

Video Exclusive: Syria Talks & Israel lifts veil of secrecy over air strike in Syria

Contributed by AP and The JPost
Tuesday, 02 October 2007

Israel decided Tuesday to lift the strict veil of secrecy over an air strike in Syria last month.

The censor announced that it was allowing the Israeli media to report on the raid without attributing such reports to foreign sources.

The censor did not release any other details of the raid for publication.

Israel has kept quiet on the subject until now. However, Syrian President Bashar Assad told the BBC on Monday that IAF jets had hit an "unused military building" in his country.

Assad said Israel's air raid on northern Syria showed Israel's "visceral antipathy towards peace," according to excerpts posted on the BBC's Web site.

The comments were the first by the Syrian leader about the incursion, which raised speculation that warplanes had hit weapons headed for Hizbullah or even a nascent nuclear installation - reports Damascus has repeatedly denied.

Journalists in Israel are required to submit articles related to security and military issues to the censor, which can make changes to stories or bar publication altogether. In a rare move, the censor's office issued a special directive about the Syrian air raid, specifically prohibiting publication of any details.

Violation of the censorship orders can result in the loss of press credentials or other sanctions.

Social Welfare Minister Yitzhak Herzog said that the announcement did not mean any "political change" was made regarding the Syrian strike but that it was merely a "technical move" of the censor.

"In essence, it doesn't mean there has been a change in circumstances, it is technical change," Herzog told Channel One on Tuesday night.

Although Israel did not come out with an official statement following the incident, Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu broke the silence two weeks afterwards when he said he had congratulated Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on the strike.

In an interview with Channel 1, Netanyahu said that he was "part of the matter from the beginning" and that he knew to separate matters of national security from politics.

The overflight was first reported on Syrian television just after the attack, and various reports regarding the strike's target have circulated in the press over the past month.

The Washington Post reported that the target had been a facility involved in a joint Syrian-North Korean nuclear project - a claim backed by former US ambassador to the UN John Bolton.

Britain's Sunday Times, meanwhile, reported just over a week ago that soldiers from the IDF's elite General Staff Reconnaissance Unit (Sayeret Matkal) had seized North Korean nuclear material from a secret Syrian military installation before it was bombed by IAF jets.

The paper claimed that the IAF attack on September 6 was sanctioned by the US after the Americans were given proof that the material was indeed nuclear-related. It also stated that Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who used to head the unit, personally oversaw the operation.

However, Syrian officials have repeatedly called news of the strike lies and fabrications, and on Monday, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem accused the US of inventing these reports.

"Some sources in the United States have spread rumors and fabricated news in order to justify this act of aggression," Moallem charged. "By distorting the facts they have become Israel's accomplices in this act of aggression."

Speaking to the UN, Moallem said the act was proof that the Jewish state wanted to escalate tensions.

Yaakov Katz and AP contributed to this report.

JPost.com Staff , THE JERUSALEM POST Oct. 2, 2007

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<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1191257212152&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

Syria President Assad Confirms IAF Raid - Oct. 1, 2007

{google}7456598066730573577{/google}

John Bolton Discusses the Raid on Fox News - Sept. 24th, 2007

{youtube}dWc6tBWpn5A{/youtube}

J'lem not consulted on revealing raid

Yaakov Katz and JPost staff , THE JERUSALEM POST Oct. 2, 2007

The political echelon in Jerusalem was not consulted by the censor over its decision to lift the strict veil of secrecy over an air strike on a Syrian target last month, Army Radio reported on Tuesday evening.

It followed the censor's announcement that it was allowing the Israeli media to report on the raid without attributing such reports to foreign sources.

Officials in the Prime Minister's Office said they felt a sense of "discomfort" over the censor's decision, Channel 2 reported on Tuesday night.

Social Welfare Minister Yitzhak Herzog said the announcement did not mean any political shift had occurred regarding the Syrian strike or that there has been a change in circumstances, but that it was merely a "technical" move by the censor.

A day after Syrian President Bashar Assad confirmed that the IAF bombed a target in his country on September 6, the censor, without releasing any details for publication on the incident, allowed Israeli media to report that an unspecified "military target" had been struck deep inside Syrian territory. Foreign reports have claimed the site was a military installation containing nuclear material and technology supplied to Syria by North Korea.

Since the operation, Israel has kept quiet. However, the censor eased the ban on Tuesday after Assad told the BBC on Monday that IAF jets had hit an "unused military building" in his country.

Assad said the air raid on northeast Syria showed Israel's "visceral antipathy towards peace."

The comments were the first by the Syrian leader about the incursion, which raised speculation that the jets had hit weapons headed for Hizbullah or even a nuclear installation - reports Damascus has repeatedly denied.

"The censor conducts daily assessments, and we decided that there was no longer a reason to attribute news of the strike to foreign sources," a defense official said on Tuesday.

Journalists in Israel are required to submit articles on security and military issues to the censor.

The censor's office issued a special directive about the Syria raid, prohibiting publication of any details. Violation of censorship orders can result in the loss of press credentials or other sanctions.

Although Israel did not come out with an official statement following the incident, Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu broke the silence two weeks ago when he said he had congratulated Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on the successful strike. In an interview with Channel 1, Netanyahu said he was "part of the matter from the beginning" and that he knew how to separate matters of national security from politics.

The aerial infiltration was first reported on Syrian television, 12 hours after the attack, and various reports regarding the strike's target have circulated over the past month.

The Washington Post reported it was a facility involved in a joint Syrian-North Korean nuclear project - a claim backed by former US ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton. Britain's Sunday Times, meanwhile, reported just over a week ago that soldiers from the IDF's elite General Staff Reconnaissance Unit (Sayeret Matkal) had seized North Korean nuclear material from a secret Syrian military installation before it was bombed by IAF jets.

The paper claimed the attack was given the green light by the US after the Americans were given proof that the target was indeed nuclear related. It also wrote that Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who used to head the reconnaissance unit, personally oversaw the operation.

On Tuesday, the Times of London reported that Moscow had sent a team of technicians to Syria to help upgrade the country's air defense systems in the wake of the IAF strike.

According to the report, the IAF used a sophisticated electronic warfare system operated by F-15I jets and a fleet of specialized electronic warfare aircraft that flew over the Mediterranean during the attack on a suspected nuclear facility near Dayr a-Zawr. They transmitted signals that jammed the Russian-made radar and the Syrian army's communications, the report said.

The top-secret system Israel used, the paper said, was being used for the first time.

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