

# Hamas Targets Zionist Warplanes



Members of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, parade on trucks with rockets in a street in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, on May 27, 2021.

GAZA (Dispatches) – The Palestinian Hamas resistance movement says it has fired a number of surface-to-air missiles towards Zionist fighter jets flying over the Gaza

Strip after an unmanned aerial vehicle belonging to the group was shot down.

The al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, announced in a Monday statement that one of its Shehab (Meteor) drones, while on a training flight, was shot down by the occupying regime's air force earlier the same

day. It noted that the incident occurred as members of the al-Qassam Brigades were conducting training in the southern Gaza Strip. After Zionist fighter jets targeted the drone, the Brigades responded by firing anti-aircraft missiles towards the planes.

day.

No Israeli aircraft were apparently damaged in the incident. The Israeli military said the Hamas drone was spotted in the airspace over the besieged coastal enclave, and was monitored up until the moment it was shot down.

This came a day after Zionist combat helicopters and planes downed an unidentified aircraft that appeared to have crossed into the occupying regime's "airspace" from Syria's Golan. The unidentified aircraft was tracked by the Israeli military and "taken down over an open area," without posing a threat to residents of the area, the regime's army said in a statement on Sunday.

The remnants of that drone were collected by the army on Monday morning and transferred for additional checks.

## Egyptian President on Surprise Visit to Saudi Arabia

CAIRO (AP) – The leaders of Egypt and Saudi Arabia have met in the kingdom, officials said Monday. It's the first visit by top officials in months as Egypt battles a domestic economic crisis.

President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the de facto leader of Saudi Arabia, held talks late Sunday that focused on ties between the two sides, according to Egyptian presidential spokesman Ahmed Fahmy.

Fahmy said in a statement that the two leaders "affirmed mutual concern for promoting common cooperation in all fields."

They also agreed to continue "coordination and consultation" on regional and international topics, he added.

The statement did not give further details. The meeting came as el-Sissi's government is struggling to overcome an economic crisis blamed on the war in Europe, but what critics say is resulting from mismanagement of the economy. The two sides are also both seeking to mend their frayed ties with other regional powers, including Iran and Turkey.

"I affirm the depth and strength of the bilateral relations between Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," el-Sissi tweeted after returning to Egypt early Monday.

Bin Salman, widely known in the west by the acronym MBS, received el-Sissi in the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah on the Red Sea. Images aired by state-run media in the two countries showed the crown prince waiting for the Egyptian president on the tarmac.

Other officials from both countries attended the talks, including Abbas Kamel, head of Egypt's General Intelligence Authority, and Musaed bin Mohammed al-Aiban, Saudi national security adviser, according to the Saudi official news agency.

The surprise trip was the first announced encounter between the two since they met in Qatar during the opening of the World Cup. El-Sissi also received bin Salman in Cairo in June 2022 ahead of President Joe Biden's Mideast trip.

Saudi Arabia and other Arab Persian Gulf states have been the main suppliers of aid to the Egyptian government, which has been struggling to overcome a staggering economic crisis. In 2022, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates pledged a total of \$22 billion in deposits and direct investments in Egypt, in a bid to stabilize its battered economy.

## Ex-Lebanese PM Hariri Sued by 2 Flight Attendants Over 'Brutal' Rape

BEIRUT (MEMO) – Lebanon's former Prime Minister Saad Hariri has been accused of repeatedly raping and sexually assaulting two airline stewardesses and is being sued in a U.S. court.

According to CNN, the flight attendants claim they were assaulted by Hariri aboard his private Boeing-737 plane between 2006 and 2009, with one incident having taken place en route to a state visit in Washington in 2007.

The complaint was filed in a U.S. District Court in New York on 20 March against the former prime minister and five co-defendants. The women identified in the lawsuit as Jane Doe 1 and Jane Doe 2 have both accused Hariri of "multiple instances of false imprisonment, sexual assault, and sexual harassment", while Doe 2 also accused Hariri of "brutal workplace rape."

Court documents also mention that the former statesman subjected both plaintiffs "to an atmosphere permeated with inappropriate sexual contact, coercion, harassment, and demands for sexual favors."

"Defendant S. HARIRI abused his position of authority in the airline for his own sexual gratification while repeatedly victimizing both Plaintiffs," the documents added. The New York Post also reports that the papers allege that Hariri was "heavily medicated" and his cronies drank and did cocaine during the flights.

On Saturday, Hariri's press office denied the accusations in a statement to CNN stating the lawsuit is, "full of completely false and unacceptable accusations, aimed at provocation and slander against Prime Minister Hariri."

The statement also claims this is the third time the two plaintiffs have tried to sue Hariri in New York, saying, "this is nothing but a defamation campaign orchestrated by two women who are looking for financial gain." The statement adds, "there is no truth to these baseless allegations."

The women, who hail from Australia and Wales, sued Hariri, a dual citizen in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, under New York State's Adult Survivors Act and are seeking unspecified damages.

Hariri, 52, served as Lebanon's prime minister from 2009 to 2011 and again from 2016 to 2020 before withdrawing from politics in 2022 and has been residing in the UAE. He briefly returned to Beirut in February to commemorate the 18th anniversary of the assassination of his father Rafic Hariri, who himself served two terms as prime minister.

## Mystery Baby Reunited With Mother 54 Days After Turkey Quakes

ISTANBUL (Reuters) – A mother has been reunited with her baby in southern Turkey after a DNA test confirmed it was her daughter, almost two months after a devastating earthquake ripped through the region, the country's family ministry said.

The three-and-a-half-month old "miracle baby", called Vetin, was pulled out of the rubble of a building in the province of Hatay more than five days after the Feb. 6 quake with no health problems, a ministry statement

said.

The minister handed her over to her mother Yasemin Begdas at a hospital in the city of Adana 54 days after the disaster.

"Reuniting a mother and her child is one of the most precious tasks in the world," Minister of Family and Social Services Derya Yanik was quoted as saying.

After initially being cared for at a hospital in Adana, the baby had been taken by the presidential plane to be cared for by authorities in

Ankara.

A DNA test revealed that Yasemin was her mother and the baby was flown back to Adana, where the reunion took place at the hospital treating her.

More than 56,000 people were killed by the Feb. 6 earthquake and subsequent tremors, with 50,000 of those in Turkey and the remainder in Syria.

The baby's father and two brothers died in the quake, the ministry statement said.

## OPEC...

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Saudi Arabia will cut 500,000 barrels per day, Iraq 211,000, the UAE 144,000, Kuwait 128,000, Algeria 48,000 and Oman 40,000, each country announced.

The reductions ignore calls from the United States to raise production as consumption rises and as China, the world's biggest oil consumer, reopens after its Covid shutdown.

"As world economies recover, we'll see more consumption. And therefore we'd like to see supply meet demand," said Jose Fernandez, the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs, Energy and the Environment, on the sidelines of the CERWeek energy conference, in Houston, Texas, last month.

On Monday, OPEC+ -- the 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and 11 non-OPEC allied countries -- will hold a Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee meeting by video-link.

U.S. President Joe Biden has regularly called for an increase in the OPEC+ output since Russia's invasion of Ukraine early last year sent prices soaring to above \$120 a barrel.

After the cut in October, which preceded U.S. mid-term elections, he warned of "consequences" for Saudi Arabia, a long-standing ally.

## U.S....

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said Mary Horner, senior staff attorney at Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV).

Some households were approved for rental assistance that never arrived as funding dried up, resulting in arrears of over \$10,000.

But there are also many "who owe lower amounts, who simply cannot keep up with the increase in rents," Horner said.

"Rents are a lot higher than they were. Inflation has made food more expensive... The money that families had before is just being stretched much more thinly," she added.

In Richmond, Virginia, the situation is also grim with record-low vacancies and high rent increases, said Martin Wegbreit, litigation director at Central Virginia Legal Aid Society.

Richmond ranked second among large cities for eviction rates in 2016. "It's a perfect recipe for tenants being squeezed even more now than they were before the pandemic," he added.

Yolanda Wilson, 45, said she had to get a new vehicle -- which she needed for work -- with money meant for rent after her car caught on fire.

The situation landed her with an eviction filing and some \$2,900 to repay. "Even if I have a plan (for repayment)... I feel anxious," she said.

Growth in rental prices has cooled but shelter costs still accounted for over 70 percent of the increase in consumer prices in February.

For many, the eviction process is traumatizing, said Horner of LSNV.

"Nearly all tenants are unrepresented... They don't necessarily know what their rights are," she said.

To appear in court, many have to take time off work, often bringing their children along as they lack childcare.

A 25-year-old tenant who gave her name only as Diamond returned to work shortly after having a baby in hopes of avoiding eviction.

"It's stressful because I have a small child," she told AFP. "Nobody wants to be out of a place to live."

While President Joe Biden's administration has announced actions to boost fairness in the rental market, it will take time for this to trickle down.

Black renters face greater risks, women are more likely to be listed as defendants and renters with children are at greatest risks of eviction, Hepburn noted.

"Economic factors go potentially a long way to explaining it, but we absolutely can't eliminate the possibility that discrimination plays a part as well," he said.

"When you're filed against for eviction, that record follows you," he added.

## UK...

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airport employees during the Easter holiday weekend.

Ryanair expected cancellations or delays on flights to and from France between March 30 and April 8 due to ongoing French air traffic control strikes.

Strikes at Duesseldorf, Cologne/Bonn, Stuttgart and Baden-Baden led to the cancellation of hundreds of flights on March 17.

Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg airports cancelled all commercial flights due to strike action on March 13.

EasyJet Plc cabin staff in Portugal completed a three-day strike that started on April 1 to demand higher wages to compensate for the soaring cost of living.

Pilots for Spanish airline Iberia Regional Air Nostrum voted to go on indefinite strike amid a wage dispute with the company.

Air Nostrum said pilots called for a strike every Monday and Friday from Feb 27.

Swissport handling workers called for a 24-hour strike from Feb. 27 until April 13 every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday at 17 Spanish airports, UGT union said.

Iberia, IAG's Spanish airline, planned to hire a total of 2,145 staff in the first half of the year to be able to handle the Easter travel rush and the summer season.

In Italy, ITA Airways averted strikes after an undisclosed wage increase accord with unions in end-February.

## Senior...

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the process... quadripartite meeting on the level of deputy foreign ministers will be held on April 3-4 in Moscow, he told reporters from the Turkevi Center in New York.

He added that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will visit Turkey on Thursday for talks on Syria, Libya, the extension of the grain agreement, as well as other regional issues.

The talks come after Syria and Turkey took steps towards a rapprochement after nearly a decade of severed ties, a step which was welcomed by Iran.

In a press conference held with Cavusoglu on March 8 in Ankara, Iranian Foreign Minister Hussein Amir-Abdollahian said that his country "would join a quadrilateral format of talks" as an extension of the Astana format talks between Russia, Turkey and Syria.

Ankara previously stated they had no reservations and would be "pleased" with an Iranian inclusion in the discussions.

The quadripartite meeting marks a rare yet significant high-rank talk between the key players in the Syrian crisis since it began in 2011.

The meeting was initially set to be tripartite, but Iran was added to the discussions after expressing the country's desire to be a part of the conversation.

Turkey and Syria enjoyed strong relations until war broke out 12 years ago, with Ankara entering the conflict by backing rebels fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

In spite of the efforts of rapprochement, a lot remain to be mended, as Syrian President Assad told Russian media that there was no point in a meeting with Erdogan until Turkey's "illegal occupation" ended.

Despite efforts to mend ties, a long road remains ahead. Assad previously said that a meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was not in sight until Turkey's "illegal occupation" of parts of Syria ended.

The defense ministers of Syria and Turkey met in December, marking the highest level talks.