

Israel might expand covert war against Iran beyond Syria in coming year

A reduction has noted in weapons shipments, funds to Iran's Syria project.



Israeli soldiers stand atop tanks overlooking the border between Israel and Syria. (photo credit: RONEN ZVULUN / REUTERS)

With Iran continuing to entrench itself throughout the Middle East, Israel might have to consider expanding its covert war against the Islamic republic over the next year in order to prevent harm to the Jewish State.

Israel has repeatedly warned that it would not allow Iran to establish a presence in Syria and has claimed responsibility for hundreds of air strikes in the country aimed at preventing the transfer of weapons - such as surface-to-air missile kits - to Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as the entrenchment of Iranian forces on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights.

Due to recent Israeli strikes, the defense establishment has noticed a reduction in Iranian weapon shipments through Syria; a decrease of funds available to Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani for his project in Syria; and a decline in militia fighters in the war-torn country.

Iran has also begun moving its assets from areas repeatedly struck by Israel to locations closer to the border with Iraq, specifically the T4 Airbase located between Homs and Palmyra.

It is believed that Iran will attempt to entrench itself in Iraq, a mainly Shia Muslim country, as it did in Syria where they have managed to establish, shape and consolidate a solid parallel security structure.

Israel has until recently refrained from commenting on military activities beyond its borders, believing that by neither confirming nor denying the strikes, Iran would be less likely to retaliate. But in recent months, officials have begun openly discussing the attacks. Before taking off for an international conference in

Warsaw on Tuesday night, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel was “operating every day, including yesterday, against Iran and its attempts to establish its presence in the area.” His comment referred to a strike the day before against Iranian positions in Syria’s Quinetra, right along the border with Israel.

With the help of the Russians, Iranians and Hezbollah, Assad has regained control over the majority of Syria and is rebuilding his army. It is assumed to be focusing first on intelligence and air defense divisions which could pose a threat to Israeli aircraft.

According to Israeli intelligence assessments, the Syrian military might take part in a war against Israel if one were to break out along the northern border.

While there are no reports of strikes in Iraq attributed to Israel, the Jewish state is reported to have been behind an air strike on the Syrian-Iraqi border last year near the town of Al-Bukamal which killed 22 members of a Shi’ite militia.

In September, Reuters reported that Iran had transferred ballistic missiles to Shi’ite proxies in Iraq over the course of several months and that it is developing the capacity to build more there. The missiles that were said to have been transferred include the Fateh-110, Zolfagar and Zelzal types, which have ranges of 200-700 km., allowing them to be able to threaten both Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Iraq and Israel are officially in a state of war, and Iraqi forces have participated in the 1967 and 1973 wars against Israel. In 1981, Israel destroyed a nuclear reactor in Osirak; ten years later in 1991, troops belonging to Iraqi president Saddam Hussein fired Scud missiles into Israel.

But Israeli strikes in Iraq could get complicated, with American forces deployed in the country working side-by-side with Iraqi troops, who are working with the Hashd al-Shaabi (also known as Popular Mobilization Forces) militia fighters.

The PMF, militias who were incorporated into Iraq’s security apparatus in 2016 to fight against the Islamic State group along with Iraqi and Kurdish forces, are directly financed and equipped by Iran.

The war against Islamic State in Iraq has been a success, with the group’s territorial caliphate wiped from the map. But if Iran turns its neighbor into a no-

man's land with missiles which can threaten the Jewish state, Israel will likely expand its operations.

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