
Israel temporarily 'halts' arming Georgia

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Israel claims it has halted its lucrative weapons sales to Georgia in a bid to dissuade Russia from increasing military ties with Iran.

Israeli defense officials claimed Wednesday that 'businessmen involved in military sales to Georgia' have been urged to cease visits to Tbilisi 'for the time being'.

The businessmen, most of whom are former army officers, should obtain Tel Aviv's approval for their activities in foreign countries. 'Businessmen with ties to Georgia' confirmed the recommendation, the Associated Press reported.

Israel fears that arms deals with Georgia would prompt Moscow to supply Tehran with advanced military equipments.

The announcement comes after an August 5 announcement by Israel that it had frozen 'all sales of military equipment to Georgia'.

According to the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv, Israel supplied Georgia with weapons worth of US\$300 million last year.

Despite Georgian confirmation of having close military ties with Israel, Tel Aviv claims it has not been in direct contact with the pro-Western government of President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Due to its close military ties with Israel, Georgia had permitted Tel Aviv to use two Georgian military airfields for 'a potential pre-emptive strike' against Iranian nuclear sites.

The revelation came after Georgia's offensive into South Ossetia in early August prompted Russia to march its troops into the region - where Russian Special Forces raided the airfields and captured Israeli drones.

Israel had used the airfields to 'conduct recon flights over southern Russia, as well as into nearby Iran'.

Tel Aviv, along with Washington, has threatened to launch air strikes against Iranian nuclear installations under the pretext that Tehran, a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has plans to develop nuclear weaponry.

This is while the UN nuclear watchdog has confirmed that Iran enriches uranium-235 to a level of 3.7 percent - a rate consistent with the construction of a nuclear power plant. Nuclear arms production requires an enrichment level of above 90 percent.

Natanz uranium enrichment facility in central Iran In early June, Israel conducted an air maneuver over the eastern Mediterranean and Greece in preparation, according to Pentagon officials, for an aerial bombardment of Iranian nuclear facilities.

Over 100 Israeli F-16s and F-15s partook in the exercise, which spanned some 900 miles, roughly the distance between their airfields and a nuclear enrichment facility in the central Iranian city of Natanz.

Should Russia supply Iran with advanced military equipments - namely the sophisticated anti-aircraft S-300 systems -, Israel's plans for a potential strike against Iran would be dealt a major blow.

The Russian-made system can simultaneously track 100 targets and fire on planes 75 miles (120 km) away.

According to a leading US private intelligence agency, if the S-300 system becomes operational in Iran, it would effectively rule out Israeli air raids and seriously complicate any US aerial bombings.

An S-300 launch vehicle "If Tehran obtained the S-300, it would be a game-changer in military thinking for tackling Iran. That could be a catalyst for Israeli air attacks before it is operational," the Sunday Telegraph quoted long-time Pentagon advisor Dan Goure as saying.

Suffering from electricity shortage, Iran has adopted a rationing program by scheduling power outages - of up to two hours a day - across both urban and rural areas in the country.

While citing diplomacy as the only acceptable means for clarifying the nature of its nuclear program, Iran has warned that Israel and 2 US bases in the region would be targeted should the country come under attack.
