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Kremlin Decries 'Destabilizing' Israeli Strikes in Syria

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Damaged vessels at Latakia port after a reported Israeli airstrike targeting the harbor, Latakia, Syria. **Bilal al Hammoud / EPA / TASS**

The Kremlin on Wednesday condemned Israel's strikes on Syria and the creation of a "buffer zone" along the Israel-annexed Golan Heights, calling for rapid "stabilization" in the country that toppled its longtime ruler.

As Islamist rebels ousted Russian ally Bashar al-Assad from power in Syria, the Israeli military said it had conducted 480 strikes on the neighboring country's strategic military targets since Sunday. Israel also sent troops into the UN-patrolled buffer zone east of the Israel-annexed Golan Heights.

"The strikes, the actions in the Golan Heights and the buffer zone hardly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the already destabilized Syria," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"We'd like to see the situation stabilized as soon as possible in order to reach the prospect of

bringing the situation into a legitimate course," Peskov added.

The Israeli defense minister said the military had orders to "establish a sterile defense zone free of weapons and terrorist threats in southern Syria, without a permanent Israeli presence."

The United Nations called on Israel to stop the bombardments and accused it of violating the terms of the 1974 Syrian-Israeli ceasefire.

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Peskov said Russia was in talks with "those who control the situation in Syria" as it seeks to secure its diplomatic mission and key military sites there.

The Tartus naval base and Hmeimim air base in Syria are Russia's only military outposts outside the former Soviet Union and have been key to the Kremlin's activities in Africa and the Middle East.

Russia's 2015 intervention turned the tide of the Syrian civil war and is widely credited with saving Assad's regime as it fought various rebel forces. But with Moscow bogged down with its war in Ukraine, some analysts say it did not have the resources or energy to come to Assad's rescue again.

Peskov all but confirmed the analysis, saying Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine remains an "absolute priority" for Moscow.

"All the objectives of the special military operation will be achieved," he told reporters, using the Kremlin's official term for the war in Ukraine.

AFP contributed reporting.

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