

Israel shells Lebanon with tank and artillery fire

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Israel shells Lebanon with tank and artillery fire (File photo)

Beirut, July 20 (RHC)-- The Israeli military said its artillery shelled southern Lebanon after two rockets were fired from Lebanon into Israeli territory. Israel's army said in a statement on Tuesday that aerial defences intercepted one of the rockets, and the second fell in an open area. No injuries or damage were reported.

The United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, said its radar detected rockets fired from southern Lebanon towards Israel just before 4 a.m. (01:00 GMT) on Tuesday. Subsequently, Israeli artillery fired towards Lebanon, the UN force said.

Lebanon's army said Israel fired 12 artillery shells at the Wadi Hammoul area, causing no damage or casualties. The army said its units there had found three launching pads for grad rockets in the al-Qulaylah area, one of them with a rocket prepared for firing that was subsequently disabled by the army's specialised units.

Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz said in a statement that Lebanon was responsible for the overnight rocket fire and that "Israel will act against any threat to its sovereignty and its citizens."

"We will not allow the social, political and economic crisis in Lebanon to turn into a security threat to Israel," Gantz said.

Lebanon has struggled with an unprecedented crisis, including an economic meltdown that has raised concerns of a surge in violence there. UNIFIL said it was in contact with military officials in Lebanon and Israel to "urge maximum restraint" to avoid further escalation. Both the peacekeepers and the Lebanese army increased security in the area and launched an investigation, the mission said.

In May, rockets were fired from southern Lebanon several times in one week, according to the country's military. Israel's army said the rockets landed in the sea.

On May 14, a Lebanese man was shot and killed by Israeli troops after he and others tried to cross a security fence on the border with Israel while protesting in support of Palestinians marking the 73rd anniversary of the Nakba, what Palestinians call "the catastrophe" that befell them in the war against Israel in 1948.

The incident on Tuesday along the Lebanon-Israel frontier came hours after a Syrian military official said Israel carried out air attacks near the northern Syrian city of Aleppo. The Syrian state news agency said air defences intercepted most of the missiles in the attack.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor that has activists on the ground in Syria, said the Israeli raids targeted weapons depots belonging to Iranian-backed armed groups operating in the region.

Israel has carried out scores of air raids in Syria in recent years targeting Iranian forces there, and attacking what Israel says are weapons shipments bound for the Iranian-backed Hezbollah group in Lebanon.

The Israeli military rarely comments on these attacks. Israel fought a 2006 war against Hezbollah, which is the dominant force in southern Lebanon and possesses advanced rockets. The border has been mostly quiet since then.

Lebanon has been run by a caretaker administration for nearly a year, while its currency has collapsed, jobs have vanished and banks have frozen accounts in what lenders have called one of the most severe financial crises of modern times.

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