



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

January 29 – February 5 , 2025

Overview¹

- ▶ The Victory of the Revolution Conference convened in Damascus: Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani) was declared Syria's new president, the institutions of the previous regime were dismantled and 18 armed militias announced they would disband. Al-Sharaa said presidential elections would be held in four to five years.
- ▶ Syrian President al-Sharaa made his first visits to Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Meeting with the Turkish president, al-Sharaa said he wanted strong bilateral relations with Turkey, including in security.
- ▶ The Syrian minister of the interior announced the seizure of arms shipments intended to be smuggled into Lebanon.
- ▶ The commander of the Kurdish militia of the Syrian Democratic Forces stated they had not been involved in the decision to appoint al-Sharaa president. The Syrian defense minister warned force would be used if negotiations with the Kurds failed.
- ▶ For the first time, gunfire was directed at IDF forces in the buffer zone in the Golan Heights; no casualties were reported. The Syrian Popular Resistance claimed responsibility and threatened further attacks. Syrian President al-Sharaa said normalization with Israel would not be possible as long as it occupied the Golan Heights.

Establishing the New Regime

Al-Sharaa declared President

- ▶ On January 29, 2025, senior figures from the new government participated in the Victory of the Syrian Revolution Conference, led by de facto leader Ahmed al-Sharaa and representatives of the armed factions who took part in Operation Deterrence of Aggression and Operation Dawn of Freedom, which led to the overthrow of the Assad regime on December 8, 2024. The spokesman for the Military Operations Administration, Hassan Abd al-Ghani, said there would

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

be significant changes in Syria's governmental structure (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, January 29, 2025):

- ◆ Ahmed al-Sharaa was appointed interim president for an unspecified period. He will undertake presidential duties and represent Syria in international forums. He was also granted the authority to establish a temporary legislative council for the transitional phase, which would act pro tem until a permanent constitution was drafted and voted on. The council will have 35 members, including civilians and military personnel, ensuring balanced representation across all segments of society (Syria TV, January 29, 2025).
- ◆ The People's Assembly [parliament] elected during the Assad regime and all related committees will be dismantled.
- ◆ The previous regime's army and its intelligence and security apparatus will be dismantled, and the Syrian army will be rebuilt on national foundations. All military factions, revolutionary bodies, political groups, and civil organizations will be dissolved and integrated into state institutions. Eighteen armed militias, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, including Ahrar al-Sham, Jaysh al-Ahrar and militias within the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army, announced their dissolution (Sky News Arabia, January 29, 2025).²
- ◆ The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Progressive National Front Party and all affiliated organizations and institutions will be dissolved.
- ◆ December 8, the day of the Assad regime's overthrow, will be declared a national holiday.



Right: Al-Sharaa speaks at the "victory conference." Left: The full conference (Syrian president's Telegram channel, January 29, 2025)

² For further information, see the December 2024 ITIC report, "[The Power Groups in Syria after the Fall of the Assad Regime.](#)"

► In his first address to the nation in his new role, al-Sharaa stated that the government's primary goals were achieving civil peace and prosecuting those responsible for massacres and crimes against the Syrian people; completing the unification of Syrian territories under the sovereignty of a single authority; building firm state institutions based on efficiency and justice, free of corruption and bribery; and establishing the foundations of a strong economy which would restore Syria's regional and international standing. He added that within days, the formation of a preparatory committee for the National Dialogue Conference would be announced, and a government including and reflecting all sectors of Syria's population would be established (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, January 30, 2025).

► In the first interview following his appointment, al-Sharaa stated that the battle to overthrow the Assad regime was the result of planning conducted in Idlib over five years and the unification of various factions and forces. He stated that the presence of Iranian militias in Syria during the previous regime posed a strategic threat to the entire region. Regarding the Syrian presidential elections, he said preparations were expected to take four to five years. He also noted that ensuring weapons remain solely in the hands of state forces was a top priority (Syria TV, February 3, 2025).

► A delegation from the Syrian defense ministry led by Mustafa al-Bakour, the new Syrian government's envoy to al-Suwayda, met in al-Suwayda with Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, the spiritual leader of the Druze community, to discuss the regional military situation (SANA, February 2, 2025). Reportedly, the meeting also aimed to bridge gaps between the parties regarding the integration of Druze forces into the newly restructured Syrian army and the issue of weapons held by the Druze (Suwayda24, February 2, 2025).



**Delegation from the Syrian defense ministry meets with Hikmat al-Hijri
(Suwayda24, February 2, 2025)**

Diplomacy

► This past week Syrian President al-Sharaa held meetings with diplomatic delegations which arrived in Damascus. He related to developments in Syria, the promotion of cooperation and efforts to lift the sanctions imposed on the country during the Assad regime. He also paid his first two state visits abroad since the overthrow of the previous regime.

◆ On January 30, 2025, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the emir of Qatar, arrived in Damascus for an official visit, becoming the first head of state to visit Syria since the revolution (al-Araby, January 30, 2025). He met with al-Sharaa, congratulated him on being chosen president and affirmed Qatar's support for Syria's unity, sovereignty and independence. He also praised the new Syrian government's efforts to achieve stability and emphasized the need for a government which represented the entire Syrian people. Al-Sharaa thanked him for Qatar's support and offered bilateral strategic cooperation in various fields (Syria TV, January 30, 2025).



Al-Sharaa and the emir of Qatar. Right: Reception for the emir at the airport in Damascus. Left: Overlooking Damascus (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, January 30, 2025)

◆ On February 2, 2025, al-Sharaa arrived in Saudi Arabia for his first visit abroad since taking office and met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Al-Sharaa said they discussed strengthening bilateral cooperation, particularly in the fields of energy, technology, education and healthcare, to help promote regional peace and stability and enhance Syria's role in Arab and international affairs (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, February 2, 2025). During the visit, the Syrian delegation toured the headquarters of the Saudi Arabian Authority for Data and Artificial Intelligence (SANA, February 3, 2025). Al-Sharaa and Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani also performed the Umrah at the Kaaba in Mecca (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, February 3, 2025).³

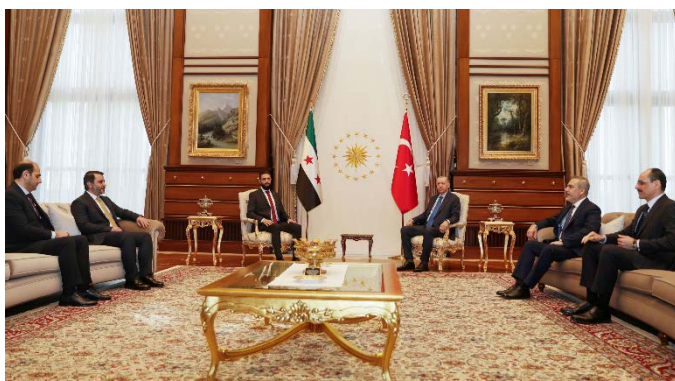
³ A pilgrimage to Mecca, conducted during the year at unspecified times, not the official Hajj whose date is dictated by the Muslim calendar.



Right: Al-Sharaa meets with Bin Salman (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, February 2, 2025).

Left: Al-Sharaa at the Kaaba in Mecca (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, February 3, 2025)

◆ On February 4, 2025, al-Sharaa visited Turkey and met with President Erdoğan. They held a joint press conference in Ankara where al-Sharaa praised Turkey's support for the revolution in Syria and said Syria sought a deep strategic partnership with Turkey in all fields. He said the two countries had already begun promoting cooperation in humanitarian, economic, cultural and social sectors, but their objective was to develop a joint strategy to confront regional security threats while ensuring security and stability for both Syria and Turkey. He also invited Erdoğan to visit Syria. Erdoğan described the visit as historic, marking the beginning of a new phase of permanent friendship and cooperation. He stated that there was consensus between the parties on all issues and that Turkey would provide all necessary support (SANA, February 4, 2025). Before the meeting, it was reported that the two leaders were expected to discuss signing a joint defense agreement, which included establishing two Turkish air bases in central Syria and training the Syrian army (Reuters, February 4, 2025).



Al-Sharaa and the president of Turkey. Left: The delegations meet (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, February 4, 2025)

Reorganizing the Syrian army

► Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra stated that the aircraft, tanks, air defense systems and radar of the newly formed Syrian army required maintenance. He claimed conscription had been made unnecessary by the high number of volunteers. He added that the government wanted to create a Syria where the people and military forces lived in peace and harmony (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 4, 2025).

Security initiatives

► "Lebanese sources" reported that the Syrian administration sent a representative to Lebanon who met with leaders of several tribes to address the chaos in the border region and the issue of smuggling gangs operating at 17 illegal border crossings. According to the report, it was agreed to hold an expanded meeting under the auspices of Sheikh Bakr al-Rifai, the mufti of Ba'albek-Hermel, with the attendance of Syrian General Security personnel (al-Sharq al-Awsat, January 29, 2024).

► The Syrian ministry of the interior announced that its forces had located and seized multiple arms shipments which were being prepared for smuggling into Lebanon via land routes in the Talkalakh area, along the northern Syria-Lebanon border (Syrian ministry of the interior X account, February 2, 2025).

► Muhammad al-Shaar, who was Syria's interior minister from 2011 to 2018, surrendered himself to the Operations Directorate, which is in pursuit of senior figures from the previous regime. He claimed he had not been involved in any crimes and was not in charge of security prisons or secret detention facilities. He had been wanted for massacres and killings of civilians in Syria and Lebanon even before the Syrian Civil War (al-Arabiya and al-Khaleej 365, February 4, 2025).

The Kurds

► Mazloum Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), stated they had not participated in the Victory conference alongside other armed factions and had not taken part in deciding to appoint al-Sharaa as Syria's president. He stated that negotiations with the Syrian government were ongoing in an attempt to reach an understanding, adding that their vision was for a decentralized, secular, democratic Syria which preserved the rights of all. He reiterated that they did not want to secede from Syria or establish an independent government and parliament like the autonomous region in northern Iraq but only to manage their local affairs within a decentralized state (AP, February 3, 2025).

- ▶ Syrian President al-Sharaa stated that the Syrian Democratic Forces had expressed willingness for their weapons to belong to the state's official forces, although disagreements remained regarding the details. He added that negotiations were also ongoing regarding the issue of the autonomous region in northeastern Syria (Syria TV, February 3, 2025).
- ▶ Syrian defense minister Marhaf Abu Qasra said that the areas under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces in northeastern Syria would be "liberated." He said it would be preferable to resolve the issue peacefully and diplomatically but hinted that force would be used if necessary (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 4, 2025).
- ▶ "Two sources" reported that negotiations between the Damascus government and the Syrian Democratic Forces had been suspended after a car bomb exploded in Manbij, northern Syria, on February 3, 2025, killing at least 20 people, most of them women working in agricultural fields. One of the "sources" stated that the Syrian government had warned the Kurdish militias not to fight battles against pro-Turkish militias in civilian areas but that "it seems the forces were not listening." According to the report, it was unclear whether it was a temporary suspension of talks or an indefinite halt (The Middle East Eye, February 4, 2025). No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

IDF Activities in Syria

- ▶ On January 31, 2025, gunfire was directed at IDF operational areas in the buffer zone within Syrian territory in the Golan Heights, marking the first such attack since the start of Israeli activity in the area. IDF soldiers responded with gunfire, and no casualties were reported (IDF spokesperson, January 31, 2025). A group calling itself the Syrian Popular Resistance claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that one of its units carried out an "improvised and high-quality operation" against a "hostile Zionist force" in the village of Taranga in the Quneitra region, resulting in injuries to several Israeli soldiers and damage to a military vehicle. The group further declared that "the resistance does not wait for orders but moves with blood and rage" and that "the occupation will not enjoy stability on this pure land" (Syrian Popular Resistance Telegram channel, February 1, 2025).⁴
- ▶ According to reports IDF forces detained two wanted individuals in the town of Taranga (Sawt al-Asimi, Damascus, February 1, 2025). Reports indicated that IDF forces withdrew from the al-

⁴ On December 17, 2024, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party called for the establishment of a Syrian front to confront "the blatant invasion of enemy forces." On January 9, 2025, the establishment of the Southern Liberation Front was announced, which changed its name to Men of Heroism – The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria on January 11, 2025.

Manitra Dam, east of Quneitra, and evacuated the governor's office and the district court building in the town of al-Baath after nearly two months (Horan Free Gathering Facebook page, February 2, 2025). Following the withdrawal, a UN delegation arrived to inspect the vacated buildings (Quneitra Province Telegram channel, February 4, 2025). It was also reported that Israeli forces withdrew from the town of al-Malqahin southern Quneitra after conducting searches in civilian homes for several hours (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 4, 2025).



UN troops in Quneitra (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 4, 2025)

► It was claimed that an Israeli UAV fired at a vehicle belonging to the Operations Administration near the village of al-Sweisah, east of Tel Kwdana (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 2, 2025).

► UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric noted that the 1974 Disengagement Agreement remained in effect. He condemned all actions that violated it and called on all parties to meet their commitments and end their "unauthorized presence" in the buffer zone (UN website, January 30, 2025). Syrian officials continued condemning Israel's presence in the buffer zone:

◆ Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa stated that Israel had to withdraw from the territories it occupied after the fall of the Assad regime. When asked whether Syria would normalize relations with Israel if Saudi Arabia did so, al-Sharaa responded that Syria sought peace with all parties, but as long as Israel continued to occupy the Golan Heights any agreement would be premature. He said public opinion would also need to be prepared before any progress toward normalization with Israel could be made (The Economist, February 3, 2025). Meeting with the Turkish president, he related to the need to exert international pressure on Israel to withdraw its forces from the buffer zone, and reaffirmed Syria's commitment to the 1974 Disengagement Agreement (Syria TV, February 4, 2025).

◆ Syrian defense minister Marhaf Abu Qasra accused Israel of committing a "violation" against the Syrian people, following the publication of satellite images documenting the construction of new Israeli outposts in the buffer zone. He stated that the "incursion" was unjustified and emphasized that the Iranian threat from Syria no longer existed, claiming that the fall of the Assad regime "saved them from Iran." According to the satellite images, one outpost was established in Jabata al-Khashab, and another near al-Hmidaya, and a new road was photographed leading toward a hill near the village of Kwdana (The Washington Post, February 2, 2025).