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Photo by: REUTERS

Intelligence minister: ISIS reign in Gaza more likely than Abbas

By GIL HOFFMAN
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Katz opposes Netanyahu's "Israeli Republican Party" idea.

Islamic State terrorists have a better chance of taking over the Gaza Strip than PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas, Intelligence Minister Israel Katz said Tuesday at a massive Likud rally held outside his succa on Moshav Kfar Ahim.

Katz, who has access to classified intelligence material, spoke on the eve of a long awaited address by the Palestinian leader to the UN General Assembly, in which Abbas has hinted he may drop a "bombshell." Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti said last week that he expected there to soon be a Palestinian election, which would be intended to reunite the West Bank and Gaza under one rule.

The statement by Katz is also significant because he holds the formal title of interim prime minister while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is abroad for the General Assembly in New York.

Katz said he is in favor of completely disconnecting the Gaza Strip from Israel, which would mean Israel stopping to provide electricity and other utilities to the people of Gaza, completing the withdrawal from the Strip that took place more than a decade ago.

Israel's minister of transportation for the past six years, Katz said more should be done to ensure that Jews are able to drive everywhere in Israel securely. He said rocks should be treated by the law like any other weapon.

Katz wished Netanyahu well in his address Thursday to the General Assembly, which is expected to focus on Iran. Katz said the international community and the Islamic Republic should be aware that Israel would respond with force to Iran's nuclearization or any Iranian attack, including from Hezbollah, its proxy in Lebanon.

"The world must understand Israel will not let Iran acquire nuclear weapons," Katz said. "We won't let those who threaten Israel's existence become a nuclear power."

Turning his attention to speeches at the UN Monday by US President Barack Obama and Russian leader Vladimir Putin, Katz said Obama should put Iranian- style sanctions on Lebanon and Putin should take steps to ensure that Iran is prevented from attacking Israel from the Golan Heights.

Katz mocked a proposal by opposition leader Isaac Herzog to take in refugees from Syria, saying that he and other Israelis were thankful Herzog was not elected prime minister.

The head of the Likud's governing secretariat, Katz said he was glad the Likud ran on its own in the March 17 election after creating a joint list with Yisrael Beytenu in 2013, which he opposed. Katz said he opposes merging with other parties for the future.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has reportedly been trying to build a coalition of right-wing parties that will run in the next general election in what has been called "an Israeli Republican Party." Such a move would be difficult without the support of Katz, who has been the prime minister's closest ally and operator in Likud.



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