

# Israel warns of retaliation if Russian-backed S-300 in Syria fire at Israel



*Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman at a local government conference in Tel Aviv on Wednesday February 14 2018.*

**Ariel Harmoni/Ministry of Defense**

**'Russian systems are in Syria, they are not acting against us, we have an open line & dialogue' Liberman said**

Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman said on Tuesday that Israel would retaliate to any attack by a Russian-backed S-300 missile defense system, as Russia warned that any strike on its newly deployed advanced system in Syria would result in "catastrophic consequences."

"What matters to us is that the arms protection that the Russians are transferring to Syria will not work against us," Liberman said in an interview with *Ynet*.

“There must be one clear thing – if someone shoots at our planes, we will destroy them,” he added.

On Monday, according to *Kommersant* newspaper, Russia revealed its intentions to send the S-300 system to Syria “very soon” and at no cost to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime. A defense analyst, cited by the newspaper, said that the move was likely Moscow’s “response” to a US-led attack in Syria last week, which targeted a number of chemical research facilities.

Lavrov said last week that after the joint US-Britain-France operation Russia no longer felt bound by “moral duty” to a previous agreement with Western nations not supply Damascus with the S-300 system.

“A few years ago at the request of our partners, we decided not to supply S-300’s to Syria,” Lavrov said in an interview with the *BBC*. “Now that this outrageous act of aggression was undertaken by the US, France and UK, we might think how to make sure that the Syrian state is protected.”



*A Russian S-300 PMU2 Favorit surface-to-air missile system in Alabino, outside Moscow, last year.*

**AFP**

On April 14, the US, UK and France carried out a wave of punitive strikes against Assad's regime forces in response to alleged chemical weapons attacks in Douma that President Donald Trump branded the "crimes of a monster."

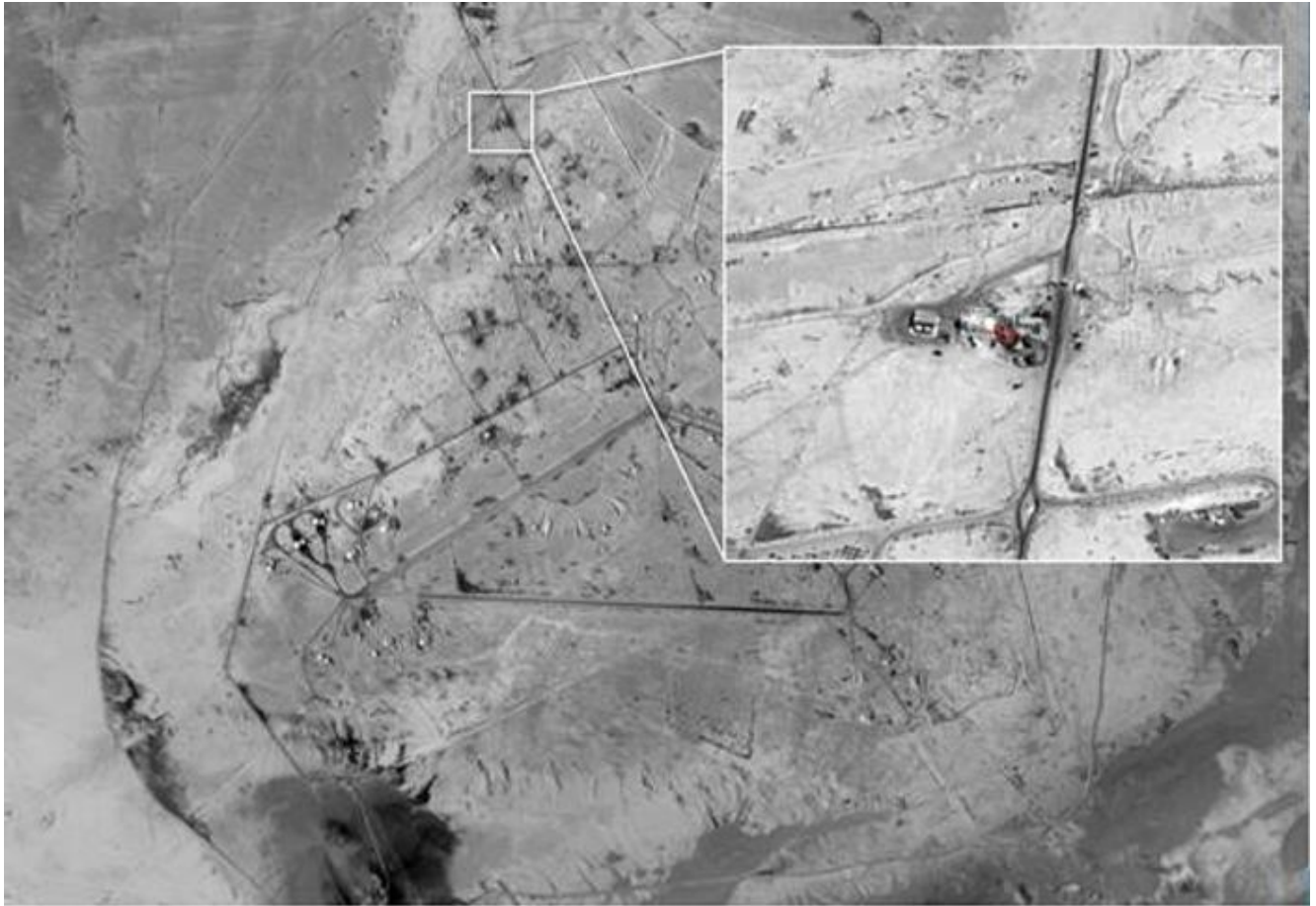
Days earlier on April 9, another air raid attributed to Israel targeted the Iranian-operated T-4 (Tayfur) base close to Syria's central Homs province killing 14 people including reportedly 7 Iranian personnel.

The Israeli strike was reportedly coordinated with the US but not with Russia, despite the two countries having established a military hotline intended to avoid conflicts of interest and clashes in Syria operations.

"The Russian systems are in Syria and they are not acting against us, we have an open line and dialogue," Liberman told *Ynet*, although he added that communication was not always very simple. "For several years now, we have been coordinating and succeeding in preventing friction with the Russians," he added.

"We are not interfering in Syrian internal affairs," Liberman confirmed, referring to Israel's formal policy of non-intervention in the Syrian Civil War.

He added, however that Israel will target "those acting against us" and when "Syrian systems acted against us, we destroyed them."



*Satellite images of Iranian-operated base in Syria, April. 17 2018*

Israel declined to comment on Russian and Syrian accusations that it was behind the April 9 strike, but media reports noted that the airbase was the same one targeted by Israel in February 10 after it shot down an Iranian explosives-laden drone breaching its air space.

Liberman, was likely referring to events that followed on February 10 when Israel' carried out "large-scale" raids on Syrian air defense systems and Iranian targets after its F-16 was shot down by a Syrian anti-aircraft fire.

Israel repeatedly warns that it will not allow its arch-foe Iran to entrench itself militarily in the region where it reportedly has special forces and drones, nor will it allow the passage of weapons to the Iranian-proxy Hezbollah operating in southern Lebanon and Syria. It's policy of nonintervention applies to all cases excluding incidents it deems linked to Iran.

Back in 2016 the Russian Defense Ministry confirmed that it had deployed a sophisticated anti-missile system to its naval facility in the Syrian city of Tartus, after reports began circulating in international media. However, this was only limited to Russian military bases.

Delivering the S-300 system to the Assad regime would thus mark a major change in Syria's defense capabilities, since the system tracks air crafts and ballistic missiles over a range of 300 kilometers. The delivery of the more advanced anti-aircraft defense system would also make Israeli jets far more vulnerable in any future operations in Syria.

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