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4.4. Impact of the Israel-Hamas war on the security in Syria

Immediately following the fall of the Assad government, Israel launched hundreds of airstrikes across Syria,768 aimed at preventing the new HTS-led authorities from accessing the former Assad government's arsenal.769 This campaign came after Israel targeted multiple airstrikes on sites of Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias in November 2024770 that according to SOHR resulted in the deaths of 16 civilians.771

The December 2024 airstrikes mainly targeted airbases linked to the former Assad forces and their contents, including aircraft, military signal stations and radar systems, scientific research facilities and weapons and ammunitions warehouses. Between the fall of Assad and 18 December 2024, SOHR documented 498 airstrikes launched by Israeli aircraft in various governorates (mostly affecting Damascus, Dar'a, Latakia, and Rural Damascus).772 These airstrikes resulted in the destruction of the country's military stocks and defence infrastructure, as well as most of its missile systems and tanks.773 The Israeli armed forces were quoted as saying that during the very first wave of bombardments that occurred within a 48-hour timespan and hit about 320 targets, some 80 % of the Syria's military capabilities had been destroyed,774 although this figure has not been verified independently.775 The aerial campaign reportedly resulted in dozens of deaths.776

Responding to the demise of Assad's rule, Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that his country no longer recognised the Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement of 1974.777 Israel's armed forces subsequently occupied the UN-patrolled778 demilitarised zone779 between the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and Syrian-controlled areas of Quneitra governorate.780 Moreover, they further entered Syrian territory beyond the demilitarised zone 781 (mainly into Quneitra,782 but also into Dar'a), seizing villages783 and strategic positions. 784

As of 19 December 2024, ACLED noted that Israeli forces were controlling eight villages in the governorates of Quneitra, Dar'a, and Rural Damascus.785 They warned villagers to 'stay home', 786 created outposts and raided some homes claiming to search for weapons and Hezbollah members.787 Between 19 December 2024 and 1 February 2025, satellite imagery showed that Israel was constructing six military sites in the buffer zone and another site outside it within Syrian territory.788

Map 5: Assessed Control of Terrain in Southwestern Syria, © Institute for the Study of War and AEI's Critical Threats Project, 4 March 2025789

As Al Jazeera reported, Israeli forces expelled hundreds of residents from their villages and towns.790 Local residents were quoted as saying that Israeli forces had demolished homes791 and there were reports of some farmers being prevented from going to their fields.792 On at least two occasions, Israeli soldiers reportedly opened fire on protesters,793 including during a 20 December 2024 protest in the village of Maariya (Dar'a governorate) decrying Israeli military activities in the area, when Israeli forces were reported to have shot and injured a Syrian protester.794

Meanwhile, Israeli forces continued to launch air strikes on former SAA sites in southern Syria, 795 near Damascus city,796 and on the coast.797 While, according to sources, Israel was initially avoiding attacks on HTS targets,798 at least one Israeli drone attack in mid-January 2025 killed two HTS fighters as it targeted a convoy of the new transitional administration in Quneitra799 that had been sent de-escalate local clashes in a village.800 Further Israeli airstrikes were reported in late February and early March on military facilities and other targets in Homs, Tartous, Latakia, and Rural Damascus governorates. Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers continued near-daily operations in Quneitra and southwest Dar'a, conducting patrols, raiding farms, and blocking local routes.801

Syrian authorities have reportedly refrained from military retaliation to Israeli attacks.802 According to reports, there have been 'no major clashes' between Israeli forces and Syria's new security forces as of early March 2025.803

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