

Syria: Transition and U.S. Policy

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Since the December 2024 collapse of the government of Bashar Al Asad, Syrians have pursued political and economic opportunities created by the end of the country's twelve-year civil war. Internal tensions and external pressures pose obstacles to the country's transition. Interim president Ahmed Al Sharaa led a group long designated by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization. Interim authorities have outlined a five-year transitional constitutional framework after limited consultation with Syrian citizens. Elections are planned in September 2025 for a partially and indirectly elected legislative assembly. The government does not exercise control over all of Syria, with areas of the northeast under the control of ethnic Kurdish-led forces and areas south of the capital, Damascus, controlled by members of the Druze religious minority. Authorities plan to delay elections in these areas. Turkish forces remain in parts of the north, while Israeli forces have moved into formerly demilitarized areas between Syria and Israel and into some Syrian territory near the frontier. Sectarian violence involving government forces, their backers, and members of minority communities has marred the transition in 2025, highlighting the interim government's limited capacity to ensure security and impose discipline. In this context, some observers have expressed skepticism about the interim government's commitments to inclusivity and the protection of all members of Syria's diverse religious and ethnic fabric. Others have warned that opponents of the interim government may be exploiting communal tensions to advance their own agendas.

The Trump Administration has outlined a policy of conditional support for the interim government, pairing endorsement of its leaders' calls for the maintenance of Syria's unity and territorial integrity with insistence that they adopt a protective and inclusive approach toward all Syrian communities. The United States is supporting dialogue between the interim government and authorities in areas of northeast Syria under the protection of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led coalition that has received U.S. security support since 2015. The SDF remains the principal U.S. partner in the fight against the Islamic State group in Syria. U.S. military forces are deployed in eastern and southern Syria, and are implementing Trump Administration directives to consolidate and streamline the U.S. military presence in the country. The United States and European Union have extended broad sanctions relief to the interim government in a bid to encourage investment and prevent economic collapse and humanitarian pressures from derailing the transition. Economic conditions across Syria have deteriorated since Asad's fall, with energy shortages and financial pressures limiting recovery efforts. Announced changes to U.S. and international sanctions on Syria since May 2025 have create possibilities for more robust investment, trade, and economic growth, but Syrians are grappling with the negative effects of decades of misrule and sanctions amid the strife and destructive consequences of a decade-plus-long civil war.

Governance and security arrangements between Syria's national government and de facto authorities in northeast and southern Syria remain a central dilemma for transitional leaders and the minority communities in these areas. Neighboring countries, including Turkey and Israel, are acting inside Syria in pursuit of their preferred outcomes. Turkey opposes Syrian Kurds' aspirations for autonomy or decentralization, citing links between Kurdish elements of the SDF and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. The PKK announced in early 2025 that it would dissolve and disarm. In March 2025, the SDF agreed in principle to integrate under the interim government's authority, but SDF figures and others have criticized what they perceive as unilateralism by interim government leaders. Israel has used military force to destroy military equipment and weaponry across Syria since December and to enforce its desire to see Syria's three southern provinces remain a demilitarized zone. Israel also has struck targets in southern Syria and in Damascus in what it describes as a bid to protect the Syrian Druze minority community. Israel-Turkey tensions over Syria also raise risks of confrontation.

In Congress, many Members welcomed the fall of the Asad government and the setbacks it has created for Iran and Russia. Members have debated U.S. policy toward the interim government, with some advocating for the elimination of remaining U.S. sanctions on Syria and others expressing concern about the intentions and actions of Syria's interim leaders and calling for a more gradual and conditional approach. President Donald Trump has acted to remove many Asad-era sanctions on Syria using authorities delegated to the President by Congress; President Trump also has revised other Syria-related sanctions mechanisms to preserve his ability to impose new sanctions based on future developments in Syria. Bills introduced in the 119th Congress would variously rescind (e.g., H.R. 3941 and S. 2133) or amend (H.R. 4427) some laws providing for Syria-related sanctions and would appropriate funds for the conditional provision of foreign assistance in Syria (H.R. 4779) or authorize (H.R. 3838/S. 2296) or appropriate (H.R. 4016/S. 2572) military assistance to U.S. partners in Syria. Legislative questions for Congress include whether and on what terms to authorize and appropriate funds for U.S. assistance and security operations in Syria; whether and to what extent to revise or rescind laws providing for U.S. sanctions on Syria; and how best to influence executive branch policies and shape the decisions of Syrian authorities, and U.S. partners and adversaries.

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Overview and Key Developments

The fall of the government led by Bashar Al Asad in December 2024 marked a dramatic end to a twelve year-long conflict in Syria and the conclusion of decades of tension between the United States and the Baath Party-dominated government of Syria, led by the Asad family.¹ The Asad government's hostility to Israel, attempts to dominate neighboring Lebanon, alignment with Russia, partnership with Iran, support for terrorist groups, and development and use of weapons of mass destruction had fueled tensions with the United States for decades. Forces and leaders associated with Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS, aka the Organization for the Liberation of Syria, see **Appendix**) toppled Asad and have exerted security control over most of western Syria (**Figure 1**). They also lead the country's transition. HTS had severed its former ties to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, but remained a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization until July 2025.

In January 2025, attendees at a "Victory Conference" of some anti-Asad armed groups appointed HTS leader Ahmed Hussein Al Sharaa (aka Abu Mohammed al Jawlani/Jolani/Golani), a U.S. Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT), as Syria's interim president. Many individuals appointed to interim national leadership positions were HTS members or previously served in the HTS-backed Syrian Salvation Government. In conjunction with Sharaa's selection as president, interim authorities rescinded Syria's 2012 constitution and dissolved the former ruling Baath Party, the Asad-era legislature, and the former regime's military and security forces. A brief and partial national dialogue preceded the issuance of a five-year transitional constitutional framework. In March 2025, a new cabinet (**Table 1**) expanded the interim leadership to include members of some minority groups. Indirect elections for a partially elected parliament are planned for September.

The authorities have declared the dissolution of all military factions, political, and civil revolutionary bodies and called for their integration into state institutions. Progress toward this goal has been uneven. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—a Kurdish-led coalition that has served as the principal U.S. partner against the Islamic State—controls the northeast in partnership with an Autonomous Administration for North and East Syria (AANES). In March 2025, the SDF signed an agreement on integrating with national security forces by the end of 2025. The SDF and AANES seek guarantees of constitutional rights amid threats from the Islamic State and concerns about sectarian violence. Talks have yet to yield further agreement. Turkey and Syria's interim leaders oppose autonomy for SDF-held areas, and Turkish concerns focus on SDF-links to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated terrorist group that is implementing plans to disband. Some southern areas home to the Druze religious minority remain outside national control. Druze groups have debated their relationship with the state, with sectarian clashes and Israeli military intervention in July 2025 driving wider calls for autonomy.

¹ The area that now comprises Syria was long ruled as part of the Ottoman Empire and was administered by France under a mandate of the League of Nations following the First World War. Syria achieved independence from France through the 1930s and 1940s; its early history as an independent state was marked by a series of Cold War-influenced coups and regional instability. The Baath (Renaissance) Party seized power in Syria in 1963. Former president Bashar al Asad's father—Hafiz al Asad—ruled the country from 1970 until his death in 2000. The Asad family are members of the minority Alawite sect (estimated 15% of the population), which has its roots in Shiite Islam, and they cultivated Alawites as a base of support. The government violently suppressed an armed uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1980s, killing thousands from the majority Sunni Muslim community. After taking office in 2000, Bashar Al Asad offered and retracted the prospect of limited political reform, while privileging family members and other Alawite supporters and aligning his government with Iran and non-state actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah in a complex rivalry with the United States and its Arab and non-Arab allies (including Israel). Violence in northeast Syria in 2004 highlighted unresolved tensions involving Syria's ethnic Kurdish minority. In 2011, Asad met local unrest with military force, sparking an insurgency and more than a decade of conflict and foreign intervention.

Syria's unresolved internal tensions, the interests of regional and international actors, and the interim authorities' limitations are presenting serious challenges to the transition. According to UN officials, clashes since March 2025 involving state forces, state-aligned armed groups, and some minority communities reportedly killed nearly 3,000 civilians and fighters and displaced more than 200,000 people. The violence has increased global scrutiny of the interim authorities' capabilities and intentions.

- Violence in Syria's western coastal provinces in March and April followed attacks there on government forces by pro-Asad groups and featured retaliatory attacks on Alawite communities by government-aligned groups.² In the wake of that violence, the interim government said it was redoubling its efforts to assert unified security command over armed groups and launched a fact-finding investigation that has delivered its report to the interim authorities.
- Sectarian violence also erupted in southern Syria between members of Druze and Sunni Arab Bedouin communities in April, May, and July.³ The July conflagration in and around the predominantly Druze city of Suweida killed nearly 1,400 combatants and civilians, displaced an estimated more than 185,000 people, and prompted military intervention by Israel.⁴ A ceasefire has held, but is fragile.

The Trump Administration has outlined a policy of conditional support for the interim government, endorsing calls for the maintenance of Syria's unity and territorial integrity while insisting on inclusion and protection for Syrian minority communities. President Trump met Ahmed Al Sharaa in Saudi Arabia in May. U.S. officials have strongly condemned sectarian violence, supported de-escalation, and called for transparent investigations and accountability. U.S. officials have supported two dialogue tracks: one between the interim government and authorities in northeast Syria and one between the interim government and Israel. U.S. forces are deployed in eastern and southern Syria, and are consolidating their presence. The United States and European Union have extended sanctions relief to Syria's government to encourage investment, prevent economic collapse, and ease humanitarian pressures.

In Congress, many Members have welcomed the fall of the Asad government and the setbacks it has created for Iran and Russia. Members have debated U.S. policy toward the interim government, with some advocating for the elimination of remaining U.S. sanctions on Syria and others expressing concern about the intentions and actions of Syria's interim leaders and calling for a more gradual and conditional approach.⁵ President Donald Trump has acted to remove many Asad-era sanctions on Syria using authorities delegated to the President by Congress; President Trump also has revised other Syria-related sanctions mechanisms to preserve his ability to impose new sanctions based on future developments. Bills introduced in the 119th Congress would variously rescind (e.g., H.R. 3941 and S. 2133) or amend (H.R. 4427) some laws providing for Syria-related sanctions, direct the withdrawal of U.S. forces (S.J.Res. 6), appropriate funds for the conditional provision of foreign assistance in Syria (H.R. 4779), or authorize (H.R. 3838/S. 2296) or appropriate (H.R. 4016/S. 4921) funds for military assistance to U.S. partners in Syria.

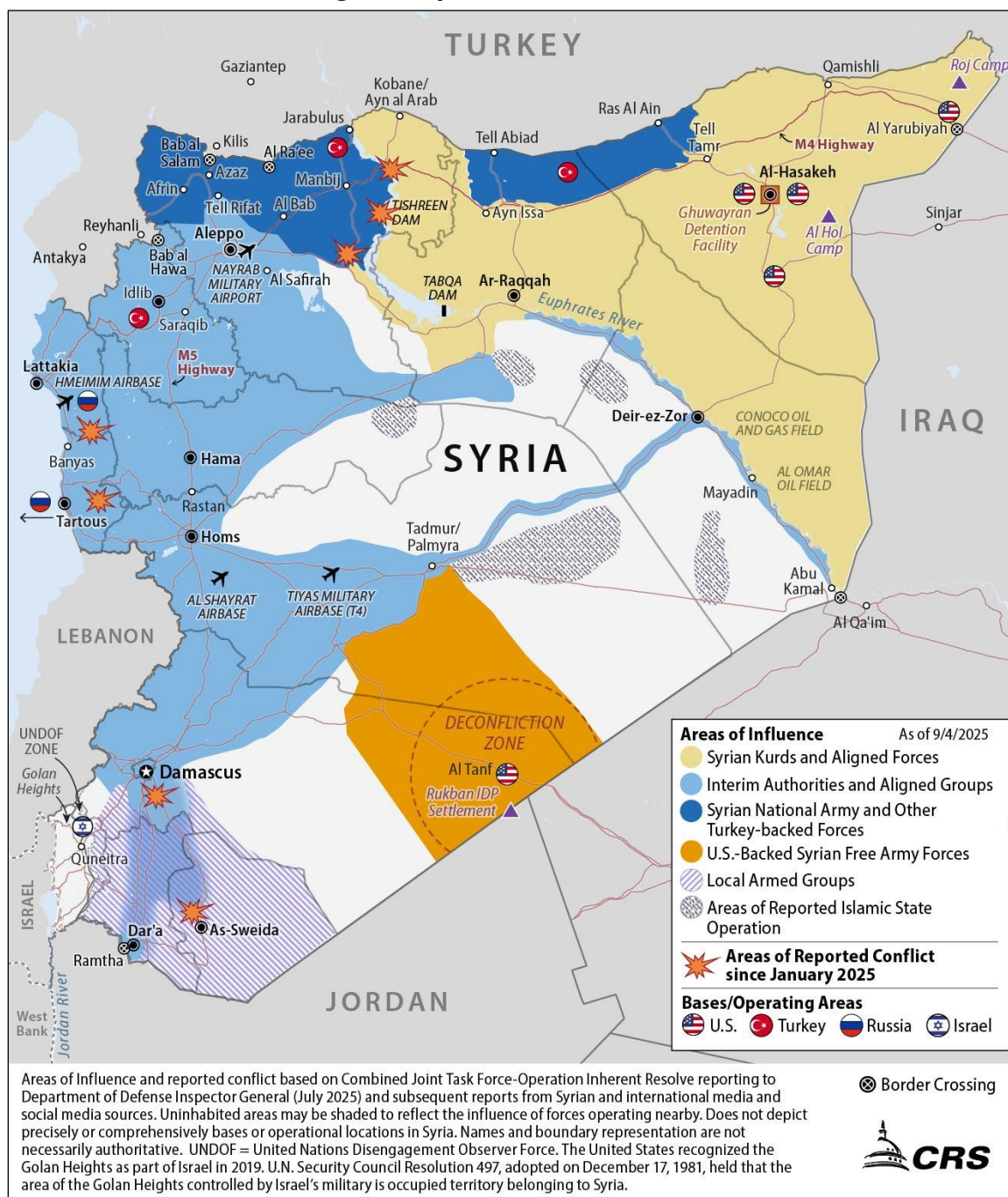
² Alawites are a religious minority group, of which the Asad family are members. Some predominantly Alawite areas of western Syria were strongholds of the Asad family and leading regime figures.

³ The Druze are a religious minority group with members concentrated in southern Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The province of Suweida has been controlled by Druze armed groups since Asad's ouster and previously enjoyed informal autonomy stemming from leading Druze armed groups' neutral position in the Syrian civil war.

⁴ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), "Al-Suwayda bloodshed in seven days," July 23, 2025; and, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen, Briefing to the UN Security Council, August 10, 2025.

⁵ For examples of these views, see the House Financial Services Committee markup of H.R. 4427, July 22, 2025.

Figure 1. Syria: Areas of Influence



Source: CRS using Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) reporting to Lead Inspector General, media and social media reporting and Esri and U.S. State Department data. All areas of influence approximate and subject to change.

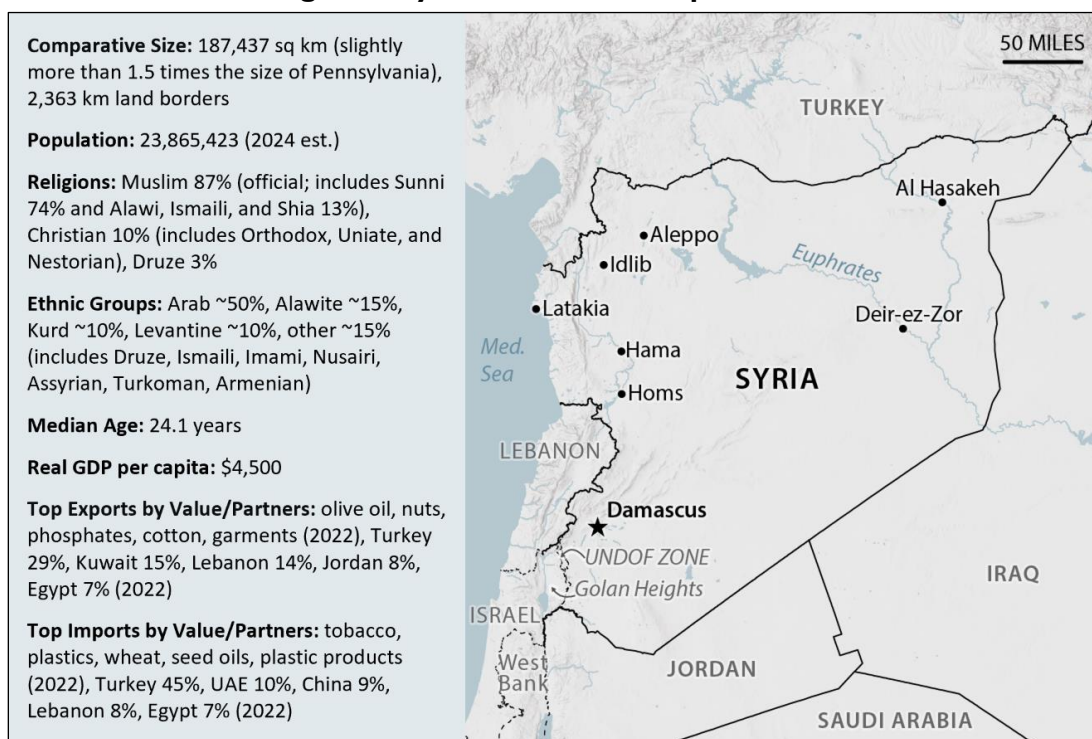
Table I. Syria: Selected Interim Authorities

As of September 4, 2025

President of the Syrian Arab Republic/ Commander-in-Chief			
Ahmed Al Sharaa			
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Asaad Al Shaibani	Minister of Defense	Maj. Gen. Marhaf Abu Qasra
Minister of Interior	Anas Al Khattab	Minister of Finance	Mohammad Yusr Barniya
Minister of Economy	Mohammad Nidal Al Shaar	Minister of Justice	Mazhar Al Weiss
Minister of Energy	Mohammed Al Bashir	Minister of Public Works and Housing	Mustafa Abdulrazak
Minister of Transport	Yarob Badr	Minister of Agriculture	Amjad Badr
Minister of Health	Musaab Nazal Al Ali	Minister of Social Affairs and Labor	Hind Qabawat
Chief of the General Staff of the Army and Armed Forces	Ali Nouredine Al Nasan	Governor of the Central Bank of Syria	Abdulqader Husrieh

Source: CRS, compiled from Syrian and international media reports. Subject to change.

Note: According to a July 2025 UN report, “At least 9 out of 23 ministers are directly or indirectly linked to HTS, 4 of whom held military roles within the group.” See UN Document S/2025/482, July 24, 2025.

Figure 2. Syria: At a Glance Map and Data

Source: CRS. Using Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook data, February 2025.

Notes: The United States recognized the Golan Heights as part of Israel in 2019. UN Security Council Resolution 497, adopted on December 17, 1981, held that the area of the Golan Heights controlled by Israel's military is occupied territory belonging to Syria.

Syria: Conflict Synopsis and U.S. Policy, 2011-2024

In March **2011**, antigovernment protests broke out in Syria, in the midst of a wider trend of regional upheaval and challenges to decades of authoritarian rule. Violence escalated, and, in August 2011, President Barack Obama called on Syrian President Bashar al Asad to step down. Over time, the rising death toll from the conflict and the use of chemical weapons by the Asad government intensified pressure for the United States to assist the opposition. In 2013, Congress debated lethal and nonlethal assistance to vetted Syrian opposition groups, and authorized the latter. Congress also debated, but did not authorize, the use of force in response to an August **2013** chemical weapons attack.

In **2014**, the Obama Administration requested authority and funding from Congress to provide lethal support to vetted Syrians for select purposes. The original request sought authority to support vetted Syrians in “defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Syrian regime,” but the subsequent advance of the Islamic State organization from Syria across Iraq refocused executive and legislative deliberations onto counterterrorism. Congress ultimately authorized a Department of Defense-led train and equip program for select Syrian forces to combat terrorist groups active in Syria, defend the United States and its partners from Syria-based terrorist threats, and “promote the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria.”⁶

In September 2014, the United States began air strikes in Syria, with the stated goal of preventing the Islamic State from using Syria as a base for its operations in neighboring Iraq. In October 2014, the Defense Department established Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) to serve as the military component of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, a multilateral civil and military coalition of dozens of countries.

In **2015**, the United States deployed military forces to Syria to counter the Islamic State and train local partner forces. Coalition and U.S. gains in Syria against the Islamic State after 2015 came largely through the assistance of Syrian Kurdish-led partner forces, but neighboring Turkey’s concerns about Kurdish forces in Syria emerged as a persistent challenge for U.S. policymakers.

In **2017**, the United States began providing arms to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the SDF, backed by U.S. forces, advanced on IS-held areas, seizing the IS stronghold of Raqqa in October 2017 and asserting control over the last IS-held areas of Syria’s eastern Euphrates River valley in March 2019.

In **2018**, the U.S. intelligence community assessed that the conflict had “decisively shifted in the Syrian regime’s favor.”⁷ Remaining armed opposition forces (including groups linked to Al Qaeda) and civilians actively opposed to Asad were pushed into a shrinking geographic space in and around Idlib province in northwestern Syria. Turkish military forces remained present in Idlib and other areas of northern Syria, limiting advances by pro-Asad forces and preventing further displacement of Syrians to Turkey.

In October **2019**, after President Trump signaled that U.S. forces would withdraw from Syria, Turkey launched a cross-border military operation attempting to expel Syrian Kurdish U.S. partner forces from areas adjacent to the Turkish border. President Trump briefly imposed sanctions on Turkish officials and negotiated a ceasefire that was later complemented by a separate agreement reached between Turkey and Russia to establish patrolled security zones. While U.S.-led coalition and partner forces focused on defeating the Islamic State in northern and eastern Syria, support from Russian, Iranian, and Hezbollah forces enabled the Syrian government to retake many areas of the country formerly held by the opposition.

The United Nations (UN) sponsored peace talks in Geneva beginning in 2012, but the talks bore little fruit. Over time, military pressure on the Syrian government to make concessions to the opposition was reduced. By **2022**, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen described the conflict as a “stalemate” with relatively fixed lines.⁸ In Idlib, Haya’t Tahrir al Sham distanced itself from Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, establishing and controlling a Syrian Salvation Government, retraining fighters into more formidable and capable units, and periodically clashing with Turkey-backed groups in control of other areas of northern Syria.

In November **2024**, HTS-led forces launched an offensive in response to escalating pro-Asad attacks, leading to the unexpected HTS capture of Aleppo and the cascading collapse of pro-Asad forces across western Syria. Some southern anti-Asad groups—demobilized under military pressure earlier in the conflict—remobilized as the regime collapsed. Asad fled to Russia on December 8, 2024, as HTS and southern armed groups entered Damascus.

⁶ For additional background, see CRS Report R46796, *Congress and the Middle East, 2011-2020: Selected Case Studies*, coordinated by Christopher M. Blanchard.

⁷ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community: 2018*.

⁸ UN Security Council, “Amid Stalemate, Acute Suffering in Syria, Special Envoy Tells Security Council Political Solution ‘Only Way Out,’” Meetings Coverage, SC/14807, February 25, 2022.

Political and Security Dynamics

On August 21, 2025, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen told the UN Security Council that Syria “remains deeply fragile and the transition remains on a knife-edge.”⁹ The following political and security issues present the principal challenges to stability.

Transition Framework Emerges, Questions Persist on Inclusion

After a series of governorate-level consultations and a National Dialogue conference in Damascus, the interim authorities appointed members of a committee that drafted a five-year transitional constitution. In March, President Ahmed Al Sharaa signed the interim constitutional declaration and named a new transitional cabinet. The interim constitution recognizes individual rights, including freedom of belief and expression, and states a commitment to preserving the country’s territorial integrity, diversity, and social peace. The declaration vests most powers with the interim presidency and states that Arabic is the official language of the state and that Islamic law is the principal source of legislation.¹⁰ The Kurdish-led administration of northeastern Syria did not participate in the national dialogue and interim constitutional declaration drafting process.

On July 28, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen told the UN Security Council that “the political transition is not yet fully inclusive. And many Syrians express concern about centralized power, limited transparency, weak checks and balances, and insufficient means for genuine public consultations, participation, and scrutiny.”¹¹ Interim authorities have announced their intention to hold indirect elections in September for 140 of 210 seats in a People’s Assembly to serve as a legislative body during the transition period. President Al Sharaa is to appoint members to the other 70 seats. The constitutional declaration may be amended by presidential proposal approved by two-thirds of the Assembly.

Arrangements for the holding of indirect elections, including participation standards for electors and administration in areas outside the interim government’s security control, have not been finalized. On August 23, a representative of the election committee said that the elections would be delayed indefinitely and seats held open for representatives from Suweida, Raqqa, and Hasakah governorates. The spokesperson said “elections are a sovereign matter that can only be conducted in areas fully under government control.”¹² Pedersen told the Security Council on August 21 that any mishandling of the indirect elections or exclusionary implementation “would entrench skepticism, aggravate the forces pulling Syria apart, and impede reconciliation.”¹³

U.S. Military Presence Evolves

In December 2024, the Department of Defense reported that approximately 2,000 U.S. military personnel were then deployed in Syria. In April 2025, a Pentagon spokesperson announced the consolidation of U.S. forces in Syria and said “a deliberate and conditions-based process will bring the U.S. footprint in Syria down to less than a thousand U.S. forces in the coming

⁹ UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen Briefing to the UN Security Council, August 21, 2025.

¹⁰ Text of Syrian Interim Constitution as translated by SyriaReport.com; and, Evan Ward, “Syria Has a New Temporary Constitution. Here Are the Highlights,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2025.

¹¹ UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen Briefing to the UN Security Council, July 28, 2025.

¹² Reuters, “Syria delays parliamentary vote in Sweida after sectarian violence,” August 24, 2025.

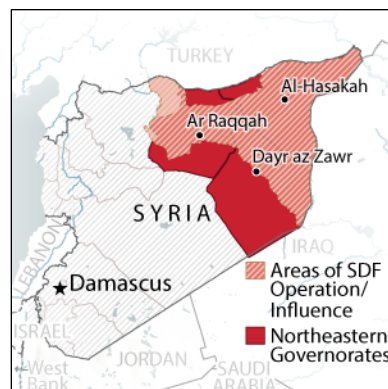
¹³ UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen Briefing to the UN Security Council, August 21, 2025.

months.”¹⁴ He reiterated U.S. support for efforts to combat the Islamic State (IS, aka ISIS/ISIL) in Syria, and a media report citing unnamed senior U.S. officials said that U.S. personnel would continue to assist the Kurdish-led SDF and aid SDF detention and camp management efforts. The SDF hold 9,000 IS prisoners and secure camps holding more than 30,000 people.

As of July 2025, some U.S. troops had relocated from areas with Arab-majority populations in the Euphrates River valley (see **Figure 1**), having closed three bases and “either dismantled and removed or handed over infrastructure to the SDF.”¹⁵ The withdrawal of U.S. forces and protection could limit the SDF’s effective control over these regions, and the U.S. military expects SDF-local tribe tensions to rise in the area.¹⁶ According to U.S. Special Envoy for Syria Ambassador Tom Barrack, the U.S. military will “eventually go to one” base in Syria.¹⁷ Turkey has sought to partner with Syria’s interim government, as well as Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon, to establish a multilateral counter-IS mechanism that Turkey hopes could replace the U.S.-led coalition (and the U.S.-SDF partnership).¹⁸ U.S. raids in northern Syria in July and August reportedly killed individuals playing senior roles in IS operations in Syria.¹⁹

The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria or the removal of U.S. assurances of force protection to partner forces could affect various parties’ actions, with possible implications for Syrian domestic and regional stability, counterterrorism concerns, and humanitarian needs. Sensitive considerations surround the degree of U.S. protection that might be afforded to SDF forces, who remain in discussions with Damascus over security arrangements and possible integration. Should Syrian government forces attempt to assert control over SDF-held areas by force, the United States may face calls from the SDF and other leaders in northeast Syria to intervene. Tensions between Kurds and Arabs in rural areas of northern and eastern Syria could become a flashpoint, and Turkish and interim government opposition to continued SDF control complicates matters further. U.S. Special Envoy Barrack visited Damascus on July 9 to support SDF talks with the interim government, but no progress was reported.

Figure 3. Syria: Northeastern Governorates



Source: CRS, using State Department and Esri data.

Note: SDF – Syrian Democratic Forces.

¹⁴ Department of Defense, “Statement from Chief Pentagon Spokesman Sean Parnell Announcing the Consolidation of Forces in Syria Under Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve,” April 18, 2025; Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Starts Withdrawing Hundreds of Troops from Northeastern Syria,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2025.

¹⁵ Amberin Zaman, “PKK ends 40-year war against Turkey, vows to pursue Kurdish rights,” *Al-Monitor*, May 12, 2025; and Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve (LIG-OIR), Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1 – June 30, 2025, p. 21.

¹⁶ LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1 – June 30, 2025, p. 22-23.

¹⁷ Ambassador Barrack interview with NTV Turkey, in Raya Jalabi, “US cuts troop presence in Syria,” *Financial Times*, June 3, 2025.

¹⁸ Ezgi Akin, “U.S. Starts Withdrawing Hundreds of Troops from Northeastern Syria,” *Al-Monitor*, May 12, 2025; “Türkiye, Jordan, Syria, Iraq to Discuss Security Cooperation in Amman,” *Asharq Al Awsat*, March 8, 2025.

¹⁹ Reuters, “US forces conduct raid in northern Syria against ISIS targets, in second since Assad’s overthrow,” August 20, 2025.

The United States and the Future of Northeast Syria

Since 2015, the U.S. military has operated in northeast Syria and provided support to local partner forces opposed to the Islamic State group. The main U.S. partner in this effort has been the Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition of armed groups whose leaders and strongest components are members of the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Syrian Kurdish nationalist militia with links to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization.²⁰ In 2017, the United States began overtly arming the YPG and other SDF elements, and by early 2019, YPG-led SDF forces backed by U.S. forces had succeeded in ending the Islamic State's control of territory north of the Euphrates River in Syria. SDF forces took control of captured IS fighters and established security perimeters around camps for persons displaced from IS-held areas. As of July 2025, U.S. partner forces detained approximately 9,000 IS fighters and controlled camps housing approximately 31,200 individuals across northeast Syria. The SDF partners with the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).

The government of Turkey consistently has objected to U.S. partnership with the YPG, characterizing the group and the wider SDF coalition as terrorists.²¹ In response to the YPG's consolidation of contiguous control over much of northern Syria's border areas by 2016, Turkey and allied Syrian militias conducted three significant military operations (in 2016, 2018, and 2019) that replaced YPG rule in some areas adjacent to Turkey with Turkish-backed Syrian forces. Turkey-Russia arrangements reached in 2019 and 2020 provided for an end to Turkish advances and joint patrols aimed at limiting the presence of the YPG and SDF in areas near the Turkish border.

As the Asad government collapsed in late 2024, Russian forces implementing Turkey-Russia agreements withdrew. SDF forces moved into areas of the lower Euphrates River valley that had been under pro-Asad forces' control, including the city of Deir-ez-Zor. HTS forces and their local partners subsequently moved to assert authority in these areas, and SDF forces withdrew north of the Euphrates River. To the west, Turkey-backed Arab militia groups operating as part of the Syrian National Army (SNA) coalition expelled YPG and SDF forces from areas north and east of Aleppo and attempted to claim control over the Tishreen Dam and Qara Qozak bridge over the Euphrates River. Fighting continued in this region into early March 2025 before a ceasefire was reached. Periodic Turkish strikes have targeted SDF personnel east of the Euphrates, including in and around the city of Kobane.

A March 2025 agreement between the SDF and the interim government created a framework for the possible future integration of security forces and administrative entities in the northeast with the national government. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from the northeast or the removal of U.S. force protection assurances could lead the YPG and SDF, Turkey and Turkey-backed militias, and the Syrian government to change their policies and posture. Regardless of U.S. posture and preferences and the course of intra-Syrian negotiations, broader conflict could erupt and may exacerbate terrorism risks and humanitarian needs. In July 2025, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan called for SDF integration and for the YPG to "lay down its arms."²² PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan has reportedly agreed with "top PKK operatives" that the YPG should only disarm "when an acceptable agreement is struck with the central government."²³ In August 2025, some sources indicated that SDF delays would not likely lead to direct Turkish intervention, but Turkey might indirectly support "a limited operation by the Syrian army."²⁴

Ahmed Al Sharaa has publicly rejected any future territorial division of Syria or the use of Syrian territory by any entity to threaten Syria's neighbors, insisting on the exclusive control of weapons by state security forces while stating his intent to resolve issues with the SDF through dialogue.²⁵ Sharaa claimed that non-Syrian PKK militants hostile to Turkey were present in northeast Syria and objects to a possible federalist solution to questions of Kurdish autonomy. SDF Commander and YPG leader Mazloum Abdi has said the SDF is "not pursuing separatism" and "envision[s] itself as an integral part of a unified Syrian army, as part of a broader political solution."²⁶ Abdi has said that the SDF accepts state sovereignty and supports a decentralized, secular governance model. He also has said, "We hope that the coalition does not withdraw. We ask them to stay."²⁷

²⁰ In a July 2025 briefing, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Special Envoy for Syria Thomas Barrack said, "SDF is YPG And YPG was a spinoff of PKK that we allied with to fight ISIS." State Department, "Strengthening U.S.-Türkiye Relations and Advancing Relations with Syria," July 11, 2025.

²¹ See CRS Insight IN12473, *Turkey (Türkiye) in Syria: Key U.S. Policy Issues*, by Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas.

²² "Turkey calls on SDF to expedite integration with Damascus," *Rudaw*, July 26, 2025.

²³ "Turkey-France rivalry disrupts US-led mediation between Damascus, Syrian Kurds," *Al-Monitor*, August 7, 2025.

²⁴ Ragip Soylu, "Turkey-Syria defence deal covers training and weapons supply," *Middle East Eye*, August 14, 2025.

²⁵ MEMRI Translation #11695, reviewed by CRS, Source - Al-Arabiya Network, December 29, 2024.

²⁶ "We want change to be the basis for a new phase in Syria" Mazloum Abdi," *Kurdistan24* (Iraq), January 28, 2025.

²⁷ Bassem Mroue, "US-Backed Commander Says His Kurdish-Led Group Wants a Secular and Civil State in Post-Assad Syria," AP, February 3, 2025.

Sectarian Violence Threatens Transition, Draws Intervention

Several instances of sectarian violence involving members of minority communities, Syrian security forces, nonstate armed groups, and armed vigilantes have threatened Syria's stability since March. Aggravating factors have included the interim government's imperfect command and control mechanisms, extremists' presence in some security force units and other armed groups, the proliferation of arms among the population, and volatile, conflict-fueled communal tensions. Social media dynamics, misinformation, and foreign intervention have exacerbated conditions further. Interim leaders' rhetoric and some government actions have prioritized de-escalation and civilian protection, and leaders have promised fact-finding and accountability. Nevertheless, the government has failed to prevent widespread violations against civilians, including some undertaken by government units or government-aligned actors. Attacks on government forces and civilians perpetrated by some minority community armed groups have contributed to ongoing cycles of violence. Some Druze have called for foreign intervention, including by Israel, to ensure their protection. Others have rejected outside involvement and separatist rhetoric, while condemning government violations and failures.

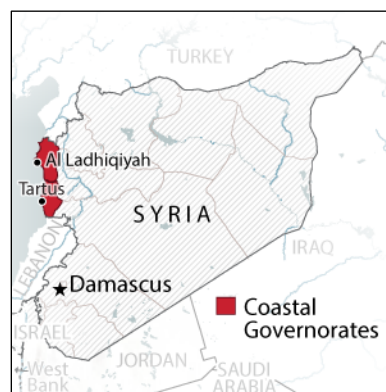
Violence in Coastal Governorates

In March and April, attacks by pro-Asad groups prompted a response by security forces that devolved into attacks on some Alawite communities by some state units, government-aligned groups, and vigilantes. A UN report issued in August 2025 details eyewitness accounts of house-to-house killings, beatings, and lootings targeting Alawites, including the abuse and summary execution of Alawite men by individuals wearing military clothing without insignia.²⁸ The report concluded that parallel hostilities were occurring between the interim government and pro-Asad armed groups at the time, and found that

there are reasonable grounds to believe that individual members of certain factions of the security forces of the interim government ... as well as private individuals participating in hostilities engaged in acts that amounted to violations and international humanitarian law, including acts that may amount to war crimes, as well as serious violations of international human rights law.

The report acknowledges measures by the interim government during and since the violence to prevent further violations and “found no evidence of a governmental policy or plan to carry out such attacks.” President Sharaa personally condemned the violence and vowed to hold those responsible accountable. In the wake of the violence in western coastal areas, the interim government said it would redouble its efforts to assert unified security command over armed groups and launched a fact-finding investigation that has delivered its report to the authorities.²⁹ That report remained unpublished in August. The UN report states that, when interviewed,

Figure 4. Syria: Coastal Governorates



Source: CRS, using State Department and Esri data.

²⁸ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025*, UN Document A/HRC/59/CRP.4, August 11, 2025.

²⁹ The body responsible is the National Inquiry and High-Level Committee to Maintain Civil Peace.

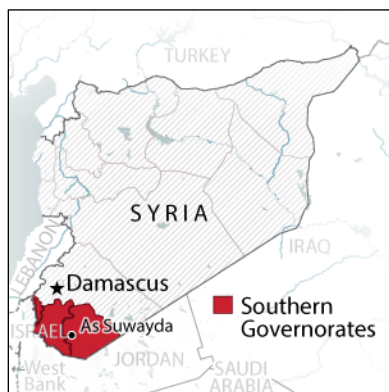
residents of the coastal provinces were not aware of any actions by interim authorities to criminally investigate any individual incidents that took place during the violence.

Violence in Southern Governorates

The extent of national authorities' control over armed groups and their commitment to civilian protection came under renewed scrutiny as sectarian violence involving members of Druze and Sunni Arab communities erupted in southern Syria in April, May, and July. Strained relationships between Druze communities and their Sunni Arab neighbors flared south of Damascus in April and May after criminal incidents and false social media reports about religiously antagonistic statements led armed groups to mobilize. In July, latent tensions between Bedouin and Druze communities in and around the predominantly Druze city of Suweida spilled over into clashes that drew in tribal fighters, security forces, and Druze militia. The violence killed nearly 1,400 combatants and civilians, displaced an estimated more than 185,000 people, and prompted military intervention by Israel, including Israeli strikes on the Ministry of Defense headquarters in Damascus.³⁰

The UN Human Rights Office cited credible reports of “widespread violations and abuses” attributed to “members of the security forces and individuals affiliated with the interim authorities, as well as other armed elements from the area, including Druze and Bedouins.”³¹ Secretary of State Marco Rubio called on the interim authorities to “hold accountable and bring to justice anyone guilty of atrocities including those in their own ranks.”³² The interim government formed a committee to investigate the violence, and in September, a committee spokesman said an unspecified number of defense and interior security personnel “were detained by the interior and defense ministries to be transferred to the judiciary when the investigations are concluded to be publicly tried for the crimes they committed against Syrians.”³³

Figure 5. Syria: Southern Governorates



Source: CRS, using State Department and Esri data.

As of September, a ceasefire has provided for the entry of Ministry of Interior forces into some areas of Suweida province in coordination with local Druze militia groups. Humanitarian access to Suweida remains limited, and Syrian and Israeli officials met in Paris to discuss related concerns. On August 10, the UN Security Council released a presidential statement calling on all parties to ensure humanitarian access and on the government to “to ensure credible, swift, transparent, impartial, and comprehensive investigations, in line with international standards” and to “ensure accountability and bring all perpetrators of violence to justice regardless of their affiliation.”³⁴

³⁰ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), “Al-Suwayda bloodshed in seven days,” July 23, 2025; UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen, Briefings to the UN Security Council, July 28, 2025 and August 21, 2025; and UN Security Council, Statement by the President of the Security Council, UN Document S/PRST/2025/6, August 10, 2025.

³¹ UN Human Rights Council, “Türk calls for immediate steps to ensure protection of people in Suweida and across Syria,” July 18, 2025.

³² X post, Marco Rubio (@marcorubio), July 19, 2025, <https://x.com/marcorubio/status/1946736912854835380>.

³³ Reuters, “Syria detains defense, interior ministry members suspected of Sweida violence,” September 3, 2025.

³⁴ UN Document S/PRST/2025/6, Statement by the President of the Security Council, August 10, 2025.

Druze militias and community leaders have at times appeared to hold differing views on relations with national authorities and with Israel, with some advocating for de-escalation and cooperation and others expressing skepticism about the interim authorities' intentions and welcoming foreign protection.³⁵ In August 2025, leading Druze religious figures for the first time released consistent statements condemning sectarian attacks against the Druze, criticizing the interim authorities, and calling for humanitarian relief for Druze areas.³⁶ Following pro-independence protests by some in Suweida city, Druze leader Sheikh Hikmat Al Hijri announced the alignment of several Druze militia forces under a National Guard, and has called for Suweida to be treated as a separate region.³⁷ On August 21, UN Special Envoy Pedersen said that while violence near Suweida "has largely subsided following a ceasefire, the threat of renewed conflict is ever-present – as are the political centrifugal forces that threaten Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity."³⁸ The UN Security Council has called on "all states to refrain from any action or interference that may further destabilize the country."³⁹

Islamic State (IS) Attacks Demonstrate Enduring Threat

U.S. officials and UN experts report that IS fighters, Al Qaeda linked groups, and other extremists are seeking to exploit fragile security conditions in Syria to reinvigorate their ranks. The July 2025 monitoring report by the UN panel on Al Qaeda and the Islamic State confirms that IS fighters have seized stockpiles of heavy weapons from Asad regime stockpiles and have undertaken prison breaks freeing some of their imprisoned members and other extremists.⁴⁰ The report estimates that "more than 5,000" foreign terrorist fighters remain at large in Syria.

Independent observers have catalogued more than 100 attacks attributed to the Islamic State group in eastern and central Syria in 2025, including attacks on interim government forces and SDF forces.⁴¹ Most of these attacks occurred in Deir-ez-Zor governorate in eastern Syria, but some occurred near Palmyra in central Syria and in remote areas patrolled by U.S.-backed Syrian Free Army forces based at Al Tanf in south-central Syria. A May 2025 IS statement condemned President Al Sharaa as an apostate and called on foreign fighters and others disillusioned by the interim government's policies to reconcile and integrate with IS forces in rural areas.⁴²

The SDF continues to detain approximately 9,000 IS prisoners, which the Department of Defense describes as "the largest concentration of ISIS fighters globally."⁴³ According to U.S. officials in a March 2025 report, the SDF is "fully capable of maintaining security at detention facilities while

³⁵ Druze leader Sheikh Hikmat Al Hijri (alt. Hajari) has been outspoken in his criticism of interim authorities and has endorsed protective foreign intervention. Other leaders, such as Sheikhs Yusuf Jarbou and Hammoud Al Hannawi, had advocated for engagement with interim authorities and refrained from endorsing intervention. See Syrian Arab News Agency, "Sheikh Yusuf Jarbou", the spiritual leader of the Druze community: We stand by our state, refuse any foreign orientation," July 15, 2025; Reuters, "Explainer: Who are the Druze and why does Israel say it is hitting Syria for their sake?" July 17, 2025; Cathrin Schaer, "What part did Druze leader al-Hijri play in Syria violence?" July 22, 2025.

³⁶ "Druze Sheikhs in Suwayda Unite in Opposition to Damascus," *Enab Baladi*, August 9, 2025.

³⁷ "Suwayda, Southern Syria: Protests Demand Independence, Raise Israeli Flags," *Enab Baladi*, August 17, 2025; What Is the "National Guard" Formed by Sheikh al-Hijri in Suwayda, Southern Syria?" *Enab Baladi*, August 24, 2025; and, Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Druze leader issues call for separation from Syria," *The National*, August 26, 2025.

³⁸ UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen, Briefing to the UN Security Council, August 21, 2025.

³⁹ UN Document S/PRST/2025/6, Statement by the President of the Security Council, August 10, 2025.

⁴⁰ UN Document S/2025/482, *Thirty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2734 (2024)*, July 24, 2025.

⁴¹ SOHR, "114 attacks since early 2025:" July 27, 2025.

⁴² "ISIS and Rebel Offshoots Challenge the Al-Sharaa Administration's Security Grip," *Syria Report*, May 28, 2025.

⁴³ DOD, Justification for Fiscal Year 2026, Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund, June 2025.

addressing external threats” but “the SDF guard force is frequently pulled away to address security demands caused by instability in the region.”⁴⁴ After President Trump met President Al Sharaa in Saudi Arabia in May 2025, a U.S. official said President Trump had urged Sharaa to (among other things) “assume responsibility for ISIS detention centers in Northeast Syria.”⁴⁵

SDF-secured camps at Al Hol and Roj house IS family members and other individuals displaced from the final areas retaken from IS forces in March 2019 (**Figure 6**). U.S. officials continue to encourage countries to repatriate their nationals from the camps. Under SDF-interim authority arrangements, some formerly IS-associated Syrian non-combatants have returned to Syrian communities. Repatriations to Iraq from Syria also have increased in 2025. SDF and UN authorities have set a goal of completing repatriations and returns by the end of 2025.

Syria and the United Nations Security Council

In 2025, the UN Security Council has called for “an inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process facilitated by the United Nations and based on key principles” in Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015).⁴⁶ These include “commitments to Syria’s unity, independence, territorial integrity, and non-sectarian character,” “credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance,” and, eventually, “free and fair elections” under a new constitution.⁴⁷

Permanent members of the Security Council differed sharply over developments in Syria from 2011 through 2024. Differences in emphasis have persisted following Asad’s departure, though the permanent members continue to make common reference to Resolution 2254 and call for civilian protection, territorial unity, and inclusive governance.⁴⁸ The United States, United Kingdom, and France have engaged with interim authorities to support the transition and have supported conditional sanctions relief for Syrian state entities. Russia seeks to preserve its military basing access in Syria and has expressed concern about attacks on minorities, the presence and actions of foreign terrorist fighters, and Israeli military operations. The People’s Republic of China has echoed these latter concerns, while highlighting the presence in Syria of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, an armed Islamist extremist group composed of ethnic Uighur and Central Asian fighters. Counterterrorism continues to provide some basis for Council consensus, but to date the Council has not revised its positions in the form of a new comprehensive resolution.

Russia and China blocked efforts in the Council to impose UN sanctions on the Syrian government and Syrian officials related to conduct during the 2011-2024 conflict, but the Council did impose targeted counterterrorism sanctions on some Syria-based groups and individuals, including HTS and Ahmed Al Sharaa.⁴⁹ In a December 2024 interview, Sharaa expressed his hope that Syrians would not be unduly constrained by Asad-era UN resolutions and international sanctions, and he asserted Syrians’ collective responsibility for solving their issues internally,

⁴⁴ LIG-OIR, Reports to the U.S. Congress, January 1 – March 31, 2025, p. 25, and April 1 – June 30, 2025, p. 23.

⁴⁵ X post, Karoline Leavitt (@PressSec), May 14, 2025 – 4:21 AM, <https://x.com/PressSec/status/1922567846317392240>.

⁴⁶ UN Document S/PRST/2025/6, Statement by the President of the Security Council, August 10, 2025.

⁴⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015).

⁴⁸ See UN Security Council, 9960th meeting, July 17, 2025, UN Document S/PV.9960.

⁴⁹ HTS and Sharaa are designated by the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida, and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. Sharaa is listed under his nom de guerre Abu Mohammed Al-Jawlani and an alias, with biographical information that does not correspond to his personal stated accounts and other expert accounts of his background.

while also welcoming international support.⁵⁰ Sharaa has argued that Asad's departure obviates international calls for negotiation with Asad-era entities and that the interim authorities are empowered to establish conditions allowing for the return of Syrian refugees and to define and implement a transition in line with the spirit of Resolution 2254.

The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen of Norway, has acknowledged that Resolution 2254's specific calls for UN-facilitated negotiations "are no longer relevant," while reiterating Security Council statements emphasizing the importance of Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity, and calling for an inclusive and Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.⁵¹ Pedersen has highlighted the risks of renewed conflict posed by the unresolved status of northeast Syria and by tensions in southern Syria, and he has called for negotiated solutions and an end to military intervention by outside actors.⁵² In April, Pedersen criticized what he described as Israel's "repeated and intensifying military escalations" in Syria, saying, "such actions undermine efforts to build a new Syria at peace with itself and the region, and destabilize Syria at a sensitive time."⁵³

Pedersen has cited Syrian and international concerns about "the inclusion of foreign fighters in the senior ranks of the new armed forces, as well as individuals associated with violations."⁵⁴ In August 2025 he expressed "grave concern over the acute threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters at large in Syria."⁵⁵

Pedersen has identified the inclusivity of a planned committee to draft a permanent constitution, the definition of mechanisms for achieving popular endorsement of such a constitution, the holding of inclusive indirect elections for an interim legislative body, and the ultimate holding of free and fair elections as critical to Syria's transition and the principles of Resolution 2254.

Humanitarian Crises and Appeals for Assistance

UN agencies estimate that nearly 7.1 million Syrians are internally displaced (of whom 1.4 million were in organized displacement sites as of August 2025).⁵⁶ According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of August 21, 4.19 million Syrians were registered as refugees in regional countries. UNHCR reports that more than 821,000 Syrians have returned to Syria through neighboring countries since December 2024, and more than 1.73 million internally displaced Syrians have returned to their homes in the same period.⁵⁷ UN agencies estimate that 16.5 million Syrians are in need of some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, nearly half of whom are children.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ MEMRI Translation #11695, reviewed by CRS, Source - Al-Arabiya Network, December 29, 2024.

⁵¹ Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria (UN OSES), "Near Verbatim Transcript of Press Conference by United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Mr. Geir O. Pedersen," January 22, 2025; and UN Document SC/15943, "Security Council Press Statement on Situation in Syria," December 17, 2024.

⁵² UN OSES, "Near Verbatim Transcript of Press Conference," January 22, 2025.

⁵³ UN OSES, Statement Attributable to United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Mr. Geir O. Pedersen, April 3, 2025.

⁵⁴ UN Document S/PV.9857, Remarks of UN SES Pederson to the UN Security Council, February 12, 2025; and, UN OSES, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen Briefing to the Security Council, March 25, 2025.

⁵⁵ UN OSES, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen Briefing to the Security Council, August 10, 2025.

⁵⁶ UNHCR, Syria Governorates IDPs and IDP Returnees Overview, August 21, 2025.

⁵⁷ UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Syria Refugee Response, at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>; and, Regional Flash Update #41, August 22, 2025.

⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Priorities, Syrian Arab Republic, January – December 2025.

In March, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher said humanitarian providers were being forced to make “brutal choices,” citing a trend of unmet appeals that caused reductions in the humanitarian response during 2024 “by more than half.”⁵⁹ The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has reported that health, education, protection, and food services have been disrupted across Syria due to limited funding of 2025 appeals and additional funding cuts, including the termination of some U.S. aid programs.⁶⁰ UNOCHA officials have described the negative effects of a what they describe as a “catastrophic drop in funding” to the UN Security Council and report that global donors have funded 14% of the 2025 UN appeal for \$3.2 billion through December 2025.⁶¹ The UN system has identified response priorities through December 2025 and intends to conduct a Multi-Sector Needs Assessment to support planning for 2026.⁶²

The Asad government’s collapse obviated the obstacles and bureaucratic restrictions the former government had imposed on the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syria. Syria’s interim security authorities have taken control of most border crossings, though large areas of northeast Syria adjacent to Turkey and Iraq are outside of their de facto control. Cross-border UN relief operations from Turkey have been extended, and goods may enter the country from functioning crossings with Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. UN agencies report that Syrian authorities are allowing Syrian refugees to enter and exit the country. According to UN surveys, among the obstacles and challenges facing returnees are security concerns, inadequate infrastructure, and limited economic opportunity and financial liquidity in Syria, along with damage to personal property, lack of civil or legal documentation, family relocation, transportation costs, and debts incurred abroad.

U.S. Interests and Initiatives

For decades, U.S.-Syrian ties were strained and, since 1979, the United States has designated Syria as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. The former Syrian government’s hostility to Israel, its attempts to dominate neighboring Lebanon, its alignment with Russia, its partnership with Iran, its support for terrorist groups, and its development and use of weapons of mass destruction all fueled tension between the United States and Syria until the fall of Asad’s regime in late 2024. In post-Asad Syria, counterterrorism, nonproliferation, civilian protection, and regional security concerns endure and may inform future U.S. policy choices.

Congress and successive U.S. Administrations imposed and maintained a range of bilateral sanctions on Syria and targeted sanctions on entities and individuals (see “U.S. Sanctions and Syria” below). After the onset of the anti-Asad uprising in 2011 and the outbreak of conflict, the United States and European countries imposed additional, more punishing sanctions on the Syrian government and individuals and entities supporting it. The Trump Administration has pursued a

⁵⁹ UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher, Briefing to the UN Security Council, March 25, 2025. The annual UN funding appeal for Syria in 2024 totaled \$4.07 billion, and donors provided \$1.91 billion, not all of which was provided under the UN appeal. The United States provided \$1.179 billion in humanitarian assistance in Syria and the region during U.S. fiscal year (FY) 2024, including more than 27% of the funds directed through the 2024 UN-coordinated plan. See <https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1175/summary>.

⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 6 (as of 27 May 2025), June 2, 2025; and, UNOCHA Geneva Head Ramesh Rajasingham, Briefing to the UN Security Council, May 21, 2025.

⁶¹ Rajasingham, May 21, 2025; UNOCHA Director of Operations and Advocacy Edem Wosornu, Briefing to the UN Security Council, July 28, 2025; and UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher, Briefing to the UN Security Council, August 21, 2025.

⁶² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Priorities, Syrian Arab Republic, January – December 2025.

policy of engagement and conditional support toward the interim government, removing many U.S. sanctions (and stating an intent to rescind Syria's state sponsor of terrorism designation).

The duration, severity, and effects of conflict in Syria have created some actual and potential threats for U.S., European, and regional security related to terrorism, weapons proliferation, the use of chemical weapons, military intervention, drug trafficking, and mass migration. In this context, successive Administrations and Congress have prioritized the following issues:

Counterterrorism. The former Syrian government's support for terrorism and the exploitation of Syrian territory by transnational terrorist groups to recruit, train, equip, raise funds, and plan attacks have been focal points for U.S. policymakers since before 2011. U.S. government reporting has described how Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, Hezbollah and other Iran-backed U.S.-designated terrorist groups, and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) have used Syria to further their aims, some with the active support of the Asad government.⁶³ Syria-based members of terrorist organizations, including the Islamic State, have used Syria "to plot or inspire external terrorist operations."⁶⁴ U.S. and partner force operations ended the Islamic State's control of populated territories in Syria in March 2019, but remnants of the group have continued to operate from remote areas in central Syria. IS fighters have attempted to break prisoners and family members out of U.S. partner-secured prisons and camps and have attacked Syrian communities and U.S. partners. In 2024, IS attacks increased in Syria relative to previous years, and, according to U.S. officials, as the Asad regime fell IS fighters "exploited the chaos to acquire some quantities of weapons and supplies from supply depots abandoned by regime forces."⁶⁵

Syria's interim authorities, with reported intelligence support from the United States, have disrupted attempted IS attacks that could have exacerbated sectarian tensions in post-Asad Syria.⁶⁶ U.S., UN, and other international officials have expressed concern about the presence in Syria of foreign terrorist fighters and the integration into Syrian security forces of foreign individuals and fighters. The interim government has appointed foreign nationals to leadership roles in its security structures, and, according to UN reporting, "many tactical-level individuals hold more extreme views" than interim government leaders.⁶⁷ Interim authorities reportedly have argued that integrating anti-Asad fighters, including some foreign fighters, into national forces is preferable to dangers that might arise from their exclusion. U.S. Special Envoy for Syria Ambassador Tom Barrack reportedly said in June that the United States and Syria have reached "an understanding, with transparency" on the issue, after previous reports suggested U.S. urging of interim authorities to exclude foreign fighters.⁶⁸ Some Syrian leaders and other individuals and entities active in Syria remain subject to U.S. and UN terrorism sanctions (see "U.S. Sanctions and Syria" below).

Foreign Military Access and Basing. Since 2011, the presence and operations in Syria of foreign military forces from Russia, Iran, Turkey, Israel, and the United States and its partners have reflected the differing priorities and goals of outside actors in the country. U.S. policymakers may

⁶³ See, for example, U.S. State Department, Country Reports on Terrorism 2023: Syria, November 2024; and, annual threat assessments of the Director of National Intelligence, 2014-2024.

⁶⁴ U.S. State Department, Country Reports on Terrorism 2023: Syria, November 2024.

⁶⁵ Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve (LIG-OIR), Report to the U.S. Congress, October 1, 2024–December 31, 2024, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Warren P. Strobel, Ellen Nakashima, and Missy Ryan, "U.S. shared secret intelligence with Syria's new leaders," *Washington Post*, January 24, 2025.

⁶⁷ UN Document S/2025/482, *Thirty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2734 (2024)*, July 24, 2025.

⁶⁸ "Exclusive - US gives nod to Syria to bring foreign jihadist ex-rebels into army," Reuters, June 2, 2025.

consider whether or how the continued operations in Syria of U.S. and coalition forces, Turkish forces, and Israeli forces affect U.S. interests. U.S. officials also may monitor and seek to shape the policies of Syrian interim authorities toward foreign military forces, including U.S. forces, Russian forces invited to Syria by the Asad government, and Israeli forces operating in and beyond the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force zone in the Golan Heights established in the 1974 Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement. Syria's interim authorities say they seek to establish normal diplomatic and security relationships with foreign countries—including their former Russian and Iranian adversaries—on the basis of mutual respect for sovereignty and noninterference. Syrian and Israeli officials met in Paris in August 2025 to discuss deconfliction and de-escalation following Israeli airstrikes on Syrian forces in July, including in Damascus, and Israeli operations in the Golan region and near the Lebanon-Israel-Syria tri-border. In a February 2025 interview, Ahmed Al Sharaa said “any military presence should be with the agreement of the host state.”⁶⁹

Weapons of Mass Destruction. The Asad government's domestic use of chemical weapons against its armed opponents and civilians drew international condemnation and motivated U.S. military strikes in 2017 and 2018. In December 2024, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) said “significant concerns persist regarding the accuracy and completeness” of the former government's declarations to the agency, “as well as the fate of substantial quantities of unaccounted-for chemical weapons.”⁷⁰ Outstanding issues of concern reported to the OPCW Secretariat prior to Asad's ouster “involved large quantities of potentially undeclared or unverified chemical warfare agents and chemical munitions.”⁷¹

In March 2025, interim Foreign Minister Asaad Al Shaibani participated in an OPCW meeting and stated the interim government's commitment “to destroy any remains of the chemical weapons programme developed under the Assad regime, to put an end to this painful legacy, to bring justice to victims, and to ensure that the compliance with international law is a solid one.”⁷² The OPCW since has deployed Declaration Assessment Team and Office of Special Missions personnel to Syria with the support of the interim government. The personnel have visited declared and suspected chemical weapons program locations and have reported their findings to the OPCW and the interim government.

The interim authorities have informed the OPCW that they lack the information and expertise to definitively identify and declare all chemical weapons related locations and materials, and the OPCW has estimated that experts will “need to visit and assess more than 100 additional locations across the Syrian Arab Republic, including military facilities, airfields, and research centres, all of which may be in varied, and hazardous, states of disarray, damage, or destruction.”⁷³ The OPCW estimates that additional donor country contributions of 33.1 million euros will be required for Syria-related activities through 2027.

Conventional Weapons and Regional Security. The influx of weapons to Syria and their wide distribution in-country since 2011 present enduring threats to Syria's internal security and to the security of Syria's neighbors. Criminal groups, extremist organizations, and non-state armed groups, including some aligned with Iran and Turkey, have benefitted from the proliferation of small arms and military weapons during the conflict. In addition, unexploded ordnance, mines,

⁶⁹ Reuters, “Syria's Sharaa aims to restore US ties, no contacts yet with Trump administration,” February 4, 2025.

⁷⁰ OPCW, “OPCW urges Syria to fulfil Chemical Weapons Convention obligations,” December 12, 2024.

⁷¹ OPCW, “Syria's caretaker Foreign Minister addresses OPCW's Executive Council,” March 5, 2025.

⁷² OPCW Executive Council, Report by the Director-General Progress in the Elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme, EC-110/DG.2, July 24, 2025.

⁷³ OPCW Executive Council, EC-110/DG.2, July 24, 2025.

and other explosive remnants of war pose risks to Syrian civilians and international actors across Syria. Interim authorities' ability and willingness to assert control over weapons stockpiles associated with the former government may be limited or vary in different areas. Israel has acted to destroy advanced conventional weapons and military air defense and air domain awareness systems across Syria since December 2024, citing potential risks to Israel's security.⁷⁴

Drug Trafficking. The Asad government enabled and profited from the production and smuggling of drugs across the Middle East, especially the drug captagon.⁷⁵ Congress sought to limit the Asad government's ability to profit from the captagon trade. In the 117th Congress, the Countering Assad's Proliferation Trafficking and Garnering of Narcotics Act (H.R. 6265, also known as the CAPTAGON Act) was introduced by Representative French Hill in December 2021, passed by the House in September 2022, and incorporated into the FY2023 NDAA (Section 1238 of P.L. 117-263). It has required the development and submission to Congress of an interagency plan to disrupt captagon trafficking and build regional counterdrug capacity. Interim authorities have pledged to dismantle captagon production and smuggling networks and cooperate with regional countries to halt the flow of the drug across Syria's borders. Arrests of criminals, including drug traffickers, are being publicized by interim authorities. Criminal networks' loss of captagon trade revenues may add to economic pressures in some areas of Syria.

Human Rights and Syrian Minorities. The Asad government's use of military force to repress demonstrations led many Syrians, the United States, and other countries in 2011 to call for Asad's departure. The Asad government's subsequent use of torture and its mass execution of prisoners continue to drive Syrian and international calls for accountability. Interim authorities have made statements calling for inclusive governance and respect for religious tolerance, and U.S. and other international officials have called on interim Syrian leaders to fulfill these commitments. U.S. officials have condemned attacks on minority communities, including by members of or forces associated with the interim government (see "Political and Security Dynamics" above). Some members of minority communities in northeast and southern Syria have expressed support for decentralized governance and appear to remain skeptical of interim authorities' intentions.

The State Department in 2023 designated HTS as an entity of particular concern pursuant to the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281), and reported in 2025 that "armed terrorist groups, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, reportedly carried out arbitrary detentions and subjected some detainees to torture" during 2024.⁷⁶ The State Department's annual human rights report on conditions in Syria during 2024 cites UN Commission of Inquiry for Syria reporting and other human rights organizations' reporting alleging the involvement of SDF, HTS, and Turkey-backed SNA forces in a range of human rights abuses and violations. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended in its 2025 annual report that HTS be redesignated.

U.S. Diplomacy

President Donald Trump's May 2025 meeting in Saudi Arabia with Ahmed Al Sharaa and President Trump's announcement of his intent to rescind U.S. sanctions on Syria signaled a new approach in U.S. policy toward Syria. High level U.S. engagement and substantial sanctions relief

⁷⁴ Emanuel Fabian, "In historic campaign across Syria, IDF says it destroyed 80% of Assad regime's military," *Times of Israel*, December 10, 2024.

⁷⁵ For more information, see, U.S. State Department Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 2024; and, Caroline Rose and Matthew Zweig, "What Will Happen to Assad's Secret Drug Empire?" *Foreign Policy*, January 16, 2025.

⁷⁶ U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria*, 2024.

have been presented as a conditional opportunity for Syrians and transitional leaders to rebuild and reorganize while interim authorities demonstrating their intentions toward ethnic and religious minority groups, terrorist threats, and Syria's neighbors. The Trump Administration's engagement builds on initial contacts made and steps taken by the previous Administration in the wake of Asad's departure.⁷⁷ In 2025, U.S. Special Envoy for Syria Ambassador Tom Barrack and some Members of Congress have visited Syria.

In May, the Trump Administration took steps to waive and relieve some U.S. sanctions on Syria and in June and July the Administration rescinded and revised executive orders providing for many U.S. sanctions on Syria and revoked the designation of HTS as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. As of September, the group, Sharaa, and Interior Minister Anas Khattab remain listed as terrorist entities pursuant to Executive Order 13224, and remain subject to UN sanctions.

The United States suspended operations at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus in 2012; the Czech Republic serves as the U.S. protecting power in Syria. On May 29, Ambassador Barrack and other officials raised the U.S. flag at the U.S. diplomatic residence in Damascus for the first time since 2012.⁷⁸ The Trump Administration has not announced any plan to return U.S. personnel to Syria on an enduring basis. In March 2014, the State Department suspended the operations of the Syrian embassy in Washington, DC, and those of Syrian consulates in Michigan and Texas, and expelled Syrian staff.

U.S. Military Operations in Syria and U.S. Partner Forces

U.S. forces have operated in Syria since 2014 pursuant to the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMF). U.S. operations in Syria as part of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) seek the enduring defeat of the Islamic State. As of December 2024, an estimated 2,000 U.S. military personnel reportedly were present in eastern and southern Syria, conducting counterterrorism missions against IS remnants and supporting Syrian partner forces. U.S. forces have conducted dozens of airstrikes and multiple operations against IS targets in Syria since Asad's ouster, and have targeted Al Qaeda affiliates in northwest Syria in 2025.

Most U.S. forces in Syria have been deployed in the northeast in support of the SDF. U.S. troops also have supported the Syrian Free Army (SFA) near Al Tanf in a former deconfliction zone in southern Syria, along a transit route between Iraq and Syria once used by both IS fighters and by Iran and Iran-backed militias. In 2025, U.S. forces have continued to provide support to the SFA following that group's integration with the Syrian interim government under its 70th Division.

In April 2025, a Pentagon spokesperson announced the consolidation of U.S. forces and said "a deliberate and conditions-based process will bring the U.S. footprint in Syria down to less than a thousand U.S. forces in the coming months."⁷⁹ By July 2025, some U.S. troops had relocated from areas with Arab-majority populations in the Euphrates River valley (see **Figure 1**), having closed three bases and "either dismantled and removed or handed over infrastructure to the SDF."⁸⁰ Ambassador Barrack has said the U.S. military will "eventually go to one" base in Syria.⁸¹

⁷⁷ "US removes \$10M bounty on leader of rebel group now in charge of Syria," Voice of America, December 20, 2024.

⁷⁸ Timour Azhari, "US flag raised in Damascus, envoy says Syria-Israel peace is possible," Reuters, May 29, 2025.

⁷⁹ Department of Defense, "Statement from Chief Pentagon Spokesman Sean Parnell Announcing the Consolidation of Forces in Syria Under Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve," April 18, 2025.

⁸⁰ "PKK ends 40-year war against Turkey, vows to pursue Kurdish rights," *Al-Monitor*, May 12, 2025; and LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1 – June 30, 2025, p. 21.

⁸¹ Interview with NTV Turkey, in Raya Jalabi, "US cuts troop presence in Syria," *Financial Times*, June 3, 2025.

Since 2015, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) has conducted periodic military strikes in Syria outside the framework of OIR, including on targets linked to Al Qaeda, Syrian government chemical weapons-related targets, and Iran-backed militias—some of which used Syria-based facilities to monitor and target U.S. forces. From October 2023 to November 2024, the U.S. military conducted strikes on facilities in eastern Syria associated with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and affiliated militias in response to attacks by Iran-backed militias on U.S. forces in Syria and Iraq. In 2024, U.S. officials reported force protection concerns linked to terrorist groups, Russia and Syrian government forces, and Iran-backed groups.

Syria Train and Equip Program FY2025 Funding and FY2026 Legislation

The Syria Train and Equip program, authorized by Congress since 2014 and funded via the Defense Department Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF), seeks to sustain the defeat of the Islamic State in Syria by enabling Syrian partner forces in the SDF and the SFA. President Joe Biden requested and Congress appropriated \$147.9 million in FY2025 CTEF funds for Syria programs available through September 2026. The FY2025 National Defense Authorization Act extended authorities for U.S. train and equip programs in Syria through December 2025.

The Trump Administration’s FY2026 defense appropriations request seeks nearly \$130 million for CTEF programs in Syria, with funds remaining available through September 2027. Program costs include training and equipping, logistical support, stipends, repair, and sustainment investments to support paramilitary, internal security, and detention personnel.

The House and Senate reported versions of the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, H.R. 3838/S. 2296/S.Amdt. 3748) would reauthorize train and equip programs in Syria at the requested funding level through December 2026. The Senate-reported version and amendment in the nature of a substitute (ANS, S.Amdt. 3748) include a provision that would prohibit the obligation or expenditure of funds authorized to be appropriated by the act “to reduce the number of, or consolidate, bases of the United States Armed Forces located in Syria” until 15 days after a certification is submitted providing assessments and information on U.S. posture and plans to continue to achieve counterterrorism objectives. The Senate-reported version and ANS also include a provision directing the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State to take measures to support the defenses and internal security of the Al Hol and Roj camps and to provide annual reporting to Congress on related matters. The report accompanying the House version (H.Rept. 119-231) would require a briefing to the House Committee on Armed Services “not later than February 15, 2026, on the progress, challenges, and outlook for potential U.S. defense partnership with the new Syrian government.”

The House-passed and Senate-reported defense appropriations bills for FY2026 (H.R. 4016/S. 2572) would appropriate funds for Syria at the requested level. The Senate-reported bill would rescind \$5 million in FY2025 appropriations from the CTEF account. The report accompanying the House version (H.Rept. 119-162) would direct the Secretary of Defense to provide a briefing within 60 days of enactment to “assess the integration of the Syrian Democratic Forces into the new Syrian government security force and evaluate progress made under the Al Hol Action Plan.” (see below)

U.S. Support for IS Prisoner Detention and Camp Management

Successive Administrations have used Department of Defense and State Department programs to address challenges posed by the continued detention in Syria by U.S. partner forces of thousands of IS fighters and the presence of tens of thousands of formerly IS-associated individuals in U.S. partner-secured camps. Since 2019, transferring prisoners and returning camp residents to their home countries and communities has been slowed by other governments’ fears about radicalization and by the uncertain security conditions prevailing in Syria. Ensuring the continued

detention of IS fighters has been a high priority for successive Administrations, and Congress has directed specific resources and outlined requirements for U.S.-funded efforts related to humane detention and security practices. U.S. officials and partner forces considered and chose not to pursue plans to construct new purpose-built facilities to detain IS prisoners.⁸² Instead, upgrades to existing facilities have been undertaken with U.S. support, starting with those assessed to have the highest risk. U.S. officials reported in July 2025 that all SDF-run prisons have received basic upgrades, though longer-term upgrades “have not yet resulted in a marked increase in security.”⁸³

The Departments of Defense and State have funded various training programs for U.S. partner force personnel focused on securing prisons and camps in northeast Syria. Some partner force personnel have received training in compliance with international humanitarian law and detainee treatment. In July, CJTF-OIR reported that because of competing demands SDF forces are “not consistently available to receive training.”⁸⁴ CJTF-OIR further reported that “the lack of a formal training program for the SDF guard force... limits Coalition visibility into any deeper problems that might exist.”

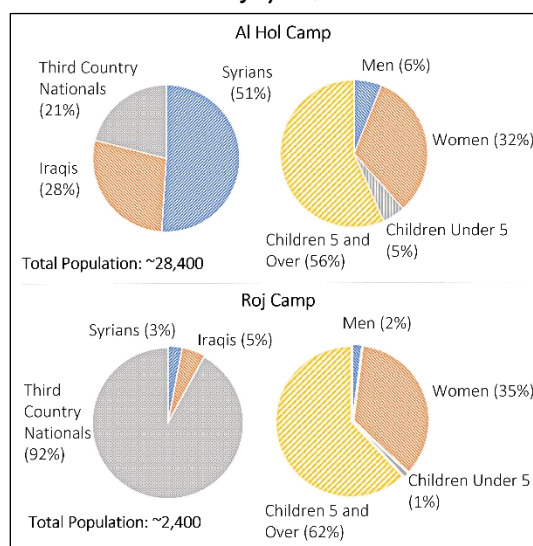
The FY2024 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act directed that not less than \$25 million in ESF monies be made available to implement the “U.S. Government Al-Hol Action Plan,” which has sought to improve conditions in the camp and support reintegration. As of June 2025, lead inspector general reporting to Congress stated that all USAID programming supporting the plan had been terminated, but that State Department programs for camp management, coordination, and child education and protection were ongoing.⁸⁵

Speaking to the UN Security Council in February, a U.S. official said the United States supports a ceasefire in northern Syria that will “enable our local partners to focus on combatting ISIS and maintain security of detention facilities and displaced persons camps.”⁸⁶ The official also said that ongoing U.S. assistance for the operations of the prisons and camps in northeastern Syria “cannot last forever” and “cannot remain a direct U.S. financial responsibility,” urging “countries to expeditiously repatriate their displaced and detained nationals who remain in the region.”⁸⁷

Of the funds appropriated for CTEF programs in FY2025, \$15 million was directed to infrastructure repair and renovation. The Administration’s FY2026 request seeks \$1.6 million for

Figure 6. Demography of U.S. Partner-Secured Camps in Eastern Syria

As of July 15, 2025



Source: CRS, using data reported to Lead Inspector General by U.S. State Department, July 2025.

⁸² LIG-OIR, Report to Congress, October 1 – December 31, 2023, February 2024.

⁸³ LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1, 2025–June 30, 2025, p. 24.

⁸⁴ LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1, 2025–June 30, 2025, p. 23.

⁸⁵ LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1, 2025–June 30, 2025, p. 30-31.

⁸⁶ U.S. Mission to the United Nations, “Remarks by Ambassador Shea,” February 12, 2025.

⁸⁷ U.S. Mission to the United Nations, “Remarks by Ambassador Shea,” February 12, 2025.

these purposes. The Senate Appropriations Committee report S.Rept. 119-52 accompanying its version of the FY2026 defense appropriations bill (S. 2572) would direct the Department of Defense to report to the committee 30 days prior to obligating funds for construction activities, states that the committee “prioritizes detention facilities repair and construction ahead of any other construction activity,” and would direct the Secretary of Defense “to engage with the SDF on ensuring that detainees are afforded all protections due under the Geneva Conventions.” The Senate-reported version of the FY2026 NDAA (S. 2296) and ANS (S.Amdt. 3748) include a provision directing the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the Secretary of State to take measures to support the defenses and internal security of the Al Hol and Roj camps and to provide annual reporting to Congress on related matters.

U.S. Stabilization and Foreign Assistance

The future of U.S. stabilization and foreign assistance programs in Syria is uncertain in light of developments in Syria and changes following the Trump Administration’s review of U.S. foreign assistance activities and implementation of agency reorganization plans and staff relocations. Through 2024, U.S. assistance supported stabilization programs in northeast Syria, funded engagement with civil society and training for local governance and security entities in areas outside of the Asad government’s control, and helped meet housing, services, reintegration, and repatriation needs at the Al Hol and Roj camps.

According to lead inspector general reporting to Congress, as of June 30, all USAID stabilization programming in Syria has been terminated. Some State Department stabilization programs have been continued. Others have been terminated.⁸⁸ USAID humanitarian assistance activities were paused in early 2025. Some were restarted and others were terminated. Lead inspector general reporting to Congress cites USAID officials as reporting that, “as a result, many partners paused operations and the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian assistance, and in some cases terminated staff and closed offices.”⁸⁹ USAID officials further reported that as of June 2025, “all USAID implementers were partially operational due to lack of payment,” and termination of third-party monitoring contracts was “increasing the risk of waste, fraud, and abuse—especially in conflict-affected areas, where there is a heightened potential for diversion of funds.”⁹⁰

The Trump Administration has provided congressional committees of jurisdiction with updated lists of foreign assistance programs in Syria that it has terminated and preserved following its global review of U.S. foreign assistance. Changing conditions, opportunities, and risks in Syria may prompt further changes to U.S. assistance plans.

The Trump Administration’s FY2026 budget request for foreign assistance does not include a specific amount for Syria programs, but, consistent with the prior Administration’s requests, does seek authority notwithstanding other provisions of law to provide “non-lethal stabilization assistance for Syria, including for emergency medical and rescue response and chemical weapons

⁸⁸ LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1 – June 30, 2025, pp. 31-33.

⁸⁹ LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1 – June 30, 2025, pp. 31-33. According to USAID responses to LIG-OIR, “At the start of 2025, USAID BHA Syria managed 29 programs valued at \$631,172,513. By the end of the quarter, 16 programs—worth \$218,174,924—were terminated, while 14 remained active, totaling \$412,998,589.” Additionally, USAID reported that “the rapid and chaotic termination of awards disrupted implementers’ internal controls, making it difficult to carry out proper closeout procedures. Staffing cuts limited their capacity for documentation, oversight, audits, and monitoring. The accelerated closure of sub-awards created pressure to spend remaining funds quickly, raising the risk of financial mismanagement.”

⁹⁰ LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1 – June 30, 2025, pp. 35-36.

investigations.”⁹¹ The House Appropriations Committee-reported version of the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2026 (H.R. 4779) includes this language, and would make funds available for assistance for ethnic and religious minorities in Syria.

U.S. Sanctions and Syria

From 1979 to 2024, the United States placed a broad array of sanctions on the government of Syria, Syrian entities and individuals, and third parties supporting certain Syrian government activities. The United States also imposed targeted sanctions on terrorist groups active in Syria and associated individuals. Successive Administrations and Congresses imposed and maintained these sanctions as a means of raising the costs to Syrian leaders of a number of policies they deemed hostile to U.S. national security, foreign policy, and economic interests. Specific sanctions actions were taken by different Administrations to address the Syrian government’s support for terrorism, its trade in weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile technologies, its interference in neighboring Lebanon, and its conduct during the country’s 2011-2024 conflict.

Sanctions Relief and Remaining Authorities

In January 2025, the Biden Administration issued a general license to allow for certain transactions in Syria through July 6, 2025, to include transactions with the government of Syria, transactions related to noncommercial personal remittances, and transactions in support of the sale, supply, storage, or donation of energy, including petroleum, petroleum products, natural gas, and electricity. President Biden also issued Executive Order 14142, amending Executive Order 13894 (2019)⁹² to remove specific references to the government of Turkey and preserving provisions allowing the potential imposition of financial and travel sanctions on individuals determined by the President to “threaten the peace, security, stability, or territorial integrity of Syria;” or be involved in “the commission of serious human rights abuse” related to Syria.

On May 13, 2025, President Trump said during a visit to Saudi Arabia that his Administration is “currently exploring normalizing relations with Syria’s new government,” and said he would “be ordering the cessation of sanctions against Syria in order to give them a chance at greatness.”⁹³ The Administration subsequently provided exemptive relief for sanctions on the Commercial Bank of Syria, issued a 180-day waiver of sanctions in the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019 (“Caesar Act,” 22 U.S.C. §8791 note),⁹⁴ and issued a general license (GL 25) that authorized

⁹¹ U.S. Department of State, FY2026 Congressional Budget Justification, accessed June 2, 2025.

⁹² President Trump in 2019 issued Executive Order 13894, which declared a national emergency based on U.S. concerns about the actions of the Turkish military in Syria. In October 2024, President Biden renewed that national emergency declaration for one year. See 84 *Federal Register* 55851 and 89 *Federal Register* 82929.

⁹³ Ben Hubbard, Jonathan Swan, and Erika Solomon, “Trump Says U.S. Will Lift Sanctions on Syria Under New Government,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2025.

⁹⁴ In 2019, Congress enacted the Caesar Act, requiring the President to impose sanctions on persons the President determines to have knowingly provided significant support or knowingly engaged in significant transactions with the government of Syria, entities it owns or controls, and its senior officials; certain military or mercenary forces; or to be subject to sanctions with respect to Syria under U.S. law; and those who knowingly sell or provide significant goods, services, technology or other support related to a number of economic sectors, including natural gas, petroleum, and “significant construction or engineering services” for the government of Syria. Congress extended the sunset of the Caesar Act through December 2029 in the FY2025 National Defense Authorization Act.

certain transactions with Syria and designated individuals that would otherwise be prohibited under sanctions regulations.⁹⁵

On June 30, President Trump issued Executive Order 14312, eliminating or waiving many Asad-era sanctions on the government of Syria, while amending Executive Order 13894 (2019) again to maintain sanctions on Asad-associated entities and refine mechanisms for possibly imposing future sanctions on entities determined to be disrupting Syria's transition, violating human rights, or threatening Syria's stability or territorial integrity. The order directs the Secretary of State to "take all appropriate action" with respect to Syria's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism⁹⁶ and the designation of Jabhat Al Nusra/Hay'at Tahrir al Sham as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity. It also directs the Secretary of State to review President Sharaa's individual designation. On July 8, Secretary Rubio's determination revoking the FTO designation of HTS was published.⁹⁷

On August 26, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) published a final rule removing the Syrian Sanctions Regulations (31 CFR Part 542) from the Code of Federal Regulations, consistent with Executive Order 14312. According to the final rule, "OFAC intends, in a separate rulemaking, to amend 31 CFR part 569 to rename it the Promoting Accountability for Assad and Regional Stabilization Sanctions Regulations and to incorporate E.O. 13894, as further amended, and other relevant authorities. The Administration's July 2025 amendment of EO13894 (2019) preserves a framework for the potential imposition of sanctions on actors in Syria for "(1) actions or policies that further threaten the peace, security, stability, or territorial integrity of Syria; or (2) the commission of serious human rights abuse."⁹⁸

Legislation providing for some specific U.S. sanctions on the Syrian government and entities in Syria has not been amended or rescinded since December 2024, although there is debate in Congress over several related legislative proposals (see "Legislation and Hearings in the 119th Congress" below).⁹⁹ Some other terrorism, chemical and biological weapons and missile

⁹⁵ FINCEN, "Exception to Prohibition Imposed by Section 311 of the USA PATRIOT Act against the Commercial Bank of Syria," May 23, 2025; U.S. State Department, "Providing Sanctions Relief for the Syrian People," May 23, 2025; OFAC, "General License No. 25, Authorizing Transactions Prohibited by the Syrian Sanctions Regulations or Involving Certain Blocked Persons," May 23, 2025.

⁹⁶ Designation as a state sponsor of acts of international terrorism under Section 6(j)(1)(A) of the Export Administration Act of 1979 or Section 1754(c) of the Export Control Reform Act of 2019 restricts export licensing for controlled goods and services; Section 620A(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 prohibits most U.S. foreign aid, Peace Corps programs, nonemergency agricultural aid, and Export-Import Bank funding; and Section 40(d) of the Arms Export Control Act prohibits sales and transfers of arms and related goods and services. See 50 U.S.C. §4813(c), 22 U.S.C. §2371(a), and 22 U.S.C. §2780(d), respectively. Section 1768 of the Export Control Reform Act of 2019 continues designations made under Section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act of 1979, which Section 1766 of the Export Control Reform Act of 2019 repealed nearly entirely. This designation also deprives targeted governments of sovereign immunity under the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act from lawsuits based on certain acts of terrorism. See 28 U.S.C. §1605a. Designation as a state sponsor of international terrorism has implications elsewhere in law, see CRS Report R43835, *State Sponsors of Acts of International Terrorism—Legislative Parameters: In Brief*.

⁹⁷ Federal Register, Public Notice 12762, July 8, 2025.

⁹⁸ Federal Register, 90 FR 41505, August 26, 2025.

⁹⁹ For example, provisions of the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act (P.L. 106-178; 50 U.S.C. §§1701 note), Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act of 1991 (title III, P.L. 102-182; 22 U.S.C. §§5601 et seq.), Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008 (title IV, P.L. 110-457; 22 U.S.C. §§2370c et seq.), and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (div. A, P.L. 106-386; 22 U.S.C. §§7101 et seq.) have been applied to impose sanctions on Syria. Other statutes such as the Illicit Captagon Trafficking Suppression Act (div. P, P.L. 118-50; 50 U.S.C. §§1701 note), the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019, as amended (Sections 7401-7402, 7411-7413, 7421-7426, 7431-7438, title LXXIV, div. F of P.L. 116-92; 22 U.S.C. §8791 note), the Syria Human Rights Accountability Act of 2012 (Title VII, P.L. 112-158 (Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012; 22 (continued...))

proliferation sanctions, human rights-related sanctions (addressing trafficking in persons and child soldiers), and drug trafficking (captagon) statutory sanctions apply. If the President or his designees act to further waive or permanently rescind the application of sanctions on Syria, such as Syria's State Sponsors of Terrorism designation, then specific notification and certification requirements to Congress under law may apply.

In the interim, the continuing application of the Caesar Act and Executive Order 13894, as amended, provide a basis for the U.S. government to reimpose some sanctions on Syrian actors if the President and his Administration determine that doing so is in U.S. interests. In May 2025, Secretary Rubio said "the President has made clear his expectation that relief will be followed by prompt action by the Syrian government on important policy priorities."¹⁰⁰ That month, the Department of the Treasury said, "U.S. sanctions relief has been extended to the new Syrian government with the understanding that the country will not offer a safe haven for terrorist organizations and will ensure the security of its religious and ethnic minorities. The U.S. will continue monitoring Syria's progress and developments on the ground."¹⁰¹

Earlier in May, the State Department had announced that Secretary of State Rubio recertified Syria as a "not fully cooperating country" (NFCC) under section 40A of the Arms Export Control Act.¹⁰² The Government of Syria is consequently denied trade with the United States in defense articles and defense services under section 40A of the Arms Export Control Act.¹⁰²

U.S. Targeted Terrorism Sanctions

In May 2018, the executive branch added Hayat Tahrir al Sham as an alias of the Nusrah Front, which until July 2025 was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. As of September, HTS remains a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) entity under Executive Order 13224. The executive branch designated Sharaa as an SDGT pursuant to Executive Order 13224 in 2013; as of September, he remains so designated, as does interim Interior Minister Anas Khattab. Sharaa has described U.S. terrorism related sanctions on him, HTS, and other former HTS figures as no longer warranted in light of subsequent counterterrorism actions and commitments and their post-Asad decision to disband armed groups, including HTS. The executive branch retains authority to amend or rescind SDGT designations under current law.

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U.S.C. §§8791-8795), and the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-175; 22 U.S.C. §2151 note) provide authority for sanctions that may be applied to entities in Syria.

¹⁰⁰ Secretary of State Marco Rubio, "Providing Sanctions Relief for the Syrian People," May 23, 2025.

¹⁰¹ U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Issues Immediate Sanctions Relief for Syria," May 23, 2025.

¹⁰² 22 U.S.C. §2781. The Secretary of State makes this determination annually by May 15; Syria has been designated each year since the provision was first enacted in 1996. U.S. State Department, Tammy Bruce, Department Spokesperson, "Certification of Cuba as a Not Fully Cooperating Country," May 13, 2025.

armed groups, including HTS. The executive branch retains authority to amend or rescind SDGT designations under current law.

European Union (EU) Sanctions

On May 28, the EU announced that it was lifting all non-security-based economic restrictive measures on Syria and removing 24 entities from its asset blocking list, including the Central Bank of Syria. The EU amended its remaining Syria sanctions measures to focus on Asad regime individuals and their international backers and extended them to 2026. The EU also placed human rights- based sanctions on those reportedly involved in the March 2025 sectarian violence in western Syria.¹⁰³

U.S. Tariffs

President Trump has increased tariffs on U.S. imports from all global trading partners.¹⁰⁴ On July 31, the President issued an executive order adjusting country-specific tariffs that set the tariff on Syria to 41 percent.¹⁰⁵ CRS has not observed any Administration comment on Syria's specific tariff rate. In 2024, U.S. exports to Syria were valued at \$2 million and U.S. imports were valued at \$11 million.¹⁰⁶

Admission of U.S. Syrian Partners and Status of Syrian Nationals

Since 2014, U.S. operations against the Islamic State in Syria have relied on partnership with local forces. Members of Congress have debated the eligibility of these local partners for admission into the United States in the case of attack by Turkish and/or Syrian forces. Several bills in the 116th Congress would have extended the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program to foreign nationals employed by the U.S. military in Syria, as well as their immediate families. The Syrian SIV programs proposed by these bills generally were modeled on the temporary SIV programs for Iraqis and Afghans who worked for or on behalf of the U.S. government. During the 117th Congress, Representatives Jason Crow and Michael Waltz reintroduced one such bill, the Syrian Partner Protection Act (H.R. 2838), which would have provided SIV status to a national of Syria or a stateless person who has habitually resided in Syria that had “partnered with, was employed by, or worked for or directly with the United States Government in Syria as an interpreter, translator, intelligence analyst, or in another sensitive and trusted capacity, on or after January 1, 2014, for an aggregate period of not less than 1 year.”

The Biden Administration in January 2024 redesignated Syria as a country whose nationals are eligible for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States through September 30,

¹⁰³ The EU measures target the Sultan Sulaiman Shah Brigade, the Hamza Division, and the Sultan Murad Division. Official Journal of the European Union, Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/1110 of 28 May 2025.

¹⁰⁴ See, Presidential 2025 Tariff Actions: Timeline and Status, by Keigh E. Hammond and William F. Burkhart.

¹⁰⁵ The White House, Further Modifying the Reciprocal Tariff Rates, July 31, 2025.

¹⁰⁶ U.S. International Trade Administration, TradeStats Express data accessed August 1, 2025.

2025.¹⁰⁷ Nearly 40,000 Syrian nationals had been admitted to the United States as refugees from FY2014 through FY2023.¹⁰⁸

Regional and International Initiatives and Interests

The nature, duration, and effects of the Syria crisis and the intervention of external actors have made the outcome of Syria's transition and the country's stability a matter of national security concern for some countries across the Middle East region and beyond. As of September 2025, notable statements and developments involving selected third parties include

Israel. The fall of the Asad regime brought an end to fifty years of rule by antagonists of Israel that facilitated the transfer of support from Iran to Israel's enemies in Lebanon and beyond. During Israel's wars against Hamas and Hezbollah following the attacks of October 7, 2023, Israel continued air strikes on Syrian territory; in September 2024, it conducted a special forces raid against Syrian missile factories.¹⁰⁹ Israel has conducted military strikes across Syria since Asad's ouster, targeting sites associated with Syrian weapons of mass destruction and defense research programs, conventional weapons, and air defense systems. Israel also has demanded that the interim Syrian government demilitarize three southern provinces, a demand that some Syrians have publicly protested.

As the Asad regime collapsed, Israeli military forces entered the UN Disengagement Observation Force (UNDOF) buffer zone established by the 1974 Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement. From 1974 until Asad's ouster, most international controversy regarding control over Israel-Syria border areas focused on Israel's 1981 annexation of areas of the Golan Heights it had captured in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Syria's interim authorities report that they have communicated with UNDOF officials and expressed their willingness to return Syrian state forces to areas adjacent to the UNDOF zone provided that Israel removes its force from areas within and beyond the zone.

In a letter to the United Nations, Israel stated that it had taken "limited and temporary measures to counter any further threat to its citizens," and that the (Israel Defense Forces) IDF have deployed temporarily in a few points and in a limited capacity east of Line A."¹¹⁰ In December 2024, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the press that Israel's seizure of control over the UNDOF zone was a "temporary defensive position until a suitable arrangement is found."¹¹¹ Subsequent media reports suggest that the IDF has been constructing more long-term infrastructure in the UNDOF zone and beyond.¹¹² In January 2025, Israeli Defense Minister Israel

¹⁰⁷ The redesignation became effective April 1, 2024 and is slated to last through September 30, 2025. According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services data provided to CRS, as of March 31, 2025, 3,860 nationals of Syria were covered by TPS. In conjunction with the redesignation, certain Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) for Syrian beneficiaries of TPS were extended through March 31, 2025. See U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Extension and Redesignation of Syria for Temporary Protected Status," 89 *Federal Register* 5562, January 29, 2024; and, CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure*, by Jill H. Wilson.

¹⁰⁸ Approximately 250 or fewer Syrian nationals were affirmatively granted asylum in the United States in each of the fiscal years from 2021 to 2023. See U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Homeland Security Statistics, *Refugees: 2023*, November 8, 2024; and, *Asylees: 2023*, October 2, 2024.

¹⁰⁹ "Israeli military says commandos raided missile plant in Syria in September," Reuters, January 2, 2025.

¹¹⁰ UN Document S/2024/887, December 9, 2024.

¹¹¹ Israeli Prime Minister's Office, "PM Netanyahu's Statement from the Golan Heights," December 8, 2024.

¹¹² Loveday Morris, Zakaria Zakaria, and Meg Kelly, "Israel is building outposts in Syria, raising local fears of occupation," *Washington Post*, February 2, 2025.

Katz said that Israeli forces intend to remain “at the top of Mount Hermon and in the security zone indefinitely to protect Golan communities, the north and all Israeli citizens.”¹¹³

As mentioned above, Israel has demanded that the new Syrian government demilitarize its three southern provinces.¹¹⁴ After a reported Israeli strike south of Damascus on February 25, Defense Minister Katz said Israel “will not allow southern Syria to become southern Lebanon. ... We will not endanger the security of our citizens. Any attempt by Syrian regime forces and the country’s terrorist organizations to establish themselves in the security zone in southern Syria—will be met with fire.”¹¹⁵

Syrian authorities reportedly have said in a letter to the U.S. government “we will not allow Syria to become a source of threat to any party, including Israel.”¹¹⁶ In a February interview, Ahmed Al Sharaa, whose family reportedly was displaced from the Golan region in 1967, said, “The Israelis need to retreat because their advancement will cause a lot of trouble in the future.... There is near-unanimous international agreement that [Israel’s] advancement is not right.”¹¹⁷

Further Israeli strikes followed sectarian violence in May and July, including strikes in Damascus on the Syrian Ministry of Defense headquarters and near facilities associated with the Syrian presidency. Israel has expressed a willingness to defend Druze communities—an offer Syrian Druze have differed over.¹¹⁸ In late August, Israeli strikes and a raid by troops killed Syrian soldiers near Kiswah.¹¹⁹

Since May, Israel and Syria have engaged in talks to ease tensions and exchange security information, including in U.S.-supported meetings following the July violence in southern Syria and Israel’s military intervention.¹²⁰ Israel has proposed the establishment of a humanitarian corridor between Israel and Suweida, an idea that the Syrian government thus far has rejected.¹²¹ Both governments have publicly acknowledged the discussions. Sharaa has not precluded future Israel-Syria ties, but current discussions reportedly focus on security arrangements in southern Syria.¹²²

¹¹³ “Syria urges IDF withdrawal from buffer zone in talks with UN observers,” AFP/Times of Israel, January 29, 2025.

¹¹⁴ “Netanyahu says Israel won’t allow Syrian forces ‘south of Damascus,’” AP, February 23, 2025; and, Sudarsan Raghavan, “Israel’s Demilitarization Demand Tests Syria’s Shaky Government,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 2025.

¹¹⁵ Times of Israel, “Katz confirms Israeli strikes in southern Syria: ‘We will not allow it to become southern Lebanon,’” February 25, 2025.

¹¹⁶ “Exclusive: Syria and Israel in direct talks focused on security, sources say,” Reuters, May 27, 2025.

¹¹⁷ “An interview with Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria’s president,” *The Economist*, February 4, 2025.

¹¹⁸ More than 100,000 Druze live in the Golan Heights. Israeli Druze serve in the Israel Defense Forces and many have ties to the Druze community in Syria. During the July fighting, Israeli and Syrian Druze both crossed their respective borders to defend coreligionists. “Israeli military strikes near Syria’s presidential palace after warning over sectarian attacks,” Associated Press, May 2, 2025; and, “Syrians in predominantly Druze city reject Israeli statements, affirm national unity,” *Arab News*, February 25, 2025.

¹¹⁹ Dov Lieber, Summer Said, and Jared Malsin, “Israeli Troops Raid Site Deep Inside Syria, Damascus Says,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 2025.

¹²⁰ “Syria has had indirect talks with Israel to calm situation, Syrian leader says,” Reuters, May 7, 2025; and, Euan Ward and Gabby Sobelman, “After Deadly Clashes, Syria and Israel Hold Direct Talks,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2025.

¹²¹ Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Syrian authorities ease roadblocks near Sweida ahead of possible reopening of Damascus road,” *The National*, August 21, 2025.

¹²² “An interview with Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria’s president,” *The Economist*, February 4, 2025; *France 24*, “Syria, Israel hold US-mediated talks in Paris on regional de-escalation,” August 20, 2025; Agence France Press, “Israel says in talks ‘right now’ on south Syria demilitarization,” August 28, 2025.

The prospect of Turkish-Syrian military cooperation and the possible stationing in Syria of additional Turkish military forces—including air and air defense forces in central Syria—has emerged as a matter of concern for Israel’s government.¹²³ Turkish and Israeli officials have taken deconfliction steps to reduce the continuing potential for military confrontation.

Turkey. Turkey has emerged as perhaps the most influential international actor in Syria and offered security and economic assistance to the interim government; Turkish and Syrian officials have exchanged high level visits and Turkish military forces remain present in areas of northern Syria. Turkey’s stated principal concerns in Syria appear to relate to the presence and activities of PKK members in areas controlled by the U.S.-backed SDF. Turkey may also harbor a basic opposition to the SDF and enduring concerns about potential Syrian Kurdish autonomy.

Turkey has offered military training and support to Syria’s interim authorities, and Sharaa and other interim leaders have adopted positions on the future of the SDF, its integration with national forces, and the political future of northeast Syria that appear to align with Turkish preferences. In August 2025, Turkey and Syria signed a “joint training consultancy memorandum of understanding [MOU]” as an apparent step toward a substantive military cooperation deal.¹²⁴ Turkish officials reportedly anticipate strengthening Syria’s regular army with arms and other forms of support in hopes of helping it establish long-term stability.¹²⁵ While Turkish and Syrian officials apparently are discussing the potential deployment of Turkish troops to some Syrian bases, the MOU reportedly does not address that point.¹²⁶ Additionally, Turkey reportedly plans to avoid providing any weapons that could provoke Israel given existing tensions.¹²⁷

Closer Syrian-Turkish official ties and an expanded Turkish military presence in Syria may provide Turkey with greater regional influence, and could affect the perceptions and security calculations of Israel, Jordan, Iraq, and other Arab states.

UN agencies report that there were more than 2.52 million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey as of August 21, 2025.¹²⁸

Arab States. Syria’s interim authorities are actively pursuing engagement with Arab states, whose interests and motives may differ. For instance, Qatar may share Turkey’s comfort with Sharaa’s Islamist orientation, while Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates may harbor reservations. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud facilitated Sharaa’s meeting in Saudi Arabia with President Trump and, via phone, with President Erdogan of Turkey, and the kingdom and the UAE have announced plans for large investments in Syria. Saudi Arabia and Qatar jointly paid Syria’s outstanding debt to the World Bank, enabling new lending, and they announced three months of joint support for Syrian public sector salaries beginning in June. Iraq’s government invited Sharaa to attend the May Arab Summit in Baghdad, but he declined amid some Iraqi groups’ vocal opposition because of his past associations with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State group. Jordan and Syria have continued to exchange official visits and Jordan joined

¹²³ “Israel, Turkey said to agree to prevent clashes in Syria, establish hotline,” *Times of Israel*, May 21, 2025.

¹²⁴ Soylyu, “Turkey-Syria defence deal covers training and weapons supply.”

¹²⁵ Ezgi Akin, “After inking military pact, Turkey to provide Syria with weapons, training,” *Al-Monitor*, August 14, 2025.

¹²⁶ Soylyu, “Turkey-Syria defence deal covers training and weapons supply.”

¹²⁷ Akin, “After inking military pact, Turkey to provide Syria with weapons, training.”

¹²⁸ UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Syria Refugee Response, at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>.

other Arab states and Turkey in rejecting Israel's July 2025 military strikes inside Syria in the context of intercommunal violence in the southern province of Suweida.¹²⁹

Iran. Syria's interim authorities control areas formerly used by Iran and Iran-backed armed groups to move weapons and personnel into and beyond Syria; Asad's ouster severed long-established and important links in the networks Iran has used to project regional power. Syria's interim authorities have reported interdicting some small arms shipments to Lebanon, but have not accused Iran or Iran-backed groups of violating Syrian sovereignty on a broad or recurring basis. This may not prove that Iran is not attempting to do so. In December, Ahmed Al Sharaa expressed his hope that Iran and Syria could have normal relations, based on mutual respect for sovereignty and noninterference.¹³⁰

Interim authorities in Syria have reportedly disrupted attempted Islamic State attacks against the Sayyida Zeinab shrine in Damascus, the protection of which Iran and pro-Iran armed groups used as a predicate and recruiting tool for their presence in Syria. A group known as Syrian Islamic Resistance Front claims to have conducted attacks since December 2024 on Israeli forces in the Golan Heights region from Syria: its statements feature a logo similar to Iran-backed armed groups in Lebanon and Iraq.¹³¹

Syria's transitional government, did not join other Arab states in condemning Israeli and U.S. military operations against Iran in June 2025. Press and social media reports suggest that Israeli aircraft transited Syrian airspace en route to and from Iran, with Israeli strikes against military equipment in Syria during December and January 2025 having eliminated Syria's already limited ability to control its airspace.

Russia. Russia was Asad's most important military supporter. The presence in Syria of Russian air, ground, and naval forces both bolstered Russia's regional power projection abilities and served as a bulwark for the Asad government. Russia's decision in late 2024 to limit its military intervention on Asad's behalf, and its rapid decision to engage with Syria's transitional authorities, illustrate the enduring nature of Russia's interests in Syria, with continued military access as a key Russian priority. Russian personnel and equipment remain at the Hmeimim air base and the Tartous Naval Facility.¹³² An August press report also suggests that Russian forces have strengthened their presence at the Qamishli airport in northeast Syria.¹³³

In a December interview, Sharaa described Syria's relationship with Russia as long established and strategic and said the interim government would work to establish a new strategic relationship with Russia based on respect for the sovereignty of the Syrian state. In April, Sharaa confirmed he had requested the return by Russia of former Syrian president Asad, who has been granted asylum in Moscow.¹³⁴ In July, the Syrian Foreign Minister visited Moscow "to start a necessary discussion ... based on the lessons of the past, to formulate the future."¹³⁵ Russia has invited Sharaa to attend a Russia-Arab League summit in October 2025.

¹²⁹ Saudi Press Agency, "Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAE, Bahrain, Turkiye, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon and Egypt Support Syrian Sovereignty," July 18, 2025.

¹³⁰ MEMRI Translation #11695, reviewed by CRS, Source - Al-Arabiya Network, December 29, 2024.

¹³¹ Jerusalem Post, "IDF opens fire on armed group in Syrian Golan, pro-Assad group claims responsibility," February 1, 2025.

¹³² LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, April 1, 2025–June 30, 2025, p. 26.

¹³³ Paul Iddon, "What Russia's Military Is Doing In This Strategic Syria Airport," *Forbes*, August 15, 2025.

¹³⁴ Christina Goldbaum, "Syria's Jihadist-Turned-President Seeks New Allies," *New York Times*, April 23, 2025.

¹³⁵ Reuters, "Russia's Putin meets Syrian FM in Moscow, Sharaa invited to Russia-Arab summit," July 31, 2025.

Russia's role in arming and training Syrian military personnel for decades may suggest that Syrian interim authorities could look to Russia as one source of military equipment and support as they rebuild and rearm Syrian security forces. Russia's seat on the UN Security Council also gives it influence over international decisions related to Syria.

Legislation and Hearings in the 119th Congress

In the 119th Congress:

- H.R. 1327 would direct the Secretary of Homeland Security to conduct a threat assessment of terrorist threats to the United States posed by individuals in Syria with an affiliation with a Foreign Terrorist Organization or a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity.
- S.J.Res. 6 would direct the President to remove U.S. armed forces from hostilities in or affecting Syria within 30 days of adoption and unless and until a declaration of war or specific authorization is enacted.
- H.R. 3941 and S. 2133 would repeal the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act (22 U.S.C. §8791 note). H.R. 4241 would repeal the Caesar Act and the Syria Human Rights Accountability Act of 2012 (22 U.S.C. §§8791 et seq.).
- H.R. 4427, the Syria Sanctions Accountability Act of 2025, would amend the Caesar Act and establish other reviews and conditions related to sanctions relief for Syria.
- H.R. 4779, the National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2026, would appropriate funds for the conditional provision of foreign assistance in Syria.
- In the House and Senate, versions of a FY2026 NDAA and (H.R. 3838/S. 2296) and defense appropriations acts (H.R. 4016/S. 2572) would authorize and appropriate funds for continued military assistance to U.S. partners in Syria.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a full committee hearing (S. Hrg. 119-37) on February 13, 2025 entitled "After Assad: Navigating Syria Policy."

The House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa held a hearing on June 5, 2025 entitled "After Assad: The Future of Syria."

The House Financial Services Committee held a full committee markup on H.R. 4427, the Syria Sanctions Accountability Act of 2025, on July 22, 2025.

Outlook and Issues Before Congress

Syria's interim authorities are asserting domestic and international legitimacy based on their leadership of the late 2024 military campaign that dislodged Bashar Al Asad and the acceptance to date by Syrians of the interim Constitutional Declaration and decisions they have taken. They are attempting to project an image of calm inevitability for their continuing leadership of the transition, amid sectarian violence, incomplete territorial control, and calls from Syrians and international observers for a more inclusive process and greater protection for minorities. As procedural steps in the transition continue, Syrian leaders face daunting challenges as they seek to reconstruct a functioning state apparatus that can protect Syrian sovereignty and citizens, rebuild national infrastructure, and establish a self-sustaining, productive economy.

Interim leaders' willingness to share power and the durability of the peace that has broadly prevailed in Syria since mid-December 2024 may continue to be tested. Stressors may include decisions made regarding the political and security future of northeast Syria; the relative integration and participation in the transition of Druze communities in southern Syria; the protection of the rights of Syrian minorities and women; the possibility of renewed or expanded foreign military intervention; and the willingness of Syrians to uphold order in the face of severe humanitarian crises, economic deprivation, sectarian violence, and vigilantism.

Outside actors continue to approach Syria in pursuit of their discrete interests. Many regional countries have pledged support for the transition in Syria, but the compatibility of their goals and Syrians' willingness to embrace them are uncertain. Israeli military operations in Syria and the Golan Heights region, Israeli actions to protect Syrian minority groups, and Israeli government demands that Syria's new government accept limits on Syrian government security and military operations in southern Syria may lead to confrontation. The possibility of Turkish military intervention in the context of disputes over the future of the northeast remains present. Outside actors, including the United States, may weigh concerns about the resumption of conflict in Syria and the reemergence of transnational terrorist threats alongside goals of supporting and shaping the political transition, stabilization, and reconstruction efforts.

In this context, Congress and the Trump Administration may continue to reassess U.S. interests in Syria and debate approaches toward securing them relative to U.S. priorities elsewhere. U.S. policy toward Syria since 2011 has pursued parallel and at times competing interests and has featured a mix of evolving diplomatic, military, assistance, and sanctions efforts. Views in Congress and successive Administrations regarding how the United States should approach Syria policy have at times been divergent and have changed over time and in response to developments at home and abroad. Looking ahead, the 119th Congress may use its national security tools and authorities to examine and shape U.S. policies toward Syria's interim government, various Syrian groups, and regional and international parties active in Syria. As it does so, Members may consider and debate three key policy questions:

Should the United States continue its military and counterterrorism operations in Syria?

Eliminating threats to the United States and U.S. national security interests posed by terrorist groups active in Syria has been a consistent goal of U.S. policy toward Syria since the Obama Administration. Through August 2025, the United States has maintained a military presence in Syria tasked with conducting operations against terrorist groups and supporting local partner forces in ensuring the enduring defeat of the Islamic State organization. This has included the provision of support to partner forces that detain thousands of IS fighters and secure camps housing tens of thousands of individuals from formerly IS-controlled areas. Congress has provided authority and funding to the Department of Defense on an annual basis for these operations, in addition to operational funds for U.S. Central Command and other military components to conduct related activities.

As President Trump considers and makes decisions about the future of U.S. military operations in Syria, Congress is considering whether or not to continue to provide related funding and authorities and, if so, on what terms. The FY2025 National Defense Authorization Act extends through December 2025 authorities for U.S. train and equip programs in Syria.¹³⁶ While Congress could act independently of the Administration's requests, to date, congressional consideration of

¹³⁶ The act did not include a Senate-reported provision that would have required the Administration to certify the independent capabilities of U.S.-backed Syrian forces before reducing the number of U.S. troops in northeast Syria below 400.

defense appropriations and authorizations for FY2026 has not featured proposals for substantial revisions of U.S. policies and programs.

The fluid political and security situation inside Syria raises continuing questions about the relationships between U.S. partner forces and Syria's interim government. Congress may consider whether U.S. assistance should continue, change, or end in light of developments and factors in Syria such as the posture and policies of Syria's interim authorities, the participation of U.S. partner forces in Syria's transition, or any emergent hostility or conflict involving interim authorities, other countries such as Turkey or Israel, and U.S. partner forces. Partner force protection concerns, including questions related to evacuation and immigration, have emerged in other contexts such as Afghanistan and Iraq where the United States has ended military and counterterrorism efforts conducted with partner forces.

Syria's interim president Ahmed Al Sharaa has emphasized that he seeks relationships with other countries, including the United States, based on respect for Syria's sovereignty. In a February interview, Sharaa said, "In light of the new Syrian state, I believe any illegal military presence should not continue. Any military presence in a sovereign state should take place under a certain agreement, and there has been no such agreement between us and the United States of America."¹³⁷ With the SDF agreeing in March 2025 to begin a process of integrating with the Syrian state, U.S. security relations with both the SDF and interim authorities may face pressures to change.

Possible questions Members may consider for oversight and legislative purposes include

- What is the current nature of Syria-based terrorist threats? To what extent do groups active in Syria threaten the United States directly or indirectly? To what extent are U.S. interests and partners threatened?
- How capable are U.S. partner forces and the interim Syrian government of independently combatting terrorist threats in Syria? On what timeline and with what assistance might these entities be capable of providing security for Syria independently? What role are foreign terrorist fighters or other extremists playing in Syria's new security forces? What are the prospects for demobilization and disarmament of armed groups in Syria? What would such efforts entail?
- Should the United States continue to operate militarily in Syria? Should Congress act to support or limit Administration actions to change the U.S. military presence or operations in Syria? What viable alternatives to U.S. leadership and resources exist, if any? How long and at what cost should the United States be prepared to combat terrorist threats in Syria?
- Should the United States continue to operate militarily without the consent of Syria's interim government? On what basis and legal justifications should any ongoing U.S. military operations in Syria take place?
- How might the integration of U.S. partner forces in Syria with national forces affect U.S. programs and interests? What changes, if any, should result in U.S. operations or engagement? Should the United States seek a status of forces agreement or counterterrorism and defense cooperation agreement with interim authorities?
- What consideration or protection, if any, does the United States owe Syrian partner forces that have supported U.S. counterterrorism objectives to date? What

¹³⁷ Reuters, "Syria's Sharaa aims to restore US ties, no contacts yet with Trump administration," February 4, 2025.

posture should the United States adopt with regard to the relationships between its Syrian partners and Syria's emergent new government? How might any such obligations best be reconciled with the security concerns of U.S. allies and any broader U.S. reputational interests?

What type of relationship should the United States have with Syria's interim government and other entities in post-Asad Syria?

On May 13, 2025, President Donald Trump said during a visit to Saudi Arabia that his Administration is “currently exploring normalizing relations with Syria's new government.”¹³⁸ The United States suspended diplomatic operations in Syria during the 2011-2024 conflict, but did not sever diplomatic relations or durably transfer recognition to any other Syrian entity. In December 2024, then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken said “The United States will recognize and fully support a future Syria government that results from ... an inclusive and transparent process.”¹³⁹ President Trump's engagement with President Al Sharaa and ongoing engagement with interim government leaders by Special Envoy for Syria Barrack reflect a de facto U.S. recognition of the transitional authorities, but, to date, the United States has not formally recognized the interim government or invited it to send diplomatic representatives to the United States on a lasting basis.

The Administration has begun the process of rescinding U.S. sanctions on the Syrian government and Syrian state entities that were imposed under the previous Syrian government, while maintaining targeted sanctions on Asad regime officials and maintaining a framework that would provide for the imposition of new sanctions on Syrian actors if necessary. Uncertainty persists over the inclusivity of the transition and the interim government's approach to minority communities and areas controlled by U.S. partner forces.

Possible questions Members may consider for oversight and legislative purposes include

- When and on what terms, if any, should the U.S. government reestablish regular diplomatic relations with Syria's interim government? What diplomatic presence should the United States and Syria have in each other's country, and what costs and opportunities might accompany the return of U.S. diplomatic personnel to Syria on a permanent basis?
- When, how, and on what terms should the United States alter prevailing sanctions on Syria, Syrian state entities, or individuals and groups in Syria, including U.S.-designated terrorist entities and individuals? What specific executive or legislative sanctions measures, if any, ought to be altered and how? Under what circumstances might sanctions be reimposed and for what purposes? When and under what circumstances should the United States release any Syrian state funds blocked in the United States? What measures can Congress directly affect and what measures are within the President's discretion?

Should the United States provide Syria-related foreign assistance and humanitarian assistance?

Through January 2025, the U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development provided a range of foreign assistance and security assistance in Syria, focused on

¹³⁸ Ben Hubbard, Jonathan Swan, and Erika Solomon, “Trump Says U.S. Will Lift Sanctions on Syria Under New Government,” *New York Times*, May 14, 2025.

¹³⁹ Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, “The Syrian People Will Decide the Future of Syria,” December 10, 2024.

areas outside the control of the Syrian government.¹⁴⁰ This included stabilization programs focused on essential services and local governance, civil society, support for democratic governance, education, demining, agriculture, support to independent media, community security, livelihoods, and economic growth. U.S. humanitarian assistance supported relief efforts for internally displaced persons in Syria, select Syrian communities, and Syrian refugees in regional countries. The Trump Administration's review of U.S. foreign assistance, the reorganization of executive branch entities responsible for implementing foreign assistance, and changes to the U.S. military presence in Syria altered U.S. capabilities and programs. Some assistance programs have ended, some have changed, and some continue on previous terms.

Congress may inquire about the extent to which changes to U.S. foreign assistance programs and implementation in Syria instituted by the Trump Administration reflect lasting changes to U.S. policy and priorities there. Congress may consult Administration officials, implementing partners, and other observers to determine whether prevailing efforts are aligned with U.S. priorities and interests in Syria and whether alternative approaches are advisable.

Past congressional and executive branch concerns have focused on obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria, the potential diversion of U.S. humanitarian and security assistance by entities in Syria, and the extent to which U.S.-funded assistance programs may benefit Syrian entities with whom the United States has policy differences. While many of these concerns were directly linked to the antagonistic relationship between the Asad government and the U.S. government, and Asad's exploitation of international aid and recovery efforts, Congress may also consider these issues when examining proposals for assistance programs in post-Asad Syria, and in considering Administration requests for authorities or funds.

Possible questions Members may consider for oversight and legislative purposes include

- How have the Trump Administration's 2025 foreign assistance policy changes affected U.S. assistance programs and policies in Syria and regional countries? What specific programs and contracts have changed and how have implementing partners and program beneficiaries been affected? How have other countries or entities responded? Have any acted to replace U.S. funding and/or implementation of programs supported by the United States through 2024?
- What are Syria's post-Asad security, economic, reconstruction, and humanitarian needs? To what extent, and how, are such needs being assessed and met? What resources and partners are engaging to provide support? What support, if any, should the United States provide? Using what authorities, resources, and mechanisms? For how long, on what terms, and at what cost?

¹⁴⁰ For a review of these programs see LIG-OIR, Report to the U.S. Congress, October 1, 2024–December 31, 2024, p. 84-99.

Appendix. Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS): Leadership, Insurgency, Terrorism, and Governance

Ahmed Hussein Al Sharaa was born in 1982 to a Syrian family from Damascus.¹⁴¹ According to Sharaa, his family lived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and returned to Syria when he was seven. Sharaa has said his grandfather was displaced from the Golan Heights amid Israel-Syria fighting during the June 1967 Six-Day War: Sharaa apparently adopted the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al Jolani/Jawlani/Golani in reference to his family's roots in that area.

Sharaa has said he travelled to Iraq in 2003, arriving just prior to the U.S. invasion, and that, after a brief return to Syria, he again travelled to Iraq in 2005 and joined the organization that would become Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Sharaa claims he differed with the group's anti-Shia Muslim sectarian ideology and targeting of civilians, but Sharaa remained an AQI member and, according to a former U.S. intelligence official, he led an AQI cell.¹⁴² U.S. forces arrested Sharaa around 2005 or 2006, and imprisoned him in Camp Bucca in southern Iraq until late 2010 or early 2011, when he was released.¹⁴³ Sharaa reportedly used a false identity while in Iraq. Sharaa says he used his time in prison to develop plans for toppling the Syrian government. Upon Sharaa's release, he sought out former associates, who were then organized and operating as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

Sharaa has said that after the start of the anti-Asad uprising in Syria in 2011, he shared his plans for waging an insurgency in Syria with AQI/ISI leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Sharaa said Baghdadi agreed to provide limited support, and Sharaa departed Iraq for Syria with funding and

Figure A-1. Interim President of the Syrian Arab Republic Ahmed Al Sharaa



Source: Above – Associated Press, 2016. Below – Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), February 25, 2025.

¹⁴¹ Biographical and historical information drawn from: *Frontline*, “The Frontline Interviews: The Jihadist,” June 1, 2021; Raya Jalabi, “The secret history of Syria’s new leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa,” *FT Magazine*, March 7, 2025; Aaron Zelin, interview with John Haltiwanger, “What to Know About the Man Who Toppled Assad,” *Foreign Policy*, December 11, 2024; Zelin, “Jihadi ‘Counterterrorism’: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Versus the Islamic State,” U.S. Military Academy Combatting Terrorism Center (CTC), *CTC Sentinel*, February 2023; Hassan Hassan, “Two Houses Divided: How Conflict in Syria Shaped the Future of Jihadism,” *CTC Sentinel*, October 2018; and Charles Lister, “How al-Qa’ida Lost Control of its Syrian Affiliate: The Inside Story,” *CTC Sentinel*, February 2018.

¹⁴² PBS Frontline Interview with Nada Bakos, *Frontline*, “The Frontline Interviews: The Jihadist,” June 1, 2021.

¹⁴³ Sharaa reportedly was detained while using a false identity.

a small number of AQI/ISI cadres. In late 2011, *Jabhat al Nusra Li-Ahl al Sham* (the Support Front for the People of Syria, or Nusra Front) began targeting the Asad government. According to the U.S. government, from November 2011 to December 2012, the Nusra Front claimed “nearly 600 attacks – ranging from more than 40 suicide attacks to small arms and improvised explosive device operations – in major city centers.” The State Department described the Nusra Front in 2012 as “an attempt by AQI to hijack the struggles of the Syrian people for its own malign purposes.”¹⁴⁴

Under Sharaa’s leadership, the Nusra Front became a leading actor in the insurgency against Asad, drawing greater support from some other Syrian factions. In April 2013, Baghdadi attempted to reassert direct control over the Nusra Front and announced that Sharaa’s group would be dissolved into the newly announced Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIL/ISIS). Sharaa said he and his group were not consulted on the change, and they pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri and said the Nusra Front would continue its operations.¹⁴⁵ While Islamic State and Al Qaeda leaders disputed global leadership of the jihadist movement in 2014 and 2015, IS and Nusra Front fighters clashed in Syria, with IS forces expelling the Nusra Front and other armed anti-Asad groups from large areas of northern and central Syria.

Sharaa announced the dissolution of the Nusra Front in July 2016 and rebranded the group as *Jabhat Fatah al Sham* (the Syrian Victory Front). In January 2017, Sharaa merged his group with some other armed Islamist opponents of Asad and established *Hayat Tahrir al Sham* (the Organization for the Liberation of Syria). Al Qaeda rejected Sharaa’s decisions and accused Sharaa of betrayal. Several Al Qaeda ideologues and operatives left the new coalition. Sharaa later directed HTS security operations against Al Qaeda-linked figures.

By 2018, HTS had become the de facto authority in Idlib province in northwest Syria, coopting some rivals and suppressing some groups’ opposition to its leadership through force. Some Al Qaeda-linked elements of HTS opposed reported HTS security cooperation with Turkey and HTS leaders’ emphasis on local security and administration. These elements split from HTS, forming *Hurras Al Din* (Guardians of Religion). As of 2025, U.S. military strikes continue to target Hurras Al Din members.

HTS established the Syrian Salvation Government in Idlib to administer limited services and provide governance. HTS at times clashed with groups operating under the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army coalition, but coordinated with them and other Islamist armed groups under a security mechanism known as the *Fatah al Mubin* (Clear Victory) Operations Room. This network, in coordination with Turkey’s armed forces, resisted pro-Asad forces’ efforts to retake Idlib province. The arrangements were the precursor to the Military Operations Department that launched the “Deterring Aggression” operation from Idlib in November 2024 that seized Aleppo, Homs, and Hama, and ultimately toppled the Asad regime.

¹⁴⁴ U.S. State Department, “Terrorist Designations of the al-Nusrah Front as an Alias for al-Qa’ida in Iraq,” December 11, 2012.

¹⁴⁵ *France24*/Agence France Presse (AFP), “Syria’s al Nusra militants vow allegiance to al Qaeda,” April 10, 2013.

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