

Quarterly Review of Syrian Political and Military Dynamics April-June 2023

SUMMARY

The Carter Center’s latest quarterly review examines the reacceptance of the Government of Syria (GoS) into the Arab League, which is widely seen as an acknowledgment of that government’s “victory” in the Syrian conflict and shifts in regional priorities. But conflict and instability in Syria persist. The illegal manufacture and sale of Captagon, a synthetic amphetamine-style drug, has created additional instability in southern Syria, with Jordan resorting to air strikes to curb the trade. Regional normalization and reengagement present an opportunity to improve the humanitarian situation and encourage necessary compromise among conflicting parties. However, unconditional normalization alone is insufficient for achieving stability and peace in Syria. Instead, reengaging countries should prioritize the safe return of refugees, facilitate aid deliveries, and encourage negotiations for a sustainable political solution.

Security-Related Developments

- The GoS was readmitted to the Arab League after a 12-year absence, signaling a normalization.
- Drug-related violence reached its highest level in southern Syria, compounding instability in an already unstable region.
- On May 8, Jordan reportedly carried out airstrikes in Dara’a and As-Sweida governorates, targeting a suspected Captagon kingpin and factory. These airstrikes come as countries across the region struggle to deal with the illegal drug trade based in Syria.
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- The GoS carried out airstrikes near Al-Yadudah and Atman — the first in the governorate since 2018.³
- In June 2023, the GoS opened a settlement center in Talbiseh in Northern Homs Governate to defer military conscriptions and

Figure 2: Breakdown of territorial holdings by party as of June 30, 2023. Note: The US and allied NSOAGs control .037% of Syria territory, represented as a small sliver in the graph according to The Carter Center's [Areas of Control Point Data](#)

Syria’s Readmission to the Arab League

After the government’s crackdown during the 2011 uprising, Syria faced regional isolation and censure. Many neighboring countries supported the uprising against the GoS. However, 12 years into the conflict — and with the GoS in control over most of Syria — regional governments that previously supported the uprising began normalizing relations with Syria. In May 2023, the GoS was readmitted into the Arab League — the most prominent move toward normalization to date.

The devastating February earthquake in northwestern Syria provided an immediate rationale for many Arab States to provide aid directly to the GoS.⁷ Some nations, like the United Arab Emirates (P0 Tc 06 Tm()Tj-0.002 Tc ay A.002 Tw [p(e G)39w3 (w)6 (ith)4-H61G)39w3 (D)-1

that full normalization can occur only with a political solution to the conflict.⁹ Russia applauded Syria's return to the Arab League, while the United States condemned it.¹⁰

Syria's readmittance comes as multiple Arab countries seek a new strategy to influence regional politics. Many Arab nations are now reengaging with the GoS in the hopes of stemming the Captagon trade,¹¹ returnRj2.09 e6Tc -0.0BDC Tf1 18w (re)-t.004 To

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The Captagon trade continues to flourish, impacting conflict dynamics in southern Syria. Between April and June 2023, at least 35 conflicts involved drugs, such as the killing of alleged drug dealers, arrests, and clashes between rival armed groups involved in smuggling. This is the highest level of conflict reported around the drug trade in southern Syria. By contrast, only 25 drug-related events were reported in the first quarter of 2023, and 68 events in all of 2022.

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