

Israel will destroy Assad's forces if fired on, Netanyahu says

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned that the Syrian regime is no longer “immune” from retaliation.

Speaking at the Policy Exchange think tank in London during a diplomatic tour of Europe, Netanyahu warned that Israel would destroy Syrian forces it deemed a threat to Israel.

“He is no longer immune, his regime is no longer immune,” the prime minister said. “If he fires at us, we will destroy his forces.... There is a new calculus that has to take place.”



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks during a news conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin, Germany, on June 4. Netanyahu has warned that the Syrian regime is no longer “immune” from retaliation. REUTERS/AXEL SCHMIDT

Netanyahu is visiting several European leaders to seek their support in curbing the influence of Iran in the Middle East. The high-level conversations also include the Iran nuclear deal, now under threat of collapse following U.S. President Donald Trump's withdrawal last month.

The remaining signatories to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—the U.K., France, Germany, Russia, China and the European Union—have all voiced their continued support for the agreement. But Netanyahu has dismissed the JCPOA as “based on Iranian lies and Iranian deception.”

Israel has been fighting against Iranian influence in Syria, which has allowed Tehran to station troops within sight of the northern Israeli border. Netanyahu considers this an unacceptable threat to national security, and has already warned he will not allow Iran a foothold in the country.



An old military vehicle can be seen positioned on the Israeli side of the border with Syria in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, on February 11. Israel has been fighting against Iranian influence in Syria, which has allowed Tehran to station

troops within sight of the northern Israeli border.REUTERS/AMMAR AWAD

Israeli forces have launched multiple attacks on Iranian targets in Syria. Last month, Israel and Iran exchanged airstrikes and missiles after several weeks of aggressive rhetoric and Israeli attacks.

In response, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) jets struck a range of targets in Syria, claiming to have hit “almost all of the Iranian infrastructure” in the country.

“Iran is trying to move its army a thousand miles so it can threaten Israel,” Netanyahu told reporters. “They want to bring in precision guided rockets with half a ton warheads and submarines to the Mediterranean.”

Israel, the U.S. and their European allies have voiced concerns over Tehran’s regional influence, which has been buoyed by wars in Syria, Yemen and Iraq. “Iran is devouring one nation after another, using the money they get from the nuclear deal,” Netanyahu said. “My real focus for this visit was not about the [nuclear] deal, but about reversing Iran’s aggression in the region and getting them out of Syria.”

Answering questions from reporters, Netanyahu spoke of his good relationship with Trump, praising the united anti-Iran front the two nations have built. “There is no disagreement between President Trump and me on Iran, and I appreciate that very much,” he said. “I’ve done very well with U.S. presidents, those I agree with and those I disagreed with. The main disagreement with Obama was on Iran, and I was quite forthright about it,” he added.

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