

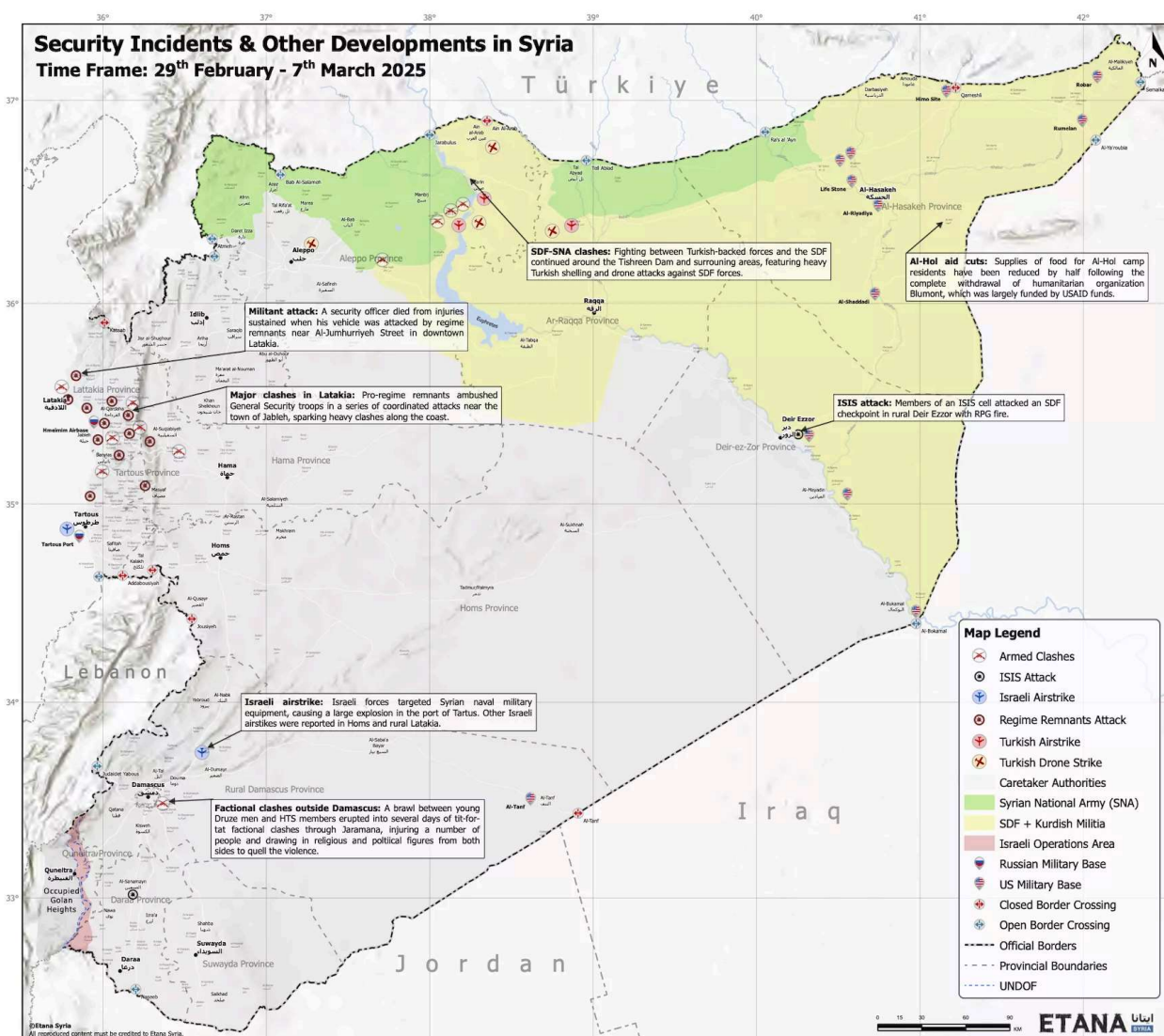
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Syria Update #21:

Attacks and operations this week by the so-called “Military Council for the Liberation of Syria” potentially mark the first signs of a more organized regime response to the fall of Bashar al-Assad last year. In effect, this week’s developments represent an organized military operation by senior regime personnel—not an organic Alawi uprising motivated by fears of caretaker authorities and sectarianized abuses by security forces. For the time being, the escalation instigated by this week’s attacks is mostly coming to an end as General Security draws down security operations across the coastal areas. However, as evidence is emerging of widespread indiscriminate violence and violations perpetrated against predominantly Alawi civilians during these operations, there is growing concern that the events of this week may entrench sectarian fault lines—all helpful recruiting tools for former regime personnel and their outside backers looking to use the coast as a staging-post for attacks against the new authorities.

In Damascus, meanwhile, caretaker President Ahmad al-Shara’a appointed a seven-person committee to draft a constitutional declaration outlining the guiding principles of Syria’s new constitutional order. Similar to the previous week’s National Dialogue Conference, however, serious concerns have arisen about the committee’s selection process, qualifications and independence, while a leaked draft of the declaration has already ignited intense controversy—particularly in reference to a clause stating that the president must be Muslim and that Islamic jurisprudence will be form the foundation for Syria’s future legislation.



Escalation on Syria's Coast

Since Assad's fall in December, remnant pro-regime groups have carried out small-scale, targeted hit-and-run attacks on General Security forces across the country. However, this week's attacks mark their most organized and casualty-heavy operation to date: pro-regime remnants ambushed General Security troops in a series of coordinated attacks near the town of Jableh in rural Latakia, killing at least 100 members of security forces and 15 civilians in the attacks and subsequent clashes. The insurgents are being led by Ghayath Dalla, the former commander of the 42nd Brigade of the 4th Tanks Division and the Al-Ghayath Forces alongside former regime officers inside the Hmeimim base near Jableh. A [statement](#) attributed to the "Military Council for the Liberation of Syria," which is claiming responsibility for the operations, outlined its objectives, including the "full liberation of Syrian territory from all occupying and terrorist forces."

The attacks and subsequent clashes are a major test for Syria's caretaker authorities and affiliated security forces. Amid the clashes, insurgent attacks saw several areas in the coast fall outside government control while pro-regime fighters reinforced positions in hilly rural areas of Latakia. Caretaker authorities have launched sweeping security operations across the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous, which led to further heavy clashes with insurgents. However, more worrying are emerging reports of indiscriminate violence—including field executions—committed against predominantly Alawi civilian communities in these areas; Sunni civilians were also targeted in the violence, albeit on a lesser scale. Initial reports suggest that hundreds have been left dead in the aftermath of the violence on Syria's coast. There is growing concern that Damascus' heavy-handed response to the attack by regime remnants will entrench sectarian fault lines and fuel a new cycle of violence.

Security Dynamics

Last weekend, clashes also broke out in the Damascus suburb of Jaramana, which has been controlled by Druze-led factions since the regime fell, after a General Security officer was killed by a member of a local Druze faction. The officer had reportedly disarmed in order to enter the area, although a dispute arising at a factional checkpoint led fighters there to shoot and kill the man. In response, caretaker authorities moved security forces to positions around Jaramana, setting up new checkpoints and leading to fears that a large security operation was imminent. Interventions by Druze leaders, from both Jaramana and Suwayda, helped defuse the situation, with officials meeting Druze figures to negotiate a new arrangement of joint control in the neighborhood.

In the northern Daraa city of Al-Sanamayn, clashes erupted between General Security force and an armed group led by Mohsen al-Hamid following failed disarmament negotiations. After a failed operation backed by Military Operations Administration Forces, groups have allowed for a temporary ceasefire to allow civilians to evacuate before the operation resumed. At least six people died in the clashes.

In the north-east, meanwhile, ISIS cells in Deir Ezzor targeted the home of an SDF fighter in Abu Hammam with RPGs, while another group struck an SDF military post in Khasham. Two IED blasts also claimed the lives of four SDF troops and injured 14 others, including one that targeted a vehicle near Al-Bukamal.

Caretaker Governance

Prior to the outbreak of violence on the coast, caretaker President al-Shara'a appointed a seven-person committee tasked with issuing a "constitutional declaration" that will guide the next stages of the constitutional process. While the committee's members include legal experts from across Syria, the selection process has not been explained by al-Shara'a's office, mirroring the [opaque process](#) that defined preparations for the National Dialogue Committee. Only one member has any background in constitutional law, raising serious concerns about the group's qualifications. In

addition, a draft version of the declaration document was already [leaked](#) to the public, with many elements generating significant controversy and criticism. Among the leaked provisions are those requiring the president to be Muslim and establishing Islamic jurisprudence as the foundation of future legislation. The document also reveals that the People's Assembly is set to be appointed by the president, raising deep concerns about legislative independence and democratic process under the new constitution. These elements directly contradict the closing statement issued at the end of the National Dialogue Conference.

At the local scale, a court in Rural Damascus criminalized public eating during Ramadan, labeling it a violation of public morals and grounds for prosecution.

Israeli Attacks & Incursions in South Syria

Israeli forces stepped up attacks against Syria in recent days, striking the Al-Shairat Military Airport in Homs, the port at Tartous, Qardaha in rural Latakia and a missile warehouse in Rural Damascus. Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu's [declaration](#) in late February that all territory south of Damascus must remain permanently demilitarized has precipitated a new chapter of aggressive military incursions and airstrikes against the country, although Syrian authorities have so far declined to respond militarily. Hundreds of Israeli soldiers continue to conduct incursions into Quneitra and south-west Daraa province on an almost daily basis, launching patrols, raiding farms and blocking routes used by local residents.

Türkiye/SNA & SDF Hostilities in Aleppo & North-East Syria

Fighting is intensifying in north-east Syria, where a sharp escalation in Turkish airstrikes against SDF positions in eastern Aleppo and Raqqa province has resulted in some of the highest daily death tolls in weeks. Despite the damage inflicted in recent days by Turkish drones and continued clashes, frontlines between the SDF and Turkish-back Syrian National Army (SNA) remain frozen despite heavy fighting around the Tishreen Dam and Qere Qozaq Bridge.

Humanitarian Developments

The supply of bread and food for Al-Hol camp residents has been reduced by half following the complete cessation of operations by the USAID-linked implementing partner Blumont, which was responsible for distributing bread and water tankers. The organization's funding was halted by the US administration at the beginning of March. Currently, the Autonomous Administration's Office of Displaced Persons and Refugees is handling aid distribution.