



Spotlight on Syria (After the Fall of the Assad Regime) February 5 – 12 , 2025

Overview¹

- ▶ For several days the security forces of the new Syrian regime exchanged fire with Hezbollah-affiliated arms and drug smugglers near the border with Lebanon.
- ▶ Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani) met with diplomats who came to Damascus and spoke with the president of France and the chancellor of Germany, who invited him to visit their countries. Al-Sharaa said Trump's plan to evacuate residents of the Gaza Strip was a "serious crime" but said he hoped Trump would succeed in promoting peace in the Middle East.
- ▶ The Syrian army deployed its first divisions across the country. A new commander was appointed to the Syrian Air Force.
- ▶ The IDF attacked a Hamas weapons depot in southern Syria. Other Israeli raids were reported in villages in the Golan Heights outside the buffer zone.

Activities of the New Regime

Security activity

- ▶ In the past week, the security forces of the Syrian regime exchanged fire with clans affiliated with Hezbollah near the border:
 - ◆ On February 6, 2025, forces from the 103rd Division of the Syrian Military Operations Directorate began operations against drug and arms smugglers in the town of Hawik in the western Homs Governate, just a few kilometers from the border, where Lebanese clans also live. The security forces exchanged fire with armed members of the Hezbollah-affiliated Z'ayter and Ja'far clans. The gunmen captured two Syrian security force operatives and took them to Lebanon, releasing them the following day. The exchanges of fire continued for the next three days, during which Syrian forces used artillery, UAVs and took control of Hawik. Reports indicated casualties and injuries,

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

including among local residents, caused by rocket attacks of Hezbollah loyalists in the border area (Syria TV and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 6-10, 2025).



Right: The two captured Syrian Military Operations Directorate operatives (al-Nashra, February 6, 2025). Left: Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra examining the situation at the border (Roastudies X account, February 6, 2025)

◆ Despite the border clashes, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun spoke with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa to congratulate him on his appointment. They agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation, coordinate to control the Syria-Lebanon border and prevent attacks on civilians (al-Nashra, February 7, 2025).

◆ Lebanese media reported that artillery and rockets fired from Syria landed in towns and Lebanese army outposts in the Hermel area in northeastern Lebanon, causing casualties (al-Nahar, February 9-10, 2025). Directed by President Aoun's, the Lebanese army ordered its units on the northern and eastern borders to respond to fire from Syria, using "appropriate weapons." The army also stated that its forces were using "extraordinary security measures" along the border, including setting up observation points, conducting patrols and establishing temporary checkpoints (Lebanese army X account, February 9, 2025).



Exchanges of fire on the Syria-Lebanon border (Syria TV, February 9, 2025)

◆ Moayad al-Salama, commander of the western sector in Syria's Border Security Directorate, said the security operations in the western border area were not directed

against the state of Lebanon but against gangs of drug and arms smugglers operating under Hezbollah supervision. He said that during the operation, security forces had seized farms, warehouses and factories for producing and storing hashish, Captagon and counterfeit currency, as well as large quantities of weapons and drugs destined for Lebanon. He added that they had a comprehensive plan for controlling the borders while considering existing challenges (SANA, February 10, 2025).

- The General Security Directorate in the Quneitra Governate arrested a gang smuggling illegal weapons, including Kornet anti-tank missiles and shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles (Quneitra Governate Telegram channel, February 9, 2025).



**Weapons seized in the Quneitra Governate
(Telegram channel of the Quneitra Governate, February 9, 2025)**

- According to a Turkish report of questionable reliability, Iranian officials, including Hossein Akbar, Iran's former ambassador to Damascus and former senior figure in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC Air Force, recently met secretly in Najaf, Iraq, with former officials of the Assad regime at a villa owned by a Shi'ite businessman, to formulate a plan to overthrow the new Syrian regime. The report claimed they planned a military coup, the assassination of Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa and to destabilize the country. It was further alleged that talks were being held with Druze and Kurds, secret cells had been established, arms depots had been prepared and Hezbollah, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces and Shi'ite militias were preparing to participate in the fighting (Türkiye Gazetesi, February 11, 2025).

Diplomacy

- This past week Syrian President al-Sharaa continued meeting in Damascus with diplomats and holding phone conversations with foreign leaders. He discussed developments in Syria, promoting cooperation and efforts to lift the sanctions imposed on the country during the Assad regime. He met with Fernando Arias, director-general of the Organization for the

Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf; and Greek foreign minister Giorgos Gerapetritis. He also held his first phone conversations with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, discussing Syria's reconstruction and security challenges. Both leaders invited al-Sharaa for an official visit (Syrian presidency Telegram account, February 5–12, 2025).



Right: Al-Sharaa with the head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, February 8, 2025). Left: Al-Sharaa with the Greek foreign minister (Syrian presidency Telegram channel, February 9, 2025)

- ▶ Syrian defense minister Murhaf Abu Qasra said Russia would be able to keep its air and naval bases along the Syrian coast as long as any agreement reached served Damascus' interests. He said Russia's attitude toward the new Syrian government had significantly improved since the overthrow of the Assad regime, adding that Damascus was studying Russia's demands based on the principle that "in politics there are no permanent enemies." He also refused to confirm whether President al-Sharaa had asked senior Russian officials to extradite deposed Bashar al-Assad, who has been in Moscow since fleeing Syria on December 8, 2024 (The Washington Post, February 6, 2025). Meanwhile, a video was published allegedly showing Syrian government security forces preventing a convoy of Russian forces from entering Tartus for ten hours before ultimately forcing them to return to the Hmeimim base (al-Arabiya, February 11, 2025).
- ▶ Abu Qasra also stated that Syria was negotiating with the United States and Turkey regarding the status of their military bases in Syria and that new agreements might include a reduction or redistribution of the Turkish forces (The Washington Post, February 6, 2025). "A source in the Turkish defense ministry" denied that Turkey was planning to establish military bases in Syria. He said Turkey's priority was achieving stability and security, but it was still too early to discuss an agreement for the establishment of bases (Reuters, February 6, 2025).
- ▶ "Diplomatic sources" reported that Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty met secretly in Ankara.

According to the report, they discussed Egypt's concerns over the presence of armed Egyptian organizations in Syria and the possibility of Syria's becoming a focal point of incitement against Egypt. It was also reported that in the near future President al-Sharaa would make a state visit to Cairo (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 8, 2025).

► Syrian President al-Sharaa said he believed the American president wanted peace in the Middle East, which was a promising beginning and positive approach to future American regional foreign policy. He said that if the ideas Trump presented during his election campaign were realized he would achieve world peace. However, al-Sharaa said he opposed evacuating Gazans, noting that although they had suffered "pain, killing, and destruction," they refused to leave their land and all attempts to uproot them over 80 years of conflict had failed. He said it would not be wise, moral or politically correct for Trump to force the Gazans to leave their land and would be "a serious crime which would fail."² Regarding the existing sanctions imposed on Syria, al-Sharaa claimed that all those who visited Damascus agreed they should be lifted (The Rest Is Politics podcast, February 10, 2025).

Reorganizing the Syrian Security System

► According to reports, the General Staff in Damascus deployed six "divisional" formations in the areas of Daraa, Damascus, Palmyra, Homs, Hama and Idlib. It was also reported that Brigadier General Aasem Rashid al-Hawari was appointed commander of the Syrian Air Force. According to unofficial estimates, the renewed Syrian army has dozens of operational helicopters and fighter jets in addition to UAVs (al-Nasr al-Akhbari, February 8, 2025).

► Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra reported that about 100 armed Syrian rebel organizations had agreed to disarm and accept the authority of the defense ministry, although some groups still refused. He said those choosing to join the new Syrian army would not be allowed to remain as autonomous units. Regarding ongoing contacts with the Kurdish Autonomous Administration in northeastern Syria and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Abu Qasra said he hoped the issue would be resolved through diplomacy, because they did not want to settle disputes through military action (The Washington Post, February 6, 2025).

► Defense minister Abu Qasra met with members of the committee refashioning the defense ministry to discuss recent developments (Syrian defense ministry Telegram channel, February 11, 2025).

² For further information, see the February 2025 ITIC report, "[The issue of emigration from the Gaza Strip in light of President Trump's proposal.](#)"

IDF Activities in Syria

► On February 8, 2025, the IDF carried out an airstrike on a Hamas weapons depot in the Deir Ali area of south Syria. According to reports the weapons were to be used in terrorist attacks on IDF forces, and Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations continue to use Syria as a base for Iranian-directed anti-Israeli terrorism (IDF spokesperson, February 8, 2025). "A source close to Hamas" denied that Hamas had a military presence in Syria, claiming it left the country during the early years of the Syrian Civil War, and despite visits by senior figures to Damascus, the movement had not resumed operations in Syria (al-Sharq al-Awsat, February 10, 2025).



**Right: The weapons depot before the airstrike (IDF spokesperson, February 8, 2025).
Left: After the attack (7al website, February 8, 2025)**

► From the air, Israeli attacked weapons depots of the former regime near the town of Inkhil in the northern countryside of Daraa and at the Khilekhlah military airport, north of al-Suwayda. No casualties were reported (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 9, 2025). It was also reported that IDF forces continued operations in the buffer zone and conducted short raids into villages outside it. It was also reported that IDF forces paved a road to the village of M'ariyah in the Yarmouk Basin, west of Daraa. According to reports, a shepherd was wounded by gunfire near the village of Rwhinah, east of the buffer zone, in Syrian territory (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 10, 2025).