



Kerry Discusses Syria Regional Fallout in Israel

By Scott Stearns

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U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met Wednesday in Jerusalem and discussed several topics, including the fallout from the civil war in neighboring Syria and how the fighting affects Israeli security.

Fighting in Syria has broad security and humanitarian implications for its neighbors - an instability that shows no sign of fading.

Kerry told Netanyahu the international community understands those risks to regional stability, including Israel's security.

"The impact of Syria on this region cannot be overstated. Massive numbers of refugees, enormous violence, now the potential of disease - polio - a breakdown of the health system - perhaps even if we don't succeed, the destruction of the state of Syria with all of those dangerous implications," said Kerry.

Mired in its civil war, the Syrian government has done little to antagonize Israel. Syria's army knows the might of Israel's military force, said Cato Institute analyst Doug Bandow, so it is not looking to open a second front with Israel.

"I think the issue for Israel much more is simply collapse [of Syria]. It's a question of al-Qaida," said Bandow. "It's a question of terrorism. In many ways the worst case for Israel is for the rebels to win because they're much less controllable. They're multiple factions. My guess is there wouldn't be a unified government."

Still, there also is the issue of Iran's support for Syrian forces and for the Lebanon-based, anti-Israel, militant group Hezbollah. Israel reportedly has struck several Hezbollah targets ferrying arms inside Syria.

American University professor Akbar Ahmed said Israel is watching Hezbollah closely. "Iran can not simply abandon the field, as it were. It also supports Hezbollah. Hezbollah is very closely allied with the government in Syria and has a major presence in Lebanon. And because of the Lebanon situation, Israel gets involved."

Especially at a time when Israel is concerned about Iran's nuclear ambitions and what it fears is a new willingness by international mediators to strike a deal over easing sanctions. Netanyahu says that would be a dangerous mistake.

"I think that this attitude buttressed by a policy of terror worldwide supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, and all the forces that are against peace participating in a mass murder in Syria - I think such a regime must not have the world's most dangerous weapons," said Netanyahu.

Israeli concerns about Syrian instability also include the political crisis in neighboring Egypt and a broader breakdown in alliances... as the United States has suspended the delivery of major weapons systems to Egypt's military-backed civilian government.

"Egypt swinging away from its traditional role as a close ally of the United States, especially in the context of the geopolitics of the region, brings in Israel, brings in Saudi Arabia," said Ahmed.

As fighting continues, Syrian peace talks that had been planned for later this month may now not happen before the end of the year-- as Israel has made clear its willingness to continue striking targets inside Syria to prevent the rearming of Hezbollah.