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Israel strikes military airbase in Syria while warning Turkey

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Syrian President Ahmad al Sharaa (second from left) meets Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar (third from left) in Damascus on August 19. (*Syrian Arab News Agency*)

Israel conducted **airstrikes** on the Abu al Duhur military airport in northern Syria during the evening of August 17–18. Syria **condemned** the strikes as a violation of its sovereignty, while Israel's Prime Minister's Office **said** that "Israel and Syria agreed to a status quo in security matters, which Syria was on the verge of breaching by permitting Turkish troops to deploy at an airbase near Aleppo." The strikes come amid increasing tensions between Israel and Turkey. The US has **worked** to reduce tensions and broker trilateral talks between Syria, Israel, and the US.

On August 19, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu **warned** Turkey against increasing its military role in Syria. "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asserted on Wednesday that Israel had already warned Turkey against any military activity in Syria before Israel bombed an airbase that Ankara had been eyeing," *The Times of Israel* **reported**. "The message was conveyed, but apparently they didn't hear it, so we made sure they understood it more clearly," Netanyahu **said**.

"Israel repeatedly warned Syria that such a deployment would pose a threat to Israel's security. Syria chose to ignore these warnings. Israel will not tolerate threats to its security, and would welcome a return to the status quo," Netanyahu's office **added**. The Israeli prime minister has **indicated** that Israel views a Turkish presence south of current Turkish positions in northern Syria as a threat.

Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir, chief of the general staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), **visited** Israeli troops on the Golan on August 19 in the wake of the strikes. "We see what is happening and are monitoring the changes on the Syrian front; we will not allow hostile forces to establish themselves on our borders, and we will know how to use our operational capabilities precisely where and when needed," Zamir said, according to a statement distributed by the IDF.

"Syria condemned Israeli airstrikes on Abu al-Duhur Military Airbase in Idlib as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, the [Syrian] Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said Tuesday," the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) **reported** on August 18. Abu al Duhur is in Idlib Governorate, south of the city of Aleppo. Syria views the strikes as an unjustified act of aggression.

"[The Syrian foreign ministry] said continued Israeli attacks since December 8, 2024, while Syria exercises restraint and works to consolidate stability and avoid escalation, reveal attempts by the Israeli occupation to undermine those efforts and push the region toward further tension and instability," SANA **added**.

US Ambassador to Turkey Tom Barrack, who is also the US envoy to Iraq and Syria, **wrote** that the US was deeply concerned by the strikes. "The Al-Sharra [sic] government has neither adopted a predatory posture nor maintained proxy forces. It has, in fact, repeatedly indicated a preference for de-escalation with Israel. The United States has in the past, and will continue in the future, to host discussions to encourage diplomatic cadence over kinetic frustration for both nations," Barrack **stated**.

Tensions between Israel and Syria have grown over the last year and a half since the fall of the Bashar al Assad regime. Israeli officials have described Syria's president, Ahmad al Sharaa, who formerly led Al Qaeda's branch in Syria before heading Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), as a "**jihadist**."

"They were jihadists and remain jihadists, even if some of their leaders have donned suits," Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar **said** in March 2025. In July 2025, Amichai Chikli, Israel's minister of diaspora affairs, **advocated** assassinating Sharaa and **warned** that war could break out with Syria. Sharaa, **formerly** known as Abu Mohammad al Jolani, was a US- and UN-designated terrorist before the US and UN rescinded his designations in November 2025.

Israel launched a ground incursion into Syria, including seizing the summit of Mount Hermon, when the Assad regime fell in December 2024. Since the end of that year, the IDF has maintained a presence in what was previously the buffer zone of the 1974 ceasefire lines on the Golan Heights.

The IDF has been **accused** by Turkish media of carrying out raids into Syria along the buffer zone. Israel's foreign ministry has responded by **highlighting** Turkey's role in northern Syria. Turkey **invaded** parts of northern Syria between 2016 and 2019 as part of its support for Syrian rebel groups and its **opposition** to the Kurdistan Workers Party and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

Reuters **reported** on August 19 that days before the recent Israeli strike on Abu al Duhur military airport, Roman Gofman, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, **spoke** with Syrian Foreign Minister Assad al Shaibani and relayed Israel's concerns about Turkey's presence. Shaibani also **met** with US Envoy Barrack in Turkey on August 17, hours before the strike. Turkish media reports over the last few weeks had **indicated** that there were rising tensions with Israel.

The US has sought to engage Syria and Israel in trilateral talks to ease tensions. In January, there was a meeting between the three countries. "Both Sides [sic] have decided to establish a joint fusion mechanism—a dedicated communication cell—to facilitate immediate and ongoing coordination on their intelligence sharing, military de-escalation, diplomatic engagement, and commercial opportunities under the supervision of the United States," the US Department of State **said** at the time. It is unclear **how** Israel's recent airstrike will affect US policy and whether deconfliction in Syria may result.

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