

'Syria-Hizbullah ties growing stronger'

Contributed by Herb Keinon , THE JERUSALEM POST
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If Israel's indirect talks with Syria were aimed at testing whether it might be possible to pull Damascus out of Iran and Hizbullah's orbits, then so far the test has failed, Military Intelligence chief Maj.-Gen. Amos Yadlin indicated in the cabinet Sunday.

Despite the talks, not only has Damascus not lessened its cooperation with Hizbullah, it has actually stepped up its relationship with the organization.

"[Syrian President Bashar] Assad currently trusts Hizbullah more than his own army," Yadlin said during a briefing. "Hizbullah operatives are working from within Syria. The Syrians are loosening all restraints, and [are irresponsibly giving] Hizbullah access to almost all of their strategic capabilities."

Assad "is continuing to open up his warehouses to Hizbullah," Yadlin continued, adding that Syria was "turning into the arms granary" for Hizbullah.

He also said that Iranian and Syrian involvement in Lebanon was a means of taking control of the country.

"Syria and Iran are buying the regime in Lebanon and are pouring substantial money into buying parliamentary representatives and into conducting dubious business deals," the MI chief said. "The Iranian offer to assist in the building of the Lebanese Army is a ruse to take control of Lebanon."

Yadlin discussed the terror attack last month in Damascus that killed 17 people, saying it was a result of Syria's involvement in world terrorism.

"Whoever sleeps with dogs should not be surprised to wake up with fleas," he said. Yadlin attributed the attack to World Jihad terrorists, saying that Damascus had in the past given them a free hand to pass into Iraq and Lebanon as long as they didn't attack the Syrian government. That unwritten agreement, Yadlin said, has now been violated.

Regarding the diplomatic process with Syria, Yadlin said Assad was interested in an agreement with Israel on Syria's terms, but wanted to wait until after the US elections and the establishment of a new administration before moving anything forward.

Yadlin said Hizbullah was still trying to avenge the assassination of its commander Imad Mughniyeh, but was concerned about a harsh Israeli response. As such, he said, Hizbullah was working through indirect channels, including attempts to carry out attacks through Gaza.

Yadlin said this was creating some tension between Hizbullah and Hamas, since Hamas had an interest in preserving the current calm in the Gaza Strip. He said Hamas had, in fact, recently arrested Hizbullah terrorists in the Gaza Strip.

Regarding the Iranian nuclear program, Yadlin said Teheran was exploiting the transition period and current political uncertainty both in Israel and the US to advance its nuclear program.

"The changing of the governments in the US and Israel, and the world economic crisis, are being exploited by the radical axis in order to improve its situation," Yadlin said. "Iran is exploiting the weakness in the international theater, in anticipation of the new government in the US, in order to move forward on its nuclear program and to soften the network of international opposition."

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