Israel grabs buffer zone in Syria's Golan Heights after al-Assad falls
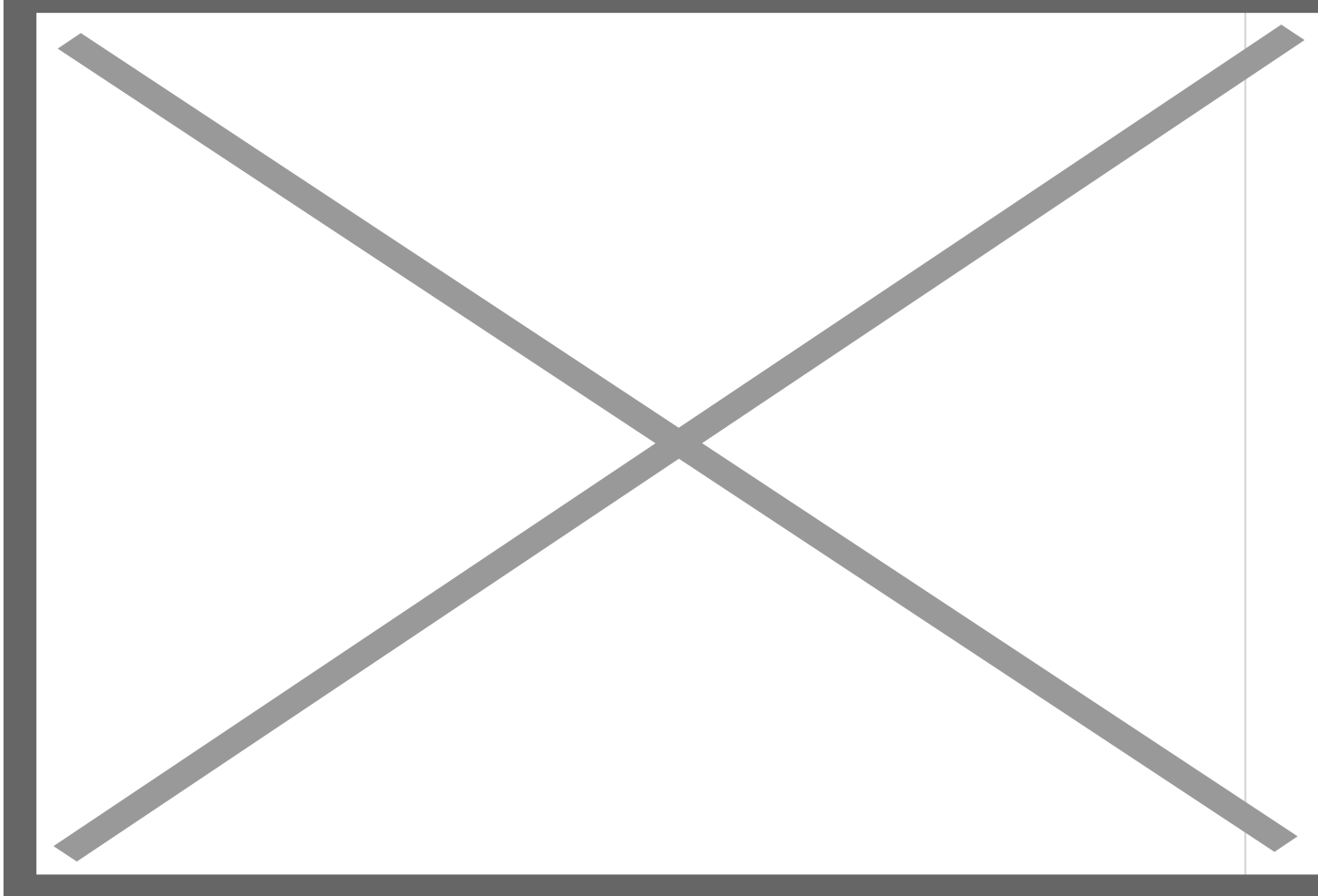
Israeli forces also bomb weapons depots in southern Syria and the capital Damascus, Israeli media reports.
An Israeli soldier stands on a tank near the ceasefire line between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights [Shir Torem/Reuters]

Tel Aviv, December 8 (RHC)-- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he ordered Israeli forces to "seize" a buffer zone in the occupied Golan Heights established by a 1974 ceasefire agreement with Syria, after a lightning advance by Syrian opposition forces ended Bashar al-Assad's rule.

Netanyahu said on Sunday that the decades-old agreement had collapsed and that Syrian soldiers had abandoned their positions, necessitating the Israeli takeover. "We will not allow any hostile force to establish itself on our border," he said.

Israel captured the Golan Heights in the 1967 war and annexed it. The international community, except for the United States, views it as occupied Syrian territory.

Agricultural areas in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights were declared closed military zones and some schools shifted to online classes in anticipation of unrest.

Netanyahu hailed the removal of al-Assad on Sunday as an "historic day" that followed the blows delivered by Israel against al-Assad's supporters Iran and Hezbollah in its recent war on Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Israeli media said on Sunday that the Israeli air force has bombed weapons depots in southern Syria and Damascus to prevent opposition groups from seizing them.

"We attacked ammunition depots in southern Syria and in the Damascus airport area for fears they might fall into the hands of armed groups and local factions," the Israeli public broadcaster KAN quoted an unnamed Israeli security official as saying.

"Israel is working to thwart any potential threats and prevent any damage to its air superiority in Syria," the official added.

Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth said weapons depots and surface-to-surface missile stockpiles were the targets of Israeli attacks in Syria, without providing further details.

Israel has frequently targeted weapons shipments and military installations in Syria throughout the country's war, citing concerns over the possible transfer of advanced weaponry to hostile groups, including Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias.

An Associated Press journalist in Damascus reported air attacks in the area of the Mazzeh military airport, southwest of the capital on Sunday.

The airport has previously been hit in Israeli air attacks, but it was not immediately clear who launched Sunday's attack.

The Israeli military refused to comment on the reports and Israel often does not publicly claim responsibility for attacks in Syria.

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