



Israel PM helped to topple Assad, but it wasn't planned, analysts say

Jerusalem (AFP) – Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday claimed the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria as a direct outcome of Israel's actions in the region, something analysts in Israel said was only partially true.

Issued on: 08/12/2024

Speaking while under growing domestic pressure over the fate of Israeli hostages in Gaza and a corruption trial, Netanyahu said Assad's demise was "a direct result of the blows we have inflicted on Iran and Hezbollah, Assad's main supporters".

Danny Citrinowicz, a research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, told AFP that while it was true Israel helped precipitate events in Syria, Assad's fall was an unintended consequence.

"It's obvious that what Israel did has definitely led to that, but I doubt that they had a strategy to do so," he said.

Netanyahu warned Assad on November 27, the day Syria's rebel offensive began, that he was "playing with fire" by supporting Hezbollah and helping to transfer weapons to Lebanon.

"But, he never knew that Jolani intended to start an attack," Citrinowicz said, referring to Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, the Islamist chief of the rebel group that led the offensive in Syria.

"And, of course, nobody calculated how the fact that Iran and Hezbollah were so weakened would damage Assad's ability to protect himself and his regime."

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