

**ISRAEL DETERMINED TO PREVENT SYRIA FROM BECOMING AN
“IRANIAN MILITARY FORTRESS”**
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Isranet Daily Briefing, October 11, 2018
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[‘The War Between Wars’: Israel vs Iran in Syria: Yaakov Lappin, *Fathom*, Oct., 2018](#)— In late August, Iran’s Defence Minister, Gen. Amir Khatami, met with his Syrian counterpart, Gen. Ali Ayoub, in Damascus and signed an agreement for military cooperation.

[S-300 Strategy: Editorial, *Jerusalem Post*, Oct. 3, 2018](#)— Russia claimed on October 2 that it had completed delivery of the S-300 surface-to-air missile defense system to Syria.

[The True Threat of S-300s is not that they’re Powerful, But that they’re Russian: Judah Ari Gross, *Times of Israel*, Sept. 25, 2018](#)— Russia’s announcement on Monday that it would be upgrading Syria’s air defenses with its formidable S-300 system within two weeks marked the latest nadir in Israel’s rapidly spiraling relationship with Moscow since the downing by Syria of a Russian spy plane off the Syrian coast last week.

[Turkey-Russia Idlib Agreement: A Lesson for the US: Seth Frantzman, *The Hill*, Sept. 26, 2018](#)— Russia and Turkey agreed to a diplomatic solution for Syria’s northern Idlib province at a meeting in Sochi on Sept. 17.

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‘THE WAR BETWEEN WARS’: ISRAEL VS IRAN IN SYRIA

Yaakov Lappin

[Fathom](#), Oct., 2018

In late August, Iran’s Defence Minister, Gen. Amir Khatami, met with his Syrian

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counterpart, Gen. Ali Ayoub, in Damascus and signed an agreement for military cooperation. This is an event that sounds deceptively mundane. In actuality, it was far from being a routine bilateral defence pact. Instead, it was a statement of Iranian intent - a message Israel paid close attention to - that it has no intention of giving up its goal of turning Syria into an Iranian military fortress in the next phase of an ongoing, explosive regional struggle.

After an extraordinarily effective series of attacks by Israel against its expansion efforts, Iran has had to go back to the drawing board and search for new ways to realise its goal of taking over Syria. In this fight, Israel is playing an aggressive defence, determined to keep Iran out of all of Syria. Iran is on the offensive, determined to take over Syria militarily, to project its radical power from Tehran all the way to Israel's border, and convert Syria into an Iranian launch pad for future aggression against Israel.

After turning half of all Syrians into refugees, and killing half a million people, the monstrous Syrian war is drawing to a close, and Iran's ally, the Bashar Assad regime, has emerged as the de-facto victor, thanks to the assistance it has received from Iranian forces on the ground, as well as Russia air power and diplomatic cover.

Now, Russia's shift away from Israel and move toward the Assad regime could provide Iran just the encouragement it was seeking to renew its efforts to infiltrate Syria. The Russian - Iranian military alliance, meanwhile, is continuing, despite rising economic rivalry over reconstruction opportunities in Syria. In addition, Iran's ongoing activities are clashing with Russia's interest in stabilising and ensuring Assad's rule for many years to come, by drawing Israeli strikes and creating potential escalation points. What remains unclear is the extent of Russia's ability or intention to reign Iran in.

At first, Iran used Syria mainly as a weapons transit zone. It moved masses of arms, such as surface-to-surface missiles and heavy rockets, surface-to-air missiles, and other arms along a complex trafficking network, which was run by the Islamic Republican Guards Corps (IRGC). These weapons are produced in Iranian and Syrian factories, and smuggled along air and ground routes into Lebanon. Their final destination was Hezbollah's storage depots and launch sites, which are embedded in built-up civilian areas across Lebanon. Once in Lebanon, the projectiles are pointed at Israeli cities and critical strategic targets, enabling Iran to threaten the whole of Israel.

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Hezbollah's offensive firepower, estimated at some 150,000 rockets, missiles, and mortar shells, dwarfs that of most NATO member states. According to IDF estimates, one out of three to four buildings in southern Lebanon is a Hezbollah military asset. With Lebanon already an Iranian-run province, the IRGC had hoped that Syria could be next. Under the IRGC's plan, Syria would not only turn into a mass transit zone for weapons making their way to Hezbollah in Lebanon but would also itself turn into a base for Iranian missile and rocket arsenals, as well as terrorist networks operating under Iran's command.

But Iran's weapons trafficking to Lebanon kept running into major trouble. Since 2012, the air strikes that targeting them displayed a high level of intelligence penetration, and accurate firepower, that deeply troubled both Hezbollah and its Iranian patron, causing them to feel exposed. These strikes evolved into a broad Israeli campaign, dubbed by the Israeli defence establishment as the 'war between wars'. The aim of this campaign was to disrupt attempts by Israel's enemies to build up their military force with improved weaponry. It also aimed at boosting Israeli deterrence, and delaying the start of the next full-scale conflict, by making enemies feel vulnerable, and robbing them of their ability to continue to arm themselves with impunity.

In 2017 the war between wars took a new turn. Over the past 18 months, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) struck no fewer than 200 targets across Syria - a very high number of active combat operations for so-called 'routine' times. Some 800 missiles and bombs were reportedly used in the Israeli attacks - an indication of the sheer scale of Israel's low-profile operations. The increase in strikes was due to Iran no longer just using Syria to transit weapons to Lebanon; it also began to turn Syria itself into a second Lebanon and create a new Iranian-run army there.

When the commander of the IRGC's Quds Force, General Qassem Soleimani tried to respond to Israel's active defence campaign, by firing a volley of rockets at Israel from a truck-mounted launcher in Syria on 10 May, the IAF decimated over 50 Iranian targets in Syria in retaliation. Israel's air operations frustrated Iran's ambitions for Syria. Relying on the highest quality real-time intelligence and standoff fire capabilities, Israel's defence establishment was able to place a roadblock in front of Iran's dangerous regional plot.

An entire IDF doctrine developed to serve this campaign, as the war between wars received growing resources. Long-range precise airpower and ever-improving intelligence capabilities came together to give Israel the ability of placing

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limitations on Iran’s activities. Israel found that it could enforce its red lines, and that it could do so without ending up in a major war. The ability to identify and track a target, analyse the costs and benefits of striking it, and decide on whether to strike in real time represents a major evolution for the Israeli defence establishment. It enabled Israel to not only enforce its red lines on Iranian expansion, but to also signal powerful regional capabilities, which contributed to deterrence against foes, and inspired Sunni moderate states that are equally threatened by Iran’s activities to boost cooperation with Israel. But Iran has made it clear that it is not going to walk away so quickly, and that it views these developments as short-term setbacks in a longer strategy...

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S-300 STRATEGY

Editorial

[Jerusalem Post](#), Oct. 3, 2018

Russia claimed on October 2 that it had completed delivery of the S-300 surface-to-air missile defense system to Syria. The delivery came after Syrians shot down a Russian IL-20 reconnaissance aircraft last month during Israeli air strikes on Syria’s Latakia region. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has indicated that although the system will improve Syria’s defenses, it will also take time to train the Syrians to use the system. This is of importance since Syrian air defense failures led to the killing of the fifteen Russians. If their defense had worked properly it would not have downed the plane of its own ally, even during the tense and confusing period after air strikes by another country.

The US views the deployment of the S-300 as adding fuel to the fire in Syria. State Department Spokeswoman Heather Nauert said on Tuesday that if reports of the missile delivery were correct, it was a “serious escalation.” This is because the S-300 is part of a wider Russian regional strategy in Syria and will bolster the war-torn country’s defenses, which might potentially threaten US and coalition aircraft operating in eastern Syria. The US is still engaged in a war against the remnants of ISIS, and Washington has indicated that American troops will remain in eastern Syria.

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The deployment of the S-300 also comes amid heightened tensions in the region. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin about the S-300 delivery prior to flying to New York for the United National General Assembly meeting last week.

During his speech, Netanyahu pointed to a secret nuclear warehouse in Tehran and referenced Hezbollah's increasing entrenchment in Lebanon. Israel wanted the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect the Tehran site. "The IAEA should inspect the site and immediately send inspectors there with Geiger counters," a statement from Jerusalem said. Both Lebanon and Iran have mocked Israel's claims. Lebanese foreign minister Gebran Bassil took diplomats on a tour of an alleged missile site near Beirut's airport. "We refuse to have missile sites near the airport," he told ambassadors, while claiming Israel was using the allegation as an excuse for "aggression." Jerusalem's claims would impact the "stability of the region," he said.

Iran's Press TV also took viewers on a tour of the exterior of the warehouse Netanyahu had alleged was a secret site. Iran's regime has sought to show that the IAEA is not concerned about Jerusalem's claims. This must be understood in the context of a war of narratives between Iran and Israel. Tehran is seeking to salvage the Iran deal signed in 2015 and wants to present itself as a stable player in the region, obeying international law while presenting Israel and the US as aggressors. Lebanon also wants to shrug off allegations about Hezbollah's increasing role in the country.

However, Iran also wants to project its military power across the region. On Monday morning it fired six ballistic missiles at an area near Albukamal in Syria. Tehran says the missiles were fired in retaliation for a September 22 attack by ISIS in Ahvaz which targeted an Iranian military parade. On Tuesday Syria's foreign minister acknowledged that Iran coordinated the missile attack with Damascus. But the missiles flew over 500 km. of Iraqi territory and landed within miles of US forces, potentially endangering lives in Iraq and elsewhere, and also endangering air traffic.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which fired the missiles, also wrote on them "death to America," "death to Israel," and "death to al-Saud," a reference to Saudi Arabia. This is not the behavior of a regime that obeys international law. Iran cannot present itself as a moderate state when it wishes death on whole countries and peoples. The S-300s in Syria help bolster Iran's reckless

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entrenchment there and are part of the larger picture of its bullying attempt to dominate the region. While Russia has legitimate concerns about safeguarding its personnel, the Syrian regime must understand that the S-300 will not protect Iran and its proxies, whose continued threat to the region must not go unchallenged.

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THE TRUE THREAT OF S-300S IS NOT THAT THEY'RE POWERFUL, BUT THAT THEY'RE RUSSIAN

Judah Ari Gross

[Times of Israel](#), Sept. 25, 2018

Russia's announcement on Monday that it would be upgrading Syria's air defenses with its formidable S-300 system within two weeks marked the latest nadir in Israel's rapidly spiraling relationship with Moscow since the downing by Syria of a Russian spy plane off the Syrian coast last week. In addition to supplying Syria with the S-300, Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu also said Monday that Russia would “jam satellite navigation, on-board radars and communication systems of combat aircraft attacking targets in Syria.” But the greater threat is not the specific tactical hurdle that the system poses for the Israeli Air Force, but rather that this episode could lead to a breakdown of Israel's relationship with Russia.

Not since the 1960s and 1970s has Israel had to contend with an antagonistic Moscow actively working against Israeli interests. Though Russia today indeed supplies weapons to many of Israel's enemies — including S-300 batteries to Israel's arch-nemesis Iran — the general understanding in Israel is that this isn't personal, it's business.

The current crisis has the potential to change that, depending on how it is handled by Israel, Russia and the United States. Though the actions of Russia are some of the most openly hostile toward Israel since the end of the Cold War, they are still reversible, at least to some degree. For over five years, Russia has been threatening to sell the S-300 anti-aircraft system to Syria, but has backed off each time at the behest of the Israeli, and sometimes the American, government. The

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long-range S-300 — with an operational radius of 250 kilometers (150 miles), according to Russia — is a far more advanced form of the S-200 air defense system that Syria currently employs.

For now, Moscow has said it will supply two to four S-300 batteries to Syria, but is prepared to deliver more if necessary. According to Russian media, the systems will be set up on Syria’s western coast and in its southwest, near the Israeli and Jordanian borders, which are the two areas from which the IAF would be most likely to conduct airstrikes. Russia has yet to indicate which model of S-300 it intends to sell Syria; there are several, each with its own range of capabilities. Even the lowest quality model’s radar would be able to monitor flights around northern Israel — and potentially civilian flights in and out of Ben Gurion International Airport, depending on where the system is placed in Syria.

For Israel, the S-300 would represent a significant but not insurmountable obstacle in Syria, where it routinely bombs Iranian and Hezbollah facilities and weapons caches. While the S-300, known by NATO as the SA-10, is far more powerful than Syria’s current long-range anti-aircraft system, the S-200 or SA-5, the Israeli Air Force has had decades to prepare for it. A number of Israeli allies operate the air defense system. The IAF has reportedly trained against S-300 batteries that once belonged to Cyprus, but are now owned by Greece, during joint aerial exercises over the years.

Israel is also the proud owner of a growing fleet of F-35 fighter jets, a model whose *raison d’être* is stealth. These fifth-generation jets have already been used operationally, the IAF said earlier this year. And the Israeli Air Force is also famed for its own electronic warfare capabilities. Indeed, in the 1982 first Lebanon War, the IAF used radar jamming against Syria’s Soviet-supplied air defenses, destroying 29 of the country’s 30 anti-aircraft batteries. Israeli also reportedly used this type of technology in its attack on the Syrian nuclear reactor in Deir Ezzor in 2007, blocking the Syrian military’s air defenses during the raid.

But a Russia-supplied S-300 system is not only an operational challenge — it is a geopolitical one as well. Though in his announcement Russian defense minister Shoigu said Syrian teams had been training to operate the S-300 system, it was not immediately clear if the batteries would also be staffed by Russian military personnel. If they were, this would make an Israeli decision to destroy Syrian S-300 batteries far more complicated, requiring the direct and intentional targeting of Russian forces.

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Russia’s plan to use electronic warfare against Israeli “hotheads” — per Shoigu — serves as yet another obstacle and point of consideration for the Israeli Air Force. According to Russian media, these electronic warfare systems will create a “radioelectronic dome” with a radius of hundreds of kilometers around western Syria and the Mediterranean coast, which would affect not only Israeli planes but also American and French navy ships, as well as civilian planes in the area. Here too, the Israeli military would likely have a number of technological and operational means to overcome this challenge, but the top brass would have to weigh the use of those measures against the value of the target...*[To Read the Full Article Click the Following [Link](#)—Ed.]*

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TURKEY-RUSSIA IDLIB AGREEMENT: A LESSON FOR THE US

Seth Frantzman

[The Hill](#), Sept. 26, 2018

Russia and Turkey agreed to a diplomatic solution for Syria’s northern Idlib province at a meeting in Sochi on Sept. 17. It followed weeks of concern that Syria’s regime, backed by its Russian and Iranian allies, would assault the last rebel stronghold in Syria, an area home to several million civilians as well as a coterie of Syrian rebel and extremist groups. The Russia-Turkey deal may provide a lesson for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. It shows that a country’s goals can be achieved, and conflict avoided, as long as military force is a clear option and a country stands by its allies. In this case, Russia and Turkey both were committed to their allies and refused to see them defeated or lose face in a potential battle.

Over the past decade, the Middle East has undergone unprecedented turmoil, characterized by the breakdown of states and the rise of extremist groups. This reached a peak in 2014 when the Islamic State took over wide swaths of Syria and Iraq, an area the size of Pennsylvania with a population of around 10 million. U.S. policy in the region has lacked clarity and U.S. allies see Washington as frequently changing course. For example, under the Obama administration the United States timidly backed the Syrian rebels, only to eventually withdraw most support under President Trump.

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Israel was concerned that the Iran nuclear deal empowered Tehran and decided to go it alone in Syria with strategic bombing against increasing Iranian influence. Saudi Arabia opposed the Iran deal and has praised the Trump administration’s recent moves to isolate Tehran. The United States also has sought to placate Turkey, while Ankara has accused Washington of training a “terrorist army” in eastern Syria.

In Iraq, U.S. policy has tacked back and forth, leaving allies frustrated and enemies empowered. In 2010, the United States backed former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki to govern Iraq as U.S. troops withdrew. In 2014, when Maliki’s policies alienated the Sunni Arab areas of Iraq and ISIS routed the Iraqi army, the United States embraced Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. Both men were from the Shi’ite sectarian Dawa party and close to Iran. Yet some U.S. policymakers thought Abadi would bring stability after ISIS was defeated in 2017. When former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told Abadi that Iranian-backed Shia militia should “go home,” Abadi objected and told the United States that the militias were the “hope of the country and the region.”

Kurdish allies in northern Iraq held an independence referendum last year, hoping the United States would support the Kurds, who fought alongside Americans against Saddam Hussein and then against Shia extremists and ISIS. Instead, the United States spurned the Kurdish region and backed Abadi. But in May 2018, Abadi came in third in the Iraqi elections — and now Washington is worried once again that it could “lose Iraq.” U.S. senators are trying to sanction Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Washington is finally confronting Iran’s meddling.

In Syria, the United States also has Kurdish allies, who are keen on a closer relationship and want guarantees that their hard-fought war against ISIS will lead to continued autonomy. But Washington is careful to use diplomatic-speak when discussing eastern Syria, talking about supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) but never full-throated on specifics about long-term commitment. Secretary of Defense James Mattis said the SDF had “carried the brunt of the fighting responsibilities overwhelmingly” against ISIS. So, the United States acknowledges that the mostly-Kurdish SDF was key to defeating ISIS in Syria, but Washington isn’t clear on what comes next...

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[IDF is Prepared to Deal with S-300](#): Yossi Yehoshua, *Ynet*, Oct. 1, 2018—At first, it seemed that the Russian threat to supply Assad with the S-300 system was yet another in a long line of warnings we have heard before. However, this time it looks much more serious seeing as Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov claimed on Wednesday that the transfer of anti-aircraft missile systems to Syria already started.

[A Snake Pit at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center](#): Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Dany Shoham, *BESA*, Oct. 7, 2018—A scientific paper published recently by the Department of Emergency Medicine at the American University of Beirut Medical Center revealed that a biomedical product manufactured serially by the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) contains polyvalent anti-serum to be used as an emergency treatment against the venoms of six snakes.

[Common Objectives, Separate Interests](#): Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, *Israel Hayom*, Sept. 21, 2018—Israel and Russia maintain an operational hotline meant to prevent unwanted incidents in the area of Syria where Israel is targeting Syrian, Iranian and Hezbollah assets.

[Is Israel's Military Honeymoon with Russia in Syria Over?](#): Anna Ahronheim, *Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 29, 2018—For the first time in decades, the operational freedom of the Israel Air Force may truly be at risk - not because of terrorist groups or countries bent on Israel's destruction, but because of Russia - and intense efforts have been put into motion on all sides to prevent that from occurring.