

Syria Threatens Retaliation Against 'Israeli Aggression'

Syria's cabinet, meeting in emergency session on Friday slammed what it called "Israeli aggression on one of the scientific researches (*sic*) in Jimraya, in the Damascus countryside," and added that the attack "comes in the framework of conspiracy to which Syria is exposed." The cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Wael al-Halqi, added that the timing of the attack was evidence that Israel was cooperating with "armed terrorist groups" trying to bring down the Assad regime.

Meanwhile, a Lebanese security official said later Friday that Israeli warplanes had flown over southern Lebanon. The official said the flights were seen heading from southern Lebanon toward the eastern Bekaa Valley that borders Syria. He spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations. Israel had no comment.

Following the cabinet meeting, the government of the Syrian Arab Republic issued a statement saying, amongst other things, that the "Israeli aggression is considered as a flagrant violation of the national sovereignty of Syria and a violation of the international law principles and to the disengagement of forces agreement of 1974.

"The Cabinet underlines that Israel would have never dared to launch this attack unless the armed terrorist groups, on top, Jabhat al-Nusra, had prepared and availed the practical circumstances to this act through its organized target against the air defense systems and radar networks. The acts of the armed terrorist groups and 'Jabhat al-Nusra' are part of an Israeli-Qatari-Turkish plot which targets to overthrow the structure of the Syrian state through depriving it from the factors of its military and economic power as well as its

national unity [*sic*].”

The Syrian Army chief of staff, General Ali Abdullah Ayoub on Thursday paid a field visit on a number units and said, according to a report on the Syrian government news agency SANA, that “the war with the Zionist enemy is continuous.” Ayoub accused Israel of being behind the “organized terrorism against the Syrian people.”

The Syrian Foreign Ministry sent a letter to the United Nations in which it said “Israeli warplanes violated Syrian airspace on Wednesday dawn, Jan. 30, 2013 sneaking from the north of Al-Sheikh Mountain, flying at a low altitude and below radars, and heading to Jamraya in Damascus Countryside where a branch of a scientific research center is located and bombarded the location.”

In its letter, the Foreign Ministry said that “Syria holds Israel and its protectors at the UNSC fully responsible for this aggression,” and stressing Syria’s right to defend itself, territories and sovereignty.

On Thursday, while not confirming details of Israel’s alleged raid itself, the U.S. had a warning to issue to Syria.

“We’ve been very clear that Syria should not further destabilize the region by transferring, for instance, weaponry to Hezbollah,” White House deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes told reporters. “And we also, of course, have been very clear beyond that that we’re closely monitoring Syria’s chemical weapons as well.”

Rhodes downplayed threats of retaliation to Israel’s alleged attack. “These types of threats from Iran and others only underscore just how much they recognize the situation in Syria is getting away from them,” he said.

The New York Times reported on Thursday that the arms convoy allegedly struck by Israel contained Russian-made antiaircraft

missiles of the SA-17 model that were on their way from Syria to Hezbollah. The truth of Israel's alleged second attack, on a research facility in Jamraya outside Damascus, remains unclear.

The paper further reported Friday that this facility produces both conventional and chemical weapons, according to Maj. Gen. Adnan Salo, a former head of the chemical weapons unit in the Syrian Army, who defected and is now in Turkey.

Iron Dome Belittled

On Saturday, the Iranians warned that an attack on Syria would be tantamount to an attack on Iran. On Thursday, the Iranians hinted that Israel had opened a battlefront. Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi described the alleged Israeli operation as "brutal." His deputy, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, had even harsher words and promised that "the Israeli attack on Syria will have significant repercussions for Tel Aviv." The deputy minister telephoned U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon and said that "the international community, which adopted a strict stance regarding Syria, now has to take serious steps and a determined stance regarding the invasion from Tel Aviv. He even recommended to the citizens of Israel not to rely too heavily on Iron Dome batteries, saying "their ineffectualness has already been proven during the eight days of Operation Pillar of Defense."

Last Saturday, Ali Akbar Velayati, an assistant to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said that Iran would respond if Syria was attacked. Iran also blamed Israel for Syria's internal turmoil claiming that Jerusalem was stirring up trouble to undermine the regime's stability.

Ali Abdel-Karim Ali, the Syrian ambassador to Lebanon, said that Damascus has the option and capacity to surprise in retaliation for the attack on the scientific research center in Jamraya.

"Israel, the Americans and the Arab regimes that are conspiring with them know that Syria will defend its sovereignty and land," he said. "This Zionist aggression exposes Israel's role in the war that has been taking place for two years already against Syria."

"The attack proves that from here on in Israel is the engine and the main beneficiary, and sometimes even the main player in the terror attacks against Syria, in coordination with terror-sponsoring nations like Turkey and Qatar," a Syrian army spokesman said.

On Thursday, Syria sent a letter to the U.N. Secretary-General stressing the country's "right to defend itself, its territory and sovereignty" and holding Israel and its supporters accountable.

"Israel and those who protect it at the Security Council are fully responsible for the repercussions of this aggression," the letter from Syria's Foreign Ministry said.

Ban expressed "grave concern" over the reports of an Israeli airstrike, even though the U.N. is not "in a position to independently verify what has occurred."

"The Secretary-General calls on all concerned to prevent tensions or their escalation in the region, and to strictly abide by international law; in particular, in respect of territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries in the region."

A spokesman for the Secretary-General also said that the U.N. Disengagement Observer Force, which monitors a ceasefire zone between Syria and Israel in the Golan Heights "did not observe any planes flying over the area of separation and therefore was not able to confirm the incident. UNDOF also reported bad weather conditions."

The U.N. mission in South Lebanon, UNIFIL, was also unable to

confirm any Israeli airstrike, the spokesman said. But the Lebanon force "can certainly confirm that there were a high number of Israeli overflights that UNIFIL recorded on Tuesday."

Russia and Hezbollah on Thursday also condemned the alleged Israeli attack or attacks.

"Hezbollah strongly condemns this new Zionist aggression on Syria," the group said in a statement, hours after the Syrian army said Israeli jets had bombed a military research center in the area of Jamraya, northwest of Damascus, about 15 kilometers from the border with Lebanon.

Hezbollah called for widespread condemnation of what it described as "barbaric aggression" by the Jewish state.

"What happened in Syria ... requires a massive, widespread condemnation campaign by the international community and all Arab and Islamic countries," the statement said.

The attack, Hezbollah went on to say, "openly reveals [Israel's] motives toward [unrest in] Syria over the past two years and the criminal thinking aimed at destroying Syria and its army and eliminating its pivotal resistance and rejectionist role to pave the way for unfolding the chapters of a major conspiracy against [Syria] and against our Arab and Muslim peoples."

Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry in Moscow has said Israeli airstrikes in Syria, if confirmed, would constitute "a grave violation of the U.N. charter."

Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby also said that the reported Israeli airstrike on Syria was "flagrant aggression and a glaring violation" of the country's sovereignty.

"Silence of the international community about Israel's bombing of Syrian sites in the past encouraged it to carry out the

aggression, taking advantage of political and security deterioration in Syria," Elaraby said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Israel is preserving a deafening silence. Israel is not reacting to reports of an attack or to threats issued by Iran and Syria. The IDF is on alert, particularly on the northern border.