

Syrian Air Defenses Respond to Zionist Attack in Hama

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) —Syrian Air Defenses have responded to another aggression by the Zionist regime in the Hama governorate, SANA news agency reported on Friday.

Earlier media reports said that explosions were heard in the sky over Hama.

Citing sources in the Syrian Defense Ministry, SANA reported that most of the incoming targets were intercepted.

“At about four o’clock in the morning today, the Israeli enemy launched an air assault with bursts of rockets from the direction of the Lebanese city of Tripoli, targeting some targets in the vicinity of the Hama governorate”, the agency reported.

It added, “Our air defenses confronted the enemy’s missiles and downed most of them.”

According to social media reports,



An Israeli F-15 I fighter jet launches anti-missile flares during an air show

the assault was directed at Hama from above northern Lebanon. The explosions were reportedly heard in the city of Tartous and over Safita in the northwest of the country.

A military source, quoted by state television, said four members of a family were killed and four others injured in the air raid which destroyed three houses.

Those killed were a mother, father and their two children. The injured were two women and two other children, the report said.

The Syrian military source said the air raid by the Zionist regime destroyed several houses.

Syria’s air defenses have in the past intercepted many of the missiles fired from by the Zionist re-

gime the occupied territories into the Arab country.

The incident comes days after the Zionist regime military carried out airstrikes on the eastern city of Dayr al-Zawr as well as the town of al-Bukamal, along the border with Iraq.

The Zionist regime keeps quiet about the attacks on Syrian territories which many view as knee-jerk reaction to Syrian government’s increasing success in confronting terrorism in country.

The Syrian government says the regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding terrorist groups to create havoc in the Arab country.

The Zionist regime has been a staunch supporter of the terrorist groups that have violently opposed the government of President Bashar al-Assad since foreign-backed militancy gripped the Arab country back in March 2011.

Iran...

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products to foreign buyers reached record highs despite U.S. sanctions, Zanganeh said on Friday.

He did not give figures but said exports of crude had recently risen “significantly” despite tough sanctions that were imposed since 2018, when the administration of former U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from a nuclear pact.

“We set the highest record of exports of refined products in the history of the oil industry during the embargo period,” the minister said, according to his ministry’s news agency Shana.

Iranian oil exports were as high as 2.8 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2018.

Iran has called on the new U.S. administration of President Joe Biden to return to the 2015 nuclear accord between Iran and world powers. Officials in Biden’s administration have said Washington would not take a quick decision on rejoining.

“If the sanctions are lifted, we will return to the market stronger than before, and faster than expected,” Zanganeh said. “I am not worried about the lost markets.”

Iran has increased exports of petroleum products in recent years, although products also fall under sanctions.

Unlike crude, where the ultimate buyer is a refinery, gasoil and other products can be sold to smaller industrial or residential buyers.

“The enemy and Trump wanted us to perish and die, our exports to reach zero,” Zanganeh said, adding “but we are alive and working with more hope to build the country.”

Suspicious...

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“Our response to those who shed innocent Iraqi blood will be bold and earth-shattering, and the evil leaders of Daesh will face a force to be reckoned with.”

Such violence was commonplace in Baghdad during the bloodletting that followed the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and later on as Daesh swept across much of Iraq and also targeted the capital.

But with the group’s territorial defeat in late 2017, terrorist bombings in the city became rare.

Iraqi President Barham Salih said in a tweet: “The twin terrorist bombings against the safe people of Baghdad at this time confirm the attempts and endeavors by dark groups to target the national needs and aspirations of the Iraqi people for a peaceful future.”

“We stand firmly against these rogue attempts to shake our country’s stability.”

Iraq’s Kata’ib Hezbollah resistance group blamed Saudi Arabia, the U.S., and the occupying regime of Israel for the bombings, warning Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman that he will pay the price for backing such plots.

In a statement, the Iraqi group described the U.S., the Zionist regime, and Saudi Arabia as the “axis of evil”.

“The Zionist, American, and Saudi evil bands have restarted their filthy criminal acts against the children of the Iraqi nation by committing an ugly crime, which targeted a marketplace full of poor Iraqis,” the statement said.

The group referred to the coincidence of the explosions and the inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden as a sign of the plot by the “axis of evil” to bring to their knees the Iraqi people who insist on the expulsion of U.S.-led foreign forces.

“We once again highlight what we earlier said about bin Salman’s decision and his intention to support brutal operations in Iraq. We had earlier warned him not to play with the lion’s tail, as this fire will engulf his kingdom of evil and bring him down.”

However, bin Salman has not only refused to stop these crimes despite the warnings, but he has committed more crimes against innocent people, it said. “Therefore, he will pay the price for his decision.”

The attack comes as Iraqis prepare for an election, events often preceded by bombings and assassinations. The 2018 attack took place just a few months before Iraq’s last round of parliamentary elections.

Iraq’s prominent Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a statement, slamming “ruthless terrorists” for targeting “innocent civilians” in a horrendous scene “that shocks every conscientious human.”

Ayatollah Sistani offered his condolences to families of the victims, urging Iraq’s security forces to intensify their efforts to maintain the country’s security and thwart plots hatched by the enemies.

Lebanon’s Hezbollah movement said the bombings after a period of relative calm in Iraq are suspicious, especially at a time when the Iraqi people and officials are demanding the withdrawal of all U.S. forces.

“The best answer to this vicious crime should be increased awareness of Iraqi people and their commitment to freedom and independence of their country,” Hezbollah said.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad

Zarif wrote, “From terrorist bombings in Baghdad to [Zionist PM Benjamin] Netanyahu’s boot-licking—albeit a new boot—all have but one objective: trap another POTUS (President of the United States) into spending U.S. blood & treasure to ‘confront’ Iran.”

British...

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Hospital warned more people are dying from coronavirus as fewer of the sickest patients are responding to treatment. One in 10 major hospital trusts had no spare adult critical care beds last week, according to NHS England data.

Sir Patrick Vallance, the Government’s chief scientific adviser, has warned hospitals are like “war zones” amid rising numbers of virus patients.

Some 15 out of 140 acute trusts reported 100 percent occupancy of all “open” beds each day from January 11 to 17.

Wassim Shamsuddin, clinical director for anaesthesia and intensive care at Milton Keynes, said: “This time around, what we’re finding is that patients aren’t faring as well if they need to be invasively ventilated.”

“Our mortality probably in the first wave for patients coming to intensive care was around 40 percent. This time around we find that the mortality is about 80 percent.”

Shamsuddin said, “The difficulty here is that even though we try our best and we throw everything at the patients, it just doesn’t seem to be working.”

The doctors and nurses at Milton Keynes University Hospital said they are now battling with the strain of exhaustion and loss.

Pictures taken inside the hospital show staff hard at work, as they face the pressure of the mortality rate doubling, the Daily Express reported.

Joe Harrison, chief executive of Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, said the hospital had seen more than twice the number of patients in the second wave than the first, and currently had 186 patients with Covid.

He said: “We believe that over the next week or so, we’re going to continue to see real pressures in our critical care unit.”

U.S....

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“The ball is in the U.S. court now. If Washington returns to Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal, we will also fully respect our commitments under the pact,” President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday.

The Iranian parliament has passed a law that demanded the government to resume uranium enrichment to a purity level of 20 percent.

The decision came shortly after top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh was assassinated in late November.

Israeli television on Wednesday reported that the occupying regime is warning an American return to the former terms of the nuclear deal with Iran under Biden could lead the countries to a crisis in relations.

Channel 12 news cited “a very senior Israeli official” as saying: “If Biden adopts Obama’s plan, we will have nothing to talk about with him.” The official was referencing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed by former president Barack Obama in 2015.

Zarif...

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negotiations on using it are underway with the UN secretariat.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman emphasized that Iran had urged the UN not to use an American bank as the “intermediary” for transfer of the funds because of the bleak history of the U.S. in encroaching on Iran’s international assets, or the world body should guarantee security of the transaction channel.

Under Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations, a member state in arrears in the payment of its dues in an amount that equals or exceeds the contributions due for two preceding years can lose its vote in the General Assembly.

According to a statement by the UN General Assembly, as of 13 January 2021, ten member states are subject to the provisions of Article 19 of the Charter, which include Iran, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Libya, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia, South Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Cuba...

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A second domestic vaccine has also been approved by both IFDA and the Iranian National Committee for Ethics in Biomedical Research.

Earlier this month, the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) canceled the import of 150,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei banned the purchase of the vaccines produced by the United States and Britain.

Don’t Ask ...

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and produced more than 17,000 pounds of enriched uranium of 3.67 percent concentration and more than 440 pounds of 20 percent enriched uranium. Similarly, the Trump administration’s campaign of “maximum pressure” has coincided with the expansion of our stockpile of low-enriched uranium from 660 to 8,800 pounds and the upgrading of our centrifuges from the older IR-1 models to the far more powerful IR-6.

The United States’ jettisoning of the nuclear deal did prove one thing—that the signature of Iran’s foreign minister carries more weight than that of the all-powerful U.S. president. Even Obama failed to prevent the U.S. Congress from passing a ten-year extension of the Iran Sanctions Act, in clear violation of the very deal his administration negotiated. Trump’s disregard for U.S. obligations—flouting not just the nuclear deal but a UN Security Council resolution endorsing the deal—reinforced the impression that the United States is an unreliable partner.

So yes, Iran has significantly increased its nuclear capabilities since May 2019—but it has done so in full conformity with paragraph 36 of the nuclear agreement, which allows Iran to “cease performing its commitments” under the deal should another signatory stop performing its own. If the new U.S. administration hopes to alter the current trajectory, it needs to promptly change course.

What Should Come Next

The incoming Biden administration can still salvage the nuclear agreement, but only if it can muster the genuine political will in Washington to demonstrate that the United States is ready to be a real partner in collective efforts. The administration should begin by unconditionally removing, with full effect, all sanctions imposed, reimposed, or relabeled since Trump took office. In turn, Iran would reverse all the remedial measures it has taken in the wake of Trump’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal. The remaining signatories to the deal would then decide whether the United States should be allowed to reclaim the seat at the table that it abandoned in 2018. International agreements are not revolving doors, after all, and it is not an automatic right to return to a negotiated agreement—and enjoy its privileges—after one simply leaves on a whim.

That return to the table will be jeopardized if Washington or its EU allies demand new terms for a deal that was already carefully constructed through years of negotiations. Let us be clear on this point: all the parties to

the nuclear agreement (including the United States) agreed to limit its scope to nuclear issues for very pragmatic reasons. We carefully negotiated timelines for the restrictions the deal imposed, and Iran agreed to forego many economic benefits resulting from the deal because of those timelines. Iran’s defense and regional policies were not up for discussion, because the West was not prepared to abandon its interference in our region, which has caused such turmoil for decades; nor was the United States—or France or the United Kingdom, for that matter—ready to limit its lucrative arms sales, which have fueled conflict and drained the resources of our region. As part of the nuclear negotiations, Iran accepted five- and eight-year limitations on defense and missile procurements respectively. The bargains—and indeed sacrifices—we made to secure the deal cannot be undone; not now, not ever. There cannot be any renegotiations. The United States cannot insist that “what’s mine is mine and what’s yours is negotiable” and expect to have its way with Iran.

Separate from the nuclear issue, Iran has always been willing to discuss the problems plaguing our region. But the peoples of the region, not outsiders, must resolve these issues. Neither the United States nor its European allies have the prerogative to lead or sponsor future talks. Rather, the Persian Gulf region needs an inclusive regional mechanism to encourage diplomacy and cooperation and to lower the risk of miscalculation and conflict.

Iran has long advocated creating a forum for regional dialogue—from the time of UN Security Council Resolution 598 in 1987 to the Hormuz Peace Endeavor, also known as HOPE, which Iran presented to the UN General Assembly in 2019. Within such a forum, countries can address anxieties with confidence-building measures, resolve grievances through dialogue, and engage in mutually beneficial efforts to solve shared problems and safeguard collective interests. HOPE is not a blueprint for the future—any permanent arrangement has to be arrived at collectively by all regional powers. But the proposal reflects Iran’s aspiration for a strong, stable, peaceful, and prosperous community of countries, free from the impositions of regional or global hegemony.

HOPE’s framework is built upon universally recognized principles. These include respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. The participating states would pledge to show respect for one another’s historical, religious, and national symbols and to avoid intervening in one another’s internal or external affairs. Within what we have dubbed the “Hormuz Community,” states would commit to settling disputes peacefully and eschew

participating in coalitions or alliances against one another. In October 2019, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani wrote letters to all the Hormuz Community states—Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—to officially invite them to join the initiative. That invitation is still on the table.

For HOPE or indeed any similar endeavor to succeed, regional states—and outside powers—must accept certain realities. These begin with the fact that the region’s future can and must be decided only by its peoples. Any other approach is bound to produce failure. To this end, the West should abandon its policy of patronage and blind support for the bad behavior of regional clients in the name of contending with an illusory Iranian threat. All littoral states of the Persian Gulf, without exception, must be included in any regional endeavor, and both regional and outside actors must recognize and respect the legitimate national rights, interests, and security concerns of all.

Westerners, and especially Americans, need to modify their understanding of Iran and the region if they are to avoid the mistakes they have made chronically in the past. They must observe and respect the sensitivities of the peoples of the region, particularly regarding their national dignity, independence, and achievements.

We in the region are capable of addressing our own problems, provided that outsiders do not act as spoilers for short-term dividends or to abet the agendas of unscrupulous clients. During the past four years, we have, sadly, come very close to catastrophe several times. Iran has exhibited strategic restraint throughout this period. But Iranians are running out of patience, as legislation our parliament passed in December clearly indicates: the new law requires Iran to boost uranium enrichment and limit UN inspections if sanctions are not removed by February.

The window of opportunity for the new U.S. administration will not be open forever. The initiative squarely rests with Washington. The Biden administration’s first step ought to be to seek to redress—rather than attempt to exploit—Trump’s dangerous legacy of maximum failure. It can begin by removing all sanctions imposed since Trump assumed office and seek to reenter and abide by the 2015 nuclear deal without altering its painstakingly negotiated terms. Doing so will open new possibilities for peace and stability in our region.

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