

Syria vows to strike back at Israel for Imad Mughniyeh's killing in Damascus and "repeated encroachments"

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DEBKAFfile's military sources report: Thursday night, Feb. 14, Syrian officials fanned out among Arab broadcasting stations with a warning: Damascus will attack Israel shortly following a decision by Syrian leaders to end its policy of restraint against its territorial violations.

Israeli land, sea, air and homeland defense units were earlier ordered to prepare to defend the country's northern borders against attacks by Hizballah, including rocket strikes, and Syria. Reinforcements were rushed to the north.

Israel has received a stream of intelligence confirmations that Iran, Syria and Hizballah have determined not to let Mughniyeh's death pass without an immediate response. They are working together to mount a revenge operation.

Western sources watching the funeral of the Hizballah commander Imad Mughniyeh earlier Thursday noted the absence of Hizballah's entire command echelon and the Revolutionary Guards officers serving at Iran's Beirut embassy. They were assumed to have gone to ground to plan a combined offensive against Israel whom they accuse of the Mughniyeh killing. Hassan Nasrallah's threats ("If Israel wants open war, so bit.") were broadcast by video

DEBKAFfile's intelligence sources note that the way Iran's foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki stood at Thursday's Beirut funeral between Hizballah's Dep. Sec. Gen Naim Qassem and the slain terrorist's father and accepted condolences, confirmed Mughniyeh's high-value role in Tehran's foreign terror system. It also informed the thousands of Shiite mourners that Iran will be part of prospective retaliation for his death against Israel.

Iran and Syria have also linked their probes to find out how a hit-team penetrated the heavy security surrounding Imad Mughniyeh in an upscale Damascus neighborhood, planted a bomb in his SUV and detonated it by remote control.

Since Wednesday night, according to our sources, a visiting Iranian team of investigators has been hard at work in the Syrian capital to identify the Mughniyeh's killers. It is headed by Gen. Ghassem Soleimani, commander of the al Qods Brigades, the Revolutionary Guards foreign terror arm.

Its other members are Adm. Mohammad Fadavi, Dep. Commander of the IRGC Navy, who set up the near-clash between Iranian speedboats and US warships in the Strait of Hormuz in January; and Gen. Morteza Rezai, former chief of the IRGC intelligence branch.

They are working with the Syrian team led by acting interior minister Gen. Bassam Abdul Majid.