

Sweida has experienced its most internally violent and unstable week in months.

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Spotlight

CHRONICLE OF SWEIDA CRISIS

JULY 2018
Attacks and suicide bombings by Daesh militants kill more than 250 people across the province

APRIL-MAY 2025
Sectarian clashes near Damascus spread south to Sweida and leave more than 100 people dead

JULY 2025
Fighting between Druze and Bedouin groups erupts and draws in government forces and allied tribal fighters

JULY 2025
More than 2,000 people are killed and tens of thousands displaced in violence, according to NGOs

JULY 2025
Israel intervenes with airstrikes claiming to be acting to protect Syria's Druze and keep borders safe

2025-2026
Druze leader Hikmat Al-Hijri continues to resist Damascus' authority while armed groups control parts of Sweida

AUG. 31, 2026
Renewed fighting wounds 10 Syrian security personnel and highlights the fragility of previous ceasefires

WHY SWEIDA MATTERS

MINORITY RIGHTS
The crisis is testing whether Syria's government can win the confidence of the Druze

TERRITORIAL CONTROL
Damascus has yet to establish full authority over Sweida and its armed factions

SECTARIAN TENSIONS
Druze-Bedouin divisions remain unresolved after the deadly violence of July 2025

ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT
Israel's military intervention has added a regional dimension to an internal Syrian crisis

SWEIDA: SYRIA'S FLASHPOINT PROVINCE

SYRIA
LEBANON
JORDAN
IRAQ
DAMASCUS
Sweida

WHY SWEIDA IS IN THE NEWS
Clashes in Syria's Druze heartland on Aug. 31 wounded 10 security personnel

SWEIDA AT A GLANCE

Location: Southern Syria, bordering Jordan
Population: Predominantly Druze
Status: Sweida city and much of the surrounding region remain outside the full control of post-Assad government
Druze: A religious minority with communities across Syria, Lebanon and Israel

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

Sweida's unfinished settlement

Fresh violence highlights challenges of integration of Syria's predominantly Druze southern province

Robert Edwards London

Renewed fighting in Syria's southern Sweida province has underscored how fragile the country's post-Assad political settlement remains — and how far Damascus still has to go to establish authority over the Druze heartland.

At least 10 members of Syria's Internal Security Forces were wounded Monday during clashes with local armed groups in western Sweida, according to Syrian state media. The fighting followed the deaths of two civilians.

The violence is the latest manifestation of a conflict that has simmered since Bashar Assad's fall in December 2024. Sweida city and much of the province remain outside the full control of Syria's new authorities.

Among the most powerful forces operating there is the National Guard, a Druze-dominated armed group affiliated with Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri, one of the community's most influential religious leaders.

The confrontation goes to the heart of a question facing

Syria's new government: How can Damascus build a unified state when communities that have spent years protecting themselves remain unwilling to surrender their weapons and accept central authority?

"During the later years of the Assad regime, the Druze enjoyed some degree of autonomy," Arman Mahmoudian, a research fellow at the University of South Florida's Global and National Security Institute, told Arab News. "They had local Druze militias that were responsible for much of their own security, operated checkpoints, and exercised a certain level of control over the area."

"There was essentially an unspoken social contract between the Assad regime and these militias," he said. "So, by the time Ahmad Al-Sharaa and his government came to power, there was already an established degree of semiautonomy in Sweida."

Sectarian violence in 2025 culminated when fighting between Druze and Bedouin groups drew in government forces and allied tribal fighters. At least 1,700 people were killed and tens of thousands displaced, according to the UN,

nongovernmental organizations and local accounts. For many Druze, the bloodshed confirmed their fears that surrendering their weapons could leave them vulnerable.

"The issue is trust," Mahmoudian said. "Druze minorities across the Middle East have historically been targeted by radical Islamist militias."

"Many of them worry that if they surrender and hand over their weapons, which remain their primary means of self-defense, they could once again become vulnerable to attacks."

The violence reshaped the balance of power. Druze armed factions reorganized, and the National Guard was formally established in August 2025 under Al-Hijri's de facto leadership, bringing together most of the province's armed groups.

Presented as a defender of Sweida's civilians, it has also become a parallel security structure exercising considerable control over parts of the province.

The confrontation is about

Clashes expose unresolved tensions over security, autonomy and central government authority. Getty Images

more than security. At its core is a disagreement over Sweida's political future.

Damascus wants the province brought under central authority. Al-Hijri has increasingly advocated self-rule, while raising the possibility of an independent Druze entity or protected arrangement outside direct Syrian sovereignty.

In August, he described Syria's Druze as an "integral part of

the State of Israel" and praised Israel's state-building model.

Israel intervened militarily during the July 2025 violence, launching airstrikes against Syrian government forces and saying it was protecting the Druze and preventing hostile forces from approaching its border. For Al-Hijri's camp, the intervention reinforced the argument that an external power could provide security guarantees Damascus has failed to offer. For Damascus, the relationship is profoundly threatening.

Mahmoudian said Israel's involvement reflects concern for its own Druze population as well as a broader security strategy. "Since the Oct. 7, 2023, attack, we have seen a persistent Israeli policy of trying to establish buffer zones between itself and territories that it perceives as potential security threats," he said. "A similar pattern appears to be emerging in Syria."

Al-Hijri has also spoken of creating an independent "State of Bashan," suggesting its future could involve independence, protected

status or association with another country. That leaves Damascus with a dilemma. Imposing central authority by force risks reigniting sectarian bloodshed, while allowing an autonomous armed enclave to persist risks undermining the government's sovereignty. Mahmoudian does not believe Sweida itself poses a direct threat to Syria's territorial integrity. But he warned it could set a precedent for other threatened minorities. "If they remain persistent and find a foreign guarantor, they may be able to secure privileges similar to those enjoyed by the Druze," he said.

The greater danger, he argued, is internationalization.

"If the conflict escalates and the new Syrian government adopts a much more aggressive approach toward the Druze in Sweida, resulting in a full-scale armed confrontation between Damascus and local Druze forces, Israel could become directly involved," he said.

"If Israel chooses to become more directly involved, this could lead to the outbreak of a broader conflict between Israel and Syria."

That is what makes Sweida so disproportionately important to Syria's future.

