

MP-IDSA *Issue Brief*

Israel's Strategic Priorities in Post-Assad Syria

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Summary

The fall of Assad in December 2024 has created a fragile transition in Syria under Ahmed Al Sharaa, marked by sectarian tensions and weak central control. Violence against the Druze community, especially in Suwayda governorate, has triggered Israeli military intervention aimed at protecting its border and Druze allies.

Following the swift military campaign that culminated in the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s government on 8 December 2024, Syria’s interim President, Ahmed Al Sharaa, sought to curb militia influence, restore state sovereignty over the use of force, and lay the groundwork for long-term security sector reforms in a deeply fragmented post-conflict situation. He attempted to consolidate military authority, initiate efforts to establish a unified national army by dissolving rival armed factions, and bring all weaponry under centralised state control.¹

While the unification of Syria’s armed forces has achieved symbolic mileposts—such as the creation of formal structures, defined divisions, and a centralised chain of command—its practical implementation remains precarious. Four critical challenges have undermined progress. These include entrenched mistrust among former rival factions, chronic financial constraints hindering operational capacity, deep-seated ideological divisions within military ranks, and ongoing interference by external actors pursuing divergent strategic interests.² The brief highlights Syria’s sectarian fault lines, especially *vis-à-vis* the Druze community, and places in perspective Israel’s objectives in the context of its recent military responses in aid of Syria’s Druze community.

Sectarian Fault Lines

Sectarian cleavages remain a defining fault line in Syria. The Sunni majority, which bore the brunt of regime violence, is now seeking political empowerment and justice for wartime atrocities. In contrast, Shiite communities, particularly the Alawites who formed the backbone of Assad’s regime and the military, now fear retaliation and marginalisation. Druze communities have pursued a posture of cautious neutrality, resisting conscription and sometimes advocating for localised autonomy. Christians, once around 10 per cent of the population but now likely below 3 per cent, have faced threats from all sides and remain politically underrepresented. Meanwhile, the Yezidis have been virtually wiped out through Islamic State (IS) led campaigns, and the once-small Jewish community has disappeared entirely.³

Despite the present Syrian government’s rhetoric of unity, the Druze community—especially in Suwayda—remains deeply affected by the conflict. The Druze are a small religious sect that emerged from the Ismaili branch of Islam, blending Islamic principles with other Abrahamic religions, Greek and Hindu philosophies. Approximately one million Druze live across the region, mainly in Syria (700,000),

¹ “[Syrian Ex-Rebel Factions Agree to Merge Under Defence Ministry](#)”, *Reuters*, 25 December 2024.

² Haid Haid, “[Syria’s Unruly Guns: Building a Unified Army in a Fractured State](#)”, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 25 June 2025.

³ Bilal Mahli, “[Syria’s Post-Conflict Recovery: Challenges and Prospects for Reconstruction and Stability](#)”, Policy Centre for the New South, 11 April 2025.

Israel (152,000), Lebanon (250,000) and Jordan (20,000).⁴ In Syria, the Druze population is concentrated in the southern province of Suwayda and Damascus's suburbs, such as Jaramana and Sahnaya.⁵ The Druze community has faced displacement, forced conversions and abductions following Al-Nusra Front's (later renamed as Hayat Tahrir al Sham [HTS]) takeover of Jabal al-Summaq in Idlib since 2014. The community remains on edge, grappling with insecurity over its future.⁶

For Syria's Druze community, interim president Al Sharaa reflects a continuation of extremist politics. His ties to the Islamic State (IS) and the HTS have fuelled fears of a broader sectarian campaign and political exclusion. Despite Druze-led protests in Suwayda in 2023 and their role in the anti-Assad campaign alongside other opposition groups, Druze leaders like Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri were excluded from Syria's National Dialogue and constitutional drafting. As a result, many now view the new government's entry into Druze areas not as liberation, but as occupation.⁷ Druze advocate for a secular, decentralised political system that guarantees local autonomy over governance, security and military affairs, reflecting their historical desire for self-rule and deep mistrust of centralised and sectarian authority.⁸

In April 2025, sectarian clashes erupted between Syrian government forces, allied militias and Druze fighters in Jaramana, Sahnaya and Suwayda, sparked by a fake audio insulting Prophet Muhammad, falsely attributed to a Druze scholar. It led to more than 100 deaths.⁹ After the ceasefire deal between Druze leaders and government officials, reports showed pro-government fighters abusing captured Druze men, further fuelling communal anger. In a strongly worded statement, Sheikh al-Hijri declared: “We no longer trust a group that calls itself a government... because the government doesn't kill its people through extremist gangs loyal to it.”¹⁰ His remarks indicate a crisis of legitimacy for Syria's caretaker authorities, especially among minority groups who feel increasingly marginalised or targeted.

Sectarian tensions were re-ignited in Suwayda on 13 July 2025 after the abduction of a Druze merchant on the Damascus highway, triggering violent clashes between Sunni Bedouin tribal fighters and Druze militias.¹¹ As the violence spread, the Al Sharaa government deployed troops to contain the unrest, but faced strong resistance from local Druze militias. As of 20 July 2025, the total death toll from the

⁴ Ruth Marks Eglash, “[Explainer: Who are the Druze and Why are They at the Centre of Tension in the Middle East Today?](#)”, Religion Media Centre, 21 July 2025.

⁵ “[Who are the Druze and Why are They Being Targeted in Syria?](#)”, *The National*, 16 July 2025.

⁶ Armin Messenger, “[Hope and Uncertainty for the Druze Community in Syria](#)”, *The New Arab*, 14 January 2025.

⁷ “[Five Questions \(And Expert Answers\) About Israel's Strikes Against Syria](#)”, Atlantic Council, 16 July 2025.

⁸ Haid Haid, “[Syria's Unruly Guns: Building a Unified Army in a Fractured State](#)”, no. 2.

⁹ “[Syrian Druze Leader Condemns Government Over Sectarian Violence](#)”, *Al Jazeera*, 1 May 2025.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “[UN Urges De-Escalation, Protection of Civilians as Conflict Roils Syria](#)”, United Nations, 15 July 2025.

clashes reached more than 1,000, including 336 Druze fighters and 298 civilians, 342 government security personnel and 21 Sunni Bedouin fighters.¹² Notably, the Syrian Druze minority and Israel share concerns regarding the Sunni-dominated political order under HTS. Both the Druze and Israel are of the view that the HTS-led government’s advance was a cover to assert long-term control over southern Syria to establish a permanent military presence, triggering Israel Defence Forces (IDF) military involvement.

Israel’s Strategic Priorities

Israel saw the fall of the Bashar al-Assad government as a major setback for Iran’s ‘axis of resistance’, cutting the vital link connecting Tehran–Baghdad–Damascus–Beirut strategic arc, disrupting Hezbollah’s rearmament process, and hindering the flow of Iranian weapons from reaching Israeli borders and the withdrawal of Iranian troops. Nevertheless, Israel has preferred Assad’s rule over the instability and insecurity created by Islamist rebel groups. During the December 2024 conflict between Assad and HTS and its allies, Israel preferred a mutual weakening of these forces rather than a decisive victory of any of them.¹³

Israel remains worried about HTS and its leader, Ahmed Al Sharaa’s radical agenda and links with Al Qaeda. Israel’s key objectives in post-Assad Syria are safeguarding its citizens and territorial sovereignty, thwarting hostile actors on its borders, preventing extremist groups to acquire strategic weapons, obstruct supply lines between Iran and Hezbollah, securing Jordan’s stability, weakening Turkish influence in Syria, forging alliances with Druze and Kurdish communities and ensuring IDF’s freedom of action to defend itself and remove any threats.¹⁴

Israel’s initial reaction was shaped by security anxieties and the shock of the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack, which led to a unilateral and militarised approach, undermining the possibility of a diplomatic alternative with Syria.¹⁵ Israel reinforced its defences in the occupied Golan Heights. It launched Operation Bashan Arrow on 8 December 2024, conducting airstrikes inside Syrian territory targeting military facilities, air defences, ballistic missiles, ammunition depots, naval and aircraft fleets, and production and development facilities, destroying 80 per cent of the state’s military capabilities.¹⁶ Israel is unwilling to tolerate any security threats along its borders, prioritising prevention over reaction and assessing risks from Syria based

¹² Lazar Berman, [“He Bombs Everything All The Time”: US Said Fuming at ‘Madman’ Netanyahu After Syria Strikes](#), *The Times of Israel*, 20 July 2025.

¹³ Carrie Keller-Lynn, [“Syria’s Civil War Puts Israel in a Bind: ‘Devil We Know’ Or Islamist Rebels”](#), *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 December 2024.

¹⁴ Nir Boms, Carmit Valensi and Mzahem Alsaloum, [“Beyond The Brink: Israel’s Strategic Opportunity in Syria”](#), The Institute for National Security Studies, 8 May 2025.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ [“IDF Destroys 80% of Assad Army’s Capabilities”](#), *i24 News*, 12 December 2024.

on capacity and potential rather than past actions and stated intentions. Israel shifted from long-term containment to pre-emptive military intervention and forward defence to eliminate threats.¹⁷

Israel is also cautious about Türkiye’s close links with the Al Sharaa government that could help it in rebuilding military bases, sign bilateral security and defence agreements, energise the Palestinian issue, and boost support for Hamas within Syria. Türkiye’s overtures could complicate Israel’s security calculations and limit access to Syrian airspace.¹⁸ In the background of Assad’s fall and Israel’s emphasis on demilitarising southern Syria, analysts suggest that the Jewish state is seeking to ensure that Syria remains weak, allowing Russia to maintain its military presence.¹⁹ Israel believes Türkiye would swiftly fill the security vacuum in the region in case of a Russian or US withdrawal.

Israel, to ensure its security, has prioritised maintaining a buffer zone. As part of the ground operation in December 2024, the IDF seized the Area of Separation, capturing Mount Hermon outpost in southern Syria, to utilise its critical vantage point. Israel’s unilateral actions have violated the 1974 disengagement agreement with Syria by moving beyond the original buffer zone. Israel seeks to establish a defensive framework of three geographical zones, i.e., “buffer zone” between Mount Hermon to Jordan–Syria–Israel border triangle; “security zone” covering Syrian villages near the buffer zone allowing IDF’s uninterrupted entry for operational purposes; and “influence zone”, delineated in the east by the Damascus–Suwayda road, extending by around 65 kms into Syria.²⁰

Israel’s considerations *vis-à-vis* the Al Sharaa government have remained consistent, i.e., preserving a defensive position inside Syria to prevent hostile forces from establishing themselves near Israel’s border.²¹ Israel, defending its position in the United Nations Security Council, insisted on the territorial takeover of the demilitarised buffer zone as a temporary measure and assured non-interference in the conflict among the Syrian armed groups.²² Subsequently, the Jewish state admitted that troops would remain in Mount Hermon and the buffer zone indefinitely. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz, visiting Mount Hermon on 28 January 2025, announced that the IDF was well-prepared to prevent Iran-linked

¹⁷ Dareen Khalifa and Mairav Zonszein, [“How Israel’s Overreach in Syria May Backfire”](#), International Crisis Group, 17 March 2025.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Einav Halabi, Itamar Eichner, Lior Ben Ari and Yoav Zitun, [“Israel Warns Syria Against Attacking Druze As Tensions Simmer Near Damascus”](#), *Ynet News*, 2 March 2025.

²⁰ [“Israel’s Policy in Syria: Military Intervention and Reliance on Minorities”](#), Emirates Policy Center, 9 April 2025.

²¹ Nicholas Tsagourias, [“Israel’s Actions in Syria and the Outer Limits of Self-Defence”](#), Lieber Institute, 14 January 2025.

²² [“Identical Letters Dated 9 December 2024 From The Permanent Representative of Israel to The United Nations Addressed to The Secretary-General and The President of The Security Council”](#), United Nations Security Council (UNSC), 9 December 2024.

forces or other groups not allied to Israel from gaining a stronghold in southern Syria between Mount Hermon and the Suwayda–Damascus axis.²³

Earlier on 9 December 2024, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the Golan Heights would remain part of Israel “for eternity”, approving plans to expand settlements and double the population in the said territory.²⁴ This announcement raised concerns within Syria over the possibility of permanently annexing the newly captured areas under the pretext of security. Israel, through its presence in Syrian territory, has sought to optimise the operational advantages against possible threats and maintain leverage to negotiate improved security arrangements in the occupied Golan Heights in the future.²⁵

Israel’s commitment to protect the Syrian Druze community by military means if necessary is part of its preserving buffer zone strategy. Due to geographical proximity, the Druze areas allow an accessible entry point of influence in Syria. Israel, through the Druze community, seeks to prevent another security vacuum while maintaining its freedom of action to respond to threats.²⁶ Israel’s Druze citizens, seen as loyal and subject to conscription, numbered around 152,000 in April 2024, up from 14,500 in 1948, and comprise 1.6 per cent of the population, mainly in Carmel and Galilee in northern Israel.²⁷ In the occupied Golan Heights, which was captured from Syria in 1967 and annexed in 1981, around 6,000 out of 29,000 or 20.45 per cent hold Israeli citizenship, while the rest retain Syrian citizenship and Israeli residency status.²⁸ The Druze constituency has been impactful in shaping Israel’s direct involvement in post-Assad Syria to safeguard the interests of the Syrian Druze affected by the increasing centralisation under the HTS rule from Damascus.

Since December 2024, Israel has been closely monitoring the situation, concerned that the Syrian government could test the Druze population’s standing in an attempt to reassert state control. A joint statement by Netanyahu and Defence Minister Israel Katz on 1 March 2025 reiterated that the government was “committed to our Druze brothers in Israel and will do everything necessary to protect their relatives in Syria”.²⁹ Israel facilitated the supply of humanitarian aid and, since March 2025, allowed

²³ [“Israel Vows ‘Unlimited’ Military Presence in Syria”](#), *Xinhua*, 29 January 2025.

²⁴ Alexandra Sharp, [“Israel Approves Plan to Double Population in the Golan Heights”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 16 December 2024.

²⁵ Assaf Orion, [“Israel and the Fall of Assad: Rejoice, Repel, Reach Out, Reload”](#), Washington Institute, 18 December 2024.

²⁶ [“Israel Vows ‘Unlimited’ Military Presence in Syria”](#), no. 23.

²⁷ [“The Druze Population of Israel: On the Occasion of the Nabi Shu’ayb Festival 2024”](#), Central Bureau of Statistics, 17 April 2024; Mostafa Salem, Mohammed Tawfeeq and Hira Humayun, [“Who are the Druze and Why is Israel Bombing Syria to Protect Them?”](#), *CNN*, 16 July 2025.

²⁸ There has been a surge in citizenship requests in recent years, possibly due to regional uncertainties. Israel approved citizenship requests are 419 in 2022, 389 in 2023, and 318 in 2024. See [“Taboo No More: One in Five Golan Druze Now Holds Israeli Citizenship”](#), *The Times of Israel*, 6 January 2025.

²⁹ Einav Halabi, Itamar Eichner, Lior Ben Ari and Yoav Zitun, [“Israel Warns Syria Against Attacking Druze As Tensions Simmer Near Damascus”](#), no. 19.

Syrian Druze individuals to work in the Golan Heights.³⁰ The IDF evacuated a few Syrian Druze individuals providing medical assistance, carried out drone strikes against Syrian government forces in late April 2025, and conducted air strikes near the Presidential Palace on 2 May, calling it a warning operation.³¹ Israel is determined to maintain the buffer zone and thwart the entry of Syrian government forces south of Damascus.³²

Israeli Military Response and Objectives

After the clashes between Druze and Bedouin fighters on 13 July 2025 and the ingress of Syrian government forces, the IDF struck more than 160 targets, hitting several tanks, military equipment and roads to prevent government forces from entering Suwayda, claiming the presence of tanks may pose a threat to Israel.³³ The IDF, shortly after a fragile ceasefire between the government and Druze leaders, launched an airstrike hitting the Defence Ministry headquarters in Damascus, killing three people and injuring 34 others.³⁴ Israeli efforts were aimed at imposing a hard stop to all fighting in southern Syria.³⁵

Syrian government forces, under Israeli pressure, withdrew from Suwayda, prompting further clashes between Bedouin and Druze fighters. On 17 July 2025, Al Sharaa called the Druze community an integral part of Syria, adding

The Israeli entity, known for its repeated attempts to destabilise us and sow division, once again seeks to turn our land into a battlefield of chaos and to dismantle the fabric of our people.³⁶

Al Sharaa, in his address, noted that Syria was faced with two options: either “an open war” with Israel at the cost of Druze citizens, or allowing Druze clerics to return to reason and prioritise the national interest.³⁷ The US, on 18 July 2025, negotiated a ceasefire between Israel and Syria. Israel faced criticism from Washington for its

³⁰ [“Israel's Policy in Syria: Military Intervention and Reliance on Minorities”](#), no. 20.

³¹ Euan Ward, Aaron Boxerman, Hwaida Saad and Vivian Yee, [“Israel Strikes in Syria, Intervening in Sectarian Violence”](#), *The New York Times*, 30 April 2025; Lazar Berman, Nava Freiberg and Emanuel Fabian, [“Israel Carries Out ‘Warning Strike’ in Syria in Defense of Druze Minority”](#), *The Times of Israel*, 30 April 2025.

³² [“IDF Strikes Near Damascus’s Presidential Palace, Syria: ‘A Dangerous Escalation’”](#), *The Jerusalem Post*, 2 May 2025.

³³ [“Watch: IDF Strikes Syrian Tanks That Advanced Towards Sectarian Violence, Near Israel’s Border”](#), *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 July 2025; [“Israel Hits Syrian Army HQ, Near Damascus Palace Suwayda Fighting Rages”](#), *Al Jazeera*, 16 July 2025.

³⁴ [“Aftermath of Deadly Israeli Air Attacks in Damascus”](#), *Al Jazeera*, 17 July 2025.

³⁵ Carmit Valensi and Amal Hayek, [“Sweida in Flames – Violent Clashes in Syria Amid Talks With Israel”](#), *The Institute for National Security Studies*, 16 July 2025.

³⁶ Eyad Kourdi, Catherine Nicholls, Eugenia Yosef, Mostafa Salem and Mohammed Tawfeeq, [“Syria Withdraws Troops From South After Days of Deadly Clashes With Arab Minority That Drew in Israel”](#), *CNN*, 17 July 2025.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

aggressive action and for hampering Syria’s state stability.³⁸ Netanyahu, confirming the ceasefire, emphasised Israel’s clear policy of ensuring demilitarisation near the border between the Golan Heights and the Druze Mountain, east of Suwayda.³⁹

The Al Sharaa government, aware of the power imbalance, opted to absorb the Israeli attacks, raised its concerns diplomatically, and de-escalated the situation. Syria, lacking military capabilities, has not retaliated against Israel’s actions. Any retaliatory action would prove Israel’s fears right, cause unprecedented destruction and potentially threaten the regime. Moreover, the Al Sharaa government, which is seeking global acceptance, removal of sanctions and international support for development, does not want to alienate the US and its regional partners by risking retaliation.

Besides Israel’s priority to secure its borders through a demilitarised zone and protect the Druze minority, domestic political considerations played a key role in prompting the IDF’s actions. Netanyahu, running a fragile coalition, intends to continue the military momentum to avoid a re-election in the coming months. With seven seats, Likud’s coalition partner, United Torah Judaism, withdrew from the government over the mandatory conscription. Shas withdrew its ministers from the cabinet while staying with the coalition. The Likud-led coalition currently has a razor-thin majority of 61 out of 120 seats. Therefore, actions in Syria have been framed as part of the IDF’s multi-front war to preserve Netanyahu’s popularity. Moreover, Likud aims to regain the support of Druze voters in the next election, after losing significant backing following the controversial 2018 Nation-State Law.⁴⁰

Syria and the region are facing a new phase of Israeli power projection focused on weakening the Syrian state by destroying its military capabilities, building security zones, blocking efforts to rebuild the army, consolidating centralised power across the country, advocating semi-autonomous regions outside the purview of Damascus, and projecting itself as a strong state safeguarding sectarian and ethnic minorities.⁴¹ Currently, Israel is convinced that the Al Sharaa government is unable to prevail over extremist and pro-Iranian groups.

However, Israel’s policy towards the Al Sharaa government could embolden radical elements to destabilise Syria and create new security challenges for the Jewish state. The weakening of the state could reignite a cycle of sectarianism, benefitting Israel’s adversaries, including Iran, to re-establish its weapons transfer routes to Lebanon.

³⁸ Lazar Bergman, [“Israel Says It’s Allowing Syrian Forces to Enter Sweida for 48 Hours Amid Renewed Clashes”](#), *The Times of Israel*, 18 July 2025.

³⁹ [“Netanyahu Confirms Ceasefire, Syrian Withdrawal From Sweida Due To ‘Forceful Action’](#), *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 July 2025.

⁴⁰ Amos Harel, [“Israel Plunged Headlong into the Syrian Storm – And Could Find Itself At Odds With Trump”](#), *Haaretz*, 17 July 2025.

⁴¹ [“Israel’s Policy in Post-Assad Syria”](#), Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, 11 March 2025.

Iran and its allies could utilise the continued IDF activity in southern Syria as a pretext to re-energise their popularity and revive the resistance from Syrian territory.

The positive momentum within Syria towards normalisation with Israel could dissipate, sparking a new wave of animosity towards the Jewish state. The Syrian state, seeking accommodation, could shift towards adversarial dynamics in case of increased pressure. Moreover, continued Israeli interference and attempts to demilitarise southern Syria could intensify deeper cooperation with Türkiye to deter further Israeli expansion. Israel’s military commitment to the Druze has enabled the de facto fragmentation of Syria into ethnic and sectarian enclaves, undermining state stability. The Druze community’s close association with Israel could, however, make them easy targets of anti-Israeli attacks within Syria.⁴²

Al Sharaa’s International Recognition and Israel’s Response

The Al Sharaa government, to rehabilitate its image and boost regional and global acceptance, emphasised pragmatic goals including power-sharing, minority rights and economic development, non-engagement with armed Palestinian groups, curbs on arms smuggling by Hezbollah, upholding the disengagement agreement, conflict avoidance and openness to normalise ties with Israel.⁴³ Al Sharaa, conveying a reconciliatory tone in mid-December 2024, questioned excuses for any foreign intervention after the withdrawal of Iranians and called for diplomatic solutions.⁴⁴

Western powers and Arab states are increasingly accepting Al Sharaa. Following US President Donald Trump’s meeting with the Syrian interim President on 14 May, the US and the European Union (EU) removed sanctions. The US is seeking to stabilise the Al Sharaa regime through economic reconstruction, prevention of sectarian conflict and reduction of its military role in Syria.

Israel, however, aware of HTS’ ideological and historical baggage, remains unconvinced about its moderate image and fears that a strong Syria could turn hostile in the future. Despite the recognition and removal of sanctions, Israel is apprehensive about the nature of the Syrian regime. Israel is doubtful whether the Al Sharaa government, after international acceptance, would be open to bilateral cooperation on security and border issues or take into account the concerns of the US and Arab states. Al Sharaa’s recognition has also weakened Israel’s freedom of action, inviting regional and global criticism for targeting a now-legitimate government and its assets. These changes have complicated Israel’s military and

⁴² Dareen Khalifa and Mairav Zonszein, “[How Israel’s Overreach in Syria May Backfire](#)”, International Crisis Group, 17 March 2025.

⁴³ Nir Boms, Carmit Valensi and Mzahem Alsaloum, “[Beyond The Brink: Israel’s Strategic Opportunity in Syria](#)”, no. 14.

⁴⁴ Peter Beaumont, “[Israel Strikes Syria As Netanyahu Approves Plan to Expand Golan Heights Settlement](#)”, *The Guardian*, 15 December 2024.

political options. Israel remains one of the few states openly hostile to the new government.⁴⁵

Israel’s strategic calculus post October 2023 has expanded its risk tolerance, attempting to change the map of the region in which it can emerge as one of the predominant powers. Israel is alarmed by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States’ efforts to boost regional and international support for the Al Sharaa government. A politically stable Syria could provide a credible alternative, linking Gulf States to the Mediterranean Sea for transporting oil and gas, challenging Israel’s gas exports to Europe. Currently, Israel’s approach to the Palestinian issue and the war in Gaza has diluted the enthusiasm for any corridor transiting through the Jewish state.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The fall of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024 ushered in a fragile transitional phase under interim President Ahmed Al Sharaa, whose efforts to centralise military control and promote political reconciliation have faltered amid persistent sectarian tensions, especially with Syria’s Druze minority. Despite calls for inclusivity, recent violent confrontations in Suwayda between Druze militias and Syrian government forces have deepened communal mistrust and highlighted the state’s precarious hold over southern Syria.

Israel, while benefitting from the Assad regime’s fall and weakening Iran’s influence, has remained apprehensive of the Al-Sharaa government’s moderate tone. It adopted a militarised approach to dismantling Syria’s military capabilities. Israel also created a security zone and utilised its image as the protector of the Druze minority to extend the buffer zone. The Druze constituency inside Israel played a key role in shaping Israel’s strategic approach towards the Syrian Druze community, facing a threat from the Sunni-dominated political order. Israel has ensured demilitarisation, blocking the entry of Syrian government forces in Druze-dominated areas and close to the buffer zone.

Israel’s July 2025 intervention in Syria is motivated by an attempt to preserve the post-December 2024 territorial security status quo and block Syrian forces close to the southern border. It is also influenced by domestic considerations to continue the military momentum, thereby preserving Netanyahu’s popularity and a strategic choice to keep Syria weak and fragmented to maintain freedom of action. However, prolonged intervention causing state instability in Syria could embolden radical groups, provide entry to Iran and its allies, deepen Türkiye’s influence, accentuate anti-Israel sentiments, and lead to further alienation of the Druze community within Syria.

⁴⁵ Dan Diker, [“Understanding Israel’s ‘Strong Horse’ Strikes on Syria: Prevention, Security, Perception in the Shadow of Iran”](#), Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, 21 July 2025.

⁴⁶ [“Israel’s Policy in Syria: Military Intervention and Reliance on Minorities”](#), Emirates Policy Center, 9 April 2025.

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