

OpenVoiceNews U.K.

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

Syria's New Leader Faces Israel's Wrath After Trump's Endorsement

July 18, 2025

— Categories: *Breaking News*



Download IPFS

Syria's interim president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, has found himself in a precarious position just seven months into his tenure. Having won the approval of U.S. President Donald Trump, he now faces a grave challenge as Israel escalates military operations in response to alleged sectarian violence under his watch. This marks a critical juncture for Syria's fledgling government, as it grapples with internal strife and external aggression.

Al-Sharaa, who led a rapid 11-day offensive to oust Bashar al-Assad in December 2024, is accused by Israel of permitting his security forces to target Syria's Druze minority in the southwestern province of Sweida. Israel claims these forces, a mix of local and foreign militias, have killed dozens of Druze, including women and children, in recent clashes with Bedouin tribes. Al-Sharaa's government insists it is merely restoring state authority in areas controlled by Druze militias. Still, the accusations have triggered a fierce Israeli response, including airstrikes on Syrian military targets and the defence ministry in Damascus.

Israel's actions represent the most intense operations in Syria since the fall of Assad, with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) seizing additional southern territory and deploying ground troops to enforce a buffer zone from Damascus to the occupied Golan Heights. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has hardened his rhetoric, dismissing al-Sharaa's calls for de-escalation. Reda Mansour, a former Israeli ambassador and CEO of Jethro Jews for Druze, told *Newsweek*, "Israel has shown lately that if Israel feels that a certain leader... is an evident threat to its national security, it will operate." Mansour warned that Al-Sharaa's failure to curb violence could lead to his targeting, citing Israel's recent strikes against leaders of Iran-aligned groups.

The Druze, an ethnic Arab religious minority, are a significant presence in Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, with the largest population in Syria. While many Druze in the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967, retain Syrian citizenship, those in Israel proper are largely full citizens. Israel has positioned itself as a protector of the Druze, with officials like Sawsan Natour-Hasoun, minister of public diplomacy at the Israeli Embassy to the United States, writing in *Newsweek*, "We are determined to deter the regime from harming the Druze, by ensuring the full demilitarisation of the border with Syria."

Al-Sharaa, whose family hails from the Golan Heights, initially focused on consolidating power and promising an inclusive government that respects minority rights. However, reports of his loosely organised forces targeting Druze, Alawites, and Kurds have undermined these pledges. Clashes in Al-Sweida flared in February and April, prompting Israeli warnings, and have now resurfaced with deadly consequences. Al-Sharaa has called protecting the Druze a "priority" and accused Israel of stoking division, but his past as a jihadist leader fuels scepticism.

Born in Saudi Arabia and raised in Damascus, Al-Sharaa joined al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2003, fighting U.S. forces before being detained. Released in 2011, he founded the Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, during the civil war. After breaking with al-Qaeda in 2016 and

rebranding his group as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), he led the charge that toppled Assad. Despite his efforts to project moderation, Gadeer Kamal-Mreeh, a former Israeli Knesset member and Druze community leader, told *Newsweek*, “I see a fundamentalist radical Islamist leader... an element of ISIS.” She urged the Trump administration to reconsider its warming ties with the Damascus government.

Trump’s meeting with Al-Sharaa in May, during a high-profile summit in Saudi Arabia, marked a shift in U.S. policy. Trump, who described Al-Sharaa as a “young, attractive guy” with a “strong past,” lifted sanctions on Syria in June, a move hailed by Al-Sharaa as a step toward stability. Yet, the U.S. has since distanced itself from Israel’s latest strikes, with State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce stating on Thursday that Washington does not support the operations. The U.S. continues to push for Syrian unity, mediating a stalled deal to integrate Kurdish forces into the central government.

Turkey’s President Recep Erdogan, a key ally of Al-Sharaa, has also condemned Israel’s actions, declaring in a cabinet meeting, “We did not consent to the partition of Syria yesterday, and we absolutely will not consent to it today or tomorrow.” Syrian politician Mahmoud Toron, speaking to *Newsweek*, warned that Israel’s strikes, including one near the defence ministry, risk destabilising Syria further by emboldening rogue factions within its fledgling army. “It’s not easy to control the factions within this army,” Toron said, noting the potential for independent militia actions if Al-Sharaa is perceived as weak.

Israel’s strategy, driven by fears of a hostile buildup near its borders, echoes its response to Hamas’s 2023 attack from Gaza. Mansour argued that Israel cannot allow southern Syria to become “another Gaza,” suggesting a Druze autonomous zone as a stabilising measure. However, such a move could fracture Syria further, undermining Al-Sharaa’s authority and U.S.-backed efforts for national unity.

As tensions escalate, Al-Sharaa walks a tightrope. His diplomatic overtures, including indirect talks with Israel via mediators, have failed to quell the violence. With some Israeli officials, like National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, openly calling for his assassination, the Syrian leader faces a stark choice: navigate a path to peace or risk becoming Israel’s next target in a region already teetering on the edge.