

Israeli warplanes strike targets inside Syria

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2 November 2013

Israeli warplanes attacked Syrian targets near the port city of Latakia and in the Jaramana neighborhood of Damascus in a wave of strikes beginning around midnight on Wednesday. The attacks were apparently intended to take out Russian-made missile systems under the control of the government.

Israeli representatives have refused to confirm the source of the attacks, while implying that they are designed to prevent weapons transfers to Hezbollah. “We have said many times that we will not allow the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah,” said Home Front Defense Minister Gilad Erdan, speaking to *Israel Radio*.

“We are sticking to this policy and I say so without denying or confirming this report,” he said.

In reality, the strikes are meant to weaken Israel’s adversaries and establish air superiority in preparation for an escalating region-wide conflict.

Numerous media reports have confirmed the strikes and attributed them to the Israeli military. *Al-Arabiya* reported on its web site Thursday, “Israel was behind a series of explosions that rocked a Syrian airbase in the norther Latakia province.... The bombing targeted a shipment of surface-to-air missiles [SAMs] that was headed for Hezbollah in Lebanon.”

Israeli officials denounced the Obama administration for confirming to CNN that the strike had been carried out by Israel. According to the *Times of Israel*, “Israel’s Channel 10 TV on Friday quoted Israeli officials branding the American leak as ‘scandalous.’ ”

Speaking to the British newspaper *Guardian*, an Israeli official said, “Sharing information is embedded in the nature of the relationship between Israel and the US. It’s like a big pipeline that’s open to permanent flow. So disclosing information is a cause for dismay.”

Along the same lines, Alex Fishman of the Israeli daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* wrote, “What on earth are the Americans thinking when they finger Israel as

responsible for the strikes in Syria?”

“Past experience suggests that we shared information with them on our operational activity so as to prevent embarrassment and surprise, but Washington is selling our secrets on the cheap,” Fishman continued. “This is now dangerous and contemptible behavior committed deliberately by the administration, with the aim of sabotaging Israeli defense policy.”

The Israeli attacks underscore the determination of Tel Aviv to press ahead with a strategy of aggressive confrontation with the Assad regime and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah forces operating in Syria and Lebanon, in spite of the Obama administration’s decision to at least temporarily postpone direct strikes against Syria and engage in further negotiations with Tehran.

“Israel is sending a message to Assad, saying ‘don’t play games with us.’ But Israel must also realize that the situation is becoming much more delicate than ever before because this is going against the US diplomatic agenda,” Uzi Rabi, director of Middle Eastern studies at Tel Aviv University, told *Reuters*.

Israel has already launched at least three major air strikes against Syria this year—in January, May and July. On January 31 of this year, explosions struck a convoy parked in front of Syria’s Scientific Studies and Research Center in the Rif Dimashq governorate, which was alleged to be carrying weapons intended for Hezbollah forces in Lebanon.

Then on May 3 and 5, airstrikes struck the Damascus International Airport and Jamraya, Al-Dimas and Maysalun. While neither attack was officially confirmed by the Israeli military, there is no doubt about who carried out the strikes, which killed at least 300 Syria soldiers.

The Israeli strikes point to the growing threat of a region-wide war. In 2006, Israel fought a month-long war in Lebanon against Hezbollah forces, which

received substantial military aid from Iran during and prior to the conflict. The strikes launched by Israel this week are part of its effort to secure complete air superiority over Lebanese air space in preparation for another such war.

The attacks coincided with the announcement that the Syrian regime has eliminated its capacity to deploy chemical weapons. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons stated on Thursday that Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles have been secured with "tamper proof" seals that cannot be removed.

"This was a major milestone in the effort to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons program," said Ralf Trapp, a specialist in chemical weapons and disarmament, to Reuters.

"Most of the sites and facilities declared by Syria to the OPCW have been inspected, their inventories verified, equipment for chemical weapons production disabled and put beyond use, and some of the unfilled weapons have also been disabled," Trapp said.



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