

## Iran helps Syria develop missile that can target Israel better

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Syria has successfully developed a new surface-to-surface missile that would enable it to target Israeli installations such as airports, ports and factories with greater accuracy, according to briefings recently presented to senior ministers.

According to the information, Syria developed the new missile with Iranian support, which is a further indication of the tight strategic bonds between the two countries. Much of these strategic ties revolve around military and intelligence cooperation.

Israeli defense officials said they thought Damascus and Tehran shared technical know-how that has allowed Syria to upgrade the Iranian-made Zelzal surface-to-surface missile. The missile has an operational range of approximately 250 kilometers and is capable of carrying an especially large warhead. It is believed that the missile is more accurate than other similar surface-to-surface weapons in the Syrian arsenal.

This comes at a time when Israeli defense sources have expressed growing concern at the rearmament program of the Syrian armed forces, which is mostly being supplied by arms transfers from Russia.

Among other weapons, Syria has recently acquired the Pantsyr air defense missile system, a self-propelled system that is capable of firing between eight and 12 missiles and can pose a substantial threat to Israeli air force aircraft.

Damascus has also procured modern anti-tank missiles with alleged capabilities of neutralizing the most advanced main battle tank of the IDF, the Merkava Mark IV.

However, Mossad chief Meir Dagen told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that at this stage the Syrian defense acquisitions appear to be defensive and that there are no indications that Damascus has any plans to initiate a military action against Israel.

Meanwhile, a political source noted Thursday that there is a discernible effort on the part of Syria to improve its missile arsenal - both in terms of range and accuracy.

"The problem is that their missiles are being transformed from less-effective weapons into precision weapons that will enable their use against military bases, airports and military depots, which is a very worrying development," the source said.

There is growing concern in Israel that the missile arsenal of Syria will be transformed from being a "blind" strategic weapon, into a precision-strike weapon.

Syria has a significant missile arsenal. During the Second Lebanon War Hezbollah fired many volleys of 220mm rockets of Syrian make against Israel, causing significant casualties in Israel.

According to Israeli estimates, Syria has tens of thousands of rockets of this type, as well as smaller-caliber and shorter-range missiles. In addition, they have Scud-C and Scud-D ballistic missiles with ranges of 500-800 kilometers, which can effectively strike every part of Israeli territory.

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