

Syria says will step in if Israel invades Lebanon

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DAMASCUS (AFX) - Syria issued a stark warning that an Israeli invasion of Lebanon would drag it into the spiralling Middle East conflict and called for an immediate ceasefire.

'If Israel makes a land entry into Lebanon, they can get to within 20 km of Damascus,' Information Minister Moshen Bilal told the Spanish newspaper ABC.

'What will we do? Stand by with our arms folded? Absolutely not. Without any doubt Syria will intervene in the conflict.'

The minister criticised the US saying that it was 'unjustifiable' that 'the superpower is not working for a rapid ceasefire.'

The Israeli and Syrian armies have not engaged in full-scale battle since the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

Bilal rejected claims by Washington that Damascus has armed the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, saying it offered 'moral support' but adding: 'We do not finance any resistance.'

Foreign Minister Walid Muallem expressed concern about the 'dangerous developments in the region' and said any solution to the crisis should be based on a ceasefire and an exchange of prisoners between Lebanon and Israel.

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