

# Internal Crossing Points in Syria

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In cooperation with:  
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## Introduction

Since mid-2011, the Syrian regime has used the tactic of besieging the neighborhoods that had witnessed uprisings against the regime in various regions across Syria, leaving only few routes linking these neighborhoods with their surroundings, in order to control the movement of people and goods in between. At the beginning of 2012, the siege tactic was expanded to become more systematic tactic against these areas.

Given the presence of some key commodities in Eastern Ghouta needed by the residents of Damascus city, such as milk and dairy products, and because of the urgent need of the people of Ghouta for various other types of food; a commercial relationship was established between the areas of Eastern Ghouta and Damascus through a crossing point was controlled by the two conflict parties. This crossing point used to be closed or opened often based on the development of the conflict. In most of the besieged areas, the stronger party was always the one that used to block the crossing points, where we saw the Syrian Regime controlling and restricting the crossing of humanitarian aid and goods as well as the movement of individuals.

In addition to the crossing points that emerged as a result of the aforementioned policy, others were founded between the different areas of control, which were initially divided only between the regime and the opposition factions, then other crossing points emerged with the areas controlled by ISIS and areas controlled by YPG the People's Protection Units (which later became under the name of the Autonomous Administration (or Self Administration) areas and under the protection of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which was established later.

Trade ties and the movement of individuals between these regions continued even under the most difficult circumstances as each region has a peculiarity that is not available in other areas within Syria, which resulted in almost a full trade exchange. Moreover, as a result of the social relations and the economic interests of individuals, their movement through these areas became a natural matter despite its risks.

Paradoxically, theoretical studies of some geographical areas such as

states and cantons required to marginalize some variables to examine the impact of others, and this very issue exists as an economic theory, where economists usually assume when studying a state's economy that it is an isolated state disregarding any external conditions or changes that may affect the subject country, in order to study the internal factors that lead to changes in income or price, and other variables that are being worked on. Economists usually conclude their lectures saying that they do so for an academic reasons purely related to the economic theories they follow, and that such situation cannot exist in reality, However, this case has been emerged in Syria since 2012, and it has become a practical reality that can be studied.

## First: Classification and Documentation Methodology

The term crossing points is a familiar concept in contiguous geographical areas that suffer from military or political conflicts or disputes, where such points emerge as a recognized means of communication between these conflicting areas. In Syria, this term naturally appeared since the beginning of the armed opposition movement, as the concept of crossing points emerged even at the level of neighborhoods in the same city where two or more parties are contesting.

As more factors of stability and the undeclared demarcation of areas of control and influence later appeared, crossing points (usually referred to as crossings) emerged between various areas controlled by the different parties in Syria.

Obviously, It is difficult to enumerate all crossing points along the Syrian geography. Therefore, this study used the following classifications as a methodology for the process of identifying and defining crossing points as the geographical areas or locations through which individuals, goods, vehicles, non-commercial or non-profit items, military patrols in special cases, can move between different areas of control.

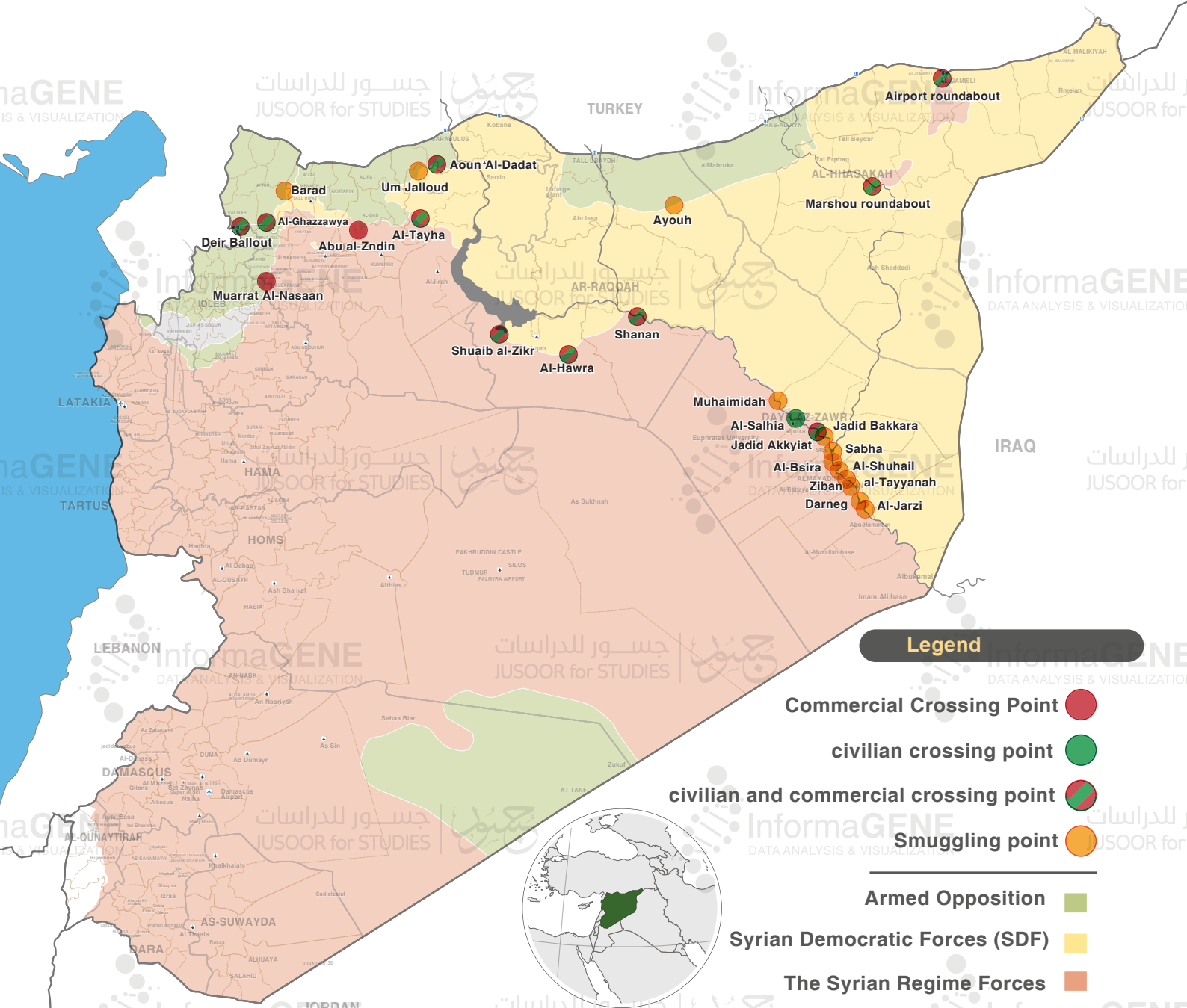
To consider a crossing point as an official one, there should be a declared presence of military or security forces or civilian representatives of both sides of control on both sides of the crossing to regulate the operation of the crossing point. In such cases, usually there is a security check on the movement through the point.

Broadly, crossing points can be described as linking points between the different areas of control, which are agreed upon and organized by both parties.

**while the unofficial crossing or smuggling points**, they are the areas or geographical locations through which the movement of people, goods, and vehicles takes place and are not mutually regulated by the parties of control, and in these cases, The smugglers dominate these points and impose taxes and fees on individuals and goods. Many cases of drug smuggling or even human trafficking between the different areas of control have been reported.

# Map of Internal Crossing Points

June 2021



## Legend

Commercial Crossing Point (Red circle)

civilian crossing point (Green circle)

civilian and commercial crossing point (Red/Green circle)

Smuggling point (Orange circle)

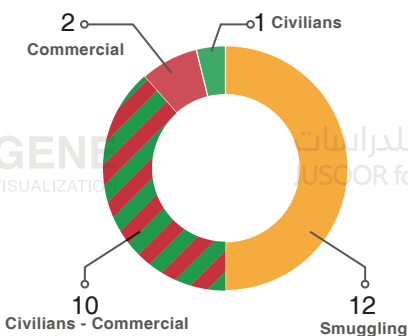
Armed Opposition (Green square)

Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (Yellow square)

The Syrian Regime Forces (Orange square)



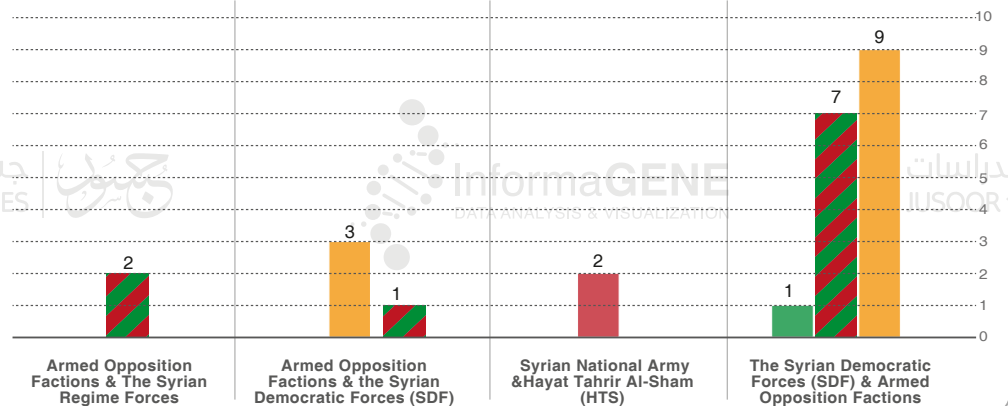
## Internal Crossing Points by Type



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## Crossing Points between Areas of Control

Smuggling point (Orange circle) civilian and commercial crossing point (Red/Green circle) civilian crossing point (Green circle) Commercial Crossing Point (Red circle)





## Second: the Political Economy of the Internal Crossing Points

Although the “self-sufficiency” concept is a philosophy that has been put forward by isolated and conflicting countries with the world starting from their surroundings to the larger space since the middle of the twentieth century, it has not practically implemented, as it may not be applicable in any country in all sectors.

It is noted that not all the areas of control might adopt the concept of self-sufficiency or isolation, Syria as a whole did not have the ability to be self-sufficiency in the first place, nor did it reach a close to that. Therefore, the areas of control sought to negotiate the development of trade relations and the opening of internal crossing points between each other. Indeed, some battles have always been broken out in order either to open a crossing or pass goods. These crossings have often been vital to providing goods for people and securing needs for them, as well as the supplying various parties with high additional resources. The internal crossing points were also used as leverage in the conflict between the dominant parties.

It is likely that some of the economic and social characteristics that were formed over time in these areas contributed to the strengthening the internal crossing points. The most prominent of these traits observed nowadays are:

- **The difficulty of specializing in work but with a comparative advantage:**

The issue of getting specialized is usually related to advanced and stable communities. The more chaos prevails and primitive living tends, the more workers practice every work. Almost in the whole conflict areas we can find workers who play different roles at different times, but we rarely can find specialists. Although specialization usually enhances trade and exchange between regions, in the Syrian case, there was a comparative advantage for the different Syrian areas. Northeast Syria, for instance contains oil and strategic commodities such as cotton and grain, and northwest Syria contains vegetables, fruits, olives and a relatively large livestock. The direct contact between these regions with Turkey also ensures the availability of food commodities, clothing and power tools required in the rest of the regions. As for the regime-controlled areas, they include basic commodities such as medicines, tobacco, auto parts, and traditional foodstuffs that stuck in Syrians' heads, and cannot be replaced in the foreseeable future despite the availability of alternatives.

- **Trade-offs and the currency value:**

Trade-offs have been using in many cases of exchange in Syria, as the role and importance of cash declined. Perhaps money is available without the availability of goods, as sellers have become less interested in money in favor of increasing interests in goods, as they want as a result of exchanging operations to obtain commodities that could benefit them not a store of value, cash money”, as the Syrian lira is no longer able to store this value.



## ● Official institutions and business centers:

With the emergence of the borders separating the Syrian regions, most of the official institutions remained in the capital city, Damascus, or the centers of major cities, which forced Syrian citizens residing in different regions to go over there in order to get services from the public utilities, which necessitated an urgent need for finding ways to reach these institutions, and the traditional business centers also remained in the major cities. As time is progressing, we could note that the establishment of business centers is currently taking place in areas outside the control of the regime, as happened in the city of Qamishli, Sarmada and Azaz.



### Third: Internal Crossing Points between the Syrian Regime- and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

The philosophy of Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration initiated from the idea of finding permanent solutions to the conflict in which the Syrian state remains in place with the possibility of creating a state of decentralization that guarantees benefits from the resources of the region it controls over, and implementing an administrative system identified with the rest of the state, which guarantees a semi-independent rule in managing the region and control over its security and resources.

SDF has relatively pragmatic policies that contributed to the creation of trade ties and cooperation with various parties. We note that the Autonomous Administration's areas of control are intertwined with the Syrian regime's, which promoted the creation of outlets that SDF sought to control to achieve economic and political gains.

We could see that more than 15 internal crossing points between its areas of control and those of the regime, at least five of which are official ones through which goods flow between the two parties. The two internal crossing points of Al-Tayha (southwest of Manbij City) and Al-Hawra (east of Tabqa city) are the most prominent passing points link the two parties, and they are vital crossing points for the regime, through which its forces pass to its own areas of control inside the SDF-held areas, and the regime also gets fuel via these routes. They are both important to the SDF considering the resources coming through such points and at the same time because they are used to pressure the regime.

As a result of the geographical area of the contact lines between the Syrian Regime-controlled areas and the Autonomous Administration controlled areas, we find that there are other crossing points that are mainly used by civilians, as in the case of Shanan crossing point, that connects SDF and the Syrian Regime controlled areas in Al-Raqqa governorate. This crossing point is the main gate for transporting goods and moving commodities- especially light ones - which reflects that the two parties need each other.

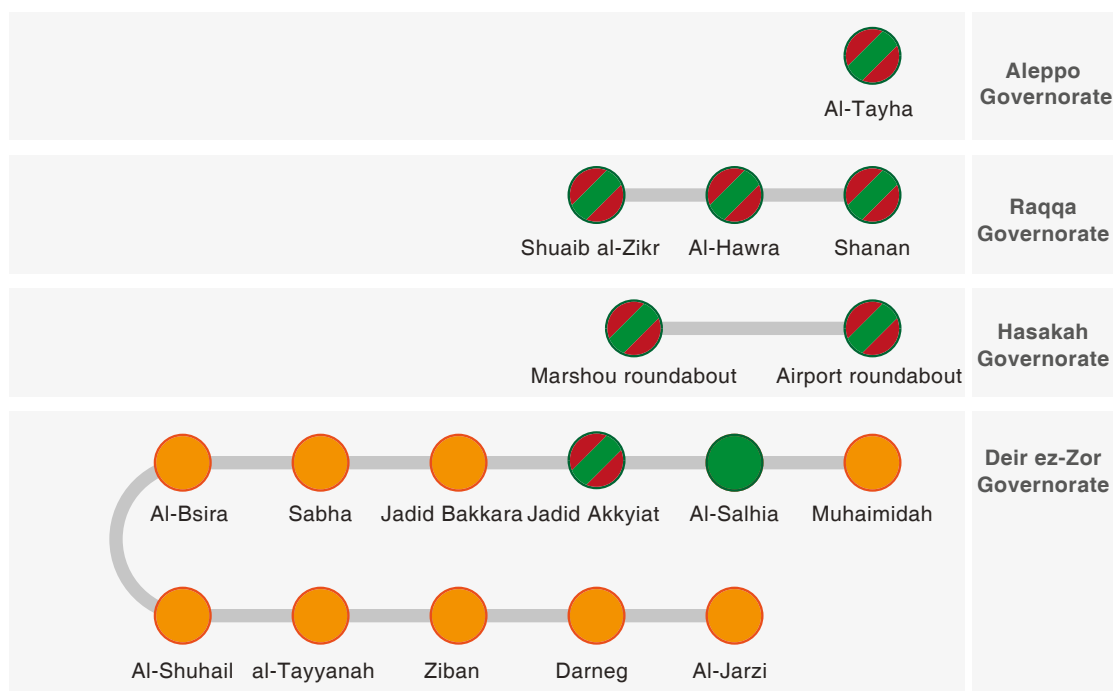
Likewise, the Shuaib al-Zikr crossing point, which connects the SDF areas to the regime-controlled regions in Aleppo Governorate, to which individuals need to go through for administrative processing, commercial and social operations.

These Internal Crossing Points open and close according to the military or security situation or may be depending on the political mood of the two parties to the conflict. Prior to the start of the presidential election process that the regime held at the end of May 2021, the Syrian Democratic Forces closed these Internal Crossing Points, declaring disapprovals of such elections, and reopened them the day after the polling time.

Furthermore, the two parties have a pressing need to pass goods between the two regions which can never ever be controlled, which led to the establishment of smuggling points through which civilians and goods could move, like Al-Shuhail and Jadid Ukidat crossings, which are with other crossings located on the Euphrates River, as the river water is used to transport goods. These points provide important resources for smuggling networks, as well as the needs of the tribesmen of the region.

Both of the Syrian Democratic Forces and the regime forces sometimes turn a blind eye to these smuggling points to get some interests.

### Crossing Points by Provinces Linking the Syrian Regime Forces with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)



Smuggling point ● civilian and commercial crossing point ● civilian crossing point ● Commercial Crossing Point ●

## Fourth: Internal Crossing Points between the Syrian Regime and the Opposition Factions

As tensions stepped up between the regime and opposition forces-held areas and as a result of the Syrian regime’s accusations against the whole civilians residing inside the opposition-held areas that they represent a popular base for the opposition, so the movement of civilians is less than it compared to the case of SDF-controlled areas, where the movement of civilians is limited to employees and some students, and some of them are often subjected to arrest or abuses, but the commercial movement continues most of the time.

The Qalaat al-Madiq (Al Madiq Castle) crossing point, which the regime seized control over in mid-2019, has been contributing to a wide commercial movement, and the opposition forces and the Syrian regime have maintained for many years the presence of commercial intermediaries between the two parties, as is the case with Ahmed Darwish (a current member of the People’s Assembly), who plays a major role - given that his village is in contact with the opposition forces and the regime's - in establishing wide commercial relations.

However, when some mediators have taken positions in support of one party against the other, the commercial movement that sometimes flows through smuggling points or during the temporary opening of Miznaz or Saraqib crossing points decreased. Moreover, Abu al-Zandin crossing point near Al-Bab city is often used to receive the displaced from the Syrian Regime’s areas, as well as for informal commercial operations. The crossing points between SDF and the Opposition Factions -held areas are often used as transit for the movement of goods and individuals from the regime-held areas to the opposition-held areas, or vice versa, passing through the SDF region.

### Crossing Points by Provinces Linking the Syrian Regime Forces with Armed Opposition Factions



## Fifth: Internal Crossing Points within the Opposition Factions-held areas and with the Syrian Democratic Forces-held areas

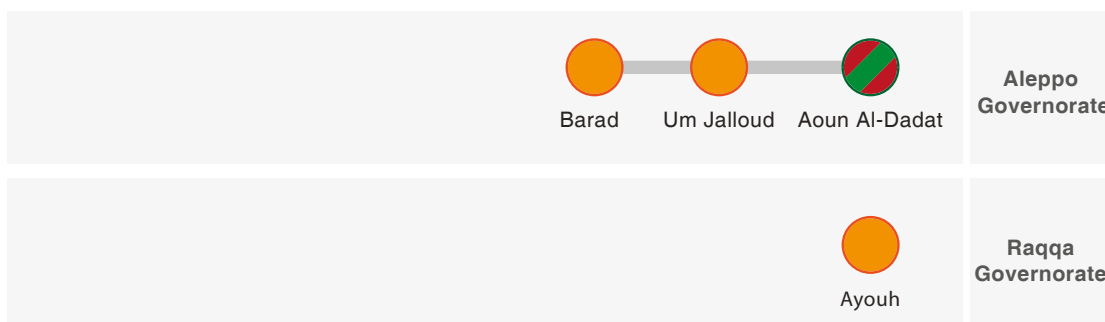
The Aoun al-Dadat crossing point near Jarablus city is the official crossing point for the flow of goods and people between the SDF and the Opposition held areas. Fuel, foodstuffs, power tools, vehicles' spare parts, clothes and other important goods for both sides cross through this crossing point. In addition, there are other smuggling points that are less important and more observed, as Um Jalloud crossing point, that is sensitive due to the situation between the two parties and the mutual accusation of destabilizing the security situation in the other's regions.

The SDF-held areas are desirable for the opposition areas to transport goods to and from the regime's areas, and sometimes to establish trade relations with Iraq.

Products are moved between these areas easily, often with transit "fees" imposed by both parties on commercial goods and sometimes on individuals wishing to move between different areas, which represents better resources for those controlling the crossing points and reflects the ability to manage and control such points.

Recently, commodities have not been moved easily between the areas controlled by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and the areas under the control of the Syrian National Army, as some restrictions have been imposed on individuals, such as security inspections and checks, but in general, the movement is often smooth, and the crossing points provide financial income and represent an economic resource rather than to control the area, where in some cases they charge fees on vehicles crossing between these areas.

### Crossing Points by Governorates Between Armed Opposition Factions and Syrian Democratic



Smuggling point ● civilian and commercial crossing point ● civilian crossing point ● Commercial Crossing Point ●

## Conclusion

- The internal crossing points inside Syria distinguish each area of control, as they are considered as separating points between these areas on one hand, and a proof of authority and control by the parties on the other hand.
- The internal crossing points are important sources of income for the party in control, as transit fees are collected for individuals, goods and vehicles, and the controlling parties always tend to develop these crossing points for reasons related to the revenues obtained from them.
- The internal crossing points within Syria are important commercial exchange points for all parties, through which profitable and beneficial deals are conducted for residents and traders in the different regions, required products for each area are moved.
- The internal crossing points represent crossing gates for individuals to conduct administrative operations, social visits, and business development among the companies' representatives, and sometimes as a center to facilitate the negotiation process between these parties, as they can be used to pressure the other party or for mediators from both parties to meet at these points as a neutral point.
- The future of the internal crossing points is related to the development of the conflict and the lines of control on the ground. Although these lines have been stable for the last months, but this may change due to the updates of the conflict. Therefore, the crossing points can't be considered as a fixed points, as they used to change with the shifts of the front lines.



## Introduction

- 1 The crossings inside Syria distinguish each area of control, as they are considered as separating points between these areas on the one hand, and a center for proof of dominance and control by the controlling party on the other.
- 2 The crossings are important sources of income for the party in control, as transit fees are collected for individuals, goods and cars, and the controlling parties always tend to develop these crossings for reasons related to the revenues obtained from them.
- 3 The crossings inside Syria are important commercial exchange points for all parties, through which profitable and beneficial deals are conducted for residents and traders in the different regions, required products for each area are moved.
- 4 The crossings represent crossing gates for individuals to conduct administrative operations, social visits, and business development among the companies' representatives, and sometimes as a center to facilitate the negotiation process between these parties, as they can be used to pressure the other party or for mediators from both parties to sit at these crossings as a neutral point.
- 5 The future of the crossings is linked to the development of military actions and the lines of control on the ground. Although these lines have been almost fixed for several years, they are likely changed. Therefore, the crossings were not fixed points, as they are using to be moved with every change in borders and centers for control.

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