

## Israel shuts door on Turkish-mediated Syria talks

Deputy Foreign Minister Ayalon tells Reuters proximity talks with Syria through Turkish mediation failed 'because of Syrian intransigence'

Reuters

[Israel](#) under right-wing Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) will not resume Turkish-mediated peace talks with Syria, insisting that any new negotiations be direct, a senior Israeli government official said on Wednesday. Skip related content

"We have enormous respect and great appreciation for the Turkish efforts. But they have not succeeded - not because of the Turks," Deputy Israeli Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon told Reuters in an interview.

"It's because of Syrian intransigence," he added, saying there would be no new recourse to Turkish mediation.

Netanyahu's centrist predecessor Ehud Olmert engaged Damascus through Ankara last year, with all sides reporting some progress.

In power since March, Netanyahu has offered direct talks without preconditions - a reference to the Syrian demand that Israel commit itself in advance to returning the Golan Heights, which it captured from [Syria](#) in a 1967 war.

Israel also insists Syria distance itself from Iran and from Islamist guerrillas arrayed against the Jewish state in Lebanon and Gaza. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been dismissive of that demand and predicted no breakthroughs with Netanyahu.

Asked if the Netanyahu government was ruling out a return to the mediated talks, which both Turkey and Syria have proposed reviving, Ayalon said: "Correct."

"We have just benefited from the experience that shows that proximity talks did not work," he said, speaking in English.

"If they (Syria) are really serious on peace, and not just a peace process which may serve them to extricate them from international isolation, if they are really serious, they will come and sit with us."

The overtures to Olmert helped Assad's relations with the West, long frayed over Syrian involvement in neighboring Lebanon and Iraq, alleged pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and sponsorship of Palestinian militants.

US President Barack Obama, who is trying to advance Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking as well as stabilise Iraq, has sent envoys to coax Syria into the circle of diplomacy.

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