

Israel Ramps Up Support for Over 7 Syrian Rebel Factions in Desperate Bid to Expand Reach

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*As the acute phase of civil warfare in Syria winds down while the government of **President Bashar al-Assad** increasingly gains the upper hand over foreign-funded insurgents, regional powers are desperately boosting aid for local proxies in a last-ditch attempt to rekindle the nearly seven-year-long conflict and gain a strategic foothold in the war-torn Arab republic.*

Israeli occupation forces are frantically hoping to secure their grip on the country's southern region surrounding the illegally-occupied Golan Heights, in hopes to gain leverage against what Israel fears is an increasing presence of fighters aligned with Iran.

For the Israeli military's top brass, this means not only launching outright aggression against alleged targets affiliated with Tehran, but also redoubling support for at least seven armed opposition factions that it euphemistically calls "the locals," according to an [investigative report](#) by Israeli analyst **Elizabeth Tsurkov**.

The Israelis fear that many of these groups are taking up posts along the Israeli-Syrian border and adjacent to the illegally-annexed Golan Heights, especially after a hesitant Russia agreed to [temporarily prevent](#) the Iranian-aligned combatants from deploying from around 5 to 7 kilometers' distance from Syria's Golan. Previous demands by Tel Aviv that Washington and Moscow guarantee the departure of the Shia groups were largely shrugged off, as was a [demand](#) that a 60-kilometer "safe-zone," free of the Iranians and their allies, be established in the districts of Daraa and Quneitra.

Israeli occupation forces seized the Golan Heights from Syria during Israel's expansionist military campaign of 1967, prior to outright annexing it. The move was never recognized by the international community, yet Tel Aviv's imperialist backers and sponsors in Washington and other Western capitals unofficially recognized the annexation of the strategic 500 square-mile plateau.

Stepping into the funding vacuum

The Israeli aid boost comes after the Military Operations Command, the United States' CIA-

directed center in Jordan, finally halted funding [last month](#) that had provided the salaries for anywhere between 10,000 and 20,000 combatants in the “Southern Front” network of Free Syria Army (FSA) militias.

According to Syrian pro-government media sources and interviews Tsurkov conducted with opposition militants, various factions of the Free Syrian Army have enjoyed increased support since the fall of 2017:

This support came in the form of weapons, ammunition and money to purchase weapons on the black market. All of my sources confirmed the identity of at least seven factions receiving Israeli support, on the condition that the groups would not be named.”

The support has also been accompanied by reported [joint operations](#) against affiliates of the Islamic State group in a bid to dislodge the Salafi-jihadists and allow the Israeli-backed militants to gain ground.

Open assistance

Damascus has long expressed alarm over the Israeli [military’s aid](#) to opposition factions such as the Quneitra-based Liwa Fursan al-Jolan, or the “Knights of the Golan Brigade,” and FSA faction Firqat Ahrar Nawa. Last month, Firqat Ahrar Nawa posted a [video](#) to YouTube showing rebels unloading a truck full of containers bearing Israeli markings before deploying a multiple rocket launcher against an unidentified target.

The Syrian Arab Army has also made claims that it seized large caches of Israeli-manufactured weapons and military equipment in the course of its battles with various foreign-backed rebel factions.

In a report last June by the *Wall Street Journal*, Fursan al-Jolan spokesman Moatasem al-Golani admitted to his group’s receiving significant direct aid — such as medical care, cash, food and fuel — from the Israelis, boasting:

Israel stood by our side in a heroic way ... We wouldn’t have survived without Israel’s assistance.”

The report was followed by an exclusive interview by right-wing Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post* with Revolutionary Command Council in Quneitra and Golan spokesman Abu Omar al-Golani. In the report, the militant – whose generic *nom de guerre* has been attached to such titles as [“opposition activist,”](#) a [“brigade leader,”](#) or [“media activist”](#) – appealed to the U.S., the Israelis, and Jordan to help “liberate” Quneitra District from “Assad regime forces” by assisting the anti-government “Operations of the Army of Muhammed” campaign. The campaign was co-led by the [rebranded al-Qaida affiliate](#) Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or the Levant Liberation Committee (previously known as Jabhat al-Nusra).

Expressing hope that the Israelis would open up a corridor allowing for wounded rebels to receive quicker treatment in Israeli hospitals, Golani asked for “all types of weapons and military support in order to be able to eliminate the Shi’ite terrorist militias and Iranian

gangs of the Assad terrorist regime.”

According to a recent speech by Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon – who has been known to [fabricate](#) his talking-points – up to [82,000](#) pro-government Shia fighters affiliated with the Islamic Republic, including Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah, are based in Syria with the consent of the country’s lawful authorities.

Prominent Israeli media personalities like Alex Fishman, chief military-security correspondent for *Yedioth Ahronoth*, have openly [advocated](#) the need to assist rebels regardless of their “religious extremist views” by “buy[ing] their loyalty through material aid.”

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the Israelis began providing Golan rebels with direct cash support in 2013 under the tenure of Israeli then-Chief of Staff Moshe Ya’alon. In a 2016 conference at the Institute of National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, Ya’alon controversially [endorsed](#) the Islamic State terrorist group as a preferable alternative to Iran:

In Syria, if the choice is between Iran and the Islamic State, I choose the Islamic State. They don’t have the capabilities that Iran has ... Iran determines future [sic] of Syria and if it leads to perpetuation, Iranian hegemony in Syria will be huge challenge [sic] for Israel.”

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