

Israel: Assad Will Bear Consequences of Syrian Escalation of Golan

The escalation of tension between Israel and Syria is becoming palpable in both word and deed. Hours after the official Syrian Arab News Agency confirmed that the Syrian army had deliberately fired at an Israel Defense Forces patrol jeep in the central Golan Heights, Defense Minister Moshe (Bogie) Ya'alon and IDF Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz gave clear warnings that Israel will not allow spillage of fire into Israeli territory.

"Our policy regarding Syria is clear—we are not intervening in the civil war. But as for the situation in the Golan Heights, we are not allowing, and won't allow Syrian fire to spill into our territory," Ya'alon said. "Tonight, a Syrian Army target was destroyed in the wake of such spillage in the Golan Heights."

Israeli and Syrian troops exchanged fire across their tense cease-fire line in the Golan Heights on Tuesday, prompting an Israeli threat that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad will "bear the consequences" of further escalation. Tuesday morning's small-arms fire attack on the Israeli jeep was the third shooting attack against IDF forces in the area in as many days.

Touring the area of the incident later on Tuesday, Gantz accused Syria's leader of encouraging and directing operations against Israel. He said the Israeli patrol was targeted several times Tuesday by a "clearly marked Syrian position." "Our nighttime patrol was clearly along the border fence and did not cross into Syrian territory. They fired three times from the Syrian post, so it was destroyed," he stated.

In his comments, Gantz clearly alluded to the possibility that hostilities could erupt between Israel and Syria, which have fought several full-scale wars over the years and are still technically at war.

"We will not allow the Golan Heights to become a comfortable space for Assad to operate from," Gantz told a conference at the University of Haifa later in the day.

The chief of staff added, "If Assad escalates the situation in the Golan Heights, he will have to bear the consequences. I am not a belligerent person, but we must know to protect [ourselves] amidst a deteriorating situation."

Gantz said the situation was extremely combustible, and "a day doesn't go by" where there could be a "sudden uncontrollable deterioration." He warned, "Instability will be the only stable thing that will happen here."

Strategic Affairs, Intelligence and International Relations Minister Yuval Steinitz also responded to Tuesday's incident, saying that "we must not allow the events and general situation in Syria, Sinai and Gaza to push aside the most critical issue, which is nuclear Iran. The Iranian nuclear program is game changing, it will change Israel's situation, and the situation of the entire Middle East, possibly even the world."

GOC Homefront Command Maj. Gen. Eyal Eisenberg stressed that "there is no doubt that as the northern front develops, the Israeli homefront will experience things it has never experienced before, and it will need to remain strong and to project its might."

"It won't be easy," he added. "But Israel has much more destructive ability than our enemies. That is why I propose that our neighbors reconsider their actions before revving their engines."

Amidst the increasing tension, official state Syrian media have for the second time accused Israel of sending military supplies to the rebels fighting the Assad regime. On Tuesday, Syrian TV said the Syrian army had “intercepted a large weapons shipment sent from Israel to the rebels. This is Israeli weaponry sent so that the ‘new freedom fighters’ will win. These are the allies of Sharon, Livni, Netanyahu and Barak,” the presenter on Syrian TV said.

Earlier this week, Syrian state media displayed an old IDF jeep with Hebrew markings on it, which Syria claims was captured in the battle of Qusayr taking place now between rebels and Assad’s forces. Israel said the jeep had been decommissioned decades ago and was a holdover of IDF operations in the security zone in southern Lebanon before Israel’s withdrawal. The use of the old jeep was a “cheap propaganda ploy,” the IDF said.

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