



## Spotlight on Syria

### April 23 – May 7, 2025

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

- ▶ The IDF carried out aerial attacks in Syria, including near the presidential palace in Damascus, in the wake of clashes between gunmen affiliated with the Syrian regime and the Druze population. The attacks provoked condemnations from senior officials in the Syrian regime and protests against Israel in cities across Syria.
- ▶ Syrian foreign minister al-Shibani and government officials in Damascus denied reports that Syria was interested in joining the Abraham Accords and strengthening its relations with Israel.
- ▶ The Syrian regime reportedly appointed an official to be responsible for the Palestinian "factions" in the country and informed their representatives that he would supervise the weapons in their possession. Hamas is mediating between the "factions" and the Syrian regime. The secretary general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command was detained for several hours.
- ▶ Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani) confirmed that Turkey and Russia had a presence in the country and reiterated his promise that Syria would not serve as a base for threats to neighboring states.
- ▶ Syrian Foreign Minister al-Shibani visited UN headquarters in New York for the first time, and reported that Syria was working with the international community against terrorist threats.

#### Israeli Actions in Syria

##### Israeli involvement on behalf of the Druze

- ▶ On April 29, 2025, violent clashes broke out in the Druze town of Jaramana near Damascus. Media affiliated with the Syrian regime reported that armed groups clashed with civil defense personnel and people were killed and injured. It is thought that the clashes were a response to the publication of a recording, later proven to be fake, in which a Druze leader allegedly insulted the Prophet Muhammad. Subsequently, clashes were reported in the Druze city of Ashrafiyat Sahnaya between "armed factions" reportedly close to the new regime and local

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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.

residents. At least 21 people were reported killed in the clashes in the Druze areas. Calm was restored after regime security forces deployed in Jaramana and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, and forces also arrived in the al-Suwayda area (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and Syrian and Arab media, April 29–May 3, 2025).

► Given the clashes in Druze areas, the IDF carried out aerial attacks targeting operatives who attacked Druze civilians on the outskirts of Damascus. An aerial attack was also conducted near the presidential palace in Damascus. Later, dozens of military targets were hit, including surface-to-air missile launchers, anti-aircraft guns and other weapons. The IDF also evacuated more than twenty injured Syrian Druze civilians for treatment in Israel (IDF spokesperson, April 30–May 7, 2025). Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Katz said Israel would not allow the Druze community in Syria to be harmed and noted that the attack near the presidential palace was intended to send a message to the Syrian regime (office of the Israeli prime minister, April 30–May 2, 2025).<sup>2</sup> According to reports in Syria, Israel attacked in the Damascus, Hama and Daraa regions, killing a member of the Syrian security forces and a civilian and injuring four others (Telegram channels of Syrian news agency SANA; Al Jazeera, April 30–May 3, 2025).



**Right: Damage from an Israeli attack in al-Suwayda (SANA, May 3, 2025).**

**Left: Air defense battery hit in northern Daraa (X account of Omar al-Hariri, May 3, 2025)**

► The Israeli involvement led to disagreements within the Druze community in Syria. Alongside calls for Israel to provide “international protection” for the Druze, other figures in the community said they did not want Israeli support but added that if the attacks on the Druze

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<sup>2</sup> On February 23, 2025, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said Israel would not allow the Druze community in southern Syria to be threatened. Netanyahu and Defense Minister Katz reiterated the threat on March 1, 2025, following violent clashes in the town of Jaramana and instructed the IDF to prepare to defend the town.

continued they would have no choice but to cooperate with Israel. In contrast, Druze figures in Syria and Lebanon rejected Israeli involvement and claimed that Israel was using the Druze in Syria for its own purposes (Syrian and Arab media, April 30–May 3, 2025).

► In response to the Israeli activity in Syria, demonstrations were held in major cities in Syria, including Latakia, Tartus and Hama, to protest Israeli or other foreign involvement in Syria's internal affairs (SANA, May 3, 2025). Syrian regime officials condemned the Israeli attacks and claimed they complicated efforts to achieve stability:

► The Syrian presidential office stated that the Israeli attack near the presidential palace was a “dangerous escalation” against state institutions and its sovereignty. It added that the attack reflected the continuation of efforts “to undermine the stability of the state and harm national security and unity.” The office called on the international community and Arab states to stand with Syria in confronting the attacks and emphasized that attacks on Syria's unity, internal or external, would not weaken the will of the Syrian people (Telegram channel of the Syrian presidential office, May 2, 2025).



**Demonstration against Israeli attacks (SANA, May 3, 2025)**

► The Syrian foreign ministry stated that Syria would not accept any external interference in its affairs and the Druze calls for “international protection” were “illegal,” posed a direct threat to the country's unity and stability and had to be completely rejected (Telegram channel of the Syrian foreign ministry, April 30, 2025).

► Syrian Minister of Information Hamza al-Mustafa said Syria condemned the Israeli attacks and demanded they stop, as they posed a threat to the Syrian people and their aspirations after the fall of the regime (Telegram channel of Al Jazeera, April 30, 2025).

► Condemnations of the Israeli attack near the presidential palace in Damascus were also issued by the UN secretary general and his envoy to Syria, as well as by the foreign ministries

of Egypt, Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and Iran (Agence France-Presse and Telegram channels of the various foreign ministries, May 2–3, 2025).

### **IDF activity in the buffer zone**

► IDF forces raided and destroyed the central headquarters of the Assad regime responsible for the Mount Hermon area. Extensive military facilities and large quantities of weapons were found, including artillery, rocket launchers, mortar shells, rockets, explosive devices and mines (IDF spokesperson, May 6–5, 2025).



**Weapons found in the Syrian headquarters of the Mount Hermon area  
(IDF spokesperson, May 5, 2025)**

► IDF forces continued targeted operations in and beyond the buffer zone in the Golan Heights. Reports included IDF activity and the erection of checkpoints near the towns of al-Asha', Jaba't al-Khashab, al-Buwaydah, Ufaniyah, Tranjah, Hadar, Bayt Tema, Qala'at Jandal, Qasim and al-Hariyah in the Quneitra Governorate (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, April 23–May 7, 2025).

### **Normalization with Israel**

► United States Congressman Cory Mills said that during his visit to Syria, he spoke with Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa about the conditions for lifting sanctions on Syria and about peace with Israel. According to Mills, al-Sharaa said Syria was interested in joining the Abraham Accords “under the right conditions” (Bloomberg, April 23, 2025). However, Syrian foreign minister Asaad al-Shibani denied that talks were being held to normalize relations with Israel and declared that Israel’s actions in Syrian territory were unacceptable (al-Arabiya, April 30, 2025).

► “Sources in Syria” stated that before the country could consider joining the Abraham Accords, Israel had to stop its “meddling” in Syria, halt the bombings and withdraw from the Syrian territories entered by Israeli forces (Levant 24, April 25, 2025). “Informed sources” claimed the Syrian government refused to join the Abraham Accords because the agreements

were with countries not occupied by Israel, and therefore Syria could not join (Syria TV, April 28, 2025).

## Palestinians in Syria

► “Palestinian sources” reported that the Syrian government informed representatives of the Palestinian “factions”<sup>3</sup> that it would act to gain control over the proliferation of weapons in their ranks. The “sources” claimed that did not mean the factions would hand over their weapons, but rather their spread would be “controlled,” particularly in Palestinian refugee camps, and their deployment would be under the control of the Syrian government. They added that Hamas was leading the contacts with the new Syrian government, both directly and indirectly. “Sources in Hamas” stated that the contacts were being held to preserve “Palestinian interests,” following remarks by the Hamas representative in Lebanon that the movement would take action to prevent any conflict which could cause the current situation to deteriorate, even if it meant collecting weapons. The “sources” also referred to the arrest of two senior officials from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) by Syrian authorities and reported that the organization had not received any clarification from Syrian officials regarding the reason for their arrest or their condition (al-Sharq al-Awsat, May 1, 2025).

► A “source in a Palestinian faction” reported that the new Syrian administration had appointed Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Shami to manage the Syrian “Palestinian factions” file. According to the “source,” al-Shami met several times with leaders of “Palestinian factions” still active in Syria to discuss the factions’ activities, weapons, property and camps in Syrian territory. The “source” said al-Shami noted the need to prosecute those involved in the killing of Syrians, for the “factions” to hand over the weapons and military equipment they held and to restrict their role to humanitarian activities. According to the “source,” Syrian authorities took over several headquarters and offices of “Palestinian factions” which had fought alongside the Assad regime and froze the bank accounts of their senior officials (al-Sharq al-Awsat, May 5, 2025).

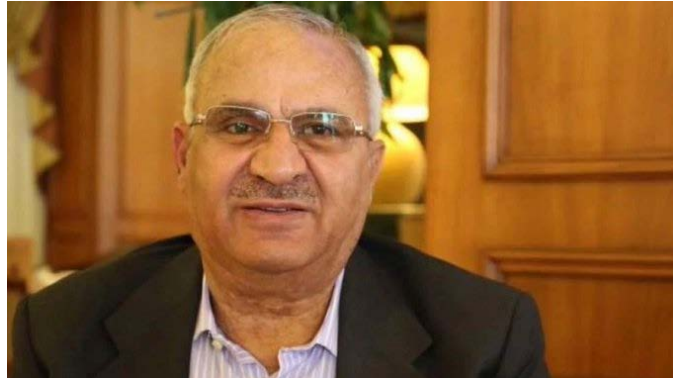
► Talal Naji, the secretary general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC), Talal Naji, was reportedly arrested by Syrian authorities in Damascus and the organization’s offices in Syria were closed. A few hours later, Naji was released after being interrogated (al-Mayadeen, Syrian TV, May 3, 2025). Senior PFLP-GC officials spoke with

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<sup>3</sup> Terrorist organizations.



Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas and with Hamas "external leader" Khaled Mashal to mediate with Syrian authorities in order to ensure Naji's release (Syria TV, May 3, 2025).



**Talal Naji (X account of the Action Group for Palestinians of Syria, May 3, 2025)**

► "Palestinian sources" confirmed that although Naji and second- and third-tier senior officials of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command remained in Syria and the organization's offices remained open, several leaders of Palestinian "factions" who had fought alongside the Assad regime left the country after the revolution. A "source in a Palestinian faction" reported that several PFLP-GC fighters were arrested as part of the new Syrian regime's security activity against those involved in crimes under the Assad regime, and it was also reported that the organization handed over its training camps in the countryside around Damascus, Daraa, Aleppo and al-Suwayda areas (al-Sharq al-Awsat, May 5, 2025).

## Establishing the New Syrian Regime

### Diplomatic activity

► Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa acknowledged that Turkey and Russia had "military presences" in Syria. He claimed that the new regime in Syria had canceled previous agreements with several countries and was in the process of defining new ones. Al-Sharaa added that the presence of foreign forces in the country had to be in accordance with Syrian law and any future agreement had to guarantee Syria's independence and stability, and no country would be allowed to threaten another country through its presence in Syria. He said Syria was committed from the beginning, even before the rebels reached Damascus, to preventing its territory from being a base for threats to neighboring states (New York Times, May 23, 2025).

► The Syrian regime reportedly responded in writing to the list of conditions presented by the American administration in exchange for a possible partial lifting of sanctions and stated that the regime had met most of them, while mutual understandings with the United States were

still needed on others. “Two Western officials” and “a senior Syrian official” reported that the Syrians pledged not to allow American or Western interests in Syria to be threatened, adding that they did not want the country to become a source of threat to any party, including Israel, although discussions on the matter might continue. It was also noted that President al-Sharaa appointed a committee to monitor the activity of Palestinian "factions" and that armed factions outside of state control would not be permitted to operate. In addition, the Syrians detailed their steps to address chemical weapons in the country and stated they were willing to expand communication with the Americans regarding the fight against ISIS (Reuters, April 26, 2025).

► Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani arrived in the United States for the first time, on the occasion of a visit to UN headquarters in New York. He attended the ceremony for raising the new Syrian flag at the UN and a UN Security Council session, and met with UN secretary general António Guterres and representatives of Arab states. He also met for the first time with senior officials from the United States State Department. Al-Shibani stated that Syria was working in coordination with the international community to address terrorist threats and was cooperating "effectively" to resolve the chemical weapons issue, and called for the lifting of sanctions on the country (SANA, Reuters, Telegram channel of the Syrian foreign ministry, April 26–30, 2025).



**Syrian foreign minister in meetings with the UN secretary general and diplomats at the UN headquarters in New York (Telegram channel of the Syrian foreign ministry, April 26–29, 2025)**

► The United Kingdom announced it was lifting the sanctions it had imposed on Syria’s defense and interior ministries during the Assad regime, as well as on various Syrian intelligence agencies. The UK minister for the Middle East stated that the Syrian people deserved a chance to rebuild their country and economy and that a stable Syria was in Britain’s national interest (Reuters, April 24, 2025).

► Syrian security forces continued to prevent weapons smuggling on the Syria–Lebanon border: the General Security Directorate seized a shipment of weapons hidden in a bus that arrived in the city of al-Qusayr in Homs Governorate from Lebanon and arrested those involved (SANA, April 26, 2025). The Security Directorate in Homs thwarted two attempts to smuggle weapons to Lebanon involving anti-tank missiles, weapons, ammunition and TNT (Syria TV, May 5, 2025).

## Iranian Intervention in Syria

► Reuters correspondents located documents in the abandoned Iranian embassy in Damascus which revealed an Iranian plan to rebuild Syria after the Civil War. The plan included dozens of infrastructure construction projects and other economic deals worth billions of dollars which were supposed to be carried out by Iranian companies in post-war Syria. Although some of the planned projects began to take shape in Syria, the plan ultimately did not materialize due to the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 and the departure of Iranian representatives from the country (Reuters, May 1, 2025).