

Militancy/Terrorism



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Syria Alert (UPDATE): US issues security alert on April 18 for 'potential imminent attacks' in Syria, including Damascus; avoid travel to Syria, keep low profile

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Current Situation:

- On April 18, the US State Department issued a warning citing credible intelligence on potential imminent attacks in Syria, specifically targeting areas frequented by tourists such as hotels, clubs, parks, religious sites, and public transport hubs, with assailants potentially employing explosive devices and firearms.
- The advisory reaffirmed the “Level 4: Do Not Travel” classification for Syria, stating that no area is exempt from violence, and urged all US nationals to depart the country immediately.
- US citizens requiring assistance were directed to the US Interests Section at the Czech Embassy. More information is available [here](#).

Source: [US Embassy in Syria](#)

Assessments & Forecast:

1. The latest warning comes as Christian holidays, including Easter on April 20, coincide with what is considered the high season for tourism in Syria. The US State Department had issued a similar warning at the onset of Eid al-Fitr on March 31 regarding a “potential imminent attack” in Damascus. Taken together, these alerts underscore a pattern in which terrorist groups seek to exploit major holidays, capitalizing on large gatherings to increase the impact and lethality of their attacks.
2. Militant groups such as the Islamic State (IS) are likely to regard foreign tourists as high-value targets, with any successful attack potentially exposing the Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)-led Syrian government’s inability to secure its territory and eroding its perceived authority. Despite counterterrorism efforts by HTS-led security forces, IS continues to maintain an operational presence in Syria, with known capabilities and intent to plot attacks in key urban centers, including Damascus, where HTS-led authorities reportedly thwarted an [IS plot targeting the Sayeda Zainab Shrine](#) in January. This is further evidenced by reports indicating that in the first two weeks of April, IS carried out at least 14 attacks across the country, underscoring the persistent threat.
3. **FORECAST:** Given these indicators and credible US intelligence assessments, a terrorist attack against major tourist sites in Syria in the coming days cannot be ruled out. These sites may include, but are not limited to, the Old City of Damascus, Aleppo, Palmyra, Krak des Chevaliers, and Bosra. The overlap with Christian holidays further elevates the risk to churches and other Christian religious sites, which may be viewed as symbolic or high-profile venues for potential attacks.
4. **FORECAST:** In response to the advisory and potential US intelligence cooperation, security forces are likely to enhance their presence at key tourist locations across Syria, especially in Damascus. Concurrently, security operations initiated by HTS authorities to identify and neutralize potential threats are also likely in the coming days.

Recommendations:

1. It is advised to continue avoiding all travel to Syria at the current juncture due to the volatile security environment.
2. Those operating or residing in Damascus over the coming days, particularly Western nationals, are advised to maintain a low profile, given indications of an elevated terrorist threat. Exercise heightened caution and avoid locales frequented by foreign nationals due to the increased potential for militant attacks.
3. Refrain from visiting crowded commercial areas, public institutions, Foreign embassies and institutions, and religious sites.
4. If an attack unfolds within your vicinity, immediately seek cover and try to safely disengage from the area as quickly as possible.