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# Israel-Syria tensions remind me of pre-1967 war period, says ex-intel chief

Amos Yadlin warns Israel should be wary of carrying out further airstrikes on Damascus, says Russia is signaling that it won't let the US touch Syria

By TIMES OF ISRAEL STAFF | May 18, 2013, 2:52 am |

**U**nderlining growing concerns over friction between Jerusalem and Damascus, the highly-respected former head of the Israeli army's Military Intelligence hierarchy on Friday compared current Israeli-Syrian tensions to the strains that presaged the 1967 Israel-Arab war.

He also said Moscow, by continuing to stand by President Bashar Assad, was signaling to that it was not going to let the US get its hands on Syria.

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Maj.-Gen (ret.) Amos Yadlin, a one-time fighter pilot, ex-head of IDF Military Intelligence and former Israeli military attaché to the US who now heads a prestigious Tel Aviv think tank, warned that Syria's embattled president might well retaliate were Israel to again strike at weapons convoys in Syria, as it has done twice this month already.

Yadlin stressed that Israel has not attacked "Syrian targets" but rather weaponry that was being transferred to Hezbollah in Lebanon from Iran via Syria. Nonetheless, he said, "there's an accumulation of pressure on the other side" — the Assad regime — "to retaliate."

Before attempting any more of the airstrikes that "have worked well for us three or four times," Yadlin said, Israel needed to ask itself whether it could "deal with the escalation that could develop. It reminds me to a certain extent of the years before the Six Day War" — the 1967 war in which Israel preempted Arab attacks and captured the Golan Heights from Syria, as well as territory from Jordan and Egypt.

Yadlin, who was interviewed on Israel's Channel 10 News Friday night, stressed that Israel has no interest in war with Assad, and Assad has no interest in war with Israel. The Syrian president was holding firm in the two-year civil war precisely because, unlike Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, his army was loyal, and unlike Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, there was no outside intervention, Yadlin said. Full-scale, direct confrontation with Israel would mean outside intervention, and Assad would inevitably fall, Yadlin said.

Nonetheless, Assad had various means short of all-out war to retaliate for further Israeli strikes, Yadlin said.

The same Channel 10 news broadcast reported that Russia has warned Israel against any further air strikes in Syria, a client state that Moscow is continuing to arm, [to the open dismay of the United States](#). It said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who met on Tuesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin, had been told by the Russians that another Israeli attack could push the region into war.

Israeli media reports earlier in the week said Netanyahu had warned Putin of the very same consequence — a descent into war — were Russia to go ahead with its planned delivery of advanced S-300 air-defense systems to Assad. Netanyahu said that if acquired by Assad, the S-300 — a state-of-the-art system that can intercept fighter jets and cruise missiles — “is likely to draw us into a response, and could send the region deteriorating into war,” a Channel 2 report said.

Yadlin stressed Friday that Russia would not like to see its most sophisticated weaponry “shown to be ineffectual” if attacked by Israel in Syria. He was referring principally to the S-300 systems that Moscow has insisted it will be delivering to Assad, despite Israeli pleas that it cancel the sale.

Yadlin said he was “not sure” that Russia would actually go through with the delivery, and that the S-300 was part of the face-off over Syria between Russia and the United States. By insistently maintaining their military support for Assad, he said, the Russians were saying to the Americans, “We lost Egypt; you took Iraq; and you took Libya. You’re not going to touch Syria.”

Yadlin said the S-300, though one of the most advanced air-defense systems in the world, was not impregnable, and that Israel had shown that it “has some tools” for overcoming even ultra-sophisticated air defenses.

Meanwhile, Brigadier-General Tamir Hyman, the commander of the IDF division responsible for the Israeli-Syrian border on the Golan Heights, said Friday that Assad’s army “has not fallen apart” despite the two years of fighting, and that its command structure was intact. Hyman said Israel had “no interest” in one side prevailing over the other in the civil war.

Twice this month, Israel carried out air attacks in the Damascus area to blow up Fateh-110 ground-to-ground missile consignments en route to Hezbollah via Syria from Iran.

On Wednesday, Israel reportedly warned Assad that further attacks were being considered, and that it would “bring down” his regime if he retaliated.

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