Israel goes on alert after second air strike on Syria

Reports: 4 killed, 70 wounded in blasts near Damascus
• Attack targets Iranian rockets bound for Hezbollah
• Israel closes northern airspace to civilian flights

* By YAACOV LAPPIN, ARIEL BEN SOLOMON and Reuters

The Israel Air Force struck storage facilities near Damascus housing Iranian Fateh-110 missiles destined for Hezbollah overnight Sunday for the second time in 48 hours – according to foreign media reports – sending flames and the sounds of blasts throughout the city.

Amateur footage shot by Syrian civilians showed several blasts, suggesting that the missiles caught on fire and were causing secondary explosions, at a site on top of Mount Qasioun, overlooking northwest Damascus.

Although the Israeli defense community believes the chances of direct Syrian or Hezbollah retaliation are low, since they are devoting their resources to the Syrian civil war and are vulnerable to Israeli air power, the IDF took a number of precautions on Sunday afternoon.

These safety measures included closing Israeli airspace to civilian flights in the North until Thursday, and deploying two Iron Dome air defense batteries, to Haifa and Sderot.

Israeli Airlines said that “due to IDF instructions on the closure of airspace in the North until May 9, Arkia is forced to announce the cancellation of domestic flights from Haifa to Eilat.”

Arabs, rebels condemn alleged Israeli attacks. Page 2

The IDF said only that northern civilian airspace was being jointly managed by the IAF and civil authorities in accordance with the latest evaluations.

“The sky was red all night. We didn’t sleep a single second. The explosions started after midnight and continued through the night,” one man told Reuters from Hameh, close to Jamraya, northwestern Damascus.

Syrian state television claimed the bombing occurred around a military research facility at Jamraya. It quoted a letter from Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallim to the United Nations saying: “The blatant Israeli aggression has the aim to provide direct military support to the terrorist groups after they failed to control territory.”

A Western intelligence source told Reuters: “In last night’s attack, as in the previous one, what was attacked

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Anti-Israel rhetoric may force Damascus, Hezbollah to retaliate

ANALYSIS
* By ARIEL BEN SOLOMON

The alleged attacks by Israel against Syria, supposedly targeting an arms facility and advanced Iranian surface-to-surface missiles believed to be headed for Hezbollah, raises pressure on the Syrian regime and the Lebanese terrorist organization to make a concrete attack against Israel.

With what could be reportedly ongoing Israeli bombardments of Syrian territory for the entire world to see, it is now hard to fathom that Syria and Hezbollah would allow for much more loss of face before responding.

In what is reported to be the third attack by Israel on Syria

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Enforcing red lines in the face of Syria’s collapse

ANALYSIS
* By YAACOV LAPPIN

The two aerial strikes in Damascus in the past 48 hours, carried out by the Israel Air Force according to foreign media reports, are likely the result of classified intelligence indicating an imminent attempt to transfer strategic weapons from Syria to Hezbollah.

With Hezbollah deploying up to half of its fighting force to Syria to help the regime of dictator Bashar Assad fight for its survival, the Lebanese Shi’ite organization will be seeking “rewards” for its actions. Hezbollah and its patron Iran may have asked Assad to make the advanced weapons available.

It would seem that Assad cannot have been in the dark over the likelihood of such proliferation triggering action to stop it. Back in January.

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IDF SOLDIERS walk by signs at an observation point on Mount Bental in the Golan Heights, west of the demilitarized zone between Israel and Syria, yesterday. (Baz Ratner/Reuters)
"We need to have a game-changing action, and that is to remove the boots on the ground, establish a safe zone and protect it to stop the massacre, and care for those who are fighting, obviously, for the things we believe," McCain said on Fox News Saturday.

"Every day that goes by, Hezbollah increases its influence and the radii of its power. If the situation becomes more and more tense," he said.

Iranian officials reportedly contributed to his report.

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this year, and with more strikes possibly coming, the pressure is increasing for some sort of response. While it is true that Hezbollah is building a resort to attack soft Jewish or Israeli targets abroad, as it has done before, it also may respond directly against Israel.

The Shi'ite axis of Hezbollah and Iran have suffered tremendously in recent years due to a lack of support by Syrian President Bashar Assad. It seems that this animosity has only been heightened by the alleged actions against Assad's regime, which is viciously defending itself against Western and Israeli strikes. Perhaps quietly, many of the Sunni countries are chasing the attack, but publicly, they do not want to be the first to do it.

Assad and Hezbollah are now desperate for a new public relations win.

According to an article by Tony Badran, a research fellow at the Foun- der's Project, the Arab League, a speech last week by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah shifted the group's dynamics and protected its role of protecting the Shi'ite strines in Syria and its role in the resistance against Israel.

In the last few months, Nasrallah's second trip to Iran in the past two weeks was perhaps a chance for Iran to offer its past services of aid and response on refocusing on a winning slogan - resistance against Israel. "If Hezbollah and Iran are to play a role in the struggle with the [jewish state] explains [his] deci- sion to send a [g] it is well over the last week."

This was also confirmed on Sun- day by a report in the Lebanese daily Al-Nashr, which stated that the Islamic Jihad, which is closely tied with Iran, said it would respond for the attacks on Syria.

"Syria has its hands full, but I'm sur- prised the regime hasn't attacked Iran already," he says, adding that the regime is still making a large effort to protect the Islamic strines in Syria.

"Iran's military regime is not to be considered a regional power anymore, but it is still a strong competitor," he said.

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Iran reportedly sent a very clear message to Syria, Hezbollah and Lebanon.

Iran when an air strike targeted a Hezbollah complex in the east Bekka, which has been turned into a training camp for the advanced surface-to-air missiles toward Lebanon. But that apparent- ly has been the end of it, as Israel claimed a除此idian attack on just a week ago.

"The threat is over, the war will end," he said.

"In this particular case, it seems that the war will end, and the war will go on," he said. "We need to have a game-changing action, and that is to remove the boots on the ground, establish a safe zone and protect it to stop the massacre, and care for those who are fighting, obviously, for the things we believe," McCain said on Fox News Saturday.

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