

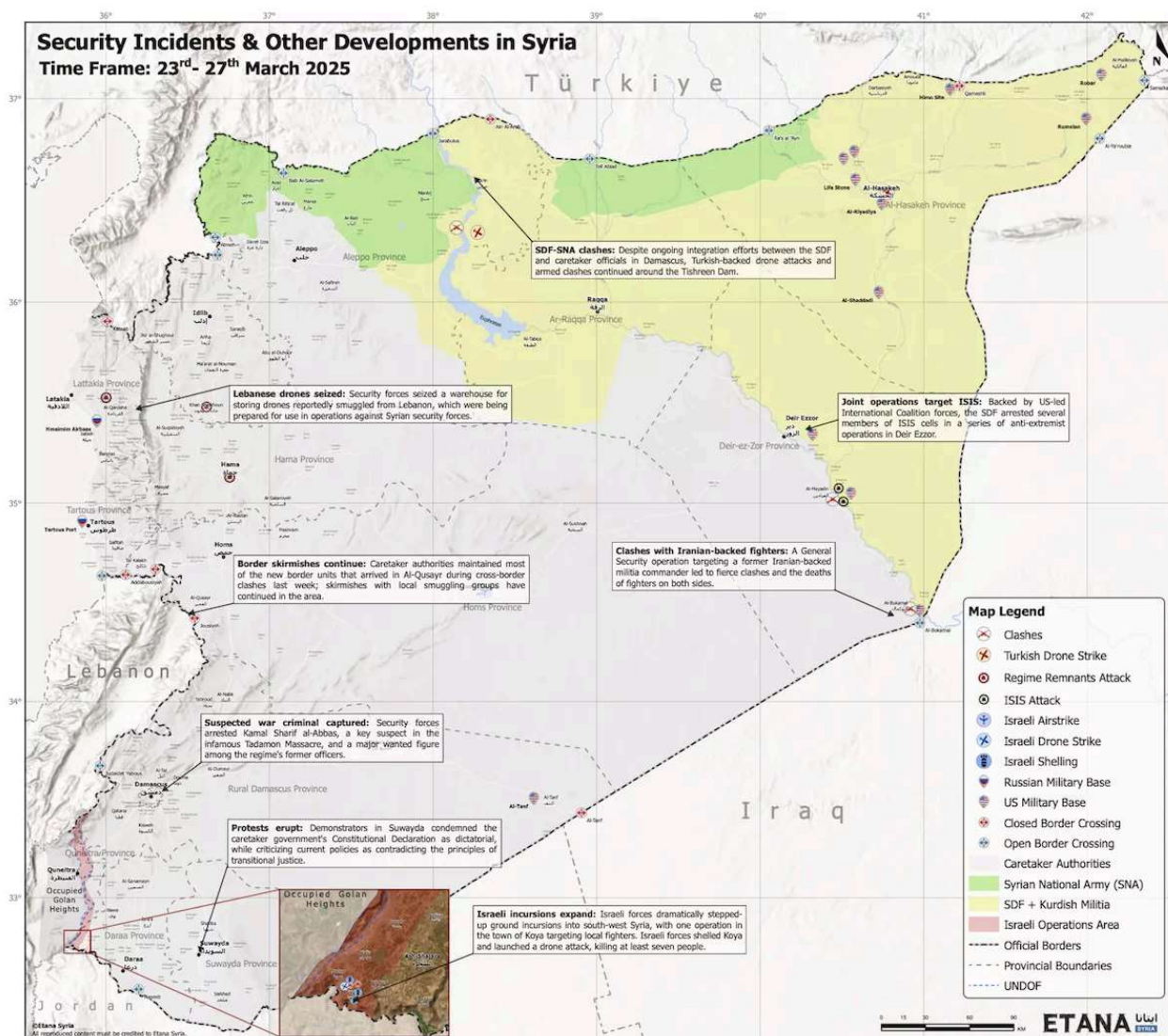
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Syria Update #23:

The raids in Koya this week portend increasingly brazen Israeli incursions into south Syria, which are now seriously hampering the ability of caretaker authorities in Damascus to secure a broad stretch of the south-west of the country from unrest and attack. The threat of airstrikes now hang explicitly over several ongoing initiatives that many see as central to stabilizing the country: the sudden cancelation of a new training center in Daraa for the Southern Division—the creation of which is essential for folding disparate factions into a unified and disciplined national army—is likely to impede and slow the process of forging a working national army under the Ministry of Defense. In a parallel Israeli attack, the destruction of the T4 and Palmyra airbases will complicate any discussions between Ankara and Damascus aimed at forging joint defense arrangements, revealing Israel's intention of pre-emptively targeting any military infrastructure at the heart of these negotiations.

On the coast, large-scale operations have wound down in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous. Even so, General Security forces continued targeted raids against regime loyalist cells there—including one operation that seized a cache of drones smuggled from Lebanon in Qardaha, the ancestral town of the Assad family. Kidnappings and smaller-scale sectarian attacks by groups unaffiliated with General Security have continued to target Alawis, however, and most civilians who fled to the Russian Hmeimim Base for protection in recent weeks are still refusing to leave and return to their homes.



Israeli Attacks & Incursions in South Syria

Following months of daily ground incursions into south Syria, Israeli forces escalated tensions on 25th March with a significant operation targeting armed groups in the Yarmouk Basin town of Koya in south-west Daraa. During the operation, a 60-member Israeli patrol advanced from south-west Daraa, reaching the outskirts of Koya, which is approximately 4km from the border strip. Israeli forces fired tank shells towards Koya's outskirts prior to actually entering the town. A group of local fighters, who had taken positions in a valley inside Koya, attempted to ambush the convoy, leading to armed clashes and a further round of Israeli artillery bombardments. An Israeli drone strike subsequently targeted a gathering of fighters to the west of Koya, killing several individuals. While some previous Israeli convoys have encountered ambushes inside Syrian territory, this week's attack represents the most serious armed resistance to challenge an Israeli incursion since the fall of the Assad regime.

The violence around Koya precipitated displacements, with at least 3,000 civilians fleeing the area for other areas in western Daraa—the largest displacement event witnessed in months in south Syria. However, most residents returned the following day.

Another less reported but significant Israeli attack took place the same day, with warplanes targeting the T4 airbase and other sites near the strategic city of Palmyra. Following the blasts, which caused significant damage, the Israeli army issued a [statement](#) claiming the strikes were intended to eliminate “remaining military capabilities.”

Other Israeli ground raids, patrols and ground operations took place across dozens of additional locations, arresting individuals and entering homes to seize weapons from local inhabitants in Quneitra and Daraa. Israeli warplanes also carried out an airstrike targeting the Mukhayber Bridge in the Hosh al-Sayyid Ali area of western Homs, close to the Syrian-Lebanese border. In an attempt to win over local residents, Israeli forces delivered humanitarian aid to the town of Al-Rafid in southern Quneitra, consisting of around 200 relief baskets. However, locals burned the aid packages in protest against Israeli actions and incursions in the region.

Security Dynamics

While large-scale operations have wound down in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous, General Security forces continued targeted raids to pursue regime loyalist cells there—including one operation that seized a cache of drones smuggled from Lebanon into Qardaha, the ancestral town of the Assad family. Kidnappings and smaller-scale sectarian attacks by groups unaffiliated with General Security have also continued to target Alawis. Most civilians who fled to the Russian Hmeimim Base for protection in recent weeks are also still refusing to leave or return to their homes. At the same time, thousands of Syrian families who [had fled](#) to Lebanon due to recent sectarian violence and military operations have begun returning to the Syrian coast.

While anti-regime operations have diminished on the coast, General Security Forces expanded campaigns to pursue regime remnants in other areas in recent weeks. Raids took place in Idlib, eastern Aleppo, Al-Bukamal, Deir Ezzor city, Al-Mayadin, Homs and Daraa. The raids resulted in dozens of arrests and weapons seizures. Among the significant regime figures captured in these raids were General Abdul Karim Ahmad Hamada, a close associate of Maher al-Assad; Moayad Duwaihi, leader of an Iranian-backed militia; Kamal Sharif al-Abbas, a key suspect in the infamous Tadamon Massacre; and Hussein al-Shawish, a prominent figure within the former regime's economic networks.

Caretaker Governance

The caretaker administration presented members of a new 23-person cabinet at the Presidential Palace on 29th March, with around 150 notable individuals from the media and civil society groups

present. As expected, the caretaker ministers of defense, foreign affairs and interior retained their positions. Other [key appointments](#) include Hind Qabawat, a Christian and the only woman in the cabinet, as minister of work and social affairs; Amjad Badr, a Druze academic from Suwayda, as minister of agriculture, and Yaroub Badr, an Alawi former minister under the regime from 2006-2011, as minister of transportation.

The full list of appointments is below:

1. 1. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates: Mr. Asaad al-Shaibani
2. Minister of Defense: General Murhaf Abu Qasra
3. Minister of Interior: Mr. Anas Khatab
4. Minister of Justice: Mr. Mazhar al-Wais
5. Minister of Endowments: Mr. Muhammad Abu al-Khair Shukri
6. Minister of Higher Education: Mr. Marwan al-Halabi
7. Minister of Work and Social Affairs: Mrs. Hind Qabawat
8. Minister of Energy: Mr. Muhammad al-Bashir
9. Minister of Finance: Muhammad Yusr Barniyeh
10. Minister of Economy: Mr. Nidal al-Sha'ar
11. Minister of Health: Mr. Musa'ab Nazal al-Ali
12. Minister of Local Administration and Environment: Mr. Muhammad Anjarani
13. Minister of Emergency and Disasters: Mr. Raed al-Saleh
14. Minister of Communications and Information Technology: Mr. Abdelsalam Haykal
15. Minister of Agriculture: Mr. Amjad Badr
16. Minister of Education: Mr. Muhammad Abdelrahman Turko
17. Minister of Public Works and Housing: Mr. Mustafa Abdelrazek
18. Minister of Culture: Mr. Muhammad Saleh
19. Minister of Sports and Youth: Mr. Muhammad Sameh Hamid
20. Minister of Tourism: Mazen al-Salhani
21. Minister of Administrative Development: Mr. Muhammad Skaf
22. Minister of Transport: Mr. Yaroub Badr
23. Minister of Information: Hamza Mustafa

Of the 23 members, nine have [links](#) to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and/or HTS' Idlib-based Syrian Salvation Government.

Dynamics with the Self Administration

Despite an agreement between caretaker authorities and the Self Administration, clashes continue around the Tishreen Dam front between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA). Turkish forces also continued to shell SDF positions near the Tishreen Dam with heavy artillery and mortar shells, while SDF drone strikes regularly retaliated against SNA positions around the dam and the Qere Qozak Bridge further north. While the daily clashes are ongoing, the lines of control have remained frozen for months. Away from the frontlines in eastern Aleppo, Turkish drones carried out attacks in other parts of the north-east.

Meanwhile, ISIS cells continue to launch attacks across the north-east, injuring two SDF troops in a roadside IED attack. In response to the ongoing ISIS threat, the SDF carried out raids and arrests with the backing of US-led International Coalition forces in Hasakeh and Al-Tabqa in Raqqa.