



Israel – Syria relations

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Why is in news? Why Israel attacked Syria's airports, amid its ongoing war with Hamas

In the ongoing conflict in Gaza between Israel and the militant group Hamas, **Israeli warplanes struck parts of Gaza and two airports in Syria** on October 22. This was roughly two weeks after Hamas struck Israel, in what was the biggest attack on Israel since the **founding of the Jewish state in 1948**.

Regional rivalries and long-running divides have determined how various West Asian countries and other actors have responded to the current bout of violence.

Relations among Israel, Hezbollah and Syria:

Israel has not directly spoken of its reasons for the latest attack but has previously mentioned the need to prevent another front of the fighting from opening up towards its north.

It is believed that the strikes are linked to attacking the **Lebanon-based, Iran-backed militant organisation Hezbollah**, which has threatened to open a front of attacks towards the north of Israel.

Lebanon and Syria both border Israel in its northern region. Hezbollah and Israel have exchanged fire in the last few weeks but Hezbollah is yet to formally join the war.

Hezbollah and Israel:

Historically, since the **group's creation in 1982**, Hezbollah has **opposed Israel and Western influence in West Asia**.

It has also, along with Russia and Iran, supported the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in neighbouring Syria during its civil war.

Hezbollah, in turn, is **supported by Iran**. The group was **inspired by its theocratic model** (having a religious regime ruling the country) that has been in place in the country from 1979 onwards.

Hezbollah is also a **Shiite organisation**, and Iran's support of it reflects West Asia's two major powers and their rivalry – the Sunni Muslim-dominated Saudi Arabia and the majority Shia Muslim-dominated Iran.

The United States estimates that Iran supplies hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to Hezbollah and that it has thousands of fighters.

Hezbollah and Syria:

Analysts say this relationship has shifted over the years with changing external influences.

While both Arab parties are opposed to Israel and Western influences, allying with Russia as well, they have also had conflicting interests at times.

Hezbollah has had to accept Syrian groups' presence in Lebanon after the **Lebanese Civil War ended in 1990**.

Syrian President Assad, who has ruled the country since 2000, has had to accept Iran and Hezbollah's Syrian Shia militias in the country.

Syria and Israel:

Syria has **opposed Israel since its formation in 1948**, in line with the **policy of other Arab countries** for a long period.

It has viewed Israeli presence and occupation to be against Palestinian and Arab interests.

The two have also fought wars, including the **Six-Day War of 1967** that led to Israel occupying Syria's Golan Heights – which it still controls today.

How has Syria been involved in the current conflict?

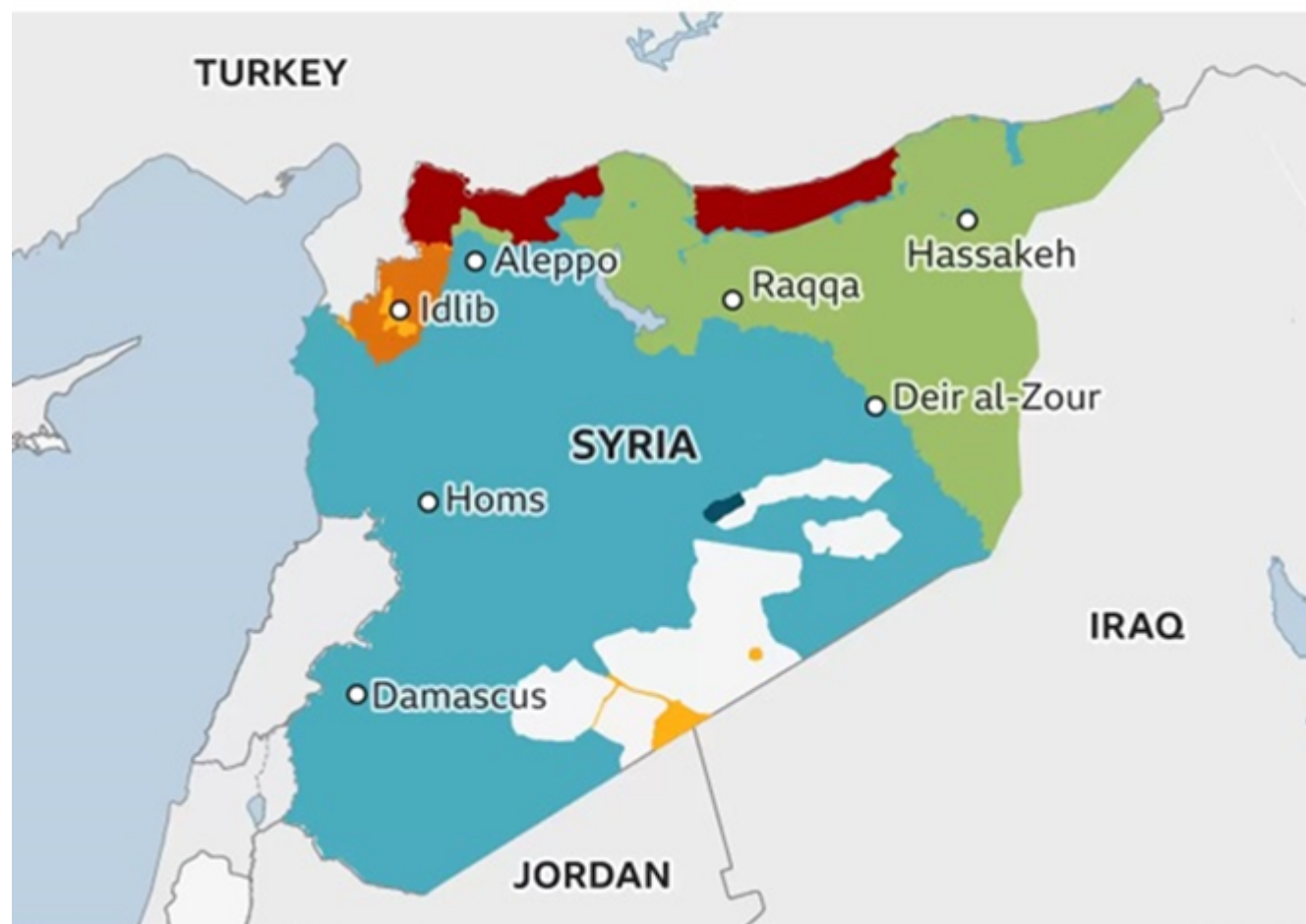
Who controls what in Syria

Feb 2021



■ Kurdish forces
■ Turkish-backed Syrian rebels and Turkish military

■ Syrian government
■ Jihadist forces
■ Syrian rebels
■ Islamic State group



Source: Janes Conflict Monitor

BBC

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Syrian state media reported that Israeli airstrikes have targeted the international airports in the capital, Damascus, and the northern city of Aleppo. The strikes killed one person and damaged the runways, putting them out of service.

Israel has carried out several strikes in Syria, including on the airports, since the war began.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah said six of its fighters were killed and the group's deputy leader, Sheikh Naim Kassem, warned that Israel would pay a high price if it started a ground offensive in Gaza.

Earlier in the war, Hezbollah had said in a statement that it fired at Israeli positions in the **disputed Chebaa Farms**, located along the border with Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, using "large numbers of rockets and shells". It also **declared its solidarity with the "Palestinian resistance."**

Timeline of the Conflict between Israel and Syria:

Six-Day War in 1967:

The conflict between Israel and Syria goes back to the Six-Day War in 1967, in which **Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria**, which it has occupied since then.

The fertile plateau of the Golan Heights overlooks both Israel and Syria, offering a commanding military vantage.

In **1973**, Syrian forces **made an unsuccessful bid to recapture** the area during the Yom Kippur War.

Although a ceasefire agreement was reached in 1974, most of the Golan Heights remains under Israeli control.

Yom Kippur War, also called the October War was fourth of the Arab-Israeli wars, which was initiated by Egypt and Syria on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur.

The war eventually drew both the US and the erstwhile USSR into indirect confrontation in defense of their respective allies.

Israel's Golan Heights Law:

In 1981, Israel passed the Golan Heights Law, extending its "laws, jurisdiction and administration" to the area and effectively annexing it.

A United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution was passed declaring Israel's imposition of law in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights "null and void and without international legal effect".

However, it has not changed the situation on the ground, but the frontier has not seen major hostilities for more than 40 years.

In 2000, Israel and Syria **attempted to negotiate a settlement but failed**.

Syrian Civil War:

Israel and Syria's long-standing conflict escalated after the start of the **Syrian civil war in 2011**.

Iran, which denies Israel's right to exist, emerged as a key player in the conflict and has been providing weapons, money, and fighters to support the Syrian President's regime.

As a result, rockets sometimes land in Israel as "errant fire" during the fighting in Syria.

Targeted Strikes in Syria:

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Israel has been accused of carrying out targeted strikes in Syria in recent years, although it does not acknowledge them.

The recent wave of attacks, however, has raised concerns of an escalation in the conflict, further destabilizing the already volatile region.

Way Forward:

From an international perspective, the Syrian conflict is seen as a proxy war between major powers such as the US, Russia, and Iran, each supporting different sides in the conflict. The situation in Syria remains complex and unresolved, with no clear path to peace.

It requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict and takes into account the concerns and interests of all parties involved.

One possible way forward could be **through diplomatic efforts** aimed at finding a peaceful and just solution to the conflict.

This could involve engaging with all the parties involved, including Israel, Syria, Iran, Hezbollah, and other regional and international actors.

Another approach could be **through regional cooperation and dialogue**, which could help build trust and confidence among the parties and reduce tensions in the region.

The Abraham Accords signed between Israel and several Arab states could provide a positive example of such cooperation and dialogue.

Israel:



It is a country in the Middle East, located at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea.

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It is bounded to the north by Lebanon, to the northeast by Syria, to the east and southeast by Jordan, to the southwest by Egypt, and to the west by the Mediterranean Sea.

Jerusalem is the seat of government and the proclaimed capital.

Israel is the **world's only Jewish state**.

Syria:

₪Syria is also home to **diverse ethnic groups and religious denominations** such as the Syrian Arabs, Turkmen, Kurds, Assyrians, Circassians, Armenians, Greeks and Mandaean, with **Arabs being the largest ethnic group**.

Syria's religious groups include Sunnis, Alawis, Shiites, Christians, Jews, Mandaean, Druze, Salafis, Ismailis and Yazidis. The **largest religious group is Sunni Muslim**.

Syria historically refers to a region encompassing the Levantine regions of the ancient world. The modern state of Syria includes regions of many ancient kingdoms and civilisations.

Its **capital city of Damascus** and another city Aleppo feature in the list of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities.

Syria emerged as a parliamentary republic in 1945 when the Republic became a founding member of the United Nations.

Hezbollah:

Hezbollah is a **Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and militant group**, led since 1992 by its Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah.

Hezbollah was **established in the wake of the 1982 Lebanon War** by Lebanese clerics who had studied in Najaf. It adopted the model set out by Ayatollah Khomeini after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and the party's founders adopted "Hezbollah" as the name chosen by Khomeini.