

Israel reportedly begins targeted ground raids in Lebanon

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Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli air strike on a southern suburb of Beirut [Fadel Itani/AFP]

Beirut, October 1 (RHC)-- The Israeli military says it has begun “targeted ground raids” on villages in southern Lebanon. The incursions backed by air strikes and artillery began “a few hours ago”, targeting Hezbollah “in villages close to the border” with Israel, according to a statement released early on Tuesday by the military.

The report from Tel Aviv added that the raids were “limited, localised and targeted” against Hezbollah.

The incursion came shortly after it was approved by Israeli political leaders and marked a new stage in Israel's war against Hezbollah. The Palestinian resistance group Hezbollah began low-intensity strikes on Israeli targets a day after Israel launched its war on Gaza last October following an attack by the Palestinian group Hamas.

Earlier on Monday, U.S. officials said Israel had launched small ground raids against Hezbollah and sealed off communities along its northern border on Monday as Israeli artillery pounded southern Lebanon.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Israel informed the U.S. about the raids, which he said were described as "limited operations focused on Hezbollah infrastructure near the border."

The sounds of airstrikes were heard throughout the Lebanese capital Beirut and smoke rose from its southern suburbs, strongholds for Hezbollah, shortly after Israel ordered residents of three buildings to evacuate.

There were no reports of direct clashes between Israeli troops and Hezbollah militants, who were last involved in ground combat during a month-long war in 2006. Tens of thousands of people on both sides have fled their homes over the past year.

Last week, Israel escalated its attacks on Hezbollah, targeting the group's leadership in Lebanon. On Friday, Hezbollah's veteran leader Hassan Nasrallah was killed in an Israeli air attack on the southern suburbs of Beirut. Israel has also killed several other top commanders of the Lebanese armed group.

Hezbollah has continued to fire rockets and missiles at Israeli targets. On Monday, in the group's first public broadcast since Nasrallah's assassination, Hezbollah deputy chief Naim Qassem said it was prepared for any potential Israeli ground incursion and a long war.

When asked about reports that Israel was preparing for a "limited" ground invasion of Lebanon, U.S. President Joe Biden called for a ceasefire. Asked if he was comfortable with Israel's plan, Biden replied: "I'm comfortable with them stopping."

However, he did not elaborate on any plans to halt the conflict, or discuss U.S. supplies of weapons and military aid to their ally Israel.

More than 100,000 people have fled to Syria from Lebanon since the conflict escalated this month.

Lebanon's acting Prime Minister Najib Mikati has said the government is ready to fully implement the 2006 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which aimed to end Hezbollah's armed presence south of the Litani River as part of an agreement to stop war with Israel.

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