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## **Syria's Arab tribes revolt: US bases and allies become prime targets**

The current uprising in Syria's Deir Ezzor represents the growing armed resistance of local Arab tribes against US-backed Kurdish forces who control their land and resources – potentially opening up a new front for West Asia's Axis of Resistance.



(Photo Credit: The Cradle)

On 7 August, a coalition of Syrian Arab tribes **recaptured** several key towns from US-backed Kurdish forces in the eastern countryside of Syria's Deir Ezzor governorate. These tribesmen, led by Sheikh Ibrahim al-Hafil, launched the largest assault on Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) sites since the onset of the **Arab tribal rebellion** against the US-backed militia last year.

The renewed offensive has also reignited popular resistance against the US presence in the region, tracing its origins to the SDF leadership coup against the Deir Ezzor Military Council, which led to the arrest and removal of Arab leader Ahmed al-Khabil, also known as Abu Khawla.

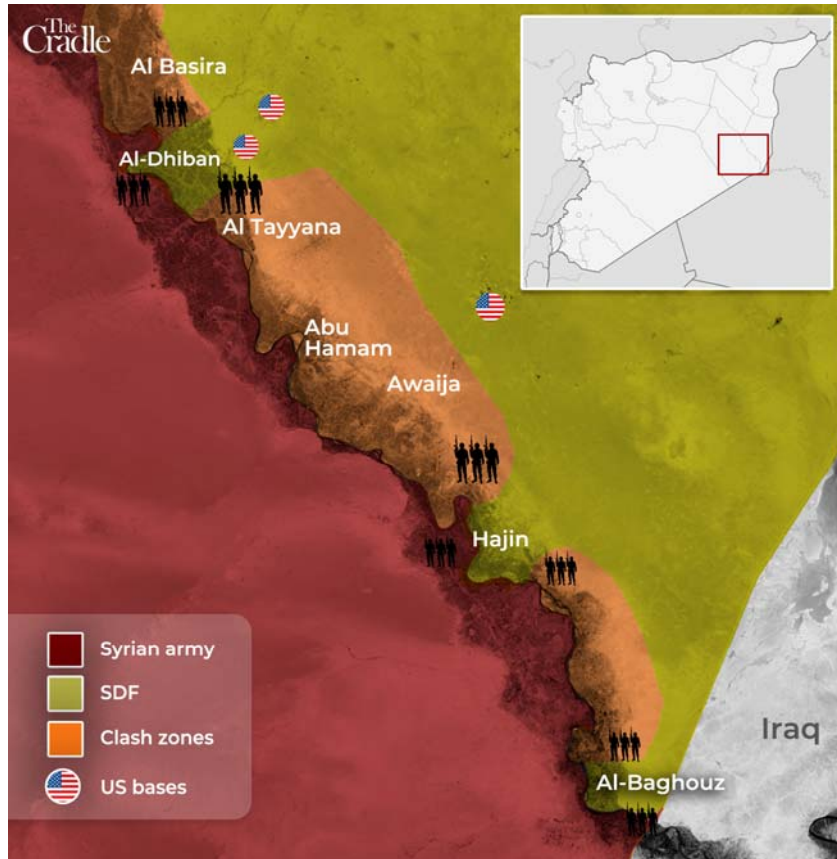
### **The spark of resistance**

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In August 2023, the SDF's arrest of the Deir Ezzor Military Council leader triggered a tribal uprising across several villages under SDF control – from Al-Baghouz to Al-Shuhail. This uprising quickly evolved into a more organized resistance when Sheikh Hafli announced in an audio statement the formation of a military command for the “Army of Tribes and Clans in the countryside of Deir Ezzor” last September.



*Clashes along the Euphrates River in Deir Ezzor governorate.*

Since then, Hafli has become a constant menace to the SDF, with [accusations](#) flying that the Syrian government and Iran supported him. It is an obvious attempt to discredit the Arab tribal movement, which is genuinely focused on liberating land and reclaiming resources.

The SDF prematurely [announced](#) the “failure” of the attack, which it claims was carried out “upon the orders” of Hossam Louka, head of Syria’s General Intelligence Directorate. In a statement posted on Facebook, the SDF said:

**Our sweep campaign continues against the remnants of the Syrian regime-backed mercenaries who attacked the villages of Al-Dhiban, Al-Latwa, and Abu Hamam.**

US occupation forces have established prominent bases at the Al-Omar and Conoco oil fields, in a region largely inhabited by Arab communities who have long been persecuted by the SDF. When the US failed to control and co-opt these tribes into a loyal

organization, it sought to instead characterize them as a threat aligned with Syrian and Iranian interests.

This narrative is consistent with the approach of the US project and its allies in the SDF, who seek to suppress any resistance movements that challenge their agenda and practices, including the [theft](#) of Syrian oil and wheat.

### **‘Iranian-backed’ tribal resistance**

Sheikh Hafl called upon the tribes and clans, especially those beyond Syria’s borders, to support the resistance, leading to increased and sustained attacks against the SDF. The tribal resistance, primarily rooted in Dhiban, spread throughout the towns and cities east of the Euphrates, turning them into a continuous conflict zone.

This resistance posed a significant threat to US interests, with the so-called “Operation Inherent Resolve” [reporting](#) in its October–December 2023 quarterly update to the US Congress that tribal fighters have evolved into a “full-fledged resistance movement.”

These fighters, the report said, receive “explicit support from the Syrian regime and its Iranian allies on the western side of the Euphrates River, where resistance fighters resupply, rearm, and launch attacks across the river in SDF-controlled villages on the eastern side.”

Recognizing this threat, the US aircraft recently launched several raids targeting the Arab tribal forces to prevent them from advancing towards their bases or achieving their goal of expelling the SDF from “Arab land.”

### **Gaining ground as SDF lays siege to Hasakah**

After a year of limited confrontations and small operations, Hafl re-issued the call to confront what he called the “Qandil” gangs. This announcement coincided with the launch of a violent attack by Arab tribal forces on SDF positions in the cities and towns of Deir Ezzor.

During this assault, tribal forces managed to cross into and expand control over areas including Dhiban, Al-Busaira, Ibriha, Al-Hariji, Al-Tayyaneh, Abu Hamam, Gharanij, Al-Kishkiya, and the entire riverbed. The SDF, in turn, responded by imposing a siege on the residents of Hasakah and Qamishli within Syrian government-controlled areas, cutting off supplies of flour, food, and water – a tactic the SDF frequently uses to pressure Damascus. Insiders believe that the SDF is leading Hasakah into the unknown, as the imposition of a siege policy could trigger local confrontations within the city. This will not, however, deter the tribal “resistance” from continuing its project aimed at pressuring the US occupation and its Kurdish militias.

Notably, a Syrian-based [Russian delegation](#) arrived at Qamishli airport before Friday afternoon and held several meetings to mediate the crisis. According to Syrian daily *Al-Watan*, these discussions did not yield positive results after the SDF leaders rejected mediation and insisted on continuing the siege of Hasakah's population.

### **Serving geopolitical goals**

The US occupation of the Jazira region and the establishment of more than 20 American bases was not primarily to combat terrorism, as claimed by the international coalition, but rather because "ISIS" served as the pretext for strengthening the US obstruction of the strategic land links between the eastern Mediterranean, via Central Asia, to China, and to Iran on the Persian Gulf. The US further seeks to prevent the development of close ties between the Syrian and Iraqi arenas.

Political affairs writer and researcher Dr Ahmed al-Druze explains to *The Cradle* why the US continues to provide unlimited support for the SDF in opposition to the region's inhabitants.

**The American occupation will remain as long as it has the ability to do so, and it deals with the Arab tribes from this perspective.**

Druze believes that the events unfolding today in Syria's eastern region are a result of the repercussions of the Palestinian resistance's Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and the broader [spillover of conflicts](#) across West Asia.

He highlights that, while some may view the recent developments as a local conflict – either between Arab clans or between Arab clans and Kurds – the reality suggests otherwise, as the clans find common cause and common targets with the Axis of Resistance.

Even if the situation temporarily stabilizes, with tribal forces retreating and the SDF lifting the siege on Hasakah and Qamishli, Druze believes the underlying international conflict will likely resurface, potentially tied to events in occupied Palestine and Gaza.

Though it may be premature to speak of a US existential predicament in the Jazira region, given that its losses currently remain limited, writer and political analyst Khaled al-Miftah argues that the US faces growing popular rejection and resistance.

The region is increasingly aware of Washington's goals – to establish a separatist Kurdish entity and exploit Syria's resources. Al-Miftah tells *The Cradle* that the US is beginning to feel the effects of the [Turkish–Syrian rapprochement](#), which, if achieved under Russian auspices, could spell the end of the SDF's separatist ambitions. Consequently, the US has begun to create obstacles to prevent this outcome.

## **Part of the region's resistance**

Despite the end of large-scale military conflict in most of Syria years ago, the eastern region remains embroiled in tension and ongoing strife. Armed confrontations between the SDF and pro-Turkish factions in the north continue, while the war with Arab tribal forces east of the Euphrates enters a new chapter, driven by different calculations than in past battles.

The tribes are now determined to expand their operations and have increased their readiness. US bases have become permanent targets for resistance forces on both the Syrian and Iraqi sides, with drones and rockets frequently striking occupation bases in the Omar and Conoco oil fields. Meanwhile, the tribes have expanded their control over villages that serve as the first line of defense for the SDF around US bases.

Meanwhile, with the [SDF's release of hundreds of ISIS fighters](#) from prisons in July, ISIS continues its terrorist attacks in the region, despite the international coalition's previous claims of having eliminated the group's presence. ISIS cells periodically launch assaults on Syrian army positions and their allies in the Resistance Axis.

The Jazira region has essentially become a battleground where the US now reaps consequences from its forced occupation of Syrian territory, disregarding the impact on Syrian territorial unity and the strife it sows among the population.

The eastern region remains trapped in a cycle of escalation, with local and international actors involved, while the Syrian people bear the brunt, suffering both from ongoing violence and the theft of their resources.

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