



## Spotlight on Syria

### April 9 –23, 2025

#### Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ IDF forces continued targeted raids in the Golan Heights buffer zone. UN officials claimed that Israeli “violations” threatened stability in Syria, while the United States expressed support for Israeli actions against terrorist elements in Syria.
- ▶ Turkish involvement in Syria: President Erdoğan accused Israel of trying to ignite ethnic and sectarian conflict, although the Turkish foreign minister said they did not seek to confront Israel in Syria.
- ▶ Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas held his first meeting with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa and agreed to enhance cooperation.
- ▶ The Palestinian Islamic Jihad reported that two of its senior operatives were arrested by the authorities in Syria “without cause.”
- ▶ Syrian security forces confiscated various weapons, including anti-tank and shoulder-fired missiles, during operations against gangs in Daraa Governorate in southern Syria.
- ▶ Syrian President al-Sharaa met with United States Congressmen for the first time. One Congressman claimed al-Sharaa expressed a willingness to improve relations with Israel.

#### Israeli Activity in Syria

- ▶ IDF forces continued targeted operations in and around the buffer zone on the Golan Heights, mainly in Quneitra Governorate, conducting raids and searches in the villages of Turanja, Qudna, and al-Asha in the rural areas of Quneitra, and established temporary checkpoints to inspect vehicles and residents. No unusual incidents or clashes with locals were reported (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, X accounts of Daraa25 and Omar al-Hariri, April 9–23, 2025).

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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 vehicle near the village of al-Asha (X account of Daraa24, April 20, 2025)**

- ▶ A resident of the village of Kuwayya in Daraa Governorate said the movement of Israeli soldiers and vehicles the area had declined after locals "thwarted" infiltration attempts last month. He said there were rumors that Israeli forces would soon begin to withdraw and said he hoped the rumors were true. Bilal Hamu, until recently the mayor of the city of Salam in central Quneitra, also said he had heard of IDF movements and trailer evacuations from posts, expressing hope this signaled an imminent withdrawal (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 17, 2025).
- ▶ On April 10, 2025, the UN Security Council met to discuss Israeli activity in Syria. The Syrian representative accused Israel of continuing "aggressive actions on Syrian territory to undermine its security," claiming Israel was promoting "sightseeing tours for tourists" in the areas it invaded, taking over water resources in southern Syria and diverting river channels. He called on the Security Council to act immediately to stop the "aggression" and asserted Syria's full right to apply sovereignty across its territory and reject any Israeli interference. UN Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East Affairs Khaled Khiari condemned Israeli "violations" of the disengagement agreement on the Golan and warned they threatened Syria's transitional process. UN Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix claimed the situation remained unstable due to "significant violations" of the agreement and said Israeli forces occupied 12 positions on the eastern side of the buffer zone (the Bravo Line) and were constructing barriers to restrict movement along the ceasefire line. Acting US Ambassador Dorothy Shea said the United States shared Israel's concerns that Syria could become a base for terrorism. She emphasized the awareness of global jihadist activity and said Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed groups were trying to gain a foothold in the area and threaten Israel and other countries. Therefore, she said, Israel had the right to defend itself, including against terrorist groups operating near its borders (UN website, April 10, 2025).

► Turkish officials accused Israel of destabilizing Syria and violating its territorial integrity but claimed they did not seek direct confrontation with Israel despite Turkey’s growing involvement in Syria under President Ahmed al-Sharaa’s new leadership.

◆ Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan accused Israel of having a strategy to leave “nothing” for Syria’s new government. He confirmed direct contacts with Israel to prevent conflict and said that while Turkey would not remain passive regarding Syria’s instability, it did not seek conflict with any state in Syria, including Israel (CNN Turk, April 9, 2025). At the conclusion of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Turkey, Fidan stated that Israeli “provocations” destabilized Syria and that Turkey wanted to maintain stability and avoid threats to its security (TRT X account, April 13, 2025).

◆ President Erdoğan, speaking at the forum, accused Israel of trying to incite ethnic and sectarian conflict in Syria, warning that “anyone who wants to inflict pain on the Syrian people again should prepare to pay the price.” He claimed Turkey did not want to take land from other countries and would not allow anyone to undermine Syria’s stability and security (Anadolu Agency, April 11, 2025). He later added that anyone trying to prevent peace in Syria “will find themselves up against us and the Syrian government” (TRT X account, April 15, 2025).



**Al-Sharaa meets with Erdogan on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (SANA X account, April 11, 2025)**

◆ A Turkish defense ministry spokesperson said Israel had to stop its “provocative attacks” immediately, since they threatened Syria’s territorial integrity and stability. The ministry said regional security required Israel to abandon its “position as occupier,” and called on the international community to stop the “illegal actions.” “Sources in the Turkish defense ministry” said Turkey’s presence in Syria “is not intended to harm a third country,” adding they had made it clear to Israel that Turkey was present in Syria at the

request of Damascus to strengthen Syria's defense capabilities against terrorism (Anadolu Agency and Turkish media, April 10, 2025).

## Palestinians in Syria

### Mahmoud Abbas' visit

► Palestinian Authority (PA) chairman Mahmoud Abbas visited Syria for the first time in nearly two decades and met with President Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus. The two discussed strengthening bilateral relations and recent developments in the Palestinian arena, noting the need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, humanitarian aid access, reconstruction without displacement and full Israeli withdrawal from the Strip with responsibility transferred to the PA. They agreed to appoint joint committees to increase cooperation (Wafa, April 18, 2025). According to reports, hundreds of Syrians and Palestinian refugees in camps protested Abbas' visit and demanded his expulsion. Protesters took to the streets after the Friday prayers in Damascus mosques chanting, "Abbas, get out! Ramallah will remain free!" They also chanted slogans supporting Gaza and the "resistance"<sup>2</sup> (al-Shaheed, April 18, 2025).



**Al-Sharaa and Abbas meet (Telegram channel of the Syrian Presidential Office, April 18, 2025)**

### Arrests of Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders

► Syrian security forces reportedly arrested senior leaders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) branch in Syria without explanation. Among the detainees were PIJ Syria sector head Khaled Khaled Abu al-Hassan and Syrian sector "organizing committee" chief Abu Ali Yasser (Telegram channels of Sabrin News, Hussein Mortada and Quds Press, April 22, 2025).

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<sup>2</sup> Palestinian terrorist organizations.



**Khaled Khaled (Telegram channel of Free Syria News Agency, April 22, 2025)**

- ▶ The PIJ’s military wing confirmed that Syrian sector head Khaled Khaled and organizing chief Yasser al-Zafari were arrested several days ago and that no explanation had been given. They expressed hope that “our brothers in the Syrian government” would release them soon, citing their “significant contributions to the Palestinian cause.” The statement added that, “At this time, when we have been fighting the Zionist enemy for more than a year and a half without surrender, we expect support and appreciation from our Arab brothers, not the opposite. Our weapons have always been aimed solely at the enemy and never deviated from the main goal, the occupied Palestinian territories. When our fighters were killed in the Syrian arena, it was on the borders of occupied Palestine” (Jerusalem Brigades' Telegram channel, April 22, 2025).
- ▶ PIJ-Syria liaison official Bassam al-Agha speculated the arrests were due to “personal issues.” He denied that the arrests were linked to PIJ activity in Syria, claiming that the group operated humanitarian programs for Palestinian refugees. He also denied rumors that the arrests were related to recent visits by Mahmoud Abbas or United States congressmen to Damascus. Efforts are reportedly underway to secure the release of the two, though the matter is in Syrian authorities’ hands. He added that PIJ had not received any notification of new restrictions on its activities in Syria (*al-Quds al-Arabi*, April 22, 2025).

## Consolidating the New Regime

### Security operations

- ▶ On April 20, 2025, Syrian General Security and the ministry of the interior launched raids in Daal and Abtaa in western Daraa Governorate against gangs involved in weapons theft and trafficking. They uncovered anti-tank missiles, shoulder-fired missiles, Katyusha rockets,

mortars and heavy machine guns (Telegram channels of Daraa Governorate and Syrian ministry of the interior, April 20–22, 2025).



**Weapons found during raids in Daraa Governorate (Right: Telegram channel of Daraa Governorate, April 21, 2025. Left: Telegram channel of the Syrian ministry of the interior, April 22, 2025)**

### Diplomatic activity

► Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam visited Syria and held his first meeting with President Ahmed al-Sharaa. They discussed bilateral issues including border security and preventing smuggling; the atmosphere was described as “positive.” Salam said his visit opened a new chapter in relations based on respect for sovereignty and noninterference in domestic affairs. They stressed the importance of enhanced security coordination for the stability of both countries and agreed to appoint a committee of representatives from the foreign, defense, interior and justice ministries to monitor shared issues. They also called for preserving Syria’s unity and lifting sanctions on the country (X account of the Lebanese government, April 14, 2025; Nidaa al-Watan, April 14, 2025).

► Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani met with United States Congressman Cory Mills in Damascus, the first visit by a member of Congress since the new regime’s came into power. They discussed Syria’s security and economic situation, the potential for strategic partnership and shared threats such as drug trafficking and organized crime. They also addressed American sanctions, with al-Shibani urging their removal to build trust and affirming Syria’s openness to serious dialogue with international actors, including the United States, based on shared interests and mutual respect. Mills later met with President al-Sharaa, who reportedly expressed willingness to improve relations with Israel and take action to prevent weapons smuggling through Syria for attacks on Israel (Syrian foreign ministry Telegram channel, April 19, 2025; al-Araby, April 22, 2025). Al-Sharaa later met with another United States congressman, Marlin Stutzman (Syrian Presidential Office Telegram channel, April 21, 2025).



**Al-Sharaa meets Congressman Mills (Syrian Presidential Office Telegram channel, April 19, 2025)**

► “Sources” said the American administration had issued policy directives to the Syrian government to improve relations, which included demands to publicly denounce jihadist groups, ban Palestinian militias from operating or raising funds in Syria and expel their members. According to the sources, if Syria implements the directives, the United States would commit to Syria’s territorial integrity, consider restoring diplomatic ties, extend the waiver on sanctions issued by the Biden administration and lift terrorist designations on members of the Syrian government (*Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 2025).