Profile

Geography
Area: 185,170 sq. km. (71,504 sq. mi.), including 1,295 sq. km. of Israeli-occupied territory; about the size of North Dakota.
Cities: Capital--Damascus (1.7 million). Other cities--Metropolitan Damascus (excluding city) (2.7 million), Aleppo (4.6 million), Homs (1.7 million), Hama (1.5 million), Idleb (1.4 million), al-Hasakeh (1.4 million), Dayr al-Zur (1.1 million), Latakia (1 million), Dar'a (1 million), al-Raqqah (900,000), and Tartus (800,000).
Terrain: Narrow coastal plain with a double mountain belt in the west; large, semiarid and desert plateau to the east.
Climate: Mostly desert; hot, dry, sunny summers (June to August) and mild, rainy winters (December to February) along coast.

People
Nationality: Noun and adjective--Syrian(s).
Population growth rate (2009 est.): 2.37%.
Major ethnic groups: Arabs (90%), Kurds (9%), Armenians, Circassians, Turkmans.
Religions: Sunni Muslims (74%), Alawis (12%), Christians (10%), Druze (3%), and small numbers of other Muslim sects, Jews, and Yazidis.
Languages: Arabic (official), Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian widely understood, French, English somewhat understood, principally in major cities.
Education (2008 est.): Years compulsory--primary. 6 yrs. Attendance--97.9%. Literacy--90.8%, illiteracy--9.2%.
Health (2009 est.): Infant mortality rate--171/1,000. Life expectancy--69.8 yrs. male, 72.68 yrs. female.
Work force (5.5 million, 2008 est.): Services (including government) 26%, agriculture 19%, industry 14%, commerce 16%, construction 15%, transportation 7%, and finance 3%.
Unemployment (2008 est.): 9.8%.

Government
Type: Republic, under authoritarian military-dominated Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party regimes since March 1963.
Independence: April 17, 1946.
Constitution: March 13, 1973. Since 1963, Syria has been under Emergency Law, which