



Spotlight on Syria

March 12 – 19, 2025

Overview¹

- ▶ IDF forces continued targeted raids in the Golan Heights buffer zone and attacked a large number of military sites in southern Syria and a structure belonging to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in Damascus. Syria and several other Arab states condemned the attacks and accused Israel of "escalation."
- ▶ Syrian security forces exchanged fire with armed forces affiliated with Hezbollah after three security personnel were kidnapped and murdered on the Lebanese side of the border; there were at least 20 fatalities. Hezbollah denied involvement.
- ▶ Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani) signed a declaration for an interim constitution to cover the transition period. According to the constitution, Islamic law will be the core of legislation and calls for separatism and foreign intervention will be considered criminal offenses. Al-Sharaa also established a national security council.

Israel's Activities in Syria

- ▶ This past week IDF forces continued targeted raids in the Quneitra Governorate, both within and outside the buffer zone in the Golan Heights. The forces detained a young man from the village of Kudna in southern Syria and opened fire at the area of Tel al-Ahmar; tanks fired at military positions on the Damascus-Ain al-Nuriya road and advanced toward the Salam Highway; the forces searched for weapons in the village of Jabata al-Khashab. The forces also carried out raids in the villages of Ruwayhina, Zubayda, and the southern outskirts of the village of Ma'ariya (Umm Sharq), and took control of the military checkpoint in al-Khiran (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 12–19, 2025). "Local sources" claimed an IDF unit fired at a flock of sheep in the village of Rafid, south of Quneitra, killing 75 of the grazing animals, adding that the IDF imposed restrictions on farmers and beekeepers in the Yarmouk Basin (Nour Golan's X account, March 12, 2025).

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



**IDF forces in the village of al-Nasira, on the Quneitra-Daraa border
(Daraa24 X account, March 19, 2025)**

► On March 13, 2025, the IDF attacked a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) headquarters in Mashrou Dummar, northwest Damascus, from the air. The headquarters was used for planning and directing terrorist attacks against Israel (IDF spokesperson, March 13, 2025). PIJ secretary general Ziyad al-Nakhalah had previously lived in the building; seven people were reportedly injured (al-Araby TV, March 13, 2025). PIJ spokesman Muhammad al-Hajj Musa claimed "Zionist aggression" had targeted an empty house rather than the organization's headquarters. He also expressed solidarity with the Syrian people, who he said were suffering from "the occupation and ongoing aggression" (Filastin al-Yawm, March 13, 2025).



The building in Damascus after the attack (Fars, March 13, 2025)

► On March 17, 2025, the IDF attacked military targets in southern Syria, including command centers and sites housing weapons and military equipment from the previous Syrian regime, which the current regime was reportedly trying to restore (IDF spokesperson, March 17, 2025). Syrian media reported 20 aerial attacks on Daraa Province, targeting residential areas and Regiment 175 in the city of Izraa, as well as the area between the 132nd Brigade base and the al-Shayah housing complex in western Daraa, where civilian residences and old Assad-era weapons storage sites were located. Three civilians and a soldier from the military operations directorate were reportedly killed, and 19 people were injured, including children and civil

defense volunteers (Syria TV and SANA, March 17–18, 2025). The Islamic Resistance Front in Syria claimed one attack hit a site belonging to the Front, killing one fighter and injuring two others. The Front warned it would not remain silent about the attack and would respond "appropriately" (Telegram channel South Lebanon - Enemy Watcher, March 17, 2025).



Strikes in Daraa (Daraa24 X account, March 17, 2025)

► On March 18, 2025, the IDF attacked artillery positioned in the Khan Arnabah area of southern Syria, which posed a threat to Israel. The IDF said it would take action against any military threat from southern Syria (IDF spokesperson, March 18, 2025). From the air Israel also attacked a missile battalion in Jdayde al-Sharqiyah in the Homs area and explosions were heard at a military facility in the southern countryside of Homs (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 18, 2025). A "Syrian military source" reported that two military sites were attacked, one between the villages of Shanshar and Shamsin, and another near the village of al-Jdayde, causing casualties, injuries and fires in trucks which had arrived from Lebanon with humanitarian aid for Lebanese civilians displaced to Syria by the war (al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 19, 2025).

- The Israeli operations in Syria continued to provoke criticism both inside and outside Syria:
- ◆ Asaad al-Shibani, Syrian foreign minister, related to Israeli activities in the Golan Heights buffer zone at the Syria Donors Conference in Brussels. He said there were security threats to the country from the previous regime, militias along the borders, and "Israeli invasions of our territory," adding that Syria would not accept attacks on its sovereignty and unity (SANA, March 17, 2025).
 - ◆ The Syrian foreign ministry condemned the Israeli airstrikes in the Daraa area, claiming that the "act of aggression" was part of an Israeli campaign against the Syrian people and stability, and the continued attacks violated international law and directly

threatened regional and international security (Syrian foreign ministry Telegram channel, March 18, 2025).

◆ Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN under-secretary general for peacekeeping operations, said the 1974 Disengagement Agreement had to be upheld. He said the UN's mandate was to maintain regional peace and stability. He added that Israeli representatives had indicated that their presence in the buffer zone was temporary. He said that according to the UN Security Council resolution, the UN was the only military presence which should exist in the area (Chinese news agency CGTN, March 17, 2025).

◆ Dozens of local residents demonstrated in al-Karama Square in the center of the Druze city of al-Suwayda to protest the Israeli attacks on Daraa. They carried signs reading, "Our lands are not the spoils of war and our souls are not a meal." They also opposed attempts to undermine the unity of Syrian society (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 18, 2025).

◆ Qatar's foreign ministry strongly condemned the Israeli attacks in Daraa, claiming they were a "blatant violation" of international law. It called on the international community to compel Israel to obey international law and end its "recurring aggression" against Syria (Qatari foreign ministry X account, March 18, 2025).

◆ The Egyptian foreign ministry called the Israeli attacks "a severe escalation and blatant violation" of Syrian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Egypt added it considered the attacks part of Israel's "imposition of a new situation on the ground," reflecting its insistence on "igniting regional tensions." The foreign ministry demanded that the international community and the UN Security Council intervene and condemn the "Israeli violations" (Egyptian foreign ministry Facebook page, March 19, 2025).

◆ Despite the IDF's efforts to demilitarize southern Syria, "local sources" reported the beginning of a voluntary recruitment process for the 40th Division, which will include four brigades in the new Syrian Army in the Daraa region. Brigadier General Banyan Ahmed al-Hariri was appointed commander of the new division (Al Jazeera X account, March 12, 2025).

Activities of the New Regime

Security activity

► This past week along the Syria-Lebanon border, Syrian security forces exchanged fire with Hezbollah-affiliated forces and the Lebanese army. Thirteen Syrian security personnel and two civilians were killed in the clashes, and seven Lebanese civilians, including a child, were killed. In addition, 52 civilians were injured, including correspondents covering the fighting, who were reportedly hit by a Hezbollah guided missile (Syria TV, March 17, 2025; al-Mayadeen, March 17, 2025; Al Jazeera, March 17, 2025; al-Araby TV, March 18, 2025:

◆ According to reports in Lebanon, on March 16, 2025, four gunmen affiliated with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the militia formerly led by Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani) before its recent dissolution, tried to infiltrate Lebanese territory and clashed with armed clans. Three of the gunmen were killed (al-Nashra, March 16, 2025). Syrian security forces denied the reports and accused Hezbollah operatives of infiltrating Syrian territory and waiting in ambush near the Zita Dam, west of Homs. They claimed Hezbollah had kidnapped three elite fighters from the 103rd Brigade and executed them in Lebanon, shooting and stoning them to death (Syria TV, al-Madan, March 16, 2025).

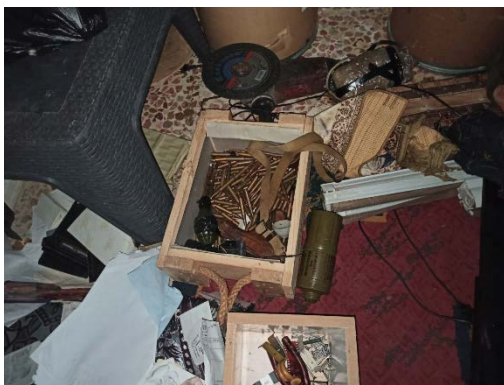
◆ The Syrian defense ministry said it would take all necessary measures to respond to the escalation. Border forces received heavy weapons and artillery and fired rockets at positions of armed Shi'ite tribesmen in the Hermel region on the Syria-Lebanon border (al-Arabiya X account, March 16, 2025). Towns and villages on the Lebanese side of the border were reportedly attacked. In response, Lebanese army forces deployed and returned fire at Syrian forces (Lebanese News Agency, March 17, 2025). The Lebanese army said it was maintaining communication and coordination with Syrian forces to ensure security in the border area (Lebanese army X account, March 17, 2025).

◆ According to a "source in the Syrian defense ministry," forces were searching lands and villages near the Lebanese border in the al-Qusayr area to find and expel Hezbollah from Syrian areas used for smuggling and drug trafficking. The source added that activities focused on the Syrian village of Khush al-Sayyid Ali, which had become a Hezbollah base during the Assad regime (SANA, March 17, 2025).

◆ Hezbollah denied reports of involvement in the border events. It reiterated its previous claim that it had no connection to events occurring in Syrian territory (Hezbollah's Simia social network, March 16, 2025).

◆ A ceasefire was reached by the diplomatic efforts of Lebanese Defense Minister Michel Mansa and Syrian Defense Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra (al-Nashra, March 17, 2025). Maher al-Zaywani, commander of the Syrian army division deployed along the border, said reinforcements had arrived to strengthen positions along the border and prevent violations (Syria TV, March 17, 2025).

◆ Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani and Lebanese Foreign Minister Youssef Rajji met on the sidelines of the Syria conference held in Brussels. They discussed developments on their countries' mutual border and agreed to continue contacts to ensure the sovereignty of both states and prevent the situation from deteriorating further (al-Nashra, March 18, 2025).

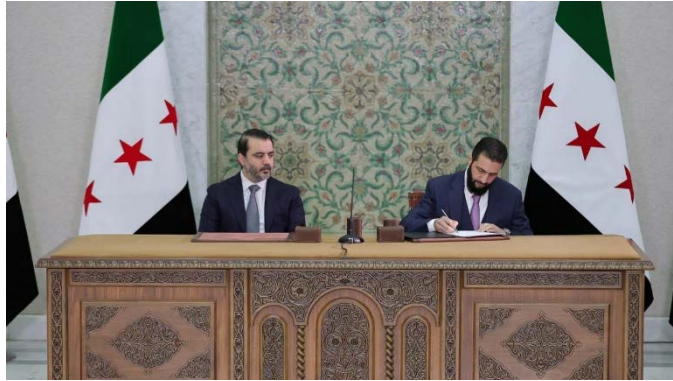


Right: Syrian army forces near the Lebanese border. Left: Weapons discovered in a Hezbollah hideout in the village of Khush al-Sayyid Ali (SANA, March 17, 2025)

Drafting a temporary constitution

► On March 13, 2025, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa signed the new interim constitutional declaration for the transition period after receiving the final text from the committee which drafted it. The constitution stipulates that the state will have a monopoly on weapons, and the role of the army is to defend the country and its citizens while maintaining civil peace; Syria's territorial integrity will be preserved, and calls for division, separatism and foreign intervention will be considered criminal offenses; Islamic law [Sharia] is the primary source of legislation; freedom of belief will be upheld, the state will respect all religions and ensure the liberty to perform their rituals, provided they do not disrupt public order; Syria is defined as a religious state while recognizing cultural diversity; all citizens are equal before the law in rights and

obligations, without discrimination based on race, creed, gender or family affiliation; the state will safeguard freedom of expression, opinion, communication and the press, and will enforce the protection of political participation and the establishment of political parties (Syria TV, March 13, 2025).



Al-Sharaa signs the constitutional declaration, while the chairman of the constitutional drafting committee, Abd al-Hamid al-Awaq, looks on (SANA, March 13, 2025)

National security council appointed

► Syrian President al-Sharaa signed a presidential decree for the establishment of a national security council which will coordinate and manage Syria's security and national policy. The council will be chaired by the president and its members will include the ministers of foreign affairs, defense and the interior, and the head of the general intelligence directorate. Two additional seats will be filled by advisors invited ad hoc by the president based on their expertise, and one additional seat will focus on technology and intelligence-related matters (Syrian presidency Telegram Channel, March 12, 2025).

Diplomatic activity

► A high-ranking Turkish delegation, including Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, Defense Minister Yasar Guler and Intelligence Chief Ibrahim Kalin, paid a working visit to Syria. The three met with President al-Sharaa and their Syrian counterparts to discuss key issues, including the framework agreement signed between the Damascus government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia (Anadolu Agency, March 13, 2025).



**The Turkish delegation meets with al-Sharaa
(Syrian Presidency Telegram Channel, March 13, 2025)**