



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on May 11, 2018

Israel Expels Human Rights Watch as Violence Intensifies With Iran

For the second day in a row, Israeli forces bombed Iranian military installations in Syria on Wednesday. Israel claimed that the airstrikes hit “nearly every target” and were in response to “20 rockets” fired by the Iranian Quds Force — a special forces unit of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard — from a base in Damascus, Syria. The rockets fired by Iranian forces came after Israel fired on the Iranian base in Syria on Tuesday, the same day Israel ordered Human Rights Watch to leave the country.



Israel’s attack on Tuesday came less than an hour after President Trump announced U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and threatened sanctions on any nation that helps Iran with its nuclear program. Iran appears to have responded by firing “20 rockets” into the Golan region of Israel. Wednesday’s airstrikes by Israel on Iranian military installations in Damascus were a response to that response.

Peace in the Middle East, it appears, is not on the immediate horizon and Trump’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal appears to be a cause for escalation, as many — including former Congressman Ron Paul and paleoconservative writer and speaker Pat Buchanan — predicted.

Five Syrian soldiers, including two officers, and 18 militia fighters were killed in Tuesday’s attack, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. That death toll will no doubt rise, since the organization also pointed out that some of the wounded are in critical condition and are likely to die, as well.

Israeli Minister of Defense Avigdor Lieberman told a security conference on Thursday morning, “We hit nearly all the Iranian infrastructure in Syria,” but added, “I want to warn of arrogance. There was no sweeping victory tonight. This is not the Battle of Stalingrad. It was a limited confrontation and should be confined to it and not expanded.”

Changing to a more threatening tone, Lieberman also said, “They need to remember the saying that if it rains on us, it’ll storm on them. I hope we’ve finished this episode and everyone understood.”

The implication is clear: Israel will respond with disproportionate force unless Iran backs down. U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May — who has voiced her criticism of U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran and has, along with other European leaders, committed to maintaining the deal in the absence of the United States — “condemned” the Iranian missile strikes in the Golan region. She also said, “Israel has every right to defend itself,” adding, “We call on Iran to refrain from any further attacks and for calm on all sides. We call on Russia to use its influence in Syria to prevent further Iranian attacks.”

Most of the “20 rockets” fired by Iranian forces were destroyed by Israel’s “Iron Dome” defense system. The others did limited damage, according to reports.



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During the airstrikes, Syrian regime air defense systems also fired missiles at attacking Israeli aircraft. Israel said its missiles struck several of the anti-aircraft systems and also destroyed the Iranian rocket launcher used to fire the rockets into the Golan region.

To make matters worse, on Tuesday — the same day President Trump announced withdrawal from the 2015 agreement and Israel launched the first attack on Iran in this new wave of escalating violence — Israel ordered the head of the international group Human Rights Watch (HRW) to leave the country. The eviction order follows Israeli allegations that HRW supported boycotts of Israel. As the Associated Press reported:

Israel has ordered the head of the local office of Human Rights Watch to leave the country within 14 days for allegedly supporting boycotts of Israel.

The international group said Tuesday that it stands by Omar Shakir, a U.S. citizen of Iraqi descent, and accused Israel of trying to muzzle criticism of its human rights record. It says neither it nor Shakir support boycotts, and that it will challenge the decision in court.

Iain Levine, a Human Rights Watch official, says Israel's actions, such as compiling a dossier on Shakir, and "deporting human rights defenders is a page out of the Russian or Egyptian security services' playbook."

With continued aggression from both Iran and Israel, the Middle East and Europe could quickly be divided between those on the one side and those on the other. As violence continues to escalate, a larger war could be on the near horizon.

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