



Harmoon Center Monitoring Report for March 2025



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Administration and Governance

In March, Syria made noteworthy developments across administration and governance both in Damascus and throughout the provinces. The month was marked by a flurry of administrative decisions and changes, most important of which was the formation of a transitional government. The presidency concentrated on overseeing the shift from caretaker government to a transitional body, finalising key administrative appointments, and recruiting as many personnel as possible - all while attempting to address Syria's dire economic and social challenges. President Ahmed al-Sharaa also disbursed a one-time financial grant to all state employees in celebration of Eid al-Fitr. In response to recent security incidents along the coast, he ordered the formation of several committees, including those focused on civil peace and fact-finding, and established a new department; namely, the General Secretariat for Political Affairs.

The process of completing appointments and restructuring the administrative framework in Syria's provincial governorates is ongoing. It began with the formation of the Supreme Fatwa Council and the appointment of Sheikh Osama al-Rifai as Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic. Administrative decisions have also been issued at various levels, including a review of neighborhood *mukhtars* (neighborhood chiefs) in Aleppo and a round of new *mukhtar* appointments - a move that has been welcomed by local communities.

In the health sector, developments across Syria continued apace. Latakia Governorate appointed new heads of medical departments, while In Aleppo, several administrative decisions were issued - including measures to manage the operations of administrative units in rural areas. In Daraa, Nizar Abdul Razzaq Al-Rashdan was appointed director of Daraa National Hospital, and a judicial committee was formed within the governorate's justice department. As part of the broader appointment process, the Syrian government also named new members to the chambers of commerce across Aleppo, Idlib, Homs, Hama, and Damascus provinces. Dr. Adel Hamed Barhoum was assigned to oversee the work of the Tartous Health Directorate. Meanwhile, in Aleppo, there was public discontent over the appointment of local officials who had previously served under the Assad regime, signaling a continuation of the former regime's governance policies.

Waves of employee dismissals and paid leave across several sectors continued throughout March. New dismissal lists were issued for employees at the Port of Latakia, while around 600 male and female workers at Jableh Hospital were granted three-month paid leave. A similar decision affected 399 employees at Qardaha National Hospital. In Daraa, the assignments of two judicial inspectors were terminated, with new judges appointed in their place. A general directive was issued to dismiss all employees appointed by the Baath Party and to grant three-month paid leave as severance pay to those dismissed, as well as to the families of martyrs. The General Company for Iron and Steel Products suspended 500 workers, while in Tartous, 220 health center employees were also granted three-month paid leave. At the same time, several employees were reinstated. Minister of Electricity Omar Shaqrouq reversed a previous dismissal order and reinstated 18 employees of the electricity company. The Ministry of Education, in coordination with the Ministry of Administrative Development, also issued lists of teachers dismissed by the former regime, approving their return to work in education.

As part of military-administrative coordination, the Ministry of Defence emphasized the need for employees to avoid giving media interviews unless coordinated in advance with the Ministry's media offices. In response to public concerns over the misuse of newly established administrative powers, the Aleppo Governorate Administration opened channels for filing complaints related to real estate and home ownership.

Along the coast, civilian forces returned stolen property to families following clashes with pockets of resistance from the former regime. The Ministry of Education introduced a ban on teachers accepting gifts, deeming such acts equivalent to bribery and subject to similar disciplinary action. Due to intense demand, particularly during the disbursement of March retirement pensions to civilian retirees, the Ministry of Finance extended the working hours of banks and financial institutions across the country. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Interior issued a decision to cancel travel bans for Syrians attempting to leave the country.



Policy makers have shown notable progress in addressing security and administrative issues, particularly in the review of employee dismissals and appointments. Ministries have also issued numerous decisions aimed at easing citizens' daily lives and tackling complex administrative and security challenges. This month's decisions also took the initial steps to address the widespread corruption within regime institutions, though only in preliminary ways. The government has responded to various public demands, including widespread opposition to retaining former regime officials in certain administrative positions. However, this responsiveness has not always extended to reappointments, as some sectors continue to rely on former state employees to run effectively. In some cases, individuals who were previously involved with the Syrian opposition or civil society organizations have been appointed in their stead, though these instances remain limited at the present time.

Security and Military

In Homs Governorate on March 16, the Qusayr area was host to clashes between the Syrian army and members of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia. Three Syrian army personnel were killed, prompting a rapid military response the following day. During the operation, Syrian forces regained control of the village of Hosh Ali and expelled the remaining Hezbollah fighters. On March 21 and 22, Israeli airstrikes targeted Palmyra and T4 airports. Meanwhile, on March 20, a mass grave was discovered in Deir Baalba. Between March 22 and 23, security forces seized weapons depots in Ashrafiyya, Kafr Abd, and Madhabi'.

Events in Homs indicate that, at present, clashes are primarily concentrated in rural and central areas, with escalating threats mostly caused by remnants of the Assad regime and Hezbollah militias. Security forces have been responding proactively, reflecting a concerted effort to secure Homs city's outskirts and contain the ongoing security instability.

In Damascus and its countryside, security incidents ranged from arrests of wanted individuals to operations against smuggling networks. Most notably, a major drug smuggling network was dismantled in Jdeidet Artouz on March 12 and former regime Mufti Badr al-Din Hassoun was arrested on March 27. Israeli airstrikes tar-

geted military sites in Kiswah and the surrounding area of Izraa, with additional attacks by Israel on the Palace of Justice and the Dummar neighborhood in Damascus on March 10 and 13, resulting in several civilian injuries. Sporadic infiltration hotspots have continue. Israeli strikes have focused on former military headquarters, while local security operations aim to dismantle smuggling networks and neutralize entrenched remnants of the former regime within city neighborhoods.

Daraa Governorate experienced dynamic security challenges throughout March, marked by escalating tensions and intensified security operations. Between March 4 and 6, clashes broke out between General Security forces and remnants of the former regime in Sanamayn, followed by large-scale campaigns targeting drug dealers and armed cells. A major coordinated operation was then launched on March 15. On March 17, Israeli airstrikes also hit former regime positions in Izraa, resulting in multiple deaths and injuries. Another Israeli incursion took place in the village of Majaheed on March 28. A mass grave containing the remains of dozens was discovered on March 20 at the site of the 34th Brigade in the town of Masmiyya. Additionally, a new General Security detachment was established in the city of Busra al-Sham on March 17. Daraa remains a key flashpoint in the ongoing conflict with the last vestiges of the Assad regime. Assassinations and revenge attacks have also surged in the region, alongside Israeli incursions - reflecting both the deepening security challenges and the intensifying struggle for influence within the governorate.

A wave of targeted assassinations took place in **Aleppo province and its countryside**, including the killing of Ahmed Naasani, head of the Ittihad Club Fan Association on March 18, and Mukhtar Ibrahim Othman on March 19. Incidents of child abduction were also reported, notably the abduction of Farida Muhammad by the SDF in the Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood on March 15. Authorities announced the seizure of three million Captagon pills in a security raid on March 21. Widespread security operations were conducted in the areas of Azaz and Bab, including an armed clash in Bab that resulted in the death of a drug dealer who had previously escaped from the Rai'i prison. The situation in Aleppo reflects a growing threat posed by assassinations and kidnappings, the contested presence of the SDF in certain neighborhoods, and the ongoing illegal drugs trade. Despite extensive security measures, these issues continue to undermine Syria's short and long term



stability and highlight the country's fragile security environment.

In Idlib, the New Syrian Army conducted targeted security operations, including the arrest of former regime forces on March 7 and 9, and the establishment of checkpoints in the countryside on March 10 to enhance security. Compared to other regions, Idlib appears relatively stable, with ongoing security coordination and the New Syrian Army maintaining firm control in the face of sporadic external threats.

In the province of Tartous, limited clashes broke out in the city of Baniyas early in the month, followed by sweeping security operations and the imposition of a curfew on March 6, in response to massacres carried out by armed factions in the city and its surrounding countryside. On March 9, a high-level investigative committee was established to examine the events, and a comprehensive ceasefire was declared, although some security campaigns continued in rural areas. Tartous has now entered a transitional phase following the violence, marked by a fragile truce and ongoing official investigations. Authorities are working to contain the situation and prevent renewed tensions.

In as-Sweidaa Governorate, the most notable development was the security coordination between the Ministry of Interior and the Men of Dignity Movement on March 6, resulting in an agreement to deploy public security forces in cooperation with local cadres. Earlier in the month on March 4, five activists were kidnapped by an armed group in Daraa - but were later released. The collaboration between official authorities and grassroots local movements in as-Sweidaa represents a new approach to maintaining security through community partnership - one that could potentially serve as a model for the broader southern region of Syria.

Politics and Society

In March thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) returned to their villages across several Syrian cities, particularly in Idlib. Among them were Christian IDPs who returned to their villages in the Jisr al-Shughour countryside. There was also a notable movement of returnees from camps in northern Syria to Homs, including 60 families who left the Zoghra camp to return to their homes. Additionally,

displaced individuals from the Turkish and Jordanian borders began returning to their cities, although no official Syrian statistics have been released regarding the number of returnees or the specific areas to which they returned.

Regarding the Freedom Index for March, the most notable development was the Damascus Governorate's closure of several bars selling liquor, citing the serving of alcohol to minors and the lack of proper licenses for hookah pipes. However, the governorate later reversed its decision, granting these establishments a grace period until the end of Eid al-Fitr to rectify their legal status and obtain the necessary licenses. No similar instances of interference in the operation of bars, nightlife venues, or the sale of alcoholic beverages have been reported in other governorates, where such venues continued to operate during the Eid holiday.

On the political front, the decision to place the licensing and activities of political parties under the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has raised questions about the ministry's role and the extent of its influence in domestic politics. This decision came amid the absence of extant legislation to regulate political parties in the country. Despite this, political movements and parties have continued their activities, such as holding lectures and meetings.

The most prominent grassroots movement was in as-Sweidaa, where parties initially opposed to the Damascus government, including the Syrian Brigade Party, the Syrian Secular Current, and the as-Sweidaa Popular Movement, engaged in active discussions. These parties issued several statements, some of which rejected the constitutional declaration, aligning with the position of the as-Sweidaa Military Council, which opposes the current structure of the Ministry of Defence. The Military Council began recruiting young men in as-Sweidaa - though without salaries at the time of reporting and is working to expand its influence by forming a military triumvirate.

This alliance includes the Military Council as a military authority, Sheikh Hikmat al-Hajri as a religious figurehead, alongside the Syrian Brigade Party and Syrian Secular Current as political actors. On the government's side, two significant political decisions were made in March; namely the formation of a commission of inquiry into the bloody events on the Syrian coast and the announcement of the new transi-



tional cabinet. The formation of the commission had a positive international impact, as demonstrated by its meeting with the UN International Commission of Inquiry. Meanwhile, the new cabinet included ministers who retained their positions, such as those leading the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense. The cabinet received favorable reactions both internationally and within the Arab world.

On the foreign policy front, the most notable development was the first formal diplomatic contact between Syria and the United States, revealed through leaks published by Reuters. According to these reports, Washington presented a list of demands to the Syrian government in exchange for the potential lifting of sanctions. These demands included the destruction of remaining chemical weapons stockpiles, cooperation in combating terrorism, preventing foreign fighters from assuming leadership positions in Syria, and appointing a liaison coordinator to support US efforts to locate the missing American journalist, Austin Tice.

Economic and Public Services

Syrian markets are facing a severe economic recession due to a decline in local demand across the country, leading to a downturn among merchants who have resorted to offering seasonal discounts to clear their stock inventory. However, some customers have expressed dissatisfaction over prices remaining high and alleging that the discounts are “fake.” In areas east of the Euphrates, the Autonomous Administration has imposed strict conditions on the import of frozen meat, including poultry, red meat, and seafood. These conditions require importers to be Syrian or licensed companies that have obtained special approvals, and ensured adequate refrigerated storage and transportation infrastructure.

However, Syria’s annual inflation rate saw a significant decline, dropping to 36.8% for 2024-2025, compared to approximately 120.6% during the same period last year. Despite this decrease, purchasing power remains low, particularly due to the delay in implementing the government’s planned 400% salary increase.

The Hama Cement Factory has continued its production activities since resuming operations on February 23, producing approximately 3,300 tonnes of various

types of cement per day, including Portland, well, and sulfate-resistant cement. The product is sold in US dollars, with a packed tonne priced at \$107 and an unpacked, loose tonne at \$105. Distribution is handled through agents to various governorates.

Oil and Energy Imports

In a significant development, data from the London Stock Exchange revealed that Russia sent its first direct diesel shipment to Syria since 2013. The tanker, *Prosperity* - which is subject to US sanctions - departed from Russia carrying 37,000 tons of low-sulfur diesel and arrived at the port of Baniyas. On March 12, two Russian tankers also reached the Syrian coast: the *Gas Katalina*, which carried 4,000 tons of domestic gas, and the *Prosperity*, which delivered 34,000 tons of diesel. On March 25, another ship arrived in Baniyas carrying 100,000 tons of crude oil, alongside another vessel with 5,600 tons of gasoline. In related news, the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources announced a tender for the supply of seven million barrels of light crude oil to the Baniyas refinery, with an option to increase production. Additionally, Qatar has launched an initiative to supply Syria with two million cubic meters of natural gas per day via Jordan. This initiative aims to generate an additional 400 megawatts and improve the electricity supply by two to four hours per day. The gas will be transported to the Deir Ali station in the Damascus countryside via the Arabian pipeline.

Monetary and Financial Policies

The Central Bank of Syria has implemented new measures to try and reduce the gap between the official exchange rate and the black-market rate for USD. The official dollar exchange rate is set at approximately 12,000 Syrian pounds, while the black-market rate remains around 10,000. In addition, unlicensed exchange shops and counterfeit currency were seized in Damascus, and the bank has urged citizens to engage only with official exchange outlets.



In another significant move, Syria received a new shipment of currency printed in Russia on December 8, 2024 - the second such shipment since the fall of the former regime - with more shipments expected to follow.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Finance has established a committee to review the tax system, composed of experts from universities, chambers of commerce, and industry. This is part of a broader effort to reform the taxation system that had been criticized under the former regime for extortion and illegal taxation practices within the private sector.

International Cooperation and Financing

Jordanian exports to Syria rose by 520% compared to the same period in 2024, reaching approximately \$26.2 million, up from \$4.2 million the previous year. In contrast, Jordanian imports from Syria declined by 9%, amounting to \$6.7 million, down from \$7.3 million in January 2024.

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) reactivated Syria's membership at the request of the Syrian government, aiming to support recovery and reconstruction efforts following Syria's re-admission to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in March 2025. The move was welcomed by Syria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Meanwhile, Italy's Foreign Minister announced the allocation of approximately €68 million (\$73.2 million) to finance humanitarian and infrastructure projects in Syria, including those in the health sector and food supply chains. Plans are also underway to organize a business forum focused on reconstruction.

However, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) warned that the decline in pledges at the Brussels 9 Conference - totaling €5.8 billion (\$6.3 billion), a 29% drop from the previous year - poses a serious threat to the humanitarian response in Syria. The IRC's regional director emphasized the urgent need to increase international support amid worsening humanitarian conditions across the country.

Transit and Customs Clearance Fees

The General Authority for Ports issued a new directive on transit fees for Syrian, Arab, and foreign trucks, stipulating that fees should be calculated in US dollars at a rate of 2% based on the truck's weight and the distance traveled. An additional fee of 0.5% also applies to trucks bound for ports. In the same directive, the authority increased licensing fees to \$5,000 annually for customs clearance offices and \$10,000 for transit companies, with required insurance coverage of up to \$500,000. While the decision is intended to regulate the sector, combat corruption, and enhance the business environment, it has drawn criticism from office owners who argue that the costs are prohibitively high.

Food Prices Across Syria (USD)

Staple	Damascus	Aleppo	Idlib	Hama	Tartous	Latakia
Tomatoes	0.78	0.49	0.42	0.48	0.57	0.6
Onions	0.78	0.83	0.71	0.48	0.48	0.5
Potatoes	0.89	0.58	0.42	0.38	0.48	0.5
Eggs	2.59	2.35	2.7	2.3	2.87	2.8
Bread (1KG)	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26
Sugar	0.86	0.78	0.74	0.72	0.86	0.8
Tea	9.6	8.3	7.42	6.31	9.57	10
Rice	1.7	0.88	0.85	0.87	0.96	0.9
Meat	11.8	9.8	10.3	9.7	10.53	11
Chicken	3	2.9	1.9	2.2	2.97	3
Olive Oil	5.4	5.3	3.9	3.4	4.02	4.5
Vegetable Oil	2.01	1.5	1.7	1.55	1.72	1.7



Fuel and Building Material Prices (USD)

Material	Damascus	Aleppo	Idlib	Hama	Tartous	Latakia
Iron (1000KG)	700	690	670	720	669	685
Cement (1000KG)	132	118	115	116	134	136
Diesel	0.94	0.98	0.95	0.87	0.95	0.96
Gasoline	1.09	1.078	1.15	1.11	1.1	1.12
Domestic Gas	20.9	14.7	11.8	14	11.96	13.5

Gold and Foreign Currency Prices (USD)

Item	Damascus	Aleppo	Idlib	Hama	Tartous	Latakia
Gold	86	86	85.9	85.8	86.1	86
US Dollar	10,350	10,150	10,400	10,300	10,450	10,000
Euro	11,350	11,100	11,300	11,400	11,500	11,100
Turkish Lira	273	272	275	274	278	275

Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies

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