

'Syria hit by new missile attacks'

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BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian government-run media said the country's air defenses confronted a new "aggression," shooting down missiles over the central region of Homs and a suburb of Damascus early yesterday.

The reports did not say who carried out the pre-dawn strikes, which were reported by Syrian state TV and the government-run Syrian Central

Media. The reports, however, were not carried by the official news agency SANA on its website.

The reports came just a few days after the United States, Britain and France conducted airstrikes targeting alleged chemical weapons facilities in Syria, in retaliation for a suspected chemical weapons attack that they blamed on the Syrian government.

The Pentagon denied any American military activity in the area yesterday. There was no comment from Israel, which frequently carries out airstrikes in Syria but rarely acknowledges them.

The Syrian Central Media said six missiles targeted the Shayrat air base in Homs, adding that Syrian air defenses shot down most of them. Previously, the same air base was hit by US Tomahawk missiles in April last year, in retaliation for a suspected chemical weapons attack in the country's north that killed around 90 people.

The Syrian outlet also reported another, separate airstrike on the Dumayr air base, in a suburb of the capital, Damascus.

Earlier this month, four Iranian military personnel were killed in an airstrike on Syria's T4 air base, also in Homs. Syria and its main allies Iran and Russia blamed Israel for that attack. Israel did not confirm or deny mounting the raid.

Experts from the international chemical weapons watchdog are now in Damascus and have been waiting to visit the site of the suspected chemical attack in the town of Douma, just east of Damascus.

On Monday, Syrian and Russian authorities prevented investigators from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons from going to the scene, the head of the OPCW said, blocking international efforts to establish what happened and who was to blame.

The US and France say they have evidence that poison gas was used in the April 7 attack in Douma, killing at least 40 people, and that Syrian President Bashar Assad's military was behind it.

But they have made none of that evidence public, even after they, along with Britain, carried out airstrikes on Saturday, bombing sites they said were linked to Syria's chemical weapons program.

Syria and its ally Russia deny any chemical attack took place, and Russian officials went even further, accusing Britain of staging a "fake" chemical attack. British Prime Minister Theresa May accused the two countries — whose forces now control the town east of Damascus — of trying to cover up evidence.