

# Palestinian group says Syria OKs attacks on Israel

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By Albert Aji

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President [Bashar Assad](#)'s regime has given a [Palestinian militant group](#) the go-ahead to set up missiles to attack [Israel](#) in the wake of recent Israeli airstrikes on the Syrian capital, a spokesman for the group said Tuesday.

[Syria](#) has hinted at possible retribution against Israel since the Jewish state carried out the airstrikes over the weekend, although official government statements have been relatively mild. In that light, the Assad regime's decision to allow a minor Syria-based Palestinian group to prepare for attacks is largely seen as a face-saving gesture unlikely to escalate the confrontation with Israel.

"Syria has given the green light to set up missile batteries to directly attack Israeli targets," Anwar Raja of the Damascus-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command told The Associated Press.

He said authorities also told the [PFLP-GC](#) that the group could carry out attacks independently without consulting Syrian authorities. "Practically, the Syrian stand has always been supportive of the [Palestinian resistance](#) and Syria provides the Palestinian resistance with all capabilities including all kinds of weapons," Raja said.

When the revolt against Assad's rule began in March 2011, the half-million-strong Palestinian community in [Syria](#) largely stayed on the sidelines. But as the uprising shifted into a civil war, many Palestinians backed the rebels, while some groups have been fighting on the government side.

Those include the PFLP-GC, a small Damascus-based Palestinian militant faction that the U.S has designated a terrorist organization. In the 1960s through 1980s, PFLP-GC militants hijacked an Israeli airliner, machine-gunned another at Zurich's airport, and blew up a Tel Aviv-bound Swissair plane, killing all 47 aboard. In 1987, a PFLP-GC guerrilla flew from Lebanon into Israel on a hang-glider and killed six soldiers before being shot dead.

While the group earned notoriety for its past attacks on Israel, it has been eclipsed in the past 20 years by the other Islamic militant groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Israel's government has not formally confirmed involvement in the strikes on Syria. However, Israeli officials have said the attacks were meant to prevent advanced Iranian weapons from reaching Lebanon's Hezbollah militia, an ally of Syria and foe of Israel.

The airstrikes raised the possibility of a wider regional conflict with Syria, which is already engulfed in a civil war that has killed more than 70,000 people, as its focal point.

Iran, a close ally of the Assad regime, has condemned the Israeli attacks and warned of possible retaliation.

But on Tuesday, Iran's foreign minister said it is Syria's Arab neighbors — not Tehran — who should respond to the Israeli strikes. Speaking to reporters in Amman, Jordan, Ali Akbar Salehi said Arab nations "must stand by their brethren in Damascus."

The Israeli strikes were met with condemnation from Arab nations, even those who oppose Assad and support the rebellion against him, but the protests stopped there.

Iran is deeply concerned with the fate of the Assad regime, which has allowed Syrian territory to serve as a conduit for Iranian weapons and other support to reach their proxy, Hezbollah. Tehran has supplied cash and weapons to help the Syrian government in its efforts to crush the anti-Assad revolt.

Salehi warned of the possible repercussions if the government in

Damascus was to fall.

"The fallout from a vacuum in Syria will have adverse effects on its neighbors and the whole region," he said. "There will be serious repercussions from a vacuum. It will be grave and nobody can predict the results."