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ANALYSIS: Winds of war as Iran axis prepares for Golan offensive

A major battle against the rebels along the Israeli and . Jordanian border seems unavoidable

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FLASH90

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On Sunday, the Israeli military launched a massive surprise drill in the Golan Heights involving a large number of reservists who were ordered to report for immediate duty and to .show up in full gear

In a statement, the IDF claimed the exercise had nothing to do “with current events” and

was planned “in advance as part of the 2018 training schedule,” while the army warned residents of the mountainous plateau they could expect hearing “loud explosions” and “.increasing traffic of vehicles

The statement was most likely meant to reduce tensions in the region and to prevent further escalation toward war after the Iranian-backed pro-Assad coalition started to prepare for a large-scale offensive against the various rebel groups in the border area with Jordan and .Israel

The final preparations for the offensive in southern Syria started after [talks](#) between Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US army, and Russia's chief of the military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, about the situation in the so-called de-.confliction zones reportedly failed to produce concrete results

Dunford and Gerasimov met in the Finnish capital Helsinki where they tried to “avoid miscalculation and to promote transparency and de-confliction in areas,” a U.S. statement .said without further elaboration

The Israeli and Jordanian border regions in Daraa and Quneitra are one of the two de-.confliction zones in Syria

On Monday the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (ACDFRL) [reported](#) that the so-called Al Gaith division of the Syrian armed forces had already captured the city of Baath on the Syrian Golan Heights and were now less than two kilometers away from the .Israeli border

ACDFRL published images of Syrian soldiers in Baath who were preparing for an offensive against mainly Islamist rebel groups in the Kuneitra province as well as photos from a large .military parade held by the Free Syrian Army in Bosra al-Sham in the Daraa province

As forces mass on both sides, large scale fighting seems inevitable in upcoming days,” according to Forensic Research Lab which also warned the offensive could prompt Israeli .strikes

Later on Monday, local media reported attacks on “[militants](#)” in the Eastern Daraa country side and a deadly [offensive](#) against Islamic State hubs in the al-Suweida province east of .Daraa, which is home to a large Druse minority in Syria

At the same time it became clear Iran and Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad were playing .their favourite deceit game with Israel and Western powers such as France

After Assad last month [said](#) there were no Iranian troops in Syria, he now says Iran's .presence in the country is non-negotiable

During an interview with *Al-Alam* TV in Iran, the Syrian dictator also [said](#) “he would not object to the establishment of a permanent Iranian military base within his country's borders “.if such a base is necessary

Iran's president Hassan Rouhani, meanwhile, indulged in double speak about Iran's activities in Syria

Rouhani told French president Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday he didn't **rule out** an Iranian withdrawal from Syria once the "roots of terrorism" are destroyed

At the same time, the Iranian president **defended** Iran's growing presence in Syria and said the presence of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps in Syria "is quite legal and based on the official request of the Syrian government with an aim of fighting terrorism"

Rouhani and Assad were subsequently exposed as liars by the head of IDF Intelligence Directorate Maj.-Gen. Tamir Heyman, who **told** a closed forum of international security experts on Wednesday that Iran's 'counter-terrorism' excuse for setting up bases throughout Syria is a hoax

Heyman showed the experts a map with Iranian bases in Syria which are all built in 'liberated' areas where there is no longer any military threat to the Syrian regime

You probably think it's because they are trying to help the Assad regime fight extremists, "fight terror. Well, get ready for a surprise: In all these places on the map there has been no fighting going on for half a month," Heyman was quoted as saying by Israeli broadcaster *Kan*

The Israeli military, meanwhile, not only held a surprise drill on the Golan Heights, but also continued its attacks on Iranian related targets in Syria

On Tuesday, *Sky News Arabic* **reported** new IAF strikes on Hezbollah positions and weapon depots in the Qalamoun Mountains near the Lebanese border

A major battle between the rebels and Iranian backed forces along the Israeli and Jordanian border seems unavoidable after commanders of the various anti-Assad militias rejected a Russian proposal to start 'peace talks'

The pro-Assad coalition has now issued a 48-hour-long ultimatum to the rebel groups about the peace talks, but chances are slim they will give in since most of them are hard-core Islamist or even Jihadist movements who prefer to confront the army of their foe and fight to the death

The imminent large-scale offensive will first be aimed at the liberation of the so-called Death Triangle which connects Daraa and Quneitra with west Damascus and will reportedly include the involvement of Iranian backed militias such as Hezbollah

The Iranians deceived Russia and other international players by sending their proxy Hezbollah back to the border region disguised as Syrian army soldiers after an initial withdrawal, the *Wall Street Journal* **reported** last week

They are leaving ... in their Hezbollah uniforms and they are returning in regime vehicles"

and dressed in regular [Syrian] army uniforms," Ahmad Azam a commander of a rebel .group in Quneitra told the American paper

The Lebanese terror group also refuses to concede to the Russian request [to vacate](#) a .number of bases in southwest Syria

.All this is known to the Israeli military, an unnamed Israeli official told *WSJ*

You can be sure that Israel is very much aware of basically everything happening in our" .backyard," the official said

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