



Home » Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs » Bureau of Public Affairs » Bureau of Public Affairs:
Electronic Information and Publications » Background Notes » Syria

On this page:

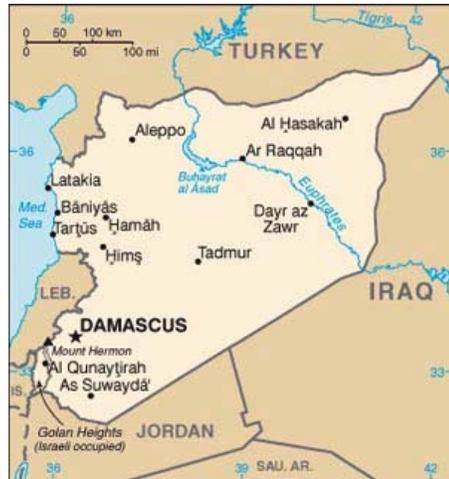
[Profile](#)
[People](#)
[History](#)
[Government](#)
[Political Conditions](#)
[Economy](#)
[Defense](#)
[Foreign Relations](#)
[U.S. Relations](#)
[Travel/Business](#)
[Background Notes A-Z](#)

March 18, 2011 | Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

Background Note: Syria



Official Name: Syrian Arab Republic



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), Idlib (1.4 million), al-Hasakeh (1.4 million), Dayr al-Zur (1.1 million), Latakia (1 million), Dar'a (1 million), al-Raqqa (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 (2009 est.): 21 million.

Population growth rate (2009 est.): 2.37%.

Major ethnic groups: Arabs (90%), Kurds (9%), Armenians, Circassians, Turkomans.

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*--17/1,000. *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



the Omayyad Mosque, Damascus, Syria, October 20, 2005. [© AP Images]

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