

Israeli air raids kill eight in southern Syria

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Damascus, October 25 (RHC)-- Israeli strikes have killed at least eight soldiers in southern Syria, according to Syrian state media, in an attack that the Israeli army claimed was a response to earlier rocket fire.

Persistent rocket and artillery exchanges with Lebanon's Iran-backed armed group Hezbollah and allied Palestinian factions across Israel's northern borders with Lebanon and Syria in recent weeks have raised fears of a new front in Israel's war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

“Around 1:45am [22:45 GMT Tuesday], the Israeli enemy carried out an aerial aggression from the occupied Golan Heights,” Syrian state media said on Wednesday. The attack also wounded seven soldiers and caused material damage, it added.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor with a wide network of sources on the ground in the war-ravaged country, put the number of dead soldiers at 11, including four officers. It said the attacks “destroyed arms depots and a Syrian air defence radar” and also targeted an infantry unit.

On Tuesday evening, the Syrian Observatory had said “fighters loyal to Hezbollah”, which fights alongside government forces in the Syrian conflict, had “launched rockets towards the occupied Syrian Golan” from Syria’s southern province of Deraa.

The Israeli army said on Wednesday its “fighter jets struck military infrastructure and mortars belonging to the Syrian army in response to the launches towards Israel yesterday [Tuesday]”. Residents in Syria’s Deraa province told the AFP news agency that Israeli planes dropped leaflets after the strike, warning the Syrian army and Palestinian factions against launching attacks towards Israel.

“Syrian commanders ... bear full responsibility for operations ... incoming from Syrian territory,” the leaflets read, adding that every attack “on the state of Israel will be met with an iron fist.”

On Sunday, Israeli strikes put out of service Syria’s two main airports, Damascus and Aleppo, Syrian state media said.

Israel has been bombarding Gaza since fighters of Hamas, the group that rules the Gaza Strip, attacked southern Israel towns on October 7, killing at least 1,400 people and taking more than 220 captives, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel has responded with withering air raids, killing 5,791 people so far, according to officials in Gaza. It has also imposed a near-total land, sea and air blockade of the enclave.

During more than 10 years of war in Syria, Israel has launched hundreds of air raids on its northern neighbour, primarily targeting Hezbollah fighters and other Iran-backed forces as well as Syrian army positions.

Israel rarely comments on individual strikes it carries out on Syria, but it has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch foe Iran, which supports President Bashar al-Assad’s government, to expand its presence.

Israel occupied much of the Golan Heights in the 1967 war and later annexed it in a move never recognised by the United Nations.

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