

Netanyahu Calls on Putin to Pressure Iran Out of Syria



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gestures while speaking to Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting in the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, April 4, 2019. Alexander Zemlianichenko/Pool via REUTERS

Russian President Vladimir Putin met Thursday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Moscow to discuss the situation in Syria and ways to foster cooperation.

The two leaders also tackled Iran's role in Syria.

An Israeli official said that Netanyahu called on Russia to use its influence in Syria to prevent Iran from securing a lasting presence in the country.

Putin stressed the special significance of keeping communication between the two countries. As for Netanyahu, he invited Putin to Israel in May for the unveiling of a monument on Leningrad during World War II.

Netanyahu's visit to Moscow was his second this year.

Although the two leaders didn't reveal details of their discussions, Kremlin sources indicated that talks mainly focused on military cooperation in Syria.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov also told journalists that they discussed events in Syria but that Netanyahu did not present any concrete plan to solve the Syrian crisis.

Reports said that the Israeli PM called on Putin to warn Lebanon of Iranian and Hezbollah plans to build a secret factory that produces weapons.

"We will discuss events in Syria ... and the regular and special coordination between our armies as well as other important issues for Israel," Netanyahu said before departing to Moscow.

The major topic discussed by Netanyahu and Putin was the constant pursuit by Iran to establish a military structure that enables it to open a front in the northeast against Israel, military analyst Ron Ben-Yishai, who accompanied Netanyahu to Moscow, told Yedioth Ahronoth.

Iranian Revolutionary Guards Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani has responded to previous Russian pressure and moved Iranian forces away from the border with Israel, Ben-Yishai said.

Meanwhile, a senior Kazakh official said the next round of the Astana-format Syrian settlement talks has been planned to be held in the Kazakh capital of Nur-Sultan on April 25-26.

Kazakh First Deputy Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tleuberdi said: "I have recently been in Brussels at the Syrian conference organized by the UN and the European Union. The new UN special representative for Syria has expressed interest in participating in the Astana process. His participation is possible, of course."

Further, Russian FM Sergei Lavrov stressed in an interview that the war on terrorism in Syria "hasn't finished yet", underlining the necessity of eliminating terrorist organizations completely.

"It is important for us to completely crush hotbeds of terrorism, and one of the most important of them which raises concerns is Idlib as there are still several thousands of terrorists in it," he added.

He reminded of Putin's proposal in his speech at the UN in 2015 on establishing a real international front for combating terrorism.

Lavrov said dialogue against terrorism was resumed with the US after its long attempts to avoid it, adding "we will resume dialogue with the European Union."

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