The British Prime Minister has revealed plans for a visit to Damascus in a bid to revive peace negotiations before the turn of the year. The British Foreign Office admitted earlier in the week that they had sent Nigel Sheinwald, the Prime Minister's chief Foreign Policy advisor, to Syria for secret discussions with President Bashar Assad. The goal of the meeting was to jolt Syria into engaging in the Middle East peace process and prize Assad away from Iranian influence. Earlier in the year, Bashar Assad stated that he would give Israel 6 months to come to a peace agreement over the Golan Heights, or face the threat of war. Syria, of course, is the main sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East, supporting Hizbullah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas. All this leads Tony Blair to believe that achieving Syrian backing of a peace agreement in the Middle East could be the key that would open "many roads to peace".

Quote: *"If Syria once again became a player, the prime minister believes, many roads to peace can be opened. Mr Blair - who visited the region in September - is convinced that Syria could hold the key to peace in the Middle East, in that it has great influence over Hamas, the democratically elected government of Palestine, as well as over Hizbullah in Lebanon, and some of the Shia insurgency in Iraq. Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal is based in Damascus, and probably has the power to release captured Israeli soldiers, one of the barriers to the reopening of peace talks between Israel and Palestine.*

Javier Solana also recently announced he would revisit the Middle East in late November or early December. And I believe Bashar Assad will eventually agree to a peace deal with Israel. Assad knows he cannot win a war with Israel, but seeks to regain the Golan Heights in the same way Egypt regained the Sinai. If the international community could give Syria assurances over the Golan, Assad may just be willing to come to the negotiating table.

Source Guardian