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Syria: The situation in Northeast Syria after the agreement between the Syrian Government and the DAANES

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1 About the author

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2 Introduction

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With the takeover of most Arab-populated regions of northern and eastern Syria by Arab forces allied with the transitional government in Damascus and the official Syrian Arab Army in January 2026, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) lost a large portion of the territories it had previously administered and that had been under the military control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). However, this does not in all cases mean that authority in these areas automatically passed to the transitional government under Ahmed al-Sharaa. Rather, many local tribal actors play a decisive role, and their loyalty to Damascus is also limited.[1]

The Arab tribes of the Euphrates Valley have always been considered difficult to control and have been culturally and linguistically more closely connected to northern Iraq than to Syria's political and economic core. Many of the Arab tribes in this region, such as the al-Baqqārah, the Shammar, or the Uqaydat and al-Jubouri, are present in both northern Iraq and Syria and continue to maintain close transnational tribal networks. Among the Arabs of the region translational political networks existed.[2]

As a result Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi branch of the Baath Party often enjoyedgreater sympathy than the Syrian branch of the Baath Party, which helps explain, for example, the raising of images of Saddam Hussein in Raqqa after the collapse of DAANES/SDF rule in January.[3]

The collapse of DAANES/SDF rule can largely be explained by a local uprising of these Arab tribes, which have historically been very flexible in their political loyalties, often shifting from loyalty to the regime to support for the Free Syrian Army, to support for the Islamic State, to the

1 ICG - International Crisis Group (20/1/2026): Preventing Further Escalation in Syrias North East, https://www.crisisgroup.org/stm/middle-east-north-africa/syria/preventing-further-escalation-syrias-north-east, accessed 22/1/2026

2 Batatu/PUP - Batatu, Hanna (Author), Princeton University Press (Publisher) (1999): Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics, https://dokumen.pub/qdownload/syrias-peasantry-the-descendants-of-its-lesser-rural-notables-and-their-politics-core-textbooknbsped-9781400845842.html, accessed 18/6/2026

3 A picture of a poster that combined the new Syrian flag with a picture of Saddam Hussein on Wadi Street in Raqqa appeared on several Kurdish Social Media sites, including the Facebook site of Hawzhin Azeez, Former Co-Director of The Kurdish Center for Studies: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=26203315112638037&set=a.156333117762926&id=100001587175044, accessed 10/6/2026

SDF, and now once again aligning themselves with the transitional government in Damascus dominated by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. The tribes themselves do possess agency and pursue their own tribal politics, but they are by no means unified actors.[4] Further segmentation of tribes into smaller units - some of which rival one another - has always been characteristic of the tribal structure in this region. Shifts from one loyalty to another are therefore often accompanied by internal power struggles within the tribes, in which a different tribal segment prevails, while those who had previously cooperated with another actor become increasingly marginalized within the tribe. Since the YPG and the leading forces of the DAANES were often supported primarily by marginalized groups within the tribes, these groups are now being doubly marginalized.[5]

The Kurdish regions of Syria are by no means clearly demarcated from the Arab regions, and there are also significant Kurdish minorities in major cities such as Damascus and Aleppo.[6] However, the core Kurdish areas of northern and eastern Syria, including the cities of Qamishli and Hasakah, as well as Kobanê further to the west (except a few villages on the southern edge of the region), remain under the control of the DAANES. However, in accordance with the ceasefire agreement of January 30, 2026, between SDF Commander-in-Chief Mazlum Abdi and Syrian transitional president Ahmed al-Sharaa, they are currently undergoing a process of integration into the Syrian state. As of early May, this integration process has only been partially implemented, and in practice the institutions of the DAANES continue to exist.[7]

Due to the defection of most Arab units, the SDF have largely been dissolved or reduced to their original core, namely the Kurdish People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG) and the Women's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, YPJ)[8].

However, it is not only Kurdish areas that remain under the control of the remaining structures of the DAANES and the SDF, but also a number of Arab villages south of Qamishli, primarily inhabited by the Tayy tribe, as well as Arab villages populated by people from the Euphrates Valley who were resettled in the 1960s in the province of Hasakah as part of the policy of establishing an 'Arab Belt' along the borders with Turkey and Iraq.[9]

In addition, the core settlement area of the Khabur Assyrians remains under the control of the DAANES/SDF—namely those Assyrian villages between Hasakah and Tell Tamr that were established in the 1930s by Christian Assyrians speaking Neo-Aramaic.[10] Other Armenian- and

4 Field Research by the author in 2020 and 2026

5 Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15/5/2026 (Interview 2); Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Hasaka, 17/5/2026 (Interview 3); Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Kobanê, 18/5/2026 (Interview 4); Telephone interview conducted by the author with an Arab Intellectual from Raqqa, 16/5/ 2026 (Interview 5); Telephone interview conducted by the author with an Arab Intellectual from Hasaka, 17/5/2026 (Interview 6)

6 McHugo - McHugo, John (2014): Syria. From the Great War to civil war; London: Saqi; p.44, https://archive.org/details/syriafromgreatwa0000mchu_p2n6/page/296/mode/2up, accessed 18/6/2026 [fee required]

7 Field research by the author in March 2026; Telephone Interview conducted by the author with Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15/5/2026 (Interview 2); Telephone Interview conducted by the author with a high ranking official of DAANES, 18/5/2026, (Interview 7)

8 Interview conducted by the author with a YPG commander, 19/5/2026, (Interview 1)

9 Schmidinger - Schmidinger, Thomas (2018): Rojava. Revolution, War, and the Future of Syria's Kurds; London: Puto Press; p.64, https://www.plutobooks.com/product/rojava/, accessed 18/6/2026 [fee required]

10 Schmidinger - Schmidinger, Thomas (Author, Publisher) (2020): Christians in North Syria: Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, and Kurdish converts, In: The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria : Between A Rock and A Hard Place; London: London Transnational Press; pp.35-54, https://dokumen.pub/qdownload/the-autonom

Aramaic-speaking Christian communitiesare located in Qamishli, Dêrik (arab.: al-Mālikīyah), and Tirbespî (arab.: al-Qaḥṭānīyah).[11]

The territory that has remained under the administration of the DAANES continues to be characterized not only by a high degree of ethnic diversity (Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Armenians, Suryoyo speakers, Domi), but also by significant religious diversity (Sunni Muslims, various Christian churches, Yazidis). In addition, there are displaced persons from other parts of Syria who have sought refuge in this region over the course of the armed conflict, including members of all of Syria's religious communities.[12] However, the situation of these displaced persons is now becoming more precarious as the region becomes increasingly integrated into the Syrian state. Yazidis are not recognized by the Syrian state.[13] Their situation is likely to become even more difficult in the future, even in the remaining DAANES-controlled areas, as a result of this integration into the Syrian state.

3 Methodology

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Since the topics discussed here are very recent, there are as yet no scholarly works on the situation in northern and eastern Syria following the armed conflict of January 2026. This Research Paper is therefore based primarily on the author's own field research and on interviews conducted by telephone or online with individuals whom the author has known for many years.

Since the author has been visiting the region regularly since 1999 - and particularly since January 2013 - for his research and to accompany Austrian politicians, he has excellent contacts with the autonomous administration, as well as with Kurdish and Assyrian opposition parties and several Arab intellectuals in the region. These contacts were available for this paper but, given the uncertainty about the future, wished to remain largely anonymous in order to speak freely. A trip at the end of March 2026 served, among other things, to verify local control of the territory and to assess the political atmosphere in the remaining region of the DAANES through participant observation at various Newroz celebrations (both private and official).

Observations derived from travel and participant observation are cited in the footnotes as 'Field Research' together with the corresponding year.

4 Control and Power Relations in the Kurdish regions

ous-administration-of-north-and-east-syria-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-9781912997510.html, accessed 18/6/2026

11 Field research conducted by the author in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2026

12 Field research conducted by the author in 2023, 2024, 2026

13 Schmidinger - Schmidinger, Thomas (2019): The Battle for the Mountain of the Kurds. Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in the Afrin Region of Rojava; Oakland CA: PM Press; p.14, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/thomas-schmidinger-the-battle-for-the-mountain-of-the-kurds.pdf, accessed 18/6/2026

With the ceasefire agreement of January 30, control over the territories held by the SDF was effectively frozen. The political structures of the DAANES, as well as the YPG and YPJ, remained in place in those areas that are predominantly Kurdish-populated, but also in some mixed districts, as well as in villages of the Arab Tayy tribe south of Qamishli and in villages of Arabs who were resettled in Kurdish border regions in the 1960s.[14]

Areas that remained under the control of the YPG/YPJ and the Kurdish Asayîş (the DAANES police) include the Semalka border crossing, Dêrik (Arabic: al-Mālikīyah) and its surrounding villages, Girkê Legê (Arabic: al-Muabbada), Çilaxa (Arabic: al-Jawādīyah), Tirbespî (Arabic: al-Qaḥṭānīyah), Qamişlo (Arabic: al-Qāmišlī), Amûdê (Arabic: ʿĀmūdā), and Dirbêsiyê (Arabic: al-Dirbāsīyah).[15]

West of Dirbêsiyê, the ceasefire line has run approximately 35 km to the west of the town since the Turkish occupation of Serê Kaniyê (Arabic: Raʾs al-ʿAyn) in October 2019. The last Kurdish-controlled village is Mişêrfê. Shortly before Mişêrfê, a road branches off southward from the 712 road, which runs parallel to the border. This road, which leads via the village of Ebû Rasên - inhabited by Kurds, Arabs, and Assyrians alike - and Aarab Khâne (Arabic: ʿArab Khān) to Tell Tamr (Kurdish: Girê Xurma), is the westernmost connection that has been held by the SDF, or YPG/YPJ, from 2019 to the present.[16]

The originally Assyrian, now predominantly Kurdish small town of Tell Tamr also continues to be held by the YPG/YPJ. From Tell Tamr, the territory still administered by the DAANES and controlled by the YPG/YPJ extends further west along the Khabur River and includes the villages of Tal Jemaah, Umm al-Keyf, and Tal Tawil, which were inhabited exclusively by Assyrians until 2015.[17] From there, it stretches southward across a very sparsely populated, steppe-like area to the strategically important Mount Abdulaziz (Arabic: Jabal ʿAbdulʿazīz, Kurdish: Çiyayê Qazwan).[18]

The area around this mountain is only very sparsely populated by members of Arab tribes, many of whom remained nomadic well into the second half of the 20th century.[19] The last larger settlements consist of the Assyrian villages further east along the Khabur River, which were largely abandoned after being taken by the Islamic State in 2015.[20] Today, only a few Assyrians

14 Field Research conducted by the author in March 2026
15 Field Research conducted by the author in March 2026
16 Field Research conducted by the author in 2022 and March 2026
17 Schmidinger - Schmidinger, Thomas (Author, Publisher) (2020): Christians in North Syria: Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, and Kurdish converts, In: The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria : Between A Rock and A Hard Place; London: London Transnational Press; pp.35-54, https://dokumen.pub/qdownload/the-autonomous-administration-of-north-and-east-syria-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-9781912997510.html, accessed 18/6/2026
18 K24 - Kurdistan 24 (31/1/2026): Syrian Army Begins Withdrawal from Hasakah Outskirts Under New Security Pact with Kurdish Forces, https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/890978, accessed 18/6/2026
19 Field Research conducted by the author in 2023
20 Schmidinger - Schmidinger, Thomas (Author, Publisher) (2020): Christians in North Syria: Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, and Kurdish converts, In: The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria : Between A Rock and A Hard Place; London: London Transnational Press; pp.35-54, https://dokumen.pub/qdownload/the-autonomous-administration-of-north-and-east-syria-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-9781912997510.html, accessed 18/6/2026

still live in these villages. Instead, Kurdish and Arab displaced persons from Afrin, Aleppo, and Serê Kaniyê have been resettled there.[21]

This Khabur Valley, which was inhabited by Assyrians from the 1930s until 2015, remains entirely under the control of the DAANES and the YPG and YPJ. The Assyrian units of the SDF that were present here after 2015 are now almost entirely absent and, at most, maintain a symbolic presence.[22]

The provincial capital of Hasakah, including its predominantly Arab-populated southern and eastern suburbs, remains under the control of the YPG/YPJ. Control by Arab units affiliated with the Syrian Arab Army of the transitional government in Damascus resumes to the east of the Arab-populated village of Tell Brak. Tell Brak itself remains under the control of the DAANES; however, immediately beyond the village, the Wadi Jarrah and its tributary flowing into the Khabur River have, since January, fallen into the hands of Arab forces allied with the transitional government in Damascus.[23]

The town of Tell Hamis and the further eastern locality of al-Hol—previously known for its large camp housing affiliates of the Islamic State—are, in turn, under the control of Arab units affiliated with the Syrian Arab Army. However, in the far eastern part of the territory that has slipped from the control of the DAANES, the situation becomes more complex. The population here consists predominantly of members of the Arab tribe of the Shammar,[24] who migrated northward from the northern regions of present-day Saudi Arabia from the seventeenth century onward, and whose tribal center shifted further north following the destruction of the Emirate of Jabal Shammar, with its capital in Ḥāʾil (today Saudi-Arabia), in 1921.[25]

From the seventeenth century onward, the Shammar also brought their slaves with them; their descendants still form an Afro-Syrian community that is easily identifiable even by appearance (especially in al-Yaʿrubīyah), a community that has faced social discrimination well into the 21st century and is de facto restricted to marrying only within its own ranks.[26]

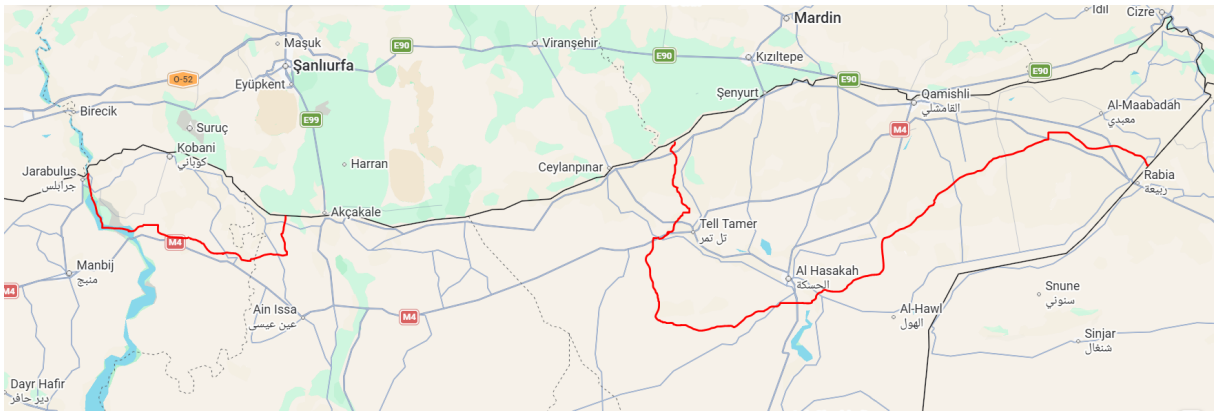
Today, the head of the Syrian branch of the transnational Shammar tribal confederation, Sheikh Manaa Hamid Daham al-Jarba, resides in his palace in the village of al-Ala near Tal Kocher. The tribal Sanadid Forces, which he established in 2013,[27] formed an integral component of the SDF. Although the Shammar also shifted sides in January and declared their loyalty to the transitional government in Damascus, Sheikh Manaa Hamid Daham al-Jarba has, since March, increasingly sought to emphasize the independence of his tribe.[28]

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21 Field Research conducted by the author in March 2026
22 Comparison between Field Research conducted by the author in 2021, 2022 and 2026
23 Field Research conducted by the author in March 2026
24 Field Research conducted by the author in January 2019
25 al-Rasheed - al-Rasheed, Madawi (2002): A History of Saudi-Arabia; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; p.26, https://assets.cambridge.org/97805216/43351/frontmatter/9780521643351_frontmatter.pdf, accessed 18/6/2026 [fee required]
26 Interview conducted by the author with an intellectual from al-Yaʿrubīyah, 1/6/2026, (Interview 11)
27 Manaa Hamid Daham al-Jarba initially established the Sanadid under the supervision of his father, Sheikh Humaydi Daham al-Hadi, who passed away in 2022. Afterwards Manaa Hamid Daham al-Jarba became the Sheikh himself
28 Online Interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish journalist, 1/6/2026, (Interview 12); Online Interview conducted by the author with a Shammar intellectual, 2/6/2026, (Interview 15)

Traditionally inclined to cooperate with Kurdish actors, the Shammar are currently attempting to position themselves primarily as mediators between the Kurds and the Syrian Arab Army, while seeking to retain as much autonomous control as possible over the core areas of their tribal territory. This territory also includes the strategically important al-Yaʿrubīyah/Rabīʿa border crossing with Iraq.[29]

In the west around Kobanê (Arabic: ʿAyn al-ʿArab), essentially all predominantly Kurdish-speaking areas remain under the control of the DAANES and the YPG/YPJ. This mainly includes the subdistrict of Kobanê (in Aleppo Governorate) and several villages on the western edge of the Tal Abyad subdistrict, which belongs to Raqqa Governorate.[30]



Sources 1: Map created by the author based on field research conducted in March 2026, several interviews conducted in 2026, and other maps

Demarcation line between DAANES (YPG/YPJ) and transitional government (Syrian Arab Army, affiliated Arab militias) February-June 2026

Even though this area as a whole continues to remain under the control of the YPG/YPJ and the Kurdish police forces (Asayîş) exercise police authority, in the weeks following the agreement security forces affiliated with the transitional government in Damascus also gradually moved in. Initially, these forces arrived in Hasaka on 2nd of February[31] and in Qamishli on 3rd of February,[32] since in Kobanê - due to the traumatic experiences with the so-called Islamic State - there was resistance against the involvement of security forces affiliated with the transitional government dominated by Islamist forces.

The number of security forces dispatched by the transitional government in Damascus remained relatively small. Around 100 members of the security forces arrived in Qamishli in 15 to 16 vehicles and settled in two facilities in the city that had already been agreed upon beforehand.[33]

29 Field Research conducted by the author, January 2019
30 Interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Kobanê, 18/5/2026, (Interview 4)
31 Rudaw - Rudaw Media Network (2/2/2026): Damascus security forces enter Rojava under SDF agreement, https://www.rudaw.net/english/categories/syria/931190, accessed 18/6/2026
32 NPA - North Press Agency (4/2/2026): Government forces enter Kurdish cities in first step of SDF-Damascus deal, https://npasyria.com/en/135274/, accessed 18/6/2026
33 NPA - North Press Agency (4/2/2026): Government forces enter Kurdish cities in first step of SDF-Damascus deal, https://npasyria.com/en/135274/, accessed 18/6/2026

In Qamishli, which functions as something like the informal capital of the DAANES, the security forces of the transitional government essentially took up positions in exactly those locations where the security forces of the Syrian regime had been stationed until December 2024: the grounds of the international airport and the so-called security quarter in the city center, where the Assad regime had already stationed its police and intelligence services. The third position, which until 2024 included a Syrian army checkpoint in front of the border gate to Turkey, was not reoccupied. Outside the security quarter and the airport, the security forces of the transitional government are not present in any way.[34]

In Hasaka as well, around 100 security forces of the transitional government have since been stationed there, and, similarly to Qamishli, they are only deployed in those buildings where forces of the former government in Damascus had already been stationed until 2024. Responsibility for public security continues to lie with the Kurdish police (Asayîş) and the YPG/YPJ.[35] Outside of Hasaka and Qamishli, the security forces of the transitional government are not present in the Jazira, that is, in the eastern territory of the DAANES.[36].

In contrast to Qamishli and Hasaka, there was internal resistance in Kobanê against the stationing of security forces of the transitional government.[37] For most of February, the city was under a strict blockade by the Syrian Arab Army. During this period, several Kurdish villages in the south of the area, which had been abandoned by their inhabitants in January, were looted by Arab villagers and some houses were destroyed. A total of 74 villages south of Kobanê were affected by this looting.[38]

In response, the local commanders of the YPG/YPJ long refused to allow security forces of the transitional government in Damascus to enter Kobanê. As a result, the stationing of regime security forces there was significantly delayed. Only on 27 February did forces of the Syrian Interior Ministry take over the Internal Security Directorate headquarters in Kobanê. Since then,

34 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Phone call conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15/5/2026, (Interview 2); Phone call conducted by the author with a Kurdish journalist from Qamishli, 1/6/2026, (Interview 12)

35 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Phone call conducted by the author with an Arab Intellectual from Hasaka, 17/5/2026 (Interview 6); Phone call conducted by the author with an Arab Intellectual from Hasaka, 18/5/2026, (Interview 8)

36 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026 in Tal Tamer, Girkê Legê, Çilaxa, Tirbespî (Arabic: al-Qaḥṭānīyah), and Amûdê; Phone call conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15/5/2026, (Interview 2); Phone call conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Hasaka, 17/5/2026, (Interview 3); Phone call conducted by the author with an Arab Intellectual from Hasaka, 17/5/2026, (Interview 6); Phone call conducted by the author with an Arab Intellectual from Hasaka, 18/5/2026, (Interview 8); Phone call conducted by the author with an Arab Intellectual from al-Yaʿrubīyah, 1/6/2026, (Interview 11); Phone call conducted by the author with a Kurdish journalist from Qamishli, 1/6/2026, (Interview 12); Phone call conducted by the author with Alicia Allgäuer, Volkshilfe, 10/6/2026 (Interview 20)

37 Interview conducted by the author with a local YPG commander from Kobanê, 10/5/2026, (Interview 1)

38 According to Kurdish media these are: Bîr Zinar, Bîr Xat, Bîr Nasir, Leqleqo, Qurquling 1, Qorqulind 2, Şerebanî, Seferî, Hemtopik, Bîr Kor, Pêşek, Xirabî Seronç, Golêketî, Demircik, Koç Kemat, Koktepe Jêrîn, Kok Tepe Jorîn, Mîlî, Xanika Ebdo, Mendik, Xuydan, Xan Memed, Derbeteht, Çixura Bicûk, Çixura Mezin, Çortanek, Tozinc, Berdax, Mizxene, Toqlî, Qeynter, Mereser, Kepirebin, Dewî, Erne, Korik, Sal, Saqî, Kefûn, Tolik, Bîr Cirût, Nurelî, Bilik, Qil Heydê, Der Felît, Qulan 1, Qulan 2, Qulan 3, Qun Eftar, Xatunî, Xirab Berkil, Qirad Kurd, Omerekê, Şakurk, Sept Eydo, Sebt Inko, Zîk, Dozî, Qerareşk, Mezra Şehîd Eşref, Bîrik, Xerab Xel, Zirkotêk, Esediyê, Goktep 1, Goktep 2, Bîr Bekê, Bîr Sewan, Sêfûn, Girê Evrê, Girê Sor, Salokê, Guçêkmet and Qube (ANHA - Hawar News Agency (5/3/2026): Interim Government factions loot 74 villages around Kobani, https://www.hawarnews.com/en/interim-government-factions-loot-74-villages-around-kobani, accessed 18/6/2026).

there has also been a symbolic presence of security forces of the transitional government there. However, as in Qamishli and Hasaka, this presence is limited to certain government buildings. Otherwise, Kurdish forces continue to be responsible for the security of the city in Kobanê as well.[39].

A very small number of Kurdish villages on the southern edge of the Kobanê region - Girik, Hemdûn, Xirab Işkê, Çelebiyê, Nihît, Hêmed, Ebû Sira, Gêçkiran and Cadê – remained unter control of the forces of the transitional government.[40]

The security organs attributable to the transitional government in Damascus are subordinate to the transitional government's Ministry of Interior, but so far they do not in fact exercise security functions either in Hasaka, Qamishli, or Kobanê. They therefore primarily constitute a symbolic presence. Naturally, this may change at any time in the course of the currently ongoing integration process; however, up to now, the everyday lives of people living in the remaining territories of the DAANES have been hardly affected at all by the presence of these security organs.[41]

How weak these forces are, became evident during Newroz, the Kurdish New Year festival, on the night of 21 March. After an individual in Kobanê had taken down a Syrian flag and posted a video of it on social media, Arabs attacked Kurdish Newroz celebrations in Afrin and Aleppo. In response, members of the 'Revolutionary Youth' (Tevgera ciwanên şoreşger) attacked the security forces of the transitional government in Qamishli, which were unable to defend themselves effectively and instead had to be protected by the Kurdish police forces (Asayîş).[42]

The relevant security forces for the remaining territory of the DAANES thus remain, for the time being, the YPG/YPJ and the conscripted Self-Defense Forces (HXP/Hêzên Xweparastinê) as military units, and the Kurdish Asayîş as police forces. The latter have repeatedly faced allegations of human rights violations in the past.[43]

One of the most serious recent cases is undoubtedly that of the Swedish citizen and Syrian Kurd Alaa al-Din Adnan al-Amin, who was arrested by the Asayîş in Qamishli in October 2025 and died in March 2026 after being severely tortured in custody. After his family had received

39 Interview conducted by the author with a local YPG commander from Kobanê, 10/5/2026 (Interview 1)

40 ANHA - Hawar News Agency (5/3/2026): Interim Government factions loot 74 villages around Kobani, https://www.hawarnews.com/en/interim-government-factions-loot-74-villages-around-kobani, accessed 18/6/2026

41 Field Research conducted by the author in March 2026

42 Field Research conducted by the author in March 2026; vgl. STJ - Syrians for Truth and Justice (27/4/2026): Syria/Nowruz 2026: Attacks on Kurds, Humiliation of Symbols, and Security Failure to Protect Civilians, https://stj-sy.org/en/syria-nowruz-2026-attacks-on-kurds-humiliation-of-symbols-and-security-failure-to-protect-civilians/, accessed 19/5/2026; K24 - Kurdistan 24 (21/3/2026): Violence Erupts in Northwest Syria as Kurds Targeted for Displaying Kurdistan Flag, https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/902258/violence-erupts-in-northwest-syria-as-kurds-targeted-for-displaying-kurdistan-flag, accessed 25/3/2026; Enab - Enab Baladi (22/3/2026): Tensions after Syrian flag lowering during Nowruz celebrations, protest calls, https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2026/03/tensions-after-syrian-flag-lowering-during-nowruz-celebrations-protest-calls/, accessed 24/6/2026

43 HRW - Human Rights Watch (19/6/2014): Under Kurdish Rule: Abuses in PYD-run Enclaves of Syria, https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/19/under-kurdish-rule/abuses-pyd-run-enclaves-syria, accessed 23/6/2026; UNGA - United Nations General Assembly (14/8/2023): Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2097210/G2315549.pdf, accessed 24/6/2024 [Login required]

no information for months regarding his whereabouts or the reasons for his arrest, they were handed the body bearing clear signs of torture on March 8, 2026[44]

In this regard, the death of Alaa Al-Din Adnan Al-Amin was an extreme case that was widely discussed even within the region itself. However, it is not uncommon for relatives of detainees of the Kurdish Asayîş to be denied information about them for a period of time, or for detainees to be beaten during interrogations or, for example, to have burns inflicted on them with cigarettes.[45]

5 Control and Power Relations in the Arab Regions

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Even in the predominantly Arab areas that nominally came under the control of the Syrian transitional government in Damascus in January, the balance of power remains complex. So far, the Syrian transitional government has not succeeded in bringing these strongly tribal-influenced areas fully under its effective control and establishing a monopoly on the use of force. De facto, these regions have largely been taken over by tribal militias whose loyalty to the transitional government in Damascus is very limited. Some of these militias already existed in core form before the fall of the Assad regime, or at least maintain personnel continuity with earlier militias. They are organized along tribal lines and, in a region that has traditionally always been heavily influenced by tribal structures, primarily pursue tribal interests as well.[46]

However, this also means that there is by no means always unity among these tribal militias themselves, and rivalries also emerge between them. They also differ from one another in their relationship to the Kurds and their political actors.

While the Shammar, whose main settlement area lies along the Iraqi border between Rabia and Tell Hamis, still position themselves as relatively friendly toward the Kurds and repeatedly offer themselves as mediators, tribes such as the al-Baqqārah and al-Jubouri are regarded by the Kurds as significantly more hostile. However, not all of these tribes are always homogeneous political entities either. Tribes in particular are characterized by internal segmentation, meaning that they themselves split into different clans and extended families. Because some segments of these tribes participated in the Kurdish self-administration before January 2026, those segments are now in turn being marginalized by those segments that had themselves been marginalized at that time.[47]

44 .STJ - Syrians for Truth and Justice (13/4/2026): Northeast Syria: The Death of Alaa al-Amin in Detention: Announced Investigations and Concerns over Lack of Transparency, https://stj-sy.org/en/northeast-syria-the-death-of-alaa-al-amin-in-detention-announced-investigations-and-concerns-over-lack-of-transparency/, accessed 18/6/2026

45 As early as 2014, the author was shown evidence of burns caused by cigarettes on members of a Kurdish opposition party within the Kurdish National Council of Syria (E.N.K.S.) by the Asayîş. With regard to jihadist prisoners held by Kurdish security forces, there have been several reports of torture by human rights organizations, most recently by Amnesty International in 2024: AI - Amnesty International (17/4/2024): Syria: Mass death, torture and other violations against people detained in aftermath of Islamic State defeat new report, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/syria-mass-death-torture-and-other-violations-against-people-detained-in-aftermath-of-islamic-state-defeat-new-report/, accessed 19/6/2026.

46 Dukhan - Dukhan, Haian (2018): State and Tribes in Syria: Informal Alliances and Conflict Patterns; London: Routledge;, https://www.routledge.com/State-and-Tribes-in-Syria-Informal-Alliances-and-Conflict-Patterns/Dukhan/p/book/9780367663704, accessed 18/6/2026 [fee required]

47 Interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 23/3/2026, (Interview F); Interview conducted by the author with an Arab intellectual from Deir az-Zor in Erbil, 29/5/2026, (Interview J); Interview

In January 2026, new tribal militias were formed on the one hand, while on the other hand there are also militias such as that of Ibrahim al-Hifl, a powerful sheikh of the Uqaydat tribe living in the area around Deir ez-Zor, which had already been fighting the SDF since 2023. Al-Hifl, the sheikh of the al-Būkamāl clan within the Uqaydat who lives in the border town of the same name on the Iraqi frontier, was already being supported by the Assad regime and the Iranian supporters of Assad against the SDF in 2023 and 2024. In September 2023, with the support of the Assad regime, he founded the Quwwat al-Qabail wa al-Ashaer al-Arabiya (Arab Tribal and Clan Forces, or ATCF) as an anti-Kurdish militia in the eastern Euphrates valley.[48] After the change of regime in Damascus in December 2024, Ibrahim al-Hifl also changed sides and now cooperates with the new transitional government in Damascus.[49]

However, not all armed groups that had been supported by the Assad regime and Iranian forces in eastern Syria until December 2024 switched sides. Thus, in the region around Raqqa there are still remnants of the neo-Baʿathist Popular Resistance of the Eastern Region (Arabic: al-Muqāwama ash-Shaʿbiyya fī al-Minṭaqa ash-Sharqiyya), founded in 2018,[50] which continues to oppose the transitional government of Ahmed al-Sharaa. In May 2025, this group joined the pro-Iranian Islamic Resistance Front in Syria (Arabic: Jabhat al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmīyah fī Sūriyā), which is devoted primarily to the fight against the Israeli occupation and expansion on the Golan Hights.[51]

Further north, along the southeastern border of the territory still controlled by the DAANES and the YPG/YPJ, the Shammar militia of the al-Sanadid Forces (Arabic: aṣ-Ṣanādīd) also continues to exist. Until January 2024, they were part of the SDF, but then, together with most other Arab forces, they broke away from the SDF, while continuing to exist today as a tribal militia led by Bandar Humaydi al-Daham al-Hadi[52]

Today, the Syrian Arab Army's 60th Division is stationed at Qasrok, the last U.S. military base to be handed over, which only occurred in mid-April. As part of the integration process of SDF into the Syrian Arab Army, this 60th Division stationed at Qasrok has a senior former SDF commander, Çiya Kobanî (Haji Mohammed Nebo), as deputy commander since late March 2026.[53] Its overall commander is still Brigadier General ʿAwad Muhammad al-Jassem,[54] an Arab linked to the transitional government in Damascus. Besides Kurdish fighters of SDF also

conducted by the author with an Arab entrepreneur from Deir az-Zor in Erbil, 29/5/2026, (Interview K); Interview with an Arab Intellectual from Raqqa, 16/5/2026, (Interview 5)

48 TWI - Washington Institute for Near East Policy, The (15/4/2024): Profile: Arab Tribal and Clan Forces, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/profile-arab-tribal-and-clan-forces, accessed 18/6/2026

49 Phone call conducted by author with an Arab Intellectual from Hasaka, 17/5/2026, (Interview 6)

50 NRLS - Rojava Center for Strategic Studies (20/5/2021): مقاومة شعبية، أم حرب إيرانية؟ [Volkswiderstand oder Krieg gegen den Iran?], https://www.nrls.net/Reports/923, accessed 18/6/2026

51 TWI - Washington Institute for Near East Policy, The (9/3/2025): Uli al-Baas (Part 1): A New Islamic Resistance Front in Syria?, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/uli-al-baas-part-1-new-islamic-resistance-front-syria, accessed 18/6/2026

52 .Ronahi TV - Ronahi TV (26/2/2026): قيادة قوى الأمن الداخلي تلتقي مع شيخ قبيلة شمر والقائد العسكري لقوات الصناديد [Die Führung der Inneren Sicherheitskräfte trifft sich mit dem Scheich des Stammes der Schamar und dem militärischen Befehlshaber der Al-Sanadid-Truppen], https://ronahi.tv/ar/archives/329241, accessed 18/6/2026

53 C8 - Channel 8 (27/3/2026): Chia Kobani Appointed as Deputy Commander of Syrias 60th Division, https://channel8.com/english/news/55228, accessed 18/6/2026

54 Levant24 - Levant24 (8/2/2026): SDF Integration Deal Enters Implementation Phase, https://levant24.com/news/2026/02/sdf-integration-deal-enters-implementation-phase/, accessed 18/6/2026

the al-Sanadid Forces started an integration process into the 60th Division of the Syrian Arab Army.[55] What is interesting is that the social-media footprint seems to have shifted away from dedicated Sanadid military branding and toward the Shammar tribal leadership network and the leading al-Daham family. This supports the view that the militia is maintaining a lower public profile as a distinct organization and is genuinely undergoing a process of integration into the official security forces.

Overall, the territory that has been taken over by Arab forces since January is not completely under the control of the Syrian transitional government. Rather, what exists is a partly precarious form of joint control between official security forces of the Syrian Arab Army and Internal Security on the one hand, and various tribal militias on the other.[56] Most of the time, there is a certain degree of cooperation between most of these forces; however, no consolidated monopoly of power has yet emerged, and conflicts may break out at any time. Even though there have so far been no major armed conflicts between these different armed groups, there have indeed been smaller skirmishes since the end of January 2026, although these incidents are poorly documented.

In addition, the jihadist underground organization 'Islamic State' (IS) has become increasingly active again since the end of SDF control. On 21 February, two IS attacks against the Syrian Arab Army took place in al-Mayadin (Deir ez-Zor).[57] Likewise, between 21 and 22 February, several IS attacks against the Syrian Arab Army occurred near Raqqa.[58] In March and April, there was a marked increase in IS attacks against the transitional government's security forces in the eastern part of Deir ez-Zor province.[59] However, this has thus far not resulted in the re-establishment of Islamic State territorial control in eastern Syria.

6 Prisoners of war

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Of the military confrontations of January 2026, not all prisoners of war had been exchanged by the beginning of June. Although several prisoner exchanges took place, precise figures are not available. However, public statements by DAANES officials indicate that, following the last major prisoner exchange in mid-April 2026, approximately 270 detainees affiliated with the SDF were likely still being held by the government.[60]

55 Interview conducted by the author with a Shammar intellectual, 2/6/2026, (Interview 15)

56 Interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Judge, 24/3/2026, (Interview G); Interview conducted by the author with a High ranking member of a ministry of DAANES, 25/3/2026, (Interview H); Telephone interview conducted by the author with an Arab intellectual from Deir az-Zor, 1/6/2026, (Interview 13); Telephone interview conducted by the author with an Arab intellectual form Deir az-Zor, 1/6/2026, (Interview 14)

57 REU - Reuters (21/2/2026): Islamic State claims two attacks on Syrian army, announces new phase of operations, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/islamic-state-claims-two-attacks-syrian-army-announces-new-phase-operations-2026-02-21/, accessed 18/6/2026

58 SFM - Syrian Future Movement (23/2/2026): ISIS terrorist attacks escalate in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor provinces, https://sfuturem.org/en/2026/02/isis-terrorist-attacks-escalate-in-raqqa-and-deir-ez-zor-provinces/, accessed 18/6/2026

59 RIC - Rojava Information Center (26/4/2026): Sleeper Cell Report March 2026 ISIS activity continues after Februarys vow to attack new Syrian government, https://rojavainformationcenter.org/2026/04/sleeper-cell-report-march-2026-isis-activity-continues-after-februarys-vow-to-attack-new-syrian-government/, accessed 18/6/2026

60 Interview conducted by the author with high ranking Kurdish official of DAANES, 18/5/2026, (Interview 7)

These detainees include not only SDF fighters but also civilians who were associated with DAANES. Among them is at least one German internationalist, Eva Maria Michelmann, who had long been considered missing. In April 2026, it became known that the activist and journalist, who had disappeared in January, was being held in prison. After the Syrian transitional government confirmed her whereabouts,[61] the German Embassy in Damascus was granted access to her place of detention in a Damascus prison for the first time following sustained diplomatic pressure. Mid of June, the German ministry of foreign affairs managed to negotiate her release.[62]

As a result of this situation, there have been demonstrations by relatives of SDF members who are still missing or held captive in North and East Syria, demanding the release of their family members.[63]

7 Situation of women

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Both Arab and Kurdish societies in northeastern Syria are strongly shaped by patriarchal gender norms. Violence against women who violate these gender norms has been and remains widespread, and goes largely unpunished, especially when it occurs within the family. In recent years, however, DAANES has worked to provide support to women affected by violence, both through legislative efforts and by promoting shelters such as the women's houses (Mala Jin).[64]

The situation of women in the areas that remain under DAANES control has not changed significantly as a result of the events of January 2026. Women's organizations, women's shelters, and the women's village of Jinwar, which provide protection and support for women facing violence, continue to exist and operate.[65]

However, the situation has changed fundamentally in the regions that were subsequently taken over by the Transitional Government. Although highly patriarchal social conditions had persisted in these areas even under SDF control, they were constrained by an explicitly feminist political administration. The women's houses (Mala Jin) that existed in larger cities such as Raqqa and Tabqa are all closed following the transfer of these regions to the transitional government. There are no longer any institutions in these regions that provide support to women affected by violence. Most former activists of Mala Jin in these regions stay at home and were forced to become housewives. Some of them also fled to the remaining regions under SDF control.[66]

61 TNA - New Arab, The (30/4/2026): Syria government confirms detention of missing German journalist, https://www.newarab.com/news/syria-government-confirms-detention-missing-german-journalist, accessed 19/6/2026

62 ZDF - Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (19/6/2026): Inhaftierte deutsche Journalistin in Syrien wieder frei, https://www.zdfheute.de/politik/ausland/syrien-journalistin-haft-freilassung-michelmann-100.html, accessed 22/6/2026

63 SOHR - Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (27/4/2026): Demanding release of prisoners in transitional government prisons Residents stage protest in Al-Qamishli city, https://www.syriahr.com/en/381584/, accessed 19/6/2026; ANHA - Hawar News Agency (27/4/2026): Protest held in Qamishlo demanding release of prisoners, https://www.hawarnews.com/en/protest-held-in-qamishlo-demanding-release-of-prisoners, accessed 19/6/2026

64 based on the author's personal experience and talks in the region

65 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Telephone interview conducted by the author with an activist in Jinwar, 6/6/2026, (Interview 17)

66 Interview conducted by the author with a leading activist of Mala Jin in Qamishli, 6/6/2026, (Interview 16)

Women who engage in illegal sex work are also often victims of violence. Although it is strictly prohibited, impoverished women - particularly members of the Dom or Nawar ethnic minority, an ethnic group linguistically and culturally related to the Roma in Europe and sharing their socioeconomic status - find themselves forced to work as prostitutes under extremely precarious conditions (e.g., in Qamishli near the auto repair shops, where they offer their services in trucks and cars).[67] These women are socially despised and receive no protection from the authorities. In the areas recently taken over by the transitional government and Arab tribes, however, these women now face additional ideologically motivated aggression.[68]

The future of the female fighters of the YPJ remains entirely uncertain. While the YPJ itself seeks to be integrated into the Syrian Army as an autonomous part, it remains unclear whether the Syrian Army will be willing to accommodate women within its ranks at all.[69] As a highly politicized feminist force, the YPJ would in any case face considerable difficulties integrating into a predominantly male army that includes many actors with Islamist backgrounds.

What would happen to these women if the YPJ is not integrated into the army remains completely unclear. So far, only male fighters from the YPG have been integrated, while no YPJ units have been incorporated.[70]

8 Situation of LGBTQ

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The situation for LGBTQ people in northern and eastern Syria was already very precarious even before January 2026. While the Kurdish movement in Turkey has, to some extent, advocated for the concerns of the LGBTQ community, this was not the case in Syria. In the predominantly rural and small-town society of the Syrian Kurds, there was no space for an LGBTQ community.[71]

In the region's even more conservative Arab tribal society, there was even less. Even though there was never an explicit ban on homosexuality in the DAANES' criminal code, gay and bisexual men and transgender people in particular repeatedly faced massive problems with their families as well as with authorities, ranging all the way to random arrests by the Asayîş.[72]

In many cases, serious acts of violence committed by families against queer family members go unpunished—even less so in the areas taken over by Arab tribes in January than in the

67 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Interview conducted by the author with an intellectual from Qamishli, 23/3/2026, (Interview D)

68 based on the author's personal experience and talks in the region

69 Shafaq - Shafaq News (2/4/2026): Syrias YPJ, Damascus discuss integration into army, https://shafaq.com/en/Middle-East/Syria-s-YPJ-Damascus-discuss-integration-into-army, accessed 22/4/2026; Majalla - Al Majalla (27/3/2026): Sipan Hamo on integrating Kurdish units into the Syrian army, https://en.majalla.com/node/330305/politics/sipan-hamo-integrating-kurdish-units-syrian-army, accessed 15/5/2026; NReg - New Region, The (2/4/2026): Damascus showing flexibility in womens integration into army: YPJ, https://thenewregion.com/posts/5017, accessed 22/4/2026

70 Interview conducted by the author with a local commander of the YPJ, 6/6/2026, (Interview 18)

71 based on the author's personal experience and talks in the region

72 Interview conducted by the author with a queer Kurd from a village near Qamishli, 10/2/2020, (Interview A); Interview with a queer Internationalist in Qamishli, 9/11/2024, (Interview B)

remaining DAANES territories. But even in these areas, there is a homophobic social hegemony that extends into political structures as well.[73]

While gay people sometimes manage to conceal their sexual orientation to such an extent that they can lead a double life undetected, albeit under great psychological stress, this is usually completely impossible for transgender people. As a result, they are often even more exposed to family and societal violence. This violence often continues for those affected even if they manage to flee to a neighboring country, such as Turkey or Iraq.[74]

9 Ethnicized fault lines

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Overall, the fighting in January has led to a marked ethnicization of perceptions of the conflict. The model of Kurdish-Arab brotherhood, as advocated by the leading political forces of the DAANES, has begun to show significant cracks among the Kurdish population. Many, including those who were politically close to DAANES, view the defection of the Arab tribes in the spring as political betrayal and now distrust even those Arabs who still live in the DAANES area. Among the Kurdish population, however, a clear shift toward a more pronounced Kurdish nationalism can be observed in both public discourse and political symbolism. On the one hand, this means that previously marginalized political movements, such as the parties of the Kurdish National Council (E.N.K.S.), can now engage in political activity much more freely and also display their party symbols openly in public spaces; on the other hand, however, it has led to deep mistrust between Kurds and Arabs.[75]

The Kurdish population of Kobanê and Qamishli is almost unanimously opposed to integration into the Syrian state. Many consider the political leadership of the DAANES to be too willing to compromise.[76]

To a certain extent, Christian minorities also perceive the remaining DAANES today as more ‘Kurdish’ than they did before January 2026. In conversations the author of this report had in late March with Armenian and Aramaic-speaking Christians in Qamishli, Tall Tamr, and several Assyrian villages along the Habur River, it became clear that while the Christian population still views the DAANES as a lesser evil than the transitional government in Damascus, the self-administration is now perceived as a far less inclusive joint project than it was in the past. Many Christians today find themselves, in a sense, caught between a precarious but secular Kurdish national project and an Islamist-influenced Syrian government, whose president is still referred to by most by his former jihadist nom de guerre, ‘al-Jolani’.[77]

73 Interview conducted by the author with a transgender person from Syria in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 30/5/2026, (Interview L)
74 Interview conducted by the author with a transgender person from Syria in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 30/5/2026, (Interview L)
75 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026
76 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026
77 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Interview conducted by the author with a group of Armenians from Qamishli, 20/3/2026, (Interview C); Interview conducted by the author with an Assyrian from Tal Tamr, 22/3/2026, (Interview E)

Since there are hardly any Kurds or Christians in the areas recently taken over by the transitional government, this ethnic categorization has relatively little impact there. More relevant are the effects on Kurds in Aleppo, Afrin, and Damascus, as well as on Arabs and Christians in the areas still controlled by DAANES/SDF. Since the discourse among the political elites here has changed relatively little, there is no significant repression against Arabs; however, everyday life reveals a much greater level of mistrust between ethnic groups than before the events of January 2026 -which, depending on future political developments, holds the potential for ethnicized conflicts.[78]

10 Conscription

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Conscription has been in effect in some regions of the DAANES since 2018 and was formalized by the Self-Defense Law passed in June 2019. It required 12 months of service in the Self-Defense Forces (HXP / Hêzên Xweparastinê) for men between 18 and 31 years.[79]

Although this law is still officially in effect and has never been repealed, there have been no new conscriptions for the HXP since the fighting ended in January 2026. Remaining elements of the HXP are being partially transferred to the YPG. The HXP still exists, but iseffectively in the process of being dismantled.[80]

In the past, there was no alternative service for conscientious objectors. Those who refused to serve in the HXP were sometimes arrested, or, if they managed to evade service, their family members were harassed in an attempt to force them to serve in the HXP. However, this is no longer necessary due to the HXP's dissolution process. In the areas taken over by the transitional government, the HPX no longer exists at all.[81]

The fighting in January was led on the Kurdish side primarily by the YPG and YPJ, both of which are volunteer units. The HXP saw little action during this period.[82]

Looking ahead, however, the question arises as to whether the mandatory military service for the Syrian Arab Army - which was suspended in December 2024[83] - could be reinstated in the future, thereby making conscription into the army a reality. At present the routine peacetime

78 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026

79 RIC - Rojava Information Center (10/6/2020): Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria, https://rojavainformationcenter.org/2020/06/translation-law-concerning-military-service-in-north-and-east-syria/, accessed 23/6/2026

80 Online interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15/5/2026, (Interview 2); Online interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Kobanê, 18/5/2026, (Interview 4); Online interview conducted by the author with a YPG commander, 19/5/2026, (Interview 9)

81 Interview conducted by the author with high ranking Kurdish official of DAANES, 18/5/2026, (Interview 7); Interview conducted by the author with a YPG commander, 19/5/2026, (Interview 9)

82 Interview conducted by the author with high ranking Kurdish official of DAANES, 18/5/2026, (Interview 7); Interview conducted by the author with a YPG commander, 19/5/2026, (Interview 9)

83 TNA - New Arab, The (16/12/2024): Why Al-Sharaa's scrapping of conscription for Syrians matters, https://www.newarab.com/news/why-al-sharaas-scrapping-conscription-syrians-matters, accessed 19/6/2026

conscription has been abolished but the government could theoretically reintroduce compulsory service if it judged the country's security situation to require it.[84]

11 Integration of the YPG and YPJ into the Syrian Arab Army

Last modification 2026-06-30 14:00

The integration of the YPG into the Syrian Arab Army has begun. In particular, YPG fighters have already been incorporated into the 60th Division, stationed at Qasrok, including at the command level. Essentially, however, the YPG and YPJ continued to exist as separate military formations as of early June, remaining responsible for security in the remaining areas controlled by the DAANES.[85]

It is still unclear whether all YPG and YPJ fighters will be integrated into the army. In particular, when it comes to the YPJ—the armed women's units—the two sides' positions still differ significantly.[86]

There are certainly many members of the YPG and YPJ who oppose integration into the army. However, given the high level of military discipline in both units, it is unlikely that any successful outcome of negotiations would not be accepted by all.[87]

12 Supply Situation and Public Services

Last modification 2026-06-30 14:00

Medical care and the supply of electricity, water, and gasoline were already poor before the events of January 2026 and have not improved as a result of these developments. Medical staff are often poorly trained. Medications for rare diseases are not available. Pharmacies typically only stock highly sought-after medications, some of which are sold even after they have expired.[88] Although there is enough food, the prices of many of these items are often very high relative to incomes.

The extremely problematic energy supply across the entire region means that electricity is generated using very old generators and that gasoline is sometimes refined privately. Both of these practices place an extreme burden on air and water quality. Although no reliable statistics are available on this matter, everyone in the region - especially medical personnel - reports a sharp rise in cancer cases as a result.[89]

84 AlMayadeen - Al Mayadeen (15/12/2024): All factions in Syria to be dissolved, no mandatory draft: al-Sharaa, https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/all-factions-in-syria-to-be-dissolved--no-mandatory-draft--a, accessed 23/6/2026

85 Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15/5/2026, (Interview 2); Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Hasaka, 17/5/2026, (Interview 3); Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Kobanê, 18/5/2026, (Interview 4)

86 Interview conducted by the author with a commander of YPJ, 6/6/2026, (Interview 18)

87 based on the author's assessment

88 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15/5/2026, (Interview 2); Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Kobanê, 18/5/2026, (Interview 4)

89 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Telephone interview conducted by the author with medical staff of a hospital in Qamishli, 4/6/2026, (Interview 21)

The schools and universities of the DAANES continue to operate in the remaining regions of the DAANES. Discussions are currently underway regarding their integration into the Syrian education system. While the Kurdish side wants to retain as many independent educational institutions and as much Kurdish language instruction as possible, the transitional government in Damascus seeks full alignment of the curricula with those of the Arab parts of Syria, with only a few additional hours for Kurdish.[90]

13 Freedom of Movement

Last modification 2026-06-30 14:07

Freedom of movement within Syria generally exists. However, many (former) officials of the DAANES and the SDF are afraid to travel to areas now controlled by the transitional government. Travel between DAANES-controlled areas in the east and Kobane is usually carried out in convoys accompanied by armed guards.[91]

The border crossings between DAANES and Turkey remain closed. Partially open were only the border gates to the territory that was already under Turkish occupation since October 2019 and is now partly under control of the transitional government: Akçakale/Tal Abyad and Ceylanpınar/Raʾs al-ʿAyn. Both border crossings were only open for returns to Syria and a few special cases, and not for regular travel. Only in mid May 2026 the Tal Abyad border gate on the Syrian side was transferred back to the Syrian government (Syria's General Authority for Border Crossings and Customs). Since then, this border crossing has reopened as a regular border crossing.[92] Ceylanpınar/Raʾs al-ʿAyn, on the other hand, was closed in February 2026.[93] It remains closed by early June 2026.[94]

The border crossing between the DAANES and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq at Semalka/Faysh Habur continues to be controlled by the DAANES on the Syrian side. However, there is also a symbolic presence of as small number of Syrian officials, with whom travelers have no contact. The Syrian flag was already raised there in February.[95] By early June the border crossing became an official border from the Syrian side. Travelers now receive official Syrian entry and exit stamps at Semalka that are valid throughout Syria.[96] However, the crossing has still not been officially recognized as a border crossing by the Iraqi authorities, which continues to make travel through this crossing difficult.

90 Interview conducted by the author with a Member of the negotiation teams of DAANES, 25/5/2026, (Interview I); Telephone Interview with Alicia Allgäuer, Volkshilfe, 10/6/2026, (Interview 20)
91 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Interview conducted by the author with a Head of a local NGO in Qamishli, 20/5/2026, (Interview 10)
92 FIKDP - Fondation Institut Kurde de Paris (11/5/2026): Turkey-Syria border gate to reopen after 12-year closure, https://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/latest/turkey-syria-border-gate-to-reopen-after-12-year-closure-15141/, accessed 19/6/2026
93 ITSO - Iskenderun Chamber of Commerce and Industry (4/3/2026): Regarding the Decision to Close the Ras Al-Ayn and Hammam Border Crossings, https://www.iskenderuntso.org.tr/announcement/regarding-the-decision-to-close-the-ras-al-ayn-and-hammam-border-crossings, accessed 19/6/2026
94 Telephone Interview conducted by the author with a local inhabitant of Raʾs al-ʿAyn, 5/6/2026, (Interview 22)
95 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026
96 Interview conducted by the author with Alicia Allgäuer, Volkshilfe, 10/6/2026, (Interview 20)

If the pontoon bridge over the Tigris is impassable, there is an alternative border crossing southwest of Semalka near al-Walid (roughly halfway to Rabia), which is also controlled on both sides by DAANES and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, respectively; however, border formalities must be completed in Semalka or Faysh Habur. This means that, depending on their direction of travel, travelers must first go to Semalka or Faysh Habur, then drive about 1 hour south, cross the border at al-Walid, and then drive another hour north to Faysh Habur or Semalka.[97] However, if the pontoon bridge over the Tigris River at Semalka is operational, this border crossing is not open.[98]

The al-Yaʿrubīyah/Rabia border crossing, which had been closed for years, reopened at the end of April to allow the movement of goods and people.[99]On the Iraqi side, it is under the control of the Iraqi central government, and on the Syrian side, it is under the control of the transitional government. The Abu Kamal/al-Qa'im border crossing, located further south in the Euphrates Valley south of the Euphrates River - and thus already under the control of the Syrian transitional government prior to the January offensive - had already been reopened in June 2025.[100]

Within Syria, there are numerous checkpoints in both areas. Those in the territory controlled by the transitional government are generally manned by the General Security Forces (Arab.: al-Amn al-ʿĀmm), which report to the Ministry of the Interior, while those in the remaining DAANES territory are manned by the Kurdish Asayîş. On smaller roads within the transitional government's territory, there are still some checkpoints manned by local tribal forces, but not on major thoroughfares. In the DAANES, all checkpoints were uniformly handed over to the Asayîş as early as 2019/2020. They are still operated by them today.[101]

14 Conclusion

Last modification 2026-06-30 14:31

The situation in northeastern Syria remains highly fluid and could develop in various directions. The situation in the areas taken over by pro-government forces in January differs significantly from that in the remaining DAANES-controlled areas.

DAANES institutions remain largely intact in the remaining areas, but are undergoing a process of partial integration into the Syrian state, the outcome of which remains uncertain. Given that various military units remain active in the region and that the views of the transitional government

97 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026

98 Interview conducted by the author with Head of a local NGO in Qamishli, 20/5/2026, (Interview 10); Interview conducted by the author with a DAANES official at the border of Semalka, 5/6/2026, (Interview 23)

99 REU - Reuters (20/4/2026): Iraq reopens Rabia border crossing to boost fuel oil exports via Syria, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraq-reopens-rabia-border-crossing-boost-fuel-oil-exports-via-syria-2026-04-20/, accessed 24/4/2026

100 syriacpress - Syriac Press (13/6/2026): Syrian Border Authority announces reopening of Al-Bukamal crossing with Iraq, https://syriacpress.com/blog/2025/06/13/syrian-border-authority-announces-reopening-of-al-bukamal-crossing-with-iraq/, accessed 23/6/2026

101 Field research conducted by the author in March 2026; Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15/5/2026, (Interview 2); Telephone interview conducted by the author with a Kurdish Intellectual from Kobanê, 18/5/2026, (Interview 4); Telephone interview conducted by the author with Head of a local NGO in Qamishli, 20/5/2026 (Interview 10); Telephone interview conducted by the author with an Arab Intellectual from al-Yaʿrubīyah, 1/6/2026, (Interview 11)

in Damascus and the representatives of the Syrian Kurds continue to diverge sharply, it is entirely possible that further fighting may occur in the future.

Should the integration be successfully managed, the central question is how many of the local structures can be preserved within the framework of the state as a whole and to what extent the region's ethnic and religious minorities can participate in the new Syrian state.

Particularly problematic in this regard are not only the cultural and linguistic rights of the Kurds, but above all the rights of women, which were actively promoted and protected in the DAANES but are now coming under pressure. In this context, the future of women's protection institutions is at stake, as is the future of politically active women and the members of the YPJ women's units.

This report reflects the state of developments as of early June 2026. Unexpected political changes could lead to a complete reversal of the situation in the future.

15 Interviews

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Face to face:

A. Interview with a queer Kurd from a village near Qamishli, 10 February 2020.

B. Interview with a queer Internationalist in Qamishli, 9 November 2024.

C. Group of Armenians from Qamishli, 20 March 2026.

D. Assyrian villager from Tal Nasri, 22 March 2026.

E. Assyrian from Tal Tamr, 22 March 2026.

F. Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 23 March 2026.

G. Kurdish Judge, 24 March 2026.

H. High ranking member of a ministry of DAANES, 25 March 2026.

I. Member of the negotiation teams of DAANES concerning education, 25 March 2026.

J. Arab intellectual from Deir az-Zor in Erbil, 29 May 2026.

K. Arab entrepreneur from Deir az-Zor in Erbil, 29 May 2026.

L. Transgender Person from Syria in Exile in Iraqi Kurdistan, 30 May 2026.

Via Telephone/Whatsapp/Online:

1. Local YPG commander from Kobanê, 10 May 2026.
2. Kurdish Intellectual from Qamishli, 15 May 2026.
3. Kurdish Intellectual from Hasaka, 17 May 2026.

4. Kurdish Intellectual from Kobanê, 18 May 2026.

5. Arab Intellectual from Raqqa, 16 May 2026.

6. Arab Intellectual from Hasaka, 17 May 2026.

7. High ranking Kurdish official of DAANES, 18 May 2026.

8. Arab Intellectual from Hasaka, 18 May 2026.

9. A YPG commander, 19 May 2026.

10. Head of a local NGO in Qamishli, 20 May 2026.

11. Arab Intellectual from al-Yaʿrubīyah, 1 June 2026.

12. Kurdish journalist from Qamishli, 1 June 2026.

13. Arab intellectual from Deir az-Zor, 1 June 2026.

14. Arab intellectual form Deir az-Zor, 1, June 2026.

15. Shammar intellectual, 2 June 2026.

16. Leading activist of Mala Jin in Qamishli, 6 June 2026.

17. Activist in Jinwar, 6 June 2026.

18. Local commander of YPJ, 6 June 2026.

19. Member of the negotiation teams of DAANES concerning education, 6 June 2026.

20. Alicia Allgäuer from the Austrian NGO Volkshilfe, who crossed the Semalka border crossing on 10 June 2026, 10 June 2026.

21. Member of the medical staff of Al Salam Hospital, Qamishli, 4 June 2026

22. Kurdish inhabitant of Raʾs al-ʿAyn, 5 June 2026.

23. DAANES official at the border of Semalka, 5 June 2026

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