

Israel: Iran Sending Missiles To Hezbollah Through Turkey

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Iran is shipping missiles to Hezbollah via Turkey, although Turkish authorities are unaware of the shipments, Haaretz reported March 5, citing a senior Israeli government source. Some of the weapons are being sent on flights over Turkey's airspace and some are being shipped overland through Turkey disguised as civilian cargo, according to the report. The missiles then go to Syria and finally to Lebanon.

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By Barak Ravid, Haaretz Correspondent

Iran is arming Hezbollah with missiles sent via Turkey, according to intelligence received in Israel. Turkish authorities are unaware of the arms shipments, which are in violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 that brought an end to the Second Lebanon War.

A senior Israeli government source said that Brigadier General Yossi Beiditz, head of the Israel Defense Forces research department, last week told European Union ambassadors in a briefing that Iran continues to transfer arms and equipment to Hezbollah, in spite of Tehran's denials.

Some of the weapons include long-range missiles that are being transferred through flights using Turkey's airspace, as well as overland through Turkey, under the guise of civilian cargo. From Turkey, the missiles are transferred to Syria and then Lebanon. Turkey has not permitted the use of its territory for such transfers.

The same source said that according to Beiditz, some of the missiles Iran transferred to Hezbollah have a maximum range of 300 kilometers, "capable of reaching the Dimona area from Beirut." According to intelligence so far available to Israel, the maximum range of missiles in Hezbollah's arsenal had been 250 kilometers.

Beiditz said that the missiles currently in Hezbollah's possession are more accurate and capable of carrying larger warheads.

There was no comment from the Turkish embassy in Tel Aviv concerning this information. However, a Turkish source noted that the embassy has not received any information or inquiries from official Israeli sources regarding the matter of weapons transfers to Hezbollah crossing through Turkish territory.

According to the source, Turkey has "adhered to all international decisions, with an emphasis on the arms embargo to Lebanon." He added, however, that Turkey and Israel share intelligence information on other levels, outside the embassy.

In May 2007, Turkey confiscated a load of weapons that included 300 rockets, transferred from Iran by train through Turkey. The cargo was registered as "cleaning materials."

During the Second Lebanon War, the Turkish media reported that Turkish authorities had forced two Iranian aircraft, on their way to Syria through Turkish airspace, to land because of suspicions that they were carrying unauthorized arms shipments. No weapons were found on board.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon sent the periodic report on the implementation of Resolution 1701 to the Security Council on Tuesday. According to the report, Israel maintains that Hezbollah has replenished its missile arsenal

and currently holds tens of thousands of long-range rockets along with 20,000 shorter-range ones.

During the Second Lebanon War, the radical Shi'ite organization fired about 4,000 rockets into Israel.

The report called on Syria and Iran to behave responsibly and in line with the embargo on exporting arms to Lebanon.

The UN report is also critical of Israel's intelligence-gathering overflights in Lebanon, and the UN chief expressed concern at the anger that these flights spark.

"The repeated violations, on the part of Israel, undermine the credibility of UNIFIL and of the Lebanese army in the eyes of the local population and is preventing them from carrying out their role," the report states.

According to the Israeli government source, during his briefing to EU ambassadors, Beiditz said that the official position of Israel is that the intelligence-gathering flights are of particular importance, and he showed videos filmed by various aircraft documenting the smuggling of missiles from Syria into Lebanon.

"Without the overflights it will be difficult for Israel to pinpoint the launchers, the Hezbollah arms depots and the smuggling," the source said.

During the briefing, Beiditz was asked about Israel's assessment of Hezbollah's response to last month's assassination of terrorist mastermind Imad Mughniyah in Damascus. Beiditz said that it is difficult to tell, but noted that while the group's leaders are calling for revenge and blame Israel, there are many variables that are forcing Hezbollah to exhibit restraint.
