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## Assad says Israel destabilizing Syria

**President's accusation comes as Ehud Barak gives first hint of Israeli involvement in recent air raid outside Damascus.**

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Bashar al-Assad has accused Israel of trying to destabilise Syria by attacking a military research base outside Damascus last week, and said his country was able to confront "current threats ... and aggression", according to state media.

The Syrian president made the remarks on Sunday in a meeting with Saeed Jalili, Iran's national security council secretary, in Damascus. It was Assad's first reported response to the attack.

According to diplomats, Syrian rebels and security sources, Israeli jets bombed a convoy near the Lebanese border on Wednesday, apparently hitting weapons destined for Hezbollah, the Lebanese armed group backed by Syria and Iran.

Syria said the target was a military research centre in Jamraya, northwest of Damascus.

Assad's accusations came as Ehud Barak, Israel's defence minister, gave the first hint of Israeli involvement in the air attack, during his appearance at the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

"I cannot add anything to what you have read in the newspapers about what happened in Syria several days ago," he said.

Barak said: "It's another proof that when we say something we mean it. We say that we don't think that it should be allowable to bring advanced weapon systems into Lebanon, the Hezbollah from Syria, when Assad falls."

### **Iran's 'full support'**

During his meeting with Assad, Jalili reaffirmed Iran's "full support for the Syrian people ... facing the Zionist aggression, and its continued co-ordination to confront the conspiracies and foreign projects", Syrian state media said.

Assad, who is Iran's closest Arab ally, is battling a 22-month-old uprising in which 60,000 people have been killed.

Assad maintains the rebels are terrorists funded and armed by Turkey and Sunni Muslim Gulf Arab states.

Speaking to Al Jazeera, Mark Perry, a military and foreign policy analyst, said the suspected Israeli air strike could tilt the conflict in Assad's favour.

"Israel will claim that it does not want to intervene and it is a sole, legitimate action against militants," he said.

"But if you look at Israel's real strategy here ... then you want to buttress the regime of the dictator Assad, because you prefer that to a democracy.

"This actually lends the legitimacy to Bashar al-Assad. From Israel's perspective, this sounds perfectly rational."

Israel has said it might have to intervene to prevent Syrian chemical or advanced weapons falling into the hands of groups such as Hezbollah, which fought a 34-day war with Israel in 2006.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, Israeli leaders have repeatedly expressed fears that if Syria were to disintegrate, Assad could lose control of his chemical weapons and other arms.

Purported **images of the targeted site**, aired by Syrian state television on Saturday, show destroyed cars, lorries and military vehicles.

A building has broken widows and damaged interiors, but no major structural damage.