

## Report: Syria's 'massive' buildup focuses on missiles, chemical warheads

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JERUSALEM &mdash; Syria has been conducting a major military buildup financed by Iran and supplied by Russia, a new report said.

The Institute for Contemporary Affairs asserted that Syria was augmenting its Scud-class ballistic missiles. The report said the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad was installing chemical warheads on the Scud B, C and D missiles, with ranges from 300 to 700 kilometers.

"...A massive Syrian military build-up focusing primarily on Scud [B, C, and D] heavy rockets and chemical warheads, [has been undertaken] with a massive commensurate increase in military spending over the past few years," the report, "Anatomy of Syrian-Israeli Tensions," said.  
"The Syrian armament build-up in recent years has included a major investment in chemical weaponry, in which Syria has become a regional superpower."

The report said the Syrian military buildup reflected a strategic decision by the Assad regime. The institute said the buildup preceded the U.S. decision in August to provide advanced weapons to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Iran has helped finance the Syrian military buildup, the report said. The report said Damascus was receiving advanced Russian platforms and weapons in exchange for Russian Navy access to Syrian ports.

"Syria's recent military build-up is all the more destabilizing in view of the decision by Russia to upgrade its influence in the region by providing state-of-the-art Russian weaponry and military technology, and to reopen a Russian naval base on the Syrian coast," the report said. "Additionally, Iran's huge petrodollar-driven financing capability has played a major role in Syrian weapons procurement."

The report said Syria has also increased military exercises since the Hizbullah war with Israel in mid-2006. The Syrian military has enhanced its infrastructure on the Golan Heights, while facilitating the rearming of the Iranian-sponsored Hizbullah in neighboring Lebanon.

"Syria has also increased the tempo of its military exercises and has removed roadblocks that existed for years between Damascus and the city of Kuneitra in the Golan Heights that is adjacent to its front line with Israel," the report said.

The report said Damascus supplied the majority of the heavy-payload rockets Hizbullah fired toward Israel, including 220 mm rockets and 302 mm rockets. Syrian-supplied rocket warheads usually contained anti-personnel munitions &mdash; a mixture of lethal explosives and steel balls or fragments.

"One of Syria's prime motivations in its current military behavior is to free itself of international pressure in the context of its continuing involvement in destabilizing Lebanon and with regard to its suspected main role in the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri," the report said.

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