

Israel warns Hezbollah: Attempts to attack IAF jets will draw sharp response

Contributed by Barak Ravid, Haaretz
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Israel warned Hezbollah this week that it will respond harshly to any attempt to down an Israel Air Force jet over Lebanon or to avenge last year's assassination of the organization's operations officer, Imad Mughniyeh.

Israeli planes routinely fly over southern Lebanon in an effort to collect intelligence about Hezbollah activities, and Israel currently enjoys unchallenged superiority in the air. Any attempt by Hezbollah to deploy anti-aircraft capabilities would alter the balance of power to Israel's detriment. Advertisement

Hezbollah blames Israel for Mughniyeh's death last February 12, though Israel has never admitted responsibility. The defense establishment was therefore on high alert yesterday as Hezbollah marked the one-year anniversary of the assassination.

Israel's message was transmitted via Michael Williams, the United Nations envoy to Lebanon, who visited Jerusalem earlier this week to meet with Israeli officials.

Foreign Ministry Director General Aharon Abramovitz, one of the officials with whom Williams met, told him that Israel would reject any effort by Hezbollah to evade responsibility for an attack originating in Lebanon by blaming other, smaller, terrorist groups.

He also warned that Israel's response would target not only Hezbollah, but also the Lebanese government, of which Hezbollah is a member.

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