

# Netanyahu Says Israeli Forces Secured Buffer Zone in Golan Heights After Syria's Assad Toppled

'We have to take action against possible threats,' the Israeli leader said Sunday.

By [Jack Phillips](#)

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*Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** said that Israel's military has taken over a buffer zone in the Golan Heights that was established decades ago, after Syrian opposition fighters ended the rule of **President Bashar al-Assad's** decades-long reign.*

In a statement released by video on Sunday morning, Netanyahu [said](#) that the agreement, hashed out in 1974 by Israel and former leader Hafez al-Assad's regime, "collapsed" on Saturday night because the "Syrian army abandoned its positions."

The reason Israel seized the territory is because "we have to take action against possible threats" caused by the power vacuum left by the Assad regime's collapse, he said.

"We gave the Israeli army the order to take over these positions to ensure that no hostile force embeds itself right next to the border of Israel," the prime minister added. "This is a temporary defensive position until a suitable arrangement is found."

Netanyahu said Assad's downfall is a "historic day" for the region, adding that the new situation in Syria "offers great opportunity but also is fraught with significant dangers."

His announcement was delivered in Golan Heights.

Syria's collapse, he also said, is the result of Israeli action against Iran and the Hezbollah terrorist group, which had been allied with both Iran and Assad for years. Iran and several groups loyal to Tehran had long used military bases in Syria, while Israel at times carried out air strikes against those positions over the years.

"It set off a chain reaction of all those who want to free themselves from this tyranny and its oppression," Netanyahu said.

Israel is extending "a hand of peace to all those beyond our border in Syria: to the Druze, to the Kurds, to the Christians, and to the Muslims who want to live in peace with Israel," Netanyahu said. "We're going to follow events very carefully. If we can establish

neighborly relations and peaceful relations with the new forces emerging in Syria, that's our desire."

"But if we do not, we will do whatever it takes to defend the State of Israel and the border of Israel."

Assad has not released a statement on his government's collapse, and it's not clear where he currently is. Russian officials have [said](#) that he departed Syria before opposition fighters took over the country, seizing the capital of Damascus on Sunday morning.

On Sunday, rebel groups and militias cooperating with terrorist group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, said they had entered the capital with no sign of army deployments. Thousands of people in cars and on foot congregated at a main square in Damascus waving and chanting, witnesses said.

Leading rebel commander **Abu Mohammed al-Golani**, an individual who is currently [listed](#) by the U.S. State Department as a terrorist who carried out "multiple terrorist attacks throughout Syria" over the years, said there is no room for turning back.

"The future is ours," he said in a statement read on Syria's state TV after his forces took over Damascus.

Underscoring the major changes, Iran's embassy was stormed by Syrian rebels, Iran's English-language Press TV reported.

Iran's foreign ministry said Syria's fate is the sole responsibility of the Syrian people and should be pursued without foreign imposition or destructive intervention.

The Syrian rebel coalition said it is continuing work to complete the transfer of power in the country to a transitional governing body with full executive powers. "The great Syrian revolution has moved from the stage of struggle to overthrow the Assad regime to the struggle to build a Syria together that befits the sacrifices of its people," it added in a statement.

The United States deployed forces in Syria against the ISIS terrorist group about a decade ago,

**President-elect Donald Trump** said that America should not get involved in the conflict and suggested that Russia's war in Ukraine was the reason Assad's regime was toppled. Russia also had positioned troops and military equipment in the country for years.

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*Reuters contributed to this report.*

**Jack Phillips** is a breaking news reporter who covers a range of topics, including politics,

U.S., and health news. A father of two, Jack grew up in California's Central Valley. Follow him on X: <https://twitter.com/jackphillips5>

Featured image: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks in Golan Heights on Dec. 8, 2024, in a still from video. GPO via Reuters/Screenshot via The Epoch Times

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