

# ANNUAL SLEEPER CELL REPORT (2025) FOR NORTH AND EAST SYRIA



## Executive Summary:

- RIC found ISIS sleeper-cells conducted a total of 240 attacks across North and East Syria (NES) in 2025, an 8% decrease compared to 260 attacks in 2024.
- The total number of attacks in 2025 was also slightly lower than the five-year average of 249.6 attacks per year.
- Consistent with previous years, a majority (88%) of attacks took place in the region of Deir ez-Zor, 7% in Jazira and the remainder in Raqqa and al-Hol camp.
- A total of 98 fatalities and 95 injuries were recorded by RIC in 2025, 27% of those killed and 16% of those injured were civilians.
- 127 raids took place in 2025, a 10% (115, 127) increase from 2024.
- 50% of raids were carried out in Deir ez-Zor, 21% in Raqqa, 14% in Jazira, 13% in the camps and the rest in Tabqa.
- A total of 398 suspected ISIS-affiliates were arrested, and 29 killed.
- The number of arrests is well below the five-year average of 633 and marks a 28% (556,398) decrease from 2024.
- The number of missions to repatriate third-country nationals ISIS-affiliates (excluding Iraqi nationals) drastically decreased in 2025. Only 6 missions took place. A 63% decrease from 16 in 2024.
- The number of those third-country nationals repatriated also decreased by 87% (304, 40).
- 8,677 Iraqi nationals were repatriated from North and East Syria (NES) in 2025.

## Authors:

Rojava Information Center (RIC) is an independent media organization based in North and East Syria (NES). It is made up of local staff and volunteers from across Europe and North America. There is a lack of clear and objective reporting on NES, and journalists are often unable to make contact with ordinary civilians and people on the ground. RIC was set up to fill this gap, aiming to provide journalists, researchers and the general public with accurate, well-sourced and transparent information. We work in partnership with civil and political institutions, journalists, and media activists across the world to connect them with the people and information they need.

## Methodology

RIC publishes a sleeper-cell report each month throughout the year. This annual report collates all of those reports into an easily digestible format, shortening the explanatory sections, and adding the data together to provide an analysis of the full year. RIC's monthly reports, accessible here<sup>1</sup>, include additional details. We collect our data through sources in the region, local news, OSINT research and our own on-the-ground research.

Raids against ISIS sleeper-cells have a margin of error in RIC's data, because it is possible some raids

1 <https://rojvainformationcenter.org/category/report/sleeper-cells/>

are not publicized. RIC’s categorization of “raid” includes all physical actions involving the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Internal Security Forces (Asayish) against ISIS sleeper-cells within the territories of NES. Though the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS releases monthly figures on its raids against ISIS sleeper-cells, its figures do not include raids conducted solely by forces of the SDF and Asayish.

In this report, RIC does not use quantitative data from the Coalition unless explicitly stated. In addition, operations conducted by the Coalition alone (some of which occur outside NES) are not included in our monthly statistics, however they are mentioned in writing. It should also be noted that some of our final monthly statistics are altered from the original monthly reports given new evidence or verifiable information which has emerged since the original report.

## Geopolitical Overview:

Since their inception, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were the United States’ (U.S.) primary partner in the war and following counter-insurgency against ISIS in Syria. This cooperation continued in 2025 although the arrival of a new Syrian government under President Ahmed al-Sharaa signaled an end to several years of U.S. military strategy in Syria that relied on cooperation with the SDF. Instead, throughout 2025 the U.S. slowly realigned itself with the new government in Damascus.

In March, the Syrian Transitional Government (STG) and Autonomous Administration signed an agreement stating their intent to integrate. Negotiations took place throughout 2025, particularly in the final few months of the year, to little avail. Negotiations were unsuccessful and in January 2026 the STG conducted an assault on NES taking control of nearly 80% of territory previously held by the Autonomous Administration.

During discussions Tom Barrack, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Special Envoy for Syria, represented the U.S. government’s position and promoted the view that the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) and the SDF should integrate with Damascus. July 2025, in stark contrast with DAANES’ desires for a decentralised system of government, Barrack said, “The difficulty is, in all of these countries, what we’ve learned is federalism doesn’t work. You can’t have independent non-nation states within a nation.” By January 2026, Barack had said<sup>2</sup> that the SDF’s role as the “primary anti-ISIS force on the ground” had “largely expired.” He welcomed their full integration with the STG and supported the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) military taking over the responsibilities of countering ISIS sleeper-cells.

President al-Sharaa’s rise to power has led to concerns about his ability to keep the threat of ISIS at bay due to his political past as a member of al-Qaeda during the insurgency following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and his role as leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria, a group designated as terrorist by the United States, the European Union, as well as the United Nations Security Council. These concerns are exacerbated by the fact that ISIS members have been document-

2 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/20/us-envoy-says-sdfs-role-in-syria-has-largely-expired-after-isis>

ed<sup>3</sup> as having joined the ranks of HTS and other groups like the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) which were absorbed into the new Syrian military structures.

Some hoped al-Sharaa might be able to control the ideologically committed Salafi-Jihadists now in the ranks of the new Syrian military structures. However, In December, ISIS claimed responsibility for an attack by a member of Syria's internal security forces who opened fire on U.S. soldiers in Palmyra. The attacks left two U.S. and two Syrian soldiers dead as well as a U.S. civilian interpreter. Additionally, forces loyal to Damascus massacred 1,479 Syrian Alawites<sup>4</sup> in Syria's coastal region and then more than 1500 Druze people<sup>5</sup> in Suwayda which has since effectively become independent from the rest of Syria under Israel's protection. The links between perpetrators of the Alawite massacre and Salafi-Jihadist groups, and other groups like the Turkish-backed SNA, have been reported<sup>6</sup>.

Despite these massacres, the U.S. and Western allies like the United Kingdom (U.K.) spent 2025 helping rehabilitate the image of al-Sharaa and legitimise him to the rest of the world. In early 2025 foreign ministers and diplomats from the Gulf States and Europe visited him in Damascus. Later in the year he travelled abroad to several countries, including Russia, France and several trips to Turkey. This culminated in a visit to the U.S. in November where al-Sharaa spoke at the United Nations (U.N.), and met Donald Trump in the White House. A week before the trip, al-Sharaa was removed from the U.S. government's terrorist sanctions list and the \$10 million bounty on him was dropped.

In Washington, President al-Sharaa made Syria the 90th country to join the Global Coalition Against ISIS. Syrian officials stressed that this is a political partnership<sup>7</sup> and Syria will not be participating in the Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), the U.S.-led military operation against ISIS in which the SDF played a major role.

Some hoped that the visit to Washington D.C. would coincide with the repeal of the Caesar Act, sanctions which targeted Syrian government officials, including Bashar al-Assad. Critics of the Caesar sanctions claim they had a devastating effect on the Syrian economy and were stifling economic growth and preventing investment which could aid reconstruction of Syria. Before the end of 2025 the sanctions were lifted with several conditions<sup>8</sup>, including one that stipulates the U.S. President must prove the Syrian President "is taking concrete and tangible action to eliminate the threat posed by ISIS and other terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda and its affiliates, in partnership with the United States, and prevent an ISIS resurgence." Failure to follow the stipulations for two consecutive reporting periods provides the U.S. President with a choice to reimpose the Caesar sanctions.

This realignment of the U.S.' diplomatic partnerships and priorities in the Middle East was also

3 <https://rojavainformationcenter.org/2025/03/from-idlib-to-damascus/>

4 <https://www.reuters.com/world/how-reuters-counted-dead-march-killings-syrian-alawites-2025-06-30/>

5 <https://tinyurl.com/yydudxs7>

6 <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/syrian-forces-massacred-1500-alawites-chain-command-led-damascus-2025-06-30/>

7 <https://apnews.com/article/syria-coalition-islamic-state-79ceed4666aef43465221734fca899d5>

8 <https://www.congress.gov/119/plaws/publ60/PLAW-119publ60.pdf>

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reflected in military movements in Syria. In 2025 CJTF-OIR closed four military bases in NES and began consolidating its forces in Iraq, particularly in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). As of the end of December, only three U.S. bases remained open in North and East Syria. (p.11, report for congress<sup>9</sup>)

As the U.S. shifted its commitments in Syria, ISIS continued to operate throughout the country. Despite some links, it is important to note here that HTS and ISIS have ideological differences, largely about the question of international jihad, as we detailed in a report<sup>10</sup> last year. Many of the groups in the constellation of militias that took part in the Syrian Civil War had ideological differences, tenuous alliances and internal conflicts, despite at a cursory glance appearing to be homogenous.

On May 22 ISIS claimed responsibility for a bombing<sup>11</sup> in Suweyda, located in the al-Safa desert, its first attack against the new government. One person was killed and three members of the Syrian army's 70th division were injured when their patrol was hit by a remotely detonated landmine. A small number of attacks were carried out throughout 2025 in both the south and north-east of Syria. The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) reported that ISIS sought to build capacity in the northwest around Aleppo, Idlib and Latakia.

Other attacks this year such as the Mar Elias church bombing in Damascus which killed at least 30 people and injured 54, and the Alawite-majority Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib mosque bombing which killed eight people and injured 18, were claimed by Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah. Formed in early 2025, while ideologically very similar to ISIS, Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah are a different organisation. We expect to learn more about Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah and their relationship to ISIS as they continue attacks in Syria against the STG.

Since the territorial defeat of ISIS in 2019, ISIS has become more decentralised as an organisation, both in Syria and globally. One in six terrorist attacks in 2025 around the world can be attributed to ISIS (p.16)<sup>12</sup>. According to ISIS' own media agency, Syria is now their fifth most active country in terms of claimed attacks, although the Global Terrorism Index<sup>13</sup> places Syria as its most active country.

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9 [https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2026-02/OIR\\_Q1Dec25\\_Final.pdf](https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2026-02/OIR_Q1Dec25_Final.pdf)

10 <https://rojavainformationcenter.org/2025/03/from-idlib-to-damascus/>

11 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/30/isil-isis-launches-first-attacks-against-new-syrian-government>

12 <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20250408-isis-in-2025-the-resurging-threat>

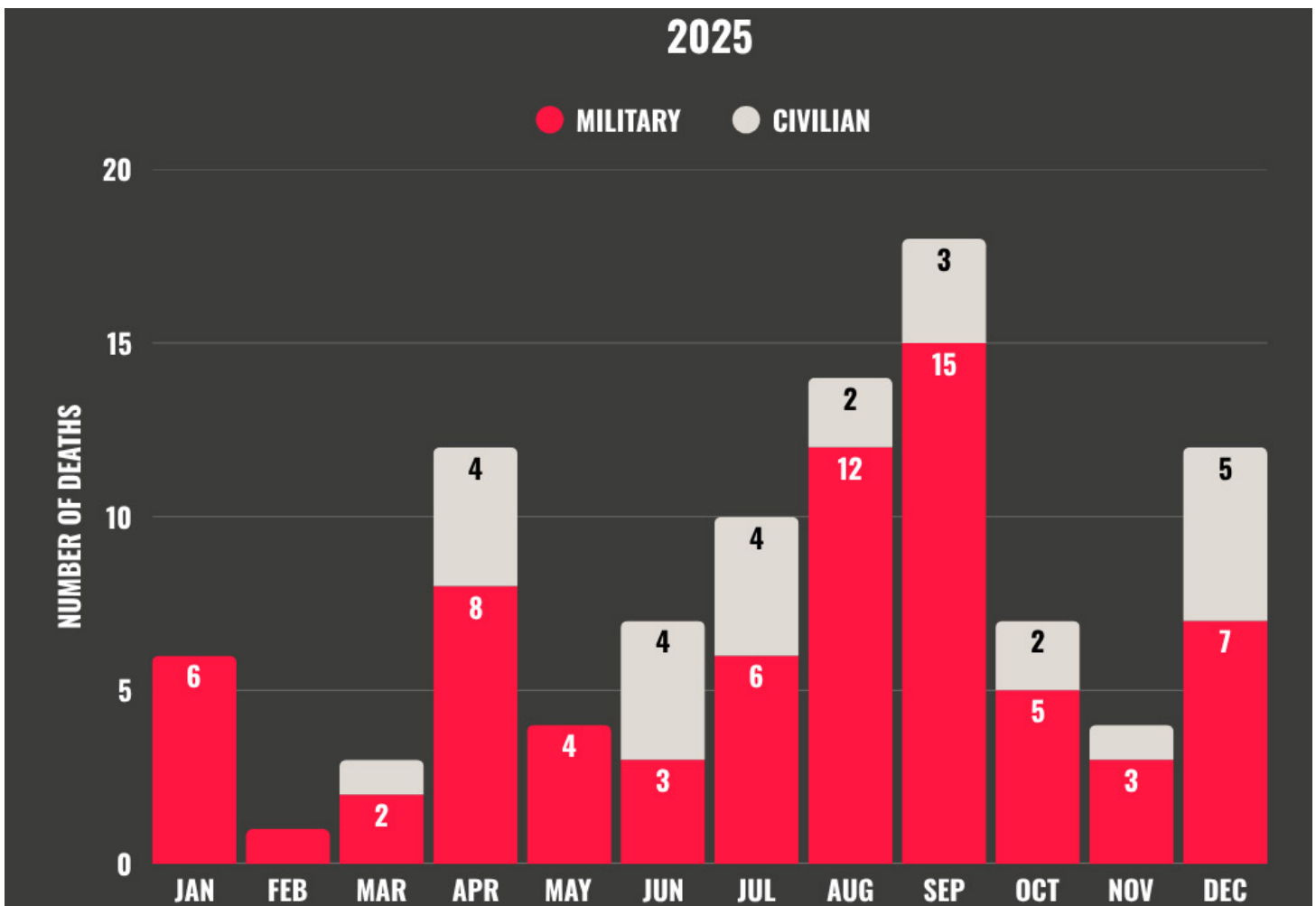
13 <https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20250408-isis-in-2025-the-resurging-threat>

14 <https://npasyria.com/en/135318/>

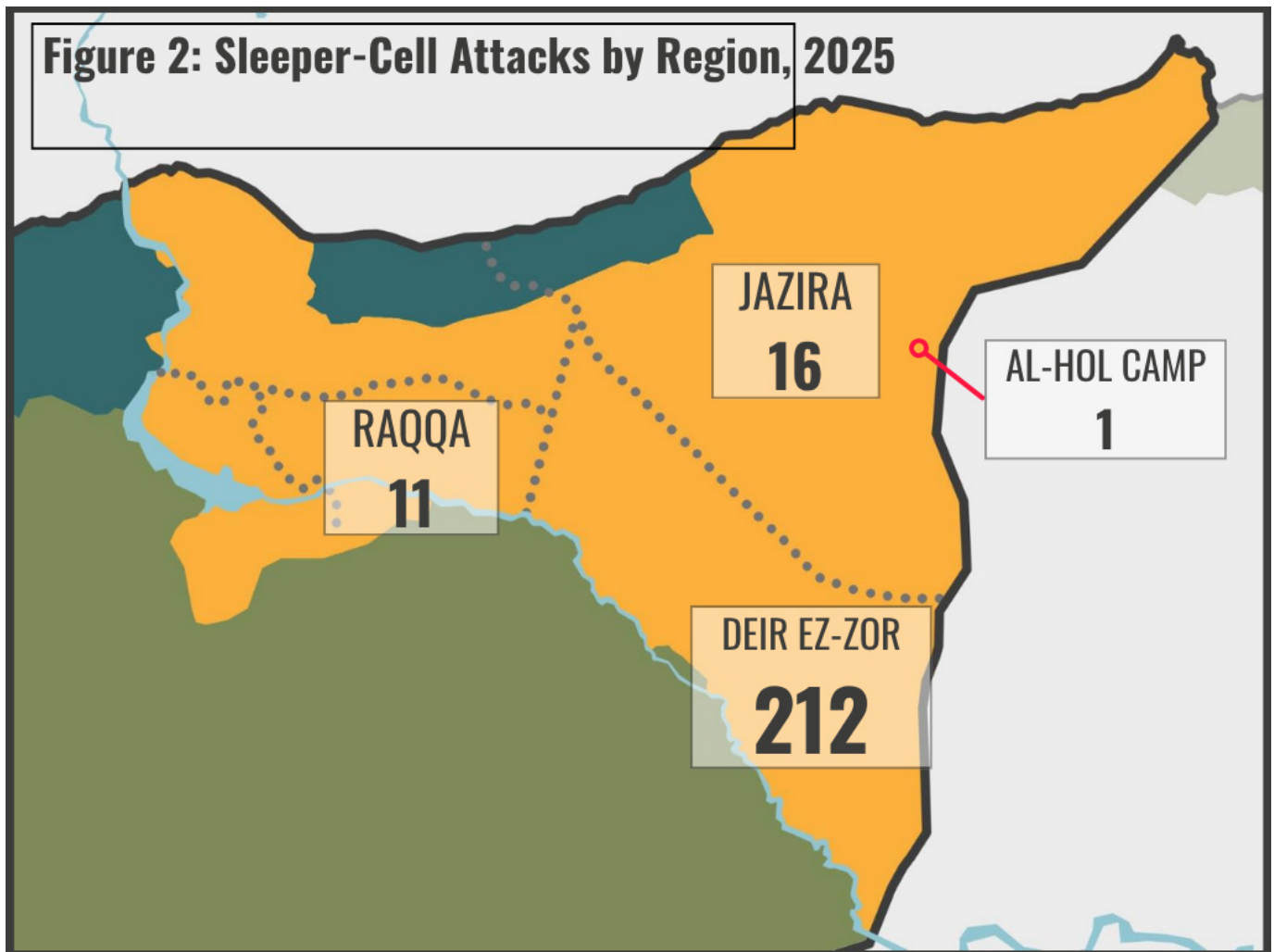
These changes reflect the shifting geopolitical landscape and changing priorities for foreign states in the Middle East and Syria. Now that the integration process is underway, the primary force fighting against ISIS in Syria moving forward will be the STG, not the SDF and Asayish of the Autonomous Administration, but it still remains to be seen if the STG will be able to effectively counter ISIS sleeper-cell efforts.

## 2025 sleeper-cell Summary

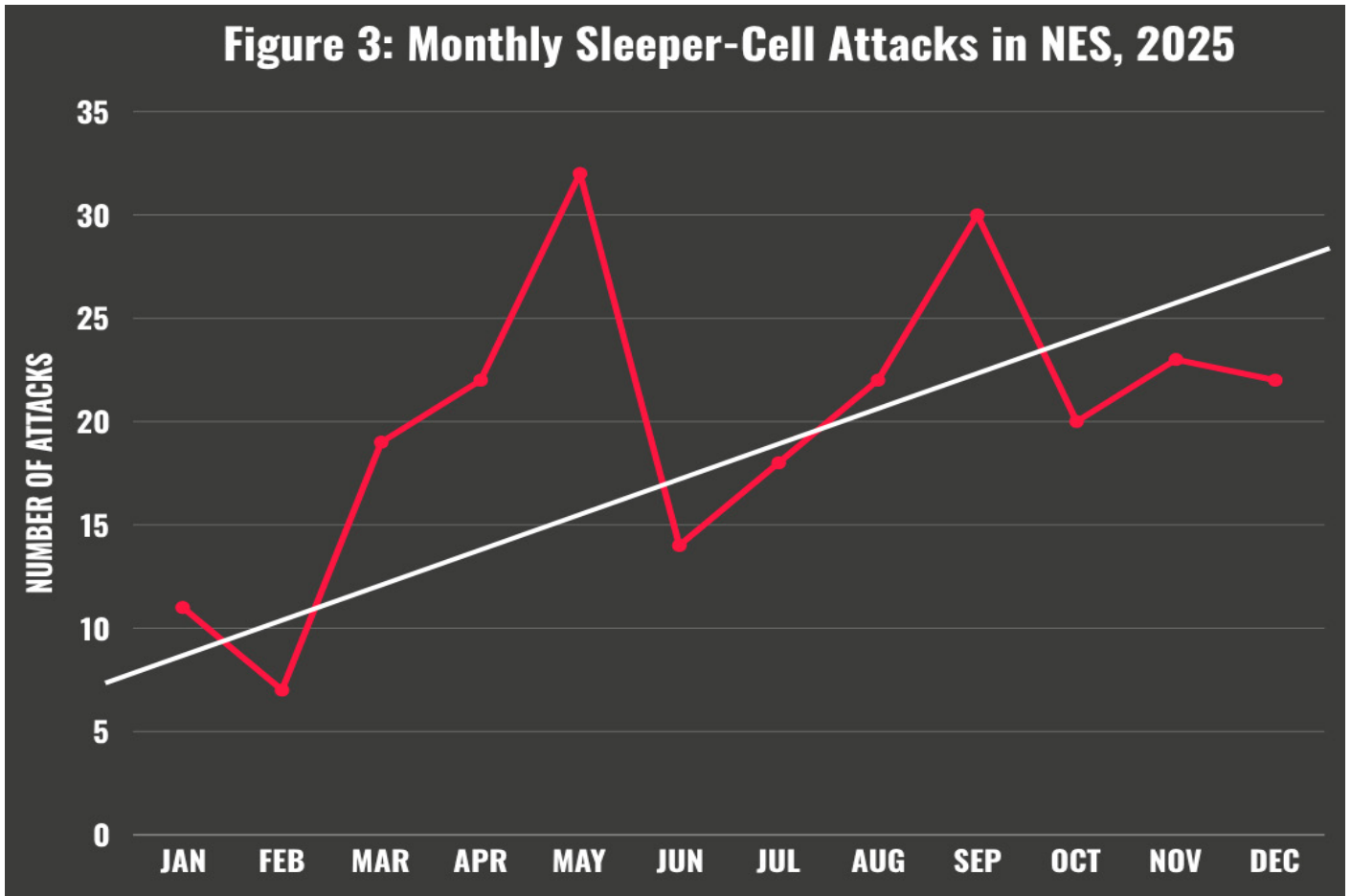
According to RIC’s data recorded during 2025, in NES ISIS sleeper-cells carried out a total of 240 attacks. Figure 1 shows that these attacks killed 72 military and security forces personnel as well as 26 civilians. Additionally, sleeper-cell attacks injured 81 military members and a further 15 civilians, making a total of 98 fatalities and 96 injuries.



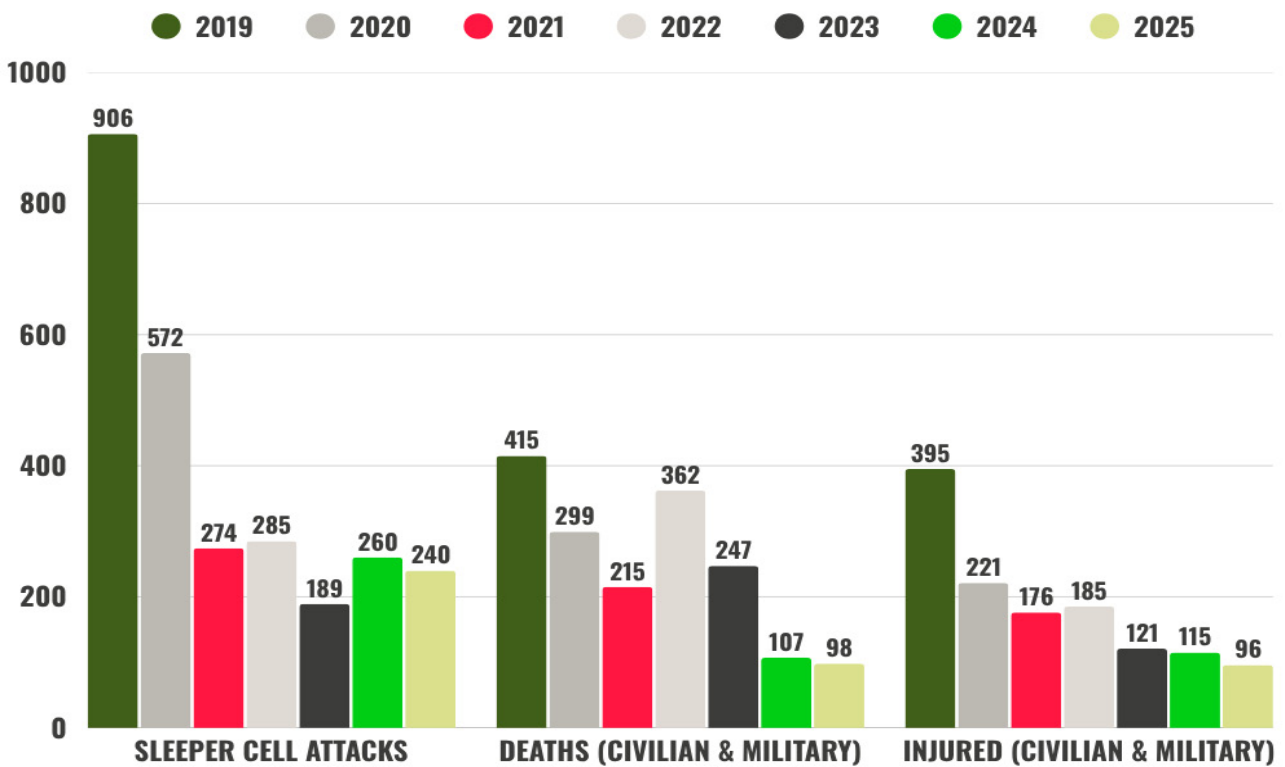
The attacks were concentrated in three regions – Raqqa, Jazira and Deir ez-Zor. In line with previous years, the majority of attacks took place in Deir ez-Zor, as illustrated in the graphic below.



According to data collected by RIC, sleeper-cell attacks trended upwards throughout 2025. (see: Figure 3). However, taken in context, this increase is very small. Overall, ISIS attacks in NES in 2025 were 8% lower than in 2024. The total of attacks from 2025 is also lower than the five-year average of 250 attacks per year.



**Figure 4: Sleeper-Cell Activity in NES, 2019-2025**



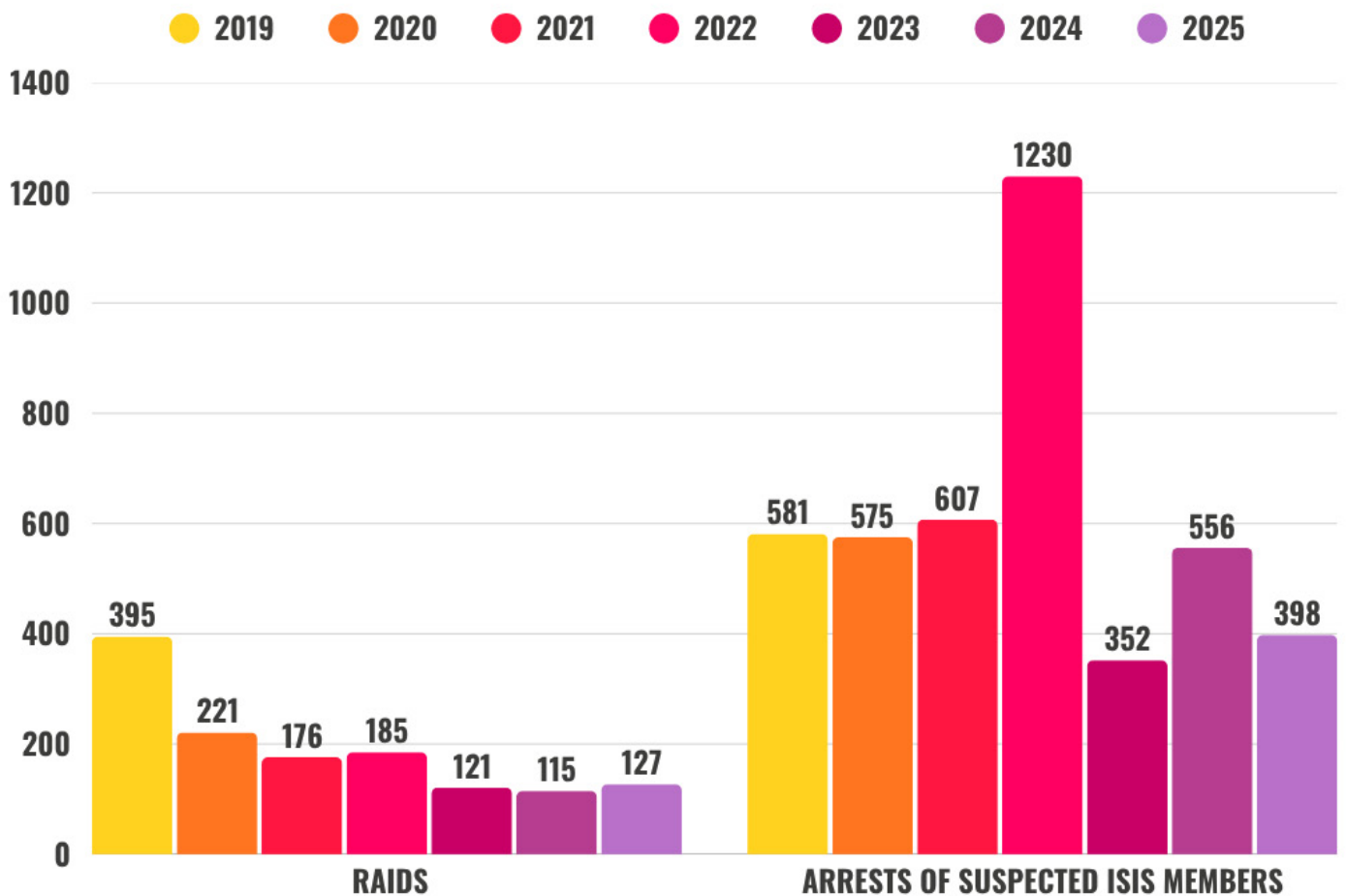
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Attacks this year were largely focused towards military targets with ISIS utilising ambushes and drive-by shootings on motorbikes to surprise their targets before retreating into the desert. Static SDF and Asayish checkpoints were a common target for these attacks. While most attacks involved firearms, grenades and other explosives were also reported. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were used in some ambushes of military convoys, such as in September 2025 when an attack on an SDF convoy left five SDF soldiers dead and another wounded.

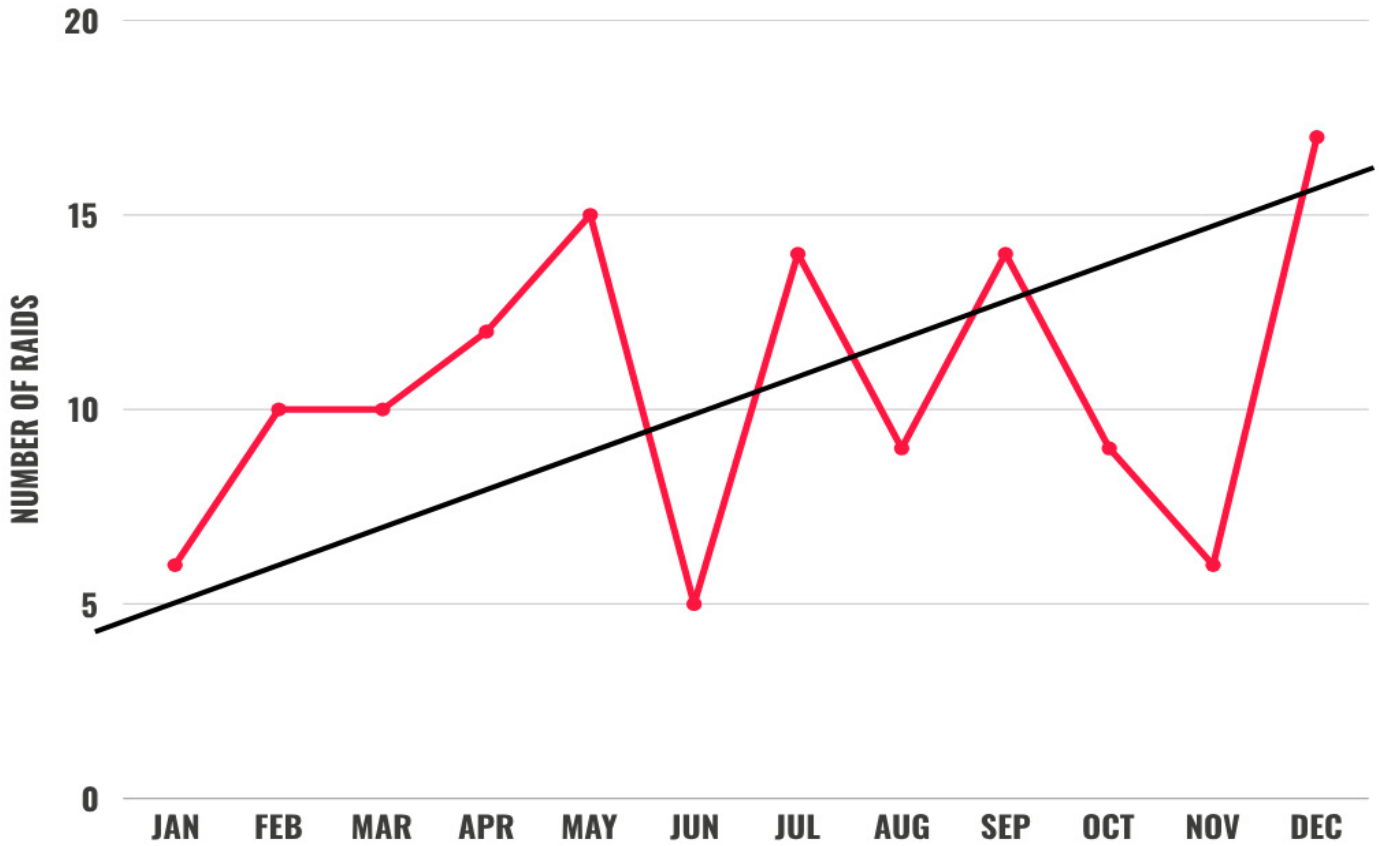
Attacks on civilian targets were often directed towards those who refused to pay Zakat, a tax in Islamic law often used by ISIS to justify extortion. Other civilian targets were related to the oil industry with attacks on oil wells or tankers transporting oil out of Deir ez-Zor. In total 26 civilians were killed and 15 injured in 2025.

RIC recorded 127 raids carried out by the SDF, the Coalition and Asayish. Across these raids and attacks, 29 suspected ISIS members were killed and 398 arrested. The number of arrests is well below the five-year average of 633.

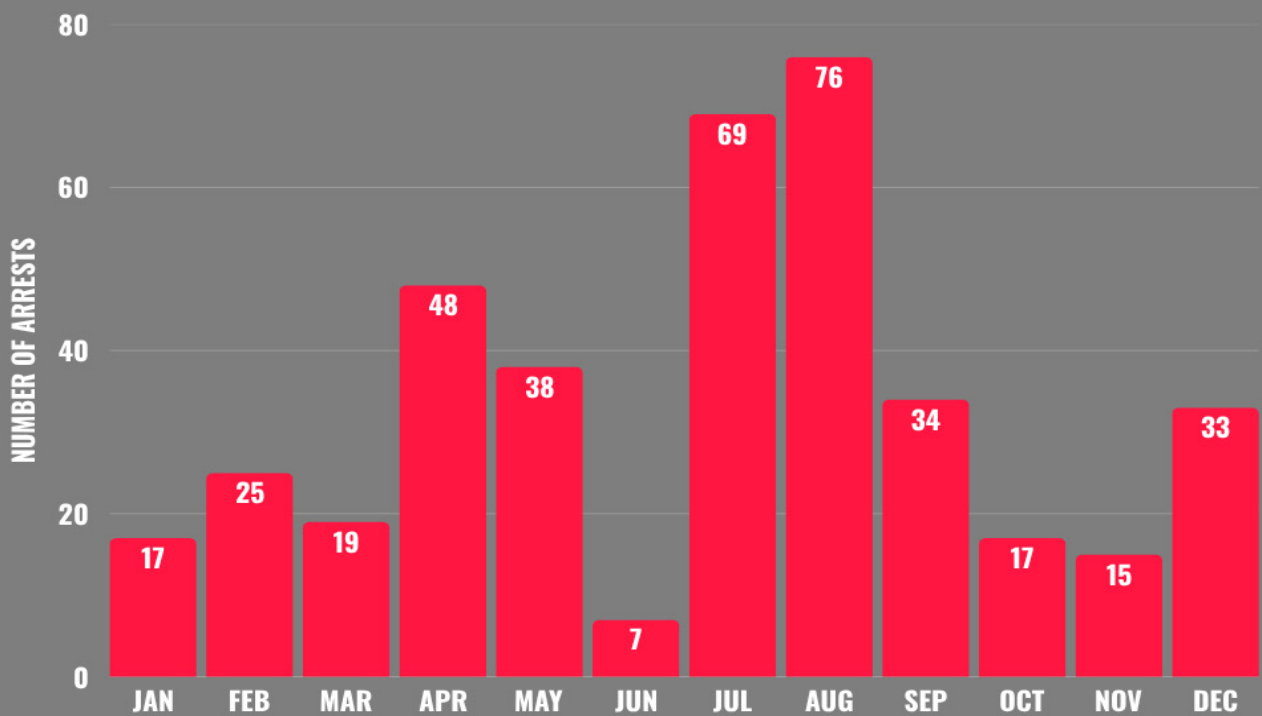
**Figure 5: Sleeper-Cell Counter-Operations in NES, 2019-2025**



**Figure 6: Monthly Raids in NES, 2025**



**Figure 7: Arrests of Sleeper-Cells, 2025**



Our research here is also backed up by data from other sources. The SDF<sup>15</sup> published reports claiming ISIS sleeper-cells conducted 220 attacks and reported making 140 arrests of suspected ISIS operatives. Asayish<sup>16</sup> meanwhile reported 90 attacks conducted by ISIS sleeper-cells. It is unclear whether this overlaps with the SDF numbers, but it is likely this is the case.

When looking at reported numbers for the entirety of Syria, RIC’s data shows the majority of ISIS’ activity remained concentrated in NES in 2025. Although Centcom stopped publishing quarterly reports on Operation Inherent Resolve on their website, the Associated Press<sup>17</sup> reported that as of November 11, 2025, Centcom had recorded 311 ISIS attacks in all of Syria and 64 in Iraq, down from 878 in Syria and 160 in Iraq in 2024. The Global Terrorism Index<sup>18</sup> meanwhile recorded 238 incidents across Syria killing 123 people and injuring 136, down from 369 attacks 2024. Despite fears of an increase in ISIS activity at the start of the year, we can say that ISIS activity in Syria broadly declined last year.

## Monthly Breakdown 2025

### January

#### Key Points:

- 11 confirmed sleeper-cell attacks, a 39% decrease from 18 in December
- 64% of the attacks took place in Deir ez-Zor, the rest in Jazira
- Six military personnel killed, five injured in ISIS attacks
- Six raids were carried out, three in Deir ez-Zor, two in Jazira and one in Raqqa
- 17 suspected ISIS members arrested in SDF/Asayish raids; significantly down from 101 in December 2024
- Three Iraqi repatriation missions in al-Hol camp brought home over 1,700 people
- Outside the NES, alleged ISIS attack in New Orleans, U.S. raised concerns of global ISIS threat

#### In-Depth

Attacks decreased by 39% with 11 cases recorded in January compared to 18 in December. Fatalities also declined by 57% with only six confirmed deaths of military personnel, down from 14 in December. Only four individuals were injured by January’s attacks. These attacks were mostly concentrated in the region of Deir ez-Zor with only four occurring outside. In this month’s raids conducted by the SDF and Asayish, five ISIS members were killed and 22 arrested, including sen-

15 <https://sdf-press.com/en/?p=19534>

16 [https://hawarnews.com/ar/134526?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://hawarnews.com/ar/134526?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)

17 <https://apnews.com/article/syria-coalition-islamic-state-79ceed4666aef43465221734fca899d5>

18 <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf>

ior ISIS members.

The SDF and Asayish conducted six anti-ISIS raids, one with direct participation of Coalition forces. These operations led to the arrest of 17 individuals. Five sleeper-cell operatives were also killed during the raids, and weapons and ammunition were seized.

In January, Iraq made three repatriation missions in al-Hol camp, taking back 1,793 citizens. On January 8, Iraq repatriated 715 people. A second batch of repatriations took place on January 25, comprising 578 individuals. Finally, on January 31, Iraq repatriated 500 citizens. No repatriations of third-country foreigners occurred in January.

The fate of al-Hol and Roj camps, which house ISIS-affiliated women and children, was thrust into the spotlight in January, when U.S. President Donald Trump announced an executive order suspending U.S. foreign aid. This poses severe risks to the humanitarian situation as well as the security of the camps.

Outside NES, the United States saw an attack carried out by an alleged ISIS member, targeting New Orleans' Bourbon Street, a popular tourist hot spot. The attack once again raised concerns about the global threat still posed by ISIS.

## February

### Key Points:

- Seven sleeper-cell attacks, 36% decline from 11 in January
- Five of those attacks were in Deir ez-Zor and two in Jazira
- One military personnel killed, four injured in ISIS attacks
- Ten raids in February, an increase from six in January
- One raid took place in Jazira, one in Raqqa and the remainder in Deir ez-Zor
- 25 suspected ISIS members arrested, up from 17 last month

### In-Depth

RIC recorded the lowest rate of sleeper-cell attacks for 2025 in February, as attacks dropped by 36% (11,7). Fatalities also reached an annual low point with only one death of an SDF fighter, and four injured. The majority of attacks were concentrated in the region of Deir ez-Zor.

ISIS sleeper-cell attacks targeted multiple military vehicles in February. On February 2, a car of the SDF's conscription forces was targeted leaving no casualties. On February 9, two vehicles of the Hajin Military Council came under fire. Three separate attacks in February were directed at

SDF vehicles injuring a total of three SDF members. All these attacks took place in Deir ez-Zor and the surrounding countryside.

February 5, a sleeper-cell targeted SDF members between Abo Khashab and Mohaimaida in the al-Kasra area in Deir ez-Zor countryside, killing one SDF fighter and injuring another. An SDF military post was attacked in al-Shanan town, Deir ez-Zor, no casualties were recorded.

The SDF and Asayish conducted ten anti-ISIS raids, four in collaboration with Coalition forces. These operations led to the arrest of 14 suspected ISIS members, four were killed.

An ISIS commander self-detonated, while another member was shot dead by Military Operations Teams (TOL), following intense clashes in Markadah town in southern Heseke countryside on February 10. Five ISIS suspects were arrested during this operation. On February 23, Muawiyah al-Hajar, a senior ISIS leader, was arrested in a joint SDF-Coalition operation in the northern Deir ez-Zor countryside.

Three Iraqi repatriation missions occurred in February: one from Roj camp, and two others from al-Hol camp. The missions were coordinated by the DAANES and Iraq's Migration and Displacement Committee. 184 individuals departed from Roj camp and a total of 1,212 Iraqis left al-Hol camp.

In February a Swedish woman was sentenced<sup>19</sup> to 12 years in prison for committing genocide and war crimes against the Yazidi people after she joined ISIS in Syria. She was found guilty of keeping three Yazidi women and six Yazidi children as slaves in Raqqa between the years of 2014 and 2016.

19 <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce3lq39zpp0o>

## March:

### Key Points:

- 19 sleeper-cell attacks, an increase of 171% from only seven in February
- Only two attacks took place outside of Deir ez-Zor in March, both in Raqqa
- Two military personnel killed, two others injured in ISIS attacks
- One civilian fatality confirmed
- 19 suspected ISIS members arrested, down from 25 last month, in the course of ten raids
- Eight raids were carried out in Deir ez-Zor, one in Jazira and one in Raqqa
- Repatriations to Austria and Iraq occur, while concerns over security in al-Hol camp prompt E.U.-level meeting

### In-Depth

Attacks in March rose by 171% (7,19) reaching a total of 19 confirmed incidents, a significant increase from February's seven. These attacks killed two military personnel and injured a further two. Additionally, one civilian was also killed in the course of March's attacks.

In March, sleeper-cells targeted SDF and Asayish headquarters and posts. Civilian targets also came under fire, including the public prosecution office in al-Basira, Deir ez-Zor as well as several civilian homes. On March 10, an SDF member was shot dead by a sleeper-cell operative. Two weeks later, a civilian working at an exchange office in Deir ez-Zor was also killed in an ISIS attack.

The rate of raids conducted by NES' security forces remained consistent as ten raids occurred in March, but arrests decreased by 36% (25, 19). The SDF and Asayish conducted a total of ten anti-ISIS raids, some with Coalition backing. The most prominent arrest of the month came on March 21, when an ISIS military emir, Raafat Rahmoun, also known as Abu Sohaib al-Adnany, was apprehended. On March 12, TOL conducted a raid in al-Basira, arresting Khaled Murbad Ebaid, also known as Abu Amir, reportedly responsible for distributing weapons and ammunition among ISIS cells in the area.

Outside of NES, a top ISIS leader was also killed<sup>20</sup> in Iraq this month, in a joint Iraqi-Coalition operation<sup>21</sup>. Abdallah Makki Muslih al-Rifai, known as 'Abu Khadijah', was presumed to be the deputy caliph of ISIS and the so-called Wali of Iraq and Syria.

Three repatriation missions took place in March, The DAANES handed over ISIS-affiliated family members to a delegation from Austria: two women and two children. This was the first third-country foreigner repatriation of 2025. 1,287 Iraqis were also repatriated this month.

The situation in the camps continues to be a concern as in Roj camp, a Moroccan girl was severely beaten and subsequently killed by strangulation, and on March 20 the European Union's

20 <https://x.com/mohamedshia/status/1900539298392273087>

21 <https://x.com/CENTCOM/status/1900737395915440260>

diplomatic arm held an emergency meeting concerning ISIS-linked individuals in al-Hol camp, some of whom are E.U. citizens.

## April

### Key Points:

- Sleeper-cell attacks increased by 16% (19,22)
- Two attacks in Jazira, 20 in Deir ez-Zor
- Eight military personnel killed, four injured
- Four civilians confirmed as dead, and two injured
- Twelve raids were conducted in April, one in Raqqa, one in Deir ez-Zor and the remaining majority in the camps
- 48 suspected ISIS members arrested, a 182% increase from the previous month
- Two security campaigns launched in al-Hol and Roj camps
- British and Iraqi repatriations took place

### In-Depth

The rate of sleeper-cell attacks continued to rise in April, with 22 confirmed incidents compared to March's 19, a 16% increase. A total of 12 fatalities were recorded, eight being military personnel and the remaining four civilians. One of the civilians was an elder from the al-Akeidat tribe, whose car was attacked in al-Azbah, Deir ez-Zor. Six individuals were injured in the course of April's attacks, two of them being civilians. These attacks primarily occurred in the region of Deir ez-Zor.

Twelve raids were conducted in April increasing 20% (10,12), and arrests increased by 153% (19,48) with 48 individuals apprehended, up from 19 in March.

On April 14, the SDF TOL teams conducted a raid in Raqqa, in which five members of an ISIS cell were arrested. The cell had reportedly been receiving and assigning ISIS recruits from abroad and preparing an attack on Raqqa prison to facilitate escape of ISIS-affiliated detainees.

On April 29, the SDF TOL with support from the Coalition, launched a raid in the Deir ez-Zor countryside, capturing Hanan Jaber al-Ali, also known as Abu Muhammad, a member of an ISIS cell and manufacturer of IEDs.

On April 5, the Asayish announced the launch of a security campaign, supported by the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), in Roj camp. During the course of the three day operation, communications equipment was seized and a hidden trench beneath the camp's outer perimeter was discovered. Another security campaign was announced on April 19, this time focusing on al-Hol Camp, resulting in the seizure of a cache of weapons and ammunition. In total, the operations in al-Hol and Roj camps resulted in the arrest of 32 people.

One Iraqi repatriation mission occurred on April 15 in which 241 families (around 866 individuals) departed from al-Hol camp. Additionally, the DAANES facilitated the repatriation of an ISIS-affiliated family, one woman and her three children, to a British government delegation.

## May

### Key Points

- 32 sleeper-cell attacks; increasing 45% from 22 in April
- 88% of attacks took place in Deir ez-Zor, 3% in Jazira and 9% in Raqqa
- Four military personnel killed, nine injured in ISIS attacks
- Raids in NES increased by 25% (12,15)
- 12 of the 15 raids were in Deir ez-Zor, two in Jazira and one in Raqqa
- 38 suspected ISIS members arrested, down from 48
- Germany repatriated an ISIS linked woman and her four children

### In-Depth

May saw the highest rate of sleeper-cell attacks for 2025 with 32 sleeper-cell attacks in NES; up from 22 in April, marking a 45% increase. These attacks killed four military personnel and injured nine. Sleeper-cells escalated their attacks, primarily targeting SDF and Asayish headquarters. There were also several attacks on civilians for refusing to pay 'Zakat' an Islamic tax ISIS uses to justify extortion. In total, two civilians were injured.

Raids conducted by NES' security forces increased by 25% (12,15) in April, resulting in the arrest of 38 suspected ISIS-affiliates, including several senior figures. While raids increased, total arrests declined by 21% to 48, down from 38 in April.

ISIS commander Hamoud Abdullah al-Khatib, nicknamed "Abu Zakaria", and responsible for taking money from civilians by force under the pretext of collecting 'zakat', was arrested during a Coalition-backed security campaign by the SDF.

Germany repatriated an ISIS-affiliated family, one woman and her four children, when a German government delegation came to NES. In 2025 so far, this was the third occurrence of third-country foreigner repatriation.

The Swedish Public Prosecutor's Office is preparing to bring formal charges against a Swedish citizen, Osama Krayem, for allegedly participating in the execution of the Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh in Syria in 2014 along with other members of ISIS.

## June

### Key Points:

- 14 sleeper-cell attacks, down from 32 in May
- One attack was recorded in Jazira and the rest in Deir ez-Zor
- Four civilians and three members of Asayish were killed, one injured in ISIS attacks
- Raids decreased 67%, (15, 5), reaching an annual low point, three raids took place in Deir ez-Zor
- Only seven arrests, an 82% decrease from the previous month
- 944 Iraqis have been repatriated from al-Hol camp
- Outside of NES, 25 individuals were killed and 63 wounded in attack on a Greek Orthodox church of Damascus

### In-Depth

In June, RIC recorded 14 sleeper-cell attacks in NES, a 56% (32,14) decrease from May. These attacks killed four civilians. Additionally, three members of Asayish were killed and one injured. In this month's raids, seven suspected ISIS members were arrested, including a senior member.

Sleeper-cell attacks were limited mainly to Asayish checkpoints and vehicles, largely in Deir ez-Zor which remains a hotbed for ISIS activity.

The frequency of raids plummeted from 15 in May to only five in June, a decrease of 67%. Consequently, arrests also reached an annual low point, as RIC only confirmed seven arrests of suspected sleeper-cells, an 82% decrease from 38 arrests in May. One of the arrests was a senior ISIS member apprehended by the YPJ on June 25 in Shuhail, Deir ez-Zor. The YPJ thwarted plans to plant mines in the region and seized weapons and ammunition.

Iraq repatriated 944 of their nationals from al-Hol camp in June, marking its seventh repatriation mission of 2025.

Notably, outside NES, a large attack took place on June 22, in the Damascus suburb of Dweilia. As a result of the attack, which targeted Mar Elias Greek Orthodox church, 25 individuals were killed and a further 63 wounded. The Interior Ministry of the STG claimed that the attack was carried out by two ISIS gunmen, one of whom self-detonated. The STG Interior Ministry also claimed that the attacker came from al-Hol Camp in NES. The SDF denied this, saying their records do not indicate that the attacker was from al-Hol Camp.

## July

### Key Points:

- Sleeper-cell attacks increased by 29% (14,18)
- The majority, 83%, of attacks were in Deir ez-Zor, 11% in Raqqa and 6% in Jazira
- Four civilians and six military personnel were confirmed dead, making a total of 10 fatalities
- 10 injuries were recorded, two of whom were civilians.
- 14 raids took place, resulting in a total 69 arrests.
- 43% of raids were in Raqqa, 29% in Deir ez-Zor, and the remaining 28% was evenly spread across Jazira and the camps
- 879 Iraqis repatriated from NES.
- The U.S. repatriated a minor from a camp in NES.

### In-Depth

In July, RIC recorded 18 sleeper-cell attacks in NES, increasing by 29% from 14 in June. These attacks killed four civilians and injured two. They also killed six and injured eight military personnel.

While sleeper-cells continued to primarily target military checkpoints, attacks on civilians still persist. As RIC has consistently recorded, the bulk of the attacks took place in the region of Deir ez-Zor.

A total of 14 counter-ISIS raids took place, an increase of 180% (5,14), most of which saw direct participation from the Coalition. In July, 69 ISIS suspects were arrested, including four emirs. This marks a drastic 886% increase from only seven arrests in June. Two raids occurred in al-Hol camp. The majority of arrests, 74%, took place in Raqqa.

Iraq continued to repatriate its nationals, with 812 individuals leaving camp al-Hol in July. Additionally, 67 Iraqis were repatriated from Roj camp, totalling 879 Iraqis that have returned from NES in the month of July.

More residents of al-Hol camp left this month, 167 of them being from other parts of Syria such as Idlib, Raqqa, and Aleppo. The U.S. also repatriated a U.S. minor from a camp in NES. In the press release announcing the return of this minor, the U.S. Department of State also called for other countries to repatriate their citizens, stating that: "The only durable solution for the humanitarian and security crisis in these displaced persons camps in northeast Syria is for their countries of origin to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate, and where appropriate, ensure accountability for their nationals."

In international news, an ISIS member has been found guilty in Swedish court for the killing of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh in Syria in 2015.

## August

### Key Points

- RIC recorded a 22% (18,22) increase in sleeper-cell attacks in August
- 81% of attacks were in Deir ez-Zor, with only four taking place outside the region
- Two civilians killed; 12 military personnel killed, nine injured
- Nine anti-counter-ISIS raids conducted, a 36% (14,9) decrease from July
- Deir ez-Zor saw six of the nine raids, the remaining three were in Jazira
- Arrests increased by 10% reaching an annual high with 76 individuals apprehended
- Two women and five children repatriated from NES camps

### In-Depth

August saw a total of 22 sleeper-cell attacks, compared to 18 in July. These attacks resulted in two civilian and 12 military fatalities, with nine additional military personnel injured. Deir ez-Zor remained the epicenter of ISIS activity, though incidents were also reported in Heseke and Raqqa. While civilian casualties declined compared to July, military deaths doubled demonstrating ISIS' persistence in targeting security forces.

The month opened with its deadliest attacks, when five SDF fighters were killed on August 1. On August 16, a civilian man from the al-Busalih tribe and his wife were shot dead in Azman Debeis village, near Abu Khashab, by gunmen reportedly affiliated with ISIS. Between August 20 and 25, three SDF members and one former member were killed in Deir ez-Zor, and the corpse of an Asayish member was found near al-Abtakh village in Heseke. During this period, gunmen from Gharanji with possible ISIS links surrounded SDF members inside a pharmacy in eastern Deir ez-Zor. Clashes resulted in the death of one of the gunmen, and injury to three others; while six SDF fighters were kidnapped and a military vehicle seized. The abducted personnel were later released following SDF raids.

Although Raqqa witnessed relatively few attacks compared to Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa's security forces imposed a partial curfew from midnight to 5 a.m.

ISIS activity across NES in August prompted a series of coordinated counter-operations by the SDF, YPJ, and Asayish, many conducted with Coalition support. On August 30, over 3,000 SDF fighters participated in a major operation in Heseke, leading to the detention of 51 ISIS-linked individuals. In total, nine raids across NES resulted in 76 arrests. Despite the relatively low frequency of raids, August saw the highest number of arrests in 2025.

On August 28, 232 Iraqi families, approximately 850 individuals, were transferred from al-Hol camp to Iraq. Additionally, three children and one woman were repatriated to Tanzania, one child to Britain, and a woman and child returned to Brazil.

## September

### Key Points

- Sleeper-cell attacks rose 36% (22,30)
- Deir ez-Zor saw 66% of attacks
- September saw the highest rate of deaths as total fatalities increased by 29% (14,18)
- 34 arrests of suspected ISIS members, in 14 raids
- 57% of raids were in Deir ez-Zor, 29% in Raqqa, the other 14% spread across Jazira and the camps
- Iraq announced its intention to repatriate all foreign nationals from al-Hol and Roj camps by the end of the year

### In-Depth

September saw 30 attacks, a 36% increase over last month's 22, making it the second highest number of attacks recorded in 2025, following the 32 recorded in May. These 30 incidents resulted in the highest number of fatalities seen this year with a total of 18 individuals, comprised of 15 SDF members and three civilians. A further 14 military members reported injuries, as well as two civilians. Only two of these 30 sleeper-cell attacks took place outside the region of Deir ez-Zor, one in Heseke and another in al-Hol camp.

Throughout September, the SDF, Asayish and the Coalition conducted 14 raids primarily in the regions of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor leading to a total of 34 arrests of suspected ISIS members in NES, a 55% (76,34) decrease from August.

Notably, one civilian was killed in the countryside of Deir ez-Zor after failing to stop at an SDF checkpoint. SDF personnel stationed at the checkpoint claimed they believed the civilian “belonged to ISIS cells” and opened fire on him.

Two high ranking ISIS members were detained in September, Ahmad al-Mahmoud, or Abu Mansour, and Hassan Jafli, also known as Abu Abdo. Jafli had been producing and distributing explosives. The SDF claimed to have seized 180 blocks of TNT, detonators, control devices, electronic circuits, as well as mobile devices and “significant sums of money” in the raid. A security operation was also conducted in camp al-Hol on September 5, following an escape attempt by 56 women and children. Eleven individuals were arrested in the operation.

The Iraqi Government announced plans to repatriate<sup>22</sup> all Iraqi citizens from al-Hol camp by the end of the year and France repatriated<sup>23</sup> three women and ten children. The children have been placed into care, while two of the women were taken into police custody and the third faces possible indictment by French authorities.

22 <https://npasyria.com/en/129449>

23 [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2025/09/16/france-repatriates-women-and-children-from-syrian-prisons\\_6745446\\_7.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2025/09/16/france-repatriates-women-and-children-from-syrian-prisons_6745446_7.html)

The Australian Government came under fire for allowing two women linked to ISIS and their four children to escape<sup>24</sup> Syria and make their way back to Australia after being detained in Lebanon and then issued passports by the Australian Embassy in Beirut. The Australian Government denied<sup>25</sup> offering any assistance but said they expect more people to follow in the future.

## October

### Key points

- Attacks decreased 33% with only 20 confirmed cases in October
- Only 3 took place outside Deir ez-Zor, all of which were in Raqqa
- Fatalities down from last month after rising for four consecutive months, with five military and two civilian deaths, seven in total
  - Raids decreased 36% (14,9) as did arrests by 51% (35, 17)
  - 67% of raids were in Deir ez-Zor, 22% in Tabqa and 11% in Jazira
  - Child found murdered in al-Hol camp
  - 840 Iraqis repatriated from al-Hol camp

### In-Depth

October was marked by a drop in ISIS activity after four months of increasing attacks, as total attacks decreased by 33% (30,20). Consequently, fatalities also decreased by 61% (18,7) after reaching an annual high in September.

Two of the confirmed deaths were civilians. Despite the drop, this month's total remains slightly above the year's monthly average of 18.3 attacks.

Raids decreased 36% (14,9) compared to September. Arrests also saw a significant drop of 51% (35,17) with 17 suspected ISIS members arrested and two killed in a total of nine raids this month.

The body of Fatima Abdullah, a 14-year-old Turkmen girl, was found in al-Hol camp on October 8. North Press Agency reported<sup>26</sup> that Fatima Abdullah suffered sexual assault, torture, and strangulation before her death.

840 ISIS-linked women and children left al-Hol camp to Iraq after the Iraqi government organised their repatriation to put them through a rehabilitation program in al-Jadah camp south of Mosul.

24 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-10-03/isis-brides-return-australia-smuggle-syria/105850360>

25 <https://www.skynews.com.au/australia-news/politics/australian-federal-police-confirm-preparations-for-more-returning-isis-brides-labor->

26 <https://npasyria.com/en/130797>

## November

### Key points

- Sleeper-cell attacks increased 15% (20,23)
- 100% of attacks occurred in Deir ez-Zor
- In November, sleeper-cells killed four individuals, one of whom was a civilian
- Raids decreased by 33% (9,6) and arrests by 12% (17,15)
- Six total raids led to 15 arrests, including the arrest of one senior ISIS member
- 50% of the raids were in Deir ez-Zor, the remaining half was evenly divided between Jazira, Raqqa and the camps
- The STG joins the Global Coalition against ISIS

### In-Depth

November saw 23 attacks by ISIS sleeper-cells, an increase of 15% from 20 in October. These attacks killed three and injured four military personnel, additionally one civilian was killed and another injured in these attacks. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported<sup>27</sup> that masked gunmen claiming to be ISIS established checkpoints in the town of Theban, Deir ez-Zor.

Over November the SDF and Coalition carried out a total of six raids leading to 15 arrests. Compared to October, raids decreased by 33% (9,6) and arrests decreased by 12% (17,15).

On November 8, the SDF and Coalition detained Iraqi national and senior ISIS leader Baha al-Maseeri, also known as Abu Abdulrahman, in al-Hol camp. An SDF press release<sup>28</sup> alleged that al-Maseeri “played a central role in reactivating ISIS cells, coordinating ideological and military recruitment, as well as manufacturing and preparing explosive devices intended to be smuggled out of the camp.”

On November 25 a Spanish ISIS-linked woman and her child were handed over to Spanish authorities by the Foreign Relations Department of the DAANES.

Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa pledged to join the fight against ISIS through joining the U.S.-led Global Coalition against ISIS. A week after being taken off the U.S. government’s terrorist sanctions list and the removal of the \$10 million bounty, al-Sharaa flew to Washington D.C. to meet with President Donald Trump. Among other discussions and meetings in the American capital, President al-Sharaa made Syria the 90th country to join the Coalition. Syrian officials stressed that this is a political partnership<sup>29</sup> and Syria will not be participating in Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S.-led military operation against ISIS in which the SDF plays a major role.

27 <https://www.syriahr.com/en/373553/>

28 <https://sdf-press.com/en/?p=19424>

29 <https://apnews.com/article/syria-coalition-islamic-state-79ceed4666aef43465221734fca899d5>

## December

### Key Points

- 22 sleeper-cell attacks resulted in 12 deaths and 11 people wounded
- Only 1 attack took place outside Deir ez-Zor, in the Jazira region
- 17 raids, the most in any month of 2025, led to 33 arrests and nine suspects killed
- 47% of raids occurred in Raqqa, 35% in Deir ez-Zor, and 18% in Jazira
- 858 Iraqis were repatriated and 16 others attempted to escape from al-Hol
- ISIS-linked attack on U.S. troops in Palmyra leads to retaliatory airstrike and ground campaign in Syria

### In-Depth

ISIS conducted 22 attacks conducted in NES in December killing seven and injuring nine military personnel and also killing five civilians and injuring two. Attacks were concentrated on military targets such as checkpoints in the Deir ez-Zor region. An assassination attempt was made on SDF commander Salem al-Hamada for the third time, in which he was injured along with two other military personnel and a civilian bystander. Although the only immediate fatality was one civilian who was caught in the shooting, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights later reported <sup>30</sup>al-Hamada had also died from his injuries.

Raids reached an annual peak in December with 17 raids recorded, concentrated mostly in Deir ez-Zor. Compared to November, raids increased 183% (6,17) and arrests rose by 120% (15,33). Among the 33 arrests on record was the Emir, Abu Zubayr, also known as Samak, who was allegedly responsible for “smuggling routes and communication lines between ISIS cells in the region and al-Hol camp, and supervised the recruitment and training of children from ISIS families.”

Nine suspected sleeper-cell operatives were killed in raids in December, including the alleged mastermind behind an attack in Palmyra on December 13 in which two U.S. soldiers, a U.S. civilian interpreter and two Syrian soldiers were killed. Also killed during the raid were one woman and one man. Reports from SOHR<sup>31</sup> indicate he was a 14-year-old boy, while an Asayish statement<sup>32</sup> identifies him as a man who opened fire on the security forces.

The final repatriations from al-Hol camp for the year were 858 Iraqis who left in early December for al-Jadaa camp in Nineveh for rehabilitation before being reintegrated into society. 16 women and children later attempted to escape from al-Hol but were caught by Asayish.

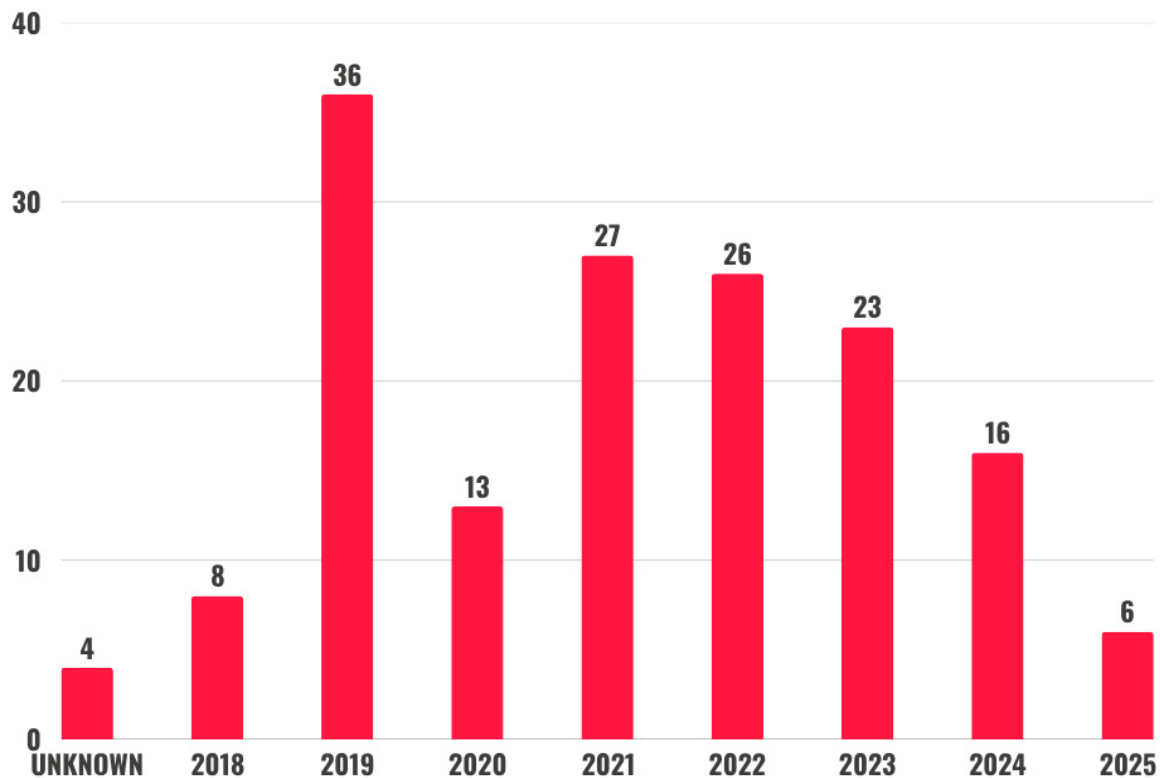
30 <https://www.syriahr.com/en/375473/>

31 <https://www.syriahr.com/en/375114/>

32 <https://hawarnews.com/en/precise-operation-by-isf-ic-east-of-raqqqa>

## Repatriations and Camps

**Figure 8: Number of Repatriation Missions (excluding Iraqis), 2018-2024**

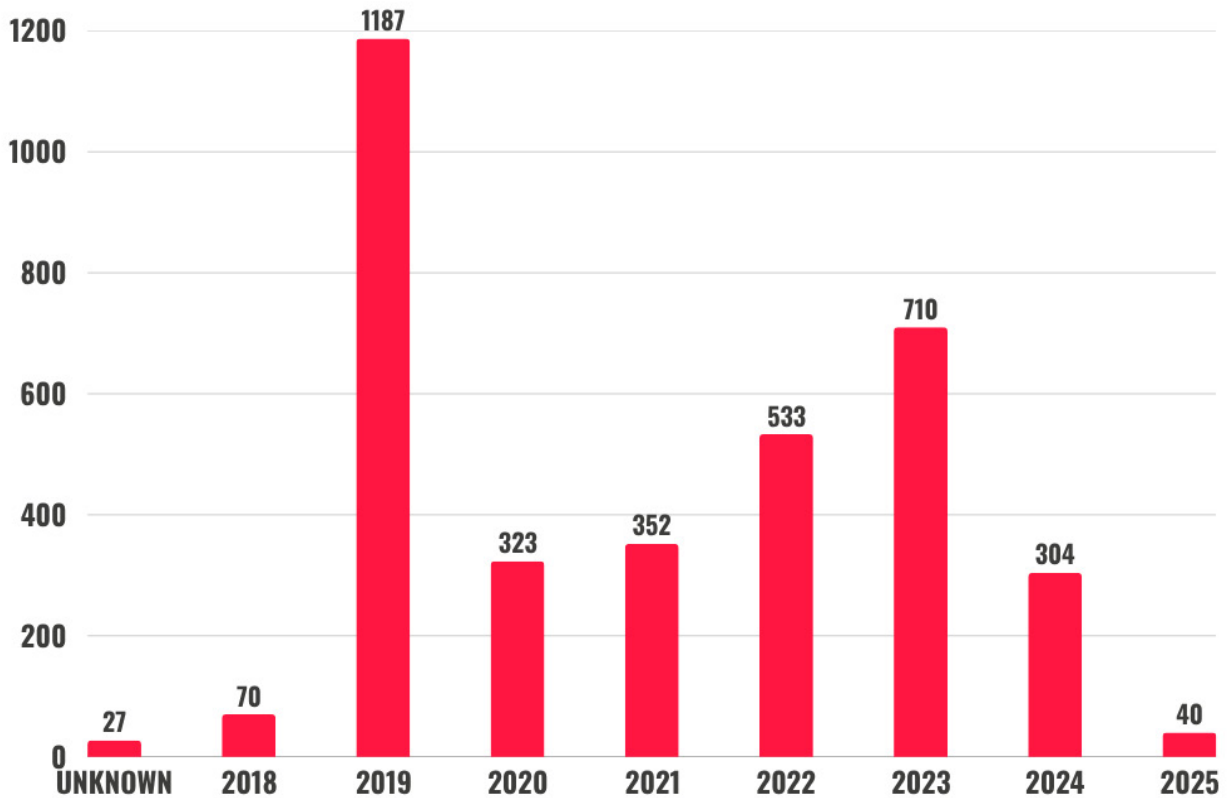


After USAID was closed in early 2025 there was much speculation and worry about the future of al-Hol and Roj camps, which housed up to 30,000 ISIS-linked individuals, mostly women and their children.

On October 1, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) took over responsibility for management of al-Hol and Roj camps after a U.S. award for al-Hol camp management ended in September.

Repatriations continued this year but at a significantly reduced rate compared to last year. In 2025 there were 8,717 repatriations of ISIS linked individuals. The majority of those repatriated were from Iraq, the remainder of repatriations were as follows: Four from Austria; four from the U.K.; five from Germany; 13 from France; 12 from South Africa; two from Spain.

**Figure 9: Number of Third-Country Nationals Repatriated from NES (excluding Iraqis), 2018-2024**



During 2025, there were regular convoys to repatriate the 8,677 Iraqi nationals, and in September Iraq stated its intention to repatriate all foreign nationals from al-Hol and Roj camps by the end of the year. It remains unclear whether they managed to complete this. Meanwhile, 1,831 Syrians were internally relocated from NES camps, mostly to Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo.

During the STG’s assault on NES in January 2026, government forces took control of four sites which combined are estimated to have housed 33,500 ISIS members: three prisons containing suspected and convicted ISIS prisoners, and al-Hol camp. At the end of 2025, RIC estimates there were around 25,000 individuals in al-Hol camp. Since the STG’s takeover of al-Hol in January, we understand the camp to be largely empty.

Roj camp lies further north than al-Hol and was not captured during January’s invasion. About 2400 people were at Roj camp and no successful breakouts were reported at the time. The camp is still run by Asayish although they are currently in the process of being integrated into the Syrian Internal Security Forces.

Due to these recent changes RIC has decided to stop actively monitoring repatriations. We aim to publish a summary of repatriations over recent years in a separate report soon.

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