

Foundation for the Development of Western Syria

January 20, 2026

Dear Honorable Member of Congress:

On behalf of the Foundation for the Development of Western Syria (Foundation), a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting stabilization, reconstruction, and inclusive governance across western Syria and throughout the country, with a particular focus on protecting vulnerable communities and fostering interethnic and interfaith cooperation, I am writing to express our deep concern regarding recent attacks on the Kurdish population and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) by Syrian government and aligned forces.

As a signatory to the December 19, 2025, statement on Syrian sanctions – led by Representatives Josh Brecheen and Brian Mast, and signed by 134 House Republican Members – you have shown unwavering commitment to monitoring the Ahmed al-Sharaa government’s treatment of ethnic and religious minorities, including Kurds. Your vigilance is more essential now than ever, especially in light of the alarming developments following the repeal of the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act sanctions in the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act.

The Kurds and the SDF have been steadfast allies to the United States, bravely fighting alongside American forces to defeat ISIS and secure stability for Syria’s Kurdish minority and other communities during the civil war. Their sacrifices have been vital in combating terrorism and stabilizing northeastern Syria.

Tragically, recent events reveal a troubling pattern of suffering under the al-Sharaa regime. In late December and early January, Turkish-backed forces and “armed factions affiliated with Damascus launched a major assault on the Kurdish neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafieh, and Bani Zaid, deploying suicide drones, tanks, heavy artillery, and Grad rocket launchers against areas housing over 500,000 residents” of Aleppo, resulting in the deaths and injuries of dozens of Kurds.¹ This was apparently done under Turkish orders by factions under Turkish command – including the so-called Amshat (led by Mohammed al-Jassim “Abu Amsha,” who commands a division in the current Syrian army despite being under international sanctions), the National Army, al-Hamzat, the Sultan Murad Division, and Turkmen factions, supported by hundreds of tribal forces with jihadist tendencies – resulting in atrocities against Kurdish civilians.²

Following the events of Aleppo, Ambassador Thomas Barrack, the U.S. Special Envoy for Syria, publicly called for restraint from “both sides.” However, there are disturbing reports that Ambassador Barrack allegedly told the SDF, a U.S.-backed ally, that if their forces did not

¹ Justus Johannsen, *Damascus Declares Aleppo’s Kurdish Neighborhoods a Military Zone*, The Amargi (Jan. 7, 2026), <https://www.theamargi.com/posts/damascus-declares-aleppo-kurdish-neighborhoods-a-military-zone>.

² See Arjin Dilek Öngel, *Activists: What is Happening to Aleppo’s Kurds Amounts to Genocide*, Jinha News Agency (Jan. 14, 2026), <https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/activists-what-is-happening-to-aleppo-s-kurds-amounts-to-genocide-38354>; Ilham Ehmed Presents Documents of Aleppo Attacks, Calls for an Independent Investigation, ANF (Jan. 15, 2026), <https://english.anf-news.com/features/ilham-ehmed-presents-documents-of-aleppo-attacks-calls-for-an-independent-investigation-83211>.

withdraw to east of the Euphrates River, that they would face increased bombardment from Turkey,³ and SDF leadership was unable to reach Ambassador Barrack to intervene as Turkish forces advanced upon them.

Clashes erupted again in northeastern Syria shortly after the January 18, 2026, ceasefire agreement between the Syrian government and the SDF, with government forces advancing into SDF-controlled areas such as Shaddadi in Hassakeh province. Dozens of Kurds were killed, including in efforts to secure prisons holding 3,000 ISIS detainees, underscoring the severe human cost and the risk of a broader security catastrophe.⁴

Syrian troops, backed by Turkey, appear poised to expand operations against Kurdish-held towns in Aleppo and Deir el-Zour, applying military pressure to extract concessions in stalled talks on integrating Kurdish institutions into the state.⁵ Senior U.S. officials have voiced concerns that this could escalate into a wider campaign against the SDF, further destabilizing the region and undermining ongoing efforts against ISIS remnants.⁶

The repeal of the Caesar Act sanctions in December 2025, as part of the NDAA and following prior suspensions and executive actions, has effectively removed critical constraints on the Syrian government, enabling it to pursue these aggressive policies. While President al-Sharaa issued a decree on January 17, 2026, ostensibly affirming Kurdish rights, recognizing Kurdish as a national language, granting citizenship to stateless Kurds, and banning discrimination, the continued violence suggests these measures may be largely symbolic rather than substantive. The persistent clashes indicate, at best, indifference to the safety and security of minorities and, at worst, active hostility, as the regime consolidates control over Kurdish territories.

The House Republican statement of December 18th appropriately highlighted the necessity for Congress to enforce snapback conditions should Syria fail to protect minorities, including Kurds. The current situation highlights the dangers of premature sanctions relief and the urgent need for sustained oversight. We urge you to convene the promised early 2026 hearing on the treatment of religious and ethnic minorities in Syria, to closely monitor these developments, and to advocate for U.S. policies that prioritize the protection of America's Kurdish allies while urgently holding the al-Sharaa administration accountable for inclusive governance and minority rights.

³ Vet Radio Syndicate, *The U.S. Ambassador to Turkey (Tom Barrack) Has Asked U.S.-Backed Kurdish Forces to Withdraw from East of the Euphrates River or Face Increased Bombardment from Turkey*, Facebook (Jan. 2026), <https://www.facebook.com/vrsrcadio/videos/the-us-ambassador-to-turkey-tom-barrack-has-asked-us-backed-kurdish-forces-to-wi/3252124894955289/>.

⁴ David Gritten & Rachel Hagan, *Clashes Reported After Syria and Kurdish-Led Forces Agree Ceasefire*, BBC News (Jan. 12, 2026), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gwk37ewvwo>.

⁵ Khalil Ashawi, Tuvan Gumrukcu & Maya Gebeily, *Syrian Troops Poised to Attack Kurdish Towns as SDF Withdraws East of Aleppo*, Reuters (Jan. 16, 2026), <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syria-poised-attack-kurdish-held-towns-pressure-stalled-talks-sources-say-2026-01-16/>.

⁶ Lara Seligman & Jared Malsin, *U.S. Officials Concerned Syria, Backed by Turkey, Will Expand Operation Against Kurds*, Wall St. J. (Jan. 16, 2026, 5:27 PM), <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/u-s-officials-concerned-syria-backed-by-turkey-will-expand-operation-against-the-kurds-0c71c53d>.

Thank you for your continued leadership on this vital issue. The Foundation for the Development of Western Syria stands ready to provide further information or support as you work to advance peace, prosperity, and tolerance for all Syrians.

Sincerely,

Milan Dalal
Counsel to Foundation for the Development of Western Syria

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Activists: What is Happening to Aleppo's Kurds Amounts to Genocide

Armed attacks on neighborhoods in Syria's Aleppo have caused a severe humanitarian crisis. Child and women's rights activists say the violence amounts to genocide, urging international pressure and UN action to stop the massacres and protect children.

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Arjin Dilek Öngel

Amed – The attacks on the Ashrafiyah, Sheikh Maqsoud, and Bani Zeid neighborhoods of Aleppo, Syria, have exacerbated a serious humanitarian crisis, with many civilians falling victim, particularly children and women. This clearly exposes the war crimes committed by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) jihadists and Turkish-backed mercenaries.

According to the Kurdish Red Crescent, at least 110 wounded people were evacuated from the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah neighborhoods and transferred to Deir Hafer. Two of them succumbed to their injuries. Approximately 700 displaced civilians are currently under the organization's care.

Since January 6th, women's and children's organizations in northern Kurdistan have continued to express their condemnation of the ongoing attacks. In this context, the Child Rights Network in Amed emphasized that "children, who bear the brunt of the war in Aleppo, have once again become direct targets," calling on the public to condemn what is happening in the region.

The network explained in its statement that the attacks on the three neighborhoods left children living in the shadow of war, noting that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions require the provision of special protection for children in conflict zones.

Activist Gulizar Ayildiz of the Children's Rights Network in Amed confirmed that attacks against Kurds in the region are not new, but rather have only decreased in intensity during the peace negotiations in Turkey. She emphasized the dangers facing women and children: "We have seen how residents were forced to flee their homes in order to dismantle the demographic structure, and the extent of the suffering caused by these coercive policies. We are fully aware of the humanitarian and social disasters caused by waves of displacement."

She believes that what the Kurds are experiencing in Aleppo amounts to genocide. "We must deal with the reality more seriously, and our statements must be more impactful and produce tangible results. I believe it is essential to take real and serious steps, without hesitation or delay, especially to protect women and children, in order to effectively mobilize international public opinion."

She emphasized that the lives of children and women are now at stake, and that what is needed is not merely the opening of a humanitarian corridor, but rather serious and direct pressure on Turkey and the Syrian Interim Government to immediately halt the attacks. She also criticized the silence of public opinion: "When it comes to the Kurds in the Middle East, the same scenario repeats itself; a silent, deafening, and mute stance, as if the suffering of this people is unseen and unheard."

She stressed that the problem is not limited to Turkish public opinion alone, but also includes Kurds residing in the country: "It is true that a woman remains a woman, a people remains a people, and a child remains a child, but when we add to that our national identity, we do not find the same level of sensitivity. It is not only Turkish society that ignores this, but even a segment of Kurdish society here does not show the necessary concern. Perhaps behind this stance lie deep social reasons, from forced assimilation to the paths of change and transformation, as well as the fears that accompany them."

She explained that ISIS had posed a serious threat to the peoples of the world in years past, especially in the region of North and East Syria, noting that the women of the region fought fierce battles against ISIS and achieved a historic victory. "We are all witnesses to that victory; the women who confronted ISIS embodied a saving force for everyone, and the international community recognized their heroic role, and it is our humanitarian duty to repay them by working hard to stop these attacks."

For her part, child rights activist and childhood development expert Aynur Ozbay called on the United Nations to take urgent action to stop the massacres against women and children, stressing that continuing to talk about the peace process in Turkey while Kurds are being killed is unacceptable. "At a time when peace and freedom for the Kurds were being talked about, we thought we would be able to live in our language and culture, but we are receiving news about Kurds being killed. We categorically reject this," she said, stressing the need to act to stop crimes against humanity. "Everyone is silent, while the world should have been turned upside down to save the children there."

Çocuk hakları aktivistleri: Halep'teki çocuklar için taş taş üstünde bırakıl...




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21/01/2026


19:32 JINNEWS ve Mezopotamya Ajansı'na erişim engeli  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/jinnews-ve-mezopotamya-ajansi-na-erisim-engeli-38415?page=1>)


19:24 Ekoloji ve kadın örgütlerinden Rojava için ortak çağrı  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/lzmirde-ekoloji-ve-kadin-orgutlerinden-rojava-icin-ortak-cagri-38412?page=1>)


18:11 HRANA: 4,251 people killed in Iran  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/hrana-4-251-people-killed-in-iran-38413?page=1>)




17:46 Campaign by Heyva Sor a Kurd for people displaced to Jazira Canton  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/campaign-by-heyva-sor-a-kurd-for-people-displaced-to-jazira-canton-38410?page=1>)




17:40 Kurdistan Region Intellectuals Delegation Arrives in Rojava Supporting the Resistance  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/kurdistan-region-intellectuals-delegation-arrives-in-rojava-supporting-the-resistance-38409?page=1>)




17:37 Tunisia... Floods Claim the Lives of Four People, Including Two Women  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/tunisia-floods-claim-the-lives-of-four-people-including-two-women-38408?page=1>)

17:34 A Critical Moment for Global Security... Al-Hol Camp Left Unmonitored  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/a-critical-moment-for-global-security-al-hol-camp-left-unmonitored-38407?page=1>)

16:45 Call on members of US Congress to stop attacks on Rojava  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/call-on-members-of-us-congress-to-stop-attacks-on-rojava-38411?page=1>)

11:12 Qamishlo Women Artists Join General Mobilization Amid Existential War Facing    (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/qamishlo-women-artists-join-general-mobilization-amid-existential-war-facing-38406?page=1>)

09:40 Women of Rania Show Solidarity with Rojava's Popular Resistance    (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/women-of-rania-show-solidarity-with-rojava-s-popular-resistance-38404?page=1>)

08:50 Women of Qamishlo Rise in Historic Uprising to Defend Hard-Won Gains    (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/women-of-qamishlo-rise-in-historic-uprising-to-defend-hard-won-gains-38403?page=1>)

20/01/2026

18:53 SDF withdraws from Al-Hol camp  (<https://jinhaagency.com/en/actual/sdf-withdraws-from-al-hol-camp-38402?page=1>)



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EXCLUSIVE MIDDLE EAST

U.S. Officials Concerned Syria, Backed by Turkey, Will Expand Operation Against Kurds

Kurdish region remains major obstacle to new president's consolidation of control over Syria

By [Lara Seligman](#) [Follow](#) and [Jared Malsin](#) [Follow](#)

Jan. 16, 2026 5:27 pm ET



A fighter with the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in Deir Hafer, in northern Syria, on Friday.

BADERKHAN AHMAD/AP

Senior U.S. officials are concerned that a new Syrian military offensive against Kurdish forces could expand into a broader campaign against the U.S.-backed militia, threatening to destabilize Syria and further divide two crucial U.S. security partners fighting Islamic State.

The Syrian army operations command said Friday night that it was striking forces allied with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in the town of Deir Hafer, east of Aleppo. The statement came after days in which the government surged military forces to the area. The SDF said in a statement just after midnight local time that it

was withdrawing its forces from the area in a show of good faith following calls from foreign powers mediating in the dispute.

U.S. intelligence agencies have assessed that Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa is planning a multipronged operation, backed by the Turkish military, against the SDF in the eastern part of the Aleppo province and potentially across the Euphrates River, according to two U.S. officials. Such an operation could extend the fighting into northeastern Syria, where most U.S. forces are deployed.

In a sign of how serious the situation has become, U.S. military forces arrived Friday in Deir Hafer to meet with Syrian partners after days of deadly clashes, according to Capt. Tim Hawkins, a spokesman for the U.S. Central Command.

The U.S. forces will “temporarily assess what is happening on the ground, engage Syrian partners, and help stabilize the situation,” Hawkins said. “A Syria at peace with itself is critical to preserving peace and stability across the region.”

Damascus’ forces began bombing Deir Hafer this past week and [urged civilians to evacuate](#) the area.



People fleeing on Friday from a Kurdish-controlled area in the Syrian countryside. ABDULMONAM EASSA/GETTY IMAGES

The semiautonomous Kurdish region of northeastern Syria remains a major obstacle to Sharaa’s consolidation of control over Syria after the collapse of the Assad regime in 2024. Turkey, meanwhile, has long had designs to get rid of Kurdish fighters who are affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, also known as the PKK, which both Turkey and the U.S. view as a terrorist group.

Sharaa and the SDF's leader signed a pact last March to merge the SDF into the Syrian military, but the deal lacked details and negotiations toward a final agreement have stalled out in recent months.

A broader conflict between the Syrian government and the Kurdish-led SDF would pose a serious challenge for the Trump administration and the U.S. military, which have [encouraged the SDF](#) to join the new government in Damascus after the fall of former President Bashar al-Assad in December 2024.

Lawmakers and U.S. military officials are particularly concerned that if the fighting extends into northeastern Syria, the Syrian Kurdish fighters guarding hundreds of Islamic State prisoners in facilities across the region will leave their posts, resulting in the escape of many.

U.S. intelligence officials are debating the scope of the potential operation, one of the officials said. Some officials believe Sharaa plans to limit the fighting to Aleppo province, but others think he is eyeing a broader operation involving troops moving from the west to the Euphrates and south from the border with Turkey, the official said. Military intelligence officials believe that Sharaa has already approved the larger operation, the official said.

Other Western officials monitoring the situation have also assessed that the offensive will be limited to the area around Deir Hafer south of the Euphrates River. But any fighting could spill over to other areas along the front line, according to security analysts.

President Trump's special envoy for Syria, Ambassador Tom Barrack, and Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of U.S. Central Command, have been engaging daily with both sides to head off a larger offensive, one of the officials said. Vice President JD Vance spoke to Sharaa to urge him to resolve differences with the Kurds, according to a person familiar with the conversation.



Tom Barrack, U.S. special envoy for Syria. KHALIL ASHAWI/REUTERS

U.S. officials have threatened to reimplement Caesar Act sanctions against the Syrian government if Damascus goes ahead with the broader attack, the official said.

“The United States remains in close contact with all parties in Syria, working around the clock to lower the temperature, prevent escalation, and return to integration talks between the Syrian government and the SDF,” Barrack said on social media Friday.

Barrack worked to impose a cease-fire in a [recent round of fighting](#) between the government and SDF in Aleppo. That battle resulted in SDF fighters’ leaving Aleppo, abandoning a small redoubt in one of Syria’s largest cities.

Deir Hafer is one of the last regions south of the Euphrates controlled by the Kurdish forces, which seized the territory during the chaos after the fall of Assad. The government this week released video of a column of military vehicles heading to the front.

The U.S. has had a longstanding partnership with the SDF to combat Islamic State, or ISIS. The alliance has posed a geopolitical challenge for the U.S. because the group includes members of the PKK.

“I hope issues are resolved through dialogue, but if dialogue fails, I see that the Syrian government may consider the use of force as an option to preserve unity and order,” Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Thursday.

The U.S. has hundreds of soldiers stationed in Syria as a part of the fight against ISIS, with most of those forces in the northeastern part of the country controlled by the SDF. Their presence in the country is a major deterrent against wider war with government forces.

The new Syrian government joined the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State in November as a part of an emerging partnership with Washington. Trump ordered a removal of U.S. sanctions on Syria and welcomed Sharaa to the White House as he tries to stabilize the country after the fall of Assad.

Trump's approach to Syria has unsettled the country in the past. In 2019, he ordered a removal of U.S. forces from the country, resulting in a Turkish military operation that took control of a swath of territory along its border with Syria. Trump reversed the decision weeks later.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R, S.C.) posted on social media on Thursday that he is "growing increasingly concerned" that Damascus was partnering with Turkey to attack the Syrian Kurds, and added that the Kurdish fighters control 9,000 Islamic State prisoners across the country.

"I support a fair chance for the new Syrian government, however if there's an escalation of attacks against the Kurds by Syrian forces supported by Turkey, this will create a whole new dynamic," Graham said. "If anyone believes that I or any of my colleagues would be comfortable—at this stage—for the ISIS prisoners to be guarded by the Syrian army or Turkey instead of the Kurds, you are sadly mistaken. Choose wisely."

Corrections & Amplifications

Deir Hafer, Syria, is east of Aleppo, Syria. An earlier version of this article incorrectly said it is west of Aleppo. The photo of Tom Barrack was taken in September. A caption in an earlier version of this article incorrectly said the photo was taken on Friday. (Corrected on Jan. 16)

[Lara Seligman](#) is a national security reporter for The Wall Street Journal in Washington, where she covers the White House and the Pentagon. She previously spent four years at Politico as a defense reporter...



[Jared Malsin](#) is a Middle East correspondent for The Wall Street Journal based in Istanbul, covering Turkey, Syria and the wider region.

During more than a decade of working as a foreign journalist, Jared's work has often focused on the...



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Videos

places."

The statement signed by Ilham Ehmed reads as follows:

"Since December 23, 2025, the Syrian government and its affiliated forces have been imposing a comprehensive siege on the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafiyah, and Bani Zayd in the city of Aleppo. These neighborhoods are home to more than 500,000 civilians, including nearly 55,000 Kurdish families, as well as thousands of Kurds who were forcibly displaced from the Afrin region, which was occupied by Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) groups in 2018.

'A continuation of long-standing efforts to isolate the Kurdish population in northern Syria'

This siege is a continuation of long-standing efforts to marginalize and isolate the Kurdish population in northern Syria, representing a continuation of the collective punishment and ethnic targeting documented since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011. These neighborhoods had remained relatively stable compared to other war-ravaged areas until this new military escalation.

The seven access routes to Kurdish neighborhoods were also closed by Defense Ministry checkpoints, with only one route left intermittently open under heavy military control. This blockade severely restricted the entry of essential supplies such as food, medicine, fuel, and humanitarian aid, further exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis. The siege violates international humanitarian law principles by depriving hundreds of thousands of civilians of their basic livelihood and health services, and amounts to collective punishment.

Despite repeated attempts to communicate with Syrian government representatives and official meetings requesting the lifting of the siege or pursuit of permission for basic necessities to enter, no response or assistance was provided. This situation further increased the suffering of civilians and heightened the risk of starvation and disease.

The launch of the attacks

On January 6, 2026, groups affiliated with the Damascus government launched a large-scale military onslaught on the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud. The units participating in the attack included the Syrian Army's 60th, 62nd, 72nd, and 86th Divisions. These units were supported by armored vehicles, heavy artillery units, Grad and Katyusha rocket launchers, mortars, DShK heavy machine guns, and suicide drones.

The attack deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure and residential areas, clearly violating the laws of armed conflict that require a distinction between military and civilian targets. The first-ever use of suicide drones against civilian population centers indicates a strategy to terrorize civilians and break their resistance.

The aggression began with suicide drone strikes targeting civilian areas, followed by indiscriminate bombardment of residential areas where unarmed civilians lived. As tanks and armored vehicles advanced toward Kurdish neighborhoods, civilians in neighboring areas were forcibly removed from their homes. Snipers were deployed to high-rise buildings surrounding the neighborhoods.

Despite the dense civilian population, the Syrian Ministry of Defense declared the neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah 'military zones'. Following this designation, heavy weapons were used in residential areas and indiscriminate bombardment took place. This act raised serious concerns over attempts to legitimize the violations of the principle of distinction and the protection of civilians under international humanitarian law.

On January 8, the attack intensified with the involvement of hardline jihadist groups such as Asaib al-Hamra (Red Bands), which was previously affiliated with Al-Qaeda. Significant reinforcements arrived from Idlib and other provinces. Turkey-backed SNA groups participated in the operation, while Turkish reconnaissance drones (Bayraktar) provided aerial surveillance and intelligence support. From the morning of January 8, operations were directed by Syrian Army Chief of Staff Major General Ali al-Naasan.

The involvement of both regular Syrian army units and extremist groups in the conflict, along with the complicity of foreign actors, highlights the complexity of the alliances that have enabled the continuation of violations and war crimes in the region. The attack was carried out with intense bombardment using tanks, heavy artillery, rocket systems, mortars, and numerous suicide drones carrying high explosive payloads, causing widespread destruction to civilian infrastructure.

Ground attacks and targeting of medical facilities

After more than twelve hours of continuous bombardment, Syrian army factions launched coordinated ground attacks on Kurdish neighborhoods at around 9:00 p.m. on January 7 and advanced along three main axes.

On January 8, the Othman Hospital in Ashrafiyah and Khalid Fajr Hospital in Sheikh Maqsoud, the only functional hospital in the area, were bombed multiple times. The attacks caused serious structural damage, rendering the Khalid Fajr Hospital completely unusable while wounded civilians, patients, and medical staff were still inside. Several health workers were killed, which constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Medical facilities are protected under the Geneva Conventions, and attacks on these facilities may constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law.

The occupation of Ashrafiyah and continued attacks on Shaikh Maqsoud

Between January 9 and 10, Ashrafiyah was completely occupied by the attacking forces. Military operations then intensified in Sheikh Maqsoud. Civilians, including the wounded, children, the elderly, and entire families, were trapped in the hospital despite it being out of service. Continued bombardments caused new casualties among civilians and medical personnel. The hospital continued to serve as the last refuge for civilians who could not escape.

Civilians, including the wounded, children, and the elderly, were trapped inside and around Khalid Fajr Hospital while the bombardment continued. International humanitarian law prohibits the use of civilians and medical facilities in a manner that exposes them to attack, and such behavior may be considered serious violations.

Ceasefire and mandatory evacuation

Following the agreement reached on the evening of January 10 through the mediation of international actors, the ceasefire came into effect in the early hours of January 11. The agreement facilitated the evacuation of the dead, wounded civilians, and the remaining members of the Internal Security Forces from Sheikh Maqsoud to areas in northeastern Syria. Subsequently, the fighting ended and the Internal Security Forces withdrew from the neighborhood.

Although the ceasefire provided temporary relief, the long-term humanitarian and political consequences remain a major cause for concern.

Humanitarian disaster

According to local administrative records and incomplete documentation, during the attacks that took place between January 6 and 10:

- a) 47 civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, were killed.
- b) 133 civilians were injured.
- c) At least 276 civilians went missing, and most of them are believed to have been arbitrarily detained.

Human rights organizations warn that these figures likely underestimate the actual number of casualties due to limited access, ongoing detentions, and the critical condition of many wounded.

Following the attacks, there was a mass exodus, and an estimated 148,000 to 155,000 Kurdish civilians were forcibly displaced from Kurdish neighborhoods in Aleppo.

Foreign elements and documented war crimes

Foreign fighters played a documented role in the attacks, as confirmed by photographs and videos released by the perpetrators themselves. This evidence confirms that serious violations constituting war crimes have been committed.

Documented cases:

All visual and witness statements referenced above have been archived, time-stamped, and stored to ensure the integrity of the evidence.

*Fighters wearing ISIS insignia who clearly participated in the attacks on Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah during live media broadcasts.

*Halil Yavuz, a Turkish citizen and member of the Turkish Wolves Union, was recorded boasting about the siege and threatening civilians with death.

*Egyptian citizen Ahmed Mansour was filmed participating in the killing and dismemberment of a female member of the Internal Security Forces. Mansour is also alleged to have been involved in previous massacres committed on the Syrian coast and in Suwayda.

*Samit Dagol (Abdul Samad), a Turkish citizen wanted for links to ISIS and Al-Qaeda, disguised himself as a journalist affiliated with Asaib al-Hamra during the attacks.

*Members of the Turkish Wolves Union are abducting Kurdish youths, and there are reasonable fears that these youths will be summarily executed.

Other documented violations:

* Use of tanks and heavy weapons in densely populated residential areas near Khalid Fajr Hospital

* Direct targeting of the Grand Mosque in Sheikh Maqsoud under false pretexts

*The dragging, dismemberment, and desecration of corpses accompanied by racist and sectarian insults

*The abuse and humiliation of detained civilians, including families and the elderly

*Statements from civilian witnesses describing widespread terror, looting, and abuse during the five-day assault

Post-ceasefire conditions

Despite the ceasefire, Kurdish neighborhoods remain effectively under siege. Arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, harassment, and movement restrictions continue unabated. Access to humanitarian aid remains severely limited, and the presence of extremist militias integrated into state security structures poses a constant threat to civilian safety.

Call for an independent investigation and action

The international community must urgently deploy independent observers to monitor the ceasefire and prevent further violations. Diplomatic recognition and aid to Syria should be contingent upon the verified protection and political participation of Kurds and other minorities. The March 10 agreement protecting Kurdish rights must be fully implemented, and extremist militias must be removed from state security forces. Inclusive political participation of all Syrian communities is essential for achieving lasting peace."

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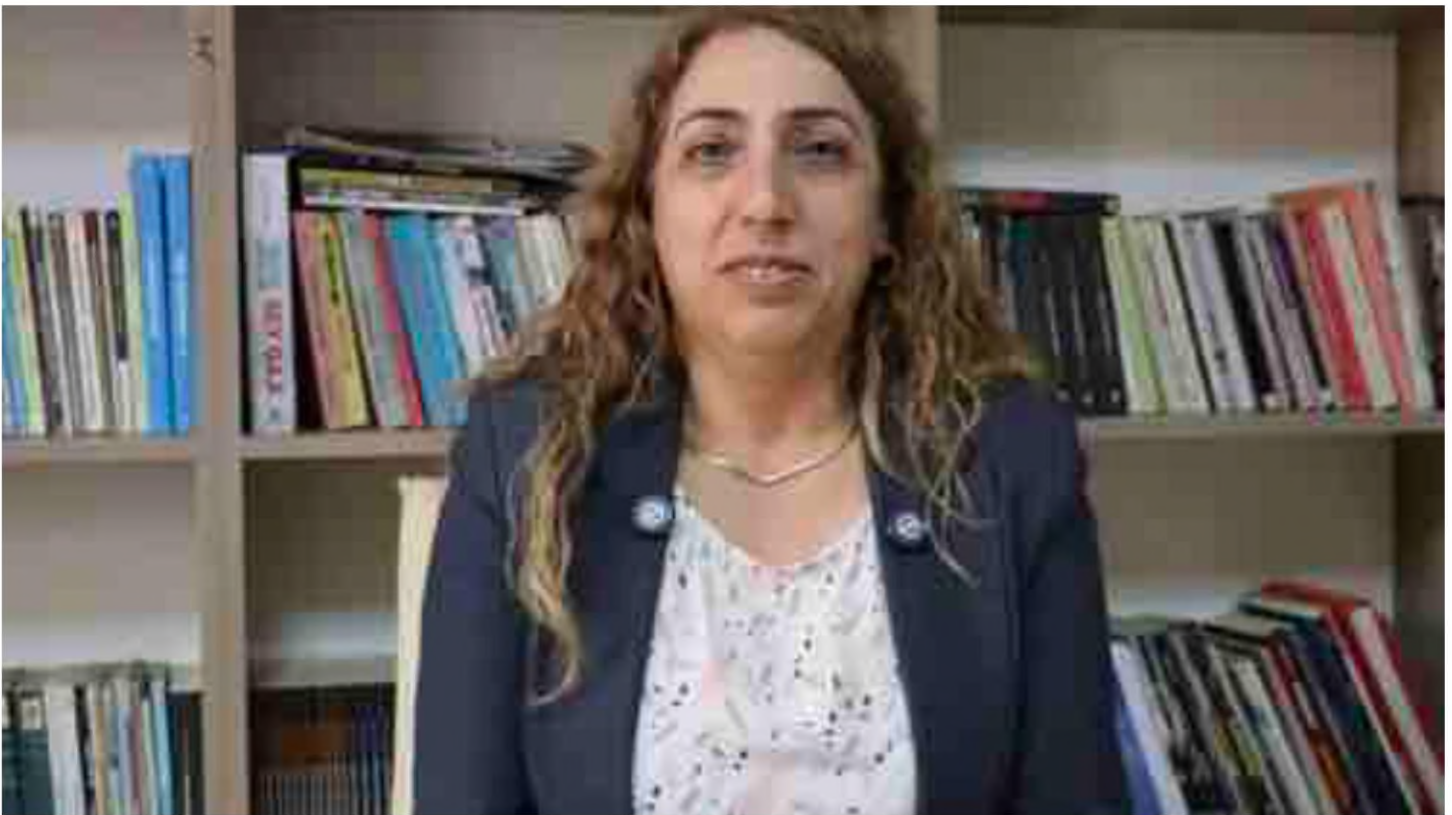


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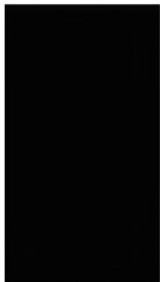
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Clashes reported after Syria and Kurdish-led forces agree ceasefire

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David Gritten and Rachel Hagan



Reuters

Syria's army and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia alliance have reported fresh clashes in the country's north-east, a day after a ceasefire deal brought much of the autonomous region under government control.

The 14-point agreement signed on Sunday, which will see the SDF withdraw from Raqqa and Deir al-Zour provinces and then be integrated into state institutions, was supposed to end almost two weeks of fighting.

President Ahmed al-Sharaa said he hoped it would allow Syria to "end its state of division and move to a state of unity and progress".

SDF commander Mazlum Abdi said the fighting had been "imposed on us" and that he had accepted the deal "to stop the bloodshed".

Abdi added that he would explain the terms after returning from Damascus, where he was expected to fly on Monday for talks on implementation.

It appears to be a major blow for the SDF, which had been reluctant to give up the autonomy it won for Syria's Kurdish minority when helping US-led forces defeat the jihadist group Islamic State (IS) during the country's 13-year civil war.

Sharaa has vowed to reunify Syria since he led the rebel offensive that overthrew Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, but the country remains deeply divided and has been rocked by several waves of deadly sectarian violence.

[Syrian army seizes country's largest oil field from Kurdish forces](#)
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On Monday, Syrian government forces advanced deep into northern and eastern areas previously controlled by the SDF.

In the afternoon, the army announced that it had entered Shaddadi, in Hassakeh province, following what it alleged was the SDF's decision to release a number of detained IS members from the town's prison, according to state news agency Sana.

The army said it had contacted mediators and the SDF to discuss an organised handover of the prison, but that the SDF's leadership had "refused". Soldiers would not take the necessary measures to restore security and apprehend the escapees, it added.

The SDF said Shaddadi prison had "fallen outside the control of our forces" following repeated attacks by "factions affiliated with Damascus" since the early hours of the day. Dozens of SDF fighters had been killed as they tried "to prevent a serious security catastrophe", it added.

The SDF also reported that clashes were continuing around another prison holding IS members, al-Aqtan in Raqqa, where it said nine of its fighters had been killed.

Earlier, the army said three soldiers had been killed in two attacks by "terrorist groups" in the north-eastern Jazira region. It alleged that members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which fought for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey for decades and has a long-running association with the SDF, were attempting to disrupt the ceasefire and "remnants of the former regime".

The interior ministry also said its forces had begun deploying to Deir al-Zour province as "part of a broader security plan aimed at protecting civilians and property".

Dozens of government military vehicles were seen crossing a bridge to the eastern bank of the River Euphrates along with cars, lorries and motorcycles.

Safia Keddo, a 49-year-old teacher who was making her way on foot, told AFP news agency: "The past few years have been very difficult... Today we must turn the page".

"We want children to return to school without fear, and for electricity, water, and bread to be restored. We're not asking for a miracle; we just want stability and a normal life."



Ali Haj Suleiman/Getty Images

President Ahmed al-Sharaa said the deal would allow Syrian state institutions to enter all regions and manage their affairs. On Sunday evening, the government and SDF agreed an immediate ceasefire on all fronts across the country, which the president hailed as a "victory for all Syrians".

"The Syrian state is unified and centralised in decision-making, and its institutions will enter all Syrian territories and manage all regional affairs," Sharaa told a news conference, according to Sana. "In areas with special characteristics, security personnel will be appointed from local residents."

He also urged Arab tribes living in Raqqa and Deir al-Zour to "maintain calm and allow the implementation of the agreement".

Before he left for Damascus, the SDF's commander said it had accepted a ceasefire agreement following an "intense war" in which many of its fighters had been killed or wounded since 6 January.

"This war was imposed on us. We wanted to prevent it, but unfortunately, because it was planned by many forces, it was imposed on us," Abdi said in a statement on Kurdish TV.



Syrian security forces took control of the al-Omar oil field after the SDF withdrew

According to Sana, the deal stipulates that the SDF will immediately hand over administrative and military control of Deir al-Zour and Raqqa provinces to the government, including all civilian institutions and facilities.

It says the government will take control of all border crossings, oil and gas fields, and prisons and camps where captured IS fighters and their family members and other affiliated civilians are detained.

It also says that the SDF's military and security forces will withdraw to Hassakeh province, where they will be fully integrated into the ministries of defence and interior "on an 'individual' basis" - not as separate Kurdish units, as the SDF had demanded.

The agreement also welcomes a decree issued by the president on Friday which recognised Syrian Kurds as an "integral and original" component of the Syrian people.

The decree affirmed their cultural, linguistic and civil rights, including designating Kurdish as a national language, which will allow its teaching at schools in Kurdish-majority areas, granting Syrian nationality to stateless Kurds, and declaring the Nowruz spring festival as a paid national holiday.

The agreement also commits the SDF to expelling all non-Syrian members of the PKK and reaffirms Syria's participation in the US-led coalition against IS.

US special envoy Tom Barrack said the deal represented "a pivotal inflection point, where former adversaries embrace partnership over division".

"The challenging work of finalising the details of a comprehensive integration agreement begins now, and the United States stands firmly behind this process at every stage - as we safeguard our vital national security interests in defeating [IS] remnants and advance President Trump's bold Middle East Peace Plan," he added.

The agreement followed months of stalled negotiations over a March 2025 integration deal, which both sides had accused each other of trying to derail.

Sharaa said last week it was unacceptable for a militia to control a quarter of the country and hold its main oil and commodities resources.

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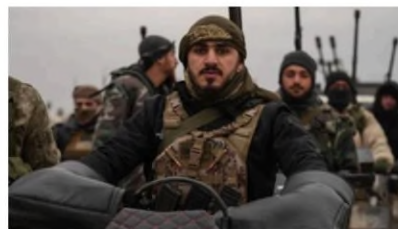


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This comes after Syria's government announced its first formal recognition of Kurdish national rights since 1946.



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The deal was announced in the early hours of Sunday morning after a week of violent clashes.









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Syrian troops poised to attack Kurdish towns as SDF withdraws east of Aleppo

By Suleiman Al-Khalidi, Mahmoud Hasano, Jonathan Spicer and Timour Azhari

January 16, 2026 5:05 PM EST · Updated January 16, 2026



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[1/3] Members of the Syrian army stand on a military vehicle, as Syrian state agency, SANA, reported on Wednesday that the Syrian army sent reinforcements from Latakia to "Deir Hafer front", amid... [Purchase Licensing Rights](#) Read more



Summary

- Damascus hopes limited operation will push Kurds back to negotiating table
- US-backed talks on integrating Kurds into Syrian institutions at impasse after deadline missed
- Syrian government has been building up forces in north and east
- Eastern tribes ready to turn on SDF at behest of Damascus, leading figure says

Jan 16 (Reuters) - Syrian troops are poised to attack towns in the north and east held by Kurdish fighters, sources familiar with the matter said, to pressure autonomy-minded Kurds into making concessions in deadlocked talks with the Damascus government.

The threat of renewed military action highlights the deepening fault lines between the government of President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who has vowed to reunify the fractured country under one leadership after 14 years of civil war, and regional Kurdish authorities wary of his Islamist-led administration.

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Syrian Democratic Forces head Mazloum Abdi said on X on Friday that the group will withdraw their forces from current contact lines east of Aleppo at 7 a.m. local time (0400 GMT) on Saturday and redeploy them to areas east of the Euphrates, citing calls from friendly countries and mediators.

Syria's defence ministry welcomed the SDF's decision to withdraw, saying it would closely monitor full implementation, including the removal of fighters and equipment, ahead of the Syrian military's deployment to the vacated areas to enforce state sovereignty.

Earlier, the Syrian military said its shelling had started against military bases belonging to a militia affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and against remnants of the former regime allied with SDF in Aleppo's Deir Hafer city.

The United States, which seeks to anchor peace in Syria to shore up wider Middle East stability and help prevent any resurgence of Islamic State militants, has urged both sides to avoid a showdown and return to talks, according to a Syrian official and a Syrian source familiar with diplomatic channels.

The two sides engaged in months of talks last year to integrate Kurdish-run military and civilian bodies into Syrian state institutions by the end of 2025, insisting repeatedly that they wanted to resolve disputes diplomatically.

But after the deadline passed with [little progress](#), clashes broke out last week in the northern city of Aleppo and ended with a withdrawal of Kurdish fighters.

Now, a broader confrontation looms, according to the sources, who include three Syrian officials, two Kurdish figures and three foreign diplomats.

As many as five Syrian army divisions could take part in the offensive targeting Kurdish-held towns in the northern province of Aleppo and the vast eastern desert province of Deir el-Zor, a senior military official involved in the planning told Reuters.

If the tactic fails to bring the parties back to the negotiating table, Syria's army is considering a full-scale campaign that could see the Kurds lose the semi-autonomous zone they have managed for more than a decade, the official said.

ESCALATION BRINGS 'GRAVE RISKS'

Syrian army units deployed on Wednesday and Thursday to the town of Deir Hafer and surrounding villages just west of the Euphrates River held by the Syrian Democratic Forces, the main Kurdish fighting force and a years-long recipient of U.S. support as it battled the Islamic State militant group.

Syria's military has ordered SDF fighters to withdraw east of the river and opened a humanitarian corridor for civilians to flee to government-held territory.

Some residents who made it out told Reuters they had to flee through farmland on foot as the main road had been shut. The SDF denied that it had blocked civilians from leaving.

Other Syrian troops were quietly sent to another front line in remote Deir el-Zor province, where the Kurds run key oil fields that Damascus says should be under central state control, according to two Syrian army commanders.

The SDF has condemned the build-up. "We clearly state that we are against any military confrontation, given its grave risks," Abdel Karim Omar, the Damascus-based representative of the Kurdish-led administration, told Reuters.

He said efforts were underway with the help of foreign mediators to revive the negotiations.

Washington had not explicitly opposed a limited operation by Syrian troops, three diplomats and an SDF official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Reuters. But the SDF official said the U.S. was not doing enough to prevent a clash.

U.S. envoy Tom Barrack said on Friday Washington was in "close contact with all parties in Syria, working around the clock to lower the temperature, prevent escalation, and return to integration talks between the Syrian government and the SDF".

A State Department spokesperson said both sides should avoid "pushing the country back into a cycle of violence".

The messaging underscores Washington's effort to recalibrate its Syria policy by balancing years of backing for the SDF against its new support for Sharaa, whose rebel forces ousted Russian-backed Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad in late 2024.

Sharaa accused the SDF of obstructing U.S. policy to nurture a reintegrated Syria and taking orders from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a separatist group that waged a long insurgency in Turkey before entering into a [peace process](#) with Ankara.

Sharaa, speaking on state TV, said the SDF had taken "no practical steps forward" to implement last year's integration pact, but hoped it could still be carried out "calmly."

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Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said the SDF must show good intentions by unilaterally leaving the Deir Hafer area, instead of being expelled by a military offensive.

"I hope it doesn't come to that point ..., but when problems are not solved through dialogue, unfortunately, I see from here that the use of force is also an option for the Syrian government," Fidan said on Thursday.

If fighting spills into Deir el-Zor, it could draw in local Arab tribes who complain of marginalisation and forced conscription of tribesmen into the SDF, according to the Syrian military officials and two tribal leaders.

Shayesh al-Mulhem, a leader of the Jabbour tribe, said it was awaiting orders from Sharaa to turn against the SDF.

"The SDF is doomed to disappear. There can't be a state within a state, and there can't be a faction on Syrian land that is against the state," he said.

Additional reporting by Khalil Ashawi in Damascus, Tuvan Gumrukcu in Ankara and Maya Gebeily in Beirut; writing by Maya Gebeily; editing by Mark Heinrich

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