

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Urges Syria's New Leadership to Expel Russia

By [AFP](#)

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Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga shakes hands with Syria's Ahmed al-Sharaa. **BAKR ALKASEM / AFP**

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga urged Syria's newly installed leader Ahmed al-Sharaa to expel Russian forces from the country during a surprise visit to Damascus on Monday.

Moscow, a key backer of ousted president Bashar al-Assad, intervened in Syria's civil war in 2015, helping Assad regain control of much of the country. Assad's removal from power earlier this month marked a significant blow for Russia, which has been occupied with war against Ukraine since February 2022.

Russia is now working to secure its naval base in the Syrian city of Tartus and Khmeimim Air Base under the new Syrian government.

“The Russian and Assad regimes supported each other because they were based on violence and torture,” Sybiga said.

“We believe that from a strategic point of view, the removal of Russia’s presence in Syria will contribute to the stability of not only the Syrian state but the entire Middle East and Africa,” the Ukrainian foreign minister added.

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Sybiga said Kyiv is ready to rebuild ties with Syria, which were severed when the Assad government recognized Russia’s annexation of Ukrainian territories.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also announced that Ukraine had sent its first shipment of food aid — 500 tons of wheat flour — to Syria, with delivery expected Tuesday.

“We support the Syrian people in overcoming decades of dictatorial rule and restoring stability, security, and normal life in Syria,” Zelensky said in a social media post.

Despite the ongoing war, Ukraine remains one of the world’s leading wheat producers.

Sharaa’s Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) led a rapid offensive that culminated in the capture of Damascus on Dec. 8, forcing Assad to flee to Russia.

However, in an interview with Al-Arabiya TV on Sunday, Sharaa acknowledged the “deep strategic interests” between Syria and Russia.

“All Syria’s arms are of Russian origin, and many power plants are managed by Russian experts... We do not want Russia to leave Syria in the way that some wish,” he said.

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