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Syria

Syria's future won't be secure through Israel normalisation

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As al-Sharaa leads Syria further towards normalisation with Israel, Joseph Daher argues that alignment with the US & its allies won't bring lasting stability.

Since the fall of the Assad regime in December, the new Syrian ruling authorities led by Hay'at Tahrir Sham (HTS), have been steering Syria towards a US axis in order to consolidate their power. This would also include some form of normalisation with Israel, whether direct or indirect. However, when armed groups affiliated with Damascus recently launched a military offensive on the southern province of Suweida, tensions have heightened between Damascus and Tel Aviv.

The Israeli airstrikes on Syria that took place in mid-July were [reported](#) to have been the result of a misunderstanding following discussions between Syrian and Israeli representatives. Syria's leaders had allegedly requested Israel's approval for the reintegration of Suweida. However, whilst Israel expressed openness to limited reintegration—that is, the restoration of state services and the deployment of a limited local security force—Damascus understood this as authorisation for a full-scale military operation.

Regardless of the details, this revealed a persistent tendency by the Syrian authorities to rely on external validation and support to justify certain policies, including coercive measures against their local populations.

A few days after the strikes on Damascus, Washington pressured Israel to cease its and to conclude a truce.

Senior officials from the US, Israel, and Syria (including Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shibani) met on July 24, with the aim of addressing the security situation in southern Syria and preventing further crises. Whilst the meeting did not result in any final agreements, talks were expected to continue.

Nevertheless, [following the events in Suweida](#), wider sections of the population in the southern province have been calling for Israeli intervention. Whilst the Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa rightly responded by saying that Israel's actions undermine Syrian unity and weaken the state, it is his actions that have led to this point. Indeed, his leadership's authoritarian and exclusionary policies have paved the path towards the crimes committed against Druze communities, and as a consequence appetite for intervention for the purpose of 'protection', has grown in Suweida.

This feeling has only strengthened due to the lack of mass national and democratic alternatives.

No threat to Israel

Al-Sharaa's "tough words" to Israel have been severely weakened over the news that the Syrian foreign minister met with an Israeli delegation (including the Minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer) [in Paris](#) a few days ago to discuss de-escalation and security in the region. Moreover, for the first time in decades, the meeting was officially announced on the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) in a clear attempt to appease Tel Aviv.

This is unsurprising given the president has reiterated on numerous occasions since the beginning of the year that his rule is not a threat to Israel and apparently also [declared](#) to president Trump his readiness to join the Abraham

Accords under the “right conditions”.

Furthermore, he confirmed the existence of indirect negotiations with Israel who he said Syria shares “common enemies” (Iran and Hezbollah) with. And, in reference to this, that [Syria](#) can “can play a major role in regional security”.

Notably, Damascus also did not condemn the massive Israeli strikes against Iran as they see any weakening of the Islamic Republic (and Hezbollah in Lebanon) as a positive thing. This position is not only connected to Iran’s violent role in supporting Assad during the Syrian uprising, but it is also reflective of the political orientation of the new ruling elite which is aligned with US policies.

Syria has even increased control of its border with Lebanon where weapons destined for Hezbollah are now regularly seized.

Ultimately, all signs point to Syria’s normalisation with Israel...

Whilst there have been no official changes regarding the lifting of US sanctions on Syria, it is clear that this only became a possibility once negotiations and concessions were made regarding the controlling of Palestinian political and armed actors, and normalisation with Israel. In fact, several Palestinian officials in Syria have already been arrested, including members of the [Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement](#) and the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command, who was an ally of the former Assad regime. Some leaders of Palestinian armed factions, mostly connected to the former Syrian regime, were also forced to leave the country.

Officials from both countries have held direct talks, reportedly facilitated by the [United Arab Emirates](#), which established a backchannel for contact. And recently, Israel’s [foreign minister](#) publicly declared openness to diplomatic ties with Syria, alongside Lebanon, whilst clearly avoiding any discussion on the Golan Heights, which Israel has been occupying since 1967.

To make matters worse, in a clear show to promote normalisation, the former hospital director from Aleppo and long-time normaliser Shadi Martini, travelled to Israel directly from Syria in July to participate in a session at the Knesset. Prior to his trip, Martini had met with al-Sharaa who he said had [described](#) the event as a “once-in-a-century opportunity for the Middle East”.

No guarantees for Syria’s future

Rooting the new Syria in a strong alliance with US led axis (and its regional allies) also serves the purpose of attracting foreign investments, which have already multiplied in the past few months, particularly from Gulf investors. This is part of a larger policy to further liberalise the economy, including through privatisation of state assets and austerity measures.

However, contrary to the rhetoric of the new ruling authority and supporters of its orientation, there are no guarantees that alliance with Western powers and normalisation with Israel will improve the country’s economic and political situation.

Just look at Egypt’s evolution following the peace agreement with Israel in 1981. Despite an average of around \$1

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billion in US financial assistance since then, the socio-economic situation only worsened in the past decades. The wealth gap has considerably widened amongst the population, and poverty has continuously increased to the point that it reached over one third of the population in 2024.

At the beginning of the year, [Egyptian authorities](#) cut millions of people from accessing the national bread subsidy program and national food rationing system, as well as increasing the price of subsidised bread in order to “unburden” the state budget. These latest austerity measures came after [repeated devaluations](#) of the Egyptian national currency and a radical slashing of electricity, fuel and drinking water [subsidies](#). The situation has created rising frustration and criticism among Egyptian popular classes who are being made to pay.

More generally, Egyptian economy is in deep crisis, with an external debt that has surged from [\\$55.8 billion in 2016 to \\$164.5 billion in 2023](#), fuelled by reliance on foreign loans and high interest rates.

At the same time, Egypt increasingly lost its sovereignty to US and Israeli interests. Its role in the blockade of the occupied Gaza Strip (especially throughout the recent genocide), as well as violent repression of supporters and demonstrators [in solidarity with Palestine](#) during the Gaza March, has demonstrated this.

If this is all that awaits ‘new Syria’, the trajectory taken by the current HTS-led leadership is deeply worrying.

It seems simple to state, but a political and economic model rooted in democracy, equality and social justice, and in solidarity with Palestinian people and other regional populations against all forms of oppression should be the path to follow. Every other concession won’t save the people from the poverty and repression that has long been imposed on them. In the words of a Syrian revolutionary who wrote in the summer of 2014 from the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights: “Freedom – a shared destiny: Gaza, Yarmouk, and the Golan.”

Source: [The New Arab](#) 21 August 2025

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