

Israeli Official to Syria: Interference Will Prompt Israel to Retaliate

The fog of uncertainty surrounding the airstrike on the international airport in Damascus on May 3, attributed in foreign reports to Israel, is becoming somewhat clearer with the publication of up-to-date satellite photographs showing the precise targets and the damage they sustained.

A senior Israeli official, meanwhile, told *The New York Times* in a story published on Wednesday that if Syrian President Bashar Assad retaliates against Israeli attempts to stem the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah, "he would risk forfeiting his regime."

The satellite photos of Damascus International Airport reveal that the air strike was aimed at the airport's main cargo bay, where Iran Air planes often dock to unload their cargo. The target, according to intelligence sources speaking to the foreign media, was a shipment unloaded from an Iran Air plane, which had landed a while earlier.

According to the reports, the shipment included Iranian-made Fateh-110 surface-to-surface missiles, which were offloaded and stored in one of the two hangars in the vicinity.

In another satellite photo, part of a sanctions report on Iran Air from September 2012, an Iran Air plane can be seen in the vicinity of the cargo bay, near the hangar that was attacked nearly two weeks ago on Friday, May 3. Iran Air has an office in Damascus, and its planes make three shipment flights per week. The airline's last cargo flight took place one day prior to the attack.

The senior Israeli official, who declined to be identified and

who was reportedly briefed by high-level officials on Israel's assessment of the situation in Syria, told *The New York Times* that "Israel is determined to continue to prevent the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah. The transfer of such weapons to Hezbollah will destabilize and endanger the entire region.

"If Syrian President Assad reacts by attacking Israel, or tries to strike Israel through his terrorist proxies," the official said, "he will risk forfeiting his regime, for Israel will retaliate."

The official added that Israel has until now refrained from involving itself in the Syrian civil war and would maintain this policy as long as Assad doesn't attack Israel, directly or indirectly.

In Jerusalem, the Israeli government confirmed the veracity of the *New York Times* report. Deputy Foreign Minister Zeev Elkin, who accompanied Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on his recent visit to Russia, where he discussed the impending sale of S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to Syria, said that the government "had a pretty good idea" who the senior official who spoke to *The New York Times* was.

Elkin stressed that the report did not constitute a threat, saying, "We are not threatening him, but we do have our clear red lines. We will not intervene in the Syrian civil war, but we have very clear positions, and the transfer of any game-changing weapons is a red line ... and we will do everything necessary to stop them."

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