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## Netanyahu's vow to Syria: Israel won't provoke war

By [Yoav Stern](#), Haaretz Correspondent

Benjamin Netanyahu sent a message to Syria before last month's election promising that a government under him would "not provoke war" and would be interested in "seriously and genuinely exploring" a peace process.

Likud officials met with senior Syrian figures in January in Washington to prepare the ground for further exchanges after Israel's next government takes office, Likud sources said.

The officials, however, did not express any willingness to make concessions or withdraw from the Golan Heights, as Syrian President Bashar Assad says is necessary.

The two sides agreed that the meetings may result in the resumption of negotiations with American mediation to be held after the Israeli government forms.

In his message, Netanyahu expressed a willingness to solve the Shaba Farms question and the issue of the village of Ghajar on the Israel-Lebanese border.

The meeting with the Syrians was held following an American initiative. Americans, including some affiliated with the Obama administration, are closely following the process.

The Syrians were represented by "a Syrian citizen of the highest stature in his country," according to the Israeli sources.

The Likud officials updated Netanyahu immediately following their return to Israel, several days before the elections.

Assad, meanwhile, has said in recent months his government would be willing to negotiate with any government in Israel.

On Monday, Assad told Al Khalij, a daily published in the United Arab Emirates, that all Israeli governments are similar and Syria will negotiate with whomever represents Israel. But Assad was skeptical about Israeli governments, whether right or left. He said "one is bad and the other is worse - the right is right and the left is right, the right kills Arabs and the left kills Arabs."

Similar exchanges are also being held by Likud officials with Palestinians, Likud sources say. They hope to massively boost the Palestinian economy and set the stage for calm and peace.

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