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3.5. Israel

For information regarding Israel's involvement in Syria prior to November 2024, see section 1.3.5. of the EUAA COI Report Syria – Security Situation (October 2024).

Israel, while celebrating the fall of Assad as a 'historic' turn of events[555] that removed a keystone of Iran's arc of proxy and allied militias that enabled it to threaten Israel, has shown scepticism towards the insurgents who ousted Assad[556] whose ranks included jihadi fighters.[557] By early March 2025, Israeli defence minister went as far as referring to the transitional administration as a 'terrorist regime of radical Islam'.[558]

Following the fall of the Assad government, Syria witnessed an escalation of Israeli airstrikes that targeted numerous facilities, destroying radar systems, missile sites, and aircraft.[559] Simultaneously, Israeli ground forces seized control of the demilitarised buffer zone between the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights and Syria[560] and conducted ground incursions on southern Syrian territory beyond the buffer zone (mainly in Quneitra,[561] but also in Dar'a), seizing villages[562] and strategic positions and carrying out efforts to disarm local residents.[563] Meanwhile, Israeli forces continued to launch air strikes on former SAA sites in southern Syria,[564] near Damascus city[565] and on the coast.[566] While the Israeli government initially emphasised the temporary nature of the seizure of the buffer zone,[567] in late January 2025, Defence Minister Israel Katz declared that the Israeli forces would remain in that zone 'indefinitely'.[568] In late February, members of the Israeli government announced that Israel would not allow the transitional administration to establish control over Syria's south, demanding its full demilitarisation.[569]

Initially, Israel appeared to avoid targeting HTS,[570] but a mid-January 2025 drone strike killed two HTS fighters in Quneitra.[571] However, as of early March 2025, 'no major clashes' have been reported between Israeli forces and Syria's new security forces.[572]

For further information on Israel's involvement in Syria since November 2024, see section 4.4. of this report.

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