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ISRAEL'S STRIKE ON SYRIA: MOTIVES AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.

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ISRAEL'S STRIKE ON SYRIA: MOTIVES AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

On July 15, 2025, the Israeli regime launched a military strike on Damascus, the capital of Syria, targeting the country's Ministry of Defense. The attack caused partial destruction of the building, resulting in the deaths of three individuals and injuring dozens of others.

Shortly before the assault, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a video message directed at the Druze minority in Israel. In his message, he urged Israeli Druze not to enter Syria to support their fellow Druze in the southern region of Suwayda, assuring them that the Israeli government would take responsibility for their protection. Only minutes after this video was published, Israeli forces launched airstrikes on Damascus.

Why did Israel carry out this attack? Who are the Druze, and what is their role in this conflict? What tensions exist between the Druze community and the central Syrian government? And most importantly, what could be the long-term consequences of this escalation?

This analytical article aims to explore these questions and offer insights into the motivations behind the strike, the role of the Druze community, and potential future developments in this complex regional conflict.

WHO ARE THE DRUZE?

The Druze community refers to themselves as "*Al-Muwahhidun*", meaning "believers in the oneness of God," and also as "*Banu Ma'ruf*", or "the Children of Ma'ruf." The name "Druze" is often traced back to Nashtakin al-Darazi, a historical figure who is believed to have deviated from the group's teachings and fled to Lebanon to promote his ideas. The Druze faith emphasizes absolute monotheism and holds that God alone governs the eternal order of the universe.

The Druze tradition is believed to have originated from the Ismaili sect of Shi'a Islam during the 10th century under the Fatimid Caliphate. However, many scholars today consider the Druze to be a distinct religious group with its own unique beliefs and philosophy.

Geographically, the Druze are primarily concentrated in Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan. Approximately 350,000 Druze live in Lebanon, around 700,000 in Syria, and about 150,000 in Israel.

The Druze presence in Syria dates back nearly a thousand years. Notably, they fought alongside Muslim forces in the Battle of Hattin in 1187 against the Crusaders, earning the trust of the



Ayyubid and Zengid dynasties. Over time, the Druze community established a strong presence in the region and came to occupy several leadership positions.

During the Ottoman era, the Druze repeatedly resisted imperial control, particularly as the Ottomans attempted to tighten their grip over the Golan Heights. In 1911, after the Ottomans solidified their control over the mountainous region, they executed several prominent Druze leaders, including Zuqan al-Atrash and Yahya Amer.

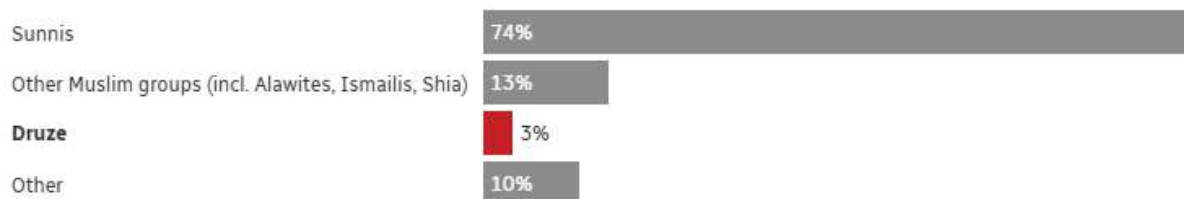
When the State of Israel was founded in 1948, the Druze community found itself divided. Some remained within Israel's borders, while others migrated back to Lebanon and Syria. That same year, Druze leaders signed a special agreement with the Israeli government: in exchange for certain privileges, they accepted compulsory military service in the Israeli army—a rare arrangement among Arab citizens of Israel. Today, the Druze have their religious courts, which oversee matters of personal status, and their language and culture are predominantly Arabic.

In 1981, Israel annexed parts of the Golan Heights and extended Israeli citizenship to Druze residents living in those areas. Israel has since claimed that the Syrian Druze are “their people,” encouraging them to adopt Israeli nationality and integrate with Israeli society. The recent strike on Damascus is seen by many observers as part of this broader political strategy—Israel positioning itself as the defender of Druze interests in the region.

WHY HAS CONFLICT ERUPTED BETWEEN THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE DRUZE MINORITY?

Syria is a religiously diverse country, though its majority—around 74% of the population—are Sunni Muslims. Other groups include the Alawites, Ismailis, and Twelver Shi'ites (approximately 13%), the Druze (roughly 3%), and various other minorities, which make up the remaining 10%. Despite this diversity, Syria has historically been considered a Sunni-majority nation.

Religious breakdown of Syria



Source: U.S. State Department (CBC)

In the southern city of Suwayda (As-Suwayda), the Druze community has maintained an armed presence for several years, often clashing with Sunni Bedouin groups in the area. Tensions deepened following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime, when a transitional government



led by Ahmad al-Sharaa assumed power. The response from the Druze leadership was far from unified.

Some Druze leaders welcomed the new government and expressed support for a unified, pluralistic Syria, offering cooperation and dialogue. Others, however, adopted a confrontational stance. Their frustration stemmed from what they saw as broken promises: although Ahmad al-Sharaa had pledged to give meaningful representation to all of Syria's minority groups, the Druze were largely left out. Only one Druze figure, Amjad Badr, was appointed to a cabinet position—as Minister of Agriculture, while other ministries and leadership roles remained out of reach.

In addition to political representation, the Druze also sought specific rights and protections that the new government had promised. While officials claimed these reforms would take time, many Druze leaders lost patience. Rather than wait, segments of the community chose to take up arms, eventually leading to open conflict with government forces. Some Druze leaders have since gone further, demanding full autonomy and declaring that they will not agree to a ceasefire until their independence is recognized.

Throughout 2025, a series of deadly clashes between Druze militias and Syrian government forces have occurred, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of Druze fighters and civilians.

One of the most volatile moments came after a video circulated online in which a Druze leader appeared to insult Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The video sparked outrage across various Muslim communities, leading to retaliatory attacks on Druze civilians. The violence escalated to such a degree that the Syrian government was compelled to intervene militarily in Suwayda.

When Syrian government troops launched operations in the region, Druze armed groups fiercely resisted. The confrontation quickly turned into a full-blown battle. In the fighting that followed, more than a hundred Druze were killed and hundreds more wounded.

ISRAEL'S OBJECTIVES IN ATTACKING SYRIA

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has justified Israel's recent strike on Damascus with several stated and perceived goals. Below is a summary of the key objectives behind this move:

1. Claiming to Defend the Druze Minority

Netanyahu's primary public justification for the attack was the protection of Syria's Druze community. After the airstrike that killed three people in Damascus, Netanyahu declared that Israel's action was aimed at stopping the ongoing violence against the Druze in Suwayda. He



called for an end to military operations in Druze-majority areas and urged other groups not to take up arms against them. Israel has long maintained a strategic interest in the Druze, some of whom live under Israeli rule in the occupied Golan Heights.

2. Deflecting Attention from Corruption Cases

Since 2020, Netanyahu has faced three major corruption cases:

- i. **Case 1000:** He and his wife, Sara, are accused of receiving nearly \$192,000 in luxury gifts from businessmen in exchange for political favors.
- ii. **Case 2000:** Netanyahu allegedly tried to make a deal with newspaper publisher Arnon Mozes to receive favorable coverage in return for curbing competition.
- iii. **Case 4000:** He is accused of directing government funds to a telecommunications firm in exchange for positive media coverage.

In addition to these cases, Netanyahu faces charges of fraud, bribery, and breach of trust. Critics argue that by escalating regional tensions, such as attacking Syria, he hopes to buy time, delay court proceedings, and deflect public scrutiny. Some Israeli lawmakers have openly accused Netanyahu of jeopardizing national interests for personal legal gain. For instance, Knesset member Naama Lazimi remarked that "Netanyahu has tied the future of Israel to the fate of his court cases." Another lawmaker, Karine Elharrar, accused him of "acting against the public interest to delay his legal process."

In short, regional conflict may serve Netanyahu as a political smokescreen to escape accountability.

3. Preventing a Strong and Unified Syrian State

Israel has a long-standing interest in keeping Syria fragmented and politically weak. A centralized, stable Syrian government could pose a strategic threat to Israel's influence in the region, particularly in the disputed Golan Heights. By encouraging division among Kurds in the north, Druze in the south, and Sunni tribes in other areas, Israel hopes to maintain leverage over its borders. A fractured Syria makes it easier for Israel to intervene in the south and solidify control over key areas like the Golan Mountain range.

4. Pursuing the Vision of Greater Israel

Some within Israel's religious-nationalist circles view regional expansion as part of a divine promise: the creation of a "Greater Israel." This ideology envisions Israeli sovereignty extending beyond current borders, rooted in a blend of religious and political beliefs.



Based on this worldview, Israel has already annexed parts of the West Bank, Gaza, and southern Lebanon. The recent attack on Syria may be part of this broader strategy. If this pattern continues, future expansion could potentially target regions in Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

In this context, the strike on Syria might be temporary in execution but long-term in ambition, part of a sustained effort to reshape the regional map in Israel's favor.



5. Projecting Power in the Middle East

Israel also seeks to position itself as the dominant military force in the Middle East. In this pursuit, the United States plays a key supportive role. Israel remains the only major non-Muslim U.S. ally in the region, and its strength is often seen as reinforcing American influence.

Through military actions in Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, and now Syria, Israel sends a message to its adversaries: any threats will be met with force. By projecting strength, Israel hopes to deter opposition and establish itself as the undisputed regional hegemon.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Israel's recent airstrike on Syria may have significant consequences for regional diplomacy and power dynamics. One immediate impact could be a strain in Israel's relations



with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Both countries have recently supported Syria and its new leadership, and have positioned themselves as backers of regional stability.

Saudi Arabia, in particular, played a key role in facilitating diplomatic outreach between Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa and former U.S. President Donald Trump, which eventually led to the lifting of U.S. sanctions on Syria. If Israel's military actions are seen as an attempt to destabilize Syria again, it may open the door for increased Iranian influence in the country, an outcome Saudi Arabia strongly opposes. As a result, the normalization process between Saudi Arabia and Israel, which was already moving cautiously, could now face further delays or even breakdown altogether.

A second consequence concerns Turkey–Israel relations. Turkey has played a critical role in shaping the post-Assad Syrian government. Many members of Syria's new leadership have studied in Turkey or received its direct support. Turkey is invested in seeing Syria achieve stability under Ahmad al-Sharaa's leadership, while Israel appears to be working against that goal. Although Turkey may not currently be in a position to confront Israel directly, a larger-scale Israeli operation in Syria could eventually force Ankara to respond. If such tensions escalate, there is a real possibility that Israeli and Turkish forces might find themselves in direct conflict within Syrian territory.

Third, the attack is likely to harm any prospects for normalization between Syria and Israel. The U.S. decision to lift sanctions and recognize Syria's new government may have been partly motivated by hopes of drawing Syria closer to Israel diplomatically. However, this airstrike has significantly undermined those efforts. President al-Sharaa and many Syrians now view Israel as a persistent threat and historical adversary. The attack has reinforced public opposition to normalization and could delay or even completely derail any future agreements between the two countries.

In summary, while the Israeli strike may have served short-term strategic goals, it risks long-term diplomatic fallout. It could damage Israel's ties with key Arab states, provoke tension with Turkey, and close the door on the possibility of a peaceful relationship with Syria for the foreseeable future.

CONCLUSION

Israel's recent attack on Syria, officially justified as a move to protect the Druze minority, targeted the Ministry of Defense in Damascus. However, beyond this stated goal, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears to have broader motives. One of them is to keep Israel engaged in conflict as a way to delay his ongoing corruption trials, portraying himself as a wartime leader facing national security threats.



Additionally, Israel is strategically working to prevent Syria from achieving long-term stability. By weakening Syria's central government and encouraging autonomous rule by the Kurds in the north and Druze in the south, Israel aims to ensure the country remains divided and vulnerable. In such a fragmented state, Syria becomes less capable of opposing Israel's objectives in the region, especially in the south near the Golan Heights.

At a broader level, this military action serves as a show of force. Israel seeks to assert dominance in the Middle East and deter regional actors from challenging its agenda. Moreover, this fits into Israel's long-standing religious-nationalist vision of establishing a "Greater Israel," which some believe includes parts of neighboring countries like Egypt's Sinai, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.

However, this aggressive approach has heightened regional insecurity. Many in the Islamic world now recognize that as Israel's power expands, so too does the threat to their own security and national interests. The attack on Syria could lead to a breakdown in Israel's relationships with several key Islamic nations that have supported the current Syrian government, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, potentially isolating Israel further and threatening its long-term regional position.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Unity among Islamic Nations:** Israel has ignited conflict across the Middle East, waging war in Gaza, launching strikes on Lebanon, Iran, and now Syria. In light of this, Islamic countries must set aside internal rivalries and unite in defense of regional peace and shared interests.
2. **Revitalize the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC):** Except Israel, all countries in the Middle East are Islamic and members of the OIC. Now is the time for the organization to be revitalized and to take a clear, unified stance. Concrete steps should be taken to address Israel's continued aggression and destabilizing influence in the region.
3. **Form a Regional Islamic Security Alliance:** The OIC, in collaboration with the Arab League, should establish a regional Islamic security bloc. Such an alliance could play a critical role in protecting member states from external aggression, fostering cooperation, and ensuring the sovereignty and security of Islamic countries in the face of growing regional threats.



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