This page was last updated on 17 April, 2007
Background:

Following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, France administered Syria until its independence in 1946. The country lacked political stability, however, and experienced a series of military coups during its first decades. Syria united with Egypt in February 1958 to form the United Arab Republic. In September 1961, the two entities separated, and the Syrian Arab Republic was reestablished. In November 1970, Hafiz al-ASAD, a member of the Socialist Ba'th Party and the minority Alawite sect, seized power in a bloodless coup and brought political stability to the country. In the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Syria lost the Golan Heights to Israel. During the 1990s, Syria and Israel held occasional peace talks over its return. Following the death of President al-ASAD, his son, Bashar al-ASAD, was approved as president by popular referendum in July 2000. Syrian troops - stationed in Lebanon since 1976 in an ostensible peacekeeping role - were withdrawn in April 2005. During the July-August 2006 conflict between Israel and Hizballah, Syria placed its military forces on alert but did not intervene directly on behalf of its ally Hizballah.

Geography

Syria

Location:

Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Lebanon and Turkey

Geographic coordinates:

35 00 N, 38 00 E

Map references:

Middle East

Area:

total: 185,180 sq km
land: 184,050 sq km
water: 1,130 sq km
note: includes 1,295 sq km of Israeli-occupied territory

Area - comparative:

slightly larger than North Dakota

Land boundaries:

total: 2,253 km
border countries: Iraq 605 km, Israel 76 km, Jordan 375 km, Lebanon 375 km, Turkey 822 km

Coastline:

193 km

Maritime claims:

territorial sea: 12 nm
contiguous zone: 24 nm
Climate: mostly desert; hot, dry, sunny summers (June to August) and mild, rainy winters (December to February) along coast; cold weather with snow or sleet periodically in Damascus

Terrain: primarily semiarid and desert plateau; narrow coastal plain; mountains in west

Elevation extremes: 
lowest point: unnamed location near Lake Tiberias -200 m
highest point: Mount Hermon 2,814 m

Natural resources: petroleum, phosphates, chrome and manganese ores, asphalt, iron ore, rock salt, marble, gypsum, hydropower

Land use: 
arable land: 24.8%
permanent crops: 4.47%
other: 70.73% (2005)

Irrigated land: 13,330 sq km (2003)

Natural hazards: dust storms, sandstorms

Environment - current issues: deforestation; overgrazing; soil erosion; desertification; water pollution from raw sewage and petroleum refining wastes; inadequate potable water

Environment - international agreements: party to: Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Wetlands
signed, but not ratified: Environmental Modification

Geography - note: there are 42 Israeli settlements and civilian land use sites in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights (August 2005 est.)

People

Population: 19,314,747

note: in addition, about 40,000 people live in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights - 20,000 Arabs (18,000 Druze and 2,000 Alawites) and about 20,000 Israeli settlers (July 2007 est.)

Age structure: 0-14 years: 36.5% (male 3,633,562/female 3,423,435)
15-64 years: 60.1% (male 5,952,275/female 5,664,236)
65 years and over: 3.3% (male 303,346/female 337,893) (2007 est.)

Median age:

- total: 21.1 years
- male: 20.9 years
- female: 21.2 years (2007 est.)

Population growth rate: 2.244% (2007 est.)

Birth rate:

- 27.19 births/1,000 population (2007 est.)

Death rate:

- 4.74 deaths/1,000 population (2007 est.)

Net migration rate:

- 0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2007 est.)

Sex ratio:

- at birth: 1.06 male(s)/female
- under 15 years: 1.061 male(s)/female
- 15-64 years: 1.051 male(s)/female
- 65 years and over: 0.898 male(s)/female
- total population: 1.049 male(s)/female (2007 est.)

Infant mortality rate:

- total: 27.7 deaths/1,000 live births
- male: 27.94 deaths/1,000 live births
- female: 27.44 deaths/1,000 live births (2007 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

- total population: 70.61 years
- male: 69.27 years
- female: 72.02 years (2007 est.)

Total fertility rate:

- 3.31 children born/woman (2007 est.)

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:

- less than 0.1% (2001 est.)

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:

- less than 500 (2003 est.)

HIV/AIDS - deaths:

- less than 200 (2003 est.)

Nationality:

- noun: Syrian(s)
adjective: Syrian

Ethnic groups: Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians, and other 9.7%

Religions: Sunni Muslim 74%, other Muslim (includes Alawite, Druze) 16%, Christian (various denominations) 10%, Jewish (tiny communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli, and Aleppo)

Languages: Arabic (official); Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian widely understood; French, English somewhat understood

Literacy: definition: age 15 and over can read and write
total population: 76.9%
male: 89.7%
female: 64% (2003 est.)

Government Syria

Country name: conventional long form: Syrian Arab Republic
conventional short form: Syria
local long form: Al Jumhuriyah al Arabiyah as Suriyah
local short form: Suriyah
former: United Arab Republic (with Egypt)

Government type: republic under an authoritarian military-dominated regime

Capital: name: Damascus
geographic coordinates: 33 30 N, 36 18 E
time difference: UTC+2 (7 hours ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time)
daylight saving time: +1hr, begins 1 April; ends 30 September

Administrative divisions: 14 provinces (muhafazat, singular - muhafazah); Al Hasakah, Al Ladhiqiyah, Al Qunaytirah, Ar Raqqah, As Suwayda', Dar'a, Dayr az Zawr, Dimashq, Halab, Hamah, Hims, Idlib, Rif Dimashq, Tartus

Independence: 17 April 1946 (from League of Nations mandate under French administration)

National holiday: Independence Day, 17 April (1946)

Constitution:
Legal system:

based on a combination of French and Ottoman civil law; religious law is used in the family court system; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:

*chief of state:* President Bashar al-ASAD (since 17 July 2000); Vice President Farouk al-SHARA (since 11 February 2006) oversees foreign policy; Vice President Najah al-ATTAR (since 23 March 2006) oversees cultural policy

*head of government:* Prime Minister Muhammad Naji al-UTRI (since 10 September 2003); Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Abdallah al-DARDARI (since 14 June 2005)

*cabinet:* Council of Ministers appointed by the president

*elections:* president approved by popular referendum for a seven-year term (no term limits); referendum last held on 10 July 2000 after the death of President Hafiz al-ASAD (next to be held in May 2007); the president appoints the vice presidents, prime minister, and deputy prime ministers

*election results:* Bashar al-ASAD approved as president; percent of vote - Bashar al-ASAD 97.29%

Legislative branch:

unicameral People's Council or Majlis al-Shaab (250 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms)

*elections:* last held on 2-3 March 2003 (next to be held in April 2007)

*election results:* percent of vote by party - NPF 67%, independents 33%; seats by party - NPF 167, independents 83; note - the constitution reserves half the seats for workers and peasants and declares the Ba'th Party, which holds 135 seats, the leading party of the state

Judicial branch:

Supreme Judicial Council (appoints and dismisses judges; headed by the President); national level - Supreme Constitutional Court (adjudicates electoral disputes and rules on constitutionality of laws and decrees; justices appointed for four-year terms by the President); Court of Cassation; Appeals Courts (Appeals Courts represent an intermediate level between the Court of Cassation and local level courts); local level - Magistrate Courts; Courts of First Instance; Juvenile Courts; Customs Courts; specialized courts - Economic Security Courts (hear cases related to economic crimes); Supreme State Security Court (hear cases related to national security); Personal Status Courts (religious; hear cases related to marriage and divorce)

Political parties and leaders:

legal parties: National Progressive Front or NPF [President Bashar al-ASAD, Dr. Suleiman QADDAH] (includes Arab Socialist Renaissance (Ba'th) Party [President Bashar al-ASAD]; Arab Socialist Renaissance (Ba'th) Party
[President Bashar al-ASAD]; Socialist Unionist Democratic Party [Fadlallah Nasr Al-DIN]; Syrian Arab Socialist Union or ASU [Safwan QUDSI]; Syrian Communist Party (two branches) [Wissal Farha BAKDASH, Yusuf Rashid FAYSAL]; Syrian Social Nationalist Party [Ali QANSU]; Unionist Socialist Party [Fayez ISMAIL]); illegal parties: Kurdish Azadi Party [Khayr al-Din MURAD]; Kurdish Democratic Alliance [Abd al-Hamid DARWISH] (includes four parties); Kurdish Democratic Front (includes three parties but no designated leader); Kurdish Democratic Union Party or PYD [Ali MUHAMMAD]; Kurdish Future Movement; Kurdish Yekiti Party [Hasan SALEH]; National Democratic Front [Hassan Abd al-AZEM]

Political pressure groups and leaders:

Damascus Declaration [Riyad SEIF, secretary general] (a broad alliance of opposition groups including: Committee for Revival of Civil Society [Michel KILO, Riyad SEIF]; Kurdish Democratic Alliance; Kurdish Democratic Front; National Democratic Front; Syrian Human Rights Society or HRAS [Fawed FAWUZ]); National Salvation Front (alliance between former Vice President Abd al-Halim KHADDAM, the SMB, and other small opposition groups); Syrian Muslim Brotherhood or SMB [Sadr al-Din al-BAYANUNI] (operates in exile in London; endorsed the Damascus Declaration but is not an official member)

International organization participation:


Diplomatic representation in the US:

*chief of mission:* Ambassador Imad MUSTAFA
*chancery:* 2215 Wyoming Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008
*telephone:* [1] (202) 232-6313
*FAX:* [1] (202) 234-9548

Diplomatic representation from the US:

*chief of mission:* Ambassador (vacant); Charge d'Affaires Michael CORBIN
*embassy:* Abou Roumaneh, Al-Mansour Street, No. 2, Damascus
*mailing address:* P. O. Box 29, Damascus
*telephone:* [963] (11) 3391-4444
*FAX:* [963] (11) 224-7938

Flag description:

three equal horizontal bands of red (top), white, and black, colors associated with the Arab Liberation flag; two small green five-pointed stars in a horizontal line centered in the white band; former flag of the United Arab Republic where the two stars represented the constituent states of Syria and Egypt; similar to the flag of Yemen, which has a plain white band, Iraq, which has three green stars (plus an Arabic inscription) in a horizontal line centered in the white band, and
that of Egypt, which has a gold Eagle of Saladin centered in the white band; the current design dates to 1980

Economy

**Syria**

**Economy - overview:**
The Syrian economy grew by an estimated 2.9% in real terms in 2006 led by the petroleum and agricultural sectors, which together account for about one-half of GDP. Higher crude oil prices countered declining oil production and exports and led to higher budgetary and export receipts. Total foreign assets of the Central Bank and domestic banking system rose to about $20 billion in 2006, and the government strengthened the private sector foreign exchange rate by about 7% from the start of the year. The Government of Syria has implemented modest economic reforms in the past few years, including cutting lending interest rates, opening private banks, consolidating some of the multiple exchange rates, and raising prices on some subsidized items, most notably, gasoline and cement. Nevertheless, the economy remains highly controlled by the government. Long-run economic constraints include declining oil production and exports, weak investment, high unemployment, and increasing pressure on water supplies caused by heavy use in agriculture, rapid population growth, industrial expansion, and water pollution.

**GDP (purchasing power parity):** $75.1 billion (2006 est.)

**GDP (official exchange rate):** $24.26 billion (2006 est.)

**GDP - real growth rate:** 2.9% (2006 est.)

**GDP - per capita (PPP):** $4,000 (2006 est.)

**GDP - composition by sector:**
- **agriculture:** 24%
- **industry:** 18%
- **services:** 58% (2005 est.)

**Labor force:** 5.505 million (2006 est.)

**Labor force - by occupation:**
- **agriculture:** 26%
- **industry:** 14%
- **services:** 60% (2003 est.)

**Unemployment rate:** 12.5% (2005 est.)
Population below poverty line: 11.9% (2006 est.)

Household income or consumption by percentage share:
  lowest 10%: NA%
  highest 10%: NA%

Inflation rate (consumer prices): 8% (2006 est.)

Investment (gross fixed): 22.1% of GDP (2006 est.)

Budget:
  revenues: $8.7 billion
  expenditures: $9.9 billion; including capital expenditures of $3.82 billion (2006 est.)

Public debt: 37.9% of GDP (2006 est.)

Agriculture - products:
  wheat, barley, cotton, lentils, chickpeas, olives, sugar beets; beef, mutton, eggs, poultry, milk

Industries:
  petroleum, textiles, food processing, beverages, tobacco, phosphate rock mining, cement, oil seeds crushing

Industrial production growth rate: 1.5% (2005)

Electricity - production: 34.94 billion kWh (2005 est.)

Electricity - consumption: 34 billion kWh (2005 est.)

Electricity - exports: 0.2 kWh (2005)

Electricity - imports: 0 kWh (2005)

Oil - production: 405,000 bbl/day (2006 est.)

Oil - consumption: 230,000 bbl/day (2006 est.)

Oil - exports: 175,000 bbl/day (2006)
## Oil
- **Imports**: NA bbl/day
- **Proved Reserves**: 2.4 billion bbl (2006 est.)
- **Production**: 8.5 billion cu m (2006 est.)
- **Consumption**: 5.1 billion cu m (2006 est.)
- **Exports**: 0 cu m (2006 est.)
- **Imports**: 0 cu m (2006 est.)
- **Proved Reserves**: 240 billion cu m (2006 est.)

## Natural Gas
- **Production**: 8.5 billion cu m (2006 est.)
- **Consumption**: 5.1 billion cu m (2006 est.)
- **Exports**: 0 cu m (2006 est.)
- **Imports**: 0 cu m (2006 est.)
- **Proved Reserves**: 240 billion cu m (2006 est.)

## Current Account Balance
- **Balance**: $-529 million (2006 est.)

## Exports
- **Value**: $6.923 billion f.o.b. (2006 est.)
- **Commodities**: Crude oil, petroleum products, fruits and vegetables, cotton fiber, clothing, meat and live animals, wheat
- **Partners**: Iraq 26.3%, Italy 10%, Germany 9.9%, Lebanon 9.1%, Egypt 5.1%, France 4.9%, Saudi Arabia 4.6% (2005)

## Imports
- **Value**: $6.634 billion f.o.b. (2006 est.)
- **Commodities**: Machinery and transport equipment, electric power machinery, food and livestock, metal and metal products, chemicals and chemical products, plastics, yarn, paper
- **Partners**: Saudi Arabia 11.6%, China 6.1%, Egypt 5.9%, Italy 5.8%, UAE 5.7%, Ukraine 4.6%, Germany 4.5%, Iran 4.2% (2005)

## Reserves of Foreign Exchange and Gold
- **Amount**: $5.5 billion (2006 est.)

## Debt - External
$8.355 billion; note - excludes military debt and debt to Russia (2006 est.)

**Economic aid - recipient:**
$180 million (2002 est.)

**Currency (code):**
Syrian pound (SYP)

**Exchange rates:**
*note:* data for 2004-06 are the public sector rate; data for 2002-03 are the parallel market rate in 'Amman and Beirut; the official rate for repaying loans was 11.25 Syrian pounds per US dollars during 2004-06,

**Fiscal year:**
calendar year

**Communications**

**Syria**

**Telephones - main lines in use:**
2.903 million (2005)

**Telephones - mobile cellular:**
3.128 million (2005)

**Telephone system:**
*general assessment:* fair system currently undergoing significant improvement and digital upgrades, including fiber-optic technology
*domestic:* coaxial cable and microwave radio relay network
*international:* country code - 963; satellite earth stations - 1 Intelsat (Indian Ocean) and 1 Intersputnik (Atlantic Ocean region); 1 submarine cable; coaxial cable and microwave radio relay to Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey; participant in Medarabtel

**Radio broadcast stations:**
AM 14, FM 2, shortwave 1 (1998)

**Television broadcast stations:**
44 (plus 17 repeaters) (1995)

**Internet country code:**
.sy

**Internet hosts:**
66 (2006)

**Internet users:**
1.1 million (2005)

Airports - with paved runways:
- total: 26
  - over 3,047 m: 6
  - 2,438 to 3,047 m: 15
  - 914 to 1,523 m: 3
  - under 914 m: 2 (2006)

Airports - with unpaved runways:
- total: 66
  - 1,524 to 2,437 m: 1
  - 914 to 1,523 m: 11
  - under 914 m: 54 (2006)

Heliports: 7 (2006)

Pipelines:
- gas 2,764 km; oil 2,000 km (2006)

Railways:
- total: 2,711 km
  - standard gauge: 2,460 km 1.435-m gauge
  - narrow gauge: 251 km 1.050-m gauge (2005)

Roadways:
- total: 94,890 km
  - paved: 19,073 km

Waterways: 900 km (not economically significant) (2005)

Merchant marine:
- total: 108 ships (1000 GRT or over) 386,603 GRT/563,506 DWT
  - by type: bulk carrier 8, cargo 93, container 1, livestock carrier 4, petroleum tanker 1, roll on/roll off 1
  - foreign-owned: 11 (Lebanon 7, Romania 3, UAE 1)
  - registered in other countries: 130 (Cambodia 20, Comoros 4, Cyprus 3, Dominica 1, Georgia 43, Hong Kong 1, North Korea 14, Lebanon 1, Malta 7, Mongolia 1, Panama 18, Saint Kitts and Nevis 3, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 6, Sierra Leone 1, Slovakia 2, unknown 5) (2006)

Ports and terminals: Baniyas, Latakia

Military

Syria

Military service age and obligation: 18 years of age for compulsory military service; conscript service obligation - 30 months (18 months in the Syrian Arab Navy); women are not conscripted but may volunteer to serve (2004)

Manpower available for military service: males age 18-49: 4,356,413 
females age 18-49: 4,123,339 (2005 est.)

Manpower fit for military service: males age 18-49: 3,453,888 
females age 18-49: 3,421,558 (2005 est.)

Manpower reaching military service age annually: males age 18-49: 225,113 
females age 18-49: 211,829 (2005 est.)

Military expenditures - percent of GDP: 5.9% (2005 est.)

Transnational Issues

Syria

Disputes - international: Golan Heights is Israeli-occupied with the almost 1,000-strong UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) patrolling a buffer zone since 1964; lacking a treaty or other documentation describing the boundary, portions of the Lebanon-Syria boundary are unclear with several sections in dispute; since 2000, Lebanon has claimed Shaba'a farms in the Golan Heights; 2004 Agreement and pending demarcation settles border dispute with Jordan; approximately two million Iraqis have fled the conflict in Iraq with the majority taking refuge in Syria and Jordan

Refugees and internally displaced persons: 
refugees (country of origin): 700,000 - 1.2 million (Iraq), 434,896 (Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA))
IDPs: 305,000 (most displaced from Golan Heights during 1967 Arab-Israeli War) (2006)

Trafficking in persons: current situation: Syria is a destination country for women from South and Southeast Asia and Africa for domestic servitude and from Eastern Europe and Iraq for sexual exploitation; women are recruited for work in Syria as domestic servants, but some face conditions of exploitation and involuntary servitude including long hours, non-payment of wages, withholding of passports and other restrictions on movement, and physical and sexual abuse; Eastern European
women recruited for work in Syria as cabaret dancers are not permitted to leave their work premises without permission and have their passports withheld; some displaced Iraqi women and children are reportedly forced into sexual exploitation

tier rating: Tier 3 - Syria does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so

Illicit drugs:

a transit point for opiates, hashish, and cocaine bound for regional and Western markets; weak anti-money-laundering controls and bank privatization may leave it vulnerable to money laundering

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