



**CENTRE FOR STATECRAFT
& NATIONAL SECURITY**

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Building Syria's New Ministry of Interior

Gregory Waters

CONTACT DETAILS

For questions and queries, please contact:

Centre for Statecraft and National Security
King's College London
Strand
London WC2R 2LS
United Kingdom

mail@csns.uk

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Cover: A member of the Syrian security forces guards the historic Aleppo Citadel during its reopening ceremony on 27 September 2025 following post-war restoration work.

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Executive Summary

Syria's Ministry of Interior (MoI) was built up from a small core of experienced and well-trained officers operating in Idlib prior to the fall of the Assad regime and has reformed and grown into the country's most important and successful security apparatus over the past 16 months. Yet the Ministry did not achieve this organisational maturity overnight.

With the country's liberation on 8 December 2024, this nascent security apparatus inherited a complex spectrum of security challenges, while simultaneously needing to create new ministerial structures from scratch. It has evolved along three main tracks: recruitment, training and structure. Each evolution has had immediate effects on the ground, reflecting the centrality of the Ministry in the daily lives of Syrians. The continued adaptability and evolution of these three tracks will be crucial if the Ministry hopes to continue its positive trajectory.

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	4
Roots in Idlib	5
Emergency Phase	6
<i>Recruitment</i>	7
<i>Training</i>	9
<i>Structure</i>	10
Foundation Phase	13
<i>Recruitment</i>	13
<i>Training</i>	14
<i>Structure</i>	15
Building Phase	18
<i>Recruitment</i>	19
<i>Training</i>	20
<i>Structure</i>	21
Conclusion: Challenges to Address in 2026	23

Introduction

Syria's Mol serves as one of two security pillars of the new state. Its mandate is internally focused: to protect civilians and government institutions, and respond to threats from criminal and terror networks. It is distinct from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and has increasingly operated independently from the latter. The Mol includes armed security forces such as the civil police and General Security Service (GSS), special task regiments overseeing counterterrorism operations, specialist directorates dedicated to counter-narcotics and road security, and a range of administrative directorates overseeing civil records.

The Mol's growth from a small component of a non-state armed group into a key security institution has been both complex and comprehensive. Without knowing how the Mol has evolved, it is impossible to understand why certain security problems in Syria persist while others have receded. At its core, the Mol has demonstrated a broader degree of flexibility than other institutions of the new Syrian state.¹ This openness to review, reassessment and change has been foundational for the Mol's ability to address its own structural deficiencies.

This report examines how the Mol has evolved between December 2024 and May 2026. It relies on scores of interviews with Mol officials and local commanders, and civilian activists who engage with the Ministry, all conducted by the author over eight visits to the country since the fall of the Assad regime.

The Ministry's evolution has been separated into three approximate periods:

1. Emergency Phase, December 2024 to early spring 2025 – This is defined by temporary measures in response to severe resource constraints.
2. Foundation Phase, mid-spring 2025 to autumn 2025 – During this phase, the Ministry reformed several of its initial systems and significantly expanded its internal structures.
3. Building Phase, ongoing – The Foundation Phase laid the basis for this third and current phase, which has seen the Ministry institutionalise many of its better practices while expanding its engagement across Syrian communities.

¹ Every Ministry official the author has interviewed over the past year has stressed the impermanent nature of the national and local structures, explaining that the Ministry is undergoing constant review and reform in order to address weaknesses and better adapt its institutions to the country's needs.

Roots in Idlib

The GSS is the core of Syria's Mol. This body is tasked with the majority of security duties, such as manning checkpoints, and conducting patrols and raids. Unlike the MoD, which is built out of a political merger of former opposition factions, the GSS is a longstanding institution with roots in the liberated areas of Idlib.

Prior to the fall of the regime, Syria's Idlib governorate was under the control of the armed opposition group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and administratively run by a technocratic body called the Syrian Salvation Government. As part of this proto-state structure, the Syrian Salvation Government created its own small ministry of interior, within which it formed the first General Security Force (GSF). The GSF, while technically independent from HTS, was led by many veteran HTS officers and coordinated closely with its leadership.²

The GSF was officially launched in 2020, though it had existed in some form since 2017.³ Unlike HTS, which was a military-oriented non-state armed group, the GSF was tasked with policing and security operations inside the liberated areas of Idlib. As such, it comprised five departments:

1. Regional Information Office
2. Internal Security Division
3. Organised Crime Portfolio
4. Regime Portfolio
5. Extremists Portfolio (for combatting al-Qaeda and IS cells).⁴

By the time the regime fell in 2024, therefore, the GSF and its leadership had already accrued experience in internal security operations.

Most importantly, the formal announcement of the GSF paralleled the opening of the Syrian Salvation Government Police Academy. This was the first formal training institution run by Syria's opposition and was designed to professionalise and standardise the training of police and GSF officers operating in Idlib. New recruits and veteran HTS fighters were accepted into the programme, and by 2024, around 2,500 men had graduated into the GSF. Cadets underwent an initial two-month training period followed by regular one-to-two-week level-up courses – essentially specialised classes on specific topics which, if passed, gave the student an additional certificate.⁵ Crucially, the training included extensive courses on civil policing, human rights and minority engagement.⁶ This training would prove vital for the nascent Mol's ability to manage its expanded forces and build trust with non-Sunni communities in the initial period after the regime's collapse.

² Charles Lister, "Twenty Years After 9/11: The Fight for Supremacy in Northwest Syria and the Implications for Global Jihad," *CTC Sentinel* 14, no. 7 (2021), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/twenty-years-after-9-11-the-fight-for-supremacy-in-northwest-syria-and-the-implications-for-global-jihad/>.

³ Aaron Zelin, "Jihadi 'Counterterrorism': Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State," *CTC Sentinel* 16, no. 2 (2023), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/jihadi-counterterrorism-hayat-tahrir-al-sham-versus-the-islamic-state/>.

⁴ Zelin, "Jihadi 'Counterterrorism'."

⁵ Interview with two former Police Academy students, Homs, July 2025; Tartous, November 2025.

⁶ Interview with two former Police Academy students, Homs, July 2025; Tartous, November 2025.

Emergency Phase

The Mol emerged on 8 December 2024 with one of the most complex mandates of the new government. Security challenges in the immediate aftermath of the liberation were multifaceted and widespread. The rapid collapse of the regime's security forces had left the new government fearful that hardcore elements would use the Alawi heartlands to regroup and launch new attacks before security could be established.⁷ At the same time, there was an ever-present threat of IS cells taking advantage of the power vacuum to move into cities and rebuild their networks. Underlying all of this were the basic policing challenges of dealing with widespread criminality and revenge-driven intercommunal violence in a country awash with weapons and factionalised armed groups.

Addressing these challenges required a large and experienced police force supported by effective intelligence networks. The Mol lacked both the manpower, particularly in experienced and professional policing units, and the funds for rapid expansion. As a result, policing in the first months after Assad's fall was often a joint effort between the Mol and the nascent MoD, which did not truly exist on the ground, meaning that many ex-opposition factions were now relied upon to support security officials in unclear capacities.

This blurry overlap of military and policing was rooted in HTS's security approach during its final offensive against the Assad regime. As part of its military plans, HTS had seconded the top-performing GSF officers into specialised combat units.⁸ These companies were assigned as second-line forces, first to support assault troops if needed, but then to immediately establish checkpoints in newly captured areas and maintain law and order.⁹ In order to expand the limited manpower of the GSF, the officers placed in these units were assigned rank and file personnel from the armed factions.¹⁰ These GSF officers were then assigned as local Mol commanders after 8 December 2024.

Complicating this security fabric yet further was the inability of the Ministry, and more broadly the new government, to assert a monopoly on violence in the first months. The armed opposition factions were not yet truly merged into a single army, and most factions from the Syrian National Army and National Liberation Front retained their financial links to Turkey. Even groups without foreign backing were still able to negotiate local power-sharing agreements, such as Ahmed Awdeh's Eighth Brigade, which was given local authority part of Dara'a to mitigate power struggles between themselves and the central state. Yet these factional arrangements often exacerbated local security issues, particularly in Homs where local Turkish-backed

7 For example, the fear resulted in the decision to deploy several of the more extremist but elite fighting groups to Masyaf district in December 2024. These groups engaged in a series of sectarian harassments and intimidation against the Alawi community until their removal and replacement with more disciplined factions by February 2025. Interview with Syrian official, Damascus, February 2025.

8 Interview with former GSF officer assigned to one such unit in November 2024, Idlib, December 2025.

9 This included preventing or arresting looters, and monitoring which armed men moved through certain areas. Interview with former GSF officer, Idlib, December 2025.

10 Interview with former GSF officer, Idlib, December 2025.

factions were given significant authority. Awdeh, who was frequently rumoured to be the front for a potential foreign coup, was eventually detained and his group dismantled after his men assassinated a former competitor who had been appointed as an Mol official in their area.¹¹

These political arrangements and resultant security challenges hindered the development of the Mol during the Emergency Phase. The Mol had to strike a balance between the integration of factions and the recruitment of new members, while at the same time developing training programmes which would address the different problems stemming from each. It did this while facing challenges both internally and externally. Importantly, factions that had retained their foreign financial streams were more emboldened and less willing to abide by security officers, limiting the Mol's ability to protect civilians from abuse by other state or pseudo-state parties. This initial phase was as much about mitigating these competing forces as it was about building the new Ministry.

Recruitment

The Mol was built from the inside out, relying on the core of GSF and civil police which had been trained and employed in Idlib prior to 8 December 2024. These two units consisted of around 2,500 personnel, hardly enough for one governorate let alone the entire country.¹² As a result, initial local policing units were extremely small. For example, in early December 2024, the Bab al-Sebaa Police Station in the city of Homs was reactivated with only four policemen.¹³

To address these deficiencies, the Mol used its core of experienced personnel as local and regional-level officials, to which former opposition fighters were then assigned. The Mol followed three broad approaches when selecting new members during this first period:¹⁴

- **Defectors from the regime's Mol:** This approach included transferring regime Mol defectors from armed factions to the new Mol, as well as contacting and hiring Mol defectors who had been living as civilians.¹⁵
- **Men with policing or technical experience:** Similar to the Mol defectors, these included men who had been serving in security or policing roles within opposition factions and non-faction-linked men with technical skills. While they may not have had formal training in policing, their on-the-ground experience and technical knowledge were valued.¹⁶

11 Tatiana Krotoff, "Huitième Brigade : « un début sérieux » dans la dissolution des structures militaires parallèles en Syrie," *L'Orient Le Jour*, April 14, 2025, <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1456028/huitieme-brigade-un-debut-serieux-dans-la-dissolution-des-structures-militaires-paralleles-en-syrie.html>.

12 Numbers range from 2,000 to 3,000, based on author's interviews with multiple mid- and senior-level Mol officials throughout 2025.

13 Interview with local activists, December 2024.

14 Interviews with post-December 2024 Mol recruits, veteran GSS officers and senior Mol officials throughout 2025.

15 For example, in Latakia city the Mol quickly appointed Captain Mazen Qunaifdi as the police chief for Sheikh Daher, the city's commercial centre. Qunaifdi, a native of northern Latakia, had defected from the Latakia police directorate in 2012 and joined the Free Syrian Army, serving as a mediator between factions in Idlib in recent years. Because his brother had been a senior police chief in Latakia before the revolution, his family had a strong social network across different communities in the city. Interview with Qunaifdi, Latakia, September 2025.

16 For example, a recent Computer Engineering graduate from Homs University had returned to Syria from Egypt where he was living illegally as a refugee just a few weeks prior to the country's liberation. Given his IT experience, he was immediately hired in mid-December 2024 to work as an IT specialist in the Damascus Police Headquarters. Interview with aforementioned police officer, September 2025.

- **Opposition fighters with a strong social base:** These were most problematic portion of the initial transfers. The Mol was forced to rely on opposition fighters who had returned to their home areas, particularly in Homs, to help fill the manpower gap. These selections appear to have been made on the basis of personal ties and social capital, rather than policing qualifications.¹⁷

A significant step was the Mol's ability to find regime defectors and incorporate them in local policing apparatuses. These included men who had not been members of the armed opposition. This also involved identifying Sunni defectors who had served at bases in Alawi areas at the start of the war, then appointing them to security positions back in those areas where they could make best use of their local cultural knowledge.¹⁸ One such man was Colonel Abdul Nasr, a police detective who defected from the regime in 2012 and returned to his home in rural Aleppo. While he had never fought in an opposition faction, he joined the new Mol in the first week after the regime fell, and on 18 December 2024 he was appointed to lead the police station in the Tartous district of Dreikish.¹⁹ This early emphasis on defectors with strong cultural backgrounds or skills preceded a more systematic approach to reintegrating defected officers in both the Mol and the MoD throughout 2025.

The expansion of the rank and file in these first months, however, was more rapid and chaotic. The most common recruitment system at this time was *tazqiya*, an Arabic term describing a process in which current employees vouch for friends and relatives. Men who were already in the Mol or who were integrated during those first weeks would provide a written letter vouching for the background of someone else. This would, by and large, count as the initial background check and the person would immediately enter training.

These informal systems, combined with widespread security fears, resulted in the concentration of recruitment on Sunni men with revolutionary backgrounds during this phase. This political bias was largely absent when recruiting for technical positions, for which skills were still prioritised. Other exceptions included networks of local volunteers integrated into community security systems. These included dozens of Alawi ex-soldiers given arms and assigned to local checkpoints in the Tartous district of Qadmus, Ismaili volunteers given arms and assigned to patrol the city of Qadmus,²⁰ and Christian volunteers given arms and assigned to guard Christian neighbourhoods in Damascus and Latakia.²¹ The decisions to support these non-Sunni volunteers appeared to have been made by the local Mol officials.

17 For example, several former Free Syrian Army commanders from Baba Amr, who later joined the Sultan Murad Division in northern Aleppo, were appointed as security officials and GSS unit commanders in and around Homs city in December 2024. See Gregory Waters, "Security in Alawite Regions in Post-Assad Syria," *Middle East Institute*, January 21, 2025, <https://mei.edu/publication/security-alawite-regions-post-assad-syria/>.

18 See for example the case of Khirbet Maazah in Tartous Governorate. Gregory Waters, "Violence and Diplomacy: A Tale of Two Alawi Towns," *Syria Revisited*, February 9, 2026, <https://www.syriarevisited.com/p/violence-and-diplomacy-a-tale-of->

19 Interview with Colonel Abdul Nasr, October 2025.

20 Gregory Waters, "The Ismaili Mediators of Qadmus," *Syria Revisited*, March 18, 2025, <https://www.syriarevisited.com/p/the-ismaili-mediators-of-qadmus>.

21 Personal observations; interview with UN official, remote, April 2025; interview with Mol official, Damascus, October 2025.

Training

The urgent need for personnel and rapid integration of new recruits and ex-opposition fighters meant that most of the Mol rank and file was operating in the first months of the transition with very limited training. Until spring 2025, most training courses lasted only one or two weeks. Ex-opposition trainees who were seconded into the Mol in December 2024 generally received only two short training sessions. In Homs, for example, the first group of fighters moved into the Mol received a one-week training course in late December 2024, in which they were handed GSS uniforms and taught only the basics of their job: how to detain people, carry out street clearing, and move from a faction mentality to one of serving the state. Their next training period would not be until March 2025.²²

New recruits with no combat experience received a slightly more structured ten-day training course, centred on basic handling and movement of weapons, and extensive daily lessons in conduct. These sessions were taught by religious sheikhs, who covered the basic principles of Islam in the context of humane treatment of civilians and detainees. Most of these sessions comprised open discussions in which recruits could ask the sheikhs questions about how to conduct themselves.²³ The core theme drilled into recruits at every stage of the ten-day training was obedience to the orders of superiors.

This emphasis on following orders was a foundational part of the Mol's approach to disciplining its ranks. In describing this period, one security official, a veteran of the Idlib Police Academy, said, "we were fighting a battle on two fronts, between the fulul [regime insurgents] and the recruits".²⁴ "Many of the new recruits arrived with the Baathist mindset, wanting to use the position to exploit civilians," he explained.²⁵ Reforming this mentality, and where necessary, removing or detaining those personnel, was a continual effort by Mol officials.

A central part of the discipline strategy in these first months relied on and encouraged inner-unit accountability. GSS rank and file were strongly encouraged to report illegal behaviour and misconduct to specific officers assigned to each station. Such reports would then be added to member profiles, which the Mol was in the process of creating, and punishments would be assigned based on the severity of the violation. This could involve infringements as simple as being on the phone while on duty at a checkpoint, which might result in the assignment of extra shifts, or accepting bribes when conducting arrests, which would often lead to demotion, probation or expulsion.²⁶ This internal accountability extended to area commanders – officers in charge of a district or neighbourhood.

As a supplement to the lack of training, these local commanders were often relied upon to gradually enforce discipline and adherence to the code of conduct among their personnel.²⁷ Relying on local

²² Interview with Homs GSS unit commander who joined the Mol on December 8, 2024, November 2025.

²³ Interview with a former Mol trainee who attended one such camp in February 2025, July 2025.

²⁴ Interview with security official, Tartous, February 2026.

²⁵ Interview with security official, Tartous, February 2026.

²⁶ One common problem among new GSS recruits during the first months was accepting bribes or intimidating people into handing over valuables while conducting arrests of ex-regime soldiers. Units in which some men opposed such actions would quickly be cleaned up thanks to the internal accountability mechanisms, while units that participated in such violations on a unit-wide basis would continue to be problematic. Interview with GSS unit commander, Homs, July 2025.

²⁷ Interview with district GSS commander, Homs, July 2025; Interview with police district commander, Latakia, May 2026.

commanders resulted in a widening gap in conduct between different units. Commanders who came from the Idlib Police Academy were often willing and able to professionalise their units, while those with factional backgrounds were not.²⁸ This discrepancy was particularly noticeable in the city of Homs in the first few months after liberation, with GSS personnel in some neighbourhoods continuing to commit sectarian harassment at checkpoints, unlike personnel in other neighbourhoods.²⁹

Structure

Central to the evolution of the MoI were the national and local structures formed in December 2024. These structures underwent significant evolution in the following year, and will continue to evolve going forward. The fluidity of security and policing structures and their ability to adapt has been a consistent theme discussed with the author by MoI officials at all levels throughout the past year. These structures and their evolutions have also had a direct impact on variations in security performance and the ability (or inability) of the MoI to exert control at the local level.

There are broadly two levels of MoI structures in Syria: national and sub-governorate.

National level structures are ministerial directorates, including the bulk of technical departments. However, these ministerial-level departments were extremely weak and limited in December 2024, and took time to build. A few regime-era civil-facing institutions, such as the Immigration and Passport Directorate, remained operational and appeared to be early priorities for the Ministry. However, most of the core security directorates had to be rebuilt. These specialised security directorates therefore remained weak and limited in capacity in the early months.

Instead, it was governorate and sub-governorate level MoI institutions that were prioritised in December 2024, in an effort to ensure that the MoI had a presence across every district in the country, not just the main cities. As a result, daily engagement between Syrians and the MoI has come through the sub-governorate-level GSS and civil police units, which were established immediately after the fall of Assad. These institutions were initially based around the Syrian Salvation Government's Directorate of the Districts (*Idarat al-Manatiq*), which had served as an additional administrative and communication layer between local communities and the central administrative and security institutions in Idlib. Under the Syrian Salvation Government, each district³⁰ had been assigned a District Director (*Mudir al-Mantiqa*), tasked with supporting any of the area's specific needs, and a District Security Official (*Masoul Amn*), responsible for GSF and police units in that district.³¹

These same positions were extended across the whole country on 8 December 2024, and became the backbone of the MoI, and of policing more broadly. Initially, there was often just one official for an area, whose specific title varied according to the district and who you

28 Interview with local GSS commander, Homs, September 2025.

29 Personal observations and interviews with activists and residents, Homs, 2025.

30 An administrative region used for decades under the regime. Every governorate consists of several districts (*mantiqa*), which in turn consist of several subdistricts (*nahiyah*).

31 Interviews with District Directors and Syrian Salvation Government officials, Idlib, March 2022.

spoke with. In the first months after Assad, these officials were the only government face in rural Syria. Their initial role was to organise police and GSS units in rural districts while assisting with basic administration and services until those respective directorates reopened.³²

It was here that the core Idlib GSF veterans played a key role. The district director and security official positions were overwhelmingly assigned to either defected police officers or veteran officers of Idlib's GSS, who were then provided with new recruits to staff the police and GSS offices.³³ Generally, these recruitment and appointment processes took a localisation approach, in which men were appointed to the governorate or district in which they were born.

Where the Mol lacked a local manpower base from which to draw officers, it attempted to appoint men who shared a similar culture. For example, because Tartous governorate is overwhelmingly Alawi, there were very few veteran Sunni opposition leaders from Tartous who could be appointed in the countryside. Instead, the Mol specifically appointed men from the Jabal Zawiyah region of Idlib to almost every local security position.³⁴ The people of Jabal Zawiyah, a poor, mountainous, agricultural region, share a similar culture to those of rural Tartous, as one official explained, so even if they were not from Tartous themselves they could nevertheless easily adapt to and work with the local communities.³⁵

Where this approach varied was in the direct appointment of opposition commanders with no policing background. This was particularly common in Homs, where several Sultan Murad commanders were given security official roles in and around the city. These men, almost all of whom were from Baba Amr and Houla, had been among the earliest Free Syrian Army commanders in their towns and neighbourhoods, carrying significant social capital. Yet some quickly used this new power to abuse and exploit the neighbouring minority communities from which many of the regime's militias had emerged.³⁶ Even if not abusing their power, these new officials lacked the experience of the veteran police commanders to effectively manage their new personnel. As a result, security in the city of Homs varied significantly in the first months of the transition, with areas under the command of these men experiencing frequent abuses by security forces, while neighbourhoods under the command of veteran GSS officers quickly stabilised.³⁷

All these local security officials operated in a highly decentralised manner. "We are given general guidelines to follow, but how we choose to enact them is up to each of us," explained one commander.³⁸ This freedom meant that the diverse backgrounds and personalities of each commander strongly influenced the conduct of local Mol forces during this period. This variation was compounded

32 For an extensive look into this localised approach to sub-governorate appointees and their multifaceted roles, see Gregory Waters, "Local Governance Model in Post-Assad Syria: A Hybrid State Model for the Future?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 15, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/10/local-governance-in-post-assad-syria-a-hybrid-state-model-for-the-future>.

33 Interviews with local security officials across Tartous, Latakia, Homs and Hama, 2025.

34 One notable exception is in Tartous governorate, where nearly every district and subdistrict security official comes from Jabal Zawiyah in Idlib. Interview with security official, Tartous, November 2025; personal observation from meetings with security officials across Tartous, 2025.

35 For example, one Alawi Mukhtar in a remote subdistrict of rural Tartous described the young security officials assigned to his area as "good men who understand our community and treat us with respect", adding that when he first met them, "they reminded me of my son". Interviews with locals and security officials in rural Tartous, November 2025 and February 2026.

36 Gregory Waters, "Security in Alawite regions."

37 Gregory Waters, "An Alawite Voice From Homs City," *Syria Revisited*, February 12, 2025, <https://www.syriarevisited.com/p/an-alawite-voice-from-homs-city>.

38 Interview with subdistrict Security Official, Tartous, February 2026.

by the blurred lines between Mol and MoD in the first months. Due to the Mol's lack of manpower, many checkpoints contained both GSS and faction members, or would alternate shifts between the two.³⁹ Factions were also routinely called on to support security operations. The highly localised nature of the GSS and factions in some areas resulted in severe violations against minority communities, as both used their new power to enact communal retribution for past crimes.⁴⁰ GSS officers had no oversight of the MoD and faction members, and no ability to hold anybody accountable, leaving the Mol in an incredibly weak position.⁴¹

Lastly, thanks to the policy freedom each official had, the mentality and actions of the local communities played an important role in influencing local Mol approaches. Some communities proactively engaged with newly appointed security officials, forming civil bodies to support trust-building and communication between residents and officials, and pressuring officials to accept local customs and practices.⁴² Other officials with more progressive policing approaches formed such networks themselves, or identified key individuals within their assigned communities to work through.⁴³

39 Personal observations; interviews with local residents, coast, 2025.

40 For example, see the case of violation in the Fahel region of western Homs. Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Violations against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions of the Syrian Arab Republic (January–March 2025)* (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2025), 46–48, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/report-coi-syria-august2025>.

41 Interviews with multiple security officials, Tartous and Homs, May 2025, July 2025 and November 2025.

42 This dynamic could be found in Latakia's Bahluliyah, Tartous' Qadmus and Dreikish, and Hama's Salamiyah and Masyaf.

43 This dynamic could be found in Tartous' Khirbet Maazah and Bramanent al-Mushayakh.

Foundation Phase

While some communities experienced good conduct from local Mol units in the winter and early spring, other areas continued to witness widespread Mol violations, particularly in Homs governorate. Many of these problems stemmed from the initial training and recruitment approaches, as well as the structural deficiencies that limited central oversight of local offices. Late spring and summer 2025 saw significant changes on all three fronts, which rapidly professionalised the Ministry and built the foundations for the significant trust-building steps it would make in the autumn. This period saw a continual reduction in Mol misconduct, as well as the rapid expansion of capabilities, particularly regarding counter-narcotics and counter-IS operations.

The reform began with the culmination of the Ministry's first internal review, which was completed around March 2025.⁴⁴ This first internal review resulted in significant changes to leadership positions, especially at the district and governorate levels. Many district security officials with good reputations were promoted to governorate-level roles, while those who were performing poorly or committing violations were either expelled or transitioned to less impactful roles.⁴⁵ At the same time, recruitment practices and training improved significantly, while major structural expansions at national level strengthened oversight and internal accountability. Nevertheless, a lack of strong institutionalization resulted in the inconsistent application and adoption of some of these reforms.

Recruitment

By mid-spring, the *tazqiyah* system of recruitment had been abandoned. According to multiple Mol commanders, the process was chaotic and had resulted in the recruitment of too many unqualified personnel who were now causing problems. Instead, a more formal application process was created with open calls to the public. The Mol's training centres and trainers were still limited, so these recruitment calls were made at the governorate level on a rotating basis.⁴⁶ According to a senior Mol official, the number of applications received in the spring and early summer of 2025 was so great that in late summer, recruitment was closed until the backlog of applicants could be processed.⁴⁷

Outreach to non-Sunni communities increased during this period, though still largely in an informal capacity. The Alawi security volunteers in Qadmus no longer existed, as most of them had participated in the 6 March 2025 insurgency against the

⁴⁴ Interview with GSS commander, Homs, July 2025; interview with Mol official, Damascus, September 2025.

⁴⁵ For example, several local FSA commanders who later joined the Sultan Murad Division were appointed to lead GSS units and the security file in Baba Amr and the west Homs countryside after 8 December 2024. Several of these men had been transferred to the MoD by June 2025. Based on author's observations on personal Facebook pages.

⁴⁶ As observed on official Mol Facebook pages announcing new recruitment periods in various governorates.

⁴⁷ Interview with Mol official, Damascus, September 2025.

government,⁴⁸ but Druze security volunteers were now in place in Jaramana and increasingly in Suwayda. In Jaramana, these local Druze fighters were initially separated from the official GSS detachments, with each unit manning its own checkpoints.⁴⁹ The May 2025 violence in the town ended this practice. However, by the end of the summer, Druze men in Jaramana had been fully integrated into local GSS units, with checkpoints manned both by Druze and Sunni members.⁵⁰ In Suwayda, the Mol at first relied on non-integrated Druze militias to provide security in their communities. However, by early summer they had formally integrated nearly 2,000 of these men into the Suwayda GSS Department.⁵¹ This integration paralleled the expansion of local Bedouin Sunni recruitment into the Suwayda GSS, meaning that Druze and Bedouin towns were each protected by salaried and uniformed members of their own sect. Most of the Druze GSS components ultimately defected during the government's military campaign and the widespread crimes its forces committed in July 2025.

The phase also saw the first steps towards rehiring regime-era security members. The Mol began to reinstate traffic police in late March 2025.⁵² The new policy was initially limited to a few hundred traffic police in the city of Damascus, but gradually scaled up to include other cities in the country. The Traffic Police Department soon became a core institution within the Mol and proved the concept of rehiring former security personnel, an experience which would be expanded upon in the autumn of 2025.

Training

This period saw the reinstatement of adequate training facilities, which allowed lengthier and more robust training programmes to begin. Previously, most Mol recruits were trained in informal military camps near the major cities or in the old Syrian Salvation Government-era Idlib Police Academy. Rehabilitation of regime-era Police Academies and training new trainers took time. With these taking place, and with the initial manpower surge addressed in the first phase, training programmes began to more closely resemble those conducted in Idlib prior to 8 December 2024. New recruits continued to receive an abbreviated 10–14 day course, but after graduating they would eventually be recalled into a full one- or two-month course.⁵³ Current Mol employees who had not received sufficient training were also routinely called in for two-week specialist courses. However, participation in these lengthier courses was still highly dependent on adequate security and ongoing personnel availability. The (re)training process was therefore slow and inconsistent in its application across the country.

48 See the Qadmus case study, in Gregory Waters, "Before the Massacres: 10 Case Studies of Syria's Coastal Insurgency," *Syria Revisited*, March 12, 2026, <https://www.syriarevisited.com/p/before-the-massacres-10-case-studies>.

49 Interview with UN official, remote, May 2025.

50 Interview with civil activist, Damascus, September 2025; interview with security official, Damascus, September 2025.

51 Interview with UN official, remote, May 2025; interview with local researcher, remote, July 2025.

52 "Damascus: What Plans Does Interior Ministry Have for Traffic Organization?," *Enab Baladi*, March 28, 2025, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/03/damascus-what-plans-does-interior-ministry-have-for-traffic-organization/>.

53 Interview, sector GSS commander, Homs, July 2025; Interview, GSS unit commander, Homs, September 2025; Interview, Mol official, Damascus, September 2025.

The summer of 2025 also saw the first international training agreements. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar each began training small cohorts of mostly new Mol recruits in specialist schools. For example, in Turkey, new high-performing recruits were selected to attend a multi-year counterterrorism programme at the country's Police Academy.⁵⁴ The Ministry has also built close ties with Qatar's Police Academy and Internal Security Directorate.⁵⁵

Structure

Important structural changes in the late spring of 2025 enabled the Mol to expand the breadth and depth of its work while increasing oversight and coordination between local- and national-level offices. On 25 May 2025, the Ministry officially announced the appointment of six deputy ministers, each overseeing a new specialised portfolio comprising multiple directorates.⁵⁶ Some of these directorates had already been operating in some capacity, but this announcement marked a true shift into a diversified ministerial structure which could serve as a foundation for building capacity in a targeted manner.⁵⁷ Some of these directorates were carried over from the regime era. Others existed on paper early in the transition, but required significant resources and time to either repair, expand or build anew.

Like every national ministry, the Mol retained many regime-era employees in December 2024 as a result of its personnel and expertise shortages. These employees were largely retained within the administrative and technical departments, where the security risks of employing regime-era people were much lower. As a result, non-Sunnis, including Alawis, have been employed in administrative

⁵⁴ Interview, Police officer, Homs, September 2025.

⁵⁵ According to the Syrian Ministry of Interior's official Facebook page, in February 2025, the Minister of Interior received the first official visit by Qatar's Deputy Interior Minister and Director of Internal Security to "explore the exchange of experiences and benefit from the Qatari experience in the fields of security and policing". This was followed by a second visit in April by more specialist Qatari departments. In May, a delegation from the Police College visited the Doha International Book Fair and met with Qatar Police College representatives, and in July, the Assistant Ministers for Security Affairs and for Civil Affairs met with the Qatari Minister of Interior and Assistant for Security Affairs in Doha. See Syrian Ministry of Interior, "Interior Minister Eng. 'Ali Kadda' receives the Assistant Minister of Interior of Qatar, General Raken 'Mohamed Musfar Al-Shahwani', the commander of the Internal Security Force 'Lakhoya' in Qatar with his accompanying delegation, to seek the exchange of experiences and benefit from the Qatari experience in the fields of security and police in the framework of strengthening security and security," Facebook, February 11, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/syrianmoi/posts/pfbid0FyjhhuffKo3NBcKnXehFLZEJK6wJWYRgBGhU4JLL1HWNwpkL9zZ6E2v9U9N2Sq22Gf>; Syrian Ministry of Interior, "Interior Minister Eng. Anas received a delegation from the sister country of Qatar, headed by the leader of the support and accreditation group in the internal security forces 'Lakhoya' forward Rakin Saleh Abdulwahab Al-Mahindi, the forward director of international cooperation forward Farah Abdullah Al-Dossary, and the leader of the search and rescue group leader Khaled Abdullah Al-Hamidi and research sides during the meeting included ways of strengthening Security, police cooperation and sharing of experiences in joint work areas, which contribute to supporting common interests and promoting coordination between the sides," Facebook, April 21, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/syrianmoi/posts/pfbid02nhcEHB1ye48meG6B67aS8wU4umC4NcEC4ZZTXcwb8TRY9xB6i9pMmCpNSYcBujtl>; Syrian Ministry of Interior, "In the framework of supporting the educational and training process, a delegation from the Police College of the Syrian Ministry of Interior visited the Doha International Book Fair in Qatar. The visit included the discussion of the Master's Thesis in the Pavilion of the Qatar Police Academy, a visit to the Syrian Al-Habouni Book Market, and several heritage and cultural pavilions," Facebook, May 15, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/syrianmoi/posts/pfbid02PrEX8Mv17EIEmGSCtJ71ifXVexudG2ZxaoxNye7t8CjdR1jIMXxJMDRp2c3CjJSrsl>; Syrian Ministry of Interior, "A delegation from the Syrian Ministry of Interior made an official visit to the sister state of Qatar, headed by General Abdul Qadir Tahan, Deputy Minister of Interior for Security Affairs, Dean Ziad Al-Ayesh, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, accompanied by a number of officers of the Ministry, where a delegation from the Ministry of Interior of Qatar, headed with His Highness Sheikh Nayef bin Falah bin Saud met. Al Thani, Deputy Representative of the Interior Ministry for Security Affairs. The visit aims to develop bilateral relations, strengthen the trends of mutual cooperation between the Ministry of Home Affairs in the two countries, as well as researching security expertise exchange mechanisms, serving the common interests of the two sister countries," Facebook, July 10, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/syrianmoi/posts/pfbid0Cd8BkWiWsxTRSS3nTqvnE3cTC8oEpmQCp4uGeWeFu1QuYpEMqCku281Bo8eAHQMfl>.

⁵⁶ The six portfolios are: 1) Deputy Minister of Interior for Police Affairs, 2) Assistant to the Minister of Interior for Security Affairs, 3) Deputy Minister of Interior for Civil Affairs, 4) Deputy Minister of Interior for Administrative and Legal Affairs, 5) Deputy Minister of Interior for Human Resources and 6) Deputy Minister of Interior for Technical Affairs. See "Appointment of a Number of Deputies to Minister of Interior," SANA, May 25, 2025, <https://www.sana.sy/?p=2223173>.

⁵⁷ The new directorates included specific security directorates such as the Counterterrorism Directorate and Special Tasks Directorate, policing directorates such as Counter-Narcotics and Criminal Investigations, administrative directorates such as Legal Affairs, civil directorates such as Immigration and Passport, and technical directorates such as Cyber Security.

and technical roles in the MoI since December 2024.⁵⁸ These national directorates were also the early priorities for the recruitment of technical experts, whether new recruits or former defectors, as previously discussed.

As part of its May restructuring, the MoI also announced that the civil police and GSS would be merged under a new Internal Security Command (ISC), operating at governorate level. Local civil police and GSS units would still have distinct mandates, with the police working on civilian-facing issues such as criminal investigations, and GSS overseeing security operations and checkpoints. The new ministerial-level directorates were intended to coordinate and support governorate-level departments that mirrored their structure.⁵⁹

Governorates in general have had a high degree of autonomy under the STG, with governors and ISC commanders able to pursue their own policies within a broadly defined set of guidelines. Governorate-level MoI departments therefore oversaw the day-to-day operations of their respective local branches under the guidance of their respective ISC commander, but also received support and their own specific guidelines from the ministerial-level directorates. This second line of reporting provides the Ministry with a degree of oversight within the broader decentralised system.

Governorate- and sub-governorate-level institutions required more time to build out than their ministerial counterparts. Most began with small offices in the administrative capitals of each governorate, and only gradually extended these to each district as resources and personnel were acquired.⁶⁰ Even during the summer of 2025, these offices were weak and at times nonexistent. Horizontal coordination between the various directorates within a governorate – and vertical coordination between Damascus and local offices – was therefore extremely weak.

One of the key structural changes during this period was the expansion of internal accountability mechanisms which, combined with the above recruitment and training reforms, rapidly improved discipline and professionalism across the Ministry. By late April 2025, the MoI had formed an official accountability system called the Inspection and Judiciary Department. The Department would later be renamed the Disciplinary Affairs and Prosecutions Department, but from the beginning it was charged with monitoring MoI personnel and responding to any violations of conduct or criminal behaviour.⁶¹ This Department works closely with the MoD's Military Intelligence and Military Police, both of which were also significantly expanded around April 2025.⁶²

58 Interview with police IT manager serving in Damascus, October 2025.

59 Interview with senior MoI officials, Damascus, September 2025.

60 Personal observations in meetings with local MoI offices across Tartous, May 2025; Latakia, July 2025; Homs, September 2025.

61 Syrian Ministry of Interior, "Director of the Department of Prosecution and Prosecution of the Ministry of Interior, Dean Mo'ad Khaled Al-Jamal, held an extensive meeting that included the heads of the Prosecution Affairs and Prosecutions branches in the internal security leaders of the provinces, in a specialized meeting to diagnose the reality of the work and update the follow-up tools. The meeting included analytical reading of the field notes, discussing ways to simplify the process of property issues without compromising performance quality, which contribute to fine-tuning the process and improving professional performance," Facebook, March 10, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/syrianmoi/posts/pfbid02mSYWaBG9XLAX3DUr8gDMYPvYt7zMvzrSsr1uzGYZLQyvykX5xU4ftcDcZfEPqI>.

62 Interview with district security official, Tartous, May 2025; interview with security official, Homs, July 2025; interview with subdistrict security official, Tartous, November 2025.

Together, these three entities enabled the Mol and MoD to institutionalise internal accountability mechanisms. Communication channels were created for local officials to easily contact governorate Military Police or Disciplinary Affairs offices to respond to any reports of either Mol or MoD violations.⁶³ The formation of these offices also made it easier for personnel to hold each other accountable, and the Military Police and affiliated Military Courts provided a structured legal means by which each violation could be properly addressed. These systems came with recurring performance reviews of personnel and more comprehensive internal records.⁶⁴ Mol officials tasked with monitoring conduct and coordination between the various accountability offices were also assigned more widely, at times serving in sub-governorate level areas.⁶⁵ By late summer, officers had also been assigned to sub-governorate regions to engage with local activists and community leaders in order to assess and monitor the conduct of locally-deployed forces.⁶⁶ This further enhanced the ministerial-level oversight of personnel and officials.

These reforms were supported by the continued expansion of the local official position. The District Security Official position became more defined over the summer, officially split from the District Director position with its duties narrowed to overseeing expanded GSS offices.⁶⁷ Thanks to expanded manpower, subdistrict security officials were now being appointed to support the work of the district-level officials, allowing them to reopen police stations in more rural areas. The civil police force was also more uniformly defined and moved under the District Director. This reorganisation essentially split the two main aspects of security – civil policing and security operations – into two distinct departments which worked closely together. Providing more defined mandates and duties to local units helped officials enforce conduct and discipline.

Importantly, expanding its local structures enabled the Mol to begin the gradual replacement of MoD checkpoints. Urban checkpoints were fully under Mol control by the end of spring 2025.⁶⁸ The Mol then began to expand its presence in the countryside.⁶⁹ Replacing the MoD checkpoints enabled the government to pull MoD units away from civilian areas and isolate them to bases. Nevertheless, this was a very slow process and MoD checkpoints continued to dominate the Syria's countryside for most of the year.

63 Interview with district security official, Tartous, July 2025.

64 Interview with GSS unit commander, Homs, November 2025.

65 Interview with local activist coordinating with these officials, Tartous, July 2025.

66 Interview with local activist, Tartous, September 2025.

67 Personal observations.

68 Personal observations.

69 Personal observations confirmed in interviews with security officials and residents across Tartous, Latakia, Homs and Hama, July 2025 and September 2025.

Building Phase

The above reforms resulted in both a significant professionalisation of the MoI and the expansion of its capabilities by late 2025. ISC personnel conduct continues to improve, and the Ministry was able to respond effectively to several major security challenges between November 2025 and January 2026. Local MoI officials and ISC personnel largely protected a series of Alawi protests on the coast in November⁷⁰ and December,⁷¹ despite serious mobilisation by Sunni counter-protesters.⁷² This marked a stark change from February 2025, when GSS units did nothing to protect a handful of small protests by Alawi activists in Tartous from being attacked by Sunnis.⁷³

Significantly, MoI personnel who have been deployed to former SDF territory in northeast Syria since January 2026 have shown significant improvements in professionalism and capabilities, particularly when compared to their mixed records of responding to security crises on the coast and in Suwayda in 2025. During the January 2026 military operations against the SDF in the city of Aleppo and then northeast Syria, the ISC was able to secure the frontlines effectively and prevent unauthorised armed men from entering the conflict zones,⁷⁴ something it had been unwilling or unable to do during both the March coastal fighting and the July fighting in Suwayda.⁷⁵

Furthermore, MoI General Security and MoD Military Police were quick and aggressive in ending looting in the city of Raqqa in the days following Damascus takeover, according to one researcher who witnessed several GSS operations against armed looters.⁷⁶ The MoI has since built a good reputation with Kurdish leaders in the northeast thanks to the professional conduct of its regional leaders and its members at checkpoints in and around Kurdish communities.⁷⁷

These improvements are deeply intertwined with ongoing trust-building with local communities, especially in minority regions. The MoI's local officials remain the primary, and at times only engagement rural communities have with the new government. These officials therefore have immense power over locals' perceptions of the country's trajectory. Most of the local security officials the author has met with over the past year emphasised the importance of trust-building and effective communication with their assigned communities.

70 "Protests on Syria's Coast Demand Decentralization and the Release of Detainees," *Enab Baladi*, November 25, 2025, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/11/protests-on-syrias-coast-demand-decentralization-and-the-release-of-detainees/>.

71 "Syria's Coastal Protests Call to 'Stop the Killing' and Demand 'Federalism'," *Enab Baladi*, December 29, 2025, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2025/12/syrias-coastal-protests-call-to-stop-the-killing-and-demand-federalism/>.

72 Gregory Waters, "Why Syria's Government Must Turn Inward in 2026," *Atlantic Council*, January 29, 2026, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/why-syrias-government-must-turn-inward-in-2026/>.

73 Personal observation, Tartous, February 2025; interview with protest organisers, Tartous, February 2025.

74 Gregory Waters, "Sheikh Maqsoud and the Changing Course of SDF Integration," *Syria Revisited*, January 15, 2026, <https://www.syriarevisited.com/p/sheikh-maqsoud-and-the-changing-course>.

75 For example, in Latakia, Alawi notables insist that GSS units in and around Daatour neighborhood did not participate in the killings of civilians, but that while some GSS were able to stop or prevent killings, others were unable to do so. Similarly, a GSS commander in rural Latakia said that while his unit was able to protect some villages, they were too weak and lacked the coordination to protect other nearby villages. Interview with Alawi notables, Latakia city, May 2026; Interview with police district commander, Latakia, May 2026; For a more detailed discussion of GSS actions during the March violence, see Gregory Waters, "Before the Massacres."

76 Author interview with researcher, Damascus, February 2026.

77 Author interview with local researchers, remote, March 2026.

These efforts have been supported by continued structural changes within the Mol and in relation to the MoD.

One underappreciated aspect of the improved professionalism occurred beyond the broader structural changes. Throughout the past year, rank and file personnel have naturally professionalised through their daily tasks. Constant interaction with civilian populations, a clear mandate, and well-trained and engaged unit commanders have helped to de-radicalise and discipline much of the Mol naturally over the course of the spring and summer. Ironically, these daily interactions at checkpoints and police stations have served as some of the most successful social cohesion initiatives in post-war Syria.⁷⁸

Recruitment

The Mol has undergone significant changes since the summer of 2025, most importantly among its rank and file. Like the MoD, the Mol's armed component was entirely Sunni for much of the first year of the transition. While there were a few aforementioned cases of non-Sunni recruitment by the summer, these remained isolated exceptions. Mol officials had faced growing demands from Alawi communities in particular to bring back regime-era police officers from their towns and assign them to local police stations, which largely remained closed.⁷⁹ For months, Mol officials and others within the Damascus government had privately acknowledged the importance of integrating Alawi men into local security forces as a key step in trust-building and improving security on the coast.⁸⁰

As a result, in September 2025 the Mol began to quietly recruit Alawi men along the coast. In Latakia, a new round of recruitment was announced for any man from the governorate who met basic physical and educational requirements, and Alawi notables were directly engaged by the Mol to encourage youth from their towns to join.⁸¹ Candidates were then trained for two months at the new Latakia Governorate Police Academy before being assigned to police stations throughout the governorate. More than 180 Alawi men graduated in this class and have since been integrated as armed police in Latakia.⁸² The first public announcement of this campaign came in December, when the Mol announced the appointment of a regime-era Alawi police lieutenant to head the Qardaha police station.⁸³

At the same time, officials in Tartous began an "experiment" in rehiring regime-era Alawi police.⁸⁴ Local security officials had reached out to Alawi community leaders in early September, asking them to submit

78 One December 2024 GSS recruit in Homs described how at first he saw all Alawis as responsible for the crimes committed by the Assad regime and for his own eventual displacement from the city, "I had pain inside of me because of the people we lost." He felt this way even while protecting the Alawi neighborhoods in Homs on March 6, 2025, saying, "'It was a very difficult feeling to stand there, but we must understand that not everyone in these neighbourhoods is a criminal and that we must have laws, not chaos.'" Yet by autumn 2025, his good conduct was no longer a result of orders from his commanders, but because he genuinely did not believe that most Alawis were responsible for the crimes of the regime and had fully adopted the mentality of a state, "We are a government and must act like one, the mentality of the revolution cannot continue." Similar changed perspectives have been shared with the author by security members deployed on Syria's coast. Interview with GSS members, Homs, November 2025; Tartous, November 2024; Latakia, November 2025.

79 Interviews with Alawi activists and residents, Latakia and Tartous, 2025; interviews with Mol officials, Latakia and Tartous, 2025.

80 Interviews with local and national Mol and Foreign Ministry officials, Syria, May 2025, September 2025 and December 2025.

81 Interview with senior government official, Latakia, February 2026.

82 Interview with senior government official, Latakia, February 2026.

83 Gregory Waters, "Syria's Integration of Alawi Police," *Syria Revisited*, February 3, 2026, <https://www.syriarevisited.com/p/syrias-integration-of-alawi-police>.

84 One senior official on the coast described the Tartous recruitment approach as "an experiment to test the viability to hiring back some former policemen". Interview, Latakia, February 2026.

lists of trusted ex-police officers from their communities.⁸⁵ These lists were submitted to the Mol later that month, at which point each man was investigated and, if found innocent of past crimes, was rehired. Rehired men were demoted to lieutenant, underwent an abbreviated ten-day training course, and were then assigned to police stations throughout rural Tartous.⁸⁶ By February 2026, at least 350 such officers had been reinstated. Meanwhile, the Tartous Police Academy had also trained and graduated its first class of new recruits, who included Alawi, Christian and Ismaili men.⁸⁷ Many of these new recruits were assigned to administrative and civil policing positions in the city of Tartous.⁸⁸

The Mol began taking similar steps in other mixed-sect governorates in early 2026. Kurdish recruits were quickly hired and trained in the cities of Aleppo and Afrin following the STG's capture of SDF positions there in January 2026. In Hama's Salamiyah District, dominated by the Ismaili sect, local officials similarly approached community leaders requesting lists of trusted young men to be recruited into local police forces.⁸⁹ In early 2026, the Latakia governorate received requests from Alawi ex-police officers to rejoin, following the model established in Qardaha and Tartous. According to a senior official in governorate, "the submitted requests are being reviewed to reinstate as many as possible".⁹⁰

Training

Training programmes were expanded and gradually standardised by late 2025 and early 2026. By late 2025, new recruits underwent one- or two-month courses, depending on their specialty, instead of relying on abbreviated ten-day courses. Since early 2026, all new recruits now undergo a standard four month training course while officers undergo a nine month course.⁹¹ The first officer training course also began in January 2026,⁹² with 500 officer cadets graduating from a three-stage multi-month training and assessment period who will now be enrolled in the formal academy.⁹³ This expansion will further enhance command and control over ISC units by standardising the training and skills of ISC officers across a range of departments and command levels.

The standardised training programmes are created and overseen by the Training and Qualifications Directorate, which contains 25 sub-departments covering a range of specialized training academies.⁹⁴ The expansion of these programs was enabled in part by the rehabilitation of more training facilities, including the various governorate-level training centres in rural Damascus, Latakia, Tartous, Idlib, and Aleppo, which opened throughout the second half of 2025, as well as the Qaboun Police Academy, which reopened in October,⁹⁵

85 Interview with coastal Alawi leaders and local security officials, September 2025.

86 Interview with local security official, Tartous, February 2026.

87 Interview with multiple security officials, Tartous, November 2025 and February 2026.

88 Interview with locals, Tartous, January 2026.

89 Interview with official, Salamiyah, February 2026; interview with senior Mol official, Damascus, February 2026.

90 Interview with senior government official in Latakia, remote, March 2026.

91 Interview with Brigadier Huda Serjawi, Director of Women's Police Institute, Damascus, May 2026.

92 Syrian Ministry of Interior, "For applicants who included the call to the first course of officers after liberation The Department of Rehabilitation and Training outlines access routes to the Police College via Gate Two.

The Ministry of Interior wishes the future officers a successful march, filled with determination, mission and dedication to serve Syria," Facebook, January 3, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1997223874534176>;

Interview with police officer cadet, Latakia, May 2026.

93 Interview with two Mol officials, Tartous, February 2026.

94 Interview with Brigadier Huda Serjawi, Damascus, May 2026.

95 Interview with Mol official, Damascus, October 2025.

and the Women's Police Institute, inaugurated in March 2026.⁹⁶ However, these institutes are still only able to train a limited number of recruits at a time.⁹⁷ Most academies only have the space to handle 150-200 recruits per class, and the Mol has to compete for functioning training facilities with the Ministry of Defense, which has its own training needs. There is currently work underway to open a new training academy in Deir Ez Zor, and plans to expand existing academies, but this takes time and resources.⁹⁸

In order to address training deficiencies among the earlier recruits, the Mol has introduced two policies. Firstly, all Mol units receive daily training at their bases before carrying out their assigned duties. These can be basic fitness and readiness drills, or may include educational seminars. Secondly, Mol district and unit commanders regularly send batches of their personnel to the Police Academies for expanded training.⁹⁹ These programmes are prioritised for high-performing personnel with strong educational backgrounds in order to enhance their technical skills.¹⁰⁰

Structure

The expansion and professionalisation of recruitment and training institutions throughout 2025, and the ministerial-level institutional building throughout the summer, enabled additional structural expansions of the Mol at local level in late 2025 and early 2026. These local expansions further improved conduct and internal oversight of personnel, but more importantly facilitated a rapid improvement in trust-building measures with local communities.

Subdistrict directors have now become commonplace across the country, reflecting a continued expansion of police stations and police forces in rural areas. The opening of additional police stations below subdistrict level is planned, thanks in part to the aforementioned recruitment of local non-Sunnis who will fill personnel gaps in their governorates of origin.¹⁰¹

Several specialised Mol units were created on paper during the late spring and summer restructuring, but were de-prioritised due to limited resources. These units have now been significantly expanded and introduced at the local level. They include the Tourism Police in several major cities and the Road Security Branch, operating first in the countryside and increasingly within urban areas.¹⁰² The rapid expansion of the Road Security Branch in early 2026 has facilitated the Mol's takeover of many of the remaining MoD checkpoints in the

96 Syrian Ministry of Interior, "Minister of Interior Eng. Anas speech via (X) platform: Believing in the importance of women's role in various fields, we opened the Women Police Institute for Rehabilitation and Training Administration, with the aim of training female cadres capable of performing police duties efficiently and responsibly, and to promote women's participation in maintaining security and stability," Facebook, March 15, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/syrianmoi/posts/pfbid0D5LKKSwYjKr94FjmrTWZTuiiW9MnYxdlmc8y1d494QJWcR4kL257dNFDg8cgXPTa8l>; The Institute has been in development since the middle of 2025, but required rehabilitating an old Baath School and identifying and hiring leadership and training staff. Recruitment was announced in November 2025 and 15,000 applications were submitted, of which around 600 women were accepted. The Ministry plans to train women police officers in a range of specialties and assign them to every police center across the country. Interview with Brigadier Huda Serjawi, Damascus, May 2026.

97 For example, the Latakia Police Academy can only train around 150 recruits at a time, Interview with Latakia government official, Latakia, May 2026.

98 Interview with Brigadier Huda Serjawi, Damascus, May 2026.

99 Interview with Mol unit commander, Homs, February 2026.

100 Interview with senior Mol official, Damascus, September 2025.

101 Interview with Mol official, Damascus, February 2026; interview with senior government official, Latakia, February 2026.

102 Personal observations, Latakia and Tartous, May 2026.

countryside.¹⁰³ The continued replacement of MoD positions has reduced the frequency and severity of violations against civilians. MoI officials had struggled to respond effectively to these violations due to their lack of authority over MoD units, reducing local trust in officials' abilities to protect their communities. The removal of MoD positions therefore significantly bolstered MoI trust-building.

¹⁰³ Personal observations in rural Homs, Hama, Latakia and Tartous, February 2026; interview with security official, Tartous, December 2025; interview with local activist, Homs, February 2026.

Conclusion: Challenges to Address in 2026

Syria's Ministry of Interior has made serious improvements in the first 16 months since the country's liberation from the Assad regime. The Ministry has become the core of security and stabilisation for the state, and now regularly engages with a multitude of international actors. It has also shown a degree of flexibility and adaptation that is not found in other state bodies, particularly the MoD. These reforms and expansions were all completed despite significant resource constraints and security challenges.

Nevertheless, there are still important steps that must be made over the next year. Trust-building with local communities, while greatly improved, remains inconsistent. The high degree of freedom district security officials have in pursuing civil engagement and policing policies has resulted in some officials identifying effective policies for engaging local communities, while others remain ineffective or even antagonistic. This independence also leaves communities vulnerable to significant upheaval when good officials are transferred elsewhere and replaced by bad officials, who then dismantle the previously established trust building and communication systems.¹⁰⁴ Despite the structural developments over the past year, there remains no system for information exchange between district officials beyond coordination on security matters. The MoI would benefit greatly from forming a structured body to engage its local officials and identify various best practices being implemented in some areas and then institutionalise these across all districts and ensure that these practices are enforced by senior leadership

Local trust-building is further inhibited by a lack of transparency on internal accountability. The Ministry has taken serious steps to both encourage accountability within units as well as build genuine infrastructure to monitor and enforce conduct at all levels. However, those outside of the Ministry do not see these processes. Locals who report misconduct know the violating members get arrested – or at least removed from their post – but never learn about the punishments or end results of the investigation. This lack of transparency fuels the widespread belief that misbehaving personnel are simply reassigned to other areas rather than truly held accountable.

The broader lack of transparency and communication from local MoI offices also undermines trust in the effectiveness of police forces. Persistent street crime, murders, robberies and house seizures in major urban areas like Homs and Aleppo are viewed by the population as a direct indictment of the MoI. A lack of both

¹⁰⁴ For example, the Alawi subdistrict of Beit Yashout had three MoI officials between December 2024 and May 2026. The first two men were, according to local leaders and activists, very good, professional and cooperative men who maintained security in the area without antagonizing locals. The third official, appointed in late January 2026, was highly sectarian and aggressive and destroyed much of the trust that his predecessors had built. For example, when the third official arrived, he told the local mayors (whose appointments are approved by the governor), "You are all fulul (regime insurgents) and can be arrested." This official was removed after three months, but his brief stay significantly damaged local trust in the MoI. Interview with local activists and community leaders, Beit Yashout, September 2025 and May 2026.

effective communication and actions has left residents of these cities suspicious of the local Mol's competency and fuels rumours of corruption and sectarian-driven conduct. Such beliefs, combined with persistent fear among some communities of ill-treatment by Mol members, prevents some people from reporting crimes or violations.

Conversely, in rural areas, ongoing violations and misconduct by locally deployed MoD units are what continue to undermine the Mol's trust-building efforts. This dynamic is especially prevalent on the coast. While liaison positions have been created within the Mol to enhance coordination between district security officials and governorate MoD and Military Police officers, Mol officials remain largely unable to address serious MoD violations.

This inability touches on a broader institutional challenge impacting the Mol's trust-building efforts. Local security officials have a narrow mandate that makes them unable to address many of the most serious local complaints, especially in Alawi areas where trust is weakest. Here, the overwhelming demand is for the release of regime soldiers captured during the December 2024 offensive that overthrew Assad. Yet the Mol has no power in releasing prisoners, and local commanders must carry out any Ministry of Justice arrest warrants. The Mol therefore often faces a limit in the returns for its efforts sans a serious government-wide effort to address local complaints and build trust.

In the next phase of reform and restructuring, Damascus and the international community should focus on continued capacity-building and civil engagement training. Priorities should focus on fully rehabilitating all training centres in order to support comprehensive training programmes for new and old recruits. At the same time, local officials should be given training seminars on community engagement, helping to further transition these men from a wartime mindset to a community policing philosophy. Finally, improved coordination mechanisms between Mol officials and ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice and Social and Labour Affairs, will enhance local commanders' abilities to effectively build trust and respond to community needs.



CENTRE FOR STATECRAFT & NATIONAL SECURITY

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

CONTACT DETAILS

For questions and queries, please contact:

Centre for Statecraft and National Security
King's College London
Strand
London WC2R 2LS
United Kingdom

mail@csns.uk

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