

What do the latest arrests of the Assad regime remnants leaders reveal?



The number of names the Syrian Interior Ministry has announced it has arrested reflects a marked acceleration in the pursuit and detention of military and security figures linked to the ousted Bashar Assad regime, with the number of detainees reaching 365 wanted individuals and suspects over the past three months (March, April and May), compared with the first months after the regime's fall.

Over the past two days, authorities managed to arrest five prominent wanted figures: Sari Moayad Makhlof, accused of taking part in the al-Bayda massacre, in addition to involvement in looting, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, car theft, theft of citizens' property and running an international smuggling network.

Authorities also arrested Ghassan Assaf, formerly the office director of Gen. Suheil al-Hassan, who is accused of participating in massacres against civilians in western rural Aleppo, as well as continuing to recruit cells, incite violence and stand behind bombings that targeted public security and its institutions after the regime's fall.

The arrests also included Shuaib Mahmoud Ibrahim, one of the commanders of military groups affiliated with the former regime, who is wanted on charges of committing war crimes and participating in military operations against rebel-held areas, particularly in the battles in the Homs and Hama countrysides in 2017, in

addition to accusations of mutilating victims' bodies.

Among those detained was also Mohammad Bassam Hassani, accused of involvement in war crimes, who fought within the "Tarmah Regiment" affiliated with Air Force Intelligence before joining Hezbollah. He faces multiple accusations related to committing violations and crimes against civilians. The fifth detainee is Karim Shalla, accused of murder, kidnapping and torture against civilians in various areas.

The work of the security forces and the Counterterrorism Administration extends beyond the country's borders, as the Interior Ministry is preparing a list of 1,000 people wanted by justice from among former officers and officials, while announcing its intention to publish the list and share it with other countries. The ministry has also expressed readiness to provide the necessary facilitation for European investigators seeking to gather evidence inside Syria, helping pursue those accused of committing violations during the years of the Syrian revolution.

A shift in the structure and role of the security institution

The Interior Ministry has undergone a series of organizational measures since the overthrow of the Assad regime and the dissolution of its security and military apparatuses. The process began with the appointment of Ali Keda as interior minister in the caretaker government, before Anas Khattab took over the ministry as part of the government formation announced at the end of March 2025, after serving as head of the General Intelligence Service.

In May 2025, the ministry announced the merger of the police and public security bodies into a unified agency called the "Provincial Internal Security Command," alongside the appointment of 12 internal security commanders in the provinces. The new structure later expanded to include Raqqa and Hasakah after the integration of the Syrian Democratic Forces into state institutions, as part of efforts to restructure the security system.

Minister Khattab said the ministry is seeking to present a new image of security as an institution for protecting people and ensuring their safety, not a tool for intimidating or terrorizing them. He said security performance has undergone a fundamental change, and that security personnel and police officers are now in the service of citizens after these institutions had for decades been associated with fear and terror among Syrians.

Speaking about the transformations within the security institution, Khattab issued a warning to the remnants of the former regime, stressing that the authorities' commitment to the law and restraint does not reflect weakness. He affirmed the continued pursuit of fugitives from justice and the adoption of firm measures against anyone threatening security and stability, adding that the new

Syria, “the Syria of reconstruction, will not turn back.”

The ministry and its provincial directorates have continued to announce the arrest of leaders and officials linked to the Assad regime, the dismantling of networks affiliated with the remnants, the seizure of weapons depots, and the foiling of plots and attempts involving attacks, bombings, kidnappings and ambushes, in an escalating security campaign reflected in the official figures and statistics released.

Military expert Brig. Gen. Abdullah al-Asaad explains the acceleration in arrests of those implicated in abuses, particularly senior leaders in the networks tied to them, as the result of ongoing investigations and security surveillance, along with the benefit of testimonies and confessions from some detained criminals.

Al-Asaad told Noon Post that these operations came as part of organized intelligence work based on gathering information, pinpointing locations accurately, and analyzing and cross-checking it, making it possible to reach the targeted networks and their leaders.

For his part, Nawar Shaaban, a researcher at the Arab Center for the Study of Contemporary Syria, attributes the acceleration in arrests to a set of overlapping factors. He explained that in the first months after the fall of the Assad regime, priorities were focused on consolidating control over cities, rebuilding the security services and dealing with immediate threats.

Shaaban notes that security institutions are now more capable of moving from broad campaigns to operations based on surveillance, information-gathering and accumulated investigations, as reflected in the series of arrests targeting officers and commanders accused of involvement in crimes and abuses.

He told Noon Post that the succession of these arrests suggests they were not the product of spontaneous moves, and that some cases required time to determine the whereabouts of wanted individuals and gather information linking them to available testimonies and documents. He added that the start of the trial of Atef Najib in April marked a shift from merely detaining wanted suspects to beginning a judicial process against them, which is helping accelerate the pursuit of other names on the premise that accountability is not limited to a small number of figures.

He explained that the security impact of these arrests varies depending on the position of the person arrested and the nature of the role they were playing. Arresting someone still active in leading a cell or managing a financing, communications or arms-smuggling network can disrupt part of the command structure of these networks, cut lines of communication between their members, and expose weapons depots or related sites.

In such a case, the importance of the operation is not limited to detaining the individual, but extends to the information that can be obtained from them and what it may lead to in reaching the rest of the network.

But if the arrest targets a former officer who has gone into hiding and is no longer playing an operational role, the direct security impact is less, while the importance of the arrest stands out from the standpoint of justice, accountability and deterrence.

The detention of such figures may also weaken the sense among some networks linked to the former regime that they are beyond pursuit. It may also push some individuals to withdraw from armed activity or surrender and benefit from available legal pathways, including settlement in cases where its conditions apply, according to the researcher.

Serious moves on the path of justice

Arresting those implicated and leaders in the Assad regime and the remnants' networks constitutes a fundamental pillar in the path toward justice and redress for victims. But it still represents only the beginning of a long and complex road, given the scale of the violations committed against Syrians and the breadth of those involved. The issue concerns thousands of perpetrators and an entire state apparatus dedicated to committing mass atrocities.

Syrian government efforts are continuing to prepare lists of wanted individuals over violations committed during the years of the revolution, alongside enhanced cooperation with Interpol as part of a cross-border pursuit targeting suspects accused of war crimes, with assurances that all those involved will be included without exception.

Officials at the Interior Ministry also confirmed that work is underway, in coordination with the Justice Ministry, to prepare a list that will be published later, alongside the initiation of procedures through Interpol to pursue some fugitives outside the country, with plans to put forward a list of 1,000 former officers and officials, and the government's readiness to provide the necessary facilitation to European investigators.

Legal researcher Nawras al-Abdullah confirms that there has been progress in the main and preparatory procedures for implementing transitional justice in recent months, including launching the judicial track and carrying out broad arrest operations compared with last year, considering this to reflect new and serious steps on the path of transitional justice.

The researcher told Noon Post that these steps are particularly important in helping ease social tensions among victims, their families and supporters of

justice, and that they also make up for earlier shortcomings, a significant part of which stemmed from the weakness of the nascent institutions at the time and their greater cohesion at the current stage.

Al-Abdullah believes that preparing the lists and sharing them with countries is an important step, even if delayed, as most of the basic measures should have been taken months ago. In any case, expanding investigations and trying to arrest suspects who fled outside Syria, while obstructing the existence of safe havens for them, supports transitional justice pathways and moves them into a new phase that requires the cooperation of other parties and their genuine response to Syrian criminal requests, without turning this human rights file into a tool for blackmail or political point-scoring.

Despite the recorded moves and measures, the path of pursuit and justice remains governed by the complexities of a transitional phase burdened by a heavy legacy, in which security and judicial structures have become intertwined with the accumulated weight of many years of abuses. Amid the widening scope of prosecutions, observations and criticisms are still being recorded regarding some manifestations of shortcomings and the uneven pace of procedures, along with fears of “exemptions” and “settlements” that could keep criminals away from trial despite government reassurances. This path remains dependent on its ability to entrench more stable standards of accountability and strengthen confidence in it.