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Beyond the Axis: Israel's Approach in Syria

from Threat Management to Reshaping the Security Environment

Strategy Paper:

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Omran for Strategic Studies

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Executive Summary

- **The year 2025 marked a critical turning point in the nature of Israeli intervention in Syria.** Israeli behavior can no longer be understood merely as a conventional extension of earlier deterrence patterns. Rather, it appears to form part of a broader approach toward Syria as a whole, and toward the reshaping of its southern security environment in particular.
- **This study seeks to define the nature of Israeli behavior in Syria during 2025** by tracking and documenting the range of Israeli operations carried out throughout the year, and by analyzing their objectives, patterns, and implications. It moves beyond describing Israeli activity or measuring its intensity, toward understanding the shift in its nature, function, approaches, and operational model.
- **Methodologically, the study combines quantitative monitoring with qualitative analysis.** It tracks 416 Israeli operations during 2025, reconstructs them analytically, and links them to a database and interactive field maps that use geographic location as the quantitative unit of measurement, namely 416 targeted locations. This allows for a layered reading of the patterns and objectives of Israeli intervention, spatially and functionally, moving beyond a simple count of strikes toward an understanding of the structure of deployment, presence, and impact.
- **The temporal analysis shows that Israel did not operate according to a simple linear escalation.** Instead, it followed a model of operational rhythm management: moving from testing and foundational calibration in the first quarter, to coercive bargaining in the second, then to the imposition of new rules of engagement in the third, and finally to attempted consolidation and management of the operational environment in the fourth quarter, which accounted for 61.2% of all operations.
- **Geographically, Israeli activity was heavily concentrated in southern Syria,** which accounted for approximately 95.9% of all operations. Quneitra emerged as the main operational center, accounting for 78.6% of activity. This reflects the transformation of southern Syria from a peripheral borderland into a central arena for reshaping the security environment.
- **The analysis of target types reveals a shift in the center of gravity from targeting military capabilities to managing the civilian environment.** Civilian sites accounted for 79.9% of all operations, indicating a transition from a logic of "destroying the threat" to one of controlling the environment that produces it. This shift is further reinforced by the nature of the activity itself: security-oriented field activities represented 68% of total activity, compared with only 32% for direct military activity. This points to a move away from reliance on strikes alone and toward repeated, low-cost field presence.
- **In terms of operational patterns, airpower was no longer the dominant instrument.** Ground incursions accounted for 77.7% of all activity, reflecting a pattern of "functional incursion" based on temporary but repeated penetration. This points to a broader shift from a deterrence-based model of intervention to one centered on managing the operational environment on the ground.

- **In the broader context, despite Israel's military superiority and its ability to impose new operational realities, this model faces a complex and overlapping regional environment.** The intersection of multiple regional and international actors in the Syrian arena limits Israel's ability to translate military superiority into unilateral strategic resolution. Syria is therefore becoming an arena for rearranging regional balances rather than decisively settling them, especially amid the broader U.S.-Israeli confrontation with Iran.
- This paper is excerpted from a longer study published in Arabic by the Omran Center for Strategic Studies on May 12, 2026. To read the full study, please refer to the following link: **https://bit.ly/430W1ZV**

Introduction

Since the outbreak of the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip following Operation *Al-Aqsa Flood* on 7 October 2023, Syria has entered a new phase in its interaction with Israeli strategy. The country shifted from being a site of selective Israeli targeting, primarily linked to threats associated with Iranian influence, into a more open arena for intensified operations and an expanded target set.

During the escalation in Gaza, Israeli operations in Syria initially retained a relatively limited and selective character, focusing on sites and commanders affiliated with Iran, Hezbollah, and some Palestinian factions. This pattern began to change as the intensity of Israeli operations in Gaza declined and attention shifted toward Lebanon. Israeli strikes in Syria then escalated in an unprecedented manner, targeting Hezbollah leaders, Iranian-backed militias, strategic sites, and a range of positions affiliated with the Assad regime.

With the **beginning of 2024**, Israeli escalation expanded at varying tempos, through different operational patterns and against diverse categories of targets. From the start of the year until late October 2024, and according to human rights monitors, Israel carried out 178 attacks on Syrian territory, including 152 airstrikes and 26 ground attacks. These attacks resulted in the targeting or destruction of approximately 332 sites and assets, including weapons and ammunition depots, headquarters, commanders, military vehicles, and missile-development centers.[1] This escalation formed part of a broader Israeli strategy aimed at striking Iranian influence in the region and limiting its regional threat capacity.

November 2024 marked an exceptional moment on multiple levels. First, the pace of Israeli strikes on Syrian and Lebanese territory increased significantly. According to reports by the Omran Center for Strategic Studies, Israeli attacks during that month targeted at least 38 locations, including border crossings, military border positions, critical military sites, and strategic positions linked to Hezbollah and Iranian-backed militias. These attacks caused substantial damage and disrupted key crossings between Syria and Lebanon.

Second, the Israeli escalation in November 2024 **coincided with several important international, regional, and local political developments.** At the international level, the U.S. elections ended with Donald Trump's victory. Regionally, the ceasefire agreement between Hezbollah and Israel in Lebanon entered into force. Yet only hours after this fragile agreement, **the Syrian front erupted on 27 November 2024, when Syrian opposition factions launched Operation Deterrence of Aggression. The operation escalated rapidly and led, on 8 December 2024, to the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime and his flight from the country.**

Amid this pivotal development for Syria and the wider Middle East, Israeli airstrikes intensified across much of Syrian territory, targeting numerous sites within a short period of time. These airstrikes were accompanied by ground incursions into parts of southern Syria, including Quneitra and Jabal al-Sheikh. During this period, the **Omran Center for Strategic Studies issued a report** documenting the most prominent Israeli attacks on **Syria between 27**

[1] Seba Abdul Latif, "Israeli Escalation in Syria: From Operation Deterrence of Aggression to the Fall of the Assad Regime," *Omran Center for Strategic Studies*, January 15, 2025, https://bit.ly/4tn4PVe

November and 11 December 2024, from the launch of Operation Deterrence of Aggression through the days following Assad's fall.

This period, particularly the first ten days of December 2024, witnessed a sharp surge in Israeli strikes, which targeted more than 53 locations across nine governorates. Israeli Army Radio also confirmed that, within the 48 hours following Assad's fall, Israel carried out more than 250 airstrikes on Syria. These were accompanied by a ground military operation through which Israel occupied the summit of Jabal al-Sheikh near the Golan, along with several villages and towns in Quneitra Governorate.

Israeli escalation at the end of 2024 varied in intensity and unfolded across several phases. **The first phase**, before the launch of Operation Deterrence of Aggression, represented a continuation of Israel's previous strategy of "threat management." This approach focused on Iranian militias, Hezbollah, and their activities, sites, and leadership structures, while remaining relatively limited in destructive scope.

The second phase, during Operation Deterrence of Aggression, witnessed a broader operational expansion. This included concentrated strikes on key supply routes, especially those linking Lebanon and Syria, as well as attacks on selected military sites and weapons depots abandoned by the Assad regime, particularly in areas close to the Israeli border.

The third phase, following Assad's fall, was marked by an unprecedented escalation in Israeli airstrikes and the systematic destruction of military and strategic assets vacated by regime forces. These included barracks, electronic warfare directorates, defensive and combat brigades with their armored vehicles and missile systems, weapons depots, military airports and aircraft, radar systems, naval assets, and military research centers. This escalation was accompanied by ground incursions, beginning with Israel's seizure of former regime positions on the summit of Jabal al-Sheikh, then expanding into the buffer zone established under the 1974 Disengagement Agreement, and later beyond it into several villages and towns in Quneitra Governorate.

During the first month after the regime's fall, Israel succeeded in imposing a new military, security, and political reality in Syria. This reflected a systematic exploitation of Syria's deteriorating conditions to advance Israeli strategic interests. Israel relied on its military superiority to bypass the 1974 Disengagement Agreement, unilaterally declare it no longer applicable, and place Syria in a de facto state of war, while invoking justifications related to "protecting national security" and concerns over the nature of the forces that had come to power in Damascus.

With the beginning of 2025, Israeli activity in Syria began to expand gradually and assume more complex and dangerous forms. Although the intensity of airstrikes declined compared with the immediate post-Assad period, they continued at varying levels and against different categories of targets. At the same time, Israel maintained an active field military presence in southern Syria, especially in Quneitra and parts of rural Daraa and rural Damascus, while broadening its operations toward security-oriented field activities, including arrests, patrols, checkpoints, and raids. This shift signaled a gradual change in approach: from targeting

military infrastructure to establishing an effective security depth designed to prevent the emergence of any vacuum.

Israel's target set soon expanded to include the new Syrian authorities and their forces. In this context, the most notable development during 2025 was **the shift in Israeli behavior from a primarily military posture to a clearer overlap between the security, political, and social spheres.** This was particularly evident in Israel's use of the discourse of "protecting minorities," which became linked to social and political components inside Syria, including the Druze and the Kurds. The rhetoric of "protecting the Druze" intensified noticeably amid internal tensions during the first quarter of the year, then became sharper and was later translated into direct military interventions in the second and third quarters, coinciding with open proposals for establishing a demilitarized zone south of Damascus.

This unprecedented escalation intersected with parallel political tracks, including efforts by regional and international actors to recalibrate the Syrian file, as well as the opening of direct and indirect negotiation channels between Damascus and Tel Aviv. These developments contributed to the emergence of a cautious and gradual political path aimed at de-escalation. In this context, Israeli strikes could no longer be understood solely within a deterrent military framework. They also carried political messages directed at the new Syrian government, Turkey, and influential international actors, reflecting the use of military pressure on the ground as a tool of negotiation.

This uneasy political track was shaped by international developments and regional shifts, most notably the United States' lifting of sanctions on Damascus in May 2025 and the accompanying divergence in priorities between Washington and Tel Aviv, which created new political space around the Syrian file. It was also affected by the outbreak of the twelve-day Israeli-Iranian war and the subsequent reordering of regional power balances and alliances, particularly after the confrontation was renewed later in 2026 and the United States entered alongside Israel. Accordingly, Israeli activity could no longer be understood in direct military terms alone. Rather, it became part of a broader approach through which Israel sought to reshape the security environment in Syria and the wider region, while using operational pressure as a tool to influence political and negotiation tracks.

The developments of 2025 marked a dangerous transitional phase in the nature of Israeli intervention in Syria. Israeli behavior could no longer be understood as a conventional extension of earlier patterns of "deterrence." Rather, it formed part of a broader approach toward Syria as a whole, and toward the reshaping of its southern security environment in particular. In this context, military force was increasingly repurposed as an instrument of pressure within a transitional setting, a fragile negotiating environment, and a complex regional landscape shaped by the decline of the "Iran axis" and Syria's departure from its sphere of influence.

Against this backdrop, the study raises a central research problem that goes beyond describing Israeli activity or measuring its intensity. It seeks instead to analyze the transformation in the nature and function of Israeli behavior, to understand its broader approach, and to deconstruct its operational model in post-Assad Syria. To do so, the study

tracks and documents Israeli operations carried out throughout 2025 and analyzes their patterns and implications within this shifting context.

The study therefore asks the following main question:

What was the nature of Israeli behavior in Syria during 2025, and what are its strategic implications for understanding Israel's approach and operational model during the transitional period that followed Assad's fall and the decline of Iranian influence in the region?

From this main question, several sub-questions arise:

- How were Israeli operations in Syria distributed over time during 2025, and what are the implications of this distribution?
- Where were these operations geographically concentrated, and what does their spatial distribution reveal?
- What operational patterns did Israel adopt in Syria during the period under study, and what do they reveal about the structure of the intervention?
- What was the nature of the targets affected by Israeli operations in Syria during 2025, and what does this indicate about the function of the intervention?
- How did Israeli behavior in Syria change after the fall of the Assad regime, and what are the defining features of Israel's approach and operational model in dealing with the new Syrian reality?
- What is the nature and future of the emerging negotiation track between Syria and Israel, and to what extent is it linked to the operational tempo on the ground and the accompanying regional and international shifts?

To answer these questions, **the study adopts a methodological approach that combines quantitative monitoring with qualitative analysis**. It tracks Israeli operations between 1 January and 31 December 2025, which constitutes the study's temporal scope, while covering Syrian territory in its entirety. The study relies on a systematic review of all documented and publicly reported Israeli operations during 2025, treated as a structured sample spanning twelve consecutive months. On this basis, a documented chronological event log was developed to capture the range of Israeli operations and activities, making it possible to trace patterns of operational behavior and their transformations across changing temporal contexts.

In this regard, the study draws on a combination of primary and secondary **data sources**. Primary sources include local and international monitoring groups, local and international news outlets, official platforms and accounts, local and international field reports and briefings, direct event monitoring, and field interviews with activists and local sources in southern Syria. Secondary sources include relevant reports, papers, and studies issued by Arab and international research centers, in addition to specialized analyses addressing Israeli behavior in Syria within its regional context.

At the implementation level, a **structured database was developed using analytical tools** such as Excel and linked to interactive field maps that reflect the distribution and patterns of operations. Each operation was recorded according to a set of key variables, including temporal

distribution by month and day, geographic distribution by governorate and area, operational pattern such as airstrike, artillery shelling, or ground incursion, target type as military or civilian, and activity type as military or security-oriented field activity. These data were also cross-referenced with political and military developments at the local, regional, and international levels in order to understand the context in which the operations occurred and the reactions associated with them. This enabled the construction of a layered analytical reading of changes in Israeli behavior across time and space.

Within this framework, **the study operationally defines Israeli operations** as the sum of military and security-oriented field actions carried out unlawfully inside Syrian territory, including airstrikes, artillery shelling, and ground incursions. It also distinguishes between military and civilian targets and classifies the nature of activity into two categories: military activity, which directly targets military sites or capabilities; and security-oriented field activity, which refers to measures of control and regulation within a given geographic space, such as raids, patrols, searches, arrests, bulldozing operations, checkpoints, surveys, and similar actions.

In calculating the total number of operations, the study relies on the "targeted geographic site" as the principal quantitative unit of analysis, rather than the number of strikes, munitions, or individual targets. In this context, a geographic site is defined as any independent spatial unit inside Syria, such as a village, town, city, military site, infrastructure facility, or similar location, that was subjected to direct Israeli activity, whether through ground incursion, aerial operation, or artillery shelling, regardless of the nature of the target, whether military or civilian, or the type of activity, whether military or security-oriented field activity.

Accordingly, every geographic site exposed to Israeli activity is recorded as an independent entry in the database, even when several activities occur simultaneously within a single operation or within the same time frame. For example, if several towns witnessed simultaneous incursions on the same day, each town is recorded as a separate unit of observation, since each represents an independent sphere of penetration and impact. Therefore, numerical differences between the number of operations and the number of geographic sites do not constitute a methodological flaw. Rather, they reflect the nature of the activity itself: a single operation may include multiple sites, and activities may recur at the same site at different times.

Using the targeted geographic site as the quantitative unit of analysis strengthens the spatial and functional accuracy of the study's representation of Israeli operations. It also helps avoid inflating figures that may result from counting repeated strikes on the same site as separate spatial events. In addition, this approach enables a more precise spatial representation of Israeli activity by linking the database to interactive maps that place each targeted site within its actual administrative boundaries. This supports a more accurate visual and analytical reading of the distribution and patterns of activity across governorates**. Within this framework, the final pre-analysis database recorded 416 site-based operations across Syrian territory during 2025.**

Accordingly, the quantitative indicators presented in the study, most notably the number of affected geographic sites and operations, should not be treated as final or exhaustive figures.

Rather, they should be understood as a weighted and structured sample that enables the construction of an analytical indicator for identifying general trends and understanding the nature of Israeli behavior in Syria. The study does not claim to provide a comprehensive count of all Israeli operations and activities in Syria, nor is that its purpose, especially since access to the actual number of operations or targeted sites remains largely confined to the actors carrying them out or directly affected by them.

Rather, **the study aims to provide an in-depth analytical reading** of Israeli operations in Syria during 2025 by deconstructing their patterns and distributions and linking them to their political and strategic context. In doing so, it contributes to a better understanding of Israeli behavior and its objectives in the post-Assad period. **The significance of the study** lies in its focus on a highly sensitive transitional phase marked by pivotal transformations in the structure of the Syrian state and authority, alongside a complex overlap of regional and international interests. This makes the analysis of Israeli behavior essential to understanding the future of stability and the reordering of the security environment in Syria.

Findings and Conclusions

Based on twelve months of monitoring throughout 2025, and on close tracking of the evolution of Israeli behavior in Syria and its interaction with field, political, and regional developments, the following findings provide a focused reading of that behavior across several interconnected levels: operational patterns on the ground, their political contexts, their strategic implications, and possible future trajectories.

Monthly Temporal Distribution of Israeli Operations in 2025

The temporal tracking of Israeli activity in Syria during the first year after the regime's fall reveals more than fluctuations in the intensity or frequency of operations. It provides a direct analytical entry point into the logic governing this intervention. The 2025 timeline shows that Israeli activity did not follow a simple linear escalation. Rather, it followed a dynamic pattern based on operational rhythm management, in which military intensity was combined with selective targeting within changing political and security contexts. This pattern culminated in a clear cumulative escalation during the later stages of the year. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the operational weight became disproportionately concentrated in the final quarter.

At the monthly level, this concentration becomes even clearer. December recorded the highest share of activity, at 26.4% or 110 operations, followed by November at 19.7% or 82 operations, and October at 15.1% or 63 operations. This means that more than 60% of annual Israeli activity was concentrated in the final three months alone. By contrast, the first months of the year witnessed very low levels of activity: January accounted for only 0.7%, or three operations; February for 3.1%, or 13 operations; and March for 4.3%, or 18 operations. This reflects a clear gap between the beginning and the end of the year, as well as a cumulative escalation in the pace of operations.

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Percentage	0.7%	3.1%	4.3%	2.2%	2.4%	3.4%	6.2%	11.3%	5.3%	15.1%	19.7%	26.4%

Figure 1. Temporal distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 by month.

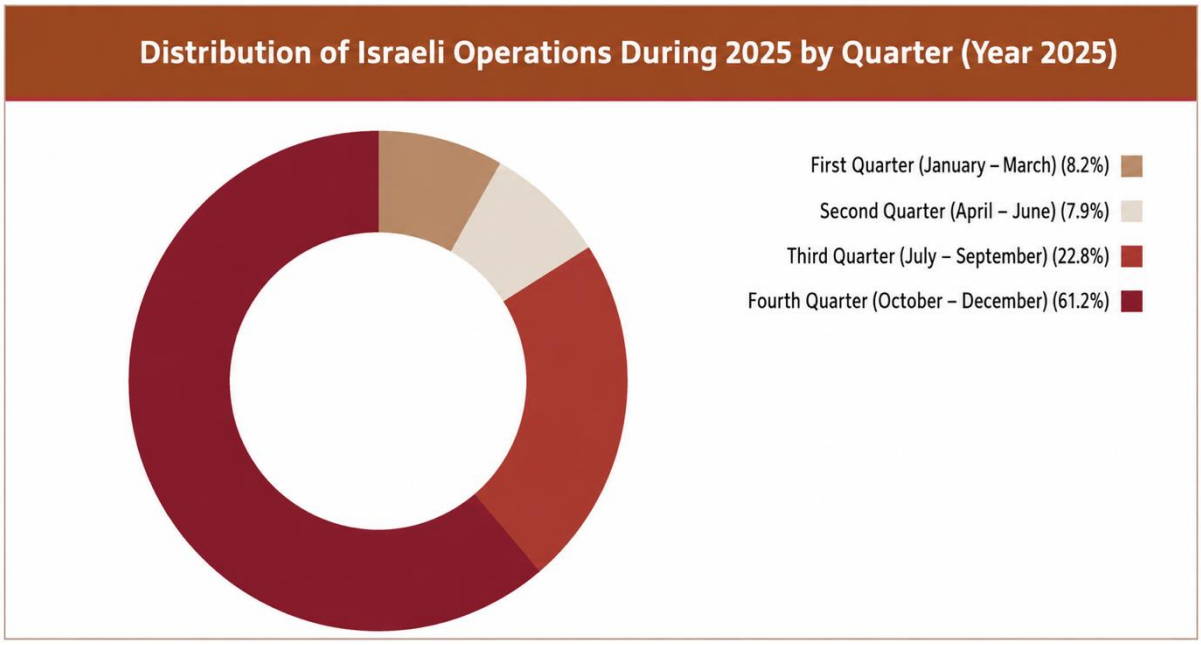


Figure 2. Temporal distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 by quarter.

The findings, as reflected in both the monthly and quarterly breakdowns, indicate that Israeli activity was not evenly distributed across the year. Rather, it was sharply concentrated in the final phase of 2025. **The fourth quarter alone accounted for approximately 61.2% of total operations**, compared with relatively low shares in the first quarter at 8.2% and the second quarter at 7.9%, and a moderate increase in the third quarter at 22.8%. This disparity reflects more than a quantitative rise. It points to a gradual shift in the function of the intervention: from testing and pressure to attempts at consolidation and management of the border space.

Accordingly, the temporal distribution of Israeli activity during 2025 should not be read merely as a quantitative curve. Rather, it should be understood as an expression of a phased intervention model based on recalibrating the operational rhythm in line with broader political and strategic objectives. This becomes clearer when tracing the transformation of Israeli activity across the successive stages of the year.

In the first quarter, from January to March, which accounted for only 8.2% of total annual operations, activity followed a gradual upward trajectory from a relatively low baseline. Yet this low level should not be understood simply as an objective decline in activity. Rather, it reflected two overlapping factors. First, it followed a previous high-intensity phase after the fall of the regime, during which a significant share of military capabilities and related infrastructure had already been targeted and destroyed, reducing the immediate target set at the beginning of the year. Second, it reflected a recalibration of the operational tempo within a more gradual approach, alongside qualitative changes in the target set.

January witnessed a low operational tempo, but it also recorded the first direct targeting of forces affiliated with the new Syrian government in the south. **February's operations** appeared as an extension of more traditional targeting patterns linked to preventing the reconstitution of supply networks and weapons-smuggling routes across the Lebanese border. They also included the targeting of Palestinian headquarters and leaders in Syria, alongside the first signs of the rhetoric of "protecting the Druze" and calls for the demilitarization of the south, amid a relatively low tempo of incursions and shelling.

In March, although the numerical share remained limited, operations reached a qualitative peak following a large-scale Israeli air attack that struck several Syrian governorates. This coincided with the announcement, on 10 March, of the integration agreement between the Syrian government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), as well as the intensification of the rhetoric of "protecting the Druze" amid the events in Jaramana in rural Damascus. During the same period, incursions were recorded in Quneitra, and a direct clash took place between Israeli forces and local residents in Koya, west of Daraa.

Accordingly, this quarter can be understood as a phase of "**testing and foundational calibration**." The objective was not to maximize operational volume, but rather to test the limits of the new authority, expand the target set, incorporate political and social dimensions into Israeli rhetoric, and translate these dimensions into operational behavior.

In the second quarter, from April to June, which recorded the lowest annual share at **7.9%**, operations declined further in volume. However, this decline was accompanied by a marked rise in the political and strategic significance of the intervention. In April, air attacks escalated to include sensitive sovereign targets across several governorates, including airports, air defense systems, and research centers. This was accompanied by direct political threats against the new Syrian leadership, amid rising tensions between Ankara and Tel Aviv over Syria. The month also saw the first operational translation of Israel's discourse of "**protecting the Druze**," following Israeli strikes against government forces in **Sahnaya**, in rural Damascus, amid local tensions.

In **May**, despite the low overall share of activity at **2.4%,** escalation peaked at the beginning of the month through broad Israeli strikes across several governorates. This was followed by the targeting of the vicinity of the presidential palace, which served as a warning message to the Syrian leadership. The second half of the month then witnessed a marked decline in operations, alongside signs of engagement in an undeclared de-escalation track and regionally

and internationally mediated negotiations in **Baku**. The month also witnessed the first meeting between **President al-Sharaa and President Trump** in Riyadh.

In June, which accounted for 3.4% of annual activity, the picture reflected the fragility of the de-escalation track. Tensions resurfaced after unidentified rockets were launched from Syrian territory, prompting retaliatory Israeli strikes. These were accompanied by assassinations and ground incursions of unprecedented depth, reaching **Beit Jinn** in rural Damascus, while repeated incursions in Quneitra also intensified. This unfolded in parallel with Syria's entanglement in the wider regional confrontation during the **twelve-day Israeli-Iranian war**. Thus, the second quarter does not reflect a decline in activity as much as a phase of "**managing negotiation through force**," in which operations became fewer in number but more directly tied to shaping the political and coercive negotiation track.

In the third quarter, from July to September, whose share rose to **22.8%,** activity began to climb again, but in a qualitatively different form. **July, at 6.2%**, marked a decisive turning point with the eruption of the **Suwayda crisis**, during which Israel intervened directly and forcefully to prevent the advance of government forces, culminating in unprecedented airstrikes on sovereign sites in Damascus.

In **August, at 11.3%**, incursions and field activities increased again in Quneitra, alongside unprecedented deep incursions and targeted strikes against government forces in rural Damascus, before the month witnessed a new round of negotiations in **Paris**. In **September, at 5.3%**, activity stabilized at a medium level, with continued ground incursions in Quneitra and Daraa and selective airstrikes elsewhere. This occurred in parallel with another round of U.S.-mediated negotiations in **London**, reflecting a growing overlap between military pressure on the ground and diplomacy. This quarter can therefore be described as a phase of "**imposing new rules of engagement**," in which operations were no longer merely a tool of pressure, but a direct instrument for shaping conflict outcomes.

In the **fourth quarter, from October to December**, which constituted the decisive bloc with **61.2%** of total annual activity, operations shifted to a different pattern and tempo based on continuity and accumulation rather than qualitative leaps alone. Monthly figures reached their highest levels of the year: **October at 15.1%, November at 19.7%, and December at 26.4%.** This reflected the transformation of Israeli activity into a near-daily pattern, especially in southern Syria.

On the ground, incursions became highly frequent and repetitive, particularly in Quneitra. They were accompanied by continued searches, raids, arrests, and the construction of checkpoints, together with selective air and artillery strikes in Daraa and other areas. This points to a clear shift from military intervention aimed at deterring threats to a phase of "**managing the environment that produces them,**" in which the objective became the consolidation and maintenance of presence rather than the creation of new operational breakthroughs.

Politically, the negotiation track intensified during this quarter while producing contradictory signals. Whenever reports suggested that a possible agreement was approaching, talks stalled again over sovereignty-related issues, such as the demand for a "**humanitarian corridor**" from Israel to Suwayda or the continued presence of Israeli forces in areas they had recently entered.

The quarter, and the year, ended without an agreement, amid Israeli field escalation matched by Syrian political escalation. This makes it possible to describe the quarter as a phase of "**attempted consolidation and outcome management**," in which activity shifted from producing facts on the ground to preserving and administering them.

This temporal distribution reflects more than variation in operational intensity. It reveals a phased pattern of intervention that progressively redefined the function of military force over time: from "**testing and foundational calibration**" in the first quarter, to "**managing negotiation through force**" in the second, to "**imposing new rules of engagement**" in the third, and finally to "**consolidation and management of the operational environment**" through near-daily, lower-intensity presence in the final quarter. Israel's activity in Syria, therefore, did not operate merely according to the logic of **when to strike**, but according to a more complex logic of redistributing intensity and function over time, whereby operations evolved from a tool of contingent pressure into an instrument of durable control.

Geographic Distribution of Israeli Operations in 2025 by Governorate

If the temporal reading shows how Israel managed the rhythm of its intervention during the year under study, the geographic reading shows where it sought to produce its deepest impact. When linked to the distribution of operations and activities across Syrian governorates, the field data do not merely indicate fluctuations in operational intensity. Rather, they reveal a clear map of priorities and a spatial concentration of strategic significance. Within this map, southern Syria emerges as the most sensitive arena in the structure of Israeli intervention, as shown in Figure 3.

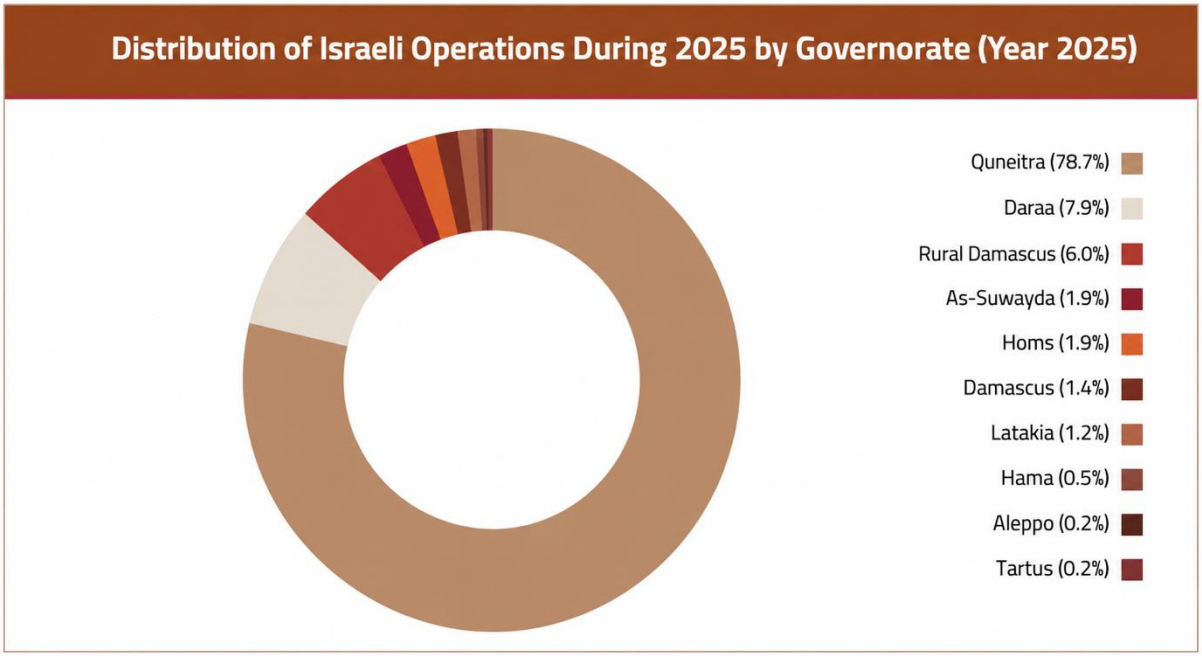


Figure 3. Geographic distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 by governorate.

The data, as reflected in **Figure 3** on the geographic distribution of operations by governorate, show that Israeli activity was far from evenly distributed across Syrian territory. Instead, it was sharply concentrated in **Quneitra**, which alone accounted for **78.66%** of all operations, or **328 operations**. This was followed by **Daraa at 7.91%, or 33 operations**, and **Rural Damascus at 6%, or 25 operations.** The remaining shares were only marginally distributed across other governorates, including **Homs and Suwayda at 1.9% each, Damascus at 1.4%, and Latakia at 1.2%**, with **very limited levels recorded in Hama, Aleppo, and Tartous**.

This disparity reflects more than a difference in intensity. It points to a sharp geographic concentration of activity. As shown in **Figure 4**, the five southern governorates — **Quneitra, Daraa, Rural Damascus, Suwayda, and Damascus** — together accounted for approximately **95.9%** of all recorded operations in 2025. By contrast, the rest of Syria remained only marginally affected, largely through selective airstrikes rather than direct field activity. **Accordingly, the geographic distribution does not indicate a broad operational spread. Rather, it reveals a clear functional concentration in which southern Syria shifts from a border periphery into the center of gravity of Israel's intervention model**.

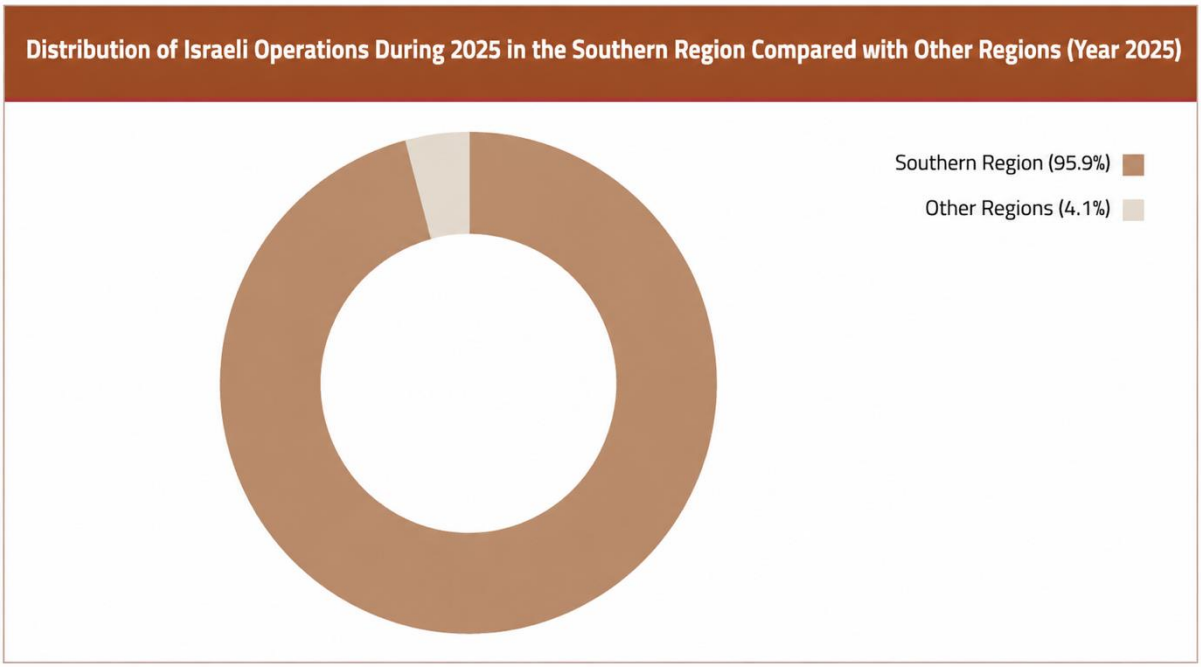


Figure 4. Geographic distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 in the southern region compared to other regions.

Quneitra emerges as the decisive geographic node in this model. It was not merely a contact zone, but the arena in which Israeli ground activity was most heavily concentrated and where different operational patterns appeared most clearly, both in intensity and regularity. A share exceeding three-quarters of all operations cannot be explained by geographic proximity alone. Rather, it reflects Quneitra's transformation into a direct testing ground for multiple forms of intervention: repeated ground incursions, fixed positions, checkpoints and searches, field reconnaissance, direct interaction with residents, and intelligence gathering. **This points to a clear shift from a logic of "border monitoring" to one of "spatial penetration,"** and to the normalization of Israeli presence as a recurrent rather than exceptional reality. In this sense,

Quneitra became a continuous field laboratory in which the limits, tools, and sustainability of intervention were tested.

Daraa, despite its geographic connection to Quneitra, represents a different functional space. Its lower share, at **7.9%,** reflects a different balance between strategic importance and operational caution. It is a more complex arena of friction, where political symbolism intersects with border geography and social structure in ways that may generate local resistance. This made Israeli activity there less regular, but no less significant. If Quneitra reflects a higher degree of permissibility for direct presence, Daraa reveals the limits and potential costs of that presence.

Rural Damascus also carries particular significance in this distribution, accounting for **6.0%** of recorded operations, because it shows that Israeli operational logic does not stop at the narrow border line. When ground operations and airborne insertions reach areas such **as al-Kiswah, Yaafour, and Beit Jinn**, or when militarily and logistically significant sites in this belt are targeted, this suggests that Israel does not define the south merely in administrative terms. Rather, it defines it in functional terms tied to the security of Damascus and its surrounding sphere. In other words, Israel expands the definition of the "**security-relevant south**" to include any area whose militarization it considers a potential threat, even if it lies beyond the immediate border strip. The south thus shifts from a limited geographic zone into a broader **security-political belt** in the Israeli operational imagination.

Suwayda, although limited in quantitative weight at **1.9%** compared with Quneitra and Daraa, carries significance that exceeds its numerical share. It occupies a different level of intervention, one with a **political, security, and social character**. Its demographic specificity gives Israel a practical entry point for instrumentalizing the discourse of "**protecting the Druze,**" making Suwayda, within this model, an advanced point of penetration within the southern intervention structure — not through operational density, but through attempts to reshape the local environment.

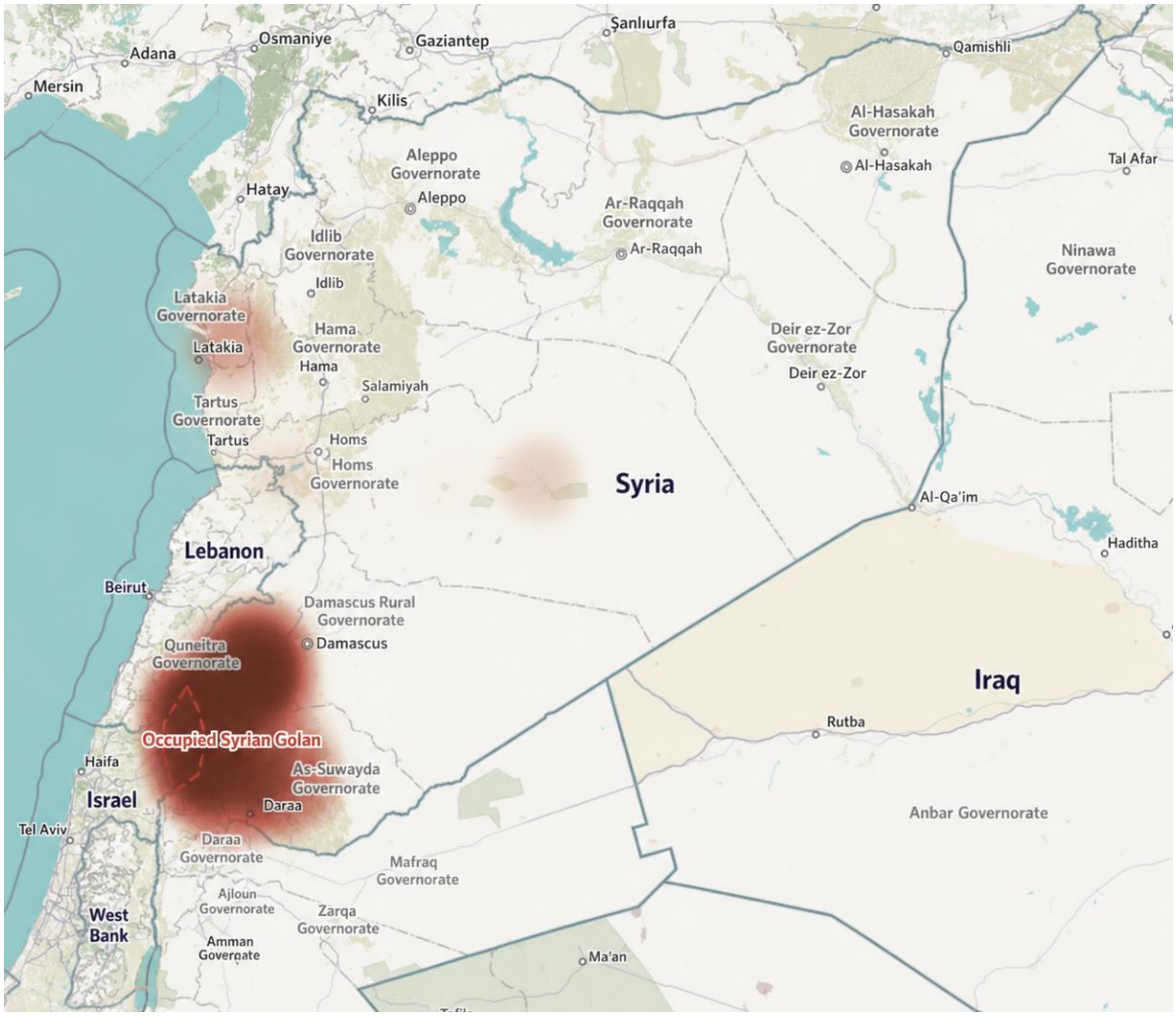
By contrast, the other governorates that recorded relatively low levels of activity — including **Damascus, Homs, Hama, the coastal governorates, and Aleppo** — appear to serve a different function within Israel's intervention model. Operations in these areas were largely limited to selective strategic airstrikes targeting central military and logistical infrastructure and degrading defensive capabilities, without turning them into arenas of direct field presence. This reflects a clear distinction between a zone that Israel seeks to recalibrate through direct field management, namely **the south**, and a zone it seeks to keep in a **state of strategic disruption without ground engagement, namely the interior**.

Homs, at 1.9%, carries particular significance in this context, given its geographic depth, concentration of important military infrastructure, exposure to the Syrian desert, links to former routes of Iranian influence, and border extensions toward Lebanon. These features place it within a targeting pattern aimed at degrading capabilities and managing space from a distance, while also making it usable, in some cases, as a platform for strategic signaling in relation to specific regional dynamics. One such strike coincided with the visit of a Turkish security delegation to Syria and rising discussion of possible Turkish bases in **Palmyra and rural**

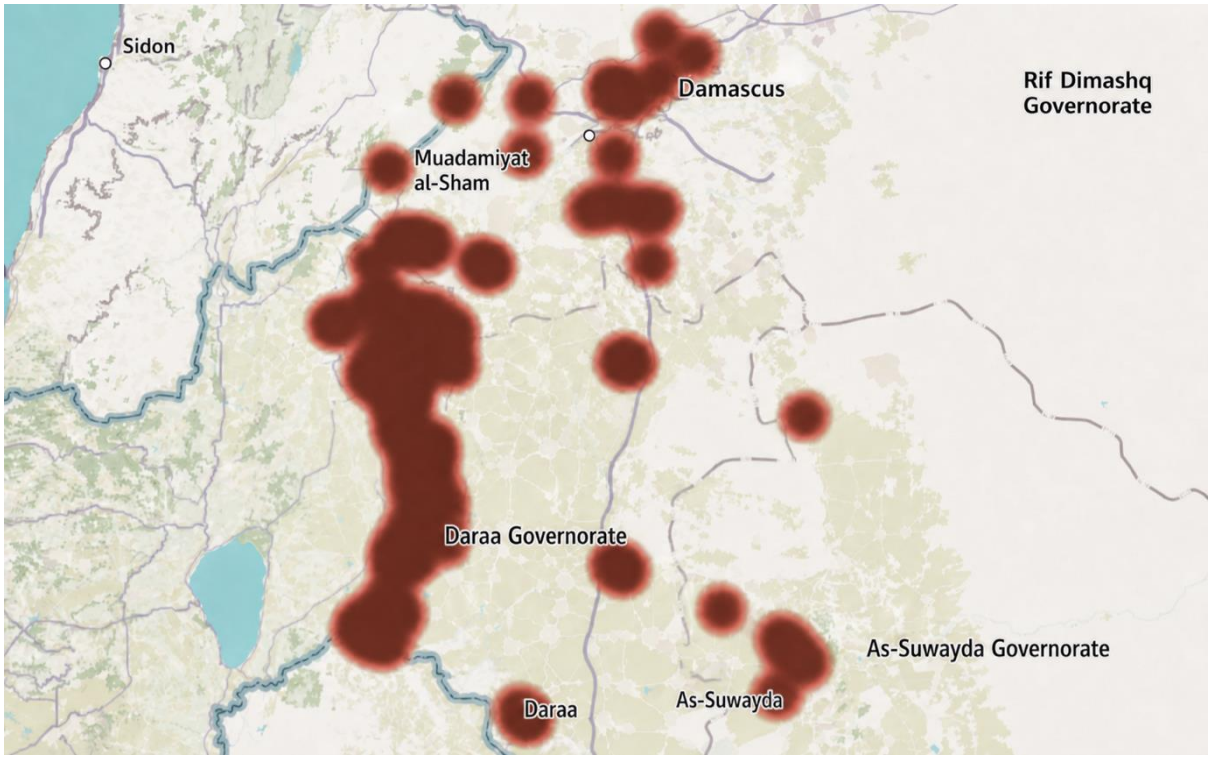
Homs. Within the same framework, **Damascus** recorded a relatively low share, at **1.4%,** compared with other governorates. Yet this remains significant because of the political symbolism of strikes in the capital and their function in targeting capabilities linked to the center of authority.

The **geographic distribution** reflects more than variation in operational intensity. It reveals a **functional remapping** of Syrian geography within Israel's intervention model. The south becomes the priority arena for field recalibration; Quneitra becomes a direct operational hub; Daraa becomes a testing ground; and rural Damascus becomes a security belt connected to the capital. The rest of the country, by contrast, remains largely within the scope of aerial deterrence.

The density of operations in the south, compared with the rest of Syria, where activity largely remained within the framework of aerial deterrence or limited intervention, suggests that Israel is not generalizing the ground-incursion model. Rather, it is testing it in a specific arena where geography, penetrability, and the fragility of the security environment make it more viable. In southern Syria, Israeli behavior approaches known patterns of managing "**security belts**," where the objective is neither full occupation nor full withdrawal, but rather keeping the area under a low level of indirect control. This is managed through a mix of military pressure, limited presence, and influence over local actors. **This does not necessarily mean that Israel seeks to establish a traditional security belt. Rather, it suggests that Israel is working to produce a more regulated border space in which the level of threat is reduced, its capacity to shape the environment that generates that threat is increased, and the area itself is gradually redefined through multi-layered intervention**.



Map 1. Heat map showing Israeli operations in Syria during 2025.
Note: Approximate map of the borders and occupied areas.



Map 2. Heat map of southern Syria showing Israeli operations during 2025.
Note: Approximate map of the borders and occupied areas.

Distribution of Israeli Operations in 2025 by Target Type and Activity Pattern

If the temporal reading revealed the logic of operational rhythm management, and the geographic reading highlighted the concentration and priorities of Israeli intervention, then the analysis of target types and activity patterns opens a further level for understanding the function of that intervention. The data show not only **what** was targeted, but also the nature of the **space** in which Israel operated, as illustrated in **Figure 5**.

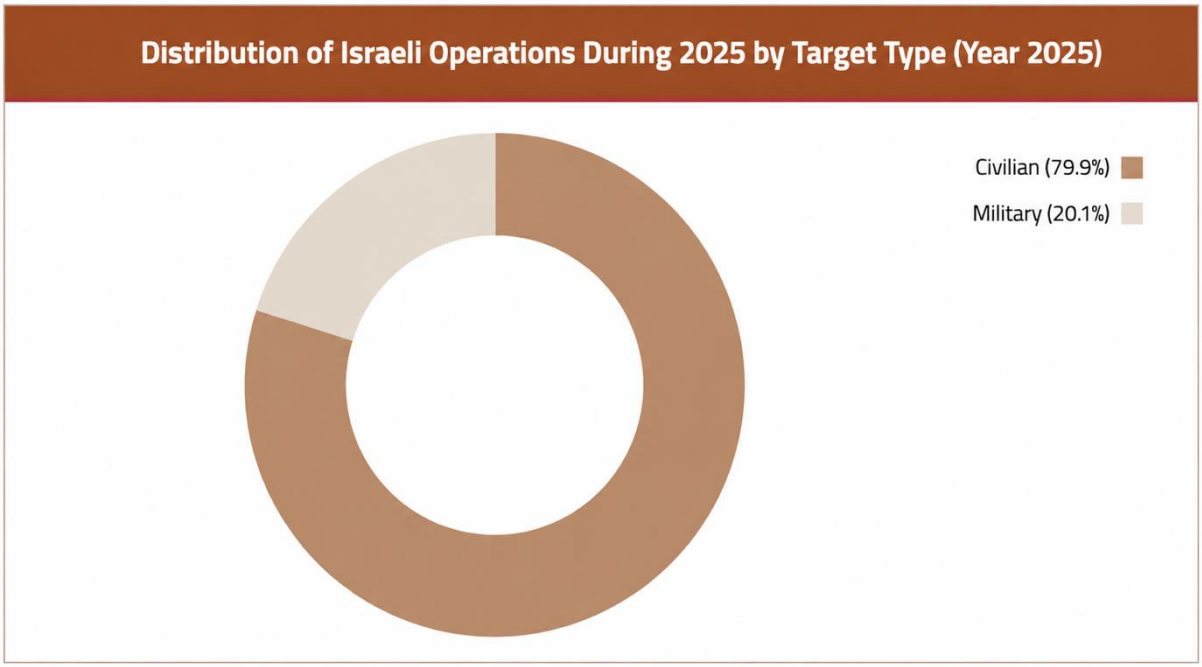


Figure 5. Distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 by target type.

The data show that approximately **79.9%** of all recorded Israeli activity and operations affected **civilian spaces, sites, and areas, amounting to 333 sites**, compared with only **20.1%, or 84 sites, directed at military targets**. **This distribution does not necessarily indicate a shift toward "targeting civilians" as such. Rather, it points to a shift in the center of gravity from targeting capabilities associated with threat production to treating the civilian sphere itself as a primary arena of intervention.**

This becomes clearer when the internal structure of Israeli activity within this sphere is disaggregated by target type. The largest share was concentrated in **towns, villages, and neighborhoods, at 65.8%**, through regular, repeated, and at times simultaneous incursions serving different purposes. These were followed by **checkpoints and house searches at 22.4%**, then **arrests at 6.4%**, in addition to scattered assaults, information-gathering activities, and efforts to pursue weapons-smuggling networks. **This distribution shows that the greater part of Israeli activity was not aimed at direct destruction**, but rather at engaging with and managing the local environment through repeated patterns of security and military presence.

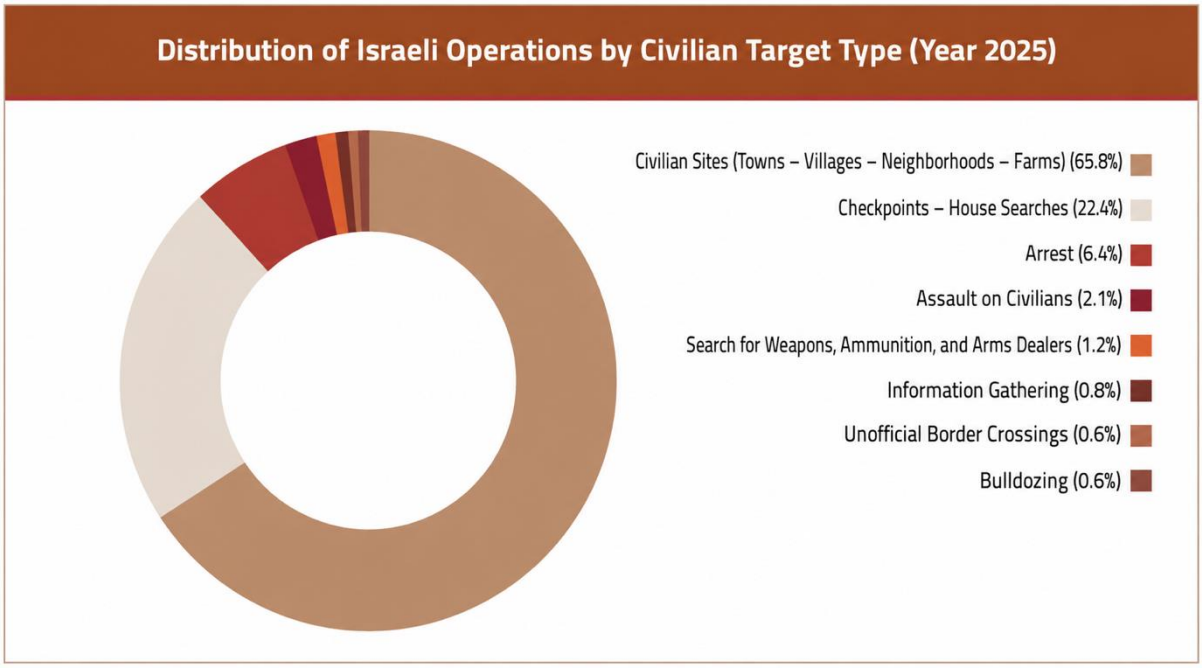


Figure 6. Distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 by type of civilian target.

By contrast, Israeli activity within the military sphere retained a more specific function. It was concentrated on **military sites, which accounted for 63%** of this category, alongside the establishment of **new military positions inside and beyond the buffer zone at 11.1%,** as well as strikes on **air defense systems, airports, and infrastructure at 10.2%.** This reflects the continued logic of degrading capabilities and preventing the reconstitution of effective military structures.

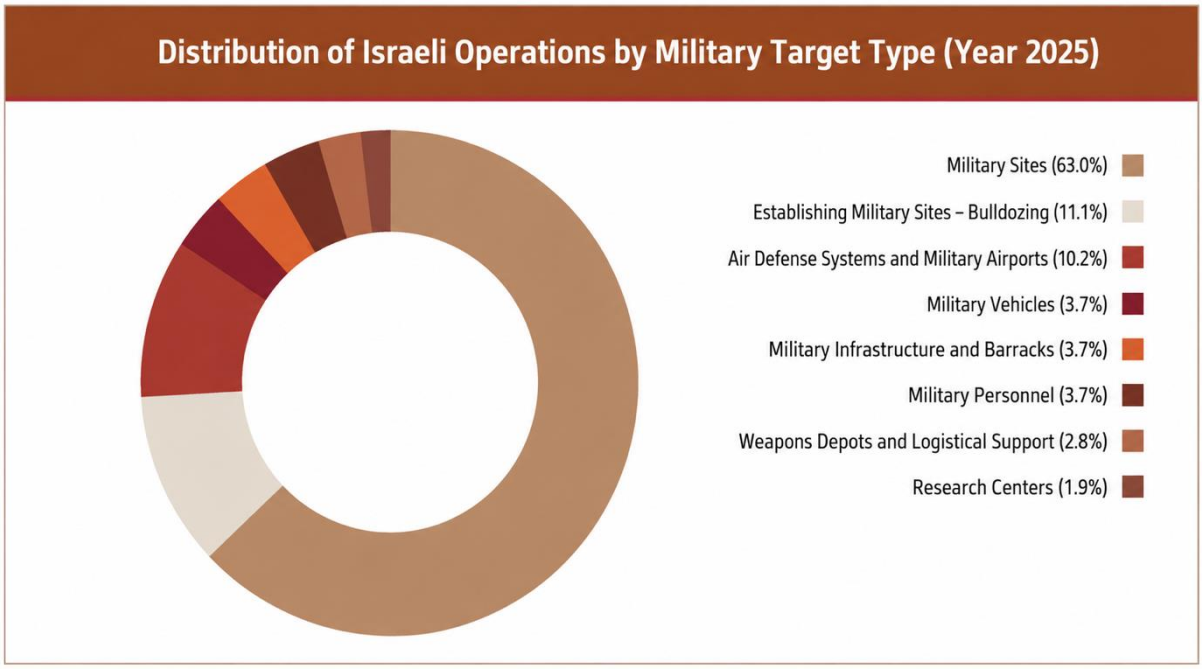


Figure 7. Distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 by type of military target.

The decisive implication, however, lies not only in the type of target, but in how target type intersects with the **nature of Israeli activity**. **Security-oriented field activities accounted for 68%** of total Israeli activity during 2025, **compared with 32% for direct military activities**. This reflects a qualitative shift in the pattern of intervention.

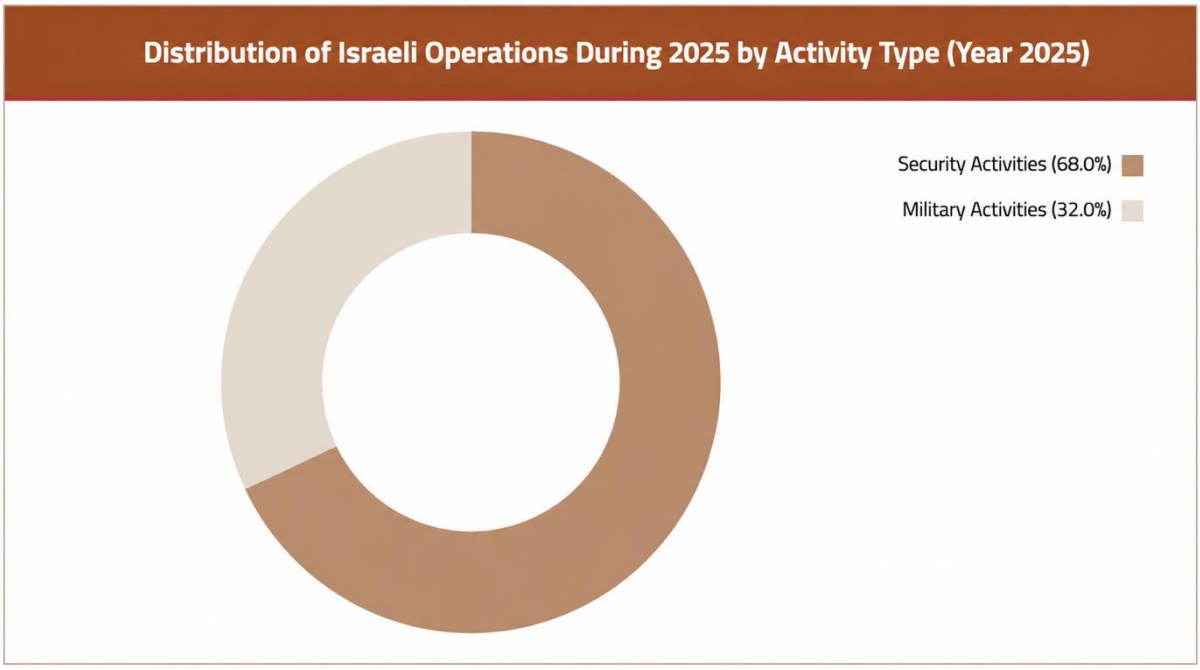


Figure 8. Distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 by activity type.

This shift becomes especially meaningful when security-oriented field activity is examined in greater detail. Such activity — including incursions, raids, checkpoints, bulldozing operations, assaults, house searches, arrests, and the establishment of positions — **was concentrated almost entirely within the civilian sphere**. In these cases, the site itself was not necessarily the primary target, but rather an entry point for penetrating and controlling the local environment. This pattern was particularly visible in southern Syria, especially in **Quneitra**, where such activities recurred with high intensity and regularity, particularly during the final quarter of the year. It also aligns with the phase of "**consolidation and management of the operational environment**" identified in the temporal reading, reflecting a shift from intermittent pressure to continuous field presence. By contrast, direct military activity remained more closely tied to strikes against sites relatively distant from front lines, within a logic of disruption without direct ground engagement.

Accordingly, this distribution reflects more than a difference in target type. It reveals a **functional division** within the structure of intervention: **military activity** aimed at capabilities, and **security-oriented field activity** aimed at the civilian sphere. This points to a clear shift from targeting the capabilities that produce threats to controlling the space that may generate them. In sum, this transformation should not be understood merely as an expansion of the target set, but as a redefinition of the intervention itself: from deterring threats to managing the environment in which they may emerge. This shift will necessarily shape the form of the conflict in the next phase, the tools that will be used, and the boundaries between the military, political, and security spheres in Syria.

Distribution of Israeli Operations in 2025 by Operational Pattern

The analysis of operational patterns shows how Israel's approach was translated into practice on the ground. When classified into ground incursions, air operations, and artillery shelling, the data reflect more than a diversity of means. **They reveal a fundamental shift in the structure of the intervention itself: from a model centered on air superiority to one in which ground-based tools became the principal instrument**.

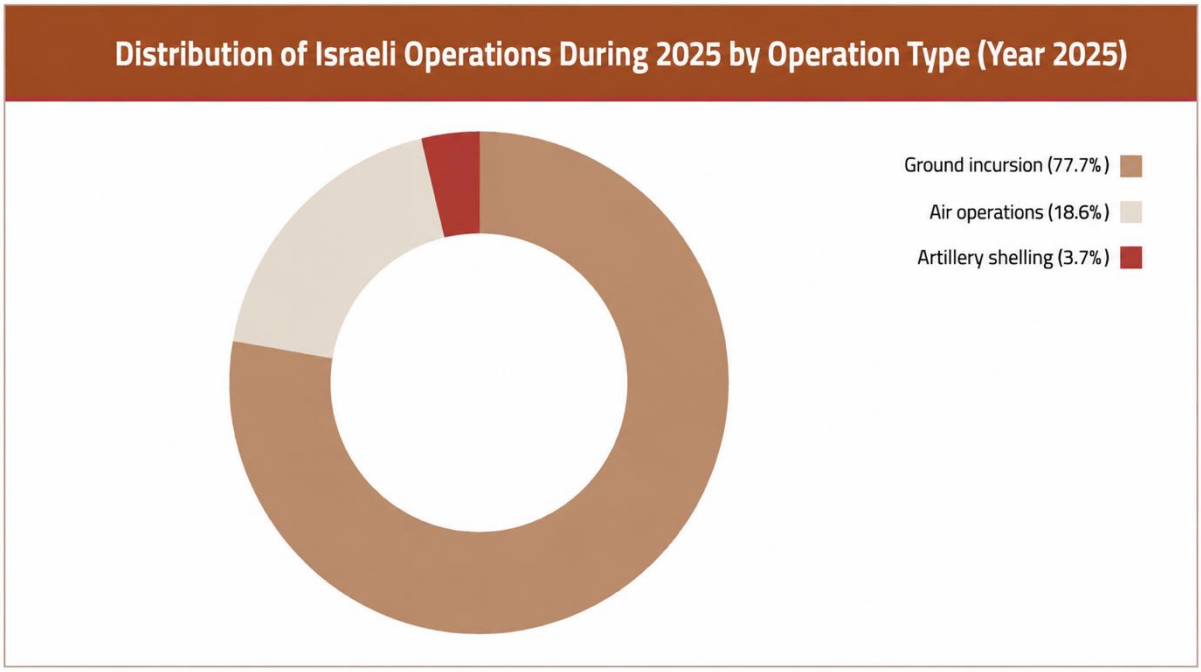


Figure 9. Distribution of Israeli operations during 2025 by operational pattern.

As shown in **Figure 9**, ground incursions accounted for the **largest share of activity, at 77.7%, or 338 operations, compared with 18.6%, or 81 operations**, for air operations, and only **3.7%, or 16 operations**, for artillery shelling. **This distribution reflects more than the numerical predominance of one operational pattern over another**. It indicates a reordering of the function of operational tools. Airpower was no longer the dominant instrument, as it had been in more traditional patterns of intervention. Instead, it became a supporting tool within a broader model driven primarily by ground operations.

Ground incursions derive their significance not only from their intensity, but also from their repetitive nature and diverse field functions. They were not carried out as conventional occupation operations or permanent deployments. Rather, they followed a pattern that can be described as "**functional incursion**": temporally and spatially limited entries designed to perform specific tasks such as searches, sweeps, intelligence gathering, arrests, and the establishment of checkpoints, followed by withdrawal while preserving the ability to repeat the operation. This pattern reached its peak in the final phase of the year, when incursions recurred on a near-daily basis, especially in **Quneitra**. It reflected a clear shift from contingent intervention to the management of a continuous, low-cost field presence.

By contrast, **air operations retained their role as a flexible and geographically mobile tool** used to degrade capabilities, strike military infrastructure, and impose new rules of engagement

without requiring direct field engagement. The data on air operations show that conventional airstrikes constituted the largest share of total air activity, at **72.5%, or 66 operations**, followed by **drone operations** at **25.3%, or 23 operations**, while **airborne insertion operations** remained extremely limited, **at 2.2%, or two operations**.

This distribution reflects a clear reliance on airstrikes as the principal tool within the military sphere, with drones used to enhance precision, flexibility, coverage, and reconnaissance, without turning airpower into an instrument of direct field presence. **Artillery shelling** remained the least prominent pattern. It was concentrated in specific contexts, especially in southern Syria, where it functioned as a tool of tactical pressure or direct support for ground incursions during moments of friction, without constituting an independent mode of intervention.

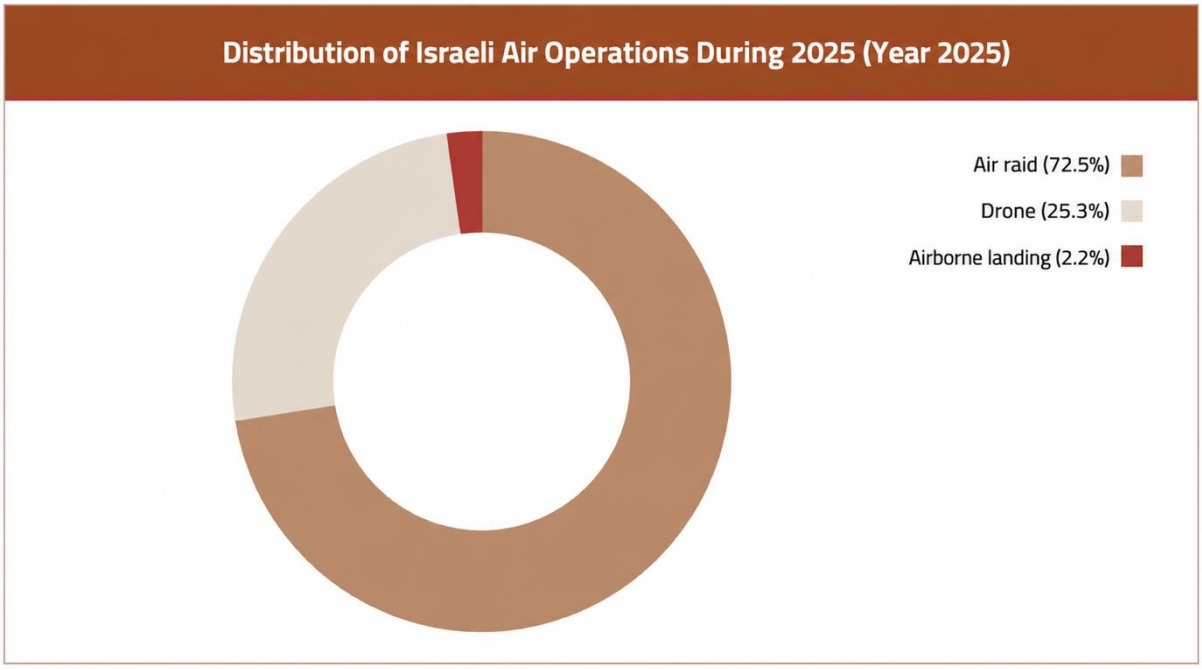


Figure 10. Distribution of Israeli air operations during 2025.

When the relationship between these operational patterns is examined, it becomes clear that they do not function separately, but rather within a clear framework of functional integration. Air operations provide a layer of disruption and deterrence across Syrian territory, while ground incursions perform the task of direct penetration, and artillery shelling serves as a support tool for regulating the tempo of friction at points of contact. The geographic distribution of these patterns confirms this functional differentiation: ground incursions are concentrated almost exclusively in southern Syria, especially in **Quneitra**, whereas air operations are distributed across multiple governorates. This reflects a clear division of roles among the instruments of intervention according to the targeted geographic space.

The distribution of operational patterns reveals not merely a plurality of means, but a transformation in Israel's intervention model itself. Airpower was no longer the central instrument, but part of a broader system driven by repeated ground operations within an approach based on limited penetration, high repetition, and the avoidance of wide-scale entanglement. Intervention was therefore no longer managed through external strikes alone,

but through a low-intensity, low-cost, yet continuous field presence that gradually reshaped the space without declaring direct control.

The New Israeli Model

If the preceding findings traced the distribution of Israeli intervention across time, geography, target type, and operational pattern, they also showed how military and political dimensions became increasingly intertwined in shaping the conditions of negotiation. The deeper conclusion that emerges from bringing these levels together is that Israel no longer treats Syria merely as a theater of threats to be contained, but as a transitional environment open to intervention and reshaping. What emerges over the course of the year under study is therefore not simply repeated military escalation, but the crystallization of a new intervention model based on managing the vacuum, exploiting the fragility of the transitional phase, and preventing the reconstitution of the Syrian state in ways that exceed Israel's acceptable parameters.

Under the traditional formula that governed earlier years, Israel operated according to a logic close to the "**campaign between wars**": striking Iranian entrenchment, disrupting supply lines, and containing risks before they turned into direct threats. In the phase that followed the fall of the regime, however, this logic did not disappear, but it no longer sufficiently explains the nature and function of the intervention. Israel no longer limited itself to striking depots, bases, or military capabilities. Rather, it expanded its intervention to include forms of ground presence, security activity, attempts to influence the local environment, and efforts to reshape the security environment of southern Syria. By "**security environment**," **this study does not mean simply a geographic area of operations, but a sphere regulated through a combination of air dominance, ground incursions, and security-oriented field activity, enabling influence over the local environment and a redefinition of the limits of what is possible within it.**

The first feature of this model is that it does not seek to fill the vacuum completely, but to manage it in a way that prevents others from filling it. Israel does not appear interested in broad occupation or long-term direct administration. Rather, it works to keep these areas in a condition of reduced sovereignty, limited organizational capacity, and continued openness to intervention when needed. This explains the combination of extensive airstrikes and repeated, limited ground incursions: the former impose a constant umbrella of pressure across Syrian territory, while the latter prevent southern Syria from becoming a closed space beyond Israeli penetration.

The second feature is the reliance on gradual intervention rather than large, declaratory moves. Israel does not present an open project to occupy the south, but instead proceeds through the accumulation of measures that may appear limited in form, yet are significant in effect: limited incursions, temporary positions that gradually evolve into a more stable presence, road closures, testing of local environments, and a gradual raising of the negotiation ceiling. The importance of this pattern lies in its ability to transform temporary facts into semi-permanent realities without provoking high political or military costs. This cumulative structure is particularly dangerous because it allows the reshaping of space to proceed without

a level of visibility commensurate with its real scale, making it possible for the temporary to become permanent in stages.

The third feature is that this model is multi-layered. It does not rely on a single tool or a single logic, but on a clear functional distribution of instruments. Airpower performs the function of broad regulation and deterrence; ground incursions perform the function of direct military presence at sensitive points; and these are reproduced in a repeated, low-cost form through security-oriented field activity, which serves to penetrate the local environment and manage potential threat spaces. At the same time, the escalation of political rhetoric produces the necessary cover to justify this model, whether through the language of "**national security**" or "**protection of minorities**." Taken together, these levels work to produce a managed and governable security environment without the need for classical direct occupation.

This composite character is reinforced by the involvement of a broad spectrum of Israeli military and security units in operations in southern Syria, rather than reliance on a single formation or one mode of intervention. The **Northern Command** emerged as the overarching framework directing the effort, alongside **Division 210**, which led field activity in the south. It was supported by a range of combat units, including the **810 Mountain Brigade**, the **Alexandroni Brigade**, regular and reserve **paratrooper units**, including **Brigades 226 and 55**, as well as commando units. This reflects the diversity of capabilities employed, ranging from ground maneuver to rapid intervention.

In parallel, intelligence services played an active role, especially **military intelligence, including Unit 504**, which carried out field interrogation activities inside certain areas. These activities were accompanied by efforts to build communication channels and local networks, facilitate intelligence collection, and gauge local reactions.

What is new in this model, then, is not only its breadth, but also its functional depth. Israel is no longer aiming merely to disable a specific adversary. Rather, it is intervening in the very conditions under which the space itself is being reshaped during a highly sensitive transitional context. This is the deeper meaning of the transformation of southern Syria from a mere border front into a center of gravity in Israeli strategy.

This cannot be separated from another dimension that may appear less visible in official behavior, but remains important in the background: **the narrative and ideological dimension**. **This can be considered the fourth feature of the model**. Some Israeli writings and discourses seek to redefine the geography itself by linking it to the biblical notion of "**Bashan"**. This approach acquires a practical dimension when official names such as "**Arrow of Bashan**" are used for Israeli military operations in Syria. Such naming reflects more than a symbolic choice; it points to a conscious overlap between the military and the ideological, in which religious text is repurposed to frame field intervention and give it a form of "historical depth." The growing rhetoric around alleged Jewish ownership in **Hauran** and the **Golan** also reflects an attempt to create a parallel legal-political basis that could be used to justify future intervention and connect ongoing operations to a broader framework of historical claims.

These narratives do not remain confined to discourse. They also find limited field expression, as seen in the activities of the religious-nationalist group "**Pioneers of Bashan**," which, during

2025, sought to test the possibility of presence in southern Syria and to lay the foundation stone for a settlement through two separate attempted entries, both of which were prevented by Israeli forces themselves. This reflects a latent potential for transforming such narratives into field action if a broader political or security umbrella were to become available.

When this model is placed in the **post–7 October context**, it becomes clear that Israel, after the major transformation unleashed by the war on Gaza and the subsequent reshaping of the regional environment up to and including the war with Iran, no longer acts solely from the standpoint of border deterrence. Rather, it acts from a position that seeks to consolidate a new regional equation. Within this framework, Syria, and especially southern Syria, appears to be one of the most important arenas through which military superiority can be converted into long-term geopolitical gain. Israel seems to believe that it has a window of opportunity to redefine the nearby Syrian space before the new authority consolidates itself, and before other actors move to fill the vacuum in ways that would narrow Israel's room for maneuver. The Israeli model in Syria is therefore not separate from the wider region or from attempts to reshape it. It forms part of a broader policy aimed at consolidating the outcomes of regional transformation by force.

Yet this model, despite its effectiveness, is not without limits. It functions so long as the Syrian environment remains fragile, the domestic Syrian landscape remains divided, and regional and international actors are either unwilling or unable to produce a countervailing balance. This means that its strength derives not only from Israel's own capabilities, but also from the weakness of the opposing environment. In that sense, the most dangerous aspect of the Israeli model is not simply that it enjoys military superiority, since that already existed, but that it found a transitional moment that allowed it to turn that superiority into a capacity to define the very shape of the vacuum itself: its limits, how it is managed, who is allowed to move within it, and who is denied access. It is precisely here that the problem moves beyond the level of strikes and incursions.

Accordingly, the most important conclusion is that, during 2025, Israel developed a new model of intervention in Syria. This model was based neither on traditional occupation nor on strikes alone, but on a combination of vacuum management and gradual efforts to reshape the security environment along Israel's northern border. It relied on aerial control, functional incursions, and security-oriented field activity, while linking the discourse of protection to groups inside Syrian territory and maintaining negotiating pressure through the field realities it created.

This is what makes the challenge facing Syria, and the regional actors invested in its stability, deeper than merely stopping bombardment or reducing incursions. The core challenge lies in preventing this model from evolving from the exploitation of a transitional moment into a relatively stable structure of influence.

The Potential Security Agreement

When the field track is connected to the political signals that emerged during 2025, it becomes clear that the idea of a security agreement between Syria and Israel was no longer merely theoretical. Rather, it evolved into an actual track driven by the realities produced on the

ground. Yet the importance of this track lies less in the likelihood of its realization than in its nature and function. It does not appear to offer a path toward a stable settlement, but rather a mechanism for regulating an existing imbalance and managing an environment that allows neither open war nor full peace.

This track did not take shape as an autonomous negotiation channel, but as a direct extension of the operational rhythm. The temporal and field data show a recurring pattern: escalation to impose new rules of engagement, followed by negotiations to test whether those rules can be consolidated, and then renewed escalation when talks stall. During 2025, signs of engagement in direct and indirect negotiations became visible, alongside official statements about seeking to "de-escalate," as well as regional and international meetings and mediation efforts, including talks in **Baku, Paris, and London**. These were accompanied by direct American and regional interventions that, at certain moments, came close to producing an announced agreement.

Yet this process later entered a stage of deadlock, with escalation resuming and demands expanding, especially after conditions such as a proposed "**humanitarian corridor**" from Israel to Suwayda were raised, once again tying negotiation to field pressure. This suggests that negotiation was not a pathway to de-escalation, but a tool for managing it, operating within the same logic of operational rhythm.

In this context, the track cannot be understood apart from the transformation in the rules of engagement that the negotiation process now seeks to redefine, especially after Israel unilaterally declared the **1974 Disengagement Agreement** no longer applicable immediately following the fall of the regime. In effect, negotiation now revolves around redefining those rules, not simply adhering to them.

When the approaches of the different parties are unpacked, a structural divergence becomes apparent in how each side understands the function of this track. **The United States is pushing toward a functional formula that reduces tension and prevents collapse without requiring involvement in a comprehensive political settlement**. In this sense, negotiation becomes a tool for regulating the environment more than radically redefining it. Washington also views this track as part of a broader vision for reengineering the regional environment after Assad's fall, and even more so after the widening U.S.-Israeli confrontation with Iran. From this perspective, any de-escalation or security arrangements between Syria and Israel could become an entry point for stabilizing the situation, containing Iranian threats, and integrating post-Assad Syria into a regional order less hostile to Israel.

Israel, by contrast, treats the track as an extension of its field behavior. It seeks through this process to convert what it has imposed through military pressure, especially in the south, into more stable arrangements that reflect a high negotiating ceiling: reducing levels of armament, expanding Israel's margin of military freedom of movement, and preserving its ability to intervene when necessary, thereby keeping the border zone in a condition of reduced sovereignty. In other words, Israel sees the process as a practical means of consolidating what it has already accumulated on the ground. It approaches it not merely as a formula for "preventing threats," but as a strategic opportunity created by the transfer of power in Syria — one that enables a shift from preventing threats to shaping the environment. Israel therefore

does not treat the agreement as a mutual concession, but as the political translation of a field imbalance it has already produced.

The Syrian authorities, meanwhile, view the process from a different position. For Damascus, it is a tool for reducing pressure and buying time, given its limited ability to impose a stable deterrent equation or enter into long-term arrangements that would carry high internal and political costs. At the same time, Damascus seeks to recover a degree of sovereign control and limit incursions.

Here lies the structural contradiction governing the process: while Israel seeks to codify an existing imbalance and consolidate its results, and Washington seeks to regulate that imbalance and prevent it from exploding, Damascus finds itself trying to manage the imbalance without being able to fully redefine it. This is what makes any talk of a final "security agreement" at this stage premature. The available indicators do not point to a fully formed agreement, but rather to a negotiation track that remains subject to reformulation according to developments on the ground and in the region.

This is precisely where the distinction lies between "**functional incentive**" and "**structural impasse**." Functionally, such an agreement appears attractive to all parties, albeit to varying degrees. For Israel, it opens the door to consolidating long-term security arrangements, such as a demilitarized south, the retention of key controlling positions, or guarantees related to freedom of movement and intervention. For the American mediator, it is a useful instrument for reducing tension, preventing collapse, and regulating the behavior of both sides without moving toward a more complex confrontation between Israel, as a U.S. ally, and the new Syrian authorities, whose relative stability Washington sees as beneficial. For Damascus, too, there is an obvious appeal in any formula that might stop the strikes, regulate incursions, or give the government room to catch its breath and reorder the domestic landscape. **Yet this functional attraction, however clear, appears to collide with a structural complexity that prevents it from easily turning into a stable agreement.**

The first knot in this impasse concerns the **Israel's negotiating ceiling itself**. Israel does not appear interested in mutual de-escalation so much as in a one-sided security arrangement that entrenches its field superiority and turns what it imposed during the first year after the regime's fall into semi-permanent facts on the ground. The problem is not negotiation as such, but Israel's attempt to make any agreement an extension of the outcomes produced by force, rather than a framework for reducing the imbalance created by them. Thus, talk of a demilitarized south, the retention of key positions such as **Jabal al-Sheikh**, or continued freedom of intervention under security pretexts points less to negotiation over de-escalation than to an attempt to redefine Syrian sovereignty itself in the south. This explains why every sign of negotiation appears, in practice, to be accompanied by a raising, rather than a lowering, of the Israeli ceiling.

The second knot concerns **Syria's internal condition**. The new authorities are not operating from the position of a stable state with a wide margin of decision-making, but from that of a transitional government in an extremely fragile environment: incomplete military integration, unconsolidated political legitimacy, sensitive local structures, and complex security files,

foremost among them **Suwayda**. Post-Assad Syria has not yet completed its monopoly over the security sphere, and the south itself remains a space of overlapping local, sectarian, and social sensitivities. Israel does not seem ready to relinquish its freedom of intervention easily, while the Damascus government cannot grant that freedom explicit political cover without paying a major domestic cost.

This means that any long-term security agreement would not necessarily be read domestically as a success in avoiding war. Instead, it could be widely interpreted as a sovereign concession, or as acceptance of translating the balance of power into a lasting commitment. The problem, then, lies not only in the substance of the agreement, but also in the authorities' ability to bear its political meaning internally. **The government of al-Sharaa**, or any transitional authority, does not have the luxury of entering into a broad strategic arrangement with Israel in a country emerging from a devastating war, nor does it possess sufficient legitimacy to absorb the repercussions such a move would have for the political and social order itself.

Added to this is a regional constraint of no lesser importance. Any potential agreement, however technical it may appear, does not take shape in a bilateral vacuum, but within a regional environment that has undergone profound changes after the war with Iran, in which major powers have moved to reposition themselves and build new balances. This limits the ability of any party to impose a unilateral formula and makes the durability of any agreement contingent on the extent to which it aligns with these balances and anxieties. Especially after the outbreak of the Israeli-Iranian war and the broader reshaping of the regional environment that accompanied it, any security arrangement will not be read solely through the prism of Damascus and Tel Aviv. It will also be assessed according to whether it forms part of a new regional order or remains merely a temporary local fix. This makes it even harder to give it a final and stable form at this stage.

For this reason, the most realistic form of any potential agreement does not appear to be a comprehensive or long-term accord, but rather a **hybrid arrangement of partial understandings and redefined rules of engagement**. In other words, what is at stake is neither peace nor even a fully integrated political agreement, but a partial regulation of conflict, especially in the south, that would allow each side to secure some of its core needs without committing to a full settlement.

The Israeli Approach and the Region Syria

A combined reading of the findings across the twelve-month monitoring period shows that the Syrian-Israeli arena can no longer be explained within a traditional bilateral framework. It has instead become a space managed through a web of overlapping regional and international interests that constrain the possibility of unilateral resolution and redefine the logic of intervention itself. Although Israel has retained clear military superiority and a high capacity for initiative, that superiority has not translated into the ability to impose final arrangements or produce unilateral strategic stability. This reflects structural limits that go beyond military power itself.

This limitation is tied not only to the nature of the Syrian arena, but more fundamentally to the reshaping of the regional environment after the war with Iran. The region is no longer defined

primarily by opposing axes, but increasingly by a network of overlapping U.S. allies. In this context, Washington no longer treats Israel as the sole ally granted wide freedom of action. Rather, it manages a broader network that includes Turkey, the Gulf states, Jordan, Egypt, and the new Syrian authorities. This obliges the United States to strike a careful balance among allies with differing priorities and limits its willingness to support unilateral pathways that could generate wider regional instability.

This reality produces a pattern of overlapping constraints, as each regional actor imposes different limits on Israeli behavior inside Syria. **Jordan**, by virtue of its geographic position and the direct connection between its national security and the stability of its northern border, cannot accept unilateral security arrangements that create a vacuum or an unregulated reality in southern Syria. Such an outcome would directly threaten Jordan's own security structure and borders. Any attempt to reshape the south outside a regional understanding is therefore likely to face objection or disruption.

In the same direction, the **Gulf states — especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar** — which have recently experienced a dual security exposure as a result of both Iranian and Israeli strikes, appear to be moving toward a redefinition of their defense priorities. This may lead to Syria's reintegration into a broader regional security framework, whether as a frontline state or as part of a larger system of early warning and balance against future escalation. In that context, it becomes unlikely that these states would accept unilateral Israeli arrangements that weaken Syria's place within this balance or remove it from the emerging Gulf strategic calculus. This, in turn, imposes an additional constraint on Israeli freedom of movement.

Egypt's interests also intersect with this direction, not only in rejecting border vacuums or strategic imbalance, but also in preventing Israel from unilaterally reshaping the regional environment in ways that could affect broader balances tied to Egyptian national security. In this context, the convergences that emerged after the war with Iran — including signs of coordination among Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, and the Gulf states — open the possibility of reintegrating Syria into wider regional arrangements. This would give Syria additional room in its external relations and reduce the unilateral pressures placed upon it.

Turkey appears as the most direct actor in balancing Israeli presence. Ankara does not view Syria as a peripheral arena, but as a vital sphere of influence tied to its national security and regional position. Any Israeli attempt to reshape the south or impose independent arrangements may therefore clash with Turkish calculations related to the balance of power inside Syria, leaving room for indirect interactions that limit the consolidation of exclusive Israeli influence.

At the same time, despite the decline of **Iranian influence** as a result of the war, its continued presence as a residual possibility, even in retreat, may push various actors to treat post-Assad Syria as a future arena of containment and deterrence, rather than as a space that can simply be removed from the regional balance. Likewise, the Russian presence, although diminished, still functions as a marginal balancing factor that prevents any single actor from fully monopolizing the arena and adds another layer of complexity to any attempt to produce a final arrangement.

On the other hand, the broader **European political climate** in the recent period—shaped by the repercussions of the war on Gaza, the growing wave of recognition of the Palestinian state,

and political tensions with Benjamin Netanyahu's government, particularly with countries such as Spain and Italy—points to an increasing inclination to support stability and limit trajectories of escalation. This has coincided with efforts by both Germany and France to propose mediation roles in the context of Syrian-Israeli interactions. However, this presence does not rise to the level of direct field influence; rather, it reflects a European political environment that tends more toward constraining Israeli overreach than supporting it, without becoming a decisive force in reshaping regional balances or the Syrian field.

Within this dense web of factors, the limits on Israeli resolution do not stem only from external constraints, but also from a deeper inability to translate military superiority into stable political arrangements. The observed patterns of behavior show that, despite Israel's ability to impose field realities and carry out high-impact strikes, it has not succeeded in producing a sustainable political framework. Instead, Israel continues to manage a condition of ongoing pressure without being able, at least so far, to move into a phase of formally consolidating the results.

Accordingly, the Syrian arena is not moving toward resolution in favor of any single actor, but toward a pattern of managing contradictions, in which de-escalation and escalation coexist, and negotiations advance and retreat within limits drawn by the network of regional and international interests. In this context, Syria is shifting from an empty arena to be filled into an arena of balances that are gradually being reshaped, compelling all actors — foremost among them Israel — to operate within structural constraints that do not allow for the imposition of unilateral or final arrangements.

At the same time, this environment opens a relative margin for the new Syrian authorities. They are not operating under one-sided pressure, but within a network of mutual constraints that can be leveraged to rebuild their negotiating position and expand their regional options, whether through engagement in collective arrangements or by benefiting from intersecting interests among different actors. Yet this margin remains contingent on their ability to manage internal complexities and invest in these balances without reproducing the same fragility.

In sum, the Syrian-Israeli scene during the year under review does not reflect a trajectory moving toward either settlement or resolution, but rather toward the continuous reorganization of the relationship within a complex regional environment. In this environment, contradictions are managed rather than resolved, and imbalances are regulated rather than decisively settled. Syria thus emerges as an open arena of reordering, not unilateral resolution, within a regional environment that has not yet stabilized, but has already begun to define the limits of possibility and the limits of incapacity for every actor involved.

Conclusion

The nature of Israeli intervention in Syria during 2025 reveals a fundamental shift in the function of force. It is no longer governed by the logic of traditional deterrence or the targeting of direct threats. Rather, it has moved toward a more complex approach aimed at producing a low-threat security environment by reshaping the security environment itself. A cross-cutting reading of Israeli behavior throughout the year — across time, geography, and function — shows that this intervention evolved gradually from testing the

limits of the new reality, to using force to manage the negotiation track, then to imposing new rules of engagement, and finally to attempting to consolidate a sustained, low-cost presence in southern Syria, especially in Quneitra. Quneitra, in particular, became a testing ground for an intervention model based on repeated penetration and regulation of the security environment, in a pattern closer to managing a "**functional security belt**" than to conducting a conventional military intervention.

Accordingly, responding to this model of intervention cannot rely on direct military retaliation, especially given the clear imbalance of power and the risks of open escalation that such a path would carry. At the same time, this does not mean accepting its continuation or allowing it to become entrenched. Rather, it requires identifying more realistic alternative policies and tools. The starting point is to reformulate the Syrian approach toward Israel under this intervention model, in a way that allows the security approach in southern Syria to be redefined on multiple levels — politically, socially, and administratively. The aim should be to reduce the intervention's capacity to expand and recur, while raising its cost by narrowing the vacuums in which it operates and strengthening effective administrative and security presence. This would support the recovery of the space and help prevent some areas from turning into soft, isolated, and easily penetrable environments.

At the domestic level, the effectiveness of this intervention model cannot be separated from the nature of the relationship with local environments, especially in areas with particular sensitivities. The instrumentalization of the discourse of "**protecting minorities**" has shown how internal divisions can become a direct entry point for external intervention. Rebuilding this relationship, containing tensions, strengthening institutional presence, and advancing genuine social reconciliation therefore represent essential elements in removing the justifications on which this pattern of intervention rests, without sliding into direct, high-cost confrontation.

Limiting this intervention is tied less to direct military escalation than to changing the conditions that make it possible and repeatable. As long as the environment remains open to penetration and low-cost in terms of its political and security consequences, this intervention will continue to expand and test its own limits. Constraining it requires narrowing its margin of movement, strengthening institutional presence, and linking local communities to the structure of the state economically, through services, and politically. This would reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and make repeated intervention more costly and more complex. In this context, it is particularly important not to treat southern Syria as an isolated security file, or to separate it politically or in the media from its national depth, since doing so would weaken the state's ability to achieve integrated control over the national space.

Raising the cost of this intervention model does not depend only on official or institutional tools. It also extends to the local environment as a sphere capable of generating forms of locally driven action under the pressure of sustained targeting. Some areas in southern Syria showed early signs during the monitoring period of locally rooted resistance pockets, in a context where direct harm intersects with the limited effective presence of the state. This makes such dynamics liable to expand or re-emerge if this pattern of intervention continues without restraint.

This factor could therefore become an indirect instrument of pressure, contributing to raising the cost of intervention and redrawing the limits of interaction, with possible implications for the ceiling of the negotiation track. Yet any attempt to make use of this dimension remains highly risky, since a slide toward unregulated forms of local action could open the way to escalation beyond the ability of both local communities and the state to absorb. It must therefore be treated as a sensitive tool requiring careful control, not as an open field for uncalculated reactions.

In this sense, managing these possible dynamics is not only a matter of using them in the field, but of redefining the relationship with the local sphere as a source of legitimacy and as a supporting element in handling this file, rather than merely as an environment that passively receives its consequences. This requires a higher level of transparency in managing the negotiation track with Israel, so that public interaction can be transformed from a condition of unregulated pressure or slogan-driven mobilization into a usable political asset that expands room for maneuver and gives the official actor additional leverage in moments of pressure. It also requires strengthening institutional presence and improving the management of the southern file, including appointments and the institutional bodies responsible for managing it, in ways that ensure coherence of performance and reduce the production of policies that could themselves become exploitable weaknesses.

On the other hand, although the Israeli model seeks to impose arrangements derived from military superiority, it still lacks the capacity to settle them strategically. That superiority, despite its effectiveness, runs up against the complexities of a regional environment in which the interests of multiple actors overlap, limiting the possibility of turning it into stable or final arrangements at the level of the negotiation track and any potential security agreement. In this context, the shifts that followed the first Israeli-Iranian war and accompanied the second have been especially important, as a regional network of interests harmed by attempts to impose Israeli dominance has begun to take clearer shape. This opens the way for the Syrian actor to reposition itself within these balances and benefit from intersecting interests that could limit pathways of pressure.

In sum, the challenge lies not in the sheer amount of force being used, but in the nature of the environment in which it operates. The more open and penetrable that environment remains, the more this pattern of intervention will continue to reproduce itself. Limiting it therefore depends on rebuilding that environment and recovering the space. In this framework, the challenge is not to keep pace with the field realities imposed by this model of intervention, but to reduce their ability to become entrenched and transformed into a stable, normalized fact. What is at stake today is not only the redefinition of the limits of movement in southern Syria, but the reshaping of the governing rules of the relationship as a whole. Hence, adherence to these rules and their preservation — including the 1974 Disengagement Agreement — matters not as a rigid formal formula, but as a way to prevent their gradual erosion through the imposition of alternative field realities that would hollow them out in practice without any explicit declaration.