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Report: Israel warns Syria to stop sending arms to Hezbollah



Israel is warning Syria to stop transferring advanced weapons to Islamic militants and hinted it is considering more air strikes to achieve this, the New York Times reported Thursday. "Israel is determined to continue to prevent the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah. The transfer of such weapons to Hezbollah will destabilize and endanger the entire region," an Israeli official told the paper. "If Syrian President [Bashar al-] Assad reacts by attacking Israel, or tries to strike Israel through his terrorist proxies," the official said, "he will risk forfeiting his regime, for Israel will retaliate." The official contacted the paper Wednesday. He declined to be identified, citing what he called the need to protect internal Israeli government deliberations. Israel twice last week carried out air strikes near Damascus, attacks a senior Israeli source said were aimed at preventing the transfer of sophisticated weapons to Hezbollah, the Lebanese militia ally of Assad and Israel's arch-foe Iran. The new Israeli warning to Syria via the Times came two days after Russian President Vladimir Putin warned against any moves that would further destabilize the situation in Syria. He spoke after talks in Moscow with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu had been expected to warn Putin against delivering advanced S-300 missiles to Syria which would severely complicate any future air attacks against the Assad regime. Netanyahu in his public comments did not indicate whether he succeeded in convincing Putin to halt arms supplies to Syria or whether the two leaders reached any firm agreements.

The warnings also come after reports suggest that Iran persuaded Syrian Assad to allow Hezbollah to open a new front from which to attack Israel in the Golan Heights. Israel Radio reported the move on Wednesday, citing a report by the pan-Arab newspaper al-Hayat.