

Assad orders Hamas to soften on Shalit

by UPI

JERUSALEM, Israel -- Syrian President Bashar Assad has told Hamas to soften its demands in negotiations for the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, sources told DEBKAfile.

Assad ordered Hamas to show flexibility in tense negotiations under way in Cairo between Israel and Hamas for the release of the soldier kidnapped in June 2006, DEBKAfile reported in an exclusive Monday.

Word of Assad's orders gave Israeli negotiators grounds for extending the negotiations until Tuesday, DEBKAfile reported.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, Rafi Eitan, an Israeli Cabinet member, said Monday he believes the negotiations will be successful and he intends to vote for Shalit's release when the matter comes before the Cabinet in a meeting now scheduled for Tuesday.

Eitan said a decision to delay Monday's Cabinet vote on Shalit's release enabled negotiators to exhaust every possibility of reaching a deal, Ynetnews reported.

Israel has agreed to release 1,400 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Shalit, including 300 considered to have terrorist links, Haaretz reported. The two sides reportedly have been deadlocked on the release of another 150 "heavyweight" Palestinian prisoners, including former Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti, said a Hamas source quoted in The Jerusalem Post.

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