

Netanyahu to meet Putin over “recent development” in Syria

ERUSALEM, Aug. 19 (Xinhua) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Saturday that he will meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Russia next week to discuss “recent development” in Syria.

A statement released by the Prime Minister’s Office said the meeting will be held in Black Sea city of Sochi on Wednesday.

The two leaders are expected to talk about the recent development in Syria, where Russian forces are fighting along with President Bashar Assad’s military, the statement said.

The meeting would be held amid Iran’s alleged increasing presence in the war-torn country.

“It should be noted that over the past two years, Prime Minister Netanyahu has met President Putin once in every few months to discuss bilateral and regional issues to prevent friction between Israeli and Russian air forces in Syria,” the statement read.

Yossi Cohen, head of Israel’s Mossad national intelligence agency, warned last week against “Iranian expansion” into the regions that the Islamic State has relinquished in the Middle East.

“The areas where IS presence is decreasing, Iran is working to fill the void,” Cohen said.

According to the intelligence chief, Iran is expanding through its proxies and local allies in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

Israel worries that Iran will deploy its forces near the Syrian border with Israel, creating an Iranian stronghold next to the Jewish state.

Netanyahu has called on Russian and U.S. leaders to contain Iranian presence in Syria in the framework of a possible cease-fire to end the eight-year-long civil war.

Israel has repeatedly declared it will not intervene in the fighting in Syria.

However, Israel's military responds to the random fire from Syria with artillery or airstrikes on posts of the Syrian army.

In addition, it is widely believed that Israel often carries out airstrikes on weapons convoys in Syria, and has been providing medical treatment to hundreds of wounded Syrians reaching the border.

Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/20/c_136539631.htm

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