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Why Syria's Air Defenses Failed to Detect Israelis

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said the Israelis struck a construction site at Tall al-Abyad just south of the Turkish border on Sept. 6. Press reports from the region say witnesses saw the Israeli aircraft approach from the Mediterranean Sea while others found unmarked drop tanks in Turkey near the border with Syria. Israeli defense officials admitted Oct. 2 that the Israeli Air Force made the raid.

The big mystery of the strike is how did the non-stealthy F-15s and F-16s get through the Syrian air defense radars without being detected? Some U.S. officials say they have the answer.

U.S. aerospace industry and retired military officials indicated today that a technology like the U.S.-developed "Suter" airborne network attack system developed by BAE Systems and integrated into U.S. unmanned aircraft by L-3 Communications was used by the Israelis. The system has been used or at least tested operationally in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last year.

The technology allows users to invade communications networks, see what enemy sensors see and even take over as systems administrator so sensors can be manipulated into positions so that approaching aircraft can't be seen, they say. The process involves locating enemy emitters with great precision and then directing data streams into them that can include false targets and misleading messages algorithms that allow a number of activities including control.

A Kuwaiti newspaper wrote that "Russian experts are studying why the two state-of-the-art Russian-built radar systems in Syria did not detect the Israeli jets entering Syrian territory. Iran reportedly has asked the same question, since it is buying the same systems and might have paid for the Syrian acquisitions."

The system in question is thought to be the new Tor-M1 launchers which carries eight missiles as well as two of the Pachora-2A system. Iran bought 29 of the Tor launchers from Russia for $750 million to guard its nuclear sites, and they were delivered in Jan., according to Agency France-Press and ITAR-TASS. Syrian press reports they were tested in February. They also are expected to form a formidable system when used with the longer-range S-300/SA-10 which Iran has been trying to buy from Russia. Syria has operated SA-6s for years and more recently has been negotiating with...
Russians for the Tor-M1. What systems were actually guarding the Syrian site are not known.

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