

Israel carried out Bombing Raids on Syria

By [Global Research](#)

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Syria-Israel bombing incident shrouded in mystery

By Alastair Macdonald Fri Sep 7, 1:19 PM ET (REUTERS)

Mystery still shrouds Syria's complaint that Israel bombed its territory but the incident has set nerves jangling across the Middle East, with commentators urging both sides on Friday against an escalation into war.

Egypt, pioneer of Arab-Israeli detente, said Israel was fuelling tension. The Arab League said "unacceptable maneuvers" showed Israeli bad faith toward peace talks in the region — the United States aims to host a conference soon involving Israel and its neighbors, with a view to resolving Palestinian claims.

"This is the beginning of a Syrian-Israeli conflict," said Sateh Nouredine, columnist with Lebanese newspaper as-Safir. He saw it as a follow-on from Israel's war in Lebanon a year ago.

Within Israel, there was criticism, too. An analyst wrote in the left-leaning Haaretz daily that commanders misunderstood the consequences and risked provoking a "pre-emptive strike."

A former Israeli diplomat who has worked for a resumption of long-stalled peace talks with Damascus said he was worried by a "very aggressive" Israeli message after a summer in which nervous speculation on both sides of a surprise attack by the other has mingled with public offers of renewed negotiations.

But a day after Syria said its forces "confronted" Israeli aircraft in the early hours of Thursday and warned that it might respond to "aggression and treachery," the Israeli government stuck to a blanket refusal to comment, leaving analysts picking over the terse Syrian statement and guessing at what happened.

Although one Syrian official said troops "fired heavily" at Israeli planes, the state news agency spoke only of air defenses "confronting" them — a phrase that several analysts, including Jihad al-Khazen of pan-Arab newspaper al-Hayat, said could mean simply locking on radar rather than opening fire.

"It leaves plenty of room for interpretation," Khazen said.

The Syrian statement said Israelis "dropped munitions" that did no damage. A Western diplomat in Damascus offered what many found a plausible version of events — that a

reconnaissance mission found itself targeted by Syrian radar, or actual fire, and jettisoned its load as part of an evasive maneuver.

WHAT CHANGED?

Israeli officials, speaking privately, do not deny Syrian accusations that Israel conducts such missions over Syria, which has left analysts pondering why Thursday's ended differently.

Was Syria's military response different from before or was the difference only that it protested publicly? Did it show Syria's defenses have improved with Russian hardware bought since Israel's war in Lebanon? Were the Israeli pilots just careless? Or did they deliberately provoke a Syrian response?

For Lebanese commentator Nouredine, "It was no mistake ... that the Israelis reached that area. It was ... a test for Syria's military, political and psychological defenses.

"As for Syria's announcement, that is a warning that any other step like that can be considered as the start of a war."

Reuven Pedhatzur, an analyst and former Israeli pilot, wrote in Haaretz that, despite recent high tensions with Damascus, whoever ordered the mission failed to grasp its consequences.

Referring to Syria's part in the 1967 war that saw Israel seize the Golan Heights, he added: "Like 40 years ago, the two sides could lose control of the situation and war could break out through a misunderstanding of the other side's intentions."

Eyal Zisser, another Israeli analyst, had praise for Syria: "Any misunderstanding could lead to conflagration. However, the Syrian announcement was surprising in its moderation."

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had shown such "moderation" before, Zisser wrote in Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper, in that warnings of retaliation had not come to actual conflict.

Arguing the Lebanon war between Israel and Syria's Hezbollah allies had disturbed the status quo, however, he added: "Both sides should make more effort in future to avoid deterioration."

Retired senior Israeli diplomat Alon Liel, who has worked with Syrian representatives to promote negotiations, said Prime Minister Ehud Olmert risked giving Syria grounds for war at a time when, he believed, both sides had a chance to talk peace:

"I see here an Israeli message that is very aggressive," Liel said on Friday. "And I'm worried."

Olmert himself was quoted as telling Israeli reporters, however, that all was well: "Do I not look relaxed?"

(Additional reporting by Yara Bayoumy in Beirut and Dan Williams in Jerusalem)

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