agency will be forced to enact negative programming adaptations this summer, unless more funding is secured. The agency [reportedly anticipates](#) the need to cull beneficiary rolls and reduce allocations, owing to heavy reliance on food aid by Syrians. Inadequate cropping and systemic failures in Syrian agriculture will hamper this further (see: [Syria Update 7 March 2022](#)).

Another consideration is the persistent weakness of steps to adapt programming portfolios according to a strategic vision for Syria's future. Heightened investment in resilience, particularly in Syria's northeast and northwest — enabled most recently through new US Treasury-issued general licences — is a positive step for meeting needs and scaling up support. Yet, there is a risk that donor agencies long-accustomed to the

political blank cheque of an emergency humanitarian modality will find it more challenging to anticipate the secondary and tertiary impacts of more complex interventions in these areas, including via early recovery support. Both regions feature distinct war economies, and their status as geopolitical chess boards complicates implementation, both as a matter of compliance and politically. Donor governments seeking to build leverage over Damascus by programming in these regions must understand that more sophisticated safeguarding measures will be necessary to ensure their support does not inadvertently boost other malign actors or empower local authorities of dubious local acceptance.

Continuing support for civil society and Syrian-led response are important signifiers of donor commitment in Syria. Cautious interest in nexus-style programming is also notable. Yet what stands out as the dominant leitmotif of the Brussels VI conference is the need to prevent Syria from becoming a forgotten crisis. Donors used their pledges to underscore their abiding commitment to Syria, despite the headwinds facing humanitarian assistance portfolios globally. For the year ahead, aid actors will be charged with drawing on their experiences and applying the lessons of the conflict in Syria not only to scale up assistance, but to improve it.

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## WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW



## 01 NORTHERN SYRIA

## US Announces Sanctions Waiver for Northern Syria

On 12 May, the United States Department of the Treasury announced the long-expected sanctions waiver for investments in opposition-controlled territories in northern Syria. The waiver authorises a broad swathe of transactions and activities across 12 sectors, with the notable exception of the oil sector – although the purchase of refined petroleum products for use in Syria is permitted. Areas controlled by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Idleb and Aleppo governorates, as well some areas occupied by Turkish and Turkish-backed forces in the northwest such as Afrin, are not included in the authorisation. US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland emphasised that investment is needed in areas previously controlled by the Islamic State (IS) to avoid the group’s resurgence.

### Opportunities and risks

The licences authorised in northern Syria have the scope to be extremely sweeping and should be interpreted as part of a broader initiative to turn away from the aid-based economy towards a genuine locally-driven economy encouraged through private, foreign investment. Nevertheless, as we have mentioned previously (see: [Syria Update 14 March 2022](#)), security will remain an issue for outside investors, as will the Democratic Union Party’s (PYD’s) dominance over business and the presence of monopolies over key commodities in Autonomous Administration territories. In addition, despite the continuation of sanctions targeting Government of Syria entities, this “private turn” brings with it risks of interaction with shell companies and other malign actors. Private investors do not have to adhere to the same social safeguards as donor governments, risking entrenching and empowering problematic actors in the region. Furthermore, the revival of a genuine, locally-driven economy that improves livelihoods and alleviates poverty will take time – humanitarian needs will remain high, necessitating continued relief and aid sector programming.



## 02 TEHRAN, IRAN

## Syrian President Bashar al-Assad Makes Unannounced Visit to Iran

On 8 May, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visited Tehran, meeting with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. During the trip, which was not previously announced and only reported following al-Assad’s return to Syria, the two sides reiterated the need to continue their bilateral cooperation and criticised the recent “compromises” by other Arab states with regards to the Palestine issue and the opening of diplomatic relations with Israel. Of note, the meeting ended with al-Assad signing a “new phase” of the credit line provided by Iran to Syria, which has allowed Damascus to finance imports of essential goods and commodities, not least of all fuel, since 2013. The visit was al-Assad’s second to Iran since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, having previously met with Khamenei in Tehran in 2019.

### Buy now, pay later

The credit line will likely facilitate the export of much-needed fuel to Syria amid its ongoing energy crisis and signals Tehran’s continued support for its ally in Damascus. Al-Assad’s visit comes shortly after his trip to Dubai (see: [Syria Update 21 March 2022](#)), and the new credit line can be read as an attempt by Iran to solidify its relationship with and interests in Syria, as regional rapprochement with al-Assad seems to gather pace (see: [Syria Update 28 March 2022](#)). Given Syria’s profound economic crisis, new deals with regional countries appear crucial to keep the Government of Syria afloat. Iran has been something of an unreliable investor of last resort for Syria over the past decade, as international sanctions related to its nuclear programme mean it often lacks the capital to transfer

Given Syria’s profound economic crisis, new deals with regional countries appear crucial to keep the Government of Syria afloat.

vaunted economic cooperation agreements and investments from paper to reality. Ultimately, the credit lines offered by Tehran will need to be repaid, which may necessitate concessions around resources such as phosphates, should the Government of Syria be unable to pay in cash. Either way, Iran looks set to continue to bolster its presence in Syria, cultivating economic dependence and providing a return on investment for its, and its proxies', decade-long military intervention in support of al-Assad.



### 03 NEW YORK, UNITED STATES

## OPCW Report Inculpates Damascus for Limited Progress on Investigations

On 3 May, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) published a [report](#) suggesting that the Syrian Government is delaying its investigations of Syria's chemical weapons capabilities despite "extensive efforts" by the Secretariat. In the monthly report issued and [discussed](#) later at the UN Security Council, the OPCW cited 20 outstanding measures which Damascus had yet to complete, as well as efforts by the Government to slow progress on investigations, including by denying visas to OPCW staff.

### Carrot or stick?

While the OPCW has long shied away from openly acknowledging the stagnation of its Syria investigations, the recent report presents a marked shift. The stark language may be an effort to build confidence in the OPCW's capacity to push for accountability after years of limited progress and negative press, which have created distrust in the body's work on both sides of the highly contested chemical weapons debate around Syria. Stronger language from the OPCW is not, however, completely new. An April 2021 [OPCW report](#) suspended some of Damascus's privileges as a signatory of the Chemical Weapons Convention after disclosing evidence that the latter was responsible for chemical attacks in Latmana in 2017 (see: [Syria Update 12 April 2021](#)). The incentive of renewed privileges within the Convention did not lead Damascus to share the re-

quested information to date. Further escalation, or pressure from beyond the parameters of the OPCW, would likely be required to substantively move the needle on chemical weapons investigations.



### 04 SAYYEDA ZEINAB, RURAL DAMASCUS

## Seven Killed in Militia Clashes South of Damascus

On 8 May, clashes [erupted](#) between Iran-backed militias in the Sayyeda Zeinab area south of Damascus, leading to seven, [including](#) a 12-year-old girl, being killed in the crossfire along with three injured. Local media sources [suggested](#) the clashes took place between a Pakistani and an Afghan militia, following an alleged dispute over revenues from the narcotics trade, while pro-Government newspapers [claimed](#) that the clashes took place between families in the area over local disputes. Sayyeda Zeinab is an important pilgrimage site for Twelver Shi'a Muslims, who consider its mosque to contain the grave of Zeinab, the daughter of Ali and Fatimah and the granddaughter of the Prophet.

### Security franchising is no solution

The civilian casualties are a grim reminder of the risks to ordinary Syrians resulting from unchecked foreign militia presence and their competition over involvement in narcotics trafficking (see: [The Syrian Economy at War: Captagon, Hashish, and the Syrian Narco-State](#)). Given the location's importance in Twelver Shi'ism, Iran-backed militias have had a strong [presence](#) in Sayyeda Zeinab from the beginning of the conflict, when it came under threat from opposition forces, and are [alleged](#) to have been working towards demographic change in the area by consolidating its Shi'a population, including with the families of militia members. The Government of Syria's presence is limited to its nominal headquarters, with the Iran-backed militias controlling security and administration in the area, and its soldiers reportedly did not intervene in the militia clashes. Amid ongoing security chaos in southern Syria (see: [Syria Update 9 May 2022](#)) and the wide range of actors with diverse interests on the ground, the risk of further clashes and civilian casualties remains.



05 MASYAF, HAMA GOVERNORATE;  
HADAR, QUNEITRA GOVERNORATE

## Two Israeli Airstrikes Over Three Days Target Syria

On 13 May, Israeli airstrikes targeted the Masyaf area in Hama Governorate, reportedly killing five, including one civilian, and injuring seven others. The Scientific Studies and Research Center in the Masyaf area was reportedly struck, which has long been associated with Syria's chemical weapons programme. The attack followed an 11 May airstrike targeting the vicinity of Hader in northern Quneitra Governorate, which caused only material damage. Syria opposition media reported that the strikes targeted military bases of Hezbollah and the Syrian Government. These are the ninth and tenth attacks by Israel on Government of Syria targets so far this year; the previous attack was also launched near Masyaf, which targeted research centres and warehouses belonging to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah, without reported casualties (see: [Syria Update 18 April 2022](#)).

### Routine strikes

Followers of the Syrian conflict have been rarely surprised by hearing about frequent Israeli airstrikes on Syria, particularly on bases belonging to the Syrian Government and Iranian-backed militias such as Hezbollah. According to the Jerusalem Post, Israel has carried out more than 1,000 airstrikes on targets in Syria since 2017. The routine attacks reflect Tel Aviv's long-standing policy of containing Iran's military presence in Syria and send a reminder to the Syrian Government of Israel's ability to monitor and play an active role in shaping the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, for Israel's attacks to continue on Syria, Tel Aviv needs to maintain its delicate relationship with Moscow, which often turns a blind eye to Israeli activities. Recent tensions between the two countries over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, evinced by Israel's Foreign Minister Yair

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Lapid accusing Russia of committing war crimes in Ukraine and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's statement accusing Israel of supporting a "neo-Nazi regime" in Kyiv, may complicate future accords regarding Syria. Although Russian President Vladimir Putin has apologised for his Foreign Minister's statement, tensions between the two countries have not yet dissipated. It is unclear to what extent the war in Ukraine could lead to a change in the Russian posture vis-à-vis Israel in Syria. Nevertheless, in the near future, it is difficult to imagine a significant change in Tel Aviv's military activities against what it deems a fundamental threat to its national security.



06 DUBAI, UAE

## Syria Participates in Tourism Exhibition in Dubai

Between 9 and 12 May, Syrian hotels, businesses, and tourism offices, along with sanctioned airline "Cham Wings," participated in the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) exhibition in Dubai. Syria's Assistant Minister of Tourism, Ghiath al-Farrah, confirmed the participation of the Ministry of Tourism in the exhibition and expressed hope that Syria would return to its pre-war active role in tourism. A number of European tour companies have begun offering package deals to travel to Syria in 2022, presenting ethical concerns and the risk of whitewashing the Government of Syria's reputation.

### Sun, sand, and security threats

The revival of Syria's tourism industry, which before the war accounted for as much as 14 percent of GDP, has been a recurring aim of the Syrian Government. In 2010, Syria registered just under 9.5 million tourists, reaching a low of around 670,000 in 2013 and rising somewhat to around 2.4 million in 2019. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Syria counted around half a million tourists in 2021. In November 2021, Minister of Tourism Mohammad Rami Martini announced a 10-year plan to develop the tourism sector, which has included the renovation of hotels in Damascus, Aleppo, Tartous, and Latakia (see: [Syria Update 28 March 2022](#)). These hotels, largely owned by regime-aligned



businessmen and Ba'ath party members, if not the Syrian state itself, provide an important source of foreign currency and revenue for the Government of Syria. Nevertheless, hopes for a return to pre-war tourist levels are unlikely to be achieved any time soon amid ongoing security concerns. Aid actors should be aware that, in its push to rehabilitate tourist infrastructure and promote the country as a tourist hotspot, land purchases for hotel development may present housing, land, and property rights risks if found to unjustly expropriate property from residents or businesses.



## 07 BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

### Pedersen to Discuss the Release of Detainees with Damascus

On 10 May, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, remarked at the Brussels Conference that he plans to discuss the release of more detainees with Syrian officials when he visits Damascus later this month. Pedersen said that the presidential decree issued on 30 April, granting a general amnesty in relation to terrorism charges, is a potentially important new development and emphasised the need for confidence-building measures that aim to alleviate the suffering of Syrian families whose members are detained. Pedersen urged the UN Security Council not to lose focus on Syria, and stressed that despite the stalemate on the ground, the Syrian conflict still needs attention and resources, with a full political solution as urgent as ever.

#### Still a long road ahead

Pedersen's statement at the Brussels conference, which was not attended by Syria or Russia, sends a possible message to the international community that there has been progress in the "step for step" approach in

*Measures to build confidence are sorely needed if the Syrian political process is to move forward.*

finding a political solution to Syria's conflict, which Pedersen called for in December 2021. The amnesty is arguably the most significant since the start of the conflict (See: [Syria Update 9 May 2022](#)), with media sources reporting that more than 400 people were released in early May by the Syrian Government from various civil and military prisons in several Syrian governorates, including 44 women and eight people who were children when they were arrested. Whether this amnesty aimed to build good will or distract from the [Tadamon massacre video](#), it is still a significant development that should not be overlooked, sending an important signal to all Syrians that progress is possible. Reciprocal measures that the international community could take as part of the "step for step" approach are as yet unclear, though measures to build confidence are sorely needed if the Syrian political process is to move forward.



## 08 SYRIA, TURKEY, INDONESIA

### The US Treasury Designates Facilitation Network Supporting IS Members in Syria

On 9 May, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated a network of five Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) financial facilitators operating across Indonesia, Syria, and Turkey. According to OFAC, these individuals have played an important role in facilitating the travel of IS figures in areas that were under the group's control. Additionally, they were implicated in financial transfers to support IS efforts in northeast Syria camps by collecting funds in Indonesia and Turkey. Some of these funds were used to smuggle children out of the camps and entice them to join the group's ranks.

#### Al-Hol, a long-standing dilemma

The designation serves as a reminder of IS's continued relevance, its ability to operate under the international financial system's radar, as well as the need to find a durable solution for the camps in northeast Syria. Although IS's current modus operandi, which is based on guerrilla warfare, requires limited financial resource-

es, the group's relentless quest to re-establish its caliphate necessitates buying allegiances and recruiting children. Reportedly, IS [pays](#) for women inside al-Hol camp to take care of young orphans. It also funds their smuggling from the camp and recruits them following their release. Factors contributing to the group's influence inside the camp include dire living conditions, perceived mistreatment by camp authorities, and the neglect of the international community, which create all kinds of grievances and feed the residents' sense of victimhood (see: [Mapping and Assessing Release and Reintegration Models from NE Syria Camps](#)). IS has been able to address these unresolved issues by financing its sympathisers in the camps and supporting their violence against local authorities. With the absence of solutions such as emptying the camps of families and repatriating foreign fighters, aid actors should intensify their efforts to improve living conditions and create a safer environment for their 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 Age of Political Jihadism: A Study of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham

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**What does it say?** Given its massive ideological and organisational transformations and ability to move beyond the military sphere into governance and service provision, HTS represents a peculiar case for policy makers and scholars of jihadism. This study captures this complexity by analysing HTS’s evolution since the time of its predecessor Jabhat al-Nusra in 2012.

**Reading between the lines:** The author explores the thorny question of whether HTS should be delisted from international terrorist lists. He argues that some of the State Department’s legal criteria for a terrorism designation still apply to HTS and that the group should therefore remain listed.

**Source:** [The Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#)  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 10 May 2022

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### Syria: Ruling over Aleppo’s Ruins

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**What does it say?** Almost six years after retaking Aleppo, the Syrian Government is again largely in control, but the city is a shadow of its former self, as many neighbourhoods remain in ruins, militias roam the streets, and an informal economy thrives.

**Reading between the lines:** The author argues that Damascus and its allies could aid Aleppo residents and its formerly vibrant entrepreneurial class by reining in militias, restraining security agencies and regime cronies, and ending the persecution of people accused of opposition links.

**Source:** [International Crisis Group](#)  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 9 May 2022

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### The dangers of forgetting Syria’s refugees

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**What does it say?** Aid cuts and distraction of the war in Ukraine mean ever-worsening conditions for Syria’s 6.6 million refugees.

**Reading between the lines:** Given the lack of a durable solution to the Syrian crisis, donor governments should recognise that many of Syria’s refugees are not going home anytime soon and support the governments that are hosting them.

**Source:** [Middle East Eye](#)  
**Language:** English  
**Date:** 4 May 2022

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