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## Syria and Israel Resume Discreet Talks to Ease Southern Syria Tension

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Senior officials from Israel and Syria are expected to meet in Baku, Azerbaijan, on Thursday in a renewed effort to ease tensions in southern Syria. The talks, scheduled for Thursday, are expected to focus on recent clashes in the Sweida region and broader security concerns near the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

A diplomat speaking anonymously to AFP said this meeting follows discreet talks in Paris last week between Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer and Syrian Foreign

Minister Asaad al-Shaibani. Both sides reportedly aim to build momentum towards de-escalation, though no formal agreement has been issued.

The meeting comes amid rising international pressure to prevent further conflict in southern Syria following intense clashes in Sweida. Sweida province, predominantly Druze, experienced severe violence from mid-July, with armed clashes between Druze militias and Sunni Bedouin tribes contributing to a death toll reported at over 300 within days. The unrest drew in Syrian government forces and prompted Israeli airstrikes in Damascus targeting the defence ministry and military headquarters.

Israel stated that the strikes were intended to protect the Druze community. A ceasefire reportedly brokered by the United States—alongside Turkey, Jordan, and others—was agreed around 18 July.

Although Syria and Israel remain technically at war since 1948, recent discreet talks in Paris and Baku suggest a modest shift towards cautious dialogue. A prior meeting in Baku on 12 July is understood to have paved the way for this latest round.

## Border Security

Much of the upcoming talks will centre around the volatile area near the Golan Heights. Israel captured the Golan from Syria during the 1967 Six-Day War. It later extended its sovereignty over the region in 1981, a move most of the international community did not recognize. Despite a disengagement agreement signed in 1974, the border area has remained unstable, particularly since the fall of former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in December.

Israeli military activity has intensified in recent months, reportedly to counter Iranian-linked forces in Syria, though precise details remain unconfirmed. Israeli officials reportedly remain concerned about security threats emanating from Syria amid recent unrest.

Before arriving in Baku, Foreign Minister al-Shaibani will travel to Moscow for a separate round of discussions with Russian officials. His Moscow visit will cover bilateral cooperation and the future of Russia's military presence in Syria, particularly at its longstanding facilities in Tartus and Hmeimim near Latakia.

Al-Shaibani's agenda in Moscow reportedly includes talks on foreign fighters, internal security reforms, and strengthening coordination between the two countries. Under the new Syrian leadership of President Ahmed al-Sharaa, Damascus has continued close cooperation with Moscow. In January, Russia's former deputy foreign minister, Mikhail Bogdanov, visited the Syrian capital to meet with President al-Sharaa, signalling Moscow's intention to retain influence in the country.

Russia, which began its military intervention in Syria in 2015 to support Assad's government, now appears to be recalibrating its strategic priorities as regional alliances shift. Moscow is believed to view the upcoming Baku talks as an opportunity to influence Syria's evolving security architecture and ensure the sustainability of its own interests.

Syrian state media described the Paris dialogue as focusing on recent security developments and efforts to de-escalate the southern Syria situation Thursday's meeting in Baku is expected to continue that discussion.

Neither side has officially confirmed the Baku meeting. Nevertheless, their decision to engage signals a shared interest in avoiding broader confrontation.

The path ahead remains uncertain, but diplomatic overtures like this suggest that quiet backchannels may once again play a role in shaping the region's future, particularly where open negotiation remains politically sensitive.