

Assad: Olmert agreed to Golan withdrawal

by UPI

DAMASCUS, Syria -- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told Turkey that withdrawing from the Golan Heights was the right thing to do, Syrian President Bashar Assad says.

Assad, in an interview published Wednesday in the Italian newspaper La Repubblica, said Olmert made the statement to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan during indirect negotiations with Syria over the occupied Golan Heights.

"We were within touching distance of an agreement," Assad told the newspaper. "When we entered the negotiations, there were only a few final details relating to the 1967 border." Assad said he, Olmert and Erdogan were negotiating indirectly when Olmert said Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights was "right" but added he needed a few more days to consult with his Cabinet.

During that time, however, Israel launched its 22-day military incursion into Gaza and "the opportunity was missed," Assad told La Repubblica.

The Syrian president also said in the interview that U.S. President Barack Obama would "restore the credibility of the United States" in the Middle East, saying his "first steps are encouraging" with the disengagement from Iraq and the move to close the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, U.S. detention camp.

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