

Russia says Syrian missiles shot down its aircraft, killing all 15 onboard

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Russian plane downed by Syrian air defence

A Russian reconnaissance aircraft was brought down by a Syrian missile over the Mediterranean early Tuesday, killing all 15 people on board, the Russian defense ministry said. The ministry blamed Israel for the crash, saying the plane was caught in the crossfire as four Israeli fighters attacked targets in northwestern Syria.

The Russian military said the Il-20 reconnaissance aircraft was hit 35 kilometers (22 miles) off the coast as it was returning to its home base nearby.

"The Israeli pilots were using the Russian aircraft as a shield and pushed it into the line of fire of the Syrian defense," Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said in a statement.

Russia said it would make an "appropriate response" to Israel.

The military said Israel did not warn it of its operation over Latakia province until one minute before the strike, which did not give the Russian plane enough time to escape.

A recovery operation in the Mediterranean Sea is underway, Konashenkov said.

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Russia has been a key backer of Syrian President Bashar Assad and it has two military bases in the country, including one close to the Mediterranean coast.

The Israeli military said earlier on Tuesday that it had no reaction, saying it does not comment on "foreign reports."

- AP