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U.S.-Brokered Syria-Israel Ceasefire Faces Tensions as Clashes Persist in Druze Region

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The United States announced that Israel and Syria agreed to a ceasefire early Saturday following intense violence in Syria’s southern Sweida province. Despite the agreement, fierce fighting between Druze militias and Bedouin tribal groups continues to devastate the region, with casualties mounting and humanitarian conditions worsening.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), more than 300 people have died since hostilities flared on Sunday. The casualties include approximately 130 Druze fighters, around 80 Syrian security forces, including 15 killed in Israeli air strikes, and an estimated 90 civilians.

The violence was sparked by the kidnapping of a Druze individual, prompting retaliatory attacks between Druze militias and Bedouin tribal groups in Sweida province. The province of Sweida, a stronghold of the Druze minority, quickly descended into chaos.

The ceasefire was announced by U.S. envoy Tom Barrack, who serves as the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Special Envoy for Syrian Affairs. Barrack confirmed that both Israel and Syria agreed to the ceasefire terms, with support from Turkey and Jordan. “We call upon Druze, Bedouins, and Sunnis to put down their weapons and together with other minorities build a new and united Syrian identity in peace and prosperity,” Barrack wrote on the social media platform X.

The Syrian presidency stated the truce had initially prevented a broader military escalation, but violations by Druze militias and Bedouin fighters are now threatening it. The government pledged to deploy additional forces to stabilize Sweida and urged restraint from all parties.

On Friday, clashes between Bedouin fighters and Druze armed groups occurred near Sweida city. Eyewitnesses reported homes ablaze, gunfire, mortar fire, and burned-out villages partly controlled by Bedouin forces, according to AFP.

Hospitals in the region, particularly Sweida National Hospital, are overwhelmed by casualties. Omar Obeid, president of the local Order of Physicians, said the morgue is full and patients are being stored in corridors, according to AFP.

UN agencies report that more than 80,000 people have been displaced in under a week amid the conflict. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) echoed warnings, noting that health infrastructure is collapsing under the pressure, and power outages are hindering morgue operations.

“The humanitarian situation in Sweida is critical. People are running out of everything,” said Stephan Sakalian, head of the ICRC’s Syria delegation. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk has called for an immediate end to the violence and independent investigations into reported abuses.

Tribal militias from across Syria, including Bedouin clans, are moving into Sweida to support their factions. Tribal leader Anas al-Enad confirmed to AFP that his group traveled from Hama to support Bedouin fighters. Israeli officials state their intervention aimed to protect the Druze community, but analysts say weakening Syria's military remains a strategic objective for Jerusalem.

While the ceasefire is a diplomatic achievement for the United States, the fragile truce is already under strain. The situation in southern Syria underscores deep ethnic and political tensions that persist weeks after President Bashar al-Assad's ousting in December. Whether the ceasefire will hold remains uncertain, but one thing is clear: the path to stability in Syria is far from over.