

## WSJ: Israel's Syria Raid Opens Rifts

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Discord Stirs Among Allies Over Response to Nuclear Threat

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WASHINGTON -- Following Israel's attack on an alleged Syrian nuclear facility, the U.S. and international community are increasingly split over how to respond to the latest nuclear-proliferation threat in the Middle East.

The discord also underscores a deep mistrust between the U.S. and the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, over how to confront would-be proliferators, particularly in the wake of the Iraq war, American and IAEA officials say.

The Syria episode is exposing rifts between hard-liners in Washington and the Israeli government, which after the strike has promoted a surprisingly moderate stance toward Damascus, fearing a possible retaliation. This is in sharp contrast to Israel's position on Iran and Tehran's declared nuclear program, according to Middle East analysts.

- What's New: Divisions have emerged among U.S., Israel and the international community over how to respond to a possible Syrian nuclear threat.
- The Background: An Israeli airstrike on a site in Syria last month allegedly revealed an early attempt to develop a nuclear reactor, aided perhaps by North Korea.
- What It Means: A hardened U.S. line could push Syrians closer to Iran. Over the past week, counterproliferation experts within and outside the U.S. government have voiced growing conviction that before Israeli aircraft struck on Sept. 6, Damascus was in initial stages of developing nuclear capability. The Israeli military refused to confirm or deny the incident. Damascus protested the attack to the U.N., but denies it has been developing nuclear technologies.

Meanwhile, commercially developed satellite photos made public by independent U.S. companies and think tanks, including Washington's Institute for Science and International Security, show what its proliferation experts said they believed was Syria's early attempt to develop a nuclear reactor, along the lines of North Korea's Yongbyon facility. These counterproliferation experts, as well as U.S. officials, cite a Syrian facility on the Euphrates River as the likely target of the Israeli attack. The facility's size, positioning and structure conform to the designs of Pyongyang's Yongbyon reactor, say U.S. officials who have seen the intelligence.

In recent days, these officials say, satellite photos show the Syrian government recently razed the site, stoking more concerns that Damascus is attempting to cover up its covert nuclear activities.

"I would say there's no doubt now that Syria was in an early phase of a program," said a senior U.S. official who has worked extensively on nuclear issues. "There's still an incredible debate about whether it was far enough along to know if it was a facility for nuclear weapons."

Syria's ambassador to the U.N., Bashar Jaafari, denied last week in New York the proliferation charges and said Washington and Israel were concocting the intelligence to weaken Damascus. "There are no nuclear sites in Syria. ... All these rumors have only one justification, one goal: to cover up the Israeli aggression."

The evidence of Syrian nuclear activity has divided the IAEA on one side and the U.S. and Israel on the other. Following the air strike, IAEA President Mohamed El-Baradei asked to see the intelligence that prompted the attack.

The agency also is seeking information from Damascus about its alleged nuclear program. As a signatory to the U.N.'s Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Syria is required to inform the IAEA of any attempt to develop a nuclear fuel cycle, even if it is for energy purposes only. IAEA member states such as the U.S. and Israel are also expected to share any such information concerning proliferation threats.

"At the IAEA, we have zero, and I stress 'zero' information" on the attack, Mr. El-Baradei told the French newspaper *Le Monde* last week. "Frankly, I venture to hope that before people decide to bombard and use force, they will come and see us to convey their concerns. We would then have gone there to check."

But U.S. and Israeli officials said they have no intention of cooperating with the IAEA on the Syria issue. Some U.S. diplomats derided the U.N. agency for failing to identify the Syrian program itself. These U.S. officials said involving the

IAEA before the Israeli strike could have bogged down the Syrian proliferation threat in endless rounds of negotiations at the U.N. Security Council, with no action.

"The Israelis decided to take care of this early on," said the U.S. official working on nuclear-proliferation issues. "We don't want to involve an agency that thinks it's in control, but isn't."

Israel, however, is in a delicate dance with some of its traditional allies in Washington on how to respond to the attack's repercussions. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and other Israeli senior officials have voiced a continued desire in recent weeks to try to engage Syrian President Bashar Assad in peace talks. Many Israeli officials say their government and the U.S. should seek ways to woo Damascus to help stabilize the Palestinian territories, Lebanon and Iraq.

Israel's emerging strategy for handling Syria, say U.S. and Israeli officials, is to identify clear red lines for Damascus not to cross militarily, but to also keep the window open for negotiations. On the nuclear issue, these officials say, Israel is hoping the attack will serve as a deterrent, not a provocation.

"All the Israelis want is for the Syrians to know they're being watched," said the American diplomat working on nuclear-proliferation issues.

Last Friday, the Israeli military announced it was moving planned military exercises away from the disputed Golan Heights territory to avoid further heightening tensions with Syria, the Associated Press reported from Jerusalem.

The Bush administration is offering few signs it would be willing to support Israeli efforts to engage Mr. Assad. Indeed, the Bush administration has moved to ratchet up financial sanctions and travel bans on Syrian officials for alleged attempts to overthrow the Lebanese government of Prime Minister Fuad Siniora.

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