

Netanyahu and Putin Rendezvous in Paris

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet on the sidelines of the UN climate summit in Paris today to discuss the situation in Syria, fighting terrorism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to Russian and Western press reports. Earlier, at Israel's initiative according to a Kremlin statement of November 18, Putin spoke with Netanyahu on the phone. Netanyahu expressed condolences to Putin about the victims of the downed Russian Metrojet Flight 9268 in the Sinai Peninsula, likely by an ISIS bomb.

Earlier, on September 21, Putin and Netanyahu met in Moscow to discuss coordination to avoid accidental clashes between Israeli and Russian forces in the context of Russia's military build-up in Syria that month, as well as Israel's related security concerns. Russia's military build-up increased the chances for Hezbollah to obtain Russian-supplied weapons. Putin and Netanyahu agreed to form a joint committee to coordinate military activities. According to both leaders and other top-level Russian and Israeli officials, the meeting was helpful and the coordination mechanism is working. Major General (Res.) Amos Gilad, director of the Political-Military Affairs Bureau at Israel's Defense Ministry, reportedly said on November 28 in Beersheba that Russian military jets breached Israeli airspace since entering the Syrian conflict, but coordination with Israel prevents clashes such as the one between Turkey and Russia on November 24.

Middle Eastern leaders have seen for some time now Russia's growing influence in the region in the context of U.S. retreat, which severely damaged U.S. credibility. This situation leaves fewer options for Israel and pushes it to work more closely with Russia. Among Israel's chief concerns is that advanced Russian weaponry will fall into Hezbollah's hands, and Russia's involvement in Syria increases this possibility. In this context, U.S. policymakers should indicate greater commitment to Israel's security concerns.

Anna Borshchevskaya is an Ira Weiner Fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

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