

Fresh Clashes Erupt in Syria's Sweida Province Between Druze and Bedouin Factions

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Tensions have reignited in southern Syria's Sweida province as Druze armed groups and Bedouin clans clashed overnight, shattering a fragile ceasefire that briefly quelled violence earlier this week. The renewed conflict, erupting in a region already scarred by years of civil

war, has prompted Syrian government forces to prepare for redeployment to restore order and protect state institutions, according to officials.

The clashes follow a temporary truce mediated by the United States, Turkey, and Arab nations, which saw government forces withdraw from the Druze-majority province after intense fighting with Druze militias. Two Syrian officials, speaking anonymously to the Associated Press on Friday due to restrictions on public statements, confirmed that security forces had reached an agreement with some Druze factions to re-enter Sweida to stabilise the region. The officials emphasised the need to safeguard government infrastructure amid the escalating violence.

The conflict initially flared on 13 July, sparked by tit-for-tat kidnappings and attacks between Druze militias and Sunni Muslim Bedouin tribes. Government forces intervened, ostensibly to restore calm, but reports indicate they aligned with Bedouin fighters, exacerbating tensions with the Druze community. The violence, which claimed hundreds of lives over four days, included allegations of government-affiliated fighters looting homes and executing Druze civilians. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based war monitor, reported nearly 600 deaths, including 86 civilians killed in “field executions,” predominantly Druze, by government forces and their allies.

Israel, citing concerns for the Druze minority, launched airstrikes on Syrian military targets, including the Defence Ministry headquarters in Damascus, escalating regional tensions. Syrian interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa condemned the strikes, calling them an attempt to sow “conflict and division” and asserting that the Druze are an “integral part” of Syria. In a statement broadcast on state television, Al-Sharaa vowed to protect all communities, though distrust persists among Druze factions wary of the new government’s intentions.

Despite the ceasefire agreement, which tasked Druze factions and clerics with maintaining internal security in Sweida, fighting resumed on Thursday. Syrian state media reported that Druze militias launched retaliatory attacks on Bedouin communities, triggering a wave of displacement. The governor of neighbouring Daraa province noted that over 1,000 families fled to the area, citing “attacks on Bedouin tribes by outlaw groups.”

The unrest highlights the challenges facing Syria’s transitional government as it attempts to unify a nation divided by ethnic and religious divisions. Issam al-Reis, a senior military adviser with the Syrian research group Etana, warned of rising “militant sectarianism” in an interview with the Associated Press. “The lack of effective state-led negotiations could sow

further divisions,” he said, urging faster integration of diverse communities into the Syrian army to foster unity.

The situation remains volatile, with the United Nations expressing concern over its limited ability to deliver humanitarian aid due to the ongoing clashes. The Syrian Civil Defence reported that one of its aid workers, Hamza al-Amarin, was kidnapped by gunmen while escorting a UN team out of Sweida, further complicating relief efforts.

As Syria grapples with this latest wave of violence, the delicate balance of its post-war recovery hangs in the balance, with regional powers and local factions vying for control in a deeply divided land.