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## Israel releases 1973 war papers to warn Syria

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Bashar Assad lays ground for Hizballah coup in Beirut

Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak decided to release the minutes of the deliberations on an air blitz against Damascus - held in Jerusalem before and during the Yom Kippur War 37 years ago - as a strong warning to Syrian President Bashar Assad, **DEBKAfile's** military and intelligence sources reveal. Then, a decision to take out Damascus to halt the Syrian offensive was overruled. This time could be different: Bashar Assad regime's own centers of power could be at risk if Syria

and Hizballah go through with their plan to overpower Beirut and topple Saad Hariri's sovereign government.

That is the message relayed by the October 1973 war papers released this week, which go beyond uncovering secret operational and intelligence decision-making and are unusually wide-ranging.

In the hours leading up to the fateful moment on Oct. 6 1973, when the combined forces of Egypt and Syria caught Israel napping by a joint offensive (designed by their Russian sponsor), Israel's chief of staff, the late Lt. Gen. David Elazar, said to Prime Minister Golda Meir: In operational terms, we can wipe out the entire Syrian air force by 12:00 noon today. We need another 30 hours to destroy its missiles. Then, if they go on the offensive at 5 pm., our air force will be free to strike the Syrian army. To me, this is operational option is attractive.

Three days later, on Oct. 9, catastrophe stared Israel in the face: The IDF was in a bad way and taking casualties in the realm of hundreds dead and thousands injured; their defense lines in Sinai and the Golan had fallen and there was nothing in the way of the Syrian army going all the way to the Sea of Galilee and Tiberias.

In a closed meeting with Golda Meir, the iconic defense minister Moshe Dayan asked for permission to bomb Damascus. "Inside the city?" she asked. "Inside the city and its environs," he replied. "We have to break the Syrians," Dayan explained that he proposed to strike the Syrian General Command and infrastructure in Damascus. "We've done enough going around the fields (a reference to targets outside the Syrian capital). There are no more key targets left. Damascus is the only one. We can't promise the population won't be hurt."

Golda's permission was withheld.

**DEBKAfile's** sources report that the decision to release these documents and the section relating to Syria was taken in Jerusalem after the Obama administration failed to prevent the two-day state visit to Lebanon by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad taking place on Oct. 13.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton may not have been tough enough on this issue when she met Syrian foreign minister Walid Muallem in New York Monday, Sept. 27. Damascus also inferred from the tenor of that conversation that Washington would not interfere with a Syrian-Iranian-backed Hizballah attack on Lebanon's centers of power.

The 1973 war papers released in Jerusalem, revealing that Israel then was just hours away from an air blitz against Damascus, was a message to Assad that Jerusalem was not aligned with the Americans in this.

The suspense ahead of the Ahmadinejad visit and its fallout continued to rise this week.

Tuesday, Oct. 5, U.S. sources told Kuwait's Al-Rai newspaper: There are international and Arab concerns over a potential assassination attempt against PM Saad Hariri.

That night, Damascus pressed ahead with its campaign to prepare Beirut for a Hizballah takeover by chipping away at Lebanese sovereignty and the authority of the Hariri government. Syria's chief military prosecutor issued summonses for four former Lebanese security officials to present themselves in Damascus and testify against three former officers, two Syrian and one Lebanese, who bore witness against Syria and Hizballah as complicit in the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005. This step followed the publication on Monday of a list of 33 Lebanese and international figures accused of conspiring in a plot to inculcate Syria for the murder.

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