

NOVEMBER 2023

CA - SYR
CRISIS ANALYSIS - SYRIA



SYRIA

MONTHLY REPORT



This timeline provides a snapshot of key events throughout the month. These events have been selected for their impact and relevance, and do not necessarily feature as full articles in the Monthly Report.



Basic services

Solar power substitutes poor electricity supply in northeast

The use of solar power is increasing in the northeast, largely due to unreliability of existing electrical infrastructure. Locals reported that the initial cost of the systems has gone down, from \$1,700 in 2022 to \$1,100, although is still unaffordable for many.



Humanitarian updates

SARC overcharges for aid deliveries

Izra' district, Jasim subdistrict: Residents in Jasim have complained that the Syrian Red Crescent has been charging a SYP 10,000 transportation fee to deliver aid baskets. The Jasim city local council has responded, saying a fee of SYP 5,000–7,000 was agreed, and that a proposal to charge SYP 10,000 had been rejected for being too high.



Basic services

New solar energy project launched in Al Bab

Al Bab subdistrict: A solar energy project to power the water wells of Al-Bab city is launched by the SIG, local councils, and community leaders in cooperation with the International Credit Fund. The project includes seven solar power stations that include 2,545 solar panels with a capacity of 1.15 megawatts. The panels are designed to rotate with the sun to maximise efficiency.



Conflict and security

Aleppo neighborhoods cordoned by 4th Division

Jebel Saman subdistrict, Aleppo city: Media sources report that the government-affiliated 4th Division cordoned off the Ashrafiyeh and Sheikh Maksoud neighborhoods of Aleppo city, which are governed by the Autonomous Administration, preventing fuel and raw materials from entering. This forced the Autonomous Administration to close the schools in both neighborhoods, because of a lack of transport options for students.

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Humanitarian updates

1 million children in northwest out of school

UNOCHA reports that 1 million out of 2.2 million children in northwest Syria are estimated to be out of school. In IDP camps, 57% of children lack access to primary schools and 80% lack access to secondary schools. Children who go to school frequently face learning disruptions due to external conflict causing closures, and persisting economic hardship.

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Politics and policy

SSG sets price purchase price for wheat

The SSG's Ministry of Agriculture set the purchasing price of hard and soft wheat at \$350 and \$325 per tonne. In 2021, the Ministry announced interest-free loans to farmers who owned private wells to boost the installation of solar-powered pumps and drip irrigation systems.

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Humanitarian updates

UNHCR discusses conditions for refugee returns

The UNHCR is working towards making conditions in Syria fit for the return of refugees, according to a statement by the commissioner, Filippo Grandi, at the Security Council. The cost of the initiative, which will require refugees have access to essential services, housing, and international support, requires funding of \$600 million by the end of 2023.

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Executive summary

In south and central Syria, the electricity minister Ghassan al-Zamel highlighted the challenges facing the electricity sector. These included partially operational power plants, a damaged electricity grid, and insufficient fuel to run the stations, all interconnected problems that have made poor electricity provision a chronic issue. The government has been conducting repairs to increase power generation but lacks the necessary resources and foreign currency to provide fuel for its power plants. Alternative measures, including encouraging a switch to renewable energy systems and permitting private generator subscriptions, have had only a limited impact. Separately, in Dar'a, former opposition leaders met in Tafas city despite the tense relationship between them. The meeting did not have a clearly stated purpose, leading to speculation about its reasons and what its results could be.

In northeast Syria, tribal leader and prominent anti-SDF local figure, Ibrahim al-Hifl, announced the formation of the 'Arab Tribal Forces' amid the intensifying insurgency against the SDF. The SDF had set up 120 military positions along the Euphrates to prevent government-affiliated militias from crossing into Autonomous Administration territory to support the insurgents. Reports also surfaced of government forces providing artillery support for insurgents, leading to an exchange of fire with the SDF in Deir-ez-Zor. Fuel shortages continued throughout the month impacting services and increasing the financial burden on residents. The Administration increased transportation prices after drivers complained of the increased cost of fuel and spare parts. Private generator owners increased electricity rationing because of difficulties in procuring enough fuel. Farmers also complained about the lack of subsidized fuel, forcing them to purchase it for soaring prices on the black market.

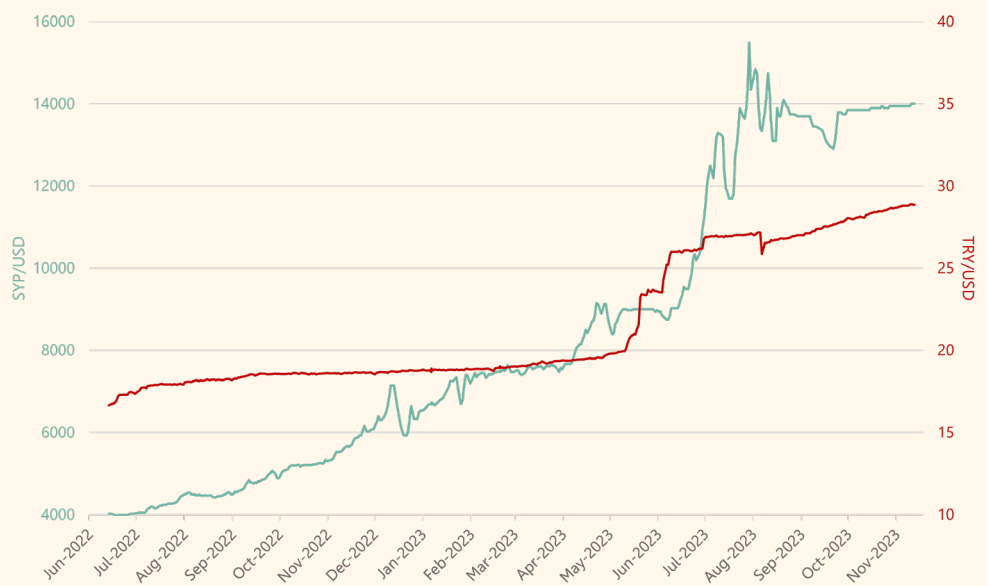
In northern Aleppo, the armed factions of the Mu'tasim Division, Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah and the Shahba Gathering announced the formation of the 'Unified Force.' The collaboration between the three factions is noteworthy, in that the Mu'tasim Division is one of the largest groups in the Syrian National Army, while the Shahba gathering is reportedly an HTS ally in northern Aleppo. The merger is an indicator of evolving relationships between armed actors in northwest Syria which could result in a strategic shift in the security landscape. Local councils in northern Aleppo announced that Syrians in Turkey who hold a temporary protection card (*kimlik*), dual citizenship, tourist residency, or other residency permits would be allowed to register for a month-long visit to Syria on the condition that a \$200 entry fee is paid per person. The announcement was not corroborated by the Turkish authorities, raising concerns among those who wish to visit their relatives in opposition-held areas of being blocked from returning to Turkey.

Cover photo: Jarablus border crossing, northern Syria. (Source: Getty Images).

Economic indicators

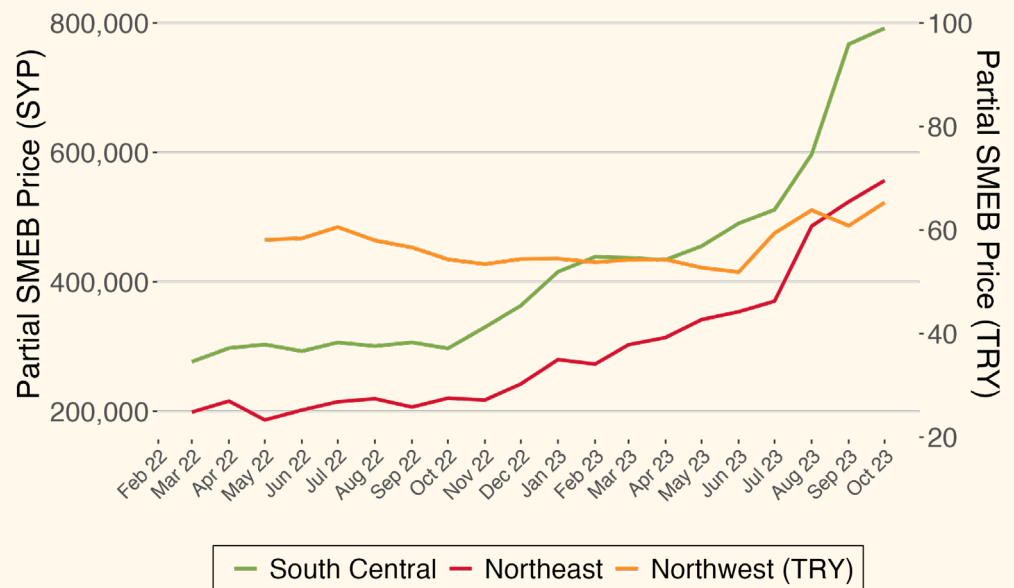
Economic indicator 1.
 Official and parallel market exchange rates, SYP/USD and TRY/USD

	September 2023	October 2023	November 2023
SYP/USD official exchange rate	8,585.0	11,500	12,600
SYP/USD parallel market rate	13,884.0 (1%)	13,728.8 (-1.1%)	14,163.9 (3.2%)
TRY/USD official rate	27.0 (0.4%)	27.9 (3.2%)	28.7 (2.9%)



Economic indicator 2.
 SYP/USD and TRY/USD exchange rates

Economic indicator 3.
 Change in partial SMEB price by zone of control.
 The partial SMEB price monitoring tool is in part built on Sphere recommendations of a 2100kcal daily diet per person. Items covered in the assessment include basic food items such as bread, rice, bulghur, lentils, oil, sugar, meats, vegetables, and fruit.



South and Central Syria

Electricity supply falls far short of demand

On 14 November, the Syrian electricity minister Ghassan al-Zamel highlighted the main challenges facing the electricity sector in an interview with pro-government media. Electricity provision in government-held areas is hampered by insufficient funds to rehabilitate power plants, repair the electricity grid, and pay for or produce a sufficient amount of fuel. The government has so far failed to find a solution for these interconnected problems, indicating that electricity provision is unlikely to improve in the near future.

Minister of Electricity announces repairs

The electricity minister, Ghassan al-Zamel, told pro-government media that repairs were made to the Aleppo thermal power plant and al-Zara power plant in Hama, in government-held areas. Zamel [said](#) that the al-Zara power plant's first steam turbine was repaired, increasing its production capacity from 110 to 190 MW.¹ Aleppo's thermal power plant, considered to be the most modern, only had two out of its five turbines repaired due to the limited resources. Both turbines reportedly added 404 MW of electricity, 20% of the 2,000 MW currently produced in government-held areas. The Ministry of Electricity is [currently negotiating](#) with several companies regarding the rehabilitation of the thermal plant's remaining turbines which will add 606 MW of electricity.

Damaged infrastructure, insufficient supply and fuel shortages

Syria's electricity sector faces other significant challenges aside from inoperable turbines. The country's electricity infrastructure was heavily [damaged](#) by military operations in the past decade. The electricity grid is in poor condition and unable to transmit sufficient electricity to residents. Local sources highlighted that displacement added pressure on the already strained electricity grid in certain locations and that the government only conducted minimal repairs in areas that it retook.² Zamel said that while the condition of Syria's power plants are not ideal, they are in good shape after the series of repairs done by the Ministry of Electricity. Zamel pointed out that these [plants can generate 5,000–6,000 MW of electricity](#), the minimum amount of electricity needed in government-held areas, if enough fuel is available. However, the government cannot secure enough fuel and often must share scarce resources to meet its allies' domestic economic interests. For instance, Zamel noted that the Homs fertilizer complex managed by the Russian engineering company, Stroytransgaz, is [using](#) 1.2 million m³ of

1 According to Syria Report, al-Zara power plant [produced](#) 21% of electricity in government-held areas in 2021.

2 Local sources stated that the government conducted minimal repairs to the electricity grid in Yalda in south Damascus and Darayya in Rural Damascus. Returnees complained of poor service provision and living conditions.

natural gas to produce fertilizer, an amount that could generate an additional 300 MW if transferred to gas power plants.

Renewable fails to make up for shortages

Aside from attempts to repair infrastructure, the Syrian government enacted other measures to improve electricity provision in government-held areas. In 2021, the Syrian government [created](#) the 'Renewable Energy Support Fund' to provide financial support to residents and businesses who wish to install renewable energy systems. As of October 2023, the Fund [received](#) 483 applications and successfully installed 151 renewable energy systems.³ The government also [allowed](#) investors to set up renewable energy power plants and sell the generated electricity to subscribers or the government at pre-approved prices. These measures are part of the government's [plan](#) to have 7% of electricity generated through renewable energy projects by 2030.

These measures, however, did not improve electricity provision significantly. Despite the installation of dozens of systems, the Fund's overall impact remains limited; the initial allocated budget of SYP 10 billion is enough either for 50 commercial, industrial or agricultural projects or 300 residential systems. Moreover, the fund [did not](#) and still does not appear to have a proper allocation in the state budget, instead relying on various income streams ranging from services to voluntary donations. The government's attempts at encouraging investment in renewable energy projects also do not appear to be having the intended effect, likely because foreign investors are hesitant to invest in government-held areas due to the Caesar sanctions, low purchasing power in the domestic market, and disincentivizing policies such as setting pre-approved prices that could lead to financial losses.

The government has now permitted the use of private generators in [Aleppo](#) and [Damascus](#) cities after their use was limited to Rural Damascus. Despite providing the required additional hours of electricity, private generator subscriptions are considered costly, making them unaffordable to the majority of residents and forcing the ones who subscribe to [ration](#) their use. Local and media sources [stated](#) that the 4th Division took control of many private generators, making the business profitable because of the relatively cheap diesel that it can smuggle through its crossings.

Former opposition commanders meet in Tafas

Dar'a governorate's [rival](#) former opposition commanders [met](#) in Tafas city's al-Takwa mosque on 5 November, sparking controversy. Meetings bringing former opposition commanders together post-2018 are rare and usually difficult to organize because of security instability and general mistrust between the different actors; the last meeting took place [two years ago](#) with the aim of forming a unified political and military body but yielded no results. However, ISIS' appear-

³ The Fund provides [loans](#) up to 35 million SYP for residences [interest-free](#) and up to SYP 200 million for commercial, industrial, and agricultural use at a [14% interest rate](#) paid over 5 to 15 years.

ance in the governorate last year and the need for representation amid regional developments could have prompted the meeting to take place and make the formation of a unified coordinating body a necessity.

Containing ISIS, protecting borders or preserving security?

The attendees included the commander of the Eighth Brigade and members of the Tafas and Dar'a al-Balad Central Committees, among others. The aim of the meeting and its results were unknown leading to speculation about its true purpose. Media sources [claimed](#) that former opposition commanders met to coordinate their operations against ISIS, to end security instability, and combat narcotics smuggling across the border, but without mention of whether this was being done in coordination with regional actors. Former opposition commanders have previously avoided responsibility for combating narcotics smuggling operations (some former opposition commanders who attended the meeting have instead been [sanctioned](#) for engaging in narcotics smuggling and production), while placing blame on the Syrian government for fomenting instability through local proxies and for sponsoring smuggling operations.

[According](#) to a strategic military analyst, General Ismail Ayoub, the commanders met under the government's instruction to coordinate efforts to prevent Iran-backed militias from conducting attacks from southern Syria against Israel. Ayoub added that the government has used its ties with these groups to help them form a military force that can protect the borders, in the absence of significant government control over Iran-backed militias. While many of the former-opposition groups have ties with the Syrian government, some maintain a certain level of autonomy and occasionally [clash](#) with government forces.

Local sources noted that the meeting could also be a stepping stone to the formation of a unified organization in Dar'a. While the relationship between the different commanders had been tense and sometimes hostile, and unification difficult, local sources stated that coordination and communication among these groups started back in October 2022, after they were forced to coordinate to [expel](#) ISIS from the governorate. Local sources added that the groups also saw the need to find common ground amid local and regional developments. In light of the protests in As-Sweida, the formation of the '[Supreme Council of Dar'a Governorate](#)' formed by actors both outside and inside Syria, local groups could be attempting to ensure their representation in any form of political change in Dar'a should such events pick up momentum. All of these factors could have eventually culminated in the meeting taking place between the governorate's commanders as a stepping stone to the formation of a unified front to represent and defend Dar'a. However, it is uncertain what form this potential new front will take.

Meeting unlikely to yield a united front

Reasons for the meeting may not be enough for former opposition groups to successfully form a unified organization. Divides between the armed groups could be too strong; for example, on 10 November, Mahmoud al-Kefri, a prominent local journalist, was [killed](#) in Moraba, Busra Esh-Sham subdistrict, by a combatant operating in an armed group led by the commander of al-Dere' Battalion, Abu Salem. The Eighth Brigade later [attacked](#) the al-Dere' Battalion, killing two

combatants and one civilian while attacking the group members' properties. The Eighth Brigade's reaction to Kefri's murder could have been motivated by an old feud between Jaysh al-Yarmouk in Moraba, now known as al-Dere' Battalion and the Busra Esh-Sham-based Qouwat Shabab al-Sunna who later formed into the Eighth Brigade. Following the incident, local sources said that Abu Salem avoided retaliation and turned himself in to the former opposition groups in Nasib, Dar'a subdistrict, claiming that he did not order Kefri's death and that the perpetrator acted in solitude. Abu Salem was later sent to Dar'a al-Balad for questioning by the Central Committee as part of its investigation into Kefri's murder.

The incident shows that relationships between former opposition groups are fragile given the pre-existing divisions, highlighting the existing obstacles in potential future unification – not to mention a higher degree of cooperation, collaboration, or coherence; local commanders in Dar'a face significant challenges ahead amid mistrust and pre-existing divisions if they choose to find common ground and work together.

Northeast Syria

Tensions in Deir-ez-Zor

On 1 November, media outlets reported that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) began [establishing](#) 120 new military points alongside the Euphrates River in Deir-ez-Zor. These new positions, stretching from Jazaret Elbuhmeid to Al Bagouz, are reportedly an attempt to curb fuel smuggling and prevent government and pro-Iranian forces from infiltrating SDF-held areas. Attacks targeting SDF positions continued throughout November – albeit at a decreased rate in comparison to August. These hostilities were coupled with media reports revealing the official announcement of a unified command to oversee the Arab Tribal Forces in the fight against the SDF, and continued reports of government interference in these events.

Interestingly, data on conflict patterns in Deir-ez-Zor seem to lend some support to this. Though the number of incidents is not alarming, nor indicative of an imminent threat by the government to launch an offensive, they do reflect CA-SYR's previous analysis on the ongoing security dynamics in Deir-ez-Zor, which argue that the prolonged lack of durable solutions for peace creates greater opportunity for third-party actors to gain influence on a certain area through influencing events.^{4,5}

New Arab Tribal Forces announced

On 9 November, tribal leader and prominent SDF rival Ibrahim al-Hifil [released](#) a voice recording officially announcing the creation of a unified leadership overseeing the 'Arab Tribal Forces', a group of 11 brigades made up of Arab tribes from Deir-ez-Zor, in their fight against the SDF. Details of the composition of the leadership group remain unknown. Despite Hifil insisting that the newly formed tribal force has no ties to any entity, including political party or external actor, media outlets [quoted](#) local activists saying government-affiliated groups are involved.⁶ Though unsubstantiated, this was supported by similar [accusations](#) made by the SDF, and arguably strengthened by pro-government [social media pages](#) and [media outlets](#) praising Hifil and the establishment of the Arab Tribal Forces that seek to target the SDF in a way that forces "the militia" and "its US-sponsor" to rethink their presence in the region.

Conflict patterns throughout November also lend truth to accusations of the government's increased involvement in the fight against the SDF. Although the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ([ACLED](#)), a non-profit NGO focused on crisis mapping and conflict analysis, recorded a decrease in the total

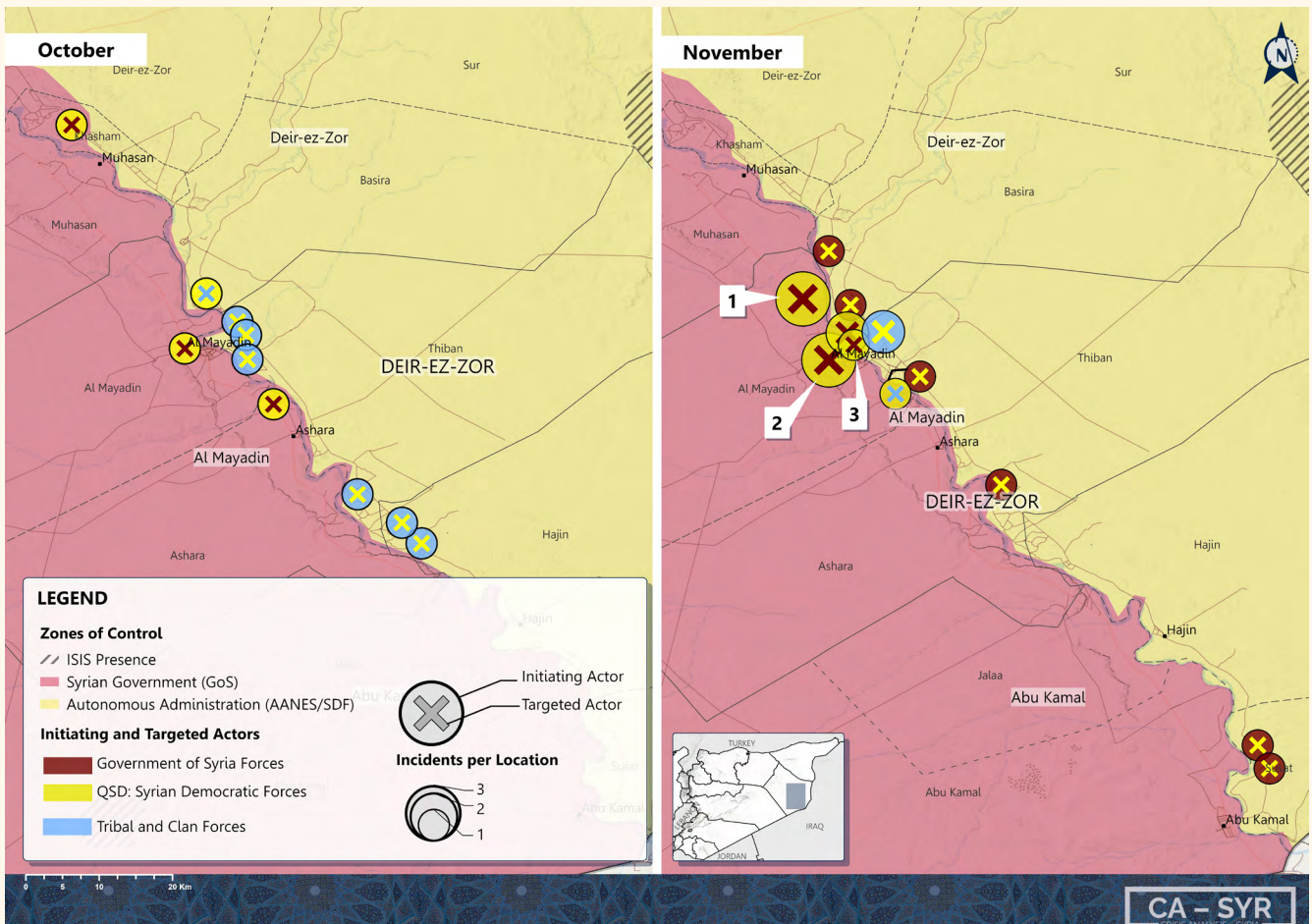
4 CA-SYR, [October Monthly Report](#), November 2023

5 CA-SYR, [August Monthly Report](#), September 2023

6 Al-Hifil's voice recording revealed that the brigades are: Liwa Suqoor al-Bakir; Liwa Suqoor al-Thilth; Liwa Suqoor albu-Kamel; Liwa Suqoor albu-Kamal; Liwa Suqoor al-Bagara; Liwa Suqoor al-Obeidiyeh; Liwa Suqoor albu-Saraya; Liwa Suqoor al-Mashahda; Liwa Suqoor al-Majawda; Liwa Fadiyeen Suqoor al-Furat; Liwa Suqoor al-Zubaid

number of security incidents led by the Arab Tribal Forces targeting the SDF throughout November (32 as of 28 November compared to 64 in October), it also recorded an increase in the amount of shelling between the SDF and government-affiliated forces in Deir-ez-Zor.⁷ In November, ACLED recorded seven incidents where government-affiliated forces shelled SDF positions in Deir-ez-Zor, compared to only two up to 28 October. However, since 29 October, ACLED started reporting government-affiliated armed groups taking part in some of the attacks led by the Arab Tribal Forces, allegedly shelling SDF positions. This continued in November as more reports of government-affiliated armed groups allegedly shelling SDF positions emerged.

Similarly, ACLED recorded another eight incidents where the SDF shelled government-affiliated forces in Deir-ez-Zor throughout November, and were all reported to be retaliatory. In comparison, only three incidents of the same nature were recorded in October. Interestingly, incidents labeled 1, 2, and 3 on the map below were all reported incidents where the SDF was targeting Arab Tribal Forces positions in government-held areas, strengthening claims of cooperation with the government.



A comparison between November and October 2023 shelling patterns in Deir-ez-Zor. Source: [ACLED](#)

⁷ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ([ACLED](#)). Data accessed 30 November 2023

The events in November should not be viewed as an imminent threat by government-affiliated forces to take control over the SDF-held parts of Deir-ez-Zor. Instead, they are largely reflective of the analysis provided by CA-SYR over the past [months](#), emphasizing that prolonging the path towards sustainable long-term peace continues to risk creating new potential spoilers that hinder the prospects for stability. Since hostilities erupted in August, the Autonomous Administration and the SDF have [yet](#) to provide solutions to deep-rooted grievances against them from Deir-ez-Zor communities. Mention of reform continues to be broad, and lacks [concrete](#) plans for action. As evident in November, this only enables third-party actors to leverage the situation and create spheres of influence to destabilize SDF-held areas by influencing constituents within its areas of control.

Fuel shortages increase prices, reduce energy provision

Media and local sources continued reporting fuel shortages throughout November; however, unlike October – where shortages were reportedly limited to subsidized fuel for heating – local sources are stressing that the shortages are now affecting electricity provided by private generators, and for transportation and agriculture, hiking prices and straining livelihoods.

Fuel shortages were initially intensified by Turkish bombardments earlier in [October](#) and have since become increasingly severe. On 6 November multiple sources reported that the price of fuel had [increased](#) by approximately 5%. While it is likely that the price increase was due to several reasons, media outlets [reported](#) that the depreciation of the Syrian pound from SYP 13,900 to 14,100 per USD prompted the price hike.

On 11 November, [reports showed](#) that the Autonomous Administration increased transportation costs for trips between Al-Hasakeh and Quamishli by 25%. According to the new pricing set by the Administration, residents in Al-Hasakeh now have to pay SYP 8,000 instead of SYP 6,000 for a one-way trip to reach Amuda, and SYP 10,000 instead of SYP 8,000 for a one-way trip to Quamishli city. The decision to increase transportation costs came at the requests of drivers operating buses, who have been constantly complaining of fuel shortages and increased maintenance costs. By 14 November, local sources in Quamishli confirmed the existence of shortages, noting that the majority of fuel stations in Quamishli and Al-Hasakeh did not have quantities of fuel for sale.

Shortages hit private electricity generators

In Ar-Raqqa, Deir-ez-Zor and Menbij, multiple sources noted a decrease in the number of electricity hours provided by private generators.⁸ According to local sources in Ar-Raqqa, residents of neighborhoods that do not have access to

⁸ 'Private generators' refers to a private sector establishment/actor providing electricity to multiple households. Though private, these generators receive subsidized fuel from the Autonomous Administration in an attempt by the latter to keep subscription prices relatively low and affordable, and ensure that continuity of electricity flow

electricity from the grid now receive only seven hours of electricity at night, with officials saying that the reason behind the increased rationing is, once again, due to the shortage of fuel provided by the Autonomous Administration to generator owners. Prior to the shortages, generator-powered neighborhoods would receive the same amount of electricity at night, in addition to two extra hours during the day.

In an attempt to diffuse community frustration, local authorities in Ar-Raqqa requested generator owners to [decrease](#) subscription fees to SYP 7,000 per ampere, from SYP 9,000 per ampere. However, local sources reported growing anger from residents towards the authorities as families are required to be increasingly nocturnal, conducting household chores at night when they can run electrical machinery.

In Deir-ez-Zor, 46 generator owners in Abu Hamam and Kishkiyeh reportedly went on strike, against the Administration's decision to cut allocations of subsidized [fuel](#). Generator owners used to [receive](#) between 600 and 1,000 liters of subsidized fuel at SYP 125 per liter – depending on the size of their generators and area needs – to operate. Since 20 October, however, the Administration cut down allocations, giving generator owners between 300 and 500 liters, and revoked the licenses of 11 generators after being accused of not conforming to its standards.

While the Administration later went back on their decision to revoke licenses, electricity provision did not improve, and rather decreased from five hours before the strike, to four hours after. The area's dependence on private generators, coupled with the strike and fuel shortages, are likely to compound matters further as winter approaches. Interestingly, however, media outlets also [reported](#) an increase in the use of solar power in Deir-ez-Zor as locals reported that initial set-up costs of panel systems had gone down from \$1,700 in 2022 to \$1,100. Despite the developments, the costs remain unaffordable for many, and thus an unlikely alternative.

Farmers hit by higher production costs

Local sources in Ar-Raqqa, Quamishli and Menbij also noted that the fuel crunch is impacting farmers. For instance, on 6 November, the lack of subsidized fuel forced farmers to buy on the black market, pushing plowing and irrigation costs up. Local sources in Ar-Raqqa reported that farmers need three liters of fuel per hour to operate water pumps for irrigation, costing over SYP 16,000 per hour. Meanwhile, local sources in Quamishli noted that tractor owners are being forced to buy fuel from the black market at SYP 4,300 per liter, expecting plowing prices to increase at a similar level to reports emerging in Menbij. The increased costs borne by farmers could pose threats to the upcoming winter crop season, likely through farmers decreasing their output, or passing on cost increases to customers.

Northwest Syria

'Unified Force' formed of three opposition factions

On 5 November, three of the most influential armed groups in northern Aleppo, Mu'tasim Division, Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah and the Shahba Gathering [announced](#) a new formation under the name the 'Unified Force'. The new formation includes about 20,000 combatants, mainly deployed in the Euphrates Shield areas, particularly around Azaz, Mare', Al-Bab, Jarablus, Suran, and several other small villages. According to the newly established force's media office, the Unified Force aims to [ensure](#) the preservation of civil peace by preventing the recurrence of armed conflicts stemming from the ineffectiveness of the Syrian National Army's (SNA) central leadership to control various armed groups amid increased polarization.

Changing dynamics of armed groups in northwest Syria

Military mergers within the SNA are not novel, with several groups – the '[Unified Command Room - Azm](#),' the '[Revolutionaries for Liberation](#),' the '[Liberation and Construction Movement](#),' and the 'Joint Force'⁹ – emerging over the past two years. What distinguishes the Unified Force from previous formations is its inclusion of the [Al-Shahba Gathering](#).¹⁰ The Gathering has been accused by the SNA of loyalty towards Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), however there has been previous tension between HTS and the other two groups in the Unified Force, the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah and the Al-Mu'tasim Division. It is also important to highlight that the announcement of the new formation came after the [September 2023](#) clashes between groups affiliated with the Al-Shahba Gathering and SNA factions from the Second Corps in several areas in rural Aleppo. Consequently, the merger is an indicator of evolving relationships between armed actors in northwest Syria.

Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah is one of the largest SNA factions and the largest in the SNA's Third Corps. While it remained neutral in the September confrontations between HTS and other SNA factions, its relationship with HTS is known to be tense. Considered one of the largest formations in the region, HTS and Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah competed over influence and resources earlier on in the Syrian conflict. For instance, in [Eastern Ghouta](#), Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah allied itself with Jaish Al-Islam against HTS in confrontations that ultimately led to HTS' expulsion from the area. More recently in northwest Syria, in addition to direct clashes between both groups in [June](#) and [October](#) 2022, HTS entered the areas of

9 Includes the Sultan Sulaiman Shah Division and Al-Hamza Division.

10 Al-Shahba Gathering was formed last February by the factions Ahrar Al-Sham - Eastern Sector, Division 50 - Ahrar Al-Tawhid and Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement.

northern Aleppo to support other HTS-affiliated¹¹ and Al-Shahba-affiliated¹² groups in their fight against the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah, ultimately contributing to a reduction of the group's influence in Al-Bab and Afrin.

Similarly, the Mu'tasim Division is the second largest faction in the SNA's Second Corps. While it has not had direct confrontations with HTS, the Division supported Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah in its confrontations against HTS. The Mu'tasim Division also has several outstanding grievances with HTS, after [accusing](#) HTS of kidnapping its former leader, Muhammad Khalil, in June 2016.

The losses incurred by the Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah from previous direct confrontations with HTS may have prompted it to try to redraw its relationship with HTS. This formation could also be considered a further indication of HTS's ambitions and interests in northern Aleppo and its resources, mainly the [Al-Hamran crossing](#), as the formation gives legitimacy to the HTS-affiliated Al-Shahba Gathering which controls the crossing. The new alliance will likely ensure that HTS will not directly interfere in northern Aleppo areas as long as their interests are protected.

This development may also indicate that HTS has secured its interests in Euphrates Shield areas, after securing its interests in Olive Branch territory through expanding its list of allies to incorporate the Al-Hamza and the Sultan Suleiman Shah Divisions. As a result, though surprising, Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah aligning itself with groups affiliated with HTS could also merely be a continuation of HTS' policy of co-opting former rivals after weakening them, as happened in with the [Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement](#) which joined HTS before being defeated and dismantled by HTS.

Contrary to the Unified Force's statement, this unfortunately does not mean stability is likely to increase in northern Aleppo. In actuality, this alliance potentially harms the interests of other, large SNA factions, such as the Sultan Murad Division, who are also vying for influence and resources. As such, this new formation could mean other actors react to protect their standings and interests, further complicating alliances, relationships, and conflict dynamics in northwest Syria. This could ultimately disrupt residents' daily lives, interrupt humanitarian access and programs, and impact markets and livelihoods.

Turkey chooses to monitor rather than intervene

Fragmentation among the SNA, the absence of a unified leadership, and the lack of factions' commitment to the SNA's structure is not a secret, despite the Turkish relationship to these developments. Over the past few years, Turkish influence has not translated into unified SNA structure, despite its sponsorship and direct support for member actors. This disunity is, in part, explained by inter-groups dynamics, with HTS in particular. While HTS seeks to gain more influence in northern Aleppo, Turkish forces have intervened in past attempts, albeit with varying degrees of reactivity and resources, to limit HTS's expansion of influence in northern Aleppo. It is also a possibility that Turkey, by interacting

11 Sultan Sulaiman Shah Division and Al-Hamza Division received HTS support against Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyah.

12 Ahrar Al-Sham-Eastern Sector which is part of Al-Shahba Gathering.

with these diverging factions, could contribute to fractures and rivalries, which in turn hinders the creation of a unified powerful body with a more monopolistic influence in northwest Syria.

More Syrians allowed to visit northwest Syria from Turkey

On 6 November, management of the Jarablus border crossing announced that the Turkish authorities [would be allowing](#) Syrians living in Turkey to visit Syria for up to a month through the Jarablus crossing. Those wishing to register for the visit would have to reach out to the local councils in Jarablus, [Al-Bab](#) and other councils in the Euphrates Shield areas which would then be responsible for coordinating Turkish approvals. This is an extension of the previous permissions, where only Syrians with Turkish citizenship or Gaziantep residency were allowed to visit Syria. The new decision allowed all Syrians residing on its territory, [whether](#) holders of a temporary protection card (*kimlik*), dual citizenship, tourist residency, or other residency permits, to register for a month-long visit.

Since 2014, Turkish authorities allowed Syrians holding [temporary residency](#) in various Turkish states to visit Syria only during the Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha periods through the Jarabulus, Bab al-Salama, and Bab al-Hawa crossings. These approvals were temporarily suspended during the outbreak of COVID-19 and later completely [canceled](#) in April 2022 due to pressure from the Turkish opposition political parties. Members of the Turkish opposition said that if a [refugee](#) is able to visit their country, then they should not be allowed to return back to Turkey. However, the Turkish government re-authorized the visits, in July 2022, but limited them to Syrians who held residency from the state of Gaziantep, or those who held Turkish citizenship. Even then, however, approvals were not automatically granted. Granting approvals for these visits is important for the Turkish government to promote the idea of voluntary return by refugees to 'safe areas,' a descriptor used by the Turkish government, for areas in northern Aleppo.

Consequently, the latest announcement is considered a welcome opportunity for Syrians in Turkey to visit their families in Syria. There is the potential risk, however, that because of a lack of official announcement or acknowledgment from Turkey of the arrangement (all announcements have come from Syria, via crossing management and local councils), of visitors being blocked from returning to Turkey – this is as yet unconfirmed and unreported.

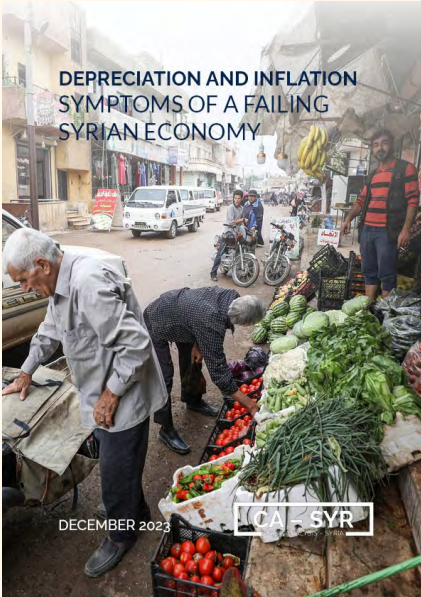
High fees and administrative uncertainty spur distrust in new policy

Those wishing to visit must pay \$100 for each person over the age of three to Syrian local councils, either by direct payments to the councils by a family member or via a bank transfer in Turkey to the councils' bank accounts. Syrians have immediately criticized the high fees imposed, while the [Syrian Network for Human Rights](#) also condemned the imposition of fees by local councils, considering it an obstacle to those wishing to visit their families in Syria. Despite the con-

demnation, the local councils then [doubled](#) the announced fees to \$200 with no clear official explanation or rationale. The local council in Jarablus clarified that the fees are non-refundable should the visit not go ahead or be blocked at the border for whatever reason. However, the statement did clarify that should the visitation fail to take place due to an error on the part of the council, whether fees will be reimbursed. The Jarablus local council also advised those wishing to visit to verify their legal residency status before applying and warned pregnant women wishing to visit against giving birth in Syria as the Turkish authorities might prevent the entry of newborns without a maternal DNA test, which is not available in Syria.

The local council in Jarablus also announced a monthly ceiling for the total number of Syrians allowed to visit; approval will be granted to 1,000 Syrians per month, or [250 per week only](#). The lists of those who have obtained approval will be [published](#) with entry and return dates set weekly and according to seniority in registration.

The small number allowed to visit is just a small percentage of the [over three million](#) Syrians in Turkey and is unlikely to have a significant impact on their mobility. Local councils could benefit from the imposed fees, which hypothetically could reach \$200,000 per month; this revenue is expected to be divided between the different councils. The \$200 per-person fee is expected to serve as a major obstacle for a sizable percentage of Syrian families; a family of five, for instance, must pay \$1,000 in fees, in addition to costs associated with travel. Ultimately, these costs may be insurmountable for many Syrians living in Turkey.



**DEPRECIATION AND INFLATION
SYMPTOMS OF A FAILING
SYRIAN ECONOMY**

DECEMBER 2023

CA - SYR

NORTHWEST SYRIA SERIES

CRISIS ANALYSIS - SYRIA
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ON NORTHWEST SYRIA



**Volume 7.
OBSTACLES TO POST-EARTHQUAKE
REHABILITATION**

October 2023

CA - SYR

Hamas-Israel War: Implications for Syria

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**HAMAS-ISRAEL WAR
IMPLICATIONS FOR SYRIA**

12 OCTOBER 2023



View from the occupied Golan Heights overlooking the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)-administered Purple line between Israel and Golan, which demarcates Israel's Golan Heights.

On 7 October, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict took a turn for the worse after Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, leading to a formal declaration of war by the Israeli government. In the following days, media outlets reported sporadic attacks originating from southern Syria and southern Lebanon targeting areas in northern Israel that were also met with Israeli retaliation, though limited in scope. This included targeted artillery fire into the Syrian government-controlled Quneitra and Dar'a governorates. Reactions from Palestinian groups in Syria suggest that should hostilities continue to escalate, Syria alongside Iran, Lebanon, northern Yemen and Iraq who are all part of the so-called 'Axis of Resistance', are expected to fall in line and retaliate against Israel, opening the door for a broader regional conflict. However, certain dynamics, particularly those related to both the Damascus-Hamas relations and the likely careful calculus by Damascus as it attempts to reemerge from a decade of civil conflict, suggest the possibility of a relatively measured outcome as compared to broader regional confrontation. That said, a number of threats - largely speculative in nature and difficult to accurately ascertain - could create further Syrian-Israeli escalation.

This situation report will attempt to clear the fog on where the Syrian government fits into the latest rounds of violence and offer key considerations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for Syria. To do so, Crisis Analysis - Syria (CA-SYR) will first briefly present the events that took place starting 7 October, followed by outlining the presence of Palestinian armed groups in Syria, and explore the Syrian government's relationship with Hamas in order to gauge the possibility of the Syrian government edging towards confronting Israel in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, but in isolation from Hamas.

This report argues that it is unlikely that the Syrian government will pursue or sponsor escalation with Israel. Nevertheless, it is difficult to decouple the latest round of violence between Israel and Hamas from the regional geopolitical realities, such as the simmering Israeli-Iranian tensions. However, the US's firm stance on supporting Israel, rhetorically and militarily, is likely to act as a deterrent preventing hostilities from reaching extraordinary heights and limiting them to possible shelling and artillery strikes targeting Israel.

CA - SYR

**Depreciation and Inflation:
Symptoms of a failing Syrian
economy**

The regular depreciation of the Syrian pound is a symptom of the failing Syrian economy, causing unchecked price increases and reducing households' already limited purchasing power. Imports are severely restricted while exports are almost non-existent, and the budget is shrinking. This report discusses the impact of rising prices and black-market inflation on households in government-held areas in Syria. It provides a forward-looking analysis of what humanitarian organizations should consider.

[Go to report](#)

NWS Series Volume 7.

**Obstacles to post-earthquake
rehabilitation**

In the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes in Northwest Syria, over 265,000 people lost their homes, while many were either moderately or severely damaged. Humanitarian and local governance actors and community and grassroots initiatives responded, however for many there has been a focus on short-term fixes overshadowing longer-term solutions. Political complexities around the Syrian conflict, coupled with a lack of longer-term vision in the humanitarian and development responses, continue to complicate matters.

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**Hamas-Israel War:
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The Crisis Analysis – Syria (CA-SYR), formerly HAT, was established in Beirut in March 2015 in response to the collective challenges facing the remote humanitarian response in Syria. CA-SYR's most important function is to collect and analyze data and information. Since 2015, our analysis has provided a forward-looking template for international interventions in Syria, and facilitated an increasingly adaptive, integrated, and ultimately impactful international response to the conflict. CA-SYR is a team within Mercy Corps, and is part of the Mercy Corps response to the Syrian crisis.



This report is for humanitarian/development purposes only. CA-SYR strives to ensure products are impartial. The content of this document does not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of Mercy Corps as an organization.