

What's Behind Israel's Escalation in Syria?



Israel has renewed its airstrikes on Syrian territory, targeting sites in the cities of Homs and Latakia, as part of an ongoing campaign of escalation and military targeting that it has pursued since the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime on December 8, 2024.

The raids drew an official condemnation from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which issued a statement saying the strikes were part of a deliberate Israeli escalation against Syrian territory.

The ministry reaffirmed Syria's rejection of any attempts to undermine its sovereignty or national security, and called on the international community—particularly the UN Security Council—to fulfill its legal and moral responsibilities.

These latest airstrikes come in the wake of official Syrian-Israeli meetings and months-long talks aimed at de-escalating tensions in southern Syria. They also precede a scheduled meeting this week between Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shibani and Israeli Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, according to Israeli media—raising questions about the timing and implications of the attacks.

Escalation Amid Talks

Following Bashar al-Assad's flight to Russia, Israel has intensified its military operations in Syria, launching repeated air raids on various regions, including Damascus and its suburbs, Homs, Latakia, and Aleppo. The strikes have primarily targeted weapons depots, with Israel justifying them as preemptive measures to

keep arms from falling into the hands of “extremists,” protect its national security, counter Turkish influence, and—ostensibly—support the Druze community.

Israeli forces have also continued incursions into villages and towns in the Quneitra countryside. Damascus has vehemently condemned these actions, describing them as obstacles to stabilization efforts and flagrant violations of international law and the 1974 Disengagement Agreement. Syria has again urged the international community to intervene and halt the attacks.

The most recent Israeli strikes occurred on the evening of Monday, September 8, when Israeli aircraft launched air raids near Homs and Latakia, according to Syrian state media. Details about the targets and extent of the damage were not disclosed, though other reports suggest the strikes hit military sites southeast of Homs and in the town of Saqoubin in rural Latakia.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry denounced the Israeli attacks as violations of international law and the UN Charter, stressing that they breached Syria's sovereignty and posed a direct threat to regional stability. It called for a firm and clear international stance to put an end to these repeated aggressions and uphold Syria's territorial integrity. Israel has not commented on the raids.

These attacks came just eleven days after an Israeli helicopter raid involving four helicopters in the town of Al-Kiswah southwest of Damascus. That operation, which lasted about two hours, followed drone strikes a day earlier on Jabal al-Mana in the same area, killing five members of Syria's Ministry of Defense forces. Surveillance and eavesdropping devices believed to be part of an Israeli espionage system had been discovered in the area beforehand.

Israeli military operations have continued in Syria despite ongoing talks between the two sides. These discussions have gradually evolved from indirect talks via mediators to unprecedented direct meetings—most notably, one officially announced by the Syrian side on August 19, when al-Shibani met with Dermer in Paris under U.S. mediation. That marked their second meeting in less than a month in the French capital.

Another meeting between al-Shibani and Dermer is expected this week, according to Israel's Kan public broadcaster, citing Israeli and Syrian sources. However, neither the Syrian side nor the U.S. mediator has confirmed or announced the meeting.

There is no official account of the content of these discussions. What has been disclosed by the Syrian side centers on efforts to de-escalate, prevent foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs, restore regional stability, monitor the ceasefire in Suwayda Province, and reactivate the 1974 Disengagement

Agreement.

Some media reports, based on leaks and unnamed sources, have speculated about a “soft normalization” or a “security agreement,” though Syria’s Foreign Ministry has denied any such deal is forthcoming.

A U.S. State Department official told Noon Post that Washington continues to encourage a permanent agreement between Israel and Syria, without elaborating on the nature of such a deal.

The official added that President Donald Trump has laid out a clear vision for a prosperous Middle East and a stable Syria at peace with itself and its neighbors. Peace between neighbors—including Israel and Syria—is seen as a cornerstone of that vision.

Military Objectives and a “Compound Arrogance”

Israel continues to strike military sites within Syria, accompanied by hostile media rhetoric against the new Syrian leadership, which it labels a “radical jihadist entity.” At the same time, it has been promoting expansionist projects such as the “David Corridor” and “Greater Israel.”

Wael Alwan, political analyst and executive director of the Jusoor Center for Studies, told Noon Post that the strikes on Homs and Latakia reflect Israel’s ongoing policy of military intervention in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime. This policy involves targeting any Syrian military movements—whether by regular army units in southern Syria or deployments of heavy weapons viewed by Israel as a threat, including warplanes, air defenses, radars, and long-range missiles.

Alwan explains that Israel operates militarily in Syria across two main zones: Southern Syria, which it believes should remain free of any military presence.

The rest of Syrian territory, which Israel insists must be devoid of any weaponry that could pose a future threat.

Regarding the timing of the latest Israeli raids, Alwan does not believe they are tied to the negotiation track, which currently appears stable. He notes that U.S. mediation is progressing well toward achieving security understandings, including disengagement, ceasefire agreements, and the prevention of direct confrontations.

According to Alwan, the negotiations represent a separate political track that is neither influenced by Israeli field operations nor affects them. He acknowledges that Israel may resort to military escalation to apply pressure if talks stall, but insists that the September 8 strikes were not such a case, as negotiations were

proceeding smoothly without significant issues.

Nawar Shaban, a military affairs researcher at the Arab Center for Contemporary Syrian Studies, also downplays any connection between the strikes on Homs and Latakia and efforts to extract concessions in the negotiations. He argues that Syria's military capabilities have already been severely degraded and that further destruction is not the primary goal.

Speaking to Noon Post, Shaban described the latest escalation as unprecedented and qualitatively different from previous attacks. He said it signals a new pattern aimed at intelligence gathering and monitoring the nature and evolution of Syria's armaments.

Shaban links the strikes on Homs to a recent show of air force capabilities by Syria's Ministry of Defense, which may have prompted Israel to target a military zone believed to house air defense systems.

As for the attacks in Latakia, Shaban believes they were related to the arrival of new weaponry in the area. He characterized Israel's actions as part of a broader strategy to sabotage Syria's military infrastructure and shape its development according to Israeli strategic interests.

He described this behavior as "compound arrogance"—a term reflecting Israel's aggressive interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states as part of a new regional policy. This policy targets any actors or activities deemed a threat to Israeli national security, however loosely defined.

Shaban noted that Israel is seeking to enforce this policy regionally, citing the attempted assassination of Hamas negotiation leaders in Doha as an example. On the morning of Tuesday, September 9, Israeli forces reportedly targeted the Hamas delegation in the Qatari capital using precision munitions based on intelligence data.

Although the delegation survived, the attack claimed the lives of several individuals, including the son of senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya, his office director, and a member of Qatar's internal security forces. The Qatari Foreign Ministry condemned the attack as a "cowardly and criminal act," calling it a grave violation of international law and a serious threat to the safety of citizens and residents in Qatar.