

# Car bomb hits near Russian base in northeast Syria

Author:

Sat, 2021-01-02 00:46

BEIRUT: A car bomb detonated near a Russian military base in northeastern Syria on Friday in the first such militant attack in the area against the ally of Damascus, a war monitor said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group reported several wounded in the attack after midnight in the Tal Saman area in Raqqa province, but did not give an exact figure.

There was no immediate Russian report of the incident, which occurred in a broader area controlled by Kurdish-led forces but where the Syrian regime and its ally Russia are also present.

A statement circulated on social media and attributed to the Hurras Al-Deen militant group claimed the attack.

The Observatory said two men parked an explosives-laden pickup truck outside the base and fled, in what was a rare such assault by Hurras Al-Deen in the area.

"It's the first such direct attack against a Russian base in northeastern Syria," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

Hurras Al-Deen has fighters in the country's last major rebel bastion in the northwestern region of Idlib, but very rarely operates outside that area.

Russia entered Syria's war in 2015, and its air force has backed Damascus regime forces in several deadly military campaigns against Idlib.

Russia has repeatedly accused rebels in Idlib of attacking its Khmeimim Air Base west of the opposition stronghold with drones, but car bomb attacks are much rarer.

Russian troops are stationed in northern Syria, including as part of several deals brokered with rebel backer Turkey.

A day earlier, Daesh claimed responsibility for an attack that killed nearly 40 soldiers in Syria the day before when militants ambushed a bus in eastern Syria.

The Observatory said Daesh had attacked regime soldiers as they traveled home for holidays in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, killing 37.

It said eight officers were among those killed while 12 other soldiers were wounded in the attack.

A statement by Daesh's propaganda arm Amaq said its fighters had "ambushed a bus transporting apostate Nusayri army elements," using a derogatory term for the Alawite sect to which Syria's Bashar Assad belongs.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**There was no immediate Russian report of the incident, which occurred in a broader area controlled by Kurdish-led forces but where the Syrian regime and its ally Russia are also present.**

The vehicle was targeted “with heavy weapons” and “multiple explosive devices, which led to destroying the bus and killing nearly 40 elements and wounding others,” added the statement, according to SITE Intelligence, which monitors jihadist activities worldwide.

It was one of the deadliest attacks since the fall of the Daesh (self-proclaimed) caliphate last year, the Observatory chief told AFP on Wednesday. Daesh overran large parts of Syria and Iraq and proclaimed a cross-border “caliphate” in 2014, before multiple offensives in the two countries led to its territorial defeat.

The group was overcome in Syria in March last year, but sleeper cells continue to launch attacks namely in the vast desert that stretches from the central province of Homs to Deir Ezzor and the border with Iraq.

The Observatory said two other buses which were part of the convoy managed to escape.

Syria’s war has killed more than 387,000 people and displaced millions from their homes since starting in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests, the Observatory says.

The dead include more than 130,500 pro-government fighters, among them foreigners, as well as 117,000 civilians.



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# US, Gulf allies brace for Iran terror attacks as Tehran vows to avenge Soleimani killing

Fri, 2021-01-01 22:13

JEDDAH: The US and its Gulf allies have been warned to prepare for Iran-led terror attacks after Tehran ramped up threats of revenge on the eve of the first anniversary of the killing of Iranian military leader Qassem Soleimani.

With tensions between the US and Iran escalating in the region, Esmail Qaani, chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Soleimani's successor, on Thursday threatened to take revenge and kill US President Donald Trump and other officials.

Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike on Jan. 3 last year after his convoy was attacked outside Baghdad airport.

Amid a series of veiled threats from Tehran, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Friday accused the US president of making up excuses to attack Iran and warned that Washington "would pay for any possible adventure" in the region, while Iran's judiciary chief, Ebrahim Raisi, said that "not even Trump is immune from justice."

Commenting on the threats, Dr. Hamdan Al-Shehri, a political analyst and international relations scholar, said that an Iranian terror strike against the US or one of its allies in the Gulf or in Yemen is "highly possible."

However, he said that any attack would be limited due to US readiness to counter the Tehran regime.

Al-Shehri told Arab News that the US, more than any other global power, needed to step up its deterrent action to halt Iran's aggressive behavior.

The US has been suffering from Iranian terrorist actions since 1977, when its embassy in Tehran was taken over by an Iranian militia group, he said.

"The US silence for over 40 years has allowed Iran to grow, develop militias and terrorist cells, and even improve its relations with several countries, which are now supporting Tehran in carrying out terrorism and challenging the US."

He warned that US "lenience" would help Iran continue its threats to the region and the world, "especially on the nuclear level."

Al-Shehri said that Iran's threats are directed at its allies in the region and Iran's revolutionary media channels.

"If you ask me whose words we should take seriously, I would say Qaani's. He

is Tehran's spearhead and the one who controls everything in the country."

He added that Qaani should be held accountable for his threats against the US president and for hinting at terrorist action inside the US.

US Central Command said on Wednesday that it had sent two B-52 bombers to the Middle East "to underscore the US commitment to regional security."

Two days earlier, a US Navy nuclear submarine passed through the Strait of Hormuz and entered the Arabian Gulf in the latest show of military strength from Washington.

Al-Shehri said: "If US forces don't take action today against Iran, they will never do so, especially with the change in the US administration and the current situation in the world."

He added: "It is now the perfect time to punish Iran for all its terror activities."

Al-Shehri said that Tehran is trying to put pressure on US decision-makers, especially the new administration.

"It wants to tell Joe Biden's administration that the best way to deal with Tehran is to placate it," the political analyst said.

"Biden is not likely to be another Obama, but he certainly will not be another Trump in confronting Tehran," Al-Shehri said.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran have been escalating since 2018, when Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed crippling sanctions.



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Iran tells IAEA it plans to enrich uranium up to 20% at Fordow site  
Iran's Soleimani sparks controversy in Gaza Strip

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## [Egyptian officials: Roadside bombing in Sinai kills 2 police](#)

Author:

By ASHRAF SWEILAM | AP

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1609528217373417500

Fri, 2021-01-01 17:59

EL-ARISH: A roadside bomb went off Friday in Egypt's northern Sinai Peninsula, killing two members of the country's security forces and wounding five, security and medical officials said.

According to the officials, the security forces were patrolling in the town of Bir Al-Abd when their armored vehicle was hit by a remotely-detonated bomb. The wounded were transferred to a military hospital in Sinai's coastal city of El-Arish. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the attacks with the media.

Friday's bombing was the second in the past three days. On Wednesday, one member of the security forces was killed and three were wounded in a roadside bombing in a village near Rafah, a town on the border with the Gaza Strip. There was no clear claim of responsibility for Friday's attack, but Daesh posted a statement on Friday, saying it was behind Wednesday's bombing and three other recent attacks. The claims could not be independently verified. Egypt has been battling a Daesh-led insurgency in Sinai that intensified after the military overthrew Muhammad Mursi in 2013. The militants have carried out scores of attacks, mainly targeting security forces and minority Christians.

The conflict has largely taken place out of the public arena, with journalists and outside observers barred from the area. So far, the fighting has not expanded to the southern end of the peninsula, where popular Red Sea tourist resorts are located.

But in 2015, a Daesh bombing brought down over Sinai a Russian passenger plane that had departed from the resort Sharm el-Sheikh, killing all 224 people on board.

In February 2018, the Egyptian military launched a massive operation in Sinai and also in parts of the Nile Delta region and the desert along the country's western border with Libya. Since then, the pace of Daesh attacks has diminished.



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## [Algerian president signs new constitution into law](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2021-01-01 16:54

ALGIERS: Algeria's president Friday signed the country's new constitution into law, his office said, after the document was approved in a November referendum on record low turnout as its leader received treatment abroad for Covid-19.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who returned to Algeria this week after two months in Germany, had promoted the new constitution as the “cornerstone of the new Algeria”, as he sought to turn the page on the long-running Hirak mass protest movement.

But the document received the backing of less than 15 percent of the electorate, in a November vote overshadowed by the novel coronavirus pandemic and following Hirak calls for a boycott.

The Hirak first launched vast street demonstrations in early 2019 to oppose then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s bid for a fifth term in office. Following his resignation that April, the Hirak kept up the pressure to demand a full overhaul of the ruling system in place since the North African country’s 1962 independence from France.

The new constitution was pitched as responding to the demands of the Hirak, but keeps in place Algeria’s presidential regime and expands the powers of the army, a central pillar of the state.

Tebboune, 75, on Thursday approved Algeria’s 2021 budget and is hoping to launch a vaccination campaign against the novel coronavirus, using the Sputnik V jab produced by its Russian ally, as early as this month.



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Algeria president Tebboune returns from COVID-19 treatment in Germany  
Algerians impatient for change with president still out sick

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# Iran tells IAEA it plans to enrich uranium up to 20% at Fordow site

Fri, 2021-01-01 19:42

VIENNA: Iran has told the United Nations nuclear watchdog it plans to enrich uranium to 20 percent purity, a level it achieved before its 2015 accord, at its Fordow site buried inside a mountain, the agency said on Friday.

The move is the latest of several recent announcements by Iran to the International Atomic Energy Agency that it plans to further breach the deal, which it started violating in 2019 in retaliation for Washington's withdrawal from the agreement and the reimposition of US sanctions against Tehran.

This step was one of many mentioned in a law passed by Iran's parliament last month in response to the killing of the country's top nuclear scientist, which Tehran has blamed on Israel. Such moves by Iran could complicate efforts by US President-elect Joe Biden to rejoin the deal.

"Iran has informed the Agency that in order to comply with a legal act recently passed by the country's parliament, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran intends to produce low-enriched uranium (LEU) up to 20 percent at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant," the IAEA said in a statement.

An IAEA report to member states earlier on Friday obtained by Reuters used similar wording in describing a letter by Iran to the IAEA dated Dec. 31.

"Iran's letter to the Agency ... did not say when this enrichment activity would take place," the IAEA statement said.

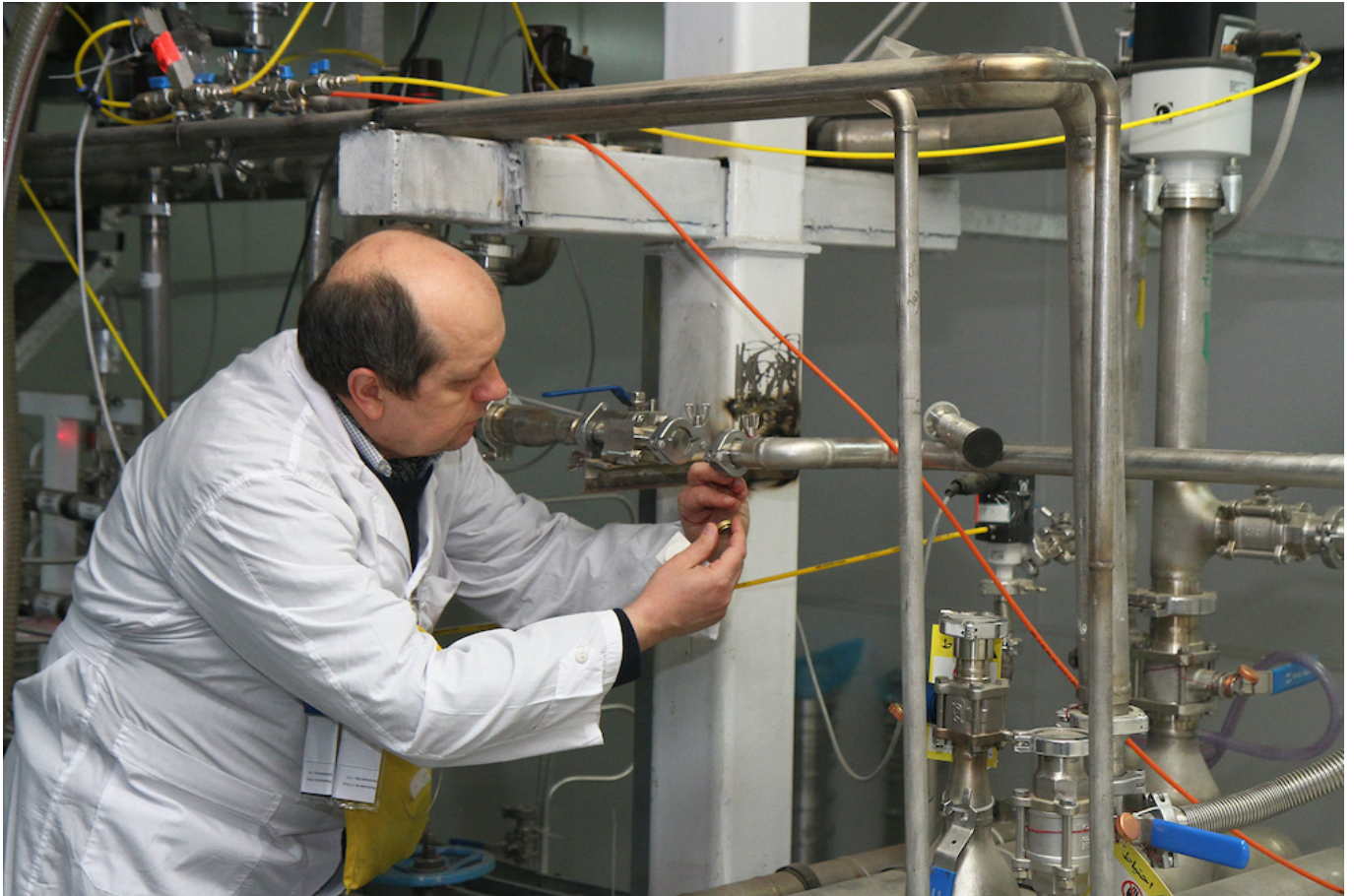
Fordow was built inside a mountain, apparently to protect it from aerial bombardment, and the 2015 deal does not allow enrichment there. Iran is already enriching at Fordow with first-generation IR-1 centrifuges.

Iran has breached the deal's 3.67 percent limit on the purity to which it can enrich uranium, but it has only gone up to 4.5 percent so far, well short of the 20 percent it achieved before the deal and the 90 percent that is weapons-grade.

The deal's main aim was to extend the time Iran would need to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear bomb, if it chose to, to at least a year from roughly two to three months. It also lifted international sanctions against Tehran.

US intelligence agencies and the IAEA believe Iran had a secret, coordinated nuclear weapons program that it halted in 2003. Iran denies ever having had one.





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Iran staggers into 2021 with its many vulnerabilities exposed  
New agreement needed to revive Iran nuclear deal under Biden, IAEA chief says