

Syria Leader Stresses 'Strong Strategic Ties' in Call With Russia's Putin

By [AFP](#)

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Syria's interim leader Ahmed al-Sharaa emphasized the "strong strategic ties" between his country and Russia during his first telephone call with President Vladimir Putin since taking power, the Syrian presidency said Wednesday.

Rebels led by Sharaa's Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham ousted Moscow's close ally Bashar al-Assad in December after a lightning offensive, and questions have remained over the fate of Russia's two military bases in the war-torn country.

Sharaa emphasized "the strong strategic ties between the two countries and Syria's openness to all parties" in a way that serves "the interests" of the Syrian people and strengthens Syria's stability and security," the presidency statement said.

It also said Putin extended "an official invitation to Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani to

visit Russia."

The Kremlin, in a readout of the call, said Putin wished Sharaa "success... in solving the tasks facing the new leadership of the country for the benefit of the Syrian people."

"The Russian side emphasized its principled position in support of the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian state," it added.

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Moscow helped keep Assad in power when it intervened militarily in Syria's war in 2015, launching devastating strikes on rebel-held areas.

When rebels swept into Damascus in December, Russia granted Assad asylum, angering many Syrians including the country's new rulers.

Russia is seeking to secure the fate of its naval base in Tartus and its air base at Khmeimim — both on Syria's Mediterranean coast and Moscow's only military bases outside the former Soviet Union — with the new Syrian authorities.

Both were left vulnerable after Assad was ousted, in a major setback for Russia's foreign policy.

'Building a new Syria'

The Syrian presidency also said the two leaders exchanged "views on the current situation in Syria and the political roadmap for building a new Syria."

Last month, Syria's new leadership urged Moscow to "address past mistakes" during talks in Damascus with Russian officials that touched on "the brutal war waged by the Assad regime."

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said he and his delegation had met for three hours with Sharaa and Shaibani.

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Russia's Foreign Ministry said that visit came at a "crunch point" in Russia-Syria relations, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov calling it an "important trip."

Peskov at the time declined to comment on reports that Syria's new rulers had requested Assad's extradition and to be paid compensation by Moscow.

Sharaa in an interview in December with Al-Arabiya TV channel noted the "deep strategic interests between Russia and Syria."

"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.

Diplomats from Ukraine, where Russia has been waging a full-scale invasion since 2022, visited Syria's new rulers in December, with Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga urging Sharaa to expel Russia from the country.

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