



Spotlight on Syria

May 7 – 14 May, 2025

Overview¹

- The president of Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani), confirmed that indirect contacts were being held by Syria and Israel to achieve calm and prevent escalation, and he expressed commitment to the 1974 disengagement agreement. IDF forces continued operating in the buffer zone in the Golan Heights and supporting the Druze in southern Syria.
- Syrian President al-Sharaa held his first meeting with Trump in Saudi Arabia, after the announcement of the lifting of American sanctions. Trump asked al-Sharaa to join normalization with Israel and to expel Palestinian terrorist operatives from Syria.
- Syrian security forces prevented arms smuggling operations intended for Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The IDF in Syria

The IDF in the buffer zone

- This past week IDF forces reportedly continued targeted operations inside and beyond the buffer zone in the Golan Heights. They detained and questioned civilians and erected checkpoints near the villages of Saida, al-Adnaniyah, Rwhinah, Tel al-Ahmar, al-Qahtaniah and al-Dawaia al-Kabira in the Quneitra Governorate (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights; Syrian TV, May 7–14, 2025). Israeli forces reportedly entered the village of al-Asha in the southern rural area of Quneitra and distributed humanitarian aid, which was burned by local residents (X account of Racha al-Basha, al-Mayadeen reporter, May 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.



Humanitarian aid burned in the village of al-Asha
(X account of Racha al-Basha, al-Mayadeen reporter, May 12, 2025)

Israeli involvement to help the Druze

- This past week, IDF forces continued supporting the Druze in Syria. The IDF spokesperson announced the activation of a “mobile forward triage facility” in the area of the village of Khadr in southern Syria (IDF spokesperson, May 8, 2025).
- The spiritual leader of the Druze community in al-Suwayda, Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, said the Druze were undergoing a crisis and called for international intervention. He noted that contrary to the views of many Syrians, Israel was not the enemy. When asked about Syria's historical support for the Palestinian issue and opposition to Israel, he said, “We lived with those slogans for decades. In Syria, we must care only for the Syrian issue” (The Washington Post, May 10, 2025).

Indirect contacts between Syria and Israel

- Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa confirmed that indirect negotiations through mediators were taking place between Syria and Israel to achieve calm and ensure that neither side loses control of the situation. At a press conference during his visit to France, al-Sharaa accused Israel of violating the 1974 disengagement agreement and of conducting attacks which killed civilians “under the pretext of protecting minorities.” He said Syria was committed to the disengagement agreement, and the UN peacekeeping force UNDOF should return to the Blue Line. He added that talks were being held with various countries to pressure Israel to cease its “intervention” in Syria and operations in Syrian airspace (SANA, May 7, 2025).
- Previously, “three informed sources” reported that the UAE was mediating between Israel and Syria through unofficial channels to ease the tensions. According to the report, the contacts mainly address security and intelligence issues and efforts to build mutual trust (Reuters, May 7, 2025).

► Another report noted that Syrian officials had asked their Israeli counterparts to give the new government in Syria “time to organize” and demanded a halt to Israeli attacks in the country. The Israeli representatives said that Israel would not let harm come to the Druze in Syria. There is reportedly an intention to expand the discussions to economic and other issues, and there were also meetings in Europe between Israeli “experts” and “Syrian government officials,” which were “marked by warmth” (Ynet, May 9, 2025).

► Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani, in a joint press conference with the foreign ministers of Jordan and Turkey, accused Israel of ongoing violations of Syria’s sovereignty and claimed its aerial attacks destabilized the region and led to confrontation. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said their countries fully supported Syria, adding that “Israel has no right to attack Syrian territory and is a threat to the stability and future of Damascus” (Al Jazeera, May 12, 2025).

Body of missing IDF soldier returned to Israel

► On May 11, 2025, the IDF spokesperson announced that IDF and Mossad forces had returned to Israel the body of missing soldier Tzvika Feldman, who fell in the Battle of Sultan Yacoub during the First Lebanon War in 1982. According to the announcement, the body was located by an operation carried out deep inside Syria, based on precise intelligence and the use of special operational capabilities (IDF spokesperson, May 11, 2025).



Return of Tzvika Feldman’s body from Syrian territory (IDF spokesperson, May 11, 2025)

Establishing the New Syrian Regime

Relations with the United States

► On May 14, 2025, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa met with American President Trump in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the first meeting between the presidents of the two countries in 25 years. The meeting lasted 33 minutes and was also attended by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, while Turkish President Erdoğan joined via video call. They reportedly discussed

bilateral relations and the wars in the Gaza Strip and Ukraine. Trump reportedly encouraged al-Sharaa to join the Abraham Accords with Israel, to order all foreign terrorists to leave Syria, to expel Palestinian terrorists, to help the United States prevent the resurgence of ISIS and to assume responsibility for ISIS detention facilities in northeastern Syria. Al-Sharaa expressed commitment to maintaining the 1974 disengagement agreement with Israel and stated that the departure of the Iranians from Syria was an important opportunity (Syria TV and the White House X account, May 14, 2025).



Trump and al-Sharaa meet in Saudi Arabia (SANA, May 14, 2025)

- A day earlier, Trump announced the lifting of American sanctions on Syria, at the request of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. He said it was time for Syria to move forward and expressed hope that lifting the sanctions would enable the country to achieve “greatness” (New York Times, May 13, 2025). In response to the announcement, Syrians took to the streets in celebration, waving Syrian and Saudi flags (SANA, May 13, 2025).
- Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani welcomed the American announcement, calling it “a major turning point for the Syrian people toward a future of stability.” He added that Trump could achieve a historic peace agreement and a true victory for American interests in Syria (SANA, May 13, 2025).



Celebrations in Aleppo and Idlib after the announcement about the lifting of sanctions on Syria (SANA, May 13, 2025)

Diplomatic activity

► On May 7, 2025, Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa arrived in France, his first visit to an EU member state since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. He met with French President Emmanuel Macron at the Élysée Palace, who said he would work toward the gradual removal of EU sanctions on Syria if it continued along its current path (Reuters, May 7, 2025).



Al-Sharaa with Macron in Paris (SANA, May 8, 2025)

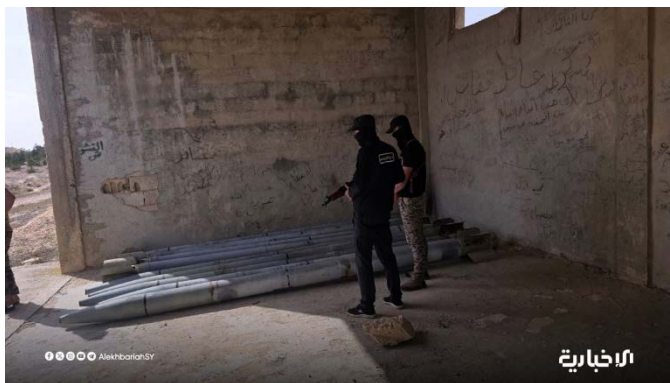
► Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani, who joined the visit to France, called the lifting of the sanctions a turning point which strengthened regional security and created a sustainable environment for peace and commercial investment. He added that the success of the visit was not limited to politics but also reflected the ongoing desire “to strengthen our international relations on solid foundations of cooperation and mutual respect with everyone” (X account of Asaad al-Shibani, May 8, 2025).

► The Syrian Ministry of Finance announced that Qatar had granted Syria \$29 million per month for three months to pay public sector wages. Syrian Finance Minister Muhammad Yasser Barnia stated that the grant would cover salaries for workers in the health, education and

welfare sectors, as well as pensions for non-military retirees (Telegram channel of al-Watan, May 8, 2025).

Security activity

- ▶ Syrian security forces continued to prevent the smuggling of arms, some of which were suspected of being intended for Hezbollah in Lebanon:
- ▶ The Syrian navy conducted a large-scale operation targeting boats used to smuggle people and weapons. After hours of clashes, several smugglers were arrested and weapons were seized (Telegram channel of the Syrian defense ministry, May 8, 2025).
- ▶ The Rural Security Directorate of Damascus in the al-Zabadani area confiscated a shipment of weapons meant to be smuggled from the town of Serghaya into Lebanon (X account of the Syrian News Agency, May 10, 2025).
- ▶ A truck carrying missiles to Hezbollah was intercepted in the town of Qarah in the southern rural area of Homs (X account of Thaer al-Homsi, May 10, 2025).
- ▶ The Security Directorate in Homs seized a shipment of Grad rockets on their way out of Syria (Syrian al-Ikhbariya agency, May 12, 2025).
- ▶ The General Security Forces found and confiscated light and medium weapons hidden in a house and a warehouse in the al-Qusayr area of Homs, near the Lebanese border (al-Watan, May 13, 2025).



Right: The weapons seized in the al-Zabadani area (X account of the Syrian News Agency, May 10, 2025). Left: Grad rockets discovered in Homs (Syrian al-Ikhbariya agency, May 12, 2025).