

Syria Update

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Not a Drop to Drink: Overlapping Crises Affect Agriculture and Drinking Water Distribution Across Syria

WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW

Update on Turkey's Potential Military Operation in Syria

Iran signals support, while Russia maintains its opposition, at least rhetorically. [Pg 6](#)

A First, HTS Advances into Turkish-Controlled Olive Branch Areas

HTS takes advantage of the fragile state of security in Turkish-controlled areas. [Pg 6](#)

IS Claims Several Attacks in Northern Syria

IS is exploiting geopolitical tension amid Turkey's potential military operation. [Pg 7](#)

Amid Summer Heat and Scorpions, A Wave of Killings Shakes Al-Hol Camp

A woman was found decapitated, but facts — and justice — remain as elusive as security. [Pg 7](#)

Lebanon, Syria, Egypt Sign Gas Import Agreement

The deal, to be financed by the World Bank, requires US approval to avoid invoking Caesar Act sanctions. [Pg 8](#)

New Zoning Plans East of Damascus: More Displacement and No Place for Return?

The Government's plan recategorises agricultural areas and informal settlements for residential use and eventual reconstruction. [Pg 8](#)

Hamas to Damascus, Damascus to Luhansk and Donetsk: Patching Relations Among Pariahs

Hamas announced its intention to rebuild relations with Damascus, and Damascus recognised the recently declared pro-Russian republics in eastern Ukraine. [Pg 9](#)

The water level of the Tabqa dam — which provides electricity and water to northeast Syria — dropped by 36 percent in May, one of the several recent cases of stress on Syria's water supply. Image courtesy of NEXTEP.



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.

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هذه ترجمة عربية لتقريرنا الذي يبحث في الحالات الإقليمية المشابهة لمجتمع الميم السوري من أجل تحديد فرص ودروس يمكن الاستفادة منها لدعم هذا المجتمع.

مجتمع الميم في سوريا: دراسات في برامج الدعم الإقليمية

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The Future of LGBTQ+ Syria and the Aid Response

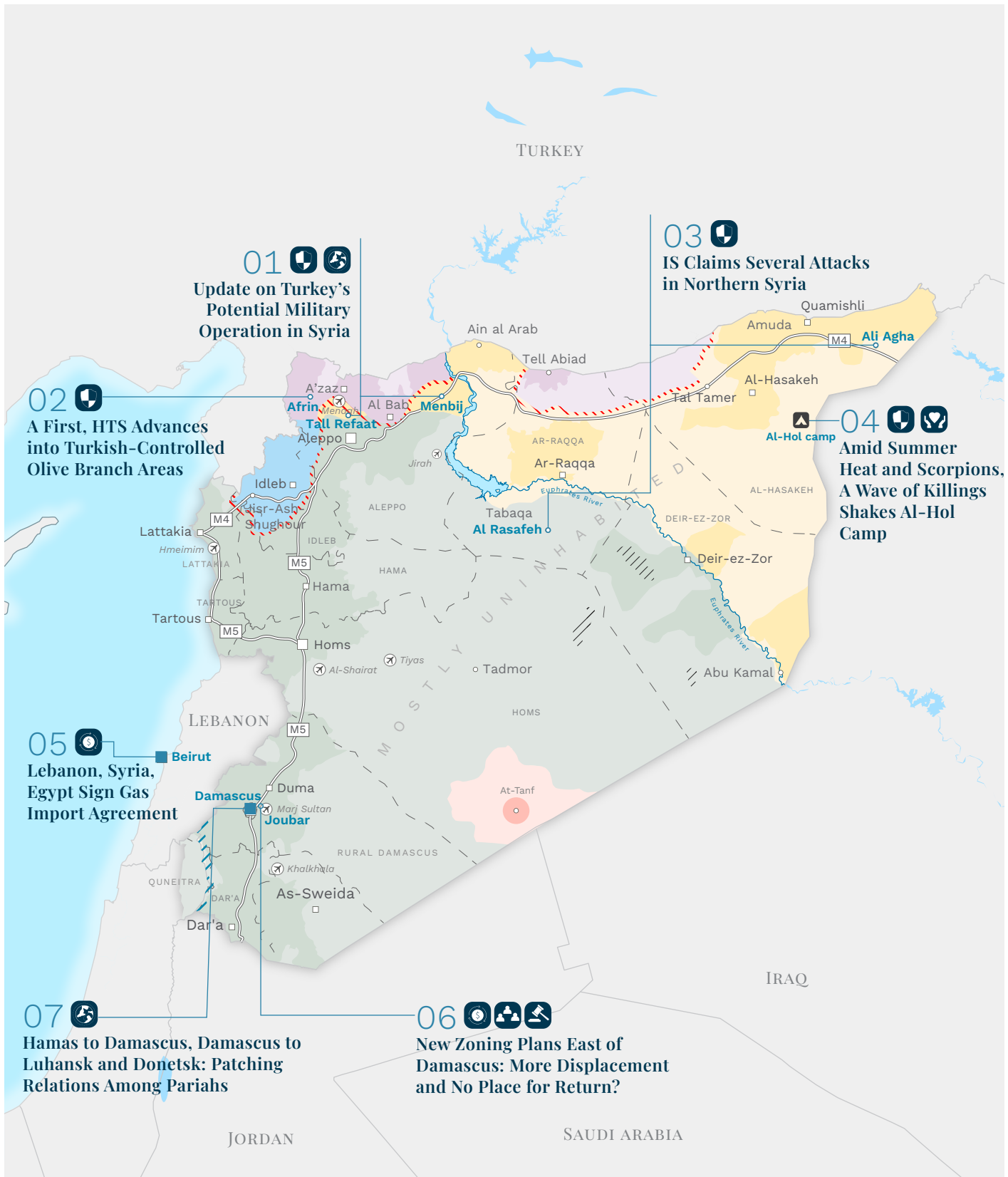
[READ MORE \(ENGLISH\)](#)

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

Several events in recent weeks have highlighted a growing water crisis across the whole of Syria, with access to both drinking water and water for irrigation severely curtailed. Syria is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, resulting from its heavy dependence on rainfed agriculture, long-term water mismanagement, and the decade-long conflict's destruction of critical infrastructure and population displacement. With droughts expected to increase in frequency and intensity, donors and aid actors in the Syria response will face the likelihood of long-term humanitarian needs relating to water and food supplies. They must also navigate the ambiguous boundaries between rehabilitation and reconstruction as they seek to mitigate future climate risk in activities that adapt agriculture and infrastructure to continued water scarcity.

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

- 01 This is the third update on Turkey's potential military operation in northern Syria (see: [Syria Update 20 June 2022](#)). Developments include Iran sending mixed messages and Turkey's decision to allow the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO, which may increase tensions with Russia.
- 02 On 19 June, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) advanced into the Turkish-controlled "Olive Branch" areas in northwestern Syria following two days of heavy clashes between two Turkish-backed Syrian National Army factions. While the group retreated shortly thereafter, the development reflects HTS's desire to expand its influence and challenges Ankara's claim to have brought stability to the area.
- 03 In the last weeks of June, Islamic State (IS) elements conducted a series of operations in northern and eastern Syria targeting both Government of Syria and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) troops. Amid the threat of a renewed Turkish incursion, military movements from the Government of Syria and the SDF to counter it may provide IS with the freedom of action to conduct further operations.
- 04 On 26 June, security forces in al-Hol camp reported discovering the decapitated body of a woman, reportedly at least the sixteenth to be killed in the camp this year. While fingers are quick to point to IS, there is not enough information emerging from the camp to determine who is behind the spate of killings.
- 05 On 21 June, Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria signed an agreement to transmit 650 million cubic metres of natural gas per year from Egypt to Lebanon via Syria – a deal that still awaits US approval. Should the arrangement be approved, it will be a step forward in Syria's regional economic reintegration and will hint at a pragmatic softening of the US approach to Syria, albeit without indicating further changes.
- 06 On 28 June, Damascus Governorate issued a new zoning plan to regulate lands east of Damascus, allowing for the confiscation of informal housing and the reappropriation of farming lands for the construction of residential administrative zones. Such development plans are cementing the displacement of Syrians who lose their properties.
- 07 Over the past week, Hamas announced intentions to rebuild relations with Damascus, and Damascus recognised the pro-Russian republics in eastern Ukraine. The geostrategic implications of this rhetorical solidification of relations among a group of heavily marginalised entities remain unclear, yet it is extremely unlikely that they will provide the Syrian population with badly needed support.



01 Update on Turkey's Potential Military Operation in Syria

03 IS Claims Several Attacks in Northern Syria

02 A First, HTS Advances into Turkish-Controlled Olive Branch Areas

04 Amid Summer Heat and Scorpions, A Wave of Killings Shakes Al-Hol Camp

05 Lebanon, Syria, Egypt Sign Gas Import Agreement

07 Hamas to Damascus, Damascus to Luhansk and Donetsk: Patching Relations Among Pariahs

06 New Zoning Plans East of Damascus: More Displacement and No Place for Return?

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

Several events in recent weeks have highlighted a growing water crisis across the whole of Syria, with access to both drinking water and water for irrigation severely curtailed. From “hydropolitics” and accusations that Turkey is [weaponising the flow](#) of the Euphrates River in the north to conflict-related infrastructure damage and the high cost of fuel disrupting networks in the south and on the coast, Syria is facing multiple pressures on its water systems that threaten the health of its food supply. Access to drinking water has also been severely curtailed — the result of poor maintenance, poor management, and subsidy cuts. Syria is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and with droughts expected to increase in frequency and intensity, donors and aid actors in the Syria response will face the likelihood of long-term humanitarian needs relating to water and food supplies. Donors will need to consider interventions within an early recovery framework, although there are no easy answers as many donors prioritise the rehabilitation of existing systems despite the pressure to carry out more impactful, climate-resilient adaptations that will future-proof agriculture and infrastructure against continued water scarcity.

Thirsty crops and thirsty people

On 18 June, the Civil Council of Raqqa issued [an order](#) limiting maize farmers to sowing 25 percent of their arable land amid limited water supplies. According to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the average flow rate of the Euphrates river was around 273 cubic metres per second, well below the minimum flow level of 500 cubic metres per second [agreed](#) between Syria and Turkey in 1987, and the water level of the Tabqa dam — which provides electricity and water to northeast Syria — dropped by 36 percent in May. While blame is regularly laid at Turkey’s feet (see: [Syria Update 10 May 2021](#)), declining water levels in the Euphrates are a [consequence](#) of long-term climate change. Overexploitation and pollution with industrial effluent from the poorly regulated oil sector (see: [Syria Update 21 February 2022](#)) is also responsible for reduced water capacity in the Euphrates Basin.

In coastal areas, in which summer crops such as peppers and eggplants are grown, farmers have [appealed](#) to the Government of Syria for assistance with irrigation, having not received fuel allocations for a month and a half. The Syrian Government has increased its [purchase prices](#) for cotton and tobacco, two economically important crops, but overall yields are low and the higher purchase prices are unlikely to [compensate](#) for the sharp increase in diesel prices and reductions in allocations needed to fuel irrigation systems and water pumps. With markets in turmoil following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (see: [Crisis in Ukraine: Impacts for Syria](#)), Syria will likely struggle to procure strategic commodities internationally, and will face prices largely unaffordable for the cash-strapped state.

Beyond agriculture, access to safe and affordable drinking water is a growing concern across many governorates of Syria. In Turkish-influenced northern Aleppo, the Syrian Response Coordination Group has [warned](#) of an ongoing water crisis with high prices for water barrels and a dependence on untreated well water. The region has been cut off from the Ain al-Bayda pumping station since 2016, when Government of Syria forces recaptured eastern Aleppo, and has since relied on drilling wells, which has reduced groundwater levels. In As-Sweida in southern Syria, residents have had [limited access](#) to drinking water for three months due to a lack of fuel for operating pumps, with 15 districts reportedly completely cut off from water for drinking and domestic use. There is also a lack of tankers to transport drinking water, with high fuel prices increasing the cost of delivery. In early June, the Syrian Trading Establishment [halved](#) its allocations of water throughout Government of Syria territories, while in late June the General Company for Water Bottling raised bottled water prices twice over 24 hours, citing increased input costs and a rise in electricity prices.

The water-food-energy nexus of need

The scarcity and high cost of water, food, and energy are mutually reinforcing — underpinning Syria’s cost-of-living crisis and undermining its stalled economic recovery. While external factors such as Turkish

“With droughts expected to increase in frequency and intensity, donors and aid actors in the Syria response will face the likelihood of long-term humanitarian needs relating to water and food supplies.”

hydropolitics, global fuel prices, and climate change play a significant role in Syria's current water crisis, heavy dependence on rainfed agriculture, long-term water mismanagement and overexploitation, and the decade-long conflict's destruction of critical infrastructure have left Syria particularly unsuited to meet its current challenges. Last year's severe drought has had a long-term impact on Syria's agriculture, with this year's above-average rainfall having had [little impact](#) on the health of crop lands. As a recent [report](#) from the European University Institute makes clear, the impacts of climate change will exacerbate Syria's water crisis going forward, requiring adaptation to a new, drier reality. This will likely necessitate a shift away from cultivating water-intensive crops such as wheat and cotton — food and cash staples in Syria — as well as enhanced water resource management and irrigation techniques.

Although the Government of Syria has at various points noted the urgent need for rehabilitation of water and electricity networks, it is nonetheless unable to prioritise such investments, and US sanctions provide obstacles against the import of some equipment needed for the recovery of the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector. It is unclear to what extent donors can prioritise climate-forward activities designed to build resilience. Although rehabilitation is now broadly accepted in non-Government areas, climate-sensitive improvements and other adaptations that may be needed for long-term resilience may run afoul of some definitions of reconstruction. Geographic divisions are also in play. While the recent US [sanctions waiver](#) for northeast Syria may provide the space for aid action and private investment in the country's most productive agricultural region (see: [Syria Update 16 May 2022](#)), its benefits are unlikely to extend to those living in Government of Syria areas. Nevertheless, donors and aid actors working in the Syria response can and should prioritise climate-conscious early recovery programming where possible and recognise that without finding the means of bolstering sustainability and resilience in the face of climate change, humanitarian needs in food and water are likely to grow.

WHOLE OF SYRIA REVIEW

01 MENBIJ AND TALL REFAAT,
ALEPPO GOVERNORATE

Update on Turkey's Potential Military Operation in Syria

This is the third update on Turkey's potential military operation in northern Syria (see: [Syria Update 20 June 2022](#)). There have been slight yet important changes in the positioning of major actors as Turkey continues to insist it will carry out the operation.

- **Iran sends mixed messages.** On 27 June, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian [told](#) reporters after talks in Ankara with his Turkish counterpart that Tehran “understand[s] Turkey’s security concerns very well” and that “maybe a special operation might be needed” and “Turkey’s security concerns must be tackled fully and permanently.” Nevertheless, during a 2 July visit to Damascus, Amir-Abdollahian [restated](#) Iran’s opposition to the operation.
- **Russia maintains its opposition, at least rhetorically.** On 20 June, the Russian President’s Special Representative for the Middle East and Africa, Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, [said](#) that Moscow will continue its efforts to prevent Turkey from launching a new attack on Syrian territory. On 22 June, Russia’s Syria envoy Alexander Lavrentyev [restated](#) Moscow’s opposition to the operation and called on other Arab states to reject Turkey’s plans, while acknowledging Turkey’s concerns.
- **Turkey is waiting for the “right time.”** President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [stated](#) that Turkey will start its “planned new military operations as soon as preparations on the Syrian border are completed.”
- **NATO’s expansion may change the calculus.** Turkey’s [decision](#) to allow the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO may increase tensions with Russia and harden its position. Additionally, it may prompt the US to adopt a more accommodating position vis-à-vis Turkey’s military aspirations in Syria.
- **The SDF may merge with the Syrian Government forces.** Ilham Ahmad, co-leader of the Syrian Democratic Council, the SDF’s political wing, [raised](#) the

possibility of the two forces merging as Russian officials pleaded with Damascus and Syrian Kurdish officials to work together. Negotiations face long odds, as Damascus would likely refuse to countenance the SDF’s demands for autonomy within the armed forces.



02 AFRIN, ALEPPO GOVERNORATE

A First, HTS Advances into Turkish-Controlled Olive Branch Areas

On 19 June, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) [advanced](#) into the Turkish-controlled “Olive Branch” areas in northwestern Syria for the first time in the Syrian conflict, briefly seizing multiple villages in Afrin’s southern and southwestern countryside and reportedly reaching within 5 kilometres of Afrin city. HTS [claimed](#) that the move was designed to put an end to the deadly infighting between Ahrar al-Sham-Eastern Sector (ASES) and the Third Legion, two factions operating under the banner of the Syrian National Army (SNA). On the ground, however, the HTS intervention supported ASES against the Third Legion, which had [launched](#) a series of attacks seizing military bases and taking dozens of ASES fighters prisoner in rural Al Bab and Jarablus City in the Turkish-controlled Euphrates Shield areas. Reportedly, Turkey [mediated](#) a deal putting an end to the violence and requiring the warring factions to move back to their previous positions.

Who can provide security?

HTS’s unprecedented military incursion into Turkish-controlled areas challenges Ankara’s claim of having ushered in stability and underscores HTS’s desire to expand its influence beyond its borders. Pervasive infighting between and within SNA factions has complicated Ankara’s efforts to form a united military force to support its potential military operation in northeast Syria and its plan to return 1.5 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey (see: [Syria Update 3 May 2022](#)). The

Turkish army has often quashed such incidents on an ad hoc basis without providing sustainable solutions for the intractable disputes between the SNA factions — a lapse that HTS may read as an opportunity to intervene and prove its capacity to provide stability in Turkish-controlled areas. By penetrating and weakening the SNA factions, HTS maintains its military hegemony in northwest Syria and ensures its superior position in any potential united military force that might emerge. Military factions in the north will likely continue to see infighting, complicating the security landscape and presenting distinct risks for aid programming.



03 NEAR JABAL AL-BISHRI,
AR-RAQQA GOVERNORATE; ALI AGHA,
AL-HASAKEH GOVERNORATE.

IS Claims Several Attacks in Northern Syria

In the closing weeks of June, Islamic State (IS) affiliates conducted a series of operations in northern and eastern Syria, targeting both Government of Syria and SDF troops. On 20 June, [at least](#) eleven Government soldiers and two civilians were killed and several wounded in an attack on a civilian bus in the Jabal al-Bishri area of Ar-Raqqa Governorate. On 26 June, [three members](#) of the SDF's Al-Sanadid forces were killed and four others wounded in an attack by motorcycle-riding gunmen near Ali Agha in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. IS [claimed](#) responsibility for both attacks. Further, on 30 June, media sources [reported](#) that IS cells managed to seize a small arms depot containing ammunition and individual weapons near al-Hol town, Al-Hasakeh Governorate.

Never let a crisis go to waste?

The IS attacks in Syria's north show it continues to pose a far-reaching, though low-level, threat across several zones of control (see: [Syria Update 23 May 2022](#)). Amid the threat of a renewed Turkish incursion, military movements from the Government of Syria and the SDF to counter it may provide IS with the freedom of action to conduct further operations. Indeed, the SDF has previously [warned](#) that diverting attention and resources toward the threat of incursions may disrupt the fight against IS. For the time being, efforts to combat IS continue in various parts of the country. [Russian](#) forces and

their supporting militias continue to comb the Badia, while the SDF, supported by the US-led International Coalition, have [increased](#) their operations to combat IS elements in the northeast. IS's ability to recruit hinges on the deteriorating living conditions in northeast Syria and the Arab population's dissatisfaction with their political representation and access to resources. Addressing the drivers of radicalisation and IS recruitment are as vital in the long term as military efforts to contain the threat (see: [Countering Violent Extremism and Deradicalisation in Northeast Syria](#)).



04 AL-HOL CAMP,
AL-HASAKEH GOVERNORATE.

Amid Summer Heat and Scorpions, A Wave of Killings Shakes Al-Hol Camp

On 26 June, amid a wave of summer heat that has brought a [surge](#) in the population of scorpions and venomous snakes to al-Hol camp in eastern Al-Hasakeh, Asayish security forces reported discovering the body of a decapitated woman, a displaced person from Homs, in the sixth section of the camp. Her killer has not been identified. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), at least six other [women](#) have been murdered in the camp so far in June, and at least fifteen this year, in addition to at least seven male victims. The violence is having an exceedingly [negative impact on children](#) in the camp — some of whom have witnessed their mothers' kidnappings or seen their discarded bodies — and is prompting UN officials to urge al-Hol's [dissolution](#).

Heart of darkness

While fingers are quick to point to IS, there is simply not enough information coming out of the camp to determine who is behind the murders. The same conditions that make al-Hol a breeding ground for violence, including gender-based violence — its size, crowding, and weak security; the presence of criminal and extremist groups; and the vulnerability of its inhabitants — make it a black hole for information. The number of female victims in recent months and the varying circumstances of their deaths may indicate multiple

types of perpetrators with a range of motivations. The opacity surrounding the dynamics within al-Hol makes it extremely difficult for protection actors to identify and counter the culprits of violence. Since the political complexity of returns makes emptying the camp infeasible in the near-term (see: [Mapping and Assessing Release and Reintegration Models from NE Syria Camps](#)), aid sector actors should focus on enhancing information-gathering capabilities in the camp and delivering more effective protection services.



05 BEIRUT, LEBANON

Lebanon, Syria, Egypt Sign Gas Import Agreement

On 21 June, representatives from Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt met in Beirut to sign a long-planned deal to pipe 650 million cubic metres of natural gas per year from Egypt to Lebanon's Deir Ammar power plant through the Arab Gas Pipeline, which passes through Jordan and Syria. [The agreement](#) is part of a wider effort by the US to boost electricity supplies to Lebanon, a key service gap that hobbles the Lebanese state's budget and economy while plunging the country into frequent blackouts (see: [Syria Update 31 January 2022](#)). The Syrian Government will also benefit from the agreement, receiving [in-kind compensation](#) in the form of natural gas supplies. The deal is contingent on US support, with Egypt and Jordan anxious to avoid invoking sanctions owing to Syria's role, and on [financial approval](#) from the World Bank, which previously agreed to fund the project on the condition that Lebanon make modifications to its energy sector. The amount of in-kind gas compensation Syria will receive is still unclear, but it is unlikely to cover the large shortfall in the country's power needs (see: [Syria Update 13 June 2022](#)).

Will sanctions soften?

Washington's final decision to approve or reject the deal, which was first announced in September 2021 (see: [Syria Update 20 September 2021](#)), will serve as a litmus test of its stance toward Syria. Suppressing Iran's influence in the region by reducing the demand for Iranian fuel imports while addressing Lebanon's energy crisis

may be sufficient motivation for the shift in tack. If the arrangement is approved, it will be a step forward in Syria's regional economic reintegration, although it is unlikely to hint at a broader softening of the US approach to Syria. Nonetheless, the main impediment to Syria's regional rapprochement remains US sanctions, and any apparent softening in their application may lead to further appeals for waivers on the grounds of Syria's importance to regional security or other regional priorities.



06 JOUBAR, DAMASCUS GOVERNORATE

New Zoning Plans East of Damascus: More Displacement and No Place for Return?

On 28 June, Damascus Governorate [issued](#) Zoning Plan No. 106 to regulate land in the towns and neighbourhoods surrounding Damascus. The plan aims to "modify the urban character of real estate areas" east of Damascus City by [redrawing](#) the administrative boundary with Rural Damascus Governorate. This will essentially transform real estate in these towns from agricultural lands and informal settlements into residential administrative zones, paving the way for large-scale construction projects. Previously at the front lines between opposition and Government of Syria forces, these formerly opposition-controlled areas witnessed heavy destruction and are now largely void of inhabitants due to forced displacement. The Director of Organisation and Urban Planning in Damascus Governorate, Hassan Traboulsi, [stated](#) that the Government will not supply alternative housing for the residents of the affected areas but will provide shares in the new developments instead, pointing out that the area contains informal settlements that [Law No. 23](#) allows the Government to confiscate for zoning purposes.

Reconstruction by confiscation

The Government's development plans are cementing the displacement of Syrians who lose their properties in the zoning process while the economic and political elite profit. [Property laws](#) introduced since 2011 have

caused many to lose their ownership rights while receiving little if any compensation. The real estate and redevelopment projects that follow these laws largely benefit business actors within Assad’s inner circle (see: [Syria Update 27 September 2021](#)). Around 40,000 currently reside in the areas under the zoning plan. The value of the shares offered by the Government under the new law remains uncertain, and it is unclear whether it will provide locals with the ability to secure other housing options, likely causing further waves of displacement, a process witnessed across other reconciled former opposition enclaves (see: [Political Demographics: The Markings of the Government of Syria Reconciliation Measures in Eastern Ghouta](#)). Amid calls for refugee returns (see: [Syria Update June 20 2022](#)), the recurring housing, land, and property rights violations by the Government of Syria raise the question of what exactly awaits returnees.



07 DAMASCUS

Hamas to Damascus, Damascus to Luhansk and Donetsk: Patching Relations Among Pariahs

On 28 June, the head of the Hamas Arab and Islamic Relations Portfolio announced that the movement would “restore its relationship with Damascus.” This decision comes after 10 years of severed ties due to Hamas’s support for the uprising in 2011. The announcement came alongside others, including the group’s pledge of allegiance to the so-called Axis of Resistance, which is led by Iran and includes the Government of Syria and Lebanon’s Hezbollah. Separately, on 27 June, Syria’s state news agency, SANA, reported that Damascus had recognised the “independence and sovereignty of the Luhansk People’s Republic and the Donetsk People’s Republic,” the regions of Ukraine largely occupied by Russia and pro-Russian separatists. Ukraine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted by “breaking off diplomatic relations with Syria,” and “imposing a trade embargo on Syria” and sanctions on “Syrian legal entities and individuals.”

Normalisation among the outcasts

The Government of Syria has been desperately seeking reintegration into the Arab League’s fold and the international economy. This exchange of recognition is unlikely to advance this mission; rather, it sends a clear message that Damascus will not sacrifice its commitment to its allies to seek badly needed economic support. Iran-backed Hamas, the Government of Syria, and the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk Republics all have a long way to go in order to be reintegrated, normalised, or — in the case of the breakaway Ukrainian territories — recognised by the global community. Damascus’s existing allies have little capacity to provide consequential economic support and help it to reintegrate into the international community. The geostrategic implications of this formal solidification of relations among a group of marginalised entities remain unclear, yet it is extremely unlikely that they will provide the Syrian population with the support it needs.

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.

Deadly Disinformation: How online conspiracies about Syria cause real-world harm

What does it say? The report qualifies and quantifies in great depth the nature and scale of a massive, years-long, Russian-backed disinformation campaign seeking to attack the White Helmets (Syria Civil Defence), spreading false information about chemical weapons attacks, and causing other harms in the Syria context.

Reading between the lines: The research confirms what many in the aid sector have known for years: that the White Helmets in particular and Syria more broadly have been the target of massive Russian-backed disinformation efforts which have complicated policymaking and heightened risks for any actor seeking to accurately document war crimes and other violations.

Source: Institute for Strategic Dialogue and The Syria Campaign
Language: English
Date: June 2022

Assad Remakes Syrian Faith to Suit the Regime’s Needs

What does it say? In contrast to its pre-2011 approach of suppressing sectarian religious identity, the Assad regime has, since the start of the war (and increasingly in recent years) sought to use various strategies to co-opt religion, positioning itself as a champion of ‘moderate’ Sunni Islam and intruding in the religious sphere with self-serving, state-sponsored ideological interpretations thereof.

Reading between the lines: While the challenges posed by religious ideology to programming in northwest Syria are familiar to aid actors, the complexities of dealing with this fraught subject will require enhanced understanding from those in the sector as they seek to engage in Government-controlled areas so as to ensure a conflict-sensitive approach.

Source: New Lines Magazine
Language: English
Date: 27 June 2022

Out of the Frying Pan and into the Fire: the Impacts of the Contemporary Drought in Syria and its Implications for the Conflict

What does it say? Despite increased rainfall this year, the compounding effects of years of agricultural misgovernance mean that drought has crippled Syrian food production capacity. This has contributed to the economic crisis and may drive agricultural communities, especially those in the northeast, into the hands of extremists.

Reading between the lines: This longform research paper is worth reading in full for those engaged with food security and livelihoods; the weakening of domestic production capacity combined with the global food shortages caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will continue to exacerbate humanitarian need in Syria across the board.

Source: Operations and Policy Center
Language: English
Date: 28 June 2022

Around 800 Syrians return from Turkey weekly, U.N. refugee agency official says

What does it say? According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 800 Syrians — mostly individuals rather than families — are returning to northwest Syria each week from Turkey; however, the area is by no means equipped for large-scale voluntary return.

Reading between the lines: With pressure mounting domestically in Turkey to “voluntarily” return Syrian refugees to their country of origin, such flows are likely to increase, and aid sector actors across the northwest in particular must be prepared.

Source: Reuters
Language: English
Date: 21 June 2022

"The Assad Regime Would Not Survive Loss of Captagon Revenues"

What does it say? Recent arrests in Germany have helped illustrate the international reach and complexity of the Assad Regime’s Captagon production-and-smuggling operations (and those in Syria more broadly); this illicit industry is, at this point, the primary source of revenue for the regime.

Reading between the lines: The article argues that the Assad regime has become a massive transnational criminal enterprise wholly dependent on the drug trade which essentially runs the Syrian state as a front business; any engagement with any arm of the state or the regime behind it requires careful risk management.

Source: Der Spiegel
Language: English
Date: 21 June 2022

Conflicting reports: 'Al-Yamani' or 'Al-Dari' killed in Coalition Strike on Hurras al-Din?

What does it say? On 27 June 2022, Coalition forces assassinated an individual travelling by motorcycle in Idlib. While the Coalition claimed the individual was Hurras al-Din leader Abu Hamza al-Yamani, other reports indicate the individual was Abu Hazaa al-Diri.

Reading between the lines: Regardless of the identity of the individual slain, both Hurras al-Din and the Coalition’s campaign to thin its ranks are marginal to events in Idlib and Syria more broadly, having little impact on aid sector actors.

Source: Enab Baladi
Language: Arabic
Date: 29 June 2022

Higher Education Council in Idlib Joins an International Quality Assurance Network

What does it say? The Salvation Government’s Higher Education Council in Idlib has acceded to the Asia Pacific Quality Network, a higher education quality assurance group, just days after the Idlib University Faculty of Pharmacy acceded to the European Association of Faculties of Pharmacy.

Reading between the lines: While the recent accessions will have only marginal impact for aid sector actors, they likely represent both a genuine attempt by the Salvation Government to improve standards in education as well as an attempt to enhance its legitimacy.

Source: Enab Baladi
Language: Arabic
Date: 21 June 2022

U.S. Secretly Reviews Israel’s Plans for Strikes Against Iranian Targets in Syria

What does it say? According to current and former US officials, Israel clears many of its counter-Iranian airstrikes in Syria with the US to avoid negatively impacting the US counter-IS mission directly or indirectly.

Reading between the lines: While there is tacit US support for the Israeli air campaign, the coordination likely doesn’t go so far as to include US support with targeting; regardless, the impact to aid sector actors is likely minimal, as Israeli air strikes are likely to remain a component of the Syria crisis for the foreseeable future.

Source: Wall Street Journal
Language: English
Date: 16 June 2022

Bahrain steps towards Syria normalisation with new envoy to Damascus

What does it say? Waheed Mubarak Sayyar has been sworn in as Bahrain’s new envoy to Syria amid increasing normalisation with Arab states, years after Bahrain’s 2018 announcement that it would reopen its embassy in Damascus — and after a decade of war in which hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed, the vast majority by the Government of Syria and its allies.

Reading between the lines: Regional normalisation is unquestionably gathering momentum; however, the impact for primarily Western-funded aid sector actors at this point is unclear.

Source: The New Arab
Language: English
Date: 27 June 2022

Putin's Troubleshooter For Syria Larentiev: Russia Will Not Block Turkish Special Operation In Syria, Up To Arabs To Dissuade Turkey

What does it say? In a wide-ranging interview, Russian President Vladimir Putin's Special Representative for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev expressed nonchalance toward a possible Turkish offensive, criticised both Turkish failure to control "extremists" in northwest Syria and US counterterrorism efforts in the northeast, dissembled about Russian policy toward repeated Israeli airstrikes, claimed the war in Ukraine has not affected the Russian military footprint in Syria, and stated that Russia will make no overture regarding solutions to the issue of the UN cross-border mechanism which expires on 10 July.

Reading between the lines: The subtext of the interview is one of general Russian weakness and inability to seriously affect facts on the ground in Syria; its primary strategic leverage vis-à-vis Syria comes from its Security Council position which, unfortunately for aid sector actors, may imperil the cross-border mechanism when the possibility of extension of UN Resolution 2585 comes to a vote on 7 July.

Source: MEMRI
Language: English
Date: 22 June 2022

The Salvation Government begins issuing personal IDs on a trial basis in Idleb

What does it say? The Salvation Government (SG) has recently begun the process of issuing new identity cards to civilians in its area of control in northwestern Syria.

Reading between the lines: Little has been revealed about the process of issuing and using these ID cards. While this may fall under the umbrella of the SG's attempts to provide better governance in Idleb, it may also constitute an attempt by HTS to gain access to residents' personal information. Residents of Idleb will now need to carry three ID cards (from the SG, Syrian Interim Government, and Syrian Government) to move throughout the Governorate.

Source: Syrianpc
Language: Arabic
Date: 25 June 2022

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