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Photo: Haim Horenstein

Helicopter carrying the wounded troops lands in Be'er Sheva

Photo: Haim Horenstein

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IDF officer moderately wounded, 2 soldiers lightly hurt in pre-dawn Gaza attack  
Israeli military says a Hamas operative belonging to a force responsible for restraining border violence breached the security fence and opened fire at the troops called into the area; the militant's brother is believed to be an amputee Palestinian protester killed by IDF last year

Yoav Zitun, Elior Levy, MatanTzuri|Published: 08.01.19 , 08:29

An Israeli officer was moderately wounded and two other soldiers had been lightly hurt after a Gaza militant breached the security fence in the southern Gaza Strip and opened fire at IDF troops in a pre-dawn attack on Thursday. The military shelled a Hamas outpost adjacent to the border in response.

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Israeli military said the perpetrator - Hani Abu Salah - who was killed during a shoot-out with the soldiers, belonged to a Hamas unit responsible for restraining border violence along the security fence, including unauthorized launching of rockets and trespassing into Israeli territory.

Gaza border area where the incident took place (Photo: Yoav Zitun)

Gaza border area where the incident took place (Photo: Yoav Zitun)

IDF Spokesperson Brigadier General Ronen Manelis said the Gaza militant was armed with an AK-47 rifle and several hand grenades. "At this point we understand the terrorist acted independently. The body of the terrorist is currently in our territory," said Manelis.

According to sources in Gaza, the militant's brother - Fadi Abu Salah - was a disabled Palestinian man killed by Israeli sniper fire during mass protests in the Strip in May 2018.

The incident sparked international criticism of the tactics used by the IDF to restrain the violent protesters during the weekly marches.

Fadi Abu Salah and his brother, Hamas operative responsible for border attack  
Fadi Abu Salah and his brother, Hamas operative responsible for border attack

In the meantime, the IDF officer has undergone an operation at Soroka Medical Center in Be'er Sheva, where all three of the wounded had been hospitalized following the incident.

The attack occurred in the area where IDF is currently constructing an underground barrier along the border in order to prevent the terror group from building cross-border attack tunnels.

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Helicopter carrying the wounded troops lands in Be'er Sheva (Photo: Haim Horenstein)  
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The militant was identified approaching Israeli territory around 2am by the soldiers remotely monitoring the area along the security fence. "It's unclear whether they realized the suspect was armed," said the military spokesperson.

The Golani force that arrived on the scene shortly after, found themselves under attack by the Palestinian who hurled a hand grenade and fired shots toward the troops. A platoon commander was moderately wounded in the shootout, while two other soldiers had been lightly hurt by shrapnel.

The Hamas operative then hid a few dozen meters away from the security fence, separating Kibbutz Kissufim and the city of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza. He was located by the security forces an hour later and fatally shot.

Photo: Reuters

Israeli strike in Syria

Photo: Reuters

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Syrian media: Israeli missile hits in Quneitra

The state news agency says the attack in Syria's Golan Heights that hit a village caused only material damages and there were no reports of casualties

Reuters|Published: 08.01.19 , 15:02

An Israeli missile hit a village in the Quneitra countryside in Syria's Golan Heights near the frontier between the two countries on Thursday, Syrian state media said.

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State news agency SANA described it as "an Israeli attack" that caused only material damages.

The Al Majd Hadith TV channel reported that Hezbollah militants were seen in the area sometime before the strike.

Israeli strike in Syria

Israeli strike in Syria

Although Israeli strikes in the war-torn country have reportedly become a common occurrence, daytime attacks are rare. It remains unclear whether the area was attacked from the air or via a surface-to-surface missile.

During Syria's eight-year war, Israel has carried out strikes in Syria which it says have targeted regional arch rival Iran and Tehran's ally Hezbollah.

The Arabic-language Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper reported on Tuesday that Israeli warplanes bombed Iranian-linked targets in Iraq and Syria in July.

The sources told the London-based newspaper that on July 19, Israel carried out an attack on the base of an Iran-linked paramilitary group in the northern Salahuddin province of Iraq.

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Asharq Al-Awsat also attributed an attack on the Daraa province on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights last week to Israel, as part of the same efforts to disturb Iranian entrenchment in the area.

Parchin nuclear facility in Iran

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U.S. renews Iran sanctions waivers

The Washington Post reports the Treasury Department asked for more time to consider the effects of possible sanctions on Russian, Chinese and European companies

Reuters|Published: 07.31.19 , 12:13

The United States is set to announce this week it will renew sanctions waivers for five Iran nuclear programs that allow Russia, China and European countries to continue civilian nuclear cooperation with Iran, the Washington Post reported on Tuesday.

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President Donald Trump, in an Oval Office meeting last week, sided with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin who argued for renewing the waivers over objections by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and national security adviser John Bolton, the Post said.

U.S. President Donald Trump at Jamestown event Tuesday (Photo: AP)

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Mnuchin “argued to Trump that if the sanctions were not again waived as required by law by Aug. 1, the United States would have to sanction Russian, Chinese and European firms that are involved in projects inside Iran that were established as part of the 2015 nuclear deal,” the Post said, citing six unnamed officials.

A State Department spokesman declined to comment to Reuters.

Pompeo in May extended five of seven sanctions waivers for 90 days. The waivers allow work at Iran’s Bushehr nuclear plant, the Fordow enrichment facility, the Arak nuclear complex and the Tehran Research Reactor.

Arak heavy water reactor (photo: Reuters) (Photo: Reuters)

Arak heavy water reactor (photo: Reuters)

Trump abandoned the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran and six world powers last year, arguing that he wanted a bigger deal that not only limited Iran’s atomic work but also reined in its support for proxies in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon, and curbed its ballistic missile program. Trump tightened sanctions on Iran in May to try to choke off its oil exports.

The Post said the Treasury Department asked for more time to consider the effects of possible sanctions on Russian, Chinese and European companies, and quoted a senior administration official as saying the goal of ending the waivers remained.

“These waivers can be revoked at any time, as developments with Iran warrant. But because of the Treasury Department’s legitimate concerns, we’ve decided to extend them for now,” the official said, according to the Post.

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Fears of a direct U.S.- Iranian conflict have risen since May with several attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf, Iran’s downing of a U.S. surveillance drone, and a plan for U.S. air strikes on Iran last month that Trump called off at the last minute.

Dutch parliament approves limited ban on burqa, niqab

Limited ban on 'face-covering clothing' in public places kicks off in Netherlands, pushed for by far-right politician Geert Wilders for over a decade

Associated Press|Published: 08.01.19 , 20:37

The Netherlands has approved a limited ban on “face-covering clothing” in public places, including Islamic veils and robes such as the burqa and niqab but not the hijab, which covers only the hair. Firebrand far-right politician Geert Wilders had pushed for the ban for over a decade.

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Parliament's upper chamber made the final approval in a vote Tuesday.

Woman wearing a burqa in Rotterdam (Photo: AP)

Woman wearing a burqa in Rotterdam (Photo: AP)

Wilders' Freedom Party claimed the development as a major victory, while Senator Marjolein Faber-Van de Klashorst called it "a historical day because this is the first step to de-Islamize the Netherlands."

"This is the first step and the next step is to close all the mosques in the Netherlands," she said, building on Wilders' anti-Islam rhetoric.

Women protesting the burqa ban in Denmark (Photo: Reuters)

Women protesting the burqa ban in Denmark (Photo: Reuters)

The Dutch law is described by the government as "religion-neutral," and does not go as far as more extensive bans in neighboring countries like France and Belgium. It applies on public transport and in education institutions, health institutions such as hospitals, and government buildings.

Successive Dutch governments have sought to ban niqabs, which cover most of the face but still shows the eyes, and burqas, which cover the face and body — even though studies suggest that only a few hundred women in the Netherlands wear the garments. The ban also covers ski masks and full-face helmets.

A woman wearing a burqa in Belgium (Photo: AP)

A woman wearing a burqa in Belgium (Photo: AP)

The government said people still have full freedom on how to dress, except when it is necessary to have full facial contact — for instance in education and health-related situations.

The ban does not apply to public streets, although police can ask an individual to remove face-covering clothing for identification.

Protests against a ban on burqas in Denmark (Photo: AFP)

Protests against a ban on burqas in Denmark (Photo: AFP)

“This is actually virtually a complete ban because the only spaces that are still available for women (who wear face-covering clothing) are the street and the private sector,” said Annelies Moors, professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. “And, of course, the private sector can also have their house rules, they could also possibly legislate against their presence. So this leaves women very little space.”

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“It is completely disproportionate and the only effect will be that many of these women will stay at home even more,” said Green Party senator Ruard Ganzevoort. “They will not have an opportunity to go to school. They will not have an opportunity to go to learn to swim, and all those things.”