



## DEFENDING THE HOMELAND

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu broadly hinted at Israeli responsibility for air attacks against Iranian targets near Damascus, telling air force cadets on Wednesday that Israel is acting against Iranian entrenchment in Syria “continuously and with firmness, including during the current period.”

“Defending the homeland starts with eradicating major hostile threats,” he said. “We are not willing to accept an Iranian entrenchment in Syria that is directed against us.”

PM Netanyahu said that Israel would not be deterred from taking the actions it feels necessary to defend itself, adding that US President Donald Trump’s decision to remove American troops from Syria “does not change our policies – we will maintain our redlines in Syria and everywhere else.”



*PM Netanyahu Addresses IDF pilots at course graduation ceremony (Photo by Coby Gideon, GPO).*

Speaking at a graduation course for new pilots at the Hatzetim Air Force Base, PM Netanyahu noted that he recently visited the plants of the Israel Aerospace Industries and saw the development of “special capabilities that no other country in the region has, and some of which – I am telling you – no other country in the world has.”

This, he said, includes, “weapons systems, defensive systems, and attack missiles that can reach everywhere and every target.” The Prime Minister said that there has never been air activity in the history of the Middle East like there is now. “Aircraft go up and come down, take off and land, and reach arenas both near and far – very far.” He did not elaborate. He said that as part of Israel’s effort to thwart threats against it, “Operation Northern Shield” to destroy Hezbollah attack tunnels is continuing.

“We are destroying Hezbollah’s terror tunnels one after the other,” he said. “They thought to create a weapon of destruction to be used against us, but we defeat them with...daring and determination.”



*PM Netanyahu at the IDF pilots’ course graduation ceremony at Hatzetim Air Force Base.*

*(Photo by Coby Gideon, GPO).*

### Russia Reacts

Meanwhile, alleged IAF air strikes against targets in Syria on Tuesday put two civilian airlines in “immediate danger,” said Russia’s Defense Ministry on Wednesday. According to ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov, Israeli F-16s carried out air strikes on Syrian targets as two civilian flights were landing in Beirut and Damascus, putting the passengers at risk.

“Provocative acts by the Israeli air force endangered two passenger jets, when six of their F-16s carried out air strikes on Syria from Lebanese airspace,” he was quoted by RT news as saying.

According to the report, the Syrian military didn’t deploy surface-to-air missiles and electronic jamming “to prevent a tragedy” and to let Damascus air traffic control divert one of the passenger jets to the Khmeimim air base near Latakia.

According to a report by Newsweek quoting a source in the US Defense Department, senior Hezbollah leaders were targeted in the air strikes. The report quoted the source as having obtained the information from a senior Israeli military officer “with direct knowledge of the attack,” which “was conducted minutes after the leaders boarded a plane bound for Iran.” Two suspicious Iranian planes left Damascus on Tuesday night just prior to reports of air strikes.

The Far Air Qeshm flight has been in the news in the past in relation to alleged smuggling of arms to Syria. Al Arabiya claimed that it transferred weapons to Hezbollah in early December. In October, Fox News carried a similar report. Similarly, Mahan Air has been targeted by the US Treasury Department for links to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, making its departure right after the Fars Air Qeshm suspicious.

Although the Fars flight appears to have left before the air strikes began, the Mahan Air flight seems to have left around the same time. In the past, reports have indicated that air strikes targeted Damascus after suspicious flights landed and allegedly disembarked cargo for arms smuggling to Hezbollah factions.



**PM Netanyahu greets IDF pilots at course graduation ceremony.**  
(Photo by Coby Gideon, GPO).

The strikes, which began at 10 p.m., struck several locations and were reported by Newsweek to have targeted – in addition to the plane – weapons warehouses as well as several Iranian ammunition supply points that contained advanced GPS-guided ammunition for Hezbollah.

Israeli officials have repeatedly voiced concerns over the growing Iranian presence on its borders and the smuggling of sophisticated weaponry to Hezbollah from Tehran to Lebanon via Syria, stressing that both are redlines for the Jewish state. With the presence of Iranian and Hezbollah forces, Israel’s northern front has become the IDF’s No. 1 priority. Working to prevent the entrenchment of Iranian forces and the transfer of advanced weaponry to Hezbollah, the IAF has admitted to carrying out hundreds of air strikes in Syria this year.

The alleged attack came a week after the White House announced that American troops would withdraw from Syria. Following the announcement, Netanyahu said that Israel would expand military operations against Iran following the withdrawal. IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot stressed that while it was a “significant” event, it would not affect the IDF’s ability to act against Iran and Hezbollah. (JPost, Seth J. Frantzman contributed to this report.)

Please continue to pray for the nation of Israel throughout the New Year, and especially for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

**“He drove out nations before them and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance; he settled the tribes of Israel in their homes” (Psalm 78:55).**

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Photo by: Tzafir

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