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# **Al-Suwayda Roadmap: Between Syrian National Demands and Foreign Interference**

Unit for Political Studies

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### Unit for Political Studies

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# Table of Contents

Background to the Crisis ..... 1

The Roadmap ..... 1

Positions of the Signatory Parties ..... 3

The Israeli Position ..... 4

Challenges Facing the Roadmap ..... 5

Conclusion ..... 6

On 17 September 2025, a new roadmap was agreed upon in Damascus to resolve the al-Suwayda crisis. The accord builds on the Amman meetings held in July and August between the United States, Jordan, and Syria's transitional government. In a statement outlining the agreement, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the plan aims to address the aftermath of the bloodshed that engulfed the governorate last July, which left hundreds dead or wounded and displaced thousands of civilians.

## Background to the Crisis

Al-Suwayda governorate, located about 100 kilometers south of Damascus and inhabited predominantly by Syrian Druze citizens, became a theatre for bloody sectarian violence between 13 and 18 July 2025, leaving dozens of casualties among the province's civilians, Syrian security forces, Bedouin tribesmen, and members of local factions and militias. Israel exploited this crisis, which erupted following an assault on the Damascus-Suwayda Road, by presenting itself as the protector of Syrian Druze citizens who had been subjected to documented abuses and killings at the hands of security forces. Israel subsequently launched airstrikes against Syrian government forces attempting to regain control of the city, forcing them to withdraw under an agreement with notables and community leaders. Israel also bombed sovereign institutions in Damascus. Following the withdrawal of government forces, Bedouin civilians were subjected to retaliatory abuses and forced displacement carried out by local Druze militias, opening the door wide to the prospect of a major civil conflict.

On 19 July, a ceasefire agreement was reached between the Syrian government and Israel through US mediation. This development effectively made Israel, which had apparently cultivated ties with Druze religious figures prior to the crisis, a central party to a crisis that should have remained an internal Syrian affair. Since then, al-Suwayda has remained outside Damascus's authority, and the rift between the two sides has continued to deepen.<sup>1</sup>

## The Roadmap

The roadmap emphasized that the solution in Al-Suwayda must preserve Syrian territorial integrity, and that addressing the situation in the governorate cannot be separated from the Syrian national framework, while emphasizing its integration into the Syrian state. This clearly excludes the separatist demands raised by some parties in the governorate. The roadmap includes key points:

### **1. Withdrawal of security forces and establishment of a local administration with security and administrative arrangements.**

The roadmap stipulates the withdrawal of all civilian fighters from the administrative borders of Al-Suwayda Governorate and the deployment of qualified, trained, and disciplined police forces

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<sup>1</sup> "Clashes in Al-Suwayda and the Sectarian Question in Syria", Situation Assessment, ACRPS, 19/7/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BP9Z>

along the governorate's administrative borders. This entails the withdrawal of fighters and heavy weapons, while the state will maintain a symbolic presence through the Ministry of Interior, rather than the army. Military forces will be deployed along the road between Damascus and Al-Suwayda to ensure the safe movement of citizens and trade. A local police force will be formed under the leadership of a governorate figure appointed by the Ministry of Interior. Negotiations will determine the composition and structure of this force.

The Ministry of Interior appointed Suleiman Abdul Baqi, formerly the leader of the “Ahrar Jabal al-Arab” organization as director of the Al-Suwayda Security Directorate. The Ministry has not announced the names of the Qanawat and Shahba regional leaders within the new governorate structure but it emphasized the possibility of negotiating the military composition of Al-Suwayda, without specifying which party would negotiate with the Ministry of Interior. This hinders the implementation of many of its provisions, particularly given the presence of Druze spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri's faction, which has monopolized decision-making within the governorate on behalf of social and political forces. This was accomplished by sidelining the two sheikhs, al-Aql Hammoud al-Hanawi and Yusuf Jarbou, while simultaneously engaging with and receiving support from the Israeli occupation.

The agreement stipulates the formation of a provincial council representing all components of the local community, which would cooperate with the Syrian government – effectively establishing a model of expanded administrative decentralization. It is likely that the council would be granted full civil and service-related powers, while “sovereign matters” (security, politics, judiciary) would remain under the authority of the Damascus government. Security arrangements would take the form of short- and medium-term measures implemented by the Syrian government in coordination with Jordan, the US, and the local communities in Al-Suwayda, within the framework of a transitional period culminating in the governorate's full reintegration into Syrian state institutions.

This text thus represents a compromise between the demands of Al-Suwayda and the commitments of the Damascus government, by affirming that Al-Suwayda is part of Syria, while underscoring the need to activate all governmental and service institutions within it. Accordingly, the framework of any negotiations would pertain to internal governance, whether civil or security-related, while steering clear of separatist claims or moves toward autonomy. This, however, prompted a current within Al-Suwayda to respond by launching a petition campaign calling for the “right to self-determination,” aimed at granting its inhabitants the authority to decide the province's administrative form and its relationship with Damascus.<sup>2</sup> Demonstrations were organized in the governorate to this end.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Entry of humanitarian aid, release of detainees, and the return of displaced persons.**

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<sup>2</sup> “For the third day in a row, the campaign launched by activists in Al-Suwayda under the title ‘The Right to Self-Determination’ continues,” Facebook, Suwayda24, 19/9/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025, at: <https://bit.ly/4nf5HZr>

<sup>3</sup> “Demonstration in Al-Karama Square in central Al-Suwayda to demand the right to self-determination and the release of all kidnapped persons,” Facebook, Suwayda24, 20/9/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BP3p>

The Syrian government, in cooperation with Jordan and the US, will ensure the delivery of humanitarian and medical aid to Al-Suwayda and launch a reconstruction program for affected villages. This process will likely be conditional on progress on the ground in security and governance, in an attempt to persuade local parties to accept the proposed security arrangements. The agreement stipulates supporting the Red Cross efforts to release all detainees and abductees and complete exchange operations and guarantees for displaced persons to return to their villages once the security situation has been stabilized. A follow-up mechanism will be established through the establishment of a tripartite committee composed of the signatory parties to monitor implementation. A joint operations room is expected to be formed to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the agreement between the parties to the crisis. Although the agreement stipulates respect for Syrian sovereignty, this paragraph clearly legitimizes foreign interference in resolving an internal Syrian crisis. It gives Jordan a mandate to invite delegations from local communities (Sunni, Christian, and Druze) in Al-Suwayda to meetings to promote the reconciliation process, widening Jordan's role in southern Syria as it seeks to build trust between the warring parties.

### **3. Curbing foreign interference in parallel with the adoption of regional security understandings.**

The agreement includes clear language on “a ‘national narrative’ based on unity and equality, and criminalizing hate speech and sectarianism through new legislation”.<sup>4</sup> It affirms that Al-Suwayda is an integral part of Syria and should not be an arena of foreign influence, implicitly referring to Israeli interference. It also stipulates that the US and Israel would hold talks to reach security understandings regarding southern Syria, related to the security concerns of both Syria and Israel, in consultation with the Syrian government. The suggestion that the US would undertake these arrangements clearly violates Syrian sovereignty.

### **4. Inquiry and Accountability**

The agreement called on the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to conduct an investigation into the events in Al-Suwayda. This is a key demand of the forces present in the governorate, and a new requirement that the Syrian government may have accepted under pressure, given the widespread violations committed by government forces and non-state actors collaborating with them during the crisis.

## **Positions of the Signatory Parties**

The Syrian government, Jordan, and the US signed the roadmap, with each pursuing its own objectives. The Syrian government seeks to consolidate its sovereignty and legitimacy in Al-Suwayda, block separatist demands or calls for external intervention, and stabilize the security situation to launch reconstruction efforts and ease pressure over this issue. It appears that Ahmad al-Sharaa's government is signaling its desire for this agreement to serve as a model for possible

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<sup>4</sup> “What are the details of the roadmap for resolving the Suwayda crisis in Syria?” *Enab Baladi*, 17/09/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BP58>

future agreements in the Syrian Jazira, particularly regarding the system of expanded administrative decentralization. This is reflected in Damascus's approval of the International Commission of Inquiry's request to investigate the events, its withdrawal of the army in favour of a police force, and its acceptance of forming a provincial council representing the local community.

Jordan, for its part, fears the impact of the Al-Suwayda crisis on its own security, especially if it continues, as this could be exploited by certain forces – chief among them ISIS – to expand into southern Syria, in addition to Israeli expansion along its northern border. Jordan also fears an increase in drug smuggling activity from these areas, which would threaten its domestic security, as well as the possibility that an escalation of the crisis could generate a new wave of migration into its territory. At the same time, Jordan recognizes that playing the role of guarantor and mediator could increase its influence in southern Syria and strengthen its partnership with Washington in maintaining regional security.

Meanwhile the US seeks to diffuse the situation in southern Syria with several aims. Most notably, it wants to reaffirm its commitment to Israel's security by assuring it that southern Syria will not become an arena for new threats. In addition, Washington aims to buttress the new Syrian administration and prevent its rivals – such as ISIS and Iran – from exploiting the crisis to reposition and expand. By signing as a partner and guarantor of the agreement, Washington has effectively inherited Russia's former role in the south, in addition to its influence in the northeast, thereby strengthening its position in Syria and making it the principal actor in the country's affairs. The US position rests on the principle of achieving low-cost stability by controlling the southern region in a way that ensures the security of its allies in Israel and Jordan, while preventing this area from descending into chaos that could undermine regional security.

## The Israeli Position

Although Israel is not a party to the agreement, it has been a central player in the crisis. On 19 July, a ceasefire agreement was reached between Syria and Israel in southern Syria under US sponsorship. This was followed by direct political negotiations, the first round of which took place in Paris at the end of July 2025, followed by a second round in August that included Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani and Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, under the supervision of US envoy Tom Barak.<sup>5</sup> These meetings discussed security arrangements across all of southern Syria, based on the facts on the ground imposed by Israel after the fall of the Assad regime.

Nevertheless, the roadmap agreement contained provisions that were troubling to Israel, most notably the restored government control over Al-Suwayda. This runs counter to Israel's strategy of keeping the security situation in the south fragile by openly rejecting any official Syrian military presence there. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphasized that Israel would not allow Syrian

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<sup>5</sup> "Syrian, Israeli Diplomats met in Paris to Discuss De-Escalation: Syrian State Media," *Arab News*, 20/8/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025, at: <https://arab.news/pghds>

government forces to deploy south of Damascus, considering any permanent military presence there a direct threat to Israeli security. Israel's position tied into a US-led negotiation track within a broader political framework. Under this approach, Washington exerted direct pressure on Damascus to accelerate talks with Israel before the UN General Assembly convened,<sup>6</sup> so the agreement could be presented as a diplomatic achievement for the Trump administration.<sup>7</sup>

In this sense, the developments on the ground in Al-Suwayda became additional leverage in the negotiations. Israel exploited the violence, seeking to advance a narrative that it needed to protect the Druze community. It also worked to reorganize local factions in Al-Suwayda through arms and funding, in an attempt to establish an alternative security structure that would keep the south tied to Israeli oversight and limit the Syrian state's ability to reassert full sovereignty over its territory. From this perspective, the roadmap carries a double-edged blow for Israel: it provides short-term calm on the ground, while simultaneously paving the way for the gradual reassertion of the Syrian government's central role. This runs against the strategy Israel has pursued in the post-Assad era, where it sought to weaken the Syrian state and prevent the restoration of its national cohesion. This tension explains why Tel Aviv continues to engage in negotiations while simultaneously preserving its military and political pressure tools.

## Challenges Facing the Roadmap

The implementation of the roadmap faces several challenges, most notably:

1. The Supreme Legal Committee in Al-Suwayda, formed in August under the auspices of Hikmat al-Hijri, has publicly rejected the agreement, accusing the Syrian government of shirking its responsibility for the events and demanding independence or self-governance.<sup>8</sup>
2. The ability to conduct a full and transparent investigation and hold accountable those responsible for violations from all sides is an issue that may not satisfy all parties and may perpetuate the crisis.
3. Although some provisions are feasible, others are highly complex. The text combines contradictory and vague phrases such as "full integration" into the Syrian state and the formation of a provincial council representing all components of the local community to cooperate with the Syrian government; in other words, recognizing broad administrative decentralization in Al-Suwayda.
4. The Israeli position and US seriousness in controlling Israeli behaviour in Syria.

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<sup>6</sup> "Under US Pressure, Syria and Israel Inch Toward Security Deal," *Reuters*, 16/9/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025, at: <https://shorturl.at/clyLs>

<sup>7</sup> "Proposed Syria-Israel Security Agreement: Provisions and Prospects", Situation Assessment, ACRPS 22/9/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPf5>

<sup>8</sup> "Al-Suwayda: Legal Committee Rejects Government Roadmap", *Sky News Arabia*, 17/9/2025, accessed on 23/9/2025, at: <https://bit.ly/3Kau9fW>



5. The position of warlords and drug traffickers, who will seek to sabotage this agreement. Its implementation would harm their interests, as they benefit from the chaos, and they may seek to carry out assassinations or kidnappings.
6. Any failure to implement any of the provisions could lead to the collapse of the agreement and a return to the status quo ante.

## Conclusion

The roadmap notwithstanding, the governorate's future remains far from settled, with scenarios ranging from the successful establishment of a local governance model to the return of fighting between various local forces, and even direct Israeli military intervention. Some forces close to the Damascus believe that the roadmap may include some provisions that violate and undermine Syrian sovereignty, such as the invitation to the International Commission of Inquiry to investigate, rather than a local committee, and the Jordanian-US oversight. There are growing concerns that the roadmap may represent part of a broader arrangement in southern Syria, represented by security agreements that limit state sovereignty and serve Israeli interests. This links al-Suwayda's future to regional and international agreements rather than to understandings between the government and segments of the Syrian population who fear marginalization and minority status – potentially laying the groundwork for foreign intervention. It must be emphasized that any international or regional arrangements are no substitute for a domestic Syrian policy based on equal rights for all Syrian people, such that this is reflected in all state institutions, including the military and security institutions.