

Newsletter Tuesday September 4, 2018

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Report: [Iran smuggled weapons to Lebanon on civilian flights](#)

Iran has been smuggling weapons to Hezbollah on Qeshm Fars Air flights from Tehran to Beirut over the past [two months](#), Fox News reports • Airline believed to be a shell company established to avoid detection, challenge Western intelligence agencies.

Israel Hayom Staff

An Iranian Qeshm Fars aircraft | Illustration: Wikimedia Commons

Iran has been using at least one of its civilian air carriers to smuggle weapons to Lebanon, where they have been delivered to Hezbollah, its proxy in the Middle East, Fox News reported Tuesday.

Quoting an unnamed Western intelligence source, the report suggested that Iran has been using Qeshm Fars Air flights from Tehran to Beirut to smuggle weapons to the Shiite terrorist group over the past two months.

According to the report, "The first flight, on July 9, involved a Boeing 747 that departed from an air force base in Tehran, stopped for a short layover at the international airport in Damascus, Syria, and then continued with a rather 'uncharacteristic flight path' to Beirut."

FlightRadar24/Google Maps

The Iranian flights followed highly irregular routes to avoid detection. Flight data showed that the route passed over northern Lebanon, straying from any commonly used commercial flight path.

The second flight took place on Aug. 2, and while it did not stop in Damascus, it followed an irregular route north of Syria rarely used by commercial airliners.

"The Iranians are trying to come up with new ways and routes to smuggle weapons from Iran to their allies in the Middle East, testing and defying the West's abilities to track them down," one intelligence official told the news network.

Western intelligence officials believe Qeshm Fars flights carried materials necessary to produce precision weapons in Iranian factories inside Lebanon.

Fox noted that Qeshm Fars Air is believed to be one of the "various pseudo-civilian airlines used for arms-smuggling" by the Revolutionary Guards and its elite black-ops arm, the Quds Force.

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| PLO, Jordan furious with Abbas over West Bank confederation scheme

Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian officials dismiss confederation idea as "inapplicable" now or any time in the future • PLO: Confederation concept "delusional" • Israeli minister: Idea may have its merits, but it is irrelevant until post-Abbas era.

Daniel Siryoti, Ariel Kahana and Israel Hayom Staff

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas | Photo: AP

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas drew harsh condemnation Monday after suggesting that the Palestinians were amenable to the possibility of establishing a confederation with Jordan in the West Bank, providing that Israel were party to such an agreement.

Abbas claimed Sunday that the idea was broached during a meeting with senior U.S. envoys as part of Washington's efforts to promote the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, but the Trump administration dismissed the report.

Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian officials also dismissed the idea as being "inapplicable" at this time or any time in the future.

A senior Palestine Liberation Organization official called the scheme "delusional," saying a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation was "a wet dream for extreme right-wing elements in Israel."

"It is hard to believe this was anything but empty rhetoric meant to throw a wrench into efforts to broker [an inter-Palestinian Fatah-Hamas] reconciliation," the official said. "Abu Mazen [Abbas] is perfectly familiar with the Palestinian leadership's position on this matter, as well as with Jordan's position."

A senior Israeli minister said that the confederation idea was "not born in a vacuum" and was "on the table."

He noted that the concept was not without its merits, but stressed that as it is clear that Abbas will never take it seriously, any discussion should be tabled until the post-Abbas era.

If and when conditions support promoting the idea of a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation, such a plan would be presented only after the moderate Arab nations weigh in on it, leaving the Palestinians little choice but to accept it, the Israeli minister said.

The Prime Minister's Office declined to comment on the issue.

Jordan, for its part, rejected the idea outright.

Jordanian government spokeswoman Jumana Ghuneimat said Sunday that the matter "is not open for discussion," stressing that the kingdom was in favor of a two-state solution that would be negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians.

A senior Jordanian official noted, "Many in Israel claim Jordan is, in fact, Palestine – an idea we utterly reject. We were surprised to hear Abbas say he would support the concept of a confederation."

Israeli Arab lawmaker Jamal Zahalka also excoriated Abbas. "The fact that the head of the Palestinian Authority even speaks of this type of plan is an insult," the Joint Arab List MK wrote on Facebook.

He further criticized Abbas for admitting he holds occasional meetings with Shin Bet security agency Director Nadav Argaman and lauding the close coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian security forces.

"Abbas boasting about how he and the Shin Bet chief agree on 99% of security issues is a knockout [to Abbas]," he said.

Abbas demands US replace 'biased' Greenblatt as peace mediator

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Abbas demands US replace 'biased' Greenblatt as peace mediator

Ramallah official: Article penned by Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt proved the U.S. administration's pro-Israel bias and total rejection of Palestinians' legitimate demands • In article, Greenblatt accused PA leaders of harming the Palestinian people.

Daniel Siryoti and Israel Hayom Staff

U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt | Photo: The Trump Organization

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is demanding that U.S. special envoy to the Middle East Jason Greenblatt be replaced as peace mediator because of his bias in favor of Israel, a senior PA official and close associate of Abbas told Israel Hayom.

The official said that Abbas was demanding Greenblatt's ouster before he would agree to resume the peace process, aimed at resolving the decades-long conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

The revelation comes on the heels of an opinion piece Greenblatt published in Hebrew in Israel Hayom on Monday, in which he declared that U.S. President Donald Trump wanted this to be a "year of peace."

Greenblatt declared in Hebrew News; Trump wants this to be a "year of peace."

"What appeared impossible only a few years ago is now possible," Greenblatt wrote, adding that a peace deal depended on willingness by both the Israelis and Palestinians to make difficult decisions for a lasting peace.

Greenblatt said that as of print time, the Palestinian leadership was "refusing to cooperate," and called the Palestinian recalcitrance "disappointing." He also accused the Palestinian leadership of harming the Palestinian people.

"Greenblatt's piece in Israel Hayom clarifies the biased stance of the U.S. administration and Greenblatt himself in favor of Israel, and total rejection of the Palestinians' legitimate demands," the official told the paper on Monday.

The official, like other PA administration figures in Ramallah, said that Abbas has recently been in secret contact with the Trump administration about the framework in which the Palestinians might return to the negotiating table and withdraw their boycott of the American administration. One of the Palestinians' main demands is that Greenblatt be replaced by an "objective" go-between, the official said.

Another Abbas associate told Israel Hayom that a delegation of American defense officials had recently arrived in the West Bank and held a series of meetings with senior PA officials.

In addition, the official said, Abbas has recently dispatched a PA delegation to Washington, which echoed the demand to replace Greenblatt.

"Despite Greenblatt's attempt to present the position of the [Trump] administration and himself as a fair and objective mediator, we aren't buying it. This is nothing but hypocrisy," the official said.

Newsletter Monday September 3, 2018

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| US floats Palestinian-Jordanian confederation as part of peace plan, Abbas claims

Abbas says he told Trump administration official he would support a confederation only if Israel joined • Jordan rejects idea, says it is "not open for discussion" • U.S. envoy Greenblatt refuses to "discuss any specific ideas or private conversations."

Daniel Siryoti and Erez Linn

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas | Photo: EPA

The Trump administration dismissed on Sunday Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' recent claim that U.S. peacemakers had proposed a confederation comprising the Palestinian Authority and Jordan as part of much-touted efforts to mediate a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

During a meeting with Israeli lawmakers MK Mossi Raz (Meretz) and Ksenia Svetlova (Zionist Union) and left-wing activists, Abbas said Trump administration officials raised the idea of establishing a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation as the basis for a regional peace plan with Israel.

"President Donald Trump's envoys – his son-in-law Jared Kushner and [Special Representative for International Negotiations] Jason Greenblatt – asked me if I would be in favor of a confederation with Jordan, and I responded that would support this only if it included Israel as well," Abbas said.

Abbas accused the Israeli government of being "rejectionist when it comes to resuming the peace process and returning to the negotiating table."

Abbas also said he "met with Trump four times, and he said he was in favor of the two-state solution, but my problem is with [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu, not the Likud and not with the Jews."

In response to Abbas' claims, Greenblatt said: "Over the past 19 months, we have probed all relevant parties about many ideas and possibilities. The plan, when it is released, will reflect ideas that we think are realistic, fair and implementable that will enhance the lives of the Israeli and Palestinian people. We will not discuss any specific ideas or private conversations that may or may not have been had with leaders in the region."

Jordan also rejected the idea. Jordanian government spokeswoman Jumana Ghuneimat said Sunday that the matter "is not open for discussion," stressing that the kingdom was in favor of a two-state solution that would be negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians.

Abbas said he occasionally meets with Israeli Shin Bet security agency chief Nadav Argaman, noting that "we and the Israelis are in total agreement on 99% of the issues."

Newsletter Monday September 3, 2018

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Iran admits to having 'worked closely' with George Soros network

American billionaire George Soros' Open Society Foundation has often been accused of promoting anti-Israeli agenda through left-wing NGOs • Iranian FM confirms Tehran worked with the foundation but says work predated his term and boasts "regulating" it.

Israel Hayom Staff

Hungarian American billionaire George Soros | Photo: AP

Iran admitted on Sunday that it had worked closely with the Open Society Foundation, a grant-making network founded by American billionaire George Soros, which has often been accused of promoting an anti-Israeli agenda through left-wing NGOs.

During a question and answer session before the Iranian parliament, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the Iranian regime's work with the OSF predated his tenure. According to the BBC, he said that he has managed to "restrict and regulate it."

According to a report published by Israel's Strategic Affairs Ministry, Soros has backed a large number of groups affiliated with the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, which seeks to isolate Israel. The groups have been blacklisted by Israel and their activists are barred from entering the country.

In 2016, Soros was found to have donated millions to Palestinian and Israeli organizations that set out to delegitimize Israel through U.S. and EU advocacy.

Over the years, he has also supported left-wing organizations in Israel such as Breaking the Silence and the New Israel Fund through the OSF, according to the watchdog group NGO Monitor.

Newsletter Monday September 3, 2018

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Israeli farmers file ICC war crimes complaint against Hamas

Israeli farmers terrorized by firebomb kites and balloons launched from Gaza across the border into Israel • Petitioners: Amazingly, Hamas, which orchestrated this terror campaign against Israeli civilians, accuses Israel and IDF of using excessive force.

Nikki Guttman

Fire caused by an incendiary kite near the Gaza Strip border

Israeli farmers from Gaza-vicinity communities flew to the Netherlands on Sunday to formally file a war-crimes complaint with the International Criminal Court against Hamas.

The complaint comes in the wake of ongoing attacks against Israeli communities by means of incendiary kites and balloons launched across the border from the Gaza Strip into Israel. The devices have sparked near-daily fires in fields near the border and inflicted significant financial damage to Israeli farmers.

The complaint was drafted by the Shurat Hadin Israel Law Center, an NGO dedicated to "fighting terrorism and safeguarding Jewish rights worldwide." Along with the farmers, some 50,000 people from Israel have co-signed the complaint as plaintiffs.

Shurat Hadin also plans to set up an exhibit in front of the ICC headquarters with displays of "blown-up photos of their fields destroyed by the terrorist kite arson."

According to a statement issued by Shurat Hadin, the complaint "demonstrates that Hamas directed its members to attack Israeli agricultural communities and urged them 'to murder, slaughter, burn and never show them any mercy.'"

According to the statement, the complaint will also show that "beginning on March 30, 2018, persons under the direction of Hamas have continuously launched airborne incendiary devices at residential property where, according to Hamas, 'Allah willing, [the incendiary devices] will light up and burn fields and houses. ... They will get to a place where it will burn a large area.'"

The farmers ask that the court prosecute Hamas leaders, including deputy political bureau chief Saleh Arouri and former political bureau chief Khaled Mashaal, for violating the Rome Statute, the international convention that serves as the legal basis on which the ICC was founded.

According to Shurat Hadin, Hamas' culpability is clearly evident since the Rome Statute "prohibits the murder of noncombatants, the destruction of civilian property for unlawful purposes, and the use of civilians as human shields."

According to Shurat Hadin president Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, "For many months, Israeli farmers have endured thousands of destructive arson attacks and rocket fire from Gaza,

while the world stood by in silence. Amazingly, Hamas which has orchestrated this campaign of terror against Israeli civilians, accuses Israel and the IDF of utilizing excessive force in defending its civilians."

"We are demanding the ICC put an end to this hypocrisy and diligently investigate these Palestinian war crimes and bring the perpetrators in Gaza to justice," she said.

Newsletter Sunday September 2, 2018

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Netanyahu: UNRWA harms Palestinian refugees, should close down

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomes U.S. move to defund U.N. agency supporting Palestinian refugees • Israel has absorbed many refugees from around the world but, unlike UNRWA, Israel integrates them rather than keeping them refugees, he says.

Netanyahu welcomes US move to defund UN supporting Palestinian refugees

Ariel Kahana, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Breuer state religious elementary school in Yad Binyamin, Sunday | Photo: Avi Ohayon / GPO

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu voiced his support for the U.S. decision Friday to halt funding for the U.N. agency that supports Palestinian refugees, saying that "the United States did a very important thing."

Speaking during a visit to a school in the central Israeli community of Yad Binyamin Sunday, Netanyahu said the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, known as UNRWA, was actually harming the Palestinians by perpetuating their status as refugees.

"Have displaced people from all over the world not arrived in Israel? Have we kept them as refugees? No, we absorbed them. That includes those who came from Arab countries. Did we perpetuate their refugee status? No," he said.

"[But] that is not what happens with the Palestinians. They created a special institution, not to integrate the refugees and rehabilitate them, but to perpetuate refugee status.

"UNRWA should close down and the refugees should be rehabilitated."

Netanyahu said the number of remaining Palestinian refugees who fled following the State of Israel's establishment in 1948 is "much lower than the number reported by UNRWA."

The Prime Minister's Office also expressed support for the move.

"The perpetuation of Palestinian refugee-dom by UNRWA is one of the central problems that perpetuate the conflict," the PMO said in a statement.

"The money should be directed toward other bodies that will make proper use of it for the benefit of the population and not the perpetuation of refugee-dom."

The 68-year-old UNRWA provides services to about 5 million Palestinians across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Most are descendants of the roughly 700,000 Palestinians who were driven out of their homes or fled the fighting in the 1948 war that led to Israel's creation.

The agency is also a major employer in the Palestinian territories.

On Friday, U.S. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said UNRWA's business model and fiscal practices were an "irredeemably flawed operation" and that the agency's "endlessly and exponentially expanding community of entitled beneficiaries is simply unsustainable."

UNRWA rejected the criticism, with spokesman Chris Guinness describing the agency as "a force for regional stability."

"These very programs have a proven track record in creating one of the most successful human development processes and results in the Middle East," he said, speaking in Jordan, where more than 2 million registered Palestinian refugees live, including 370,000 in refugee camps.

"It is a deeply regrettable decision. ... Some of the most disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable people on this planet are likely to suffer," Guinness said.

He said UNRWA provides health care and schooling for 526,000 refugee children across Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, and food assistance to 1.7 million people, 1 million of them in Gaza. The agency, which has a funding gap of \$217 million, will now ask donors for more and seek new sources of income, he said.

'An attack on the Palestinian people'

The United States, by far UNRWA's biggest donor, slashed funding earlier this year, paying out only \$60 million of a first installment in January, and withholding \$65 million. It had promised \$365 million for the entire year.

Washington said the agency needed to make unspecified reforms and called on the Palestinians to renew peace talks with Israel.

In Lebanon on Friday, before the U.S. decision was confirmed, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi was asked if his agency could assume UNRWA's role.

"The Palestinian refugees in the region are the responsibility of UNRWA," he said, making no further comment.

The UNRWA move is the latest in a number of actions by the Trump administration that have angered Palestinians, including the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Those moves reversed longtime U.S. policy and led the Palestinian leadership to boycott peace efforts led by Jared Kushner, Trump's senior adviser and son-in-law.

Trump has said his recognition of Jerusalem was meant to remove the issue from the negotiating table. The Palestinians now fear the U.S. is putting pressure on host countries including Lebanon, Jordan and Syria to absorb their refugee populations and eliminate that issue from future peace negotiations.

On Saturday, the Palestinians condemned the U.S. decision to end its decades of funding for the U.N. agency, calling this an attack on the Palestinian people and accusing the Trump administration of trying to remove sensitive core issues from the negotiating table even while it says it is preparing a Middle East peace initiative.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat accused Washington of implementing the agenda of "Israeli extremists who have done nothing but to destroy the prospect of peace."

"What is the American administration doing? They are pre-empting, prejudging issues reserved for permanent status," Erekat said in Ramallah. "They are undermining the moderate forces in Palestine and Israel. Those elements that want to achieve peace peacefully based on a two-state solution are being destroyed."

He said extremists across the region had been given "gifts."

"The United States may have the right to say that we don't want to give taxpayers' money, but who gave the U.S. the right to approve the stealing of my land, my future, my aspirations, my capital, my Aqsa mosque, my Holy Sepulcher Church?" he said.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said the U.S. decision "does not serve peace but rather strengthens terrorism in the region" and urged the U.N. to take a "firm stand" against the Americans.

In Gaza, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem accused the United States of going after UNRWA to eliminate the Palestinian right to return to their future homes.

"It's clear that Trump has shifted from taking sides with the Israeli enemy to being a partner in the assault on our Palestinian people's rights," he said. "All these decisions will not stop our people's struggle to gain freedom and return."

Michael Oren, deputy minister for Public Diplomacy in the Prime Minister's Office, said the Palestinians "must internalize that the ending of American assistance for UNRWA stems from the American administration's efforts to revive the peace process and bring the Palestinians back to the table. Ending American aid to UNRWA is a positive and essential step in any effort to achieve peace sometime in the future."

UNRWA is "an organization that perpetuates the conflict by inflating the number of refugees, that educates young people to reject the right of the State of Israel to exist while aspiring to realize the right of return and providing shelter to terrorists and smuggling their weapons," he said.

"The organization is not a vital component for peace but a clear blatant obstacle to peace. UNRWA's sponsorship of schools can go to other relief organizations, including the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. From here on in, any side that leaves the negotiating table should expect to pay a price."

Former Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon also welcomed the move.

The Palestinian refugee issue "is a problem that is used as a weapon against us and will not allow a stable situation at some point. The international attitude toward Palestinian refugees is unique and differs from that of any other type of refugees since World War II and until today," he said at an event in Beersheba Saturday.

"The organization responsible for [refugees in the former] Yugoslavia or other places is UNHCR, a U.N. mechanism whose mission is to solve the refugee problem in no more than three years following the event."

Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz said the U.S. decision represents a "realistic view of the situation and supports Israel's position, which categorically rejects the claim of the 'Palestinian right of return.'"

UNRWA is "the body that enshrines the Palestinian refugee problem," he wrote on Twitter.

Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid also took to Twitter to "welcome the U.S. decision to stop funding UNRWA. Aside from providing cover to terror, UNRWA is responsible for the fact that the 750,000 people they registered originally (most of whom have since died) became 5.5 million fake refugees. UNRWA lost sight of its purpose long ago."

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said on Saturday that his country regrets the U.S. decision to halt funding to UNRWA, as this will only fuel radicalism and harm prospects for Middle East peace.

He said that in Jordan, which hosts more than 2 million Palestinian refugees, the "disruption of UNRWA services will have extremely dangerous humanitarian, political

and security implications for refugees and for the whole region. It will only consolidate an environment of despair that would ultimately create fertile grounds for further tension. Politically it will also further hurt the credibility of peacemaking efforts."

Safadi said a planned **Sept. 27 meeting at U.N. headquarters in New York** being sponsored by Jordan with Japan, the European Union, Sweden and Turkey would try to "rally political and financial support for the agency."

"We will do everything possible to ensure that UNRWA gets the funds it needs to continue offering its services to Palestinian refugees," Safadi said.

He said international support for the agency is inseparable from future talks on the fate of refugees, among the most sensitive issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The issue was agreed to be among final status talks that were stalled in 2014.

"The status of refugees is not determined by any one single country, it is determined under international law, and as such no country can take away that status," Safadi said.

The European Union, the second-largest contributor to UNRWA with its member states, urged the U.S. to reconsider its "regrettable decision." It said it would continue its assistance to the agency and discuss funding alternatives with other partners.

British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, under fire for his anti-Semitic comments and support for terrorists, also offered his thoughts on the U.S. move.

"Shameful for the U.S. to end its funding for UNRWA, a vital U.N. refugee agency. The U.K. must help to fill the gap by boosting its contributions. Support for Palestinian refugees is a vital commitment until there is a just and viable settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict," he said.

Newsletter Sunday September 2, 2018

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Israel strikes airbase near Damascus, Arab media reports

Reports say Israeli strike caused five explosions, unknown number of casualties at Mezzeh airbase near Syrian capital, considered strategic Syrian asset • Syrian state media denies explosions were caused by "Israeli aggression," cites electrical failure.

Israel Hayom Staff

An explosion in Mezzeh airbase, late Saturday | Screenshot: Twitter

A series of five explosions that rocked the Mezzeh airbase southwest of Damascus late Saturday night was caused by an Israeli airstrike, Arab media reported on Sunday.

Several reports said the strike had caused an unknown number of casualties, while others said Syrian air defenses countered the strike.

The U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said an Israeli airstrike had caused an unknown number of deaths and injuries.

According to Arab social media, Maher Assad, the younger brother of Syrian President Bashar Assad, was wounded in the strike and an unnamed Iranian general was killed.

Maher Assad, 50, is considered the second most powerful man in Syria. He is the commander of the Republican Guard and the Syrian army's elite 4th Armored Division.

The reports were not corroborated by any Israeli source. A military spokesperson said the IDF does not comment on foreign media reports.

State-run Al-Ikhbariya TV station showed what appeared to be footage shot by residents of a string of bright explosions lighting up the night sky.

Citing an unnamed military source, the station reported that the explosions did not come from inside the airport but from a nearby munitions depot.

Twitter

Smoke rises over the Mezzeh Airbase, Saturday

One resident told the BBC that the explosions lit up the night's sky, saying, "It felt like the sun was shining for five minutes."

Syrian state media denied the explosions were caused by an Israeli raid, saying they were the result of an electrical failure in one of the base's munitions dumps.

The Syrian Arab News Agency quoted a senior military source as saying, "Mezzeh airbase has not been exposed to any Israeli aggression."

The airbase houses elite Syrian units, Iranian troops and Revolutionary Guards-backed Shiite militias, and is considered a strategic Syrian asset. It was targeted by U.S.-led coalition forces in April in retaliation for a deadly chemical attack the Syrian army carried out in Douma, in eastern Ghouta, earlier that month.

Israel rarely acknowledges strikes inside Syria but has consistently pledged to use military action to prevent weapons transfers to its enemies. Israel is alarmed by the expansion of operations by Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah to support President Bashar Assad in Syria's seven-year-long civil war.

The blasts come at a tense time, as Syrian government forces prepare to attack the last refuge of the opposition in the northwest of the country. The U.S. is warning Damascus against using chemical weapons in the battle, while Damascus claims the U.S. is preparing to falsify a chemical attack to justify military operations on Syria.