

Jordan's Deterrence Operations: An Analysis of Syrian Digital Discourse on the Airstrikes Against the South May 2026

Key Findings

- The report tracked 18,000 interactions between May 2 and 10, 2026.
- 46.2% of the discourse was classified as neutral, compared to 30.9% supportive of the strikes and 22.9% opposed.
- The "neutral" segment was not fully neutral; Syrian accounts repeatedly reshared narratives linking the strikes to smuggling networks and al-Hajari's militias without visible pushback — which the report reads as implicit acceptance of the strikes' logic.
- Qualitative analysis reveals that Syrian support for the strikes was largely not direct support for Jordan but was significantly tied to broader positions on Hikmat al-Hajari and his role in Sweida.
- The report highlights that Jordan's security presence in the Syrian equation still requires clearer framing.
- The words Sweida, Hikmat, and drugs dominated the digital conversation, reflecting how Syrian users linked place, person, and security file into a single narrative.
- Damascus dominated the discussion at 78.9%, compared to just 5.1% for Sweida itself — a gap the report attributes to digital infrastructure disparities and to fear and personal safety calculations.
- Opposition to the strikes was not uniform; it ranged from sovereignty-based rejection of unilateral military action to identity-driven discourse, to skepticism about the operation's motives and its connection to Western influence networks.
- The Syrian digital space did not engage with the strikes purely as a border security event; it used them as an occasion to revisit internal questions about sovereignty, authority, identity, and who governs southern Syria.
- The report concludes that the drug trafficking and production problem remains unresolved, and that the questions surrounding the Damascus-Sweida relationship and Jordan's security role in the Syrian equation remain open.
- A years-old tweet by Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi about Hikmat al-Hajari has effectively become a recurring historical reference point in Syrian digital discourse, resurfaced each time tensions around Sweida escalate.

Executive Summary

This report monitors Syrian digital discourse surrounding Jordan's airstrikes on southern Syria in May 2026, through the analysis of 818 original Syrian digital discussions produced by 429 unique users, generating 18,000 interactions over the period between May 2 and 10, 2026 — from the day before the strikes on May 3 to the week immediately following.

Findings show that the event generated an intense but brief digital response, peaking on May 3 and subsiding rapidly without evolving into a sustained digital debate. This indicates that the strikes occupied space in the Syrian digital sphere without producing a coherent, ongoing public issue.

In terms of sentiment, the sample recorded 30.9% positive (supportive of the strikes), 22.9% negative (opposed), and 46.2% neutral. However, the most significant finding from the qualitative data is that these figures conceal a far more complex reality.

Support was not, in its entirety, support for Jordan. It largely expressed a position on Druze spiritual leader Hikmat al-Hajari — who has taken separatist stances and demonstrated closeness to Israel — and on the deeper question of his future role in Sweida within Syria's state-building project. This was most evident in the widespread recirculation of an old tweet by Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi concerning al-Hajari's ties to the Assad regime — a tweet that has become a historical reference point resurfaced at each escalation of tensions around Sweida.

Opposition was equally varied. It ranged from sovereignty-based rejection of uncoordinated strikes to identity-driven discourse that used the event to settle prior grievances, to opposition linking the strikes to broader Western influence networks.

The neutral segment, examined qualitatively, was not genuine neutrality. Syrians chose to reshare content that framed targets as smuggling networks and al-Hajari's militias without comment or qualification — a pattern read as implicit acceptance of the strikes' logic within a digital space still calibrating the boundaries of what can be openly expressed.

Geographically, Damascus accounted for 78.9% of discourse compared to just 5.1% from Sweida itself — a disparity reflecting both the digital infrastructure gap between provinces and the weight of fear and personal safety calculations in communities living under fragile balances and multiple armed actors.

The overarching conclusion is that the Syrian digital space did not engage with the strikes as a border security incident. It used them as an occasion to revisit unresolved Syrian internal questions about **authority, sovereignty, identity, and local power** in Syria's state-building moment.

Keywords: Jordan, Syria, Sweida, Arab Army of Jordan, Jordanian Syrian Relations, Captagon

I. Introduction and Framing

Southern Syria has been characterized since 2011 by its status as a complex security space, where the challenges of security vacuums, weak central state control, and cross-border smuggling networks intersect — creating an environment that breeds tension and resists easy management. Understanding the digital debate surrounding Jordan's May 2026 airstrikes on southern Syria requires reviewing the accumulated historical context that has shaped the current situation in the south and its shared border with northern Jordan.

During the years of the Syrian crisis, overlapping factors transformed southern Syria into a fertile environment for smuggling networks. The former Assad regime played a central role in narcotics production — particularly Captagon pills, which became among the most in-demand drugs across the Middle East, with production concentrated in regime-controlled areas.¹

Drug trafficking across the Jordanian-Syrian border is characterized as unidirectional — flowing from Syrian territory into Jordan, which primarily serves as a transit country toward Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.² These networks established a robust logistical infrastructure encompassing warehouses and consolidation sites in areas such as Shahba and Arman, forming corridors stretching from eastern Daraa through Sweida to the Syrian desert.³

Sweida governorate presents a layered security and social complexity. Since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, Druze spiritual leader **Hikmat al-Hajari** has emerged as the pivotal actor shaping the governorate's local governance — regarded as the legitimate representative of the Druze community in the Jabal, in response to the post-regime security vacuum and proliferation of weapons.⁴ This role has not been met with consensus, however; Damascus has stated that al-Hajari seeks to impose an autonomous governance arrangement in the governorate, reflecting an attempt to wrest independent decision-making from the Syrian state and entrench local influence as an alternative to state institutions.⁵

In the early hours of May 3, 2026, the Jordanian Armed Forces launched an aerial operation targeting multiple sites in Sweida governorate in southern Syria — framed by Jordanian

official sources as targeting "drug and weapons smuggling networks on the Kingdom's northern border." The Syrian Ikhbariya channel, representing the current political establishment's voice, described those targeted as "rebel gangs" in Sweida.⁶ The strikes targeted warehouses, depots, and consolidation sites in Shahba and Arman, locations that had been under intelligence surveillance for months and formed part of recurring logistical cycles linked to smuggling corridors running from eastern Daraa through Sweida to the Syrian desert.⁷

This was an event that generated varied Syrian digital responses — supportive, opposed, and informational — a diversity that can be read against the backdrop of questions of sovereignty, identity, and local authority in Syria that the strikes forcefully reopened.

II. Methodology

This report draws on a methodology combining quantitative and qualitative levels to monitor Syrian digital discourse surrounding Jordan's airstrikes on southern Syria. The monitoring tool was constructed with precision to target digital interactions originating from Syrians residing in Syria specifically, filtering out electronic noise and bot activity, and restricting results to Syrian-sourced content.

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The tool monitored the period between May 2 and May 10, 2026 — spanning from one day before the Jordanian strikes on May 3, 2026, through the week immediately following. It captured a total of **818 original discussions** on publicly accessible digital spaces directly addressing the subject. These discussions exclude comments and likes, which are counted as interactions rather than independent discussions; an independent discussion is defined as any publicly accessible post that directly engages the topic. These discussions were produced by **429 unique users** — 429 Syrian electronic accounts that each published at least one independent discussion, with each person counted once regardless of the number of their posts. Together, these discussions generated **18,000 interactions** including likes, reactions, comments, and shares.

The report presents these quantitative data to map the volume and temporal distribution of engagement, then complements them with a qualitative analysis of sentiment and content.

This qualitative layer seeks to understand the angles through which Syrian users engaged with and framed the Jordanian airstrikes — whether through security, sovereignty, or identity lenses — with the aim of revealing the structure of discursive divisions in the Syrian digital space and their distinct patterns.

III. Volume of Discussion and Its Temporal Peak: A Momentary Event That Did Not Crystallize into a Sustained Digital Issue

The digital monitoring tool recorded a total of 818 discussions over the study period. However, the most revealing indicator is not the aggregate number itself, but the shape of how these discussions were distributed across time. May 3, 2026 registered a sharp peak exceeding 100 discussions within a few hours of the strikes being announced, after which numbers declined rapidly over the following two days before stabilizing at marginal levels for the remainder of the monitoring period, with a faint secondary wave on May 4 that did not approach the initial peak.



Figure 1: Distribution of Syrian digital discussions on the Jordanian strikes over time (May 2–10, 2026)

This pattern illuminates the nature of the digital response. The strikes generated an intense but short-lived reaction, without evolving into a sustained, deepening digital debate. Put differently, the event occupied space in the Syrian digital sphere without producing a coherent public issue — one in which arguments accumulate and distinct currents of opinion take lasting shape. This pattern can be attributed to several factors: the strikes arrived without prior public signal in Syrian digital discourse; reliable information was absent in the early hours; the Syrian landscape is congested with successive events that prevent any single incident from anchoring public attention; and Syrians continue to emerge from decades of repression and a culture of silence that makes open digital expression on sensitive matters a non-obvious choice for large segments of the population.

IV. Most Circulated Keywords



Figure 2: Word cloud of most circulated keywords in the data sample

The word cloud reveals that three terms lead the Syrian digital discourse on the Jordanian strikes: **Sweida**, **Hikmat**, and **drugs**. This reflects the nature of Syrian engagement with the event, as the discourse moved toward linking the strikes to overlapping elements — place, person, and security file simultaneously. Hikmat al-Hajari appeared at a level of prominence matching Sweida itself, indicating his shift from a figure associated with the event to one of its central focal points, with many treating al-Hajari as the core problem and cause.

Following these in prominence are **Jordan**, **aviation**, **raids**, and **"traders"** — typically associated with arms and drug trafficking — terms that reproduce the official Jordanian narrative of the strikes, which the Syrian government adopted without going beyond it.

At a secondary level, terms like **state**, **militias**, and **smuggling** reflect an unresolved question in Syrian consciousness: who holds the right to exercise order in southern Syria — the central Syrian state that has yet to consolidate its authority, or the local actors who filled the vacuum? The appearance of these terms together suggests that the Jordanian strikes raised not only questions about external intervention but reactivated an unresolved Syrian internal debate about stability, security, and unity.



V. Geographic Distribution of Syrian Digital Engagement with the Strikes



Journalist Malak Al-Hossen · Follow

Yesterday at 1:36 AM · 🌐

...

رسالة واضحة ، ولأزم تنسمع وتنقرأ بصراحة بدون أي رتوش: اللي صار بالأيام الماضية مو مجرد ضربات جوية، ولا "عمل إستخباراتي لمكافحة المخدرات" أو حكلي رسمي فاضي للتغطية...
القصف الأردني على مناطق مدنية بقرانا هو رسالة واضحة وصريحة: " فرض نفوذ جديدة على الجنوب السوري " وتحت غطاء دولي، وبشراكة مع اشخاص قوادة داخل السويدا..

صدقوني، ما في حدا بيقدّر يغطي على هالرسالة بالتهريج الأمني أو الكلام الفارغ عن خطوط التهريب...
اليوم شقنا الإعلان عن التدريب الأردني، وبكره رح تطلع دفعات جديدة، خمس دفعات وأكثر، رح يكون عندهم وجود مباشر عندنا بناءً على تصريحاتهم ، والرسالة واضحة لكل من يظن إنو ما في شي عم يصير تحت الطاولة .
الموضوع مش لعبة، ونحن عارفين انو ما في فرق بين العشائر الأردنية وقوة الأمن السورية والعشائر السورية ، بس المصيبة الأكبر إنو كل هالأمر صاير تحت اتفاق دولي وبغطاء من الدول الضامنة...
يعني مش بس عبث عسكري، هاد ترتيب نفوذ واستثمار للأزمة بدعم داخلي.

واللي بيوجع أكثر إنو في ناس مننا، خوفاً أو من قلة وعي، رح يضلوا ساكتين، متجاهلين كل اللي صار...
وسامحين لمستغلين الأزمة انهم يحكوا بأسم الجبل ويبررو على كيفهم .. وهنن نفسهم عم يتاجروا بالأزمة هون وعلى حساب الكل ... ونحن ساكتين كرامة موقفنا الموحد على أساس

بس صدقوني، السكوت هون مو حل، السكوت يعني قبول الرسالة، يعني إنو بيوتنا، أطفالنا، حياتنا اليومية صارت هدف لأي خطة إقليمية أو محلية بدون استشارة حدا... يعني سماح لكم شخص فكر حالي مسؤول انو يعيش على ظهر هالعالم ويقرر بأسمهم

يعني سؤال صريح : بدكن تضلوا هيكل؟ ساكتين؟ بعد كل اللي صار، رح نسمح إنو يقرروا عنا من بزا؟ رح نسمح لمد نفوذ الزعران داخل السويدا ؟

لا يا جماعة، الوقت إلنا لنشوف الحقيقة، الوقت لحتى نفهم إنو السويدا مو مجرد خريطة بيحركوها كيف ما بدهم ... لازم نكون واعيين، ونفهم إنو أي محاولة لتبرير الضربات بالإحصائيات أو الأخبار الرسمية الفارغة، ما بتغطي على حجم الضرر اللي صار، ولا على الرسالة اللي وصلتنا بوضوح.

هاد الكلام مو تهمة لأي جهة ، هاد نقد واعبي: ما لازم نسمح أبداً بتحويل بيوتنا، مدارسنا، أطفالنا إلى أهداف لتصفية حسابات سياسية، ولا لأي خطة لفرض نفوذ بالقوة... لازم كل واحد فينا يشوف الصورة كاملة، ويعرف إنو السكوت ما رح يحميننا، بالعكس، رح يفتح الباب لمزيد من التدخلات اللي ما بدنا نعيشها..

[#السويداء See less](#)

Figure 3: Geographic distribution of discussion across Syrian governorates

The geographic distribution of discourse reveals a striking disparity: Damascus governorate accounted for 78.9% of total posts, while Sweida itself — the governorate directly affected by the strikes — contributed just 5.1%. Reading these figures requires a dual methodological caution before drawing any conclusions.

Damascus's dominance does not necessarily reflect greater interest on the part of Damascenes. It reflects, first, a clear structural reality: Damascus possesses digital infrastructure that far surpasses other Syrian governorates in internet quality and penetration, making digital expression accessible to a much wider segment of its population. In other governorates, connectivity remains fragile and intermittent, constraining residents' capacity for digital participation regardless of their actual positions.

More significant than the technical factor is the weight of fear. Sweida, despite being the governorate directly targeted by the strikes, remains a community living under fragile local balances and multiple armed actors. In such environments, publicly expressing a position on a direct security event carries real risks to personal safety. Syrians broadly — including Damascenes — carry decades of a culture of silence and fear that does not dissolve with a change of authority, making the decision to post or not post in a sensitive moment one that extends beyond opinion into calculations of safety.

In this sense, Sweida's absence from digital discourse does not necessarily mean its residents had no position. It may mean they had more to lose from voicing one. Silence in this context is not a void — it is itself a statement.

VI. Sentiment Analysis

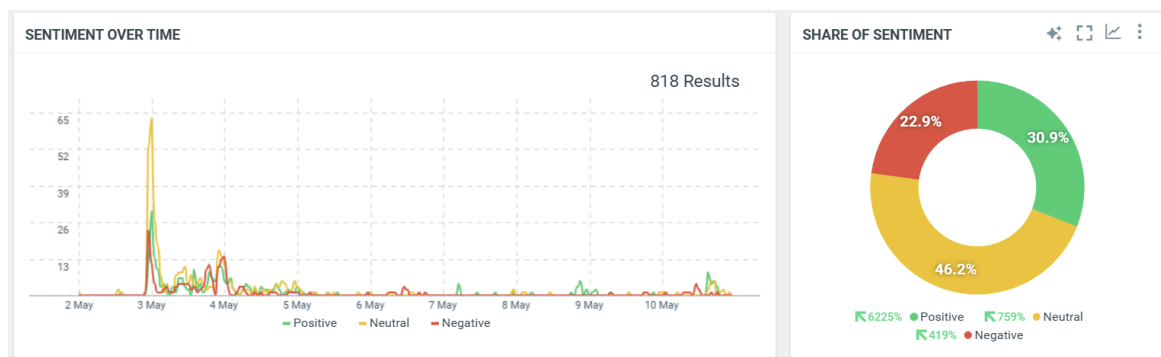


Figure 4: Distribution of Syrian digital sentiment on the Jordanian strikes — temporal and proportional (May 2–10, 2026)

The overall sentiment distribution recorded: 30.9% positive (supportive of the strikes), 22.9% negative (opposed), and 46.2% neutral with an informational-dissemination character. These figures, however, say little if taken at face value alone. The qualitative analysis of posts reveals that what transpired in the Syrian digital space was far deeper than simple support for or opposition to an external military operation.

6.1 Supportive Discourse

Supportive discourse at 30.9%, when examined carefully, fractures into several distinct positions that reveal Syrian digital support for the strikes as something that goes well beyond support for Jordan itself.

Security-pragmatic support

This represents the most prevalent pattern among supporters: its proponents adopt the logic of the strike from a security angle aimed at eliminating drug production and trafficking — an issue that extends beyond Jordan's borders to the region more broadly. This discourse is characterized by a precise distinction between those targeted and the local civilian population; it condemns specific networks — al-Hajari's militias — and frames the strikes as a logical response to a security vacuum that neither the Syrian state nor the local National Guard had filled.

SHARE OF COUNTRIES/REGIONS

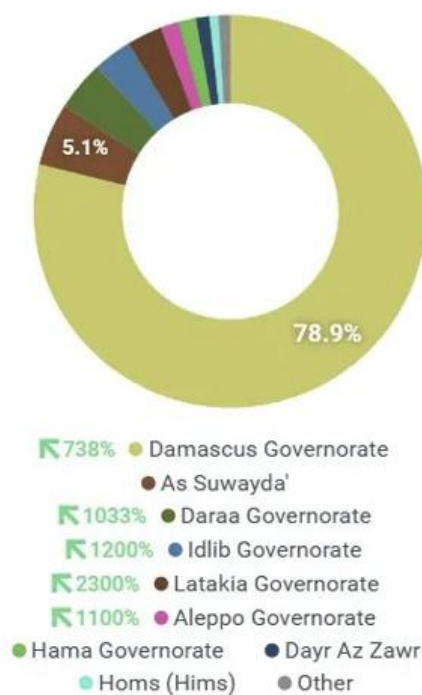


Figure 5: Sample posts from high-engagement supportive discourse

Celebratory support

A second pattern appeared: celebratory support glorifying the Jordanian Air Force and praising the strikes' precision and professionalism. This was the fastest-fading pattern, appearing densely in the peak hours then rapidly retreating as the news cycle wound down — revealing it as an immediate reactive response rather than a formed political position. Some of these posts recorded near-zero actual reach despite their authors' high follower counts, warranting caution in relying on reach metrics alone to gauge the depth of this support.

Support as rejection of al-Hajari

Here lies the deepest and most revealing dimension: many posts classified as positive were not fundamentally about the Jordanian strikes at all — they were about al-Hajari. The strikes were the occasion that allowed Syrians to voice their rejection of al-Hajari, which can be identified as the real driver behind support for the Jordanian operation.

This was most visibly manifest in the phenomenon of widespread recirculation of a 2015 tweet by Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi addressing al-Hajari and his affiliations with the Assad regime — a tweet eleven years old that the Syrian digital space resurfaced in the immediate aftermath of the strikes, as it had during the August escalation. This recurring pattern of retrieval reveals that Safadi's tweet has become a historical reference document in Syrian digital memory, invoked whenever there is a need to frame a position on al-Hajari.

Syrian commentary on this tweet divides into several patterns: admiration for Safadi's foresight and precise characterization; framing of al-Hajari and his group as traitors whose conduct is tied to criminality and the former Assad regime; and direct linkage between al-Hajari and the Israeli occupation in a narrative that renders the Jordanian strikes legitimate — not because they are Jordanian, but because they target a link in a configuration these users reject. Against this, responses from accounts associated with the Druze community defended al-Hajari as a protector rather than a collaborator, transforming the comment thread on a single tweet into a arena for the full scope of identity-laden debate.

Syrian support for the strikes was not fundamentally about Jordan, and not about drugs alone. It was largely about an older and deeper question: what is the place of Hikmat al-Hajari and his authority within the project of rebuilding Syria? The Jordanian strikes provided the occasion to raise this question at volume.

6.2 Opposing Discourse

Opposition appeared at 22.9%, and Syrian digital discussions reveal that the grounds for opposing the strikes were varied rather than unified.

A sovereignty dimension is evident in some posts: many participants did not deny the existence of a real smuggling problem in the area, but rejected the manner of addressing it through uncoordinated unilateral strikes, arguing that the absence of formal coordination with the Syrian side constitutes a slight against a state still reconstructing its institutions. This dimension manifested in recurring questions about the legal framework and limits of such

operations — though Damascus has affirmed ongoing coordination with Amman on border security matters.

Beyond this, many posts went further to question the true motivations of the entire operation, linking it to a Western influence system that uses Jordan as an instrument in southern Syria.

The qualitative analysis also reveals an identity-laden discourse that used the event as a pretext for settling prior grievances. Some posts linked the strikes to positions on the Druze and their relationship with Israel, explicitly objecting to what they characterized as "the Druze seeking Israeli support" against the Jordanian strikes. Notably, this pattern emerged in the immediate early hours before official narratives had formed, suggesting it was a pre-framed reflexive response rather than a position arising from reading the event. This warrants an explicit methodological caution: the presence of this pattern in the sample does not mean the totality of opposing discourse was identity-driven — it represents one spectrum among several.

6.3 Neutral Discourse

The neutral segment at 46.2% is the largest engaged share, and in its surface form consists of informational-dissemination content in which Syrian accounts reshared official statements and breaking news — posts from channels like Al-Mayadeen, Syria Today, Syria Now, and others that accumulated tens of thousands of followers but with very low interaction rates. Cold informational relay in an event of this scale carries more than mere neutrality: it reflects a digital space absorbing the news without finding in itself the confidence to publicly declare a position on a sensitive issue where threads of identity, sovereignty, and the relationship with a neighboring state are all intertwined.

Examining the content Syrians chose to reshare reveals patterns that go beyond mere "neutral" information relay. The most circulated content was not random: it was led by reports from Syria 24, Syria Now, and the Syrian Ikhbariya that focused their framing on the official Jordanian narrative, linking targets to smuggling networks and al-Hajari's militias. This means Syrians chose to reshare content that adopts this linkage rather than content that avoids or questions it — and this choice is itself an implicit position, even without explicit comment. Resharing a narrative that links targets to smuggling and militias without objection or questioning generally signals acceptance of its logic, or at minimum an absence of desire to defend an alternative narrative.

A notable pattern also emerged in the resharing of reports invoking accusations against al-Hajari of links to the Israeli government and the establishment of buffer zones in southern Syria — accusations that repeat across multiple "neutrally" framed posts with evident implicit orientation. Some posts classified as neutral carry a blend of breaking news and accusation in a single sentence: a user reshapes a report stating that strikes targeted sites "under al-Hajari's militia control" without adding comment. The position here is implicit but legible: neither defending al-Hajari nor challenging the Jordanian narrative, choosing instead to allow that narrative to reach their audience as-is. This choice reveals an absence of sympathy for al-Hajari rather than genuine neutrality toward both parties — real neutrality would mean conveying multiple narratives or noting the existence of competing characterizations. Choosing a narrative that implicates al-Hajari and resharing it in silence is closer to implicit acceptance of the logic of the Jordanian strikes, without the need to announce it openly. This is an understandable position in a digital space still calibrating the boundaries of what can be said.

VII. Discussion and Conclusion

What this report reveals in its totality is that the Syrian digital space continues to operate according to the logic of crisis rather than the logic of its aftermath. Despite the political transformations Syria has witnessed since December 2024, the mechanisms of digital expression remain governed by the legacy of decades of repression, a culture of silence, and the instrumentalization of identity in political conflict — and Syrian digital engagement with the Jordanian strikes exposed this plainly.

What is most revealing is that Syrian digital discourse around the strikes did not center on the question it might be expected to engage: what policy best addresses the problem of drug production and trafficking in southern Syria and how to impose stability and security. Instead it revolved around an older and deeper question: who governs southern Syria and with what legitimacy? This automatic displacement of the question suggests that the real wound in the eyes of Syrian participants is not the Jordanian strikes, but the vacuum that made them possible — a vacuum of authority, legitimacy, and trust between Syrian society and its nascent institutions.

In light of this, digital listening alone is insufficient to understand engagement in societies living through fragile transitional moments. The silent voice and the voices of communities with limited digital access remain outside the monitoring radius. Reading identity-based

discourse at face value without examining its political roots does not yield a complete picture of trends and patterns in the Syrian digital space. The absence of a clear Syrian official position, particularly in the early hours, created a vacuum that digital discourse filled in all its contradictions — pointing to a pressing need to build institutional credibility in matters of Syrian sovereignty and border security.

The Jordanian strikes on southern Syria remain an event that warrants continued attention rather than closure. The question of who governs southern Syria has not been answered, the drug trafficking and production problem has not been resolved, the relationship between Damascus and Sweida has not been settled, and Jordan's security presence in the Syrian equation has not been framed within clear coordination mechanisms. What can be said is that the Syrian digital space, even when it appears to be passing digital noise, carries legible indicators. Reading this engagement carefully — with all its contradictions and divisions — reveals that the questions raised by the Jordanian strikes were not new. The question of who governs southern Syria and with what legitimacy remains suspended, and what the strikes revealed is that the answer cannot come from outside Syria.

Footnotes

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