‘Errant Syrian missile’ fired at Israeli jet hits Negev, triggers Dimona siren

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/rocket-alert-sirens-sound-near-dimona-blasts-felt-in-central-israel-jerusalem/>

Incoming rocket sirens were triggered in the northern Negev in the area near Israel’s nuclear reactor in the predawn hours of Thursday morning, followed by massive explosions that could be heard throughout much of the country.

The Israel Defense Forces said the sirens in the northern Negev, not far from the country’s nuclear reactor, were set off not by a directed attack on a target within Israel but by an errant Syrian anti-aircraft missile that had been fired at an Israeli jet during an airstrike on targets in the Syrian Golan Heights.

“A launch was detected of a surface-to-air missile from Syrian territory toward Israeli territory, which fell in the Negev region,” the IDF said.

There were no reports of injuries or damage.

IDF troops launched an interceptor missile at the incoming projectile to try to shoot it down, though it was not immediately clear if this was successful. The IDF said it was still investigating the matter as of Thursday morning. The Israeli military refused to identify which of its air defense batteries was used.

Pieces of the Syrian surface-to-air missile landed in open areas of the Ramat Negev region of southern Israel, local authorities said in a message to residents, with some pieces reportedly striking some 30 kilometers from the Dimona nuclear reactor.

In response to the launch of the surface-to-air missile, Israeli jets conducted a second round of airstrikes in Syria, bombing the battery that fired the projectile, as well as other air defense systems, the IDF said.

According to Syrian state media, four soldiers were injured in the Israeli strike and material damage was caused.

The incident came amid peak tensions between Israel and Iran, after an attack on Iran’s Natanz nuclear site earlier this month, which has been widely attributed to the Jewish state. Iran has vowed to retaliate for the alleged Israeli sabotage.

IDF Spokesperson Hidai Zilberman stressed that the military did not believe this was a deliberate attack on the country or its nuclear facility.

“There was no intention of hitting the nuclear reactor in Dimona,” Zilberman told reporters.

According to Zilberman, the projectile appeared to be a Russian-made SA-5 surface-to-air missile, a particularly large projectile, weighing several thousand kilograms with a 200-kilogram warhead.

Residents of Jerusalem and central Israel reported feeling reverberations of an explosion. It was not immediately clear if this was caused by the impact of the Syrian missile or by a failed interception attempt.

According to Syrian state media, the Israeli attack began at 1:38 a.m., with IDF jets conducting strikes on targets in the Syrian-controlled Golan Heights.

The missile set off the sirens three minutes later near Abu Qrenat, an area between Beersheba and Dimona, as well as the military’s large Ariel Sharon Base nearby, locations that are not generally targeted by rocket fire.

Roughly an hour later, Israeli fighter jets conducted a second round of strikes on Syrian air defense batteries near Damascus, according to Israeli and Syrian sources.

Though uncommon, Syrian surface-to-air missiles fired at Israeli fighter jets have in the past caused damage and triggered sirens as they fell back to earth.

In 2019, an SA-5 missile that had been fired at an Israeli aircraft [landed in northern Cyprus](https://www.timesofisrael.com/officials-probe-mystery-explosion-in-northern-cyprus/), causing an explosion and a large fire in a village there.

In 2017, two SA-5 missiles that were launched at Israeli jets [landed in eastern Israel](https://www.timesofisrael.com/iaf-arrow-battery-intercepts-syrian-missile-in-first-reported-use-of-the-system/), while a third landed in Jordanian territory, without causing injury or damage. In that incident, the IDF fired an Arrow 2 interceptor at the incoming projectile in what was the first operational use of the system.