At least two killed in southern Lebanon as Hezbollah-Israel fighting soars

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Smoke billows from the site of an Israeli air raid on the southern Lebanese village of Khiam. [Rabih Daher/AFP]

Beirut, June 9 (RHC)-- At least two people have been reported killed in southern Lebanon as cross-border fighting between Hezbollah and Israel continues amid the threat of wider war. The two killings were the result of Israeli attacks on the outskirts of the town of Aitaroun, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported on Saturday. The agency said Israeli missiles targeted a cafe at a petrol station.

In a statement, Hezbollah accused Israel of "targeting civilians", while Israel's military later said its forces had targeted a Hezbollah fighter in the area. The identities of those killed were not immediately known.

Also on Saturday, Hezbollah said that it had fired Falaq 2 rockets at a military command centre in northern Israel. A security source told the Reuters news agency that it was the first time the rockets had been fired at Israel. Falaq 1 rockets have been used by Hezbollah in attacks on Israel several times.

The violence comes as both Hezbollah and Israel have increased cross-border fighting that has persisted since October of last year, with the Lebanon-based group saying it seeks to draw Israeli resources away from the war in Gaza.

However, Israeli officials have ratcheted up rhetoric in recent days, raising the prospect of more destructive escalation along its northern border. Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that his country was "prepared for very intense operation" along its border with Lebanon.

"One way or another, we will restore security to the north," the Israeli prime minister and war criminal said on Wednesday. That day an Israeli soldier was killed in a Hezbollah drone attack in the town of Hurfeish. Ten others were injured.

Meanwhile, far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir went further, saying on Telegram on Tuesday that "all Hezbollah strongholds should also burn and be destroyed," and calling for "War!" A day earlier, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for a "ground invasion" to push back Hezbollah fighters from the border.

For his part, deputy Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem told Al Jazeera earlier this week that the group did not seek to widen the war, but was "ready" regardless. He warned of "devastation, destruction and displacement" for Israelis if that came to pass.

Israeli attacks since October 7 have killed more than 300 members of Hezbollah and about 80 civilians, according to the group and Lebanese officials. Attacks from Lebanon on Israel have killed 18 Israeli soldiers and 10 civilians, the Israeli military has said.

The fighting has been the most volatile since Israel and Hezbollah went to war in 2006. Tens of thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes on both sides of the border.

On Saturday, Hezbollah claimed six attacks on Israel. They included the targeting of the Zarit barracks and Israeli soldiers in a newly developed artillery range in the occupied Shebaa Farms. The group claimed a "direct hit" in both instances.

Israel said it had intercepted two rockets from Lebanon towards the Zarit area in the Upper Galilee region. The military also said that its jets had struck infrastructure in the area of Khiam. Its tanks had earlier fired at a Hezbollah military structure in the Kfarkela area.

Israeli attacks using "incendiary phosphorus shells" also caused forest fires in the area of Alma ash-Shaab, NNA reported.

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