



Spotlight on Syria

March 5 – 12 , 2025

Overview¹

- ▶ IDF forces continued targeted raids in the buffer zone in the Golan Heights and the Yarmouk Basin, and attacked military sites in southern Syria and the Damascus area from the air. The foreign ministers of Syria's neighboring countries condemned "Israel's aggression." The Syrian regime appointed a governor for Quneitra Province in the Golan Heights.
- ▶ Clashes between Syrian regime forces and pro-Assad forces in Syria's coastal provinces led to atrocities carried out by supporters of the current regime against the Alawite population. Reports indicate at least 1,200 civilian casualties. Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani) appointed a committee to investigate and promised to punish those responsible. He also rejected Defense Minister Katz's statement calling him a "jihadist terrorist." Iran and Hezbollah denied involvement in the events.
- ▶ Syrian President al-Sharaa and the commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces signed an agreement to integrate Kurdish forces into state institutions. The implementation of the agreement is expected to take two years.
- ▶ Representatives of the Syrian government and Druze community leaders signed a memorandum of understanding to regulate the administrative and security situation in al-Suwayda. Conflicting reports emerged regarding the signing of an agreement to integrate Druze militias into the Syrian security forces.

IDF Activities in Syria

- ▶ During the past week, IDF forces continued targeted raids inside the buffer zone in the Golan Heights and beyond. The forces located, seized and destroyed large quantities of weapons, including rifles, ammunition and missiles (IDF spokesperson, March 8, 2025). "Syrian sources" reported that the raids took place in the towns of Rasm al-Munbateh, al-Dawayah al-Kabirah and Be'er Ajeem as well as in the village of Ruwayhina in Quneitra Province, and in the Yarmouk Basin area in the western countryside of Dara'a Province. Ground forces supported by aircraft

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set up checkpoints, searched houses and vehicles, and checked the identities of passersby. During the operation in the town of Jamla in the Yarmouk Basin, calls were heard from mosques urging mass mobilization in anticipation of a possible confrontation, but Israeli forces left without unusual incident (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 9, 2025).



**Right: Some of the weapons located by IDF forces (IDF spokesperson, March 8, 2025).
Left: IDF soldiers in the town of Swisah in Quneitra (al-Mayadeen, March 5, 2025)**

► On the night of March 11, 2025, the IDF carried out airstrikes in southern Syria on detection systems used for constructing aerial intelligence pictures, as well as command centers and storage sites for weapons and military equipment belonging to the Syrian regime (IDF spokesperson, March 11, 2025). Multiple strikes targeted military sites belonging to the previous Syrian regime in southern Syria and the Damascus area, including sites of the 10th Division in Sa'asa' and the 5th and 9th Divisions in the rural areas of Dara'a. Tanks and heavy weaponry were destroyed in attacks on sites of the 90th Brigade in the rural area of Quneitra. In addition to the airstrikes, Israeli military vehicles reportedly entered the village of Maariya in the Yarmouk Basin in western Dara'a. Later, an airport in the al-Suwayda area was attacked (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 10-11, 2025).

► Israel's continued operations in Syria continued to draw criticism both in Syria and abroad:

- ◆ The summary statement of the meeting of the foreign ministers of Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq condemned "Israeli aggression" in Syria, which they claimed violated international law. The ministers also demanded that the UN Security Council lead efforts to halt the "aggression" and ensure Israel's withdrawal from Syrian territories (Syria TV, March 9, 2025). Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi accused Israel of attempting to create chaos to achieve its goals. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan reported that they rejected Israel's regional "expansionist policy" (Al Jazeera, March 9, 2025).

◆ In the town of Tafas in the western countryside of Dara'a, a nighttime demonstration was held to protest the Israeli presence on Syrian soil. Protesters opposed the continued IDF activity without interference. During the demonstration, armed men gathered in the town, declaring their support for Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa and their readiness to fight against IDF forces (Al Jazeera Syria YouTube channel, March 10, 2025).

◆ A Syrian Telegram channel supporting the Syrian Popular Resistance issued a training video showing two masked operatives conducting a tactical sniper shooting lesson on how to attack an IDF patrol during a raid in southern Syria (MEMRI, March 8, 2025). On January 31, 2025, the organization claimed responsibility for gunfire targeting IDF soldiers in the buffer zone in the Golan Heights.

Governor appointed for the al-Quneitra Province

► Ahmed al-Dalati, deputy commander of Ahrar al-Sham and a senior figure in the Operations Directorate which led to the overthrow of the Assad regime, was appointed governor of Quneitra Province, where IDF forces operate. The appointment came after residents criticized the new administration in Damascus for neglecting the province the way the Assad family had. Arriving in the province, al-Dalati met with local officials and pledged to provide solutions for urgent problems. Muhammad al-Khalid, a resident of the town of Khan Arnabeh, said it was understood that the new regime could not deploy security forces in the province because of Israeli restrictions, but the government was still obligated to provide local residents with basic services (al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 9, 2025).



The arrival of the new governor al-Dalati in Quneitra (New Syria Front X account, March 9, 2025)

Establishing the New Regime

Violence and atrocities in Alawite areas

► On March 6, 2025, forces loyal to the previous regime of Bashar al-Assad launched a coordinated attack against the security forces of the new regime in Alawite areas along Syria's northern coast, primarily in the provinces of Latakia and Tartus, reportedly killing dozens of

people. The new regime imposed a curfew on the provinces and deployed military and security forces to the coastal region to suppress supporters of the former regime. On March 10, 2025, the Syrian ministry of defense announced the end of security operations and the restoration of order and security, stating that public institutions were resuming normal operations (Syria TV and SANA, March 6-10, 2025).



Syrian security forces in Latakia (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 6, 2025)

► During the clashes in Alawite areas, civilians were reportedly massacred and entire families executed by armed groups affiliated with Syrian security forces and pro-regime militias, many of whom were jihadists (BBC and Reuters, March 6-10, 2025; Le Monde, March 9, 2025). According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 1,225 civilians were killed between March 6 and 11, 2025, including 658 in Latakia and 384 in Tartus, with some of the victims being non-Alawite civilians. There were reports of at least 47 mass killings, along with ethnic cleansing, house burnings and the forced displacement of residents (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 11, 2025). The events on the Syrian coast were reportedly accompanied by a disinformation campaign on social media which exaggerated the number of civilian casualties and recycled old pictures and videos from massacres that took place during Syrian Civil War under the Assad regime.

► Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa initially said the regime would continue to pursue hangers-on from the former regime, and praised the army and security forces for their commitment to protecting civilians (Syrian Presidency Telegram channel, March 7, 2025). However, following reports of atrocities and international criticism, he ordered an independent investigation committee be appointed to examine the events which occurred on the Syrian coast, identify those responsible and bring them to justice; the committee was required to submit its findings within 30 days. Al-Sharaa also announced the formation of a Supreme Committee for Civil Reconciliation to maintain direct contact with residents of the

Syrian coast, listen to their concerns and provide necessary support (Syrian Presidency Telegram channel, March 9, 2025). He vowed to punish those responsible for killing civilians, even if they were his close allies, warning that the killing of Alawites endangered efforts to unify the country (Reuters, March 10, 2025).

► Al-Sharaa also responded to Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz's statement that the events on the Syrian coast indicated that the Syrian president was a "jihadist terrorist from the school of al-Qaeda, who committed atrocities against the civilian population." He dismissed Katz' remarks as "nonsense" and added that Israelis "are the last ones who can speak, after the number of deaths they caused in Gaza " (Israeli media and Reuters, March 10, 2025).

► Hezbollah media issued a statement denying the organization's involvement in events in Syria, claiming that "certain parties" were attempting to drag Hezbollah's name into the affair, accusing it of being a party to the ongoing conflict, and that the accusations were "baseless." The organization called on media outlets to maintain accuracy and not be drawn into misinformation campaigns serving "political agendas and suspicious foreign interests" (al-Manar Telegram channel, March 9, 2025).

► Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei also rejected allegations of Iran's involvement in incidents in Syria. He called the accusations ridiculous and unacceptable, saying the killing of innocent Syrians had to stop as soon as possible (Iranian foreign ministry website, March 10, 2025).

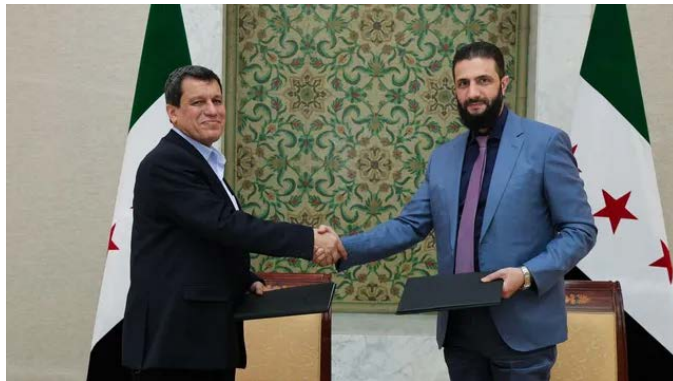
Syria and the Kurds

► On March 10, 2025, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa and Mazloum Abdi, commander of the Kurdish militia of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), signed an agreement for the integration of Kurdish forces into Syrian state institutions. The agreement, brokered by the United States, stipulated that Kurdish forces would be incorporated into the Syrian national forces no later than the end of 2025 and that the constitutional rights of the Kurdish community as a "native Syrian community" would be guaranteed. It also stipulated that all civilian institutions of Kurdish autonomy in northeastern Syria, including border crossings, the airport, and oil and gas fields, would be transferred to state management. A ceasefire would be declared across all Syrian territories, and the return of displaced persons to their homes would be ensured (Syrian Presidency Telegram channel, March 10, 2025).

► A "source within the SDF" said dozens of unresolved issues remained between the Kurds and the Damascus government, and reaching a final resolution could take two years. According to

the source, eight committees were established to address disputed matters and develop ways to implement the terms of the agreement, including the integrating of Kurdish forces, issues related to oil and gas, and the management of prisons housing ISIS operatives and their families. He said Kurdish forces would continue overseeing ISIS prisons and camps in coordination with the international coalition (Syria TV, March 11, 2025).

► Mazloun Abdi said the fundamental principle of the agreement was that there would be a unified army in Syria and that the SDF would participate in its reorganization and adapt to the situation. He added that foreign fighters in the militia would leave as soon as a permanent ceasefire in Syria was approved. He also denied any cooperation with Iran, stating, "This will not happen, not now and not later," adding that their focus was on becoming part of the new government, not the opposition (al-Majalla , March 11, 2025).



Al-Sharaa and Abdi at the agreement signing ceremony (Sham Agency, March 10, 2025)

Syria and the Druze

► On March 6, 2025, a large-scale demonstration took place in the Druze city of al-Suwayda to protest the policies of Syria's new administration in the wake of the atrocities in Alawite areas. Protesters chanted, "al-Julani, get out! Free Syria!" and carried signs criticizing with the regime's policies. They also voiced support for Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, the spiritual leader of the Druze community in Syria, and held up his picture alongside that of Sheikh Mowafaq Tarif, the leader of the Druze community in Israel. Protesters removed the Syrian flag from the governor's building and replaced it with a Druze flag (Levantin Events X account, March 6, 2025).

► On March 10, 2025, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa met with Mustafa al-Bakour, the governor of al-Suwayda, and prominent Druze figures. They discussed key national and local issues, relating to Syria's current historical moment and the need to fairly represent all segments of the Syrian people, despite regional and international circumstances and "plots against Syria's unity, land and people" (SANA, March 10, 2025). The meeting resulted in an

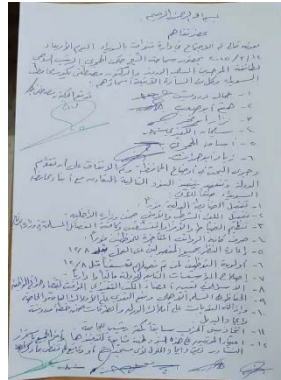
agreement to integrate al-Suwayda province into state institutions while merging local security services into the Syrian ministry of interior. It was also stated that local police would be from the province, while the police commander would be appointed by the Syrian government and would not necessarily be a local resident (Al Jazeera, March 11, 2025). A "source close to the provincial leadership" claimed that reports about the agreement were inaccurate but noted that they remained open to dialogue (al-Suwayda 24, March 11, 2025). Meanwhile, Druze Sheikh Laith Wahid al-Bal'ous, commander of the Druze Men of Dignity militia, said the agreement with the Damascus administration had been in place for several days and granted responsibility for local security to the province's residents (al-Araby, March 11, 2025).



Al-Sharaa meets representatives of the al-Suwayda province (SANA, March 10, 2025)

► On March 12, 2025, representatives of the Syrian government and senior Druze community figures in al-Suwayda signed a memorandum of understanding regarding administrative and security arrangements in the region. The meeting was hosted by Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, the spiritual leader of the Druze in Syria, and included Mustafa al-Bakour, governor of al-Suwayda, and other senior figures who had participated in the national dialogue conference held in Damascus in late February 2025. The memorandum of understanding stipulated that police and security services would be strengthened under the supervision of the ministry of interior; the status of all armed factions and deserters would be regularized by the ministry of defense; public order would be maintained and attacks against public and private institutions would be prevented; roadblocks would be removed (Syria TV, March 12, 2025).

► However, a "source within the spiritual leadership of al-Suwayda" claimed it was not a final agreement but rather a list of demands presented to government representatives, who pledged to implement them. The source added that many issues were still being negotiated (al-Suwayda 24 Facebook page, March 12, 2025).



**of understanding between Druze representatives and the Syrian government
(al-Suwayda 24 Facebook page, March 12, 2025)**

Diplomacy

► On March 6, 2025, the British government announced the removal of sanctions imposed during Bashar al-Assad’s rule on 24 financial entities in Syria, including the Central Bank (UK Government website, March 6, 2025). Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani welcomed the decision, saying that lifting the sanctions would help ease economic pressures and facilitate basic transactions beneficial to the Syrian people. He added that Syria expected further steps on the matter and the removal of restrictions hindering the country’s recovery (SANA, March 6, 2025).