

*Arab states condemn Israel's plan  
for settlement expansion in  
Syria's Golan and stress  
territorial integrity*

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**An Israeli military vehicle patrols near the fence leading into the so-called buffer zone, which separates the occupied Golan Heights from the rest of Syria, near the Druze village of Majdal Shams on December 15, 2024. (Photo by AFP)**

Doha, December 17 (RHC)-- Several Arab countries have condemned a new controversial project by the Israeli regime to expand its illegal settlements in the occupied Golan Heights, expressing their support for Syria's sovereignty over the mountainous area.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq and the UAE denounced Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's \$11 million plan to double the population in the occupied Golan on Sunday, after the scheme received unanimous approval from the regime's cabinet.

In a statement, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemned and rejected the decision, emphasizing that such actions "undermine Syria's prospects for regaining security and stability." It also called on the international community to denounce Israeli violations and reiterated that the Golan Heights is occupied Syrian Arab land.

The statement by Saudi Arabia further underscored the importance of respecting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Similarly, Qatar's Foreign Ministry said the contentious plan is "a new episode in a series of Israeli aggressions on Syrian territories and a blatant violation of international law." The international community, it added, should "fulfill its legal and moral responsibilities to compel the Israeli occupation to cease its aggressions" on Syria.

The ministry also reiterated Doha's firm position in support of Syria's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, saying it backs all regional and international efforts aimed at establishing security and stability in the Arab country.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry said the Israeli settlement expansion constitutes a "flagrant violation" of international law and international resolutions.

Iraq supports Syria's right to reclaim full sovereignty over its land, it noted, stressing that any measures aimed at changing Golan's legal and demographic status are "invalid and unlawful." It further called on the international community to "take a firm stance to condemn Israel's continuous violations ... and ensure the achievement of security and stability in the region."

Additionally, the UAE warned in a statement by its Foreign Ministry that the Israeli actions could exacerbate regional tensions. "The UAE categorically rejects all measures and practices aimed at altering the legal status of the occupied Golan Heights," the statement read.

In 1967, Israel waged a full-scale war against Arab territories, during which it occupied a large swathe of Golan and annexed it four years later – a move never recognized by the international community.

Israel started its push to grab more Syrian land on December 8, after foreign-backed militants led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) announced the fall of President Bashar al-Assad's government following a rapid two-week onslaught.

The regime's warplanes also conducted hundreds of aerial assaults on Syria in violation of international law. Israel's exploitation of the current chaotic situation in Syria to invade and occupy the country has sparked a wave of condemnations.

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