

Iran 'actively facilitating' attacks on US bases

Says White House; Biden directs dept of defense to brace for more, respond appropriately

AGENCIES

The White House on Monday said Iran was in some cases "actively facilitating" rocket and drone attacks by Iranian-backed proxy groups on US military bases in Iraq and Syria, and President Biden has directed the Department of Defense to brace for more and respond appropriately.

White House spokesman John Kirby said there had been an uptick in such attacks over the last week, and especially over the last few days, but the US would not allow threats to its interests in the region to "go unchallenged."

He said the United States believed these groups were supported by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and the Iranian government, which was also continuing to support the Hamas and Hezbollah groups.

"We know that Iran is closely monitoring these events, and in some cases, actively facilitating these attacks and spurring on others who may want to exploit the conflict for their own good, or for that of Iran," he said.

There has been an increase in attacks on US forces since the conflict in Israel intensified on October 7 when members

from Hamas attacked southern Israel.

"We are deeply concerned about the potential for any significant escalation of these attacks in the days ahead," Kirby said.

Biden has sent naval power to the Middle East in the past two weeks, including two aircraft carriers, other warships and about 2,000 Marines, reports Reuters.

"We know Iran's goal is to maintain some level of deniability here, but we're not going to allow them to do that," Kirby said. "We also are not going to allow any threat to our interests in the region to go unchallenged."

A senior US defense official said Monday that the situation could get significantly worse.

"We see a prospect for much more significant escalation against US forces and personnel in the near-term," the official told journalists.

The US has promised major defense aid to Israel since the assault. Kirby confirmed that the United States has also sent a "few" military advisors to Israel.

The officers have experience in "the sorts of operations that Israel is conducting, and may conduct in the future" and were "over there to share some perspectives," Kirby said.



Palestinians carry a child casualty at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Freed Israeli hostage says 'I've been through hell'

REUTERS, Tel Aviv

An elderly Israeli hostage who was released by Hamas overnight said she had been beaten by the group's members when she was abducted and taken to Gaza on October 7, but was then treated well during her two-week captivity in the Palestinian enclave.

Yocheved Lifshitz, 85, was one of two elderly women freed late on Monday, leaving around 220 hostages still in the hands of Hamas, including both of their husbands.

"I've been through hell," Lifshitz told reporters, speaking in barely a whisper and seated in a wheelchair outside the Tel Aviv hospital where she was taken following her release.

Looking frail, Lifshitz said gunmen had burst into her kibbutz, Nir Oz, taking residents by surprise.

"They stormed into our homes. They beat people. They kidnapped others, the old and the young without distinction."

Israel's public broadcaster Kan has said that a third of Nir Oz's 400 residents was believed to have been abducted or killed on October 7. No official figure has been given. In all, 1,400 people were killed by Hamas fighters on October 7, Israel says.

Lifshitz herself was put on a motorbike and driven into nearby Gaza. "When I was on the bike, my legs were on one side and the rest of my body on the other side. The young men hit me on the way. They didn't break my ribs but it was painful and I had difficulty breathing."

Gaza displaced show signs of disease from crowding

Say doctors as 1.4m fled their homes for temporary shelters under Israel's heaviest-ever bombardment

REUTERS, Gaza

Doctors in Gaza say patients arriving at hospitals are showing signs of disease caused by overcrowding and poor sanitation after more than 1.4 million people fled their homes for temporary shelters under Israel's heaviest-ever bombardment.

Aid agencies have repeatedly warned of a health crisis in the tiny, crowded Palestinian enclave under an Israeli blockade that has cut off electricity, clean water and fuel, with only small UN convoys of food and medicine getting in.

"The crowding of civilians and the fact that most schools used as shelters are housing lots of people, it's a prime breeding ground for disease to spread," said Nahed Abu Taama, a public health doctor at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis.

Palestinian authorities say nearly 5,800 people have been killed by Israeli air and artillery strikes that followed the October 7 attack by Hamas who stormed into Israel killing more than 1,400 people and grabbing more than 200 hostages.

Israel has told everybody living in the northern half of the 45km-long (28 mile) Gaza Strip to move south but its strikes have flattened districts throughout the enclave.

With all hospitals running out of fuel to power their generators, doctors have warned that critical equipment, like incubators for newborns, risk stopping.

The Hamas-run Health Ministry said 40 medical centres had suspended operations at a time when the bombardment and displacement are putting increased stress on the system.

The World Health Organization warned that a third of Gaza hospitals were not operating. "We are on our knees asking for that sustained, scaled up, protected humanitarian operation," said WHO regional emergencies head Rick Brennan.

The private Indonesian Hospital, the biggest in north Gaza, said yesterday it had switched off everything except the last vital departments such as the Intensive Care Unit.

The only other hospital that had still been serving patients in northern Gaza, Beit Hanoun Hospital, stopped operations because of the intense bombardment of the town, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

"If the hospital doesn't get fuel, this is going to be a death sentence against the patients in northern Gaza," said Atel al-Kahlout, the hospital's director.

In the temporary shelters where displaced Palestinians are crowding with

their families hoping for safety from the bombs, people are starting to suffer from stomach complaints, lung infections and rashes said Abu Taama of Nasser Hospital.

"It's hot in the tent under the midday sun and there are insects and flies... At night it's cold and there aren't enough blankets for everyone. The children are all sick. Some are coughing, some have runny noses, some have fevers at night," said Sojood Najm, a woman staying at a UN shelter.

She fled her home in Gaza City with her husband and three children and they have been living in a tent for nine days, unable to bathe. "Every day I cry to my mother," said Najm.

At a pharmacy, the owner said there were few stores left. People had stockpiled over the counter medicines, but there were concerns that treatments for chronic illnesses could run out.

With electricity cut off, many people had gathered at a petrol station equipped with solar panels in order to charge their phones but it was hit by an air strike overnight, killing several people, said a neighbour, Abdallah Abu al-Atta.

Israel said it had killed dozens of Hamas fighters in strikes overnight, one of the most intense bombardments since the war began, but that it would take time to achieve its aim of destroying the Hamas group.

Since the last major warfare between Israel and Hamas, the group has grown more adept at urban warfare. Unlike in some previous wars, Hamas fighters are very rarely seen on the streets, operating instead almost entirely from under cover.



Firefighters work to put out fire at a house that was hit by shelling in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict in Donetsk, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CORRUPTION CASES

Pak ex-PM Nawaz Sharif gets bail

REUTERS, Islamabad

A Pakistan High Court yesterday granted bail to three-times former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in corruption cases until October 26, his lawyer said. Sharif was convicted on corruption charges in two cases after his ouster as prime minister in 2017. He returned to Pakistan last week after four years in self-exile in London, promising to work toward an economic recovery for the South Asian country. The Islamabad High Court extended the protective bail for Sharif after prosecutors from the anti-graft agency said they did not have any objection to the extension as long as he turned up for the trial, said Sharif's lawyer, Azam Nazeer.

Putin laughs off body double rumours

REUTERS, Moscow

The Kremlin yesterday denied a report that President Vladimir Putin was ill, and laughed off persistent rumours that he used body doubles to cover for him in public appearances. "Everything is fine with him, this is absolutely another fake," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said when asked about an unsourced report by a Russian Telegram channel, picked up by some Western media, that the president had suffered a serious health episode on Sunday evening. The spokesman laughed in response to a further question about body doubles, and denied that Putin had any.

Armed attacks in Mexico leave 24 dead

AFP, Acapulco

Three separate armed attacks in Mexico on Monday left at least 24 people dead, including a dozen police officers, authorities said about the latest violence to hit regions plagued by drug trafficking. In the deadliest incident, unidentified attackers targeted a security patrol in Guerrero state's municipality of Coyuca de Benitez, prosecutor Alejandro Hernandez said. At least 13 people were killed and two others wounded in that attack, the state prosecutor's office said in a statement, with Hernandez earlier having confirmed that at least 11 of those killed were members of the municipal police force. A senior state security official was traveling in the convoy when it was attacked, authorities said, without confirming media reports that he was murdered along with police bodyguards.

REBEL-HELD SYRIA

Russian strikes kill six civilians

AFP, Beirut

Six people, including two children, were killed yesterday in Russian strikes on a displacement camp in Syria's northwest, the country's last main rebel bastion, a war monitor said. Tensions have soared in northwest Syria since a drone attack on a military academy graduation ceremony in Homs earlier this month killed dozens of people. "Six civilians, including a woman and two of her children, were killed and eight others injured after Russian warplanes carried out two air strikes on a camp for displaced people" in Idlib province, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

China ousts defence minister

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday removed defence minister Li Shangfu and ousted former foreign minister Qin Gang from its cabinet, state media reported, as part of a major reshuffle of its top leadership.

"According to the sixth meeting of the standing committee of the People's Republic of China's 14th National People's Congress, it was decided on October 24, 2023... to remove Li Shangfu from the positions of State Council member and Minister of Defence," state broadcaster CCTV said.

The committee also "removed Qin Gang's position of State Councillor", CCTV said in its regular evening news bulletin.

CCTV did not name a replacement for Li, who has not been seen in public for months, and did not give reasons for the ministers' removal.

Science and technology minister Wang Zhigang and finance minister Liu Kun were also removed from their posts, to be replaced by current Ministry of Science and Technology party secretary Yin Hejun and finance ministry party secretary Lan Fo'an respectively, according to CCTV.