

Katyusha fire on Israel was Syrian warning. Turkey ready for any scenario

Contributed by Debkafile
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debkafile's military sources report that the four-Katyusha rocket volley from S. Lebanon which hit Galilee in northern Israel in the small hours of Tuesday, Nov. 29, was initiated by Hizballah commanders in South Lebanon although it was claimed by the al Qaeda-linked Abdullah Azzam Brigades. Hizballah activated a Palestinian cell it controls in the Ain Hilwa refugee camp near Sidon on behalf of its ally in Damascus, arming the cell with the rockets and marking out their firing positions and targets in Israel's Galilee.

One Katyusha blew up near the border, two inside a Galilee moshav damaging a hen coop and a fourth in a wood outside Maalot, causing damage but no injuries. Israeli artillery returned the fire.

Officers in the IDF northern command familiar with the terrain across the border, assert that those firing positions are located in a sector under Hizballah's exclusive control. It is off limits to any outsiders without the Iran-backed Shiite group's permission and knowledge.

IDF sources read the rocket attack as the Assad regime's last warning to the US, fellow NATO members and Gulf nations that Israel would be first to pay the price for their planned intervention in Syria. It would trigger a Lebanese-Israeli border clash followed by a massive rocket assault on Israel. More Katyusha incidents are therefore to be expected to emphasize the message.

In Istanbul meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said his government hopes that a military intervention in Syria will never be necessary "but is ready for any scenario."

A regime which tortures its own people has no chance of survival, he added. Turkey may consider setting up a buffer zone on its border in co-ordination with the international community in the event of a massive exodus of refugees from Syria, its foreign minister said on Tuesday.

This was the first time, debkafile's sources note, that Turkey has publicly declared itself ready for direct military intervention in Syria in addition to providing bases in support of an allied operation.

Monday, Nov. 28, debkafile reported a group of military officers from NATO and Persian Gulf nations had quietly established a mixed operational command at Iskenderun in the Turkish Hatay province on the border of North Syria:

Hailing from the United States, France, Canada, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with Turkish officers providing liaison, they do not represent NATO but are self-designated "monitors." Their mission is to set up "humanitarian corridors" inside Syria to serve the victims of Bashar Assad's crackdown. Commanded by ground, naval, air force and engineering officers, the task force aims to move into most of northern Syria.

Laying the groundwork for the legitimacy of the combined NATO-Arab intervention in Syria, the UN Independent International Commission set up to assess the situation in Syria published a horrendous report Monday, Nov. 28 on the Assad regime's brutalities. It documented "gross violations of human rights" and "patterns of summary execution, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, torture including sexual violence, as well as violations of children's rights."

Syrian foreign minister Walid al-Moallem fought back by showing a press conference Monday photos of dismembered bodies of Syrian soldiers as proof of the atrocities he claimed were perpetrated by the anti-Assad opposition. He also complained that "the Arab League and others refuse to believe that there is a foreign conspiracy targeting Syria."

debkafile military sources report exclusively that the Western-Arab intervention in the Syrian crisis is in an advanced state of operational planning. It entails a buffer zone in northern Syria encompassing beleaguered towns, primarily Idlib, Rastan and Homs - but also Aleppo, Syria's largest city (2.5 million mostly Sunni and Kurdish inhabitants).

The protest movement never caught on in Aleppo, home to the moneyed classes who run the country's financial and trading sectors, and it was confined to the highway network feeding the city. Therefore, for the Assad regime, bringing Aleppo into the "humanitarian corridor" system under foreign military control will round off the damage caused by the economic sanctions approved this week by the Arab League.

Losing Aleppo will fatally hammer the economy into the ground and rob the Syrian ruler of funding for sustaining his

military crackdown to wipe out the unrest in the areas remaining under his control.

Aware of this threat, Foreign Minister al-Moallem accused the Arab League of declaring economic war on Syria.

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