

# What Motivates Israeli Missile Attacks on Syria?

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*The central command of the Syrian army has announced that on Friday morning the Israeli regime fired several missiles at a big military airport in the western side of the capital Damascus. The army statement also warned Tel Aviv of the consequences of such a “blatant violation” of the Syrian sovereignty.*

The official Syrian television quoted Syrian army’s statement as saying that a couple of missiles- launched from an area close to the Lake Tiberias in the occupied territories- hit the Al-Maza military airport. The airport contains installations belonging to the country’s presidential guard.

Immediately after the missile attacks, the Syrian foreign ministry sent two separate letters, one to the United Nations Security Council and the other to the UN secretary general, strongly condemning the assault against the military airport outside Damascus. The letter of the foreign ministry read that the aggression comes as part of a series of earlier Israeli aggressions against Syria since the beginning of the crisis in the country.

“Such an attack would not have occurred had it not been for the direct support from the outgoing American administration and French and British”, the letter to the international community added.

Syria also blamed the “mercenaries” of the Western powers like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and Turkey, saying that the attack aimed at destroying the Syrian independence and government and also domination of the country and the region as a whole. The Syrian foreign ministry maintained that the aggressions are coming after back-to-back blows dealt to the terrorists in north, center, and south of the country. The Syrian army has recently pushed the militants of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front) out of eastern Aleppo and disarmed terrorists in Damascus outskirts and other fronts like Khan Al-Sheikh, Quneitra, and Daraa.

This is not the first time Tel Aviv strikes Syrian territories. Earlier, the Israeli fighter jets several times violated the Syrian air space, carrying out attacks on targets in the crisis-hit country. The al-Mezzeh military airport was hit at least twice in November and December last year by the Israeli fighter jets. But the fresh assault is attention-grabbing while the country is experiencing a ceasefire after liberation of Aleppo and inflicting heavy losses on the terrorist groups across the country. A couple of goals can drive the Israeli regime to carry out such apparent aggression through missile attacks on a country that is involved in a domestic battle with terror groups:

## **Distracting the Israeli public opinion**

The Israeli government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is striking the Syrian territory while it is at home facing unprecedentedly bitter criticism and questions over its political incompetence and economic corruption cases. Referring to the PM Netanyahu's financial corruption investigation and the resultant popular backlash, the Lebanon-based al-Ahed news website, quoting the Israeli Anyan research institute, said that the Israeli political circles, Western intelligence services, and the political analysts believed that the Israeli PM is doing his best to use the security issues to calm the popular anger that followed the recent corruption inquiry, and so direct the attentions to other issues. The Israeli officials so far declined to comment on their aggressive measures on Syria, but according to the previous experiences and records of such attacks by the Israeli regime, the recent missile attack on al-Mezzeh military airport can be Tel Aviv's move in a bid to divert the public attention from Netanyahu's investigation, especially that the last week's probe also saw engagement of his wife Sarah Netanyahu in the case. She was questioned by the Israeli police for illegally receiving presents from some rich people. With these happenings in mind, targeting the al-Mezzeh military airport and similar potential measures in the future will manage to at least remove part of the pressures put on the Netanyahu's family by the media outlets.

### **Influencing the truce and peace talks in Syria**

On the other side, the Israeli missile attacks on Syria are aimed at impacting the underway cessation of fire across Syria and the peace dialogue that is planned to be held between the Damascus government and the armed opposition groups. This possibility is raised in a time that the Syrian government shows commitment to the current ceasefire and supports the scheduled peace negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan. Amid this display of commitment by Syria, the Israelis are making rogue moves in a bid to foil the truce and thus block ways of peace. Their final aim is to distance the Syrian crisis from any settlement.

Missile attacks on the military installations outside Damascus will push the Israelis closer to their objective of influencing the Astana peace talks if Damascus decides to respond to the Israeli regime out of a miscalculation. In fact, this is what the Israelis favor. Any direct Syrian confrontation with Tel Aviv will mar the ceasefire and the planned dialogue with the opposition. But the immediate reaction of the Syrian foreign ministry and sending letters to the UNSC and raising legal case against the Israeli regime showed that Damascus reactions come with a consideration of the regional circumstances and forthcoming peace talks. Actually, Syria is by no means poised to sacrifice a possible solution of its six-year domestic crisis to an uncalculated response to the Israeli roguery. In these conditions, Damascus will steer clear of any reciprocal military reaction which appeals to Tel Aviv.

### **Impairing Syrian army and anti-terror Resistance camp**

Perhaps the key goal behind the Israeli missile strikes on Syria is to weaken the Axis of Resistance and particularly Lebanon's Hezbollah that are currently involved in battle with the terror organizations in Syria. The Israeli news website Walla back in May 2015 quoted the former Israeli defense minister Moshe Ya'alon as saying that Tel Aviv will not allow Hezbollah achieve modern weapons. Short after these comments, the Israeli fighter jets bombed the Syrian areas on the border with the Israeli regime. The airstrikes, according to Tel Aviv officials, came to impair Hezbollah forces operating in Syria.

Following the recent Israeli attack in Syria, Abdel Bari Atwan, the prominent Arab author and editor-in-chief of London-based Rai al-Youm news website, in his note quoted the Israeli

press, saying that the Israeli attack hit a shipment of high-accuracy "Fateh-1" missiles. The missile has a range of 300 kilometers and a warhead with payload of about 400 kilograms. Atwan added that the Israeli media declined to make it clear if the missile shipment was bound for Hezbollah or was set to be stockpiled for the Syrian forces.

A consideration of the Israeli officials' comments, like those of Ya'alon, and the previous attacks on Syria on the one hand and the Israeli media claims that took attention of Abdel Bari Atwan on the other hand helps us make sure that recent Israeli assaults on the Syrian military airport come to undermine the power of Hezbollah in Syria. This aim comes as part of open striving for the final aim of saving the anti-Damascus terrorists from defeats. In fact, according to the Israeli claims, the missile offensives in Syria come to weaken a pro-Damascus group that is currently present on the front lines of battle against terrorist groups in Syria. So this measure was an effort to prevent any losses and retreats of the terrorist groups in Syria.

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