

WORLDNETDAILY EXCLUSIVE

FROM WND'S JERUSALEM BUREAU

Source: Obama secretly pledged cooperation with Syria Said to favor Israel's retreat from strategic Golan Heights

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JERUSALEM – Representatives of President-elect Barack Obama recently told Syrian officials that Obama supports ending their country's isolation and that as president he would work to bring [Damascus](#) into the international community, a Syrian diplomatic source revealed to WND.

The source said the pledges were made this past summer in a meeting in Washington, D.C., between Obama's policy aids and Syrian Ambassador Imad Moustapha. The source said Moustapha was asked at the time by Obama's camp not to comment on the meeting.

The source said Moustapha was told that Obama favors engagement and economic cooperation with Syria as opposed to the Bush administration's policy of isolating the country and imposing economic sanctions.

The source also disclosed Obama's team said the president-elect favors talks between Israel and Syria leading to an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, strategic, mountainous territory looking down on Israeli population centers that was twice used in the past by Syria to mount ground invasions into the Jewish state.



Syrian Ambassador Imad Moustapha

(Story continues below)

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The information comes at a time when U.S.-Syrian relations seem to be reaching a low point following a U.S. [military](#) raid on Syrian soil last month that reportedly targeted elements of a robust foreign fighter logistics network operating from Syria and planning attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq. A U.S. military official said the raid was carried out due to Syrian inaction against insurgents working in its country.

The U.S. has long accused Syria of failing to halt insurgents from using Syrian territory to smuggle weapons into Iraq or to stage attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq.

Syria is accused of fomenting instability in Lebanon and has been widely blamed for a series of political assassinations there against anti-Syrian leaders, including the 2005 car bomb murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.

Syria also openly hosts the chiefs of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad terror groups.

Yesterday, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad called on the U.S. to pull its troops out of Iraq, claiming the troops pose a threat to neighboring states.

"The [presence in Iraq](#) of American forces of occupation is a permanent threat to neighboring countries and an element of instability in the region," Assad said in a speech to Arab parliamentarians in Damascus.

Obama has been a harsh critic of the war in Iraq and has pledged to make ending the war a top priority.

After the Illinois [senator](#) won last week's election, the official Syrian state-run SANA news agency quoted Syrian Information Minister Mohsen Bilal as expressing hope that Obama would "change US foreign policy from a policy of war and siege to one of diplomacy and dialogue."

Bilal made the comments during a [trip](#) to Cuba last Wednesday, the report said.

While the Syrian diplomatic source speaking to WND said his country was told Obama supports diplomacy over sanctions, it wasn't immediately clear what was asked of Syria in return for U.S. engagement.

Last April, a top Syrian official told WND [his country floated a proposal to the Bush administration](#) stating that if the U.S. helps facilitate billions of dollars in business for Syria and builds up Damascus as the primary American ally in the Arab world in place of Saudi Arabia, the Syrians would be willing to discuss scaling back alliances with Iran and making peace with Israel.

He said Syria also demanded as a key condition for considering altering its alliances that the U.S. cease opposing Syrian influence in Lebanon.

"Syria is the key to the Arab world. We have influence with Hezbollah and Lebanon and hold many cards in the Palestinian and Iraqi arenas," said the official, who spoke by phone from Damascus on condition his name be withheld. "The U.S. needs to rethink the value of the investment it places in Saudi Arabia."

The official said Syria is asking the U.S. to end its opposition to a trade and association agreement between Damascus and the [European Union](#) drafted in 2004 that is said to be worth about \$7 billion per year for the Syrian economy. The agreement was not signed or implemented, largely due to American pressure, said the Syrian official.

Syria is also asking the U.S. not to object to Syrian "influence" in Lebanon, which was occupied for nearly 30 years by Syrian forces until protests prompted by Hariri's assassination. Pro-democracy Lebanese leaders accuse Syria of meddling in Lebanon's affairs by directing the Hezbollah terrorist group, which holds key parliamentary seats, to interfere in the election of a new Lebanese president.

The main Syrian request is that America uphold Damascus as its main "partner" in the Arab world instead of Saudi Arabia, said the Syrian official.

He said in exchange Damascus would discuss severing "many ties" with Iran, but he would not specify which ties and whether Syria is willing to cut off all coordination with the Iranians.

"We are ready to significantly and deeply reduce relations with our Iranian brothers if conditions are met," the official said.

He said Syria is willing to sign a treaty with Israel and come to some sort of [accommodation](#) regarding the strategic Golan Heights, mountainous territory looking down on Israeli population centers which Syria used twice to launch ground invasions into the Jewish state.

The official claimed the Golan was not "the biggest obstacle" in preventing a Syrian-American-Israeli agreement.

He claimed Syria would "not categorically reject the idea of leasing some sections of the Golan to Israel for up to 99 years."

Just yesterday, Israeli leaders, including sitting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzippi Livni, expressed public willingness to engage in direct negotiations with Syria regarding the Golan Heights.

Security officials in Jerusalem confirmed in April to WND their knowledge of the Syrian offers to the U.S., which they said prompted a major crisis between Syria and Saudi Arabia.

According to the security officials, Saudi Arabia earlier this year began shipping weapons to the anti-Syrian leadership in Lebanon to bolster them against Damascus' influence and the Syrian-backed Hezbollah.

The Syrian-Saudi crisis was highlighted at last March's Arab Summit, a major annual meeting of Arab leaders, which was held this year in Damascus. Saudi Arabia sent only a low-level representative – which was seen as a major snub to Syria – and used the platform to blast Syria.

According to knowledgeable Arab diplomatic sources, Saudi Arabia wanted to boycott the event altogether, but sent the low-level delegation to uphold its record of attending every Arab Summit