

## Israel on the cusp of full-scale intervention in Syria

### ARVAK Center comment, July 15, 2025

#### **Abstract**

*ARVAK's comment analyzes the critical escalation of the situation surrounding the Druze communities in Syria's As-Suwayda governorate. The deployment of Damascus's government forces, predominantly composed of radical Sunni groups, has provoked an Israeli ultimatum demanding the immediate withdrawal of these formations under threat of direct military intervention. The comment asserts that these conflicts are not spontaneous but rather instigated by external actors. It emphasizes Israel's strategic interest in preventing Syria's unification and strengthening, aligning with long-articulated goals of demilitarizing southern Syria and establishing a de facto federalization with a weakened central authority. The conclusion posits that despite Damascus's efforts towards stabilization, Tel Aviv is actively constructing a "legitimate basis" for invasion, leveraging a "window of opportunity" amidst comprehensive U.S. support and a clear aim to realize the "Greater Israel" concept. This forebodes Israel's potential transition to full-scale military operations in Syria.*

**Keywords:** Syria, Israel, Druze, As-Suwayda, Ahmed ash-Sharaa, HTS, SNA, geopolitical escalation, military intervention, Syrian unification, Greater Israel.

#### **1. Escalation in Syrian Druze communities: factors of destabilization**

In the second decade of July 2025, the situation surrounding Syria's Druze communities reached a critical point of tension. Raids by Arab-Bedouin militias in Druze-populated areas of Syria, particularly in the As-Suwayda governorate, instigated large-scale clashes. Subsequently, the provisional government in Damascus authorized the deployment of regular army units and security forces into the affected regions of the republic. Ostensibly, this measure was presented as an attempt by the central authority to de-escalate the situation and separate the warring factions. Representatives of the provisional government in Damascus articulated this as the justification for their intervention in the conflict.

However, a critical issue arises from the composition of these deployed government forces, which are predominantly fighters from the radical groups "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham" (HTS) and the "Syrian National Army" (SNA). These formations adhere to Sunni Islam and consider the Druze to be their ideological adversaries. Syrian Sunni Islamists currently uphold a 13th-century fatwa issued by a prominent Islamic theologian, which declares Druze to be non-Muslims deserving of persecution due to their perceived apostasy. Israel is leveraging this circumstance, having issued an ultimatum to Syria's provisional President Ahmed ash-Sharaa, demanding the immediate withdrawal of these "*government forces*", which Tel Aviv identifies as illicit armed groups, from As-Suwayda. The Israeli side asserts that these units cannot be impartial in the conflict between the Druze and Sunni Bedouins and are, in fact, merely contributing to the escalation of violence against the religious minority, mirroring events in March of the current year concerning Alawites in northwestern Syria.

Conversely, it would be highly disadvantageous for the government of A. ash-Sharaa to exacerbate tensions in Druze-populated areas or to permit mass killing of this religious

minority. A policy of oppressing or eliminating the Druze does not align with A. ash-Sharaa's efforts to unify Syria and consolidate all ethno-confessional groups and political parties within the country. This is particularly salient given that Damascus, in cooperation with Turkey, is engaged in complex negotiations with the Kurdish administration of Rojava and commanders of the "*Syrian Democratic Forces*" (SDF) regarding modalities for the reintegration of the already de facto established Kurdish autonomy into the state system of the "*new Syria*". While Damascus would find the disarmament of Druze self-defense units highly beneficial, it recognizes that such a task is currently infeasible. Consequently, the government of A. ash-Sharaa is unlikely to be the instigator of provocations in As-Suwayda, as such actions would yield no productive outcomes for Damascus beyond undermining its plans for consolidating centrifugal forces within the country.

## **2. Israeli interests and rhetoric: prepositioning for intervention**

In this context, the most plausible hypothesis posits that the clashes between Bedouin militias and Druze self-defense units, far from being spontaneous, were instigated by an external actor. The objective was to destabilize the situation in southern Syria and create preconditions for intervening in processes "*uncontrolled by Damascus*". In this regard, periodic statements from Tel Aviv officials since the beginning of the current year warrant attention. These statements consistently declare that Israel will not tolerate the persecution and killing of "*Druzes, who are friendly to Jews*", and that should such a trend continue, Israel would be prepared to conduct military operations within the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) to protect this confessional minority.

Insider sources in the Middle East report that, in response to the recent events in As-Suwayda, the government of the Jewish state has issued an ultimatum to Damascus, demanding the unconditional withdrawal of Syrian government-controlled military units from the governorate. These units, instead of establishing order and separating the belligerents, are allegedly contributing to the escalation of killings and pogroms against the peaceful Druze population. Failure to comply would compel Tel Aviv to escalate beyond aerial strikes on Syrian Army units (which were already observed on July 15-16) to a ground operation. Certain Israeli government representatives advocate for even more radical measures against Damascus.

For instance, Amichai Chikli, the Minister for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, in an open letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, called for the physical liquidation of A. ash-Sharaa, whom he considers a threat to Israel's security. According to A. Chikli, the provisional Syrian president is an Ankara-sponsored "*terrorist and barbarian*" who is facilitating the creation of a "*Sunni axis*" in the region to replace the "*Shiite axis*". Chikli argued that radical measures must be taken before this materializes. Subsequently, Israeli Defense Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir joined Chikli's call, promising to "*destroy the leader of the new Syria*". It is plausible that the Israeli aerial bombardment of the presidential palace in Damascus and the General Staff building on July 16, 2025, was likely intended to either liquidate A. ash-Sharaa or, at minimum, to signal Tel Aviv's extreme seriousness regarding escalation.

### **3. Israeli strategic objectives & the “Window of opportunity”**

Thus, while Damascus endeavors to stabilize the situation in As-Suwayda through force and demonstrate its sovereign right to deploy troops to the governorate, Tel Aviv is actively laying the “*legitimate foundations*” for an invasion of the SAR. The ARVAK Center has repeatedly highlighted that the unification of Syria is disadvantageous to Israel. Tel Aviv will consequently employ all permissible means to undermine processes aimed at consolidating the country around a regime in Damascus that, effectively, has been fostered by Turkey and acts as its proxy. Official representatives of the Jewish state and experts supporting the current cabinet’s policy have consistently asserted that a unified and strong Syria poses a security threat to Israel. Therefore, the preferred outcomes are either to facilitate the SAR’s complete disintegration or, as a last resort, to achieve its federalization with a weak central government and extensive privileges for peripheral regions.

For Israel, it is fundamentally important that the Kurds, Alawites, and Druze, by one means or another, remain outside Damascus’s sphere of influence, and that the entire southern Syria be demilitarized, devoid of government forces, and especially Turkish military bases. Otherwise, within several years, Israel would face the challenge of confronting a qualitatively new force: a unified Syria with a restored economy, a modernized army (Turkey plans to assist Damascus in equipping national armed forces numbering 300,000 personnel), and a leadership ideologically committed to a radical Islamic worldview. As long as this has not occurred, and while the new government in Damascus faces difficulties, Tel Aviv will evidently exploit this “*window of opportunity*” to transition to more radical measures.

The comprehensive military-political support from the U.S. Republican administration has enabled Israel to wage war on three fronts (Gaza, Lebanon, Iran) almost simultaneously and with considerable success. Consequently, Tel Aviv believes it need not fear a “*fourth front*”. Moreover, this situation is perceived not solely as a matter of national defense but also of territorial acquisitions, actualizing long-disclosed plans for the creation of the so-called “*Greater Israel*”.