



Spotlight on Syria (After the Fall of the Assad Regime) February 12 – 19, 2025

Overview¹

- ▶ Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Mohammad al-Julani) held his first conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who said Russia was willing to support the new leadership in Damascus. According to reports, an agreement is being formulated to keep a limited number of Russian forces in Syria.
- ▶ Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani participated in conferences in Europe and met with foreign leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron. A conference in Paris in support of Syria called for respecting the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and adhering to the disengagement agreements in the Golan Heights.
- ▶ The committee preparing the National Dialogue Conference announced that the Kurdish militia of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) would not be invited. Senior officials of the Kurdish autonomous administration in northeastern Syria said they were willing to integrate into Syrian security forces.
- ▶ The IDF continued operations in villages inside and beyond the demilitarized zone in the Golan Heights. In southern Syria the Israeli Air Force attacked weapon stockpiles of the previous regime.

Establishing the New Regime

Diplomacy

- ▶ Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa held his first conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who wished him success in meeting the challenges facing the new leadership in Syria. Putin said Moscow was willing to help improve Syria's socio-economic situation, including providing humanitarian aid. He added that Russia was committed to Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity (Kremlin Telegram channel, SANA, February 12, 2025). During the conversation, Putin noted the need to lift economic sanctions on Syria and extended an official invitation to Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani to visit Russia (Syrian Presidency

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

Telegram channel, February 12, 2025). Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Russia remained committed to developing bilateral relations with Syria and Moscow was in contact with Damascus to identify opportunities for cooperation. She added that discussions were ongoing regarding Russia's military presence in Syria (RT, February 14, 2025). Reports also suggested that Russia was close to reaching an agreement with the new Syrian government to maintain forces and equipment at its bases in Syria, although the number of troops would be significantly smaller than during the Assad era (Bloomberg, February 17, 2025).

► Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani began a diplomatic tour, participating in international conferences and meeting with foreign leaders and diplomats. He called for the lifting of sanctions on Syria and said the new government would represent all communities in Syria (Syrian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, SANA, February 12-19, 2025):

◆ Al-Shibani's visit to France marked the first visit of a senior Syrian official from the new government to an EU country, where he attended the Paris Conference on Syria's Political Transition. He met with French President Emmanuel Macron and the foreign ministers of France, Jordan, Qatar and Canada. In the conference's final statement, participating countries pledged to help Syria's new leadership safely navigate the transition period. They reiterated their commitment to Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity in accordance with UN resolutions, including the 1974 Israel-Syria Golan Disengagement Agreement, and called for an end to hostilities. Participants urged economic sanctions on Syria be lifted and advocated an increase in the volume and pace of humanitarian aid (Agence France-Presse, February 13, 2025).



**Right: Paris Conference participants (French Foreign Ministry website, February 14, 2025).
Left: Al-Shibani and Macron (Syrian Foreign Ministry Telegram channel, February 13, 2025)**

◆ Al-Shibani later attended the Munich Security Conference, where he participated in a roundtable discussion titled "A New Dawn for Damascus – Prospects for Syria's

Transition Phase." He also met with foreign ministers from Germany, Turkey, the UK, Norway and Croatia, as well as with three United States Senators.

◆ Al-Shibani went to Saudi Arabia, where he attended an international conference on emerging market economies in the resort city of al-Ula.

Security activity

▶ A "source in Syrian intelligence " reported the arrest of Abu al-Harith al-Iraqi, a senior ISIS operative who held various positions in the organization's branch in Iraq. He was reportedly responsible for recruiting and equipping operatives and planning terrorist attacks. He is also accused of operating the cell, exposed in January 2025, plotting to attack the shrine of al-Sayyidah Zaynab, a site south of Damascus sacred to Shi'ites (SANA, February 16, 2025).

Reorganization of Syria's security system

▶ "Syrian sources" reported that an agreement had been reached between the ministry of defense in Damascus and armed groups in southern Syria regarding the establishment of four brigades of 15,000 soldiers from the region. Three infantry brigades will be deployed in the provinces of Daraa, al-Quneitra and al-Suwayda, while the fourth brigade will be composed of rapid response forces (Syria TV, February 16, 2025).

▶ According to reports, Banyan al-Hariri, recently appointed commander of the Daraa Division, met with local militia operatives, and it was agreed to integrate the militias' operatives, vehicles and military equipment into the new Syrian army (Instagram account of Syria Post, February 16, 2025).

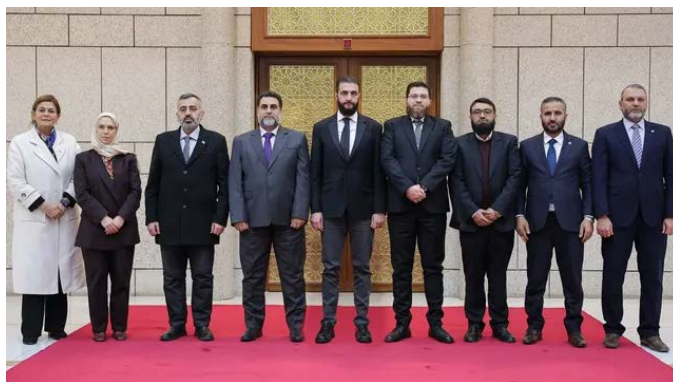
▶ Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra met with Nassim Abu Ara and Ali Bash, two commanders of the Eighth Brigade in southern Syria, as part of efforts to integrate the brigade's forces into the ministry of defense. They agreed that further meetings would be held to assess the security situation and the recruitment of officers and fighters to establish an organized army which would include all forces and specializations while determining their deployment sites (Facebook page of Daraa24, February 12, 2025). However, a "source close to the Eighth Brigade" said the discussions had not gone well, as the ministry of defense approved only three out of eighty names submitted by the brigade for integration into the new security framework. He added that although the ministry of defense sought to dismantle the brigade peacefully, its leadership "will not surrender easily" (al-Araby al-Jadeed, February 19, 2025).



**Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra (Middle) with Nassim Abu Ara and Ali Bash
(Facebook page of Daraa24, February 12, 2025)**

The Kurds

► Syrian President al-Sharaa appointed the seven members of the committee preparing the National Dialogue Conference. They are to draft the frameworks for discussions, determine required objectives, propose an agenda, compile a list of invitees and send invitations to participants (Sham Network, February 12, 2025). Reportedly, the key principles of the planned conference are preserving ethnic diversity and promoting open dialogue while calling on all Syrians to participate in the national dialogue. However, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) will not be invited to the dialogue, as the organization does not represent the eastern provinces or their residents (al-Araby, February 13, 2025).



**Al-Sharaa and the preparatory committee members
(Telegram channel of the Syrian Presidency, February 12, 2025)**

► Mazloum Abdi, commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), congratulated al-Sharaa on assuming the presidency of Syria and said he hoped al-Sharaa would successfully lead the country during its sensitive period. Abdi said joint efforts were underway with the new government and emphasized SDF support for any effort contributing to stability and national unity, while affirming their commitment to Damascus' unity. He also said efforts were ongoing to prepare the ground for negotiations with the new government, saying it was the best way to

achieve solutions that served the national interest. He further called on al-Sharaa to visit the north and east of the country (North Press, February 17, 2025).

► A meeting was held by representatives of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Syrian Democratic Council, and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. Abu Omar al-Idlibi, commander of the Northern Democratic Brigade affiliated with the SDF, said they noted the need to integrate the Kurdish militia forces and security institutions affiliated with the Autonomous Administration into the Syrian army and security forces. He added they had agreed that all non-Syrian fighters should leave the ranks of the militia to strengthen national sovereignty and stability. Participants also called for the reactivation of civilian institutions in northern and eastern Syria to ensure the provision of basic services to local residents (Syria TV, February 18, 2025).



Meeting of senior Kurdish officials (Syria TV, February 18, 2025)

IDF Activity in Syria

► This past week, Israeli military raids were reported in villages in the Quneitra Governorate, inside the buffer zone in the Golan Heights, and beyond. Israeli forces reportedly entered the villages of al-Ashah, al-Asbah, al-Rafeed and Saida al-Joulan (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 12-19, 2025). Additionally, Israeli artillery fire was reported in the Yarmouk Valley in the agrarian western Daraa region, with no casualties reported (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, February 18, 2025). In another incident, the Israeli military targeted weaponry belonging to the Assad regime in the Sa'sa' area in southern Syria (IDF spokesperson, February 18, 2025).

► Geir Pedersen, UN special envoy to Syria, addressing members of the UN Security Council, called for pressure on Israel to withdraw its forces from areas it entered in the buffer zone of the Golan Heights following the fall of the Assad regime (al-Sharq al-Awsat, February 12, 2025).

► After Israeli forces withdrew from the Quneitra Governor's building inside the buffer zone of the Golan Heights, the new Syrian flag was raised over the structure for the first time in 51 years,

following the 1974 disengagement agreement (Syrian journalist Nour Golan's X account, February 15, 2025). It was further reported that a UN delegation entered the building to assess its condition after the Israeli military's withdrawal (X account of Syrian journalist Nour Golan, February 17, 2025).



**Quneitra Governor's building with the new Syrian flag
(Syrian journalist Nour Golan's X account, February 15, 2025)**