

Israel calls emergency security cabinet meeting following deadly Syria strikes



IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman discuss the confrontation with Iran and Syria on February 10 2018.

Ariel Hermoni/Ministry of Defense

Reports say cabinet ministers set to be briefed on 'development' regarding Iran nuclear deal

Israel was set to convene an emergency meeting of its political security cabinet at the government's Tel Aviv headquarters on Monday, hours after massive explosions at Syrian military outposts killed 26 pro-regime fighters.

The security cabinet was expected to discuss recent events in Syria, including an overnight strike on military positions and weapons caches which a monitor group said was "likely" carried out by Israel.

Cabinet ministers were also reportedly expected to be presented with a new

“development” regarding the Iran nuclear deal, the fate of which it set to be decided by US President Donald Trump in less than two weeks.

Netanyahu has repeatedly called for the deal with Israel’s main enemy to be altered or scrapped, though most world powers see it as key to preventing Tehran from obtaining atomic weapons.

Trump had given European co-signatories to the 2015 accord until May 12 to amend the deal with tougher inspections and measures targeting its ballistic missile programs.

Following a meeting with Netanyahu on Sunday, newly-appointed US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that Washington was committed to “rolling back to the gulf range of Iranian malign influence in Syria,” specifically mentioning “Iran’s missile systems, its support for Hezbollah, its importation of thousands of Shiite fighters into Syria.”

Israeli and US officials have in recent weeks drawn renewed attention to cargo flights between Syria and Iran and suspicions that they are carrying weapons bound for Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad’s regime and Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Shiite militia.



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv on April 29, 2018.

Stern Matty/US Embassy Tel Aviv

Meanwhile, flight tracking data showed that a Syrian cargo flight from Tehran had landed at a military airport in the city of Hama on Sunday less than twenty-four hours before a powerful explosion rocked a Syrian military base there.

The Syrian Observatory of Human Rights said that 26 pro-regime fighters were killed in the blasts, describing them as a “likely” Israeli airstrike.

Iran backtracked on reports that 18 of its countrymen were killed in the overnight raids, following a now-deleted report from Iran’s semi-official *ISNA* news agency confirming the deaths.

But *The New York Times* cited an official from a regional alliance including Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria as saying that 16 people were killed in the attack, including 11 Iranians.

The source, who spoke anonymously, said that the strike had destroyed some 200 surface-to-surface missiles. He added that regional leaders allied with Iran expected a retaliation against Israel for the strikes, likely following parliamentary elections in Lebanon slated for May 6.

The *Tansim* news agency cited an unnamed source as saying that reports of an attack on Iranian military bases and the deaths of Iranian personnel in Syria were “baseless”.

“All these reports over attack on an Iranian military base in Syria and the martyrdom of several Iranian military advisers in Syria are baseless,” the source said.

Details of the alleged strike were murky, with Syria’s official SANA news agency reporting a “new enemy aggression” on regime positions in Hama and Aleppo provinces, without alleging who was behind the raid.



A massive fireball seen after an alleged missile attack against a Syrian army arms depot in Hama, April 30, 2018

Screen Capture/Twitter

Some Syrian sources were quick to blame Israel, while the state-owned *Tishreen* news site said that the US and Britain had launched the strikes, firing nine ballistic missiles from a military base in Jordan.

A US military source denied to Israel’s *Hadashot* news that an American coalition was behind the attack.

A number of strikes on targets in Syria have been attributed to Israel, though it rarely confirms such raids.

Nevertheless, Israel and the United States received the indirect ire of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who spoke after the alleged attacks on Iranian targets in Syria, and said the time when Iran's enemies could "hit and run" was over.

"They know if they enter military conflict with Iran, they will be hit multiple times," he said.

Tensions have flared on Israel's northern borders following an airstrike in Syria, widely attributed to Israel, on the Iran-operated T4 airbase.

Fourteen people, including seven Iranian personnel, were killed in the April 9 raid and Iran vowed repeatedly to retaliate for the attack sparking a tense standoff between the arch-foes.

That raid on the Iran-operated base was widely seen as its first direct attack on Iranian assets and a worrying sign of how Syria's seven-year conflict could escalate into a wider regional war.

Israel and Iran have inched towards increasingly more direct confrontations since February 10, when Israel shot down what it says was an armed Iranian drone that had breached its airspace "tasked to attach Israeli territory."

Israel immediately responded at the time with strikes against Syrian air defenses and Iranian "targets", hailing it as "the biggest and most significant attack the air force has conducted against Syrian air defenses" since the 1982 Lebanon War.

Further complicating matters, key Assad-backers Russia have indicated over recent weeks that they could soon deploy game-changing air defense capabilities to Syria in response to the Western raids in Syria.

Moscow has not explicitly indicated which systems it would send to Damascus, but has hinted that it could deploy the S-300, which would make Israeli jets far more vulnerable in any future operations it undertakes in the country.

Source: <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy-defense/173587-180430-israel-calls-emergency-security-cabinet-meeting-following-deadly-syria-strikes>

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