

Israel's attack on Syria heightens tensions between Tel Aviv and Ankara

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Israel has intervened in the clashes between Druze groups and Bedouin tribes in the southern Syrian city of Sweida, striking the Syrian General Staff headquarters in Damascus on Wednesday.

These events highlight the falsity of claims that the regime change that took place in December 2024 with the support of the US and its allies, including Turkey, would bring democracy and peace to Syria, and point to the risk of a regional war.

It is alleged that the clashes in Sweida began on July 13 with the kidnapping of a Druze merchant by Bedouins on the Damascus-Sweida highway. The city of Sweida, which is predominantly Druze, is controlled by Druze militias who refused to join the armed forces of the Al-Qaeda-rooted Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) government, established after the overthrow of former Russian and Iranian-backed President Bashar al-Assad.

The new Damascus regime entered the city on Tuesday, after clashes broke out between Druze groups and Bedouin tribes. The Druze saw this as a violation of the agreement reached with the regime in May, and fighting broke out between HTS forces and Druze militias.

The number of people killed in armed clashes in Sweida is reported as exceeding 300. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), which is funded by Washington and London, 69 Druze militiamen and 40 civilians have been killed in Sweida since Sunday. The SOHR also claimed, based on local sources, that 27 Druze civilians had been “executed” by Syrian government forces in Sweida. The organisation recorded the deaths of 165 Syrian soldiers and 18 armed Bedouin.

Israel, which occupies part of southern Syria, first became involved in the conflict by demanding that “no troops be stationed in southern Damascus”. It first attacked the government’s armoured vehicles in Sweida. On Wednesday, Israel bombed some state institutions in Damascus, including the building housing the Syrian

General Staff Headquarters.

Following regime change, Israel targeted Syria’s remaining military infrastructure with large-scale airstrikes, including an airstrike on Damascus in May. At the time, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Israel Katz issued an ultimatum to the HTS regime, saying, “This is a clear message to the Syrian regime. We will not permit Syrian troops to move south of Damascus or any threat to the Druze community.”

The overthrow of the Assad regime in December greatly undermined Iran’s influence in the country. The US and its allies had been trying to overthrow the regime since 2011 by using Islamist jihadists and Kurdish militias as proxies. In June, when Israel used Syrian airspace to attack Iran, the Damascus regime remained silent in the face of US-Israeli aggression against Tehran.

Regime change in Damascus also intensified the rivalry between two of the US’s allies: Turkey and Israel. While Ankara continues to occupy northern Syria militarily in order to combat Kurdish forces, Tel Aviv views Ankara’s strong political and ideological ties with the HTS regime as a threat to its own influence.

The Nagel Commission report presented to the Netanyahu regime in January stated that “Turkey has become the most influential power in Damascus and that the Sunni-Turkish axis has replaced Iran’s Shiite axis,” and argued that military capabilities should be strengthened in preparation for a possible conflict with Turkey.

President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s government is also concerned about Israel increasing its influence in Lebanon and Syria, as well as Palestine, and its consolidation as the main regional Middle East power with the support of the US. In October, Erdo?an said: “The Israeli leadership, acting with the delirium of the promised land and with a purely religious fanaticism, will set its sights on our

homeland after Palestine and Lebanon.”

Yesterday, the Turkish Ministry of National Defence issued a statement saying, “If requested, we will provide all possible support to strengthen Syria’s defence capabilities and assist in its fight against terrorism.”

However, although Ankara has made rhetorical criticisms of Israel’s genocide in Gaza and its attacks on Iran, it continues to fuel the Zionist regime with oil from Azerbaijan and allows US bases in Turkey to be used for Israel’s benefit.

Ankara is also concerned about Israel’s declaring Kurdish forces in Syria as “natural allies.” This has been a factor in Turkey’s move toward a new agreement with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), as Turkey seeks to cooperate with the US in its “new Middle East” plans and reap its own rewards. The Erdo?an government is promoting a reactionary “Turkish-Kurdish-Arab” alliance perspective, with the support of the PKK’s imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan, to counter Zionist Israel’s expansionist ambitions in the region.

In Syria, Washington is trying to develop a coordinated policy with Turkey and Israel, as well as the HTS regime and Kurdish forces linked to the PKK. This policy is particularly aimed at Iran and its allies.

Washington intervened in the situation out of concern that Israel’s attacks could lead to an uncontrolled escalation among its allies. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement Wednesday night, “We have engaged all the parties involved in the clashes in Syria. We have agreed on specific steps that will bring this troubling and horrifying situation to an end tonight. This will require all parties to deliver on the commitments they have made and this is what we fully expect them to do.”

As forces loyal to the Damascus regime withdrew from Sweida, HTS leader Ahmad al-Sharaa (Abu Mohammad al-Julani) made a statement on television Thursday morning, saying, “We are not afraid of war, and we have dedicated our lives to confronting challenges and defending our people. However, we place the interests of Syrians above chaos and destruction.” He added: “For this reason, we have decided to entrust local factions and tribal elders with the task of maintaining security in Sweida.”

Sharaa continued: “Effective US, Arab, and Turkish mediation saved the region from an uncertain fate. We were faced with two choices: either open war with the Israeli entity at the expense of our Druze people and their security, destabilising Syria and the entire region, or allowing the Druze notables and sheikhs to regain their

senses and prioritise the national interest over those who seek to tarnish the reputation of the honourable people of Sweida.”

On Wednesday, the Turkish Grand National Assembly, including Erdo?an’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its fascist ally, the Nationalist Movement Party, as well as various “opposition” parties, including the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP), passed a resolution condemning Israel. The Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), which has been mediating negotiations between the Erdo?an government and Öcalan, abstained from the vote.

The resolution said, “We emphasize in the strongest terms that we support Syria’s territorial integrity and sovereignty and that we stand against all actions that threaten the peace of our friend and brother Syrian people.”

This comes from the political establishment of a country that, alongside the US and Israel, has played a critical role in the bloody war in Syria since 2011, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions more.

The resolution continued, “We state that peace and stability in Syria will serve regional peace and stability, while any developments to the contrary will only benefit Netanyahu and his team, who have built their existence on blood and conflict.”

As further proof of the hypocrisy of the Turkish bourgeois political establishment’s calls for “peace,” the resolution called on the “international community,” i.e., the US and NATO imperialism, Israel’s main supporters, to “raise its voice against Israel’s aggression, which is deepening the regional crisis and threatening world peace, and to take effective, consistent, and decisive measures.”

The only way forward in Syria, devastated by a regime-change war supported by imperialism and now the scene of a dangerous power struggle between various regional and local forces, is through an international socialist perspective that will unite all workers beyond ethnic, religious, or sectarian divisions in the struggle for workers’ power against imperialism.



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