



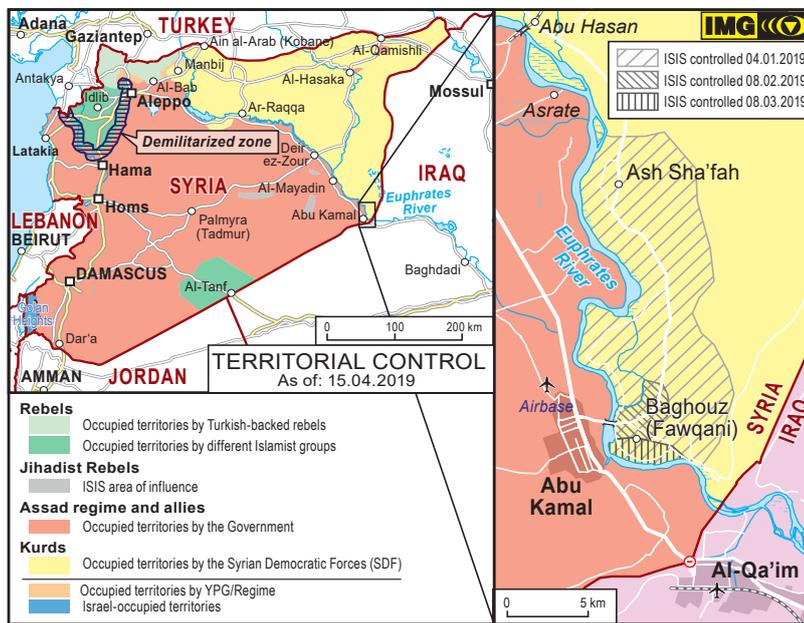
# FACT SHEET SYRIA

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Over the last weeks Turkey and Russia intensified their cooperation in northern Syria. For the future, joint Turkish-Russian patrols to secure opposition held areas in Aleppo and Idlib are planned, in addition to the current practice of coordinated efforts, whereby Turkey patrols the opposition held area around Aleppo and Idlib from the inside and Russia from the outside. According to the Turkish minister of defence, a joint coordination center for their activities in Syria will be established. Turkey also eased its border policy by re-opening two new border crossings, one to Latakia, the Alawite heartland, another from Kilis to Azaz. The border to the Kurdish areas, however, remains closed. On March 23, by capturing Baghouz, the Syrian Demo-

cratic Forces (SDF) seized the last population center under ISIS control. However, ISIS still possesses the capacity to perpetrate isolated attacks against the SDF, as well as against government forces in northern and eastern Syria.

Kurdish representatives decided to call for the establishment of a special tribunal of the International Criminal Court in northern Syria to prosecute incarcerated ISIS members. This decision was taken (a) because home countries of captured ISIS members pursue different and sometimes contradictory policies regarding the handling of their citizens, and (b) because hosting such a court under Kurdish auspices in northern Syria would give international legitimacy to "Rojava".



Note: No claim to completeness of the map is put forward.

## MAP ANALYSIS

The territory of ISIS reached its maximum extent of about 400,000 km<sup>2</sup> in summer 2014, approximately the size of Sweden. In contrast, ISIS controlled an area of just 20 km length and 5 km width east of the Euphrates river, in January 2019. After having suffered further loss of territory since the beginning of the year, ISIS eventually lost its last stronghold in Baghouz in March. Subsequently the SDF declared victory over ISIS. Operations to eliminate remnants of ISIS, hiding in caves and tunnels, continued even weeks after the announced victory. ISIS still conducts attacks, especially in the area between Al-Mayadeen, Palmyra and Deir ez-Zour.

## FORECAST

The security arrangements in Aleppo and Idlib have proven to be lucrative for both, Turkey and Russia. Mutual trust was established, which lays the foundation for further cooperation. Turkey, though, faces two challenges, on one hand it has to prevent Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) from carrying out further attacks against the regime and on the other hand Turkey must persuade HTS to strengthen collaboration with the Turkish army in maintaining security in Idlib.

After having taken control over Baghouz and having eliminated the common enemy, ISIS, the future of the SDF remains unclear. Since negotiations between the government and the SDF stalled and the long-term presence of US forces on the ground is not a given anymore, some Arab leaders within the SDF tend towards direct rapprochement with Damascus.

Prospects for a Kurdish operation against Afrin remain rather dim, despite the SDF's higher availability of troops after the last battles in the Euphrates valley and contrary to the official announcement of SDF commander Kobane. The YPG's latest wave of attacks on Turkish forces and their allied militias in northern Syria, as well as its extension to al-Bab and northern Idlib must be seen in the context of the increasing Russian-Turkish cooperation and the gridlock on negotiations between the SDF and Damascus.

*The periodically published Fact Sheet compiles and analyzes significant developments pertaining to the Syrian conflict while providing maps and an outlook of possible future events.*

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SOURCES: MEDIA ANALYSIS; LAYOUT: REF III/Medien, IMG



## INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

14.03.: During the third donor conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region”, co-chaired by the EU and UN, 7 bn US dollars (6.2 bn €) were pledged for 2019. According to the UN, however, 8.8 bn US dollars are needed.

15.03.: The Turkish Red Crescent sent two aid trucks via the new border gate to Syria named “Olive Branch”. The crossing point is situated near Jenderis and has been open since the end of 2018. Two other border gates, the crossing from Hatay to Latakia and the border gate between Kilis and Azaz, were opened for regular trade the week before.

18.03.: Assad received a joint Iraqi-Iranian military delegation in Damascus in order to discuss fields of development and advancing the joint anti-terror battle.

18.03.: According to the commander of the Iraqi Army, Ghanemi, Iraq intends to open the al-Qaim border crossing between Syria and Iraq in the near future.

21.03.: US-president Trump announced that the US will formally recognize Israel's claim on the Golan Heights. Subsequent protests against Trump's statement took place in Damascus and other Syrian provinces. A UN-spokesperson confirmed that nothing changed regarding the UN's rejection of the Israeli occupation.

26.03.: Turkish and Russian troops started coordinated patrols in northern Syria to secure the region Tal Rifaat, east of Afrin, which was formerly held by the YPG.

27.03.: Israeli airstrikes hit Iranian targets in the industrial area of Shaykh Najjar and near the Al-Nayrab military airport, both near Aleppo. Although the attacks were partly warded off, they led to a power outage in Aleppo and to the death of seven fighters associated with Iran. Further Israeli attacks on April 13 were directed against military installations in Masyaf, west of Hama.

01.04.: Under pressure from the US, France banned all incoming and outgoing flights of Iran's Mahan Air, which is accused of transporting military equipment and personnel to Syria as well to other war zones in the Middle East. Germany had already suspended flight operations by Mahan Air in January.

04.04.: Putin and Netanyahu met in Moscow to talk about, inter alia, the coordination between their armed forces in Syria.

08.04.: During a meeting with Turkish president Erdoğan, Putin announced that Turkish and Russian troops will carry out joint patrols in Idlib. There had been no information concerning ongoing Russian patrols outside the demilitarized zone so far. Turkey, however, has already patrolled between the Turkish observation posts in Idlib since the beginning of March and uses military aircraft in Syrian airspace for reconnaissance purposes.

12.04.: According to the annual report on the implementation of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, a program to support Syrian refugees, 84 humanitarian, health as well as socio-economic assistance projects have been contracted so far. Since March 2016 two billion Euros, comprising one third of the total budget, have already been spent.

## MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

23.03.: The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) proclaimed victory over ISIS in Syria, having captured the last ISIS bastion Baghouz after six weeks of fighting.

26.03.: The first attack by ISIS after the loss of Baghouz targeted a checkpoint of the SDF, west of the city Manbij. Seven SDF fighters died during the attack, which ISIS framed as attack against the PKK.

28.03.: ISIS carried out attacks on a regular basis, particularly in the area around al-Mayadeen, Deir ez-Zour and al-Sukhna. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), ISIS is still present in an area of about 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> northeast of Palmyra.

28.03.: Commander-in-chief of the SDF, Mazloum Kobane, announced to take Afrin from the Turkish military and its allies. Due to the military balance of power, however, this seems unlikely. The YPG carried out numerous small attacks against the Turkish military and its allied militias in Afrin, Tall Rifat and Al-Bab since the beginning of April. Several people, among them a Turkish soldier, were killed.

02.04.: Despite the announcement of the victory over ISIS, the SDF were still conducting security operations in the surroundings of Baghouz, where numerous ISIS fighters were hiding in trenches and dens.

04.04.: The Syrian Human Rights Network (SNHR) published a report stating that a total of 221 chemical attacks have been documented since December 2012 in Syria, killing more than 1,400 people.

07.04.: Combat activities between government forces and oppositional militias in northwestern Syria caused the death of at least 15 people. According to the SOHR, there have been a total of 45 casualties over the past five days, the majority in rebel-held areas. Russian and Syrian airstrikes in the south and west of Idlib, targeting HTS infrastructure, had intensified within the last weeks

09.04.: According to the SOHR an explosion in Raqqqa killed 13 people, among them four members of the SDF. On the same day another explosion occurred in the city of Shadadi, which is also under control of the SDF..

14.04.: At least 11 people were killed and a dozen more injured during an attack in Aleppo. Rockets were fired from opposition-held areas outside the city and hit several neighbourhoods in government-controlled Aleppo.

## DOMESTIC POLITICS

10.03.: Hundreds of Syrians protested in the city of Daraa against the construction of a new statue of Hafez Assad. The original was destroyed at the beginning of the civil war.

18.03.: The UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, arrived in Damascus to negotiate with government officials the implementation of a Constitutional Committee. Syrian foreign minister Mualllem expressed the regime's willingness for cooperation regarding a political solution.

22.03.: Mazloum Kobane laid out two primary conditions of the SDF for reconciliation with Damascus: The autonomous administration has to be preserved and legally recognized. Furthermore, the SDF shall continue to exist and the security of the territory east of the Euphrates should remain under the SDF's responsibility.

30.03.: The Syrian Salvation Government, an alternative government of the Syrian Opposition in Idlib, announced the names of the 102 members of the newly elected Shura Council, which has the task of organizing parliamentary elections. The election of the council was largely criticized by the opposition in Idlib as it further consolidated the political power of HTS.

08.04.: During a speech on the occasion of the victory over ISIS, General Mazloum Kobane signalled his willingness to negotiate with Turkey and presented conditions for talks. Kobane demanded that Turkey must withdraw from Afrin, which has been occupied since March 2018, and declare its willingness to end military action against Syrian Kurdistan.



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