Israel implied that it was responsible for the missile strikes at the Damascus airport in Syria that they claim was a depot for weapons imported from Iran by Hezbollah militants. Hezbollah is allied with Assad’s forces and is fighting against ISIS. Earlier this week, Israeli forces bombed a military camp for pro-Syrian forces. There is no doubt that Israel is waging war against Syria. –GEG

Israeli strikes have hit an arms depot operated by the Lebanese Hezbollah group near Damascus airport, Syrian opposition sources told Al Jazeera. Witnesses said a total of five strikes occurred near the Damascus airport road, about 25km from the capital, early on Thursday. Syrian state TV quoted a military source saying rockets fired from Israeli territory targeted a military area in the southwestern part of
the airport which caused explosions.

Al Jazeera’s Hashem Ahelbarra, reporting from the Turkish city of Gaziantep near Syria’s border, said opposition activists posted pictures online showing a huge fire near the area.

“We do understand that the Israelis have been carrying out strikes in the past. The last one was in January targeting the Mezze military base.

“In 2015 they also launched attacks near the capital Damascus and in the Golan Heights, killing two prominent Hezbollah commanders, including Jihad Mugniya who is the son of the top military commander of Hezbollah Imad Mugniya who was also killed in Damascus in 2008,” Ahelbarra said.

Israeli Intelligence Minister Israel Katz, speaking from the United States where he has been meeting US officials, told Israeli Army Radio: “I can confirm that the incident in Syria corresponds completely with Israel’s policy to act to prevent Iran’s smuggling of advanced weapons via Syria to Hezbollah … Naturally, I don’t want to elaborate on this.

“The prime minister has said that whenever we receive intelligence that indicated an intention to transfer advanced weapons to Hezbollah, we will act.” Katz added. An Israeli military spokeswoman declined to comment.

Reuters news agency, citing an intelligence source, said the depot that was targeted handles a significant amount of weapons that Tehran, a major regional ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, sends regularly by air. The source said the arms depot gets a major part of the weapons supplied to an array of Iranian backed armed groups, led by Hezbollah, which have thousands of fighters engaged in battle against Syrian rebels.

Rami Abdurrahman, head of the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said the blasts were heard across the capital,
jolting residents awake. Activist-operated Diary of a Mortar, which reports from Damascus, said the explosions near the airport road were followed by flames rising above the area.

This is the second Israeli attack on Syria in the past week: on Sunday, Israeli forces bombed a camp for pro-government forces killed three fighters near the Golan Heights on Sunday according to AFP. Two fighters were also wounded in the attack on the Al-Fawwar camp near Quneitra in southwestern Syria, adding that it was unclear whether the damage was inflicted by an air strike or shelling.

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War Drums. Israeli Airstrikes On Syria Have Triggered Threats Of Syrian And Russian
Retaliation – And Then Counter-Threats of Israeli Retaliation.

Israel is crossing over the border to carry out airstrikes on weapons shipments to Hezbollah, which is allied with Syria and fighting ISIS. Syria responded by threatening to use scud missiles against Israeli planes if they continue. Israel responded by saying it would take out Syria’s air defenses without blinking an eye. -GEG

Multiple outlets are reporting that Russia has delivered a message to the Israel government on behalf of Syria’s Assad regime stating that any more Israel Air Force strikes into Syrian territory will be answered with a barrage of Scud missiles. In particular, it describes what will be targeted and why. If a Israel air strike hits civilian infrastructure, Syria will launch missiles aimed at Israel’s port in Haifa as well as its nearby petrochemical plant. If strikes hit Syrian military-related targets, the Scud missiles will be targeted at Israel Defense Force bases.

The message brings a whole new level of potential escalation to what have been brewing tensions between Damascus and Jerusalem. It started on March 17th when Israeli warplanes were fired upon by Syrian surface-to-air missile sites after executing an air strike in southern Syria. The IAF had made dozens of similar bombing runs over the last five years, focused on taking out weapons shipments destined for Iranian-backed Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon. The Syrian SAMs missed their targets but one was intercepted by an Israel Arrow anti-ballistic missile system battery—a system that is designed to take out ballistic missiles like the Scud, not a Soviet-era SA-5 SAM.

A few days later, after the Assad regime made it clear that
any IAF jets that make forays into Syrian airspace will be engaged, the head of the Israel’s Ministry of Defense made it clear that the IAF would “destroy Syria’s air defenses without thinking twice” if their jets were fired upon. Meanwhile, Russia summoned Israel’s ambassador, which sent rumors flying that Moscow had told Israel that it will no longer allow the strikes in Syrian territory to occur—a move that has been hinted at for many months.

Following these reports, Benjamin Netanyahu stated “it’s simply incorrect to say the Russians are changing their policy toward us,” although what exactly is going on behind closed doors remains a mystery. Over the last week, Israel has only ramped up its strikes in Syria, with multiple missions being carried out including the assassination of a militant leader with close ties to the Assad regime. Since the Syrian civil war began six years ago, Israeli air strikes in Syrian territory were far less frequent, and the Israeli government did not officially even admit that they had been occurring until Syria fired on the IAF’s jets nearly two weeks ago.

As far as Syria’s ability to carry out such a counterstrike against Israeli targets—there is no doubt that the Assad regime still retains hundreds of Scud derivatives of various origins. These include copies from North Korea and from Iran. Since the conflict in Syria began, Assad’s forces have used Scuds against their own people on numerous occasions.

Israel has an extremely capable anti-ballistic missile defense system that has a multitude of layers aimed at countering everything from small improvised artillery rockets to medium-range ballistic missiles. Still, a barrage of short-range ballistic missiles from Syria, even if they are all intercepted or fail to hit their targets, would result in a major IAF operation to route Assad’s ballistic missile capabilities, and could even include the targeting of Syrian command and control or regime targets as well.
Israeli Attacks In Syria Against Hezbollah Benefit ISIS

Syria, in response to an attack by Israeli forces, fired anti-aircraft missiles and says that one of the attacking planes was shot down. Israel says that the attacks were aimed, not against Syria, but against Hezbollah. Hezbollah is a military force from Lebanon fighting against ISIS, so these attacks are viewed as an Israeli defense of ISIS. In an unusual move, Russia summoned the Israeli Ambassador for “clarification” of Israel’s intent. –GEG

Throughout Syria’s Civil War, Israeli warplanes have launched pretty regular attacks on military targets. Today’s incidents were different in a few ways: Israel publicly acknowledged that they carried out the strikes, though they didn’t say what was struck, and Syria fired anti-aircraft missiles at the
raiding warplanes.

That Syria resisted the raids this time was a huge difference, and may suggest today’s raids were bigger. Also pointing to this being no ordinary Israeli attack, Russia summoned the Israeli Ambassador after the incident to seek “clarification” on what happened, which is also unprecedented, with reports in the past of Israel having communications with Russia about operations in Syria and Lebanon to prevent incidents.

Exactly what ended up happening is a matter of some dispute. Syria claimed in state media to have shot down an Israeli warplane, hit a second one, and then the Israeli planes fled. Israeli officials said no damage was done to any planes, and that they’d intercepted one of the anti-aircraft missiles with an Arrow anti-missile system.

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