

Iran fires missiles at Islamist “rebels” as US vows to remain in Syria

By Bill Van Auken
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Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) early Monday morning carried out missile strikes against targets inside Syria, claiming that it had killed and wounded a significant number of Islamist militia members that it charged with responsibility for a terrorist attack against an Iranian military parade last month.

The six missiles fired from the western Iranian province of Kermanshah flew 355 miles over Iraqi territory to hit their targets in Syria’s eastern Deir Ezzor province. Tehran said that the missiles, Iranian-made Qiam and Zolfaghar models capable of carrying over 1,500 pounds of explosives, were followed up with drone strikes.

The Pentagon reported that the missiles hit just three miles from where US troops are based in the Al Bukamal district of Deir Ezzor.

“Iranian forces did conduct no-notice strikes last night and we see open source reports stating that they were targeting militants it blamed for the recent attack on an Iranian military parade in the Middle Euphrates River Valley,” US military spokesman Col. Sean Ryan said in a statement. “At this time, the Coalition is still assessing if any damage occurred and no Coalition forces were in danger.”

Iranian media reported that some of the missiles were inscribed with the slogans “death to America,” “death to Israel” and “death to the house of Saud.”

Tehran has blamed Washington, Tel Aviv and Riyadh, as well as the United Arab Emirates for supporting “foreign mercenaries” responsible for the September 22 terrorist attack on a military parade in Iran’s southwestern city of Ahvaz that killed 29 people and wounded 70 others.

The Iranian missile strike coincides with a ratcheting up of tensions between Washington and Tehran, with US President Donald Trump and other top administration officials using last week’s opening of the United Nations General Assembly to demonize Iran as the source of all

problems in the Middle East and to issue a series of bellicose threats.

The US is already imposing punishing economic sanctions in direct violation of the UN-backed nuclear accord from which the Trump White House unilaterally withdrew last May. Even more severe sanctions, imposing a ban on Iranian oil exports and barring Iran from accessing the US-dominated world banking system, are set to go into effect on November 5.

Meanwhile, as the *Washington Post* spelled out in a lead article Monday, the Trump administration has “opened a new chapter in American involvement in Syria, vowing to remain until the civil war’s conclusion in a bid to halt Iran’s expansion across the Middle East.”

The newspaper cites James Jeffrey, the State Department’s special representative for Syria, as stating that the US would maintain its presence in the country, where over 2,000 US troops are presently deployed without either UN sanction or the permission of the Syrian government, until Iran and Iranian-backed militias have left the country. Iran is the closest ally of the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad and its military advisers work closely with the Syrian army.

Similarly, Trump’s national security adviser, John Bolton, vowed that the US military would continue to occupy Syrian territory “as long as Iranian troops are outside Iranian borders.”

Bolton delivered a blistering speech last week in which he warned Tehran, “If you cross us, our allies, or our partners; if you harm our citizens; if you continue to lie, cheat, and deceive, yes, there will indeed be hell to pay. ... We are watching, and we will come after you.”

The Al Qaeda-linked militias that Iran targeted in its missile attack may well qualify as one of Washington’s “allies” or “partners.”

The Trump administration has sought to strengthen an anti-Iranian axis throughout the Middle East, centered on

Washington's close ties with and military support for Israel, Saudi Arabia and the other Persian Gulf oil monarchies.

To this end, the US is not only seeking to continue its military presence in both Iraq and Syria. It is also providing indispensable military assistance for the near genocidal war being waged against the impoverished nation of Yemen. Washington and Riyadh are determined to impose a US, Saudi puppet regime there—and preclude any growth of Iranian influence—at the cost of what could prove to be millions of Yemeni lives already driven to the brink of starvation.

Syria's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem delivered a speech to the UN General Assembly on Saturday charging “the so-called international coalition” led by the US with having “done everything but fight terrorism” in Syria. “It has even become clear that the coalition's goals were in perfect alignment with those of terrorist groups; sowing chaos, death and destruction in their path,” he said. “The coalition destroyed the Syrian city of Raqqa completely; it destroyed infrastructure and public services in the areas it targeted; it committed massacres against civilians, including children and women, which amount to war crimes under international law.”

Moallem went on to demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US, French, Turkish and Israeli troops from Syrian soil.

The justification of the demands of the Syrian government notwithstanding, there is every indication that the dirty war in Syria is far from over. The US and its NATO as well as regional allies, having invested billions of dollars in arming and funding the so-called rebels dominated by Al Qaeda-linked Islamists, have no intention of abandoning their goal of regime change or of ceding any regional influence to Iran.

The US military presence in Syria is aimed not only at countering Iran's influence, but at blocking the government in Damascus from accessing the vitally needed wealth of the oil and gas fields in eastern Deir Ezzor province, now under the control of American occupation forces and their proxy forces, comprised of the YPG Syrian Kurdish militia.

Washington's regional NATO ally, Turkey, meanwhile, is committed to vanquishing the presence of the YPG, which it views as a branch of the Turkish Kurdish separatist guerilla movement, the PKK, on its border.

Tensions have also mounted in the wake of last month's Israeli attack on Latakia, which caused the

shoot-down of a Russian aircraft and the deaths of all 15 of its crewmembers. Moscow has responded by offering to deploy Russian S-300 air defense systems to Syria, which would threaten not only Israeli, but also US warplanes.

Even as the threat of a military confrontation involving these various countries mount, the *Wall Street Journal* Monday published an article questioning whether the stated ends of the US government in confronting Iran were being matched by the means of US military deployments.

The Pentagon, the *Journal* reported, “has scaled back its presence in the Persian Gulf region ... removing ships, planes and missiles that would be needed in a major confrontation.”

The article points out that the US Navy has not sent an aircraft carrier strike group into the Persian Gulf since March, the longest interval in two decades, while four Patriot missile-defense systems are being pulled out of Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain this month.

It quotes senior Pentagon officials as saying that the forces are being shifted from the Middle East to confront China and Russia, in line with US strategy documents released late last year, which affirmed that “great power” conflicts have become the main focus for the US military.

Any mismatch between Washington's rabidly anti-Iranian rhetoric and the actual deployment of military might, however, will only serve to deepen the instability of the situation in Syria, which increasingly poses the threat of erupting into a region-wide and even global war.

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