

Syria, Hizballah on alert for Israeli action after US raid

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Israeli strike now feared by Hizballah and Damascus

DEBKAfile's Middle East sources report that Damascus and the Lebanese Hizballah have alerted their forces to a possible Israeli strike against Hizballah's arms smuggling routes, supply sources, and stocks, using as a precedent the US cross-border raid which killed eight people at an al Qaeda base in northern Syria Sunday, Oct. 26.

Those sources report that Syrian president Bashar Assad and Hizballah's leader Hassan Nasrallah fear that US-Israeli military synchronization for Israel's attack on Syria's nuclear reactor in September 2007 may have been repeated in Sunday's American raid at Abu Kemal.

According to DEBKAfile's military sources, intelligence analysts in Damascus, Beirut and Tehran have concluded that US Air Force planes, specifically those providing an umbrella for the helicopter-borne raid, flew over Israel before reaching Syrian skies.

They point out that, on the morning of the attack, Israel's military intelligence chief, Brig. Amos Yadlin, appeared before the cabinet session in Jerusalem with an unusually grave assessment of the military collaboration between Damascus and Hizballah.

He disclosed that Syria had become "Hizballah's arms warehouse" and was catering to "every single Hizballah wish for strategic resources."

Syria has given Hizballah, DEBKAfile reveals, medium-range surface rockets, radar systems and anti-air missiles. Yadlin reported that "Assad trusts Hizballah more than his own army." Its operatives work out of Syria without any restraint.

Damascus and Hizballah find room for anxiety in three more events:

1. Israel's chief of staff Lt. Gen. Gaby Ashkenazy met the UNIFIL commander Gen. Claudio Graziano last week and put him on notice that Israel would no longer put up with the ongoing Syrian violations of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which imposed an embargo on arms supplies to Hizballah.
2. Before Sunday's cabinet meeting, defense minister Ehud Barak and Gen. Ashkenazi put their heads together on ways to halt these violations.
3. Barak then phoned Gen. Graziano to reiterate that Israel had run out of patience with Syrian arms smuggling to Hizballah.

Israel normally liaises with the UNIFIL commander through the OC Northern Command, Brig. Gad Eisenkott. Direct high-level contacts are rare.

All these pointers to possible Israeli military action in the steps of the American raid have made Damascus and Hizballah's leadership anxious; they fear Israel has reached breaking-point and may no longer choose to look the other way on Hizballah's massive rearmament.

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