

# Sources tell CNN's Christiane Amanpour Israel launched a military airstrike against Syria

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Syria complains to U.N. about Israeli airstrike

(CNN) -- Syria accused Israel of a "flagrant violation" of its obligations when it carried out an airstrike inside the country last week, according to a copy of a letter released Tuesday.

Syria called the incursion a "breach of airspace of the Syrian Arab Republic" and said "it is not the first time Israel has violated" Syrian airspace, the letter to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon read.

It also accused the international community of ignoring Israeli actions.

Sources tell CNN's Christiane Amanpour Israel launched a military airstrike against Syria  
{flv}Amanpour.IAF.aircraft.syria.Sept607{/flv}

Earlier, a U.N. spokeswoman said Syria had not requested a meeting of the Security Council.

Meanwhile, France -- the current president of the Security Council -- said it had received no letter from Syria.

Last week, Syria reported that its aircraft fired on Israeli "enemy aircraft" that flew into northern Syria early Thursday.

The airstrike may have targeted weapons that were destined for Hezbollah militants, according to sources in the region and in the United States. [Watch a report on the airstrike »](#)

The Israel Defense Forces had no comment on the report, and have refused to comment further on the new revelations.

But the sources told CNN the military operation, which happened Wednesday into Thursday, may have also involved Israeli ground forces who directed the airstrike, which "left a big hole in the desert" in Syria.

The strike may have targeted Hezbollah weapons coming into Syria or transiting through the country from Iran -- a pattern that, over the past three or four years, has occurred without any retaliation or other action taken against it -- the sources said.

The Israeli government is very happy with the success of the operation, the sources said.

Sources in the U.S. government and military confirmed to CNN's Barbara Starr that the airstrike did happen, and that they are happy to have Israel carry the message to both Syria and Iran that they can get in and out and strike when necessary.

Right now, diplomats in the region are trying to ensure the incident does not escalate.

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, is serving as a conduit between Israeli and Syrian foreign ministers, urging both sides to allow cooler heads to prevail, Solana's office said.

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem and other Syrian officials have been putting out their version of events. The Syrian government said Israeli bombs were dropped on its territory and fuel tanks from Israeli jets were dropped on the Turkish side of the border.

Al-Moualem was in the Turkish capital, Ankara, on Monday protesting this action and trying to get Turkey to support its

desire to take Israel to the Security Council for the airstrike.

Israel fought a war with Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon last year after Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers, who are still being held.

CNN Chief International Correspondent Christiane Amanpour and U.N. Correspondent Richard Roth contributed to this report.

Find this article at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/09/11/israel.syria>

Monday, Sep. 10, 2007

Why Did Israeli Planes Enter Syria?

By Nicholas Blanford/Beirut

A mysterious incident involving Israeli jets over northern Syria last week has revived fears of war between Israel and Syria, just as months of tension between the bitter foes had appeared to be subsiding. The Israeli government is maintaining a rigid and uncharacteristic silence over the affair, which has drawn threats of retaliation from Damascus and a vow to take the matter to the U.N. Security Council. Speculation is rife, but facts elusive, over why Israeli warplanes were over above the arid plains of northern Syria early Thursday. Syria's official news agency last week quoted a Syrian military official saying that Israeli jets had entered Syrian airspace from the Mediterranean, and broke the sound barrier before coming under fire from air defenses. The Israelis, according to this account, had "dropped munitions" over deserted areas before departing. The report did not specify whether the Israelis had bombed any targets. The following day, fuel tanks were discovered inside Turkey near the Syrian border. Other jettisoned tanks were reportedly found inside Syria.

"They dropped bombs over Syria and they dropped fuel tanks on Syrian soil," Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem said in Ankara Monday, while briefing Turkish officials on the incident. Turkey, which has strong military and diplomatic ties to Israel, described the overflights as "unacceptable," and has demanded an explanation from the Israeli government.

The Syrians are suggesting that Israel had, albeit discreetly, moved preemptively to reassure Damascus of its intentions before the incident. Muallem told European ambassadors in Damascus at the weekend that last Wednesday and the day before the incursion he had received a "calming message" from Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, sent via a top EU official, according to the Arabic Al-Hayat newspaper. Israeli officials have lately sought to defuse tensions by making clear Israel has no plan to attack Syria and reducing troop numbers near the border. But Muallem told the diplomats that Olmert's message was a "preparation for the penetration of planes into Syrian skies, just hours later," Al-Hayat reported. Israeli aircraft routinely breach Lebanese airspace, in defiance of U.N. resolutions, mainly to monitor the activities of Hizballah, and on rare occasions, usually connected to tensions in Lebanon or the Palestinian territories, they have also entered Syrian skies.

But northern Syria is a long way from the traditional Arab-Israeli front line, suggesting that the mission was of sufficient importance to endanger air crews and risk a serious escalation of tensions with Damascus. Mohammed Raad, a senior Hizballah official, suggested that the overflight was an attempt to "identify an aggressive aerial passage" for an air strike against Iran. Analysts long have pondered the potential flight routes Israeli bombers would take in the event of a decision to target Iran's nuclear sites. Given the limitations of aircraft range, one option would be to fly directly across Jordan and/or Saudi Arabia and through U.S.-patrolled Iraqi skies. Neither the Saudis or the Jordanians would shed tears if Iran's nuclear capability were destroyed in an air strike, but they could not afford to be seen as having granted the Israelis safe passage through their skies.

An alternative would be to follow the Turkish-Syrian border eastward to Iraqi Kurdistan, and then on to Iran. According to John Pike of [globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org), the many technical and political factors in play make it difficult to predict which route the Israelis might choose. "At this level of technical detail, one starts to get thinking about what sort of weapons would be carried, and what sort of drag this imposes and how that affects combat range," Pike told TIME.

Even if it were not related to a bombing route, the purpose of Israel's unusual air mission last week may yet be related to Iran. In August, Syria reportedly received from Russia the first batch of 50 Pantsyr S1E short-range air defense systems, part of an alleged sale worth almost \$1 billion. The deal is said to have been financed by Iran, which reportedly will receive from Syria some of the Pantsyr units and deploy them to protect its nuclear facilities. The recently developed Pantsyr, which its Russian manufacturers claim is immune to jamming, includes surface-to-air missiles and 30mm Gatling guns, providing complete defensive coverage for a range of 11 to 12 miles and 6 miles in altitude. Pantsyr batteries could pose a serious challenge to either an Israeli or a U.S. air strike on Iran. So were the Israeli aircraft playing a perilous game of chicken to assess the capabilities of the Pantsyr system in response to their countermeasures? Some

in Syria believe so.

"There seems to be a consensus here that the Israelis were testing Syrian air defense systems," Andrew Tabler, Damascus-based editor of Syria Today, told TIME.

Whatever their purpose, the overflights appear to have dashed hopes of cooling Israeli-Syrian tensions. Having absorbed the lessons of Israel's failure to crush Hizballah during last summer's month-long war, Syria has been building up its military capabilities in recent months, purchasing advanced anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles. Veteran Hizballah instructors have been helping train crack Syrian commando units in guerrilla warfare, according to Lebanese intelligence sources. Syria's growing military confidence has been further bolstered by defense agreements with Iran. Some Israelis worry that Syria, sidelined by the U.S. and Washington's Arab allies in regional peacemaking efforts, could launch a lightning strike against Israel in order to push to the top of the diplomatic agenda its ongoing quest to recover territory captured by Israel in 1967.

Hizballah, meanwhile, has spent the past year frenetically restocking its war-depleted arsenal, preparing new lines of defense and recruiting and training hundreds of eager volunteers in anticipation of a second round with Israel. Commentators in Lebanon and Syria believe that Israel's need to restore its battered military deterrence has heightened the prospect of an attack on Syria. Writing in Monday's Syrian state-run Tishreen newspaper, Ezzieddine Darwish said that the Israeli government is seeking to provoke a war with Syria to "wash away the shame of Israel's defeat in Lebanon". Indeed, many Lebanese, Syrians and Israelis are no longer asking if a war will happen, only when and how.

Find this article at:

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1660477,00.html>

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Original Article from CNN:

Syria returns fire on Israeli aircraft, Damascus says

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) -- Syrian air defenses opened fire on Israeli aircraft that violated Syrian airspace, a Syrian military spokesman said Thursday.

The Israelis broke the sound barrier and "dropped ammunition" over deserted areas of northern Syria overnight, the spokesman was quoted by the official Syrian Arab News Agency.

"We warn the Israeli enemy government against this flagrant aggressive act, and retain the right to respond in an appropriate way," the Syrian spokesman said.

It was not clear if Syria was accusing the Israelis of using warplanes or some type of other aircraft such as drones.

"The Israeli enemy aircraft infiltrated into the Arab Syrian territory through the northern border, coming from the Mediterranean heading toward the eastern region, breaking the sound barrier," the spokesman said. "Air defense units confronted them and forced them to leave after they dropped some ammunition in deserted areas without causing any human or material damage."

Israel's army said it was looking into the report.

Israel acknowledges flying over Lebanon routinely, but it is unclear how often its aircraft fly over Syria.

At the beginning of last summer's war against Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon, Israeli warplanes buzzed the palace of Syrian President Bashar Assad in what analysts called a warning to Damascus.

They also flew over Assad's summer home in the coastal city of Latakia, after Syrian-backed Palestinian militants in Gaza captured a young Israeli soldier.

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Israel, Syria: A Few Clues, But More Questions

September 11, 2007 16 48 GMT

## Summary

More details concerning Syrian claims of an Israeli air force incursion into its airspace emerged Sept. 10, ultimately leaving the matter even more opaque than before.

## Analysis

Both Turkey and Syria made statements Sept. 10 concerning the alleged Sept. 6 overflight of Israeli air force (IAF) warplanes. Taken as a whole, these statements offer a few more clues to actual events, but ultimately they obscure the matter even further.

During a scheduled visit from Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem, Ankara announced Sept. 10 that it had found external fuel tanks close to the Syria-Turkey border near Hatay and Gazintep provinces. Turkey also insisted that Israel had promised a swift investigation into the possible violation of Turkish (not, however, Syrian) airspace. The same day, al-Moualem described the alleged incursion into Syrian airspace as "intentional" and "hostile" and said that three Israeli aircraft had fired four missiles in the Dayr al-Zur district. Syria's Sept. 6 claims included the release of "live ammunition" -- an odd euphemism even after translation is taken into account.

This series of clues -- none necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive -- does not present a definitive picture. The continued oddities surrounding Damascus' claims of dropped ordnance could indicate a strike mission. Many of the early details that suggested a reconnaissance flight -- perhaps to track a militant training camp or ping the light Syrian air defenses in the East -- still hold true. These details could indicate a possible strike against a militant camp or, as some information indicates was most likely, destruction of a newly imported ballistic missile shipment, likely from Iran or North Korea.

The northwestern spit of Syrian territory near which the external fuel tanks were found is an odd place for the fuel tanks to be dropped, if credence is lent to one (or both) of the sites where the Syrians claim they shot at Israeli aircraft. The most likely explanation is that the planes used Turkish airspace as an egress route; it is the quickest route to the open water of the Mediterranean and a nice way to avoid the dense Syrian air defense network along the coast, but would probably involve Ankara's complicity. Furthermore -- though this fact likely has no relevance to the incident -- the U.S. air base at Incirlik is just 50 miles away.

The lack of an outright denial from the Israelis and Turkey's subsequent statements lend some credence to the occurrence of some airspace violation by the IAF. But even this is not certain -- and in all likelihood, the matter will remain largely obscure.

Nevertheless, two salient points have emerged. First, as was clear Sept. 6, the IAF appears to retain the ability to violate Syrian airspace with impunity. The Syrian air defense network remains aged and worn, and without a systemic upgrade, it will remain unable to defend against Israeli incursions (an impression Damascus would certainly like to change, but one it patently failed to, in this case).

Second, and perhaps ultimately more important, the incident also is very revealing of Syria's current diplomatic posture and the price it has paid by aligning itself closely with Iran. A typical Syrian response to a serious IAF airspace violation would involve eliciting condemnations from the U.N. Security Council, the European Union and Arab League members against Israel; demanding answers from the United States; and mobilizing forces in the Golan Heights along its border with Israel. It also is curious that the Syrians took four days to specify that the alleged "live ammunition" that was dropped included four missiles -- a detail they would have had by Sept. 7 at the very latest. Releasing details such as this at the last minute raises questions about the validity of Syrian allegations surrounding the incident, and could be as much an indication of Damascus' need to keep the issue alive as it is a clue to actual events.

So far, Syria has written angry letters to EU diplomats and U.N. members demanding a condemnation. The responses, for the most part, have been either silence on the issue or outright defenses of Israel's right to keep silent. Syria's Arab neighbors also are refraining from showing the slightest concern, with Saudi Arabia taking the opportunity to publicly humiliate Syria by saying an allegedly canceled Syrian diplomatic visit to Riyadh was never planned in the first place. Turkey has responded with enough restraint to clear its name from complicity since fuel tanks landed in its territory. And as expected, only Iran has come out in strong defense of Syria.

Likely spooked by the IAF's intentions behind the overflight and with only a feeble diplomatic defense against Israel, the Syrians are being extremely cautious not to provoke a military confrontation with the Jewish state. Syria has even refrained thus far from massing troops along the border in response to Israel's military buildup in the Golan Heights, revealing that Damascus lacks the confidence and capability to risk a fight at this stage.

Stratfor

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Israeli Overflight and the Syrian Response  
September 06, 2007 14 06 GMT

The Syrian army's air defenses fired Sept. 6 on an Israel air force (IAF) warplane that entered Syrian airspace and "dropped ammunition," SANA, the official Syrian news agency, reported.

After midnight local time Sept. 6, the Israeli aircraft entered Syria through the northern border, coming from the Mediterranean Sea and heading toward the eastern region, SANA reported, citing an unidentified government spokesman. Local residents said they heard the sound of five or more planes above the Tal al-Abiad area on Syria's border with Turkey, about 52 miles north of the Syrian city of Rakka. It is unlikely that a single plane would be operating without at least one wingman, and the area Syria claims the ammunition drop took place is deep inside the country. The IAF plane or planes apparently avoided the dense air defense network near the Israeli border and around the Syrian capital, Damascus. This is the same area the IAF successfully penetrated in the summer of 2006 to buzz Syrian President Bashar al Assad's summer home in Latakia.

This incident unlikely was intended to be an Israeli attack against Syria. While the situation is still unclear, several things could have occurred. Like any good air force, the IAF has clear standard operating procedures that dictate what a pilot does when his aircraft detects enemy radar illuminating it or identifies a missile launch, or when the pilot visually sees anti-aircraft artillery fire. Under these procedures, the pilot would immediately jettison external fuel tanks or extraneous ordnance in order to facilitate maneuverability and save his aircraft. This is likely what the Syrians are referring to when they accuse Israel of dropping ammunition in the desert.

The IAF is the most competent air force in the region. Were it to attempt to strike a target in Syria, that target more than likely would have been hit. Israel Defense Forces remains mum on the subject, and no evidence of an external fuel tank with Israeli markings has yet been presented.

Since the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in the summer of 2006, Israel has conducted regular reconnaissance missions into Syria. These overflights are embarrassing for Syria, since the country's air defense is ill-equipped to respond in time. Though Israel and Syria have stepped up rhetoric in recent months, accusing each other of provoking a military conflict, this is largely posturing. Israel has no interest in destabilizing the al Assad regime right now, and though the Syrians will play up Israeli violations of Syrian airspace, they are nowhere near capable or confident enough to start up a military confrontation with the Jewish state.

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