



Beyond the Axis: Israel's Approach in Syria from Threat Management to Reshaping the Security Environment

Session with Dr. Ammar kahf

CONCEPT NOTE:

The ongoing U.S.-Israeli war against Iran has reopened the door to a new phase of regional instability in the Middle East. Its implications are not limited to the direct parties to the conflict but extend to other arenas deeply connected to regional balances of power. In this context, Syria emerges as one of the most sensitive arenas, especially considering the geopolitical transformations that followed the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and the complex challenges facing the new Syrian government.

Although Syria no longer represents the same direct arena for Iranian military deployment and influence as it did during the previous decade, its geography, regional entanglements, and fragile internal transition make it highly exposed to the repercussions of the ongoing regional confrontation. The new Syrian government has attempted to position itself through an approach that may be described as "active neutrality": avoiding direct military involvement while engaging diplomatically and security-wise to contain the conflict's spillovers and benefit from the margins of movement created by the new regional environment.

At the same time, Israel's approach toward Syria appears to be moving beyond the traditional framework of managing threats linked to Iran and Hezbollah. Since the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, Israel has expanded its military activity in southern Syria, including repeated incursions into the UN-monitored buffer zone established under the 1974 Disengagement Agreement. These actions have raised growing concerns that Israel is not merely responding to immediate threats but is seeking to impose a new security geography in southern Syria. Reports have also indicated that Israeli operations and incursions have continued in Quneitra and western Daraa, underlining that the south remains unsettled rather than contained.

This shift is taking place amid the faltering of the so-called Paris Track negotiations. While Syria insists on Israeli withdrawal to the lines preceding 8 December 2024 and argues that any economic or developmental arrangements must be preceded by a clear security understanding, Israel appears to be using military pressure, regional escalation, and developments in Lebanon to push Damascus toward accepting a security arrangement more favorable to Israeli interests.

The situation in Suwayda adds another layer of complexity. Israeli support for separatist or autonomous tendencies led by Hikmat al-Hijri, alongside Israel's recurring discourse on protecting the Druze community, has become part of a broader strategy to pressure the Syrian government and limit its ability to consolidate sovereignty in the south. The UN Security Council's Syria briefing in April 2026 also noted that Israel has described some of its strikes as linked to protecting the Druze community amid recurring tensions.

The session therefore seeks to examine Israel's evolving agenda in Syria: from preventing Iranian re-entrenchment and managing border threats, to reshaping the security environment through military presence, buffer-zone expansion, diplomatic pressure, and the instrumentalization of local divisions. It also explores how the new Syrian government is responding to this agenda while still facing internal pressures related to state consolidation, economic recovery, territorial unity, and unresolved relations with local actors in Suwayda and the northeast.



Objectives of the Session

- Examine the evolution of Israel's approach toward Syria after the fall of the Assad regime.
- Analyze how the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran is reshaping Israel's security calculations in Syria.
- Discuss whether Israel's actions in southern Syria represent temporary threat management or a longer-term strategy to reshape the security environment.
- Assess the status and limitations of the Paris Track negotiations between Syria and Israel.
- Explore the role of Suwayda, the Druze question, and local fragmentation in Israel's Syria policy.
- Understand how the new Syrian government is responding to Israeli pressure while attempting to consolidate sovereignty and territorial unity.
- Discuss the implications of Israel's approach for Jordan, southern Syria, and regional stability.

Main Discussion Themes

- Beyond the Axis: Is Syria still viewed by Israel mainly through the Iranian-Hezbollah lens?
- From Threat Management to Security Engineering: How has Israel's approach changed after 8 December 2024?
- The Southern Syria File: Quneitra, Daraa, Suwayda, and the Israeli attempt to shape a new security geography.
- The 1974 Disengagement Agreement: Is Israel undermining the post-1974 security framework in the Golan and buffer zone?
- The Paris Track: Why has the negotiation process stalled, and what are Israel and Syria each trying to achieve?
- Suwayda and the Druze Question: Protection discourse, separatist tendencies, and Israeli leverage.
- Syria's Active Neutrality: can Damascus avoid regional escalation while preserving sovereignty?
- Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran: How do neighboring fronts affect Syria's room for maneuver?
- Jordan's Security Interest: What does Israel's behavior in southern Syria mean for Jordan's border security and regional policy?
- Future Scenarios: Is Syria heading toward containment, negotiated security arrangements, or prolonged Israeli pressure?