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U.S. LAUNCHES CRUISE MISSILES AT SYRIAN AIR BASE IN RESPONSE TO CHEMICAL ATTACK

April 6, 2017 wsj.com reported: "The U.S. military launched nearly 60 Tomahawk cruise missiles against a Syrian air base Friday, responding to mounting calls for a display of force in the wake of this week's suspected chemical-weapons attack in Syria.

The strikes represented the first time a U.S. military operation deliberately targeted the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and came a day after U.S. President Donald Trump said the chemical attack in Idlib province earlier this week had changed his thinking on Syria and Mr. Assad. Speaking inside his Mar-a-Lago resort, President Trump said he ordered targeted missile strikes at a Syrian airfield as a response to the "barbaric" chemical weapons attack. The Assad regime, Mr. Trump said, "choked out the lives of helpless" people in Syria.

"It is in the vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons," Mr. Trump said. "There can be no dispute that Syria used banned chemical weapons."

The strike represented a limited operation and was intended in part to signal that the chemical attack wasn't acceptable. But it also thrust Mr. Trump, his still-forming administration and the American military more deeply into a complex and treacherous conflict that has defied resolution for five years.

Now at war with Mr. Assad, the Trump administration must decide how much further to go and how to contend with possible reaction and retaliation from the Syrian regime and its many allies, including Russia, Iran and the militant groups Hezbollah and Hamas.

The U.S. strikes targeted the Shayrat Airfield near Homs, Syria, and were meant to cripple the base's airfield and other infrastructure, preventing the regime from using the facility or fueling its planes. The air base was thought by U.S. officials to be connected to the chemical attack. A U.S. military official said earlier Thursday that the U.S. had intelligence that traced the attack to a particular plane, and therefore might have sought to target the plane's air base."..."



JERUSALEM ARABS ENRAGED BY IDEA OF PASSOVER ON TEMPLE MOUNT

April 5, 2017 Arutz Sheva 7 reported: "Al-Quds General Mufti (Islamic scholar) Sheikh Muhammad Hussein warned Israel of the possible consequences which may result if Jews 'break into Al-Aqsa mosque and hold religious Pesach (Passover) ceremonies on the Temple Mount.'

Hussein serves as the mufti for the Arab areas in Judea, Samaria, and Jerusalem, as well as a member of the Islamic-Christian Association. In a statement published on Monday, Hussein said that 'continued attacks against sites holy to the Muslims and Palestinians, and especially against Al-Aqsa, will turn the entire region into a ticking time bomb and cause a religious war, who's results cannot be fathomed.'

He also called on all Muslims to strengthen their ties to Al-Aqsa by holding prayers there 'in response to the activities of Jewish organizations, who are trying to cause a dangerous escalation.'..."

WORLD WAR III NIGHTMARE SCENARIO BREWING IN THE EAST CHINA SEA

April 4, 2017 msn.com reported: "While the world watches mounting military tensions in the South China Sea, another, more ominous situation is brewing in the East China Sea that could be the trigger point for a major war between the superpowers. At the heart of tensions are eight uninhabited islands controlled by Japan that are close to important shipping lanes, rich fishing grounds and potential oil and gas reserves. China contests Japan's claims and is escalating its military activity in Japan airspace. In response, Japan has been doubling its F-15 jet intercepts.

The situation increases the risk of an accidental confrontation — and could draw other countries, like the United States, into a conflict. It's a topic President Trump will likely bring up with Chinese President Xi Jinping at his Mar-a-Lago estate this week.

From the departure lounge at Naha International Airport on the Japanese island of Okinawa, passengers can easily see what's going on. Between the regular comings and goings of commercial airliners, first one, then two, then two more F-15 fighter jets streak down the runway that Japanese Air Self Defense Forces (JASDF) share with Naha's regular airline traffic. Rising rapidly from the tarmac, the quartet of combat aircraft heads out to sea to intercept yet another Chinese military aircraft — usually other fighter jets, sometimes a bomber or reconnaissance plane — flying into or close to Japanese airspace.

Such airborne intercepts are on the rise over the East China Sea, with Japan now averaging roughly two intercepts of Chinese aircraft per day since April of last year, nearly twice as many as in the 12 months prior. In response to the uptick in Chinese military activity in airspace Japan considers its responsibility, JASDF has doubled the number of fighter aircraft at its Naha Air Base, adding a second squadron of F-15Js — the Japanese version of the U.S.-made F-15 fighter jet — in January of last year.

The increased intrusion of Chinese military air traffic into airspace protected by the JASDF, along with the uptick in aerial intercepts, heightens the risk of an accident or misunderstanding between the two militaries — a situation that could rapidly escalate, given the already heightened military tensions in the region. Such an incident, intentional or not, could quickly spiral, potentially drawing U.S. forces in the region into the fray.

"They've routinized their intrusions into our territorial sea space," says Eisuke Tanabe, a senior policy coordinator in the joint staff councilor's office at the Japanese Ministry of Defense, noting that incursions by Chinese surface ships into waters claimed by Japan are increasing alongside airborne incursions by Chinese fighter jets. "We send our fighters, and that makes the situation possibly very dangerous, when fighters and fighters come close."..."

CHINESE WARY ABOUT U.S. MISSILE SYSTEM BECAUSE CAPABILITIES UNKNOWN: EXPERTS

April 4, 2017 Reuters reported: "China is steadfastly opposed to the deployment of advanced U.S. anti-missile radars in South Korea because it does not know whether the defenses, intended for North Korean missiles, are capable of tracking and countering Beijing's own nuclear program, experts say.

Beijing's resistance to the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) anti-missile system put up south of Seoul has become a major thorn in bilateral ties with the United States and is bound to be discussed at this week's summit meeting between President Xi Jinping and President Donald Trump.

While the United States says THAAD is needed to protect Seoul from the threat posed by North Korea's growing nuclear and missile programs, some Chinese strategists believe it is also a threat to the viability of China's nuclear deterrent.

'It is clear that there is no one in China who really knows the technical capability of THAAD and that's part of the problem,' said Zhang Baohui, a Hong Kong-based mainland expert on China's nuclear deterrent.

'THAAD's full capabilities are secret so there is a real knowledge gap among Chinese strategists. If they are misplaced, they are at least genuine in their concern – they have to assume a worst case scenario.' ..."

ST PETERSBURG METRO EXPLOSIONS KILL TEN

April 3, 2017 BBC News reported: "At least 10 people have been killed in explosions at underground stations in St Petersburg, Russian media report.

The Tass and Interfax agencies reported the blasts hit the Sennaya Ploschad and nearby Tekhnologicheskoy Institut stations in the centre of the city. Images posted on social media showed a carriage in Sennaya station with its doors blown out with casualties nearby.

President Vladimir Putin, who is in the city, said all causes, including terrorism, were being investigated. Interfax reported that at least 20 people had been injured, and that one of the blasts involved a device filled with shrapnel..."

S. KOREA, JAPAN, US HOLD DRILL AGAINST N. KOREA SUBMARINES

April 3, 2017 spacedaily.com reported: "South Korea, Japan and the US held a joint naval exercise Monday aimed at countering missile threats from North Korean submarines, Seoul's defense ministry said, amid mounting concerns over the hermit state's weapons programme.

Pyongyang is on a quest to develop a long-range missile capable of hitting the US mainland with a nuclear warhead, and has so far staged five nuclear tests, two of them last year.

The three-day drills involving more than 800 troops kicked off after US President Donald Trump warned Sunday that the United States is prepared to act unilaterally to deal with North Korea's nuclear program if China proves unwilling to help. The exercise began off South Korea's southern coast near Japan, featuring multiple naval destroyers and helicopters used in anti-submarine warfare, the ministry said.

It was aimed at "ensuring effective response to the North's submarine threats including the submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM)," and "demonstrates the three countries' strong determination", according to the ministry.

Tensions have escalated in the region following a series of missile launches by North Korea in recent months and reports suggesting Pyongyang may be preparing another atomic test.

In February the North simultaneously fired four ballistic missiles off its east coast, three of which fell provocatively close to Japan, in what it said was a drill for an attack on US bases in the neighbouring Asian country. Last August Pyongyang also successfully test-fired a SLBM 500 kilometres towards Japan, far exceeding any previous sub-launched tests, in what the North's leader Kim Jong-Un hailed as the "greatest success." ..."

EGYPT'S SISSI SAID SET TO PRESENT TRUMP WITH MIDEAST PEACE PLAN

April 3, 2017 timesofisrael.com reported: "Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi and Jordan's King Abdullah II will reportedly present US President Donald Trump with a framework to an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal during their visits to the White House this week.

Based on a two-state solution, the framework aims to establish a basis for fresh peace talks between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, according to Israel Radio citing a Gulf media outlet on Monday.

According to the report, the initiative would start with a series of gestures, including a long-delayed release of Palestinian prisoners and a complete stop to all Israeli settlement building in the West Bank.

The Dubai-based al-Khaleej Times said Trump would respond to the Jordanian-Egyptian initiative during his meeting with PA President Mahmoud Abbas tentatively scheduled for later this month in Washington..."

LONDONISTAN: 500 CLOSED CHURCHES, 423 NEW MOSQUES

April 2, 2017 Arutz Sheva 7 reported: "'London is more Islamic than many Muslim countries put together,' says London Islamic preacher Maulana Syed Raza Rizvi.

The city of London – dubbed 'Londonistan' by outspoken journalist Melanie Phillips – now has 423 new mosques, which are 'built on the sad ruins of English Christianity.' So writes Italian journalist and writer, Arutz Sheva columnist Giulio Meotti in an article written for Gatestone Institute reported here.

The Hyatt United Church, for instance, on Hamilton Road, was purchased by the Egyptian community and is being converted into a mosque. St Peter's Church is now the Madina Mosque, and the Brick Lane Mosque used to be a Methodist church. Not only buildings are converted, writes Meotti, but also people: 'The number of converts to Islam [in London] has doubled; often they embrace radical Islam, as with Khalid Masood, the terrorist who struck Westminster.'

'Given the current trends,' he predicts, 'Christianity in England is becoming a relic, while Islam will be the religion of the future.'

It is estimated that by 2020, the number of Muslims attending prayers will top the number of Christians attending weekly Mass, 683,000 to 679,000. Within a generation, the number of churchgoers will be three times lower than that of Muslims who go regularly to mosque on Friday..."

