

Russia Swats Away Israeli Bluster on Syria

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The Russian version of the visit by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Chief of Staff General Valery Gerasimov to West Jerusalem on July 23 became available, finally, on Wednesday in the nature of a [terse TASS report quoting a 'military-diplomatic' source in Moscow](#) as saying that the visiting Russian officials "looked into the tasks of completing the anti-terrorist operation in Syria's South."

An [unnamed Israeli official had earlier floated a story](#) that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did some tough talking with Lavrov and "rebuffed" a Russian offer to create a 100-kilometre buffer zone adjacent to Golan Heights. Netanyahu reportedly insisted that he won't be satisfied with anything short of Iran ending its presence in Syria conclusively.

The first indication that the talks didn't go well came when Israel shot down a Syrian jet on July 24 in Quneitra bordering Golan. It was a calculated act of belligerence by Israel. (The Islamic State fighters who are present in the region have since [released the photograph of the wreckage](#) and the mutilated body of the Syrian pilot.)

The TASS report on July 25 punctures the Israeli version that the two Russian officials were deputed by President Vladimir Putin specially to discuss with Netanyahu the future of Iranian presence in Syria. (It now transpires that the Russian officials were on a tour of Israel, Germany and France.) The Israeli bravado can only be seen as a desperate ploy to cover up its humiliating defeat in Syria with the terrorist groups that were its proxies surrendering lock, stock and barrel in Daraa and Quneitra to the Syrian-Russian forces – especially the [hasty exfiltration of the controversial group known as the White Helmets](#) to Jordan via Golan Heights with the logistical help from the Israeli military.

Quite obviously, Moscow does not want to get entangled in the Israel-Iran tensions. This is also the American assessment of the Russian thinking, as articulated by the Director of the National Intelligence Agency Daniel Coats on Thursday:

"We have assessed that it's unlikely Russia has the will or the capability to fully implement and counter Iranian decisions and influence (in Syria.) Russia would have to make significantly greater commitments [in Syria] from a military standpoint, from an economic standpoint. We don't assess that they're keen to do that."

Nonetheless, the Israeli propaganda has gone overboard in attempting to create a wedge between Russia and Iran. (Read a [fine piece, here, by Moon of Alabama](#) on the Israeli disinformation campaign.) This couldn't have gone down well in Moscow. At any rate, [Russian Foreign Ministry came out on July 24 with some sharp criticism](#) of the move by the Israeli parliament (six days earlier) to adopt a bill known as Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People.

The operation by the Syrian forces (backed by Russian allies) to liberate Quneitra succeeded beyond expectations once Washington signaled that the extremist groups entrenched in the southern provinces bordering Jordan and Israel should not expect any American intervention to bail them out.

Damascus is now turning attention to the liberation of the northwestern province of Idlib. It will be a major confrontation due to the presence of a large number of foreign terrorists in Northwestern Syria. The Iranian media reported that a Russian flag ship Ro-Ro Sparta was spotted crossing the Bosphorus en route to Syria's Tartus, carrying military cargo mostly ammunition, shells and missiles and that the reinforcements are meant for the Syrian Army's "upcoming assault" on Idlib province.

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