



# Spotlight on Syria (Following the Toppling of the Syrian Regime)

January 8–15, 2025

## Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ The de facto leader of Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani), said it was necessary to adopt a "state-building mentality" and abandon revenge to make it possible to establish stable Syrian institutions.
- ▶ The Syrian defense minister and chief of staff met with the heads of armed militias, and reportedly an agreement was reached to integrate most of them into the Ministry of Defense and the new Syrian army.
- ▶ Al-Sharaa continued meeting with foreign diplomats who arrived in Damascus, including the interim prime minister of Lebanon. Al-Sharaa declared that Iran and Hezbollah had caused damage to Syria and that the transfer of weapons from Iran to Hezbollah through Syria would not be permitted. The Syrian foreign minister participated in a meeting of Arab and Western foreign ministers in Saudi Arabia, who called for preserving Syria's unity and lifting sanctions.
- ▶ The Syrian justice minister announced courts would be established to prosecute those who committed crimes against the people and to pursue senior figures of the previous regime who were abroad. Security forces of the new regime continue their operations to locate senior officials of the Assad regime still in the country. Two security personnel were ambushed and killed by Alawite gunmen. Syrian security forces and Hezbollah operatives smuggling weapons exchanged fire on the Syria-Lebanon border.
- ▶ The commander of the Kurdish militia of the Syrian Democratic Forces said they did not seek to separate from Syria but wanted geographic autonomy to safeguard their rights. Turkish President Erdogan justified his country's involvement in Syria. A report of unclear reliability claimed that Iran would supply Kurdish organizations in Iraq and Syria with 1,500 UAVs to counter Turkish activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

► IDF operations continue in the demilitarized zone in the Golan Heights, with thousands of weapons seized. The international community expressed concern over Israel's "invasion" of Syria.

## Activities of the New Revolutionary Regime

### Reorganization of the political system

► Ahmed al-Sharaa, de facto leader of Syria, said they had to transition from a revolutionary mentality to a state-building mentality and had to abandon revenge if they wanted to achieve stability. In an interview with documentary creator and YouTuber Joe Hattab, al-Sharaa said the top priority was building institutions capable of achieving justice for Syrians and preventing a recurrence of past events, adding that the country needed a president, an executive authority, a parliament and strategic working plans. He said Syria needed political stability and strong public trust so all Syrians could live together. He also said he hoped the Syrian passport would soon gain value and status on the international stage and that Syrians would no longer be treated with contempt at airports (Syria TV, January 12, 2025).



**Ahmed al-Sharaa during an interview (Joe Hattab's YouTube channel, January 12, 2025)**

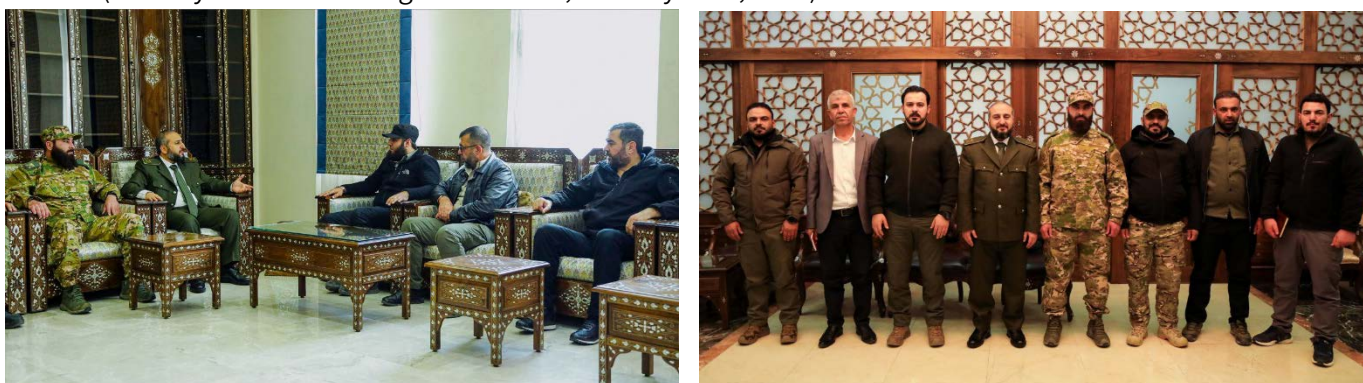
### Reorganization of the security system

► Major General Ali Nour al-Din al-Nassan was appointed as the new chief of staff of the Syrian army, which is undergoing reconstruction. Al-Nassan, a native of the town of Taybat al-Imam in the Hama province, was a senior military figure in Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and commanded battles during the campaign against Assad regime forces in northern Syria (al-Jazeera, January 8, 2025).



**Syria's new chief of staff (Majed Shama's X account, January 8, 2025)**

► This past week, Syrian Defense Minister Marahaf Abu Qasra , together with new Chief of Staff al-Nassan, met with leaders of the armed militias in Syria to promote their integration into the Ministry of Defense. Abu Qasra said they had to work day and night to redesign the organizational structure of the army "in record time." He added that the previous regime used the armed forces to serve its own objectives, personal ambitions and to protect itself, and that they were working to restore the army's primary role, defending the homeland and the people (Ministry of Defense Telegram channel, January 8–15, 2025).



**Meetings between the defense minister and the chief of staff with militia leaders  
(Ministry of Defense Telegram channel, January 10, 2025)**

► "Sources" reported that Abu Qasra and al-Nassan had reached agreements with most factions regarding the structure of the Ministry of Defense, agreeing that the army would be based on volunteers rather than conscription. They reported that an agreement had been forged with factions of the pro-Turkish Syrian National Army to join the new army, with experienced officers receiving special status. They also said most Druze factions in al-Suwayda had expressed willingness to join the army based on national principles, without quotas, while the requests of factions in Daraa for regional uniqueness had not been not granted (Syria TV, January 13, 2025).

## Security activities

► On January 14, 2025, two fighters from the General Security Apparatus were killed in the Latakia region when their convoy was ambushed by armed operatives of an Assad-supporting Alawite militia. Seven Security Apparatus operatives were captured, prompting the deployment of large forces from the Operations Directorate assisted by combat helicopters. The seven operatives were freed after clashes lasting several hours. Mustafa Qanifati, head of the General Security Directorate in Latakia, reported that Bassam Hussam al-Din, who led the gunmen, blew himself up during the firefight, and five members of the militia were arrested (Syria TV and al-Sharq, January 14, 2025).



**Forces of the Operations Directorate during the activity in the Latakia area  
(Ayn al Furat, January 14, 2025)**

► This past week fighters of the Military Operations Directorate continued efforts to eliminate senior officials and former security personnel who had served under the Assad regime. Activities were carried out in Damascus, Aleppo, Hama and Latakia, with reports of arrests and killings of former senior figures in the military and the Republican Guard who had been involved in the Syrian Civil War, as well as Syrian and foreign operatives in pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias who supported the Assad regime (Syria TV and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 8–15, 2025).

► According to reports, during the night of January 13, 2025, there were heavy exchanges of fire between Hezbollah terrorist operatives and residents and operatives of the Operations Directorate in the village of al-Masriyah on the Syria-Lebanon border. According to the report, Hezbollah operatives attacked the village from three directions and the residents called for assistance from the Operations Directorate, which dispatched reinforcements. It was also reported that on the morning of January 14, exchanges of fire continued between Hezbollah operatives and Directorate operatives in the region between Hermel and al-Qusayr in the

border area, as Hezbollah terrorists attempted to smuggle weapons from the al-Qusayr area (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 14, 2025).

► The General Security Apparatus announced that it had foiled an ISIS attempt to attack inside the shrine of al-Sayyidah Zaynab in Damascus, arresting several suspects, including one holding a Lebanese passport. Explosives and weapons were found in their possession. The statement noted that their objective had been to cause chaos in the area and that security around the shrine and its environs had been reinforced (Syria TV, January 11, 2025). The shrine of al-Sayyidah Zaynab<sup>2</sup> is considered sacred by Shi'ites, and Iran has justified its intervention in the Syrian civil war alongside the Assad regime as necessary to protect it.



**The suspects and the explosives (Syria TV, January 11, 2025)**

► The Syrian Ministry of Interior announced that operatives of the [new] General Security Apparatus, in coordination with the Intelligence Apparatus, located a car bomb driving from areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces to Aleppo. According to reports, the explosives were dismantled and neutralized (al-Arabi TV, January 10, 2025).



**The car bomb and the explosives it had contained  
(journalist Ahmed Rahal's X account, January 10, 2025)**

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<sup>2</sup> Muhammad's granddaughter.

## Law and public order

► Shadi al-Waisi, justice minister in the interim government, said courts would be established to prosecute all those who committed crimes against the Syrian people. He added that individuals from the previous regime and their associates were being investigated on suspicion of having committed crimes, and appeals had been made to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Interpol regarding legal proceedings against "symbols" of the Assad regime. In addition, he said, the new government in Syria was considering signing the ICC's Rome Statute and other international treaties to enable the pursuit of senior officials from the ousted regime (al-Jazeera, January 14, 2025).

► A "senior official" in the Damascus public transportation system said the authorities planned to segregate men and women on buses in the Syrian capital. He claimed the matter was being examined and they expected to implement it "within a few days," following "successful trials" conducted in Idlib, Aleppo, Hama and Homs, where, he claimed, the decision was "well-received by the traveling public" (al-Quds al-Arabi, January 11, 2025).

## International activity

► Al-Sharaa and Syrian Foreign Minister al-Shibani continued meeting with foreign diplomats who arrived in Damascus, discussing bilateral relations and cooperation with the various countries. They met with a delegation from Bahrain led by Foreign Minister Abdullatif al-Zayani, one led by Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, and a delegation from Amman led by the sultan's special envoy Abdulaziz al-Hanai (General Command – Syria Telegram channel, January 8–11, 2025).



**Right: Ahmed al-Sharaa with Bahrain's foreign minister (Syrian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, January 8, 2025). Left: Al-Sharaa with Italy's foreign minister (General Command – Syria Telegram channel, January 10, 2025)**

- ▶ On January 11, 2025, Najib Mikati, prime minister of the Lebanese interim government, arrived for a visit to Damascus and met with Ahmed al-Sharaa. It was the first visit of a Lebanese prime minister to Syria since 2010 (Lebanese News Agency, January 11, 2025).
- ▶ In the joint press conference following the meeting, al-Sharaa reported they had discussed bilateral relations and the issue of cross-border smuggling. He said relations with Lebanon would be strategic, long-term and built on solid foundations. Mikati stated that Syria represented Lebanon's natural gateway to the Arab world, emphasizing that "as long as Syria was stable, Lebanon would be stable." He added that it was urgent for both countries to address the issue of the displaced persons in Lebanon and return them to Syria. Mikati said they looked forward to friendly relations based on cooperation and announced the establishment of an ad hoc committee to address the demarcation of the land and maritime borders between Lebanon and Syria (al-Nashra, January 11, 2025). The Syrian Foreign Ministry reported they had agreed to form joint political, security, military and economic committees (Syrian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, January 11, 2025).



**Mikati (left) and al-Sharaa (General Command – Syria Telegram channel, January 11, 2025)**

- ▶ According to "Lebanese sources" who were present during Mikati's visit to Syria, an agreement had been reached to appoint a joint committee "to address issues of mutual interest to both sides," primarily the issue of Syrian displaced persons in Lebanon, whose number stands at approximately 1.5 million. According to the sources, al-Sharaa said Iran had caused damage to Syria and Hezbollah had left the country deeply wounded. Al-Sharaa said Syria would no longer serve as a pipeline for the transfer of Iranian weapons to Hezbollah but added that Syria was ready to cooperate with all parties in Lebanon and wished Lebanon well, particularly following the election of the newly-elected president, Joseph Aoun (al-Hadath, January 12, 2025).

- ▶ On January 11, 2025, al-Sharaa congratulated Joseph Aoun, Lebanon's newly elected president. According to reports, they spoke of the importance of building positive relations between Syria and Lebanon and strengthening bilateral issues (General Command – Syria Telegram channel, January 12, 2025). In his inauguration speech, Aoun said they now had a historic opportunity to begin a serious, friendly dialogue with Syria to address shared issues, including respecting each other's sovereignty and independence, establishing common borders, non-interference in each other's affairs, addressing the issue of missing persons and resolving the Syrian refugee crisis (Lebanese News Agency, January 9, 2025).
- ▶ The American State Department reported that senior diplomat Daniel Rubinstein visited Damascus and met with the Syrian leadership to discuss domestic issues, counterterrorism and weakening Iran's position in Syria (Margaret Brennan's X account, January 8, 2025). According to reports, al-Sharaa met with a delegation from the State Department, which included representatives from the incoming Trump administration. They discussed easing American sanctions on Syria, the security situation and the fight against terrorism (al-Jazeera, January 8, 2025). According to other reports, the Americans made it clear to al-Sharaa that appointing foreign jihadist operatives to senior positions in the security apparatus was a source of concern and harmed Syria's image (Reuters, January 8, 2025).
- ▶ On January 12, 2025, Syrian Foreign Minister al-Shibani participated in an international summit in Saudi Arabia with the foreign ministers of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, the UK and Germany, as well as Italy's deputy foreign minister, an United States Under Secretary of State and representatives from the European Union, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the UN (al-Arabiya, January 11, 2025). The summit's concluding statement expressed the participants desire to assist the transitional government at this critical and historic crossroads for Syria's future, and a genuine international commitment to support the Syrian people in managing the peaceful transition of governance. The statement also noted the need to preserve Syria's territorial integrity and lift the economic sanctions imposed on Damascus to create conditions for the return of Syrian refugees and the country's reconstruction (al-Arabiya, January 12, 2025). Al-Shibani met on the sidelines with other foreign ministers, including those from the UK, Germany and Turkey, and Norway's Geir



Pedersen, UN envoy to Syria (Syrian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel and SANA, January 12, 2025).



**Right: The foreign ministers who participated in the Syria conference in Riyadh. Left: Al-Shibani with David Lammy, British foreign minister (Syrian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, January 12, 2025)**

## The Kurds

- ▶ Mazlum Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), informed the new Syrian regime that his forces did not seek separation from the rest of the country and were in favor of Syria's unity and territorial integrity (Agence France-Presse, January 8, 2025). In another interview, Abdi said his demands for autonomous governance in northern Syria did not contradict the country's territorial integrity. He said the Kurds wanted geographic, not national autonomy, and were not seeking an independent government or parliament but were fighting to protect the rights of the regional Kurdish population. He added that the best path for Syria was a new constitution and renewed understanding among all groups despite their differences (al-Sharq, January 14, 2025).
- ▶ An "official source" in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria stated that the administration was prepared to allow American-French coalition forces to secure Syria's northern borders. It was also reported that they planned to request France's help in establishing good relations with Turkey (al-Hadath, January 9, 2025).
- ▶ According to a report in Turkey, Iran reached an agreement with the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces, to supply 1,500 suicide UAVs to destabilize Syria and counter Turkey's regional military activities. According to the report, whose reliability was unclear, Iranian representatives held a secret meeting in Iraq with Kurdish representatives who requested 2,000 UAVs. Iranian representatives said Iran could supply only 1,500 but the delivery was delayed due to Turkey's close monitoring of the Syria-

Iraq border and its intention to intercept any attempts to transfer drones to Syrian territory (Yeni Safak, January 12, 2025).

► Farhad Shami, head of the Syrian Democratic Forces' media center, denied the report and accused media outlets affiliated with the Turkish government of issuing fake news. He said the objective of such reports was to attack Kurdish forces, foment hostility against residents of northern and eastern Syria and turn global public opinion against them. He added that the Syrian Democratic Forces had developed independent military capabilities, including UAVs (Farhad Shami's X account, January 14, 2025).

► This past week the Syrian Democratic Forces and Turkish-backed Syrian militias continued clashing in northern Syria. The fighting was concentrated in the Manbij area and near the Tishrin Dam (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 14, 2025).

► Turkish President Erdogan accused the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) of exploiting Syria's natural resources and warned that they would face a "dire fate" if they did not disarm. Erdogan added that together with "our brothers" in Turkey, they would "crush" the heads of ISIS, the YPG and other terrorist groups in no time at all. Erdogan stated that there was nothing more natural than Turkey intervening in a neighboring country [i.e., Syria] for completely legitimate, justified reasons (Anadolu Agency, January 15, 2025).

## IDF Activities in Syria

► According to reports, on January 9, 2025, IDF forces located and destroyed weapons and infrastructure belonging to the Syrian army in the demilitarized zone in the Golan Heights. An APC with large quantities of weapons, anti-tank missiles and explosive devices was discovered at one of the posts (IDF spokesperson, January 9, 2025). The IDF reported that since the beginning of operations in Syria, more than 3,300 items of captured equipment had been located and confiscated, including two Syrian army tanks, 20 anti-aircraft missiles, 1,500 anti-

tank launchers and missiles, armed RPG launchers, more than 160 mortars and mortar shells, and surveillance equipment (IDF spokesperson, January 15, 2025).



**Weapons found in Syrian army posts (Right: IDF spokesperson, January 9, 2025. Left: IDF spokesperson, January 15, 2025)**

- ▶ According to reports, on January 15, 2025, the IDF began withdrawing some of its forces from the main district building and the courthouse in the center of al-Quneitra (Ayn al-Furat Agency, January 15, 2025)
- ▶ During the week there were reports of attacks attributed to Israel. Explosions were reported at the military airport in al-Suwayda as Israeli fighter jets passed over the area (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 8, 2025). In addition, an Israeli drone reportedly attacked a military site in the al-Kiswa area on the outskirts of Damascus, causing multiple explosions at the site (Sputnik Arabic, January 8, 2025).
- ▶ On January 9, 2025, a Syrian organization calling itself the Southern Liberation Front announced its establishment and demanded that Israel withdraw all its forces from Syrian territory within 48 hours. The new organization also called on the Syrian people to join its ranks to repel the "Israeli aggression" against Syria, threatening it possessed military-quality weapons left from the previous regime (MEMRI, January 10, 2025). On January 11, 2025, the organization announced it had changed its name to Men of Valor – Islamic Resistance Front in Syria (MEMRI, January 14, 2025). On December 17, 2024, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party called for the establishment of a Syrian front to stand against the "invasion of enemy forces" and to take action to liberate the "occupied territories" (Syrian Social Nationalist Party website, December 17, 2024).<sup>3</sup> However, no activity by the organization has been identified on the ground so far.

<sup>3</sup> For further information, see the August 2024 ITIC report, "[The Organizations Assisting Hezbollah in Combat Against Israel.](#)"

- ▶ Participants at the foreign ministers' conference on Syria held in Riyadh noted that there was no place for violations of Syrian sovereignty and expressed concern over an Israeli "ground invasion" of Syria (Saudi Press Agency, January 12, 2025). Geir Pedersen, UN envoy to Syria, noted the need to halt Israeli operations in Syrian territory (al-Arabiya, January 12, 2025).
- ▶ During a UN Security Council discussion, Qusay al-Sheikh, representing Syria, accused Israel of exploiting the current circumstances to establish "a new situation" in Syria. Russia's representative warned that Israel's "illegal activities" in Syria and claimed its "policy of creating facts on the ground" in the Golan Heights threatened Syrian unity (al-Arabi Network, January 8, 2025).