

# Syrian capital rocked by explosions as Israel hits targets

Mon, 2020-02-24 00:39

DAMASCUS: Israeli fighter jets launched air strikes on suspected Islamic Jihad positions in Syria, the Israeli military said on Monday, after the militant group and Israel exchanged rockets and air strikes around Gaza.

An Israeli military statement said its forces had “struck Islamic Jihad terror targets south of Damascus” in addition to “dozens” of Islamic Jihad targets throughout the Gaza Strip.

The air strike in the Adeliyah region outside Damascus targeted what the Israeli military called “a hub of Islamic Jihad’s activity in Syria,” including the research and development of weapons.

The Israeli announcement came shortly after Syrian state media said its air defenses had intercepted “hostile targets” over the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Residents said multiple explosions shook Damascus for about 15 minutes as air defenses fired back.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the Syrian conflict, said the explosions resulted from Israeli bombing of suspected Iranian-backed militias in the vicinity of Damascus International Airport.

The strike escalated the latest round of hostilities, which began around dawn on Sunday, when, Israel said, its troops killed an Islamic Jihad member who was trying to plant explosives near Israel’s border fence with the Gaza Strip.

Video footage shot by a Gaza photographer and widely posted on social media showed what appeared to be the lifeless body of an Islamic Jihad militant dangling from an Israeli military bulldozer as it removed the corpse.

Palestinian health officials and other onlookers said two other Palestinians were wounded by Israeli gunfire directed at a group of people who had approached the area and tried to recover the body.

The images caused an uproar in Gaza, with many social media commentators calling for retaliation.

Islamic Jihad fired a barrage of rockets from Gaza into Israel, setting off air-raid sirens in communities such as Ashkelon. Israel hit back with a series of air strikes in Gaza.

The rockets sent residents of southern Israel running for shelters. Some of the rocket fire was intercepted by Israeli aerial missile defenses, and there were no reports of any Israelis injured.

The Israeli military said that among the “dozens” of targets struck in Gaza were underground infrastructure and compounds in Rafah that had been used to store raw material used for manufacturing rockets.



A ball of fire is seen following an Israel airstrike at Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip early on Feb. 23, 2020. On Sunday night, Israeli aircraft also hit suspected Islamic Jihad sites in Damascus, Syria. (AFP / SAID KHATIB)

Shortly before midnight on Sunday, the Syrian state news agency SANA quoted a military source saying that Israeli planes had entered Syrian airspace and targeted areas around Damascus with a wave of guided missiles.

Syrian state-run Al-Ikhbariya TV aired footage of what it said were explosions set off in the Damascus night sky by the air defense system shooting down missiles.

The Syrian military source said most missiles were destroyed before reaching their targets and that the aftermath of the strike was being examined.

Israel frequently strikes at targets inside Syria, but has largely refrained from public admissions of its covert military operations there.

Iran is an ally of Damascus and has offered military advisers and sent militiamen and material support to help President Bashar Assad’s government forces in the nine-year civil war.

Israel considers Iran a national security threat and says it won’t tolerate Iran’s presence on its borders.

In November, Israel targeted two senior Islamic Jihad commanders in a simultaneous attack, killing one in the Gaza Strip and missing the second in Syria.

At the time, Israeli warplanes fired three missiles at the home of Akram Al-Ajouri, a member of Islamic Jihad's leadership living in exile. He was not harmed, but his son and granddaughter were killed.





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## [Saudi-led coalition tightens the screws on Houthi smuggling routes](#)

Mon, 2020-02-24 00:01

AL-MUKALLA: The Saudi-led coalition and Yemen's internationally recognized government have intensified security measures around main sea and land entry posts in Yemen to prevent Iran from smuggling arms to Houthis in Yemen.

Over the last couple of months, hundreds of Yemeni coast guard soldiers have been deployed off the Yemeni coasts on the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, as the coalition tightens security checks at the Shihen border crossing in the western province of Mahra.

Dozens of army and security checkpoints have also stepped up the inspection of vehicles that cross into Houthi-controlled territories in northern Yemen.

Local army officers and experts say those measures have yielded considerable results, as several arms shipments have been intercepted before reaching the Houthis.

### **Yemen alert**

In the Red Sea, local officers said Yemeni troops had consolidated their presence on the island of Perim near Bab Al-Mandab Strait, and off the coasts of the provinces of Hodeida and Taiz.

The coast guard initiated a hotline for receiving alerts from local fishermen, who were urged to report any suspected movements of boats in the Red Sea.

“Local fishermen are now helping us monitor the sea. They alert us about any ship or a boat suspected of carrying weapons to Houthis,” a coast guard officer in the Red Sea Khokha district told Arab News on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief reporters, adding that coast guard forces had increased sea patrols around Zuqar and Perim Islands with the same aim.

The two islands are located at the southern entrance of the Red Sea, where arms shipments from Iran are thought to pass through.

The same officer said that three ships carrying a large amount of explosive materials heading to Houthis had been intercepted at sea in the last three months.

Last week, the commander of the Yemeni coast guard in the western coast announced seizing a ship carrying 20 tons of urea fertilizer. The material can be used for making bombs.

The investigation with the three Yemeni fishermen captured on the ship showed that they received cargo from unidentified smugglers near the Somali port city of Zeila and were asked to give it to the Houthis for several thousand Saudi riyals.

“A big smuggling network is involved,” the officer who learned about the investigation said.

“We are confident that the Iranian smugglers do not directly hand over shipments to the Yemenis. All directions come from big smugglers in Yemen. We have learnt that Iranian smugglers pretending to be fishermen are active near Somalia.”

### **FASTFACTS**

- **The coast guard initiated a hotline for receiving alerts from local fishermen.**
- **Three ships carrying a large amount of explosive materials heading to Houthis ‘had been intercepted at sea in the last three months.’**
- **Yemen’s coast guard authority crumbled in late 2014 when Houthis seized control of Sanaa and expanded across the country, triggering a civil war.**

In the southeastern province of Hadramout, dozens of soldiers have been deployed across a vast and porous coastline at suspected entry points for

arms and drugs.

Maj. Gen. Faraj Salmeen Al-Bahsani, the governor of Hadramout, said the deployment was the last phase of a plan aimed at securing the province's coasts.

"The coalition has asked us to secure areas between Shiher and Mahra to prevent smuggling," he told Arab News. "We have discovered several vehicles carrying weapons to the Houthis."

### **Starting from scratch**

Yemen's coast guard authority crumbled in late 2014 when Houthis seized control of Sanaa and expanded across the country, triggering a civil war. When the Saudi-led coalition intervened militarily in support of Yemen's government, monitoring the country's sea waters was left to the coalition's navy. At the same time, the coalition had to rebuild the coast guard by training troops inside and outside Yemen, building facilities and equipping the forces with boats that would enable them to take on the mission.

The governor of Hadramout said that the coast guard branch in the large province was now working without much help as the coalition had furnished them with the equipment needed for the missions.

"We have stood on our feet thanks to great help from the coalition. They provided us with radar and boats," Al-Bahsani added.

### **Smuggling focal points**

Yemeni experts believed that large shipments of Iranian weapons to the Houthis went through a few seaports that were under rebel control in the western province of Hodeida.

"It is true that the Houthis might bring in light devices and weapons on land through government-controlled areas. But rockets, drones and heavy weapons come through Hodeida," Yasser Al Yafae, a political analyst, told Arab News. Hodeida city, which hosts Yemen's biggest seaport, was the target of a major military offensive that managed to liberate several seaports on the Red Sea and reach the city's outskirts.

The offensive was canceled in late 2018 under the UN-brokered Stockholm Agreement that obliged the coalition-backed Yemeni forces to stop hostilities in exchange for a Houthi withdrawal from Hodeida's seaport. Two years later, the Houthis have neither pulled out of the seaports nor allowed inspection on ships docked.

"The inauspicious Stockholm Agreement allowed Houthis to use Hodeida seaports to smuggle, weapons, weapons and drones," Yahya Abu Hatem, a Yemeni military expert, told Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath on Friday.



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## [Egypt abolishing jail terms for businessmen](#)

Sun, 2020-02-23 22:52

CAIRO: The Egyptian parliament has announced that laws that imprison investors have been scratched, stressing that imposing jail time on financial wrongdoers affects investment in Egypt.

Speaker Ali Abdel-Aal said in a public parliamentary session that he and parliament will not allow investment to “escape” from Egypt, “so the idea of replacing imprisonment with deterrent fines must be preserved.”

“I will never allow the imprisonment of businessmen involved in financial violations,” Abdel-Aal said.

Egypt’s parliament takes its cue from countries which have abolished penalties to safeguard the freedom of investors in economic legislation, in

support and encouragement of investment, said Economic Affairs Committee Chairman in Parliament Ahmed Samir. Samir said the principle of not imprisoning investors in financial crimes was approved by parliament at the beginning of the current legislative term but is not final. He explained that investors do not enjoy absolute immunity against imprisonment and that there are crimes in which jail is necessary, including harming public money or the interest of the state or harming the health of citizens.

"Harming public money or the health of citizens entails serving sentences. Any economic or administrative violations are punishable," Samir told Arab News.

Mohsen Adel, former head of the Investment Authority, stressed that Egypt has taken the view of international institutions which is believed may encourage investment incentives to attract direct foreign investment, and that preventing businessmen from going to jail guarantees the protection of the investor who works in good faith and is similar to international standards.

## **SPEEDREAD**

**Egypt's parliament takes its cue from countries which have abolished penalties to safeguard the freedom of investors in economic legislation with the aim to support and encourage investment.**

Ahmed El-Zayat, a member of the Egyptian Businessmen's Association, said the abolition by parliament of imprisoning businessmen in economic legislation is aimed at encouraging investors to invest more and to provide all logistical support to help deal with global competition and attract foreign investment. El-Zayat pointed to efforts such as solving the problems of troubled factories, refinancing, operating, reconciling with investors and providing a safe business environment that provides the factors needed to increase investments.

El-Zayat said doing away with incarceration of investors and replacing that with financial fines and providing new mechanisms to tighten control over economic business to prevent any excesses and achieve economic justice will raise the confidence of businessmen in the Egyptian economy, especially in industry. He said this will realize the state's vision of increasing Egyptian exports \$55 billion over the coming years.

Mohamed Waheed, chairman of Catalyst Company and founder of the first electronic market for trade in Egyptian products, said the state's new initiative is a "legislative boom" which will add to the advantages and incentives guaranteed by the investment law, making Egypt the most prominent destination for investors as it enhances its competitiveness and increases demand for work and investment.

Waheed emphasized that the new investment law and its amendments, in addition to investment incentives and positive benefits for projects, organizes the file of penalties for the economic sector within the framework of a general approach from the state to develop the investment environment in a way that enhances its competitiveness and elements of its attraction to local and

foreign investments.

He said this vision is a message from the state that supports serious investment and protects well-intentioned investors from the risks and fluctuations of local and global markets.

Al-Waheed added that this will guarantee the seriousness of work and strengthen the values of governance, transparency and serious competition on the basis of common interests and hard work to reap the fruits of development without measures that limit market capabilities and hinder opportunities for expansion and prosperity.



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Egypt's parliament says abolishing imprisonment of businessmen will attract investment  
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[Lawyer of man suing Qatari royal says intimidation won't discourage accountability fight after girlfriend](#)

# raped

Sun, 2020-02-23 21:35

CHICAGO: The legal fight to hold Sheikh Khaled bin Hamad Khalifa Al-Thani accountable will not be discouraged by any intimidation, the attorney of a man suing the Qatari royal for more than \$33 million told Arab News.

Attorney Rebecca Castaneda's comments came after the girlfriend of co-plaintiff Matthew Allende was found brutally bludgeoned and raped in her security-gated condominium in Pasadena, California.

Allende, one of two contractors who have accused Al-Thani of trying to kill them because they refused his orders to defend his honor and kill his enemies, said he fears that the brutal assault of his girlfriend is tied to the lawsuit.

Castaneda said she cannot confirm that the rape and assault are linked to the lawsuit she filed against Al-Thani on behalf of Allende and co-plaintiff Matthew Pittard.

But she insisted that the legal fight to hold Al-Thani accountable will not be discouraged by any intimidation.

"We don't yet know all the facts surrounding what occurred, but the plaintiffs aren't dissuaded in any way from pursuing their cases. In fact, it has had the opposite effect and they're now more driven than ever to succeed," Castaneda told Arab News.

A high-profile playboy race car driver, Al-Thani threatened Allende and Pittard and, according to the lawsuit, vowed that they "would pay the price" for refusing to kill his enemies.

The lawsuit has brought embarrassing public headlines to Al-Thani, Qatar and his brother, who is the country's ruling emir.

Allende told Pasadena police that he returned home from work on Jan. 14 and discovered his girlfriend Han, 42, on their bed in a pool of blood, with severe bruises to her head and face.

Police recovered DNA evidence suggesting that she was also raped, but no suspect has been identified.

## **FASTFACT**

**For more than seven months after the lawsuit was filed, Sheikh Khaled bin Hamad Khalifa Al-Thani was elusive, avoiding legal service possibly in the hopes of having the lawsuit thrown out of court.**

Pasadena Detective Lt. Jesse Carrillo, who is heading the investigation, said he can only conclude at this time that the assault is not the result of a robbery.

He noted that no valuables were stolen from the apartment, which contained more than \$10,000 in jewelry and other valuables that were visible.

Allende filed the lawsuit against Al-Thani on July 23, 2019, along with his colleague Pittard. The lawsuit details how Al-Thani's controversial lifestyle brought him into contact with shady characters who he feared would embarrass him on social media.

Allende was employed as a paramedic by Al-Thani from approximately Oct. 15, 2017, to Feb. 4, 2018.

Pittard was employed from Sept. 17, 2017, until July 10, 2018, as US director of security and as a senior defense consultant in Qatar.

Angered when they refused, Al-Thani threatened them with a gun and imprisoned them for several months in his palace in Doha.

Allende, now a Los Angeles paramedic, and Pittard, a former US Marine, fled Qatar in February 2018.

For more than seven months after the lawsuit was filed, Al-Thani was elusive, avoiding legal service possibly in the hopes of having the lawsuit thrown out of court.

Castaneda filed the lawsuit in a Florida Federal Court initially against him personally, and against two of his companies, GEO Strategic Defense Solutions LLC and KH Holdings LLC.

But when Al-Thani refused to be served and lawyers denied representing him, she expanded the lawsuit on Nov. 5, 2019, to include another of his companies, Al-Anabi Racing USA LLC, which has offices in Florida.

Lawyers for Al-Anabi Racing USA LLC, and Al-Thani, finally responded to the lawsuit and asked Federal Court Judge Thomas P. Barber to dismiss it.

They argued that neither Al-Thani nor Al-Anabi Racing USA LLC had any legal presence in Florida.

**We don't yet know all the facts surrounding what occurred, but the plaintiffs aren't dissuaded in any way from pursuing their cases. In fact, it has had the opposite effect and they're now more driven than ever to succeed.**

**Rebecca Castaneda, Attorney for Matthew Allende**

Elated, Castaneda asked the court to dismiss her lawsuit and announced that it will be refiled in Duxbury, Massachusetts, where Al-Anabi Racing USA LLC

is headquartered.

When the lawsuit is refiled, Castaneda believes that she will force Al-Thani to submit to deposition and document discovery, or force a default judgment in her client's favor.

The timing of the beating is suspicious because it came right after the legal maneuvering seemed to give Allende's and Pittard's case more weight.

Al-Thani's attorney, Alejandro Soto of the Florida law firm Fridman Fels & Soto PLLC, argued in the motion to dismiss that Al-Thani has no legal presence in Florida and that its federal courts have no jurisdiction over his actions.

Attorneys for Al-Anabi Racing LLC, Armando Rosquete and Javier A. Reyes of the Bell Rosquete Reyes Esteban PLLC law firm, argued that Al-Thani is not employed by Al-Anabi Racing USA LLC and claimed that Florida lacks jurisdiction to hear the case.

Reyes, Rosquete and Soto did not respond to repeated inquiries from Arab News for comment on the lawsuit.

The violence against Allende and his girlfriend may also have been prompted by salacious details that Castaneda released to Arab News in December.

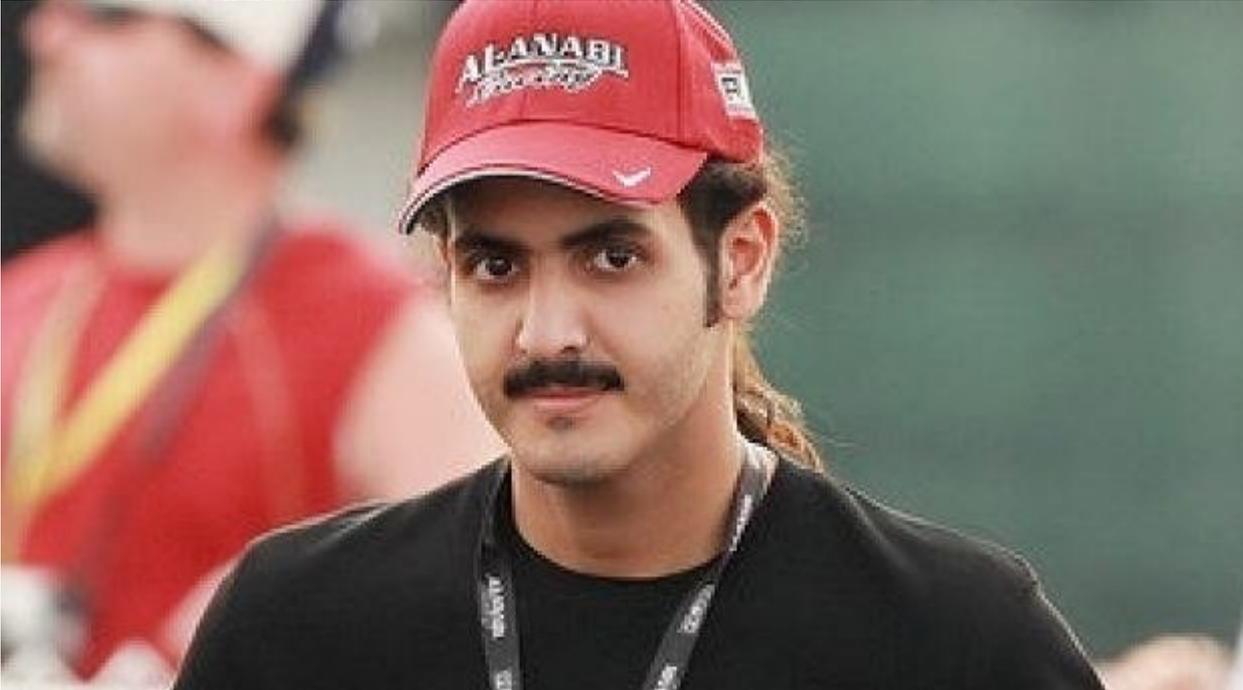
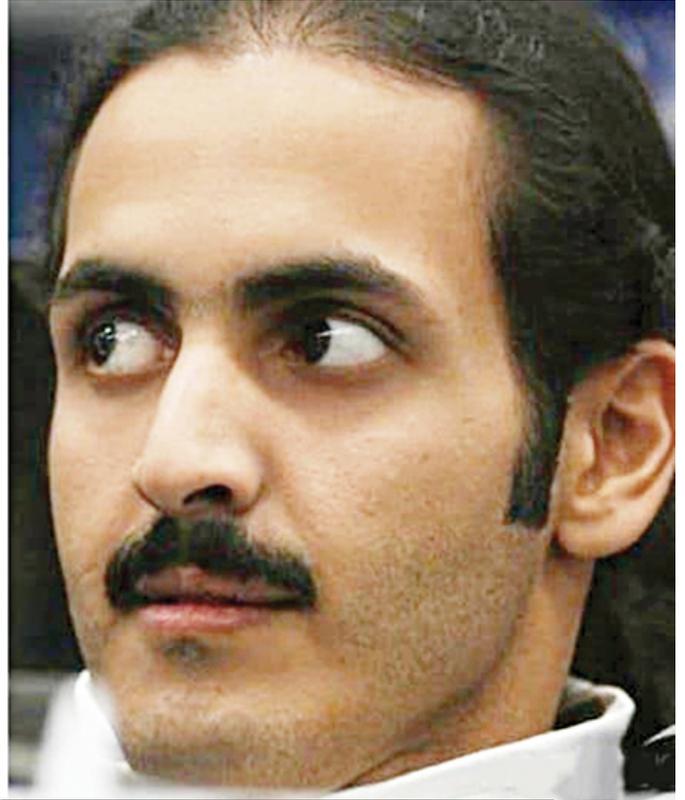
Castaneda said the person Al-Thani ordered Allende and Pittard to murder is a Los Angeles-based drug dealer who was trying to blackmail the Qatari royal.

The unnamed drug dealer claimed to have photographs and videos of Al-Thani engaged in drug and homosexual sex parties at his mansion in Qatar and in Los Angeles.

"We don't know the veracity of the drug dealer's claims, but the sheikh took them seriously and he wanted Pittard and Allende to kill the blackmailer," Castaneda told Arab News at the time.

In another case, she said Al-Thani ordered the two security contractors to murder a Moroccan woman who was a friend of his wife.

Castaneda said Al-Thani feared that the woman was feeding embarrassing information about him to a Saudi national at a time when his brother, the emir, and Qatar were in a row with Saudi Arabia and three other Arab countries.



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US lawsuit against Qatari emir's brother to be re-filed in Massachusetts court  
Tampa attorney forces Qatari emir's brother into legal corner

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# Egyptian ministry launches mobile app

Sun, 2020-02-23 23:07

CIARO: The Ministry of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs has launched Kallem Masr (Call Egypt), a mobile app to facilitate communication with citizens living abroad.

Nabila Makram, minister of immigration and Egyptian expatriates affairs, said the free app includes a monthly electronic magazine issued by the ministry in both Arabic and English.

The app is available for Android users, and officials are working on making it available for iOS users as well, communications expert Ashraf El-Wardany told Arab News.

Android users can download the app from Google Play. Its sections include questions and answers, contact us, complaints, an interactive map of locations of embassies and consulates, and a news section on the ministry's activities.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**Android users can download the app from Google Play. Its sections include questions and answers, contact us, complaints, an interactive map of locations of embassies and consulates, and a news section on the ministry's activities.**

Islam El-Souissi, an Egyptian community leader in Rome, praised the app, saying "all Egyptians living abroad are expressing their great happiness" about it.

But some Egyptians who visited the app's page on Google Play said it is not available in some countries such as Sweden. Others complained that they had problems logging in.



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