

Syria feeds Russian spy tips to Hezbollah - Israel

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JERUSALEM, Sept 19 (Reuters) - Israel believes Russia passes intelligence it gathers about the Jewish state to Syria and indirectly to Hezbollah guerrillas in neighbouring Lebanon, a senior military officer said on Friday.

The allegations were made by Colonel Ram Dor, chief of information security in the armed forces, to Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth.

They came at a touchy time in relations with Moscow, given Russian arms talks with Syria and the involvement of a Russian state-owned company in building a nuclear power plant for Iran at Bushehr on its Gulf coast.

Russia has, in turn, complained about Israeli arms and training for Georgia, with which it fought a five-day war last month over the Georgian province of South Ossetia. "My assessment is that their facilities cover most of the state of Israel's territory," Dor told Yedioth Ahronoth, describing Russian spy ships that dock in Syria and Russian personnel who he said serve in electronic eavesdropping stations on the Syrian side of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

"The Syrians share the intelligence that they gather with Hezbollah, and the other way around. This we know, because we know how to build a mirror-image that shows us what enemy intelligence knows about us," Dor said.

"So if the Russians help the Syrians get information, and the Syrians constantly pass it on to Hezbollah, it is a reasonable supposition that the information gathered by the Russians also reaches Hezbollah's hands."

Russian officials in Moscow were unavailable for comment.

Moscow has denied providing Syria or Iran with support that could boost their offensive capabilities and in recent years has offered to host Israeli-Arab peace summits.

Israel generally avoids public censure of Russia. Analysts say it is concerned such criticism could hurt efforts to lobby Moscow into scrapping arms sales to Syria or weaken its backing for U.N. sanctions designed to deny Iran the means to make an atomic bomb. Israel suffered surprise setbacks in a 2006 war with Hezbollah which some Israeli military commanders blamed on the guerrilla group's access to Russian intelligence and weapons.

Hezbollah does not volunteer information on its military assets, and Iran and Syria deny providing the group with arms.

According to Yedioth, Israel believes the Russian are spying on it "so significant changes in the region do not catch them by surprise. They are preoccupied with Middle East stability".

(Writing by Dan Williams; Editing by Mark Trevelyan)

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