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Lebanon Flare-up with Israel over drones but Monday reverting to calm

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Iran acknowledges rocket explosion, blames technical malfunction during test

09.01.19 - News Placed in Sept 1 spot - Sunday

Lebanese anti-tank missiles strike IDF vehicles, accusing IDF of drones in Beirut.

09.01.19

Netanyahu under fire after urging boycott of Israeli TV channel

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PM slams Channel 12 for airing HBO show on violent events of summer 2014, calling the network 'anti-Semitic' and asking Israelis to boycott it; Rivlin appears to rap prime minister for comments, saying Israelis should show unity
Raz Shechnik|Published: 09.01.19 , 20:06

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came under fire Sunday for his attacks on an Israeli television channel that aired a controversial HBO show about the events of summer 2014, when three Israeli teens were kidnapped and murdered by members of the Hamas terror group and three settlers kidnapped, tortured and murdered a Palestinian teen in retaliation.

Netanyahu took aim at Channel 12 for airing "Our Boys" in a Facebook post Friday evening, calling it a "propaganda channel" and "anti-Semitic," and calling on Israelis to boycott the network.

"The Keshet (Channel 12) propaganda channel has created an anti-Semitic series called 'Our Boys,' which is distributed world-wide and smears the good name of the State of Israel," Netanyahu wrote in his post.

"I am not surprised by Channel 12 smearing Israel's good name with lies, since I'm used to them smearing my name daily. The show "Our Boys" devotes only a few minutes of cold archive footage to the murder of the three boys.

"Immediately thereafter and throughout the entire series, the whole plot detaches itself from their shocking murder story and focuses on one case - the murder of the Arab boy in Jerusalem, a shocking but rare case.

"Since the series aired last month, many of you have contacted me and asked what could be done. I made a clear recommendation: Don't watch Channel 12. They benefit from ratings".

The prime minister faced widespread backlash online, with social media users berating him for his accusations, even liking him to the pro-Palestinian BDS movement, which calls for the boycott of Israel.

One Twitter user wrote: "This is it folks: Netanyahu has endorsed BDS. He wants no one to watch the Israeli HBO series Our Boys." The writer went on to quote from Netanyahu's Facebook post: "This is the real answer in a democracy, the freedom to choose what to watch".

09.01.19

Lebanese anti-tank missiles strike IDF vehicles, accusing IDF of drones in Beirut.

Hezbollah fires anti-tank missiles at IDF base, vehicles in north
IDF returns fire as Lebanese terror group claims to have destroyed army vehicle; IDF tells local residents to enter protected spaces, instructs municipalities near along border to open bomb shelters; incident comes day after Nasrallah vowed response to Beirut drone attack attributed to Israel

Ynet, Agencies|Published: 09.01.19 , 16:43

Anti-tank missiles were fired at an Israel Defense Forces base and at several military vehicles from Lebanon on Sunday afternoon, the IDF said, warning local residents to remain in their protected areas.

The Lebanese-based terror group Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attacks in the area of Avivim.

The military reported a "number of hits" by anti-tank missiles fired at an army base and military vehicles near the Lebanese border in the northern. It said it was responding with fire toward "the sources of fire and targets in southern Lebanon."

Hezbollah said that it had destroyed an IDF vehicle in the strikes. Local residents reported hearing explosions and the IDF instructed all communities within 4km of the Lebanese border to open their bomb shelters.

The incident occurred amid increasing tensions between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah organization, which last week accused the IDF of sending two drones is said crashed in its stronghold in Beirut.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said Saturday that the incident would not go unanswered and warned that **all options were open to counter Israeli drones violating Lebanon's sovereignty.**

Drones like the ones used in the Beirut attack last weekend "open the door to assassinations" if left unanswered, he said. "This matter will not be tolerated ... Israel must pay the price."

Meanwhile, Israeli warplanes and helicopter were seen Sunday making their way to the country's northern border. Concrete roadblocks were also put up in some areas of the north.

Israel has accused **Iran** of stepping up efforts to **provide Hezbollah with precision-guided missile production facilities**, a warning to Beirut that **Israeli counter-strikes could escalate.**

Israel's army said Saturday that in the past week its "ground forces, air, navy and intelligence forces improved their preparedness for various scenarios in the northern command area."

It posted on Twitter footage of tanks and ground forces being deployed.

Without claiming responsibility for the drone attack, the Israeli military has published what it said were details about the Iranian campaign to boost Hezbollah's missile capabilities.

09.02.19

Iran acknowledges rocket explosion, blames technical malfunction during test

Satellite image showing smoke rising over a launch pad at the northern Iran space center on Thursday

Iran acknowledges rocket explosion, blames technical malfunction during test

Tehran spokesman insists incident did not occur during launch itself, slams Trump for tweeting what appeared to be surveillance photo of aftermath of blast, suggesting U.S. president 'posts satellite pictures with excitement' due to 'lack of Iran-related subjects' Associated Press | Published: **09.02.19**, 16:22

TEHRAN -- **Iran acknowledged** for the first time on **Monday that a rocket** at its Imam Khomeini Space Center **exploded** after satellite photos showed the blast last week, with an official saying a **technical malfunction during a test caused the explosion.**

The comments by government spokesman Ali Rabiei were the first explanation offered by Iran for Thursday's explosion, which came ahead of a planned satellite launch by the Islamic Republic that the U.S. has criticized.

Rabiei also criticized U.S. President Donald Trump for tweeting what appeared to be a surveillance photo of the aftermath of the explosion shot by an American spy satellite.

The explosion marked the third failure involving a rocket at the Iranian center, which has raised suspicions of sabotage in Iran's space program.

However, Rabiei dismissed that, saying that "this has been a technical matter and a technical error. Our experts unanimously say so."

"The explosion happened at the launchpad and no satellite had yet been transferred to the launchpad," Rabiei said. "It happened at a test site, not at the launch site."

Commercially available satellite images by Planet Labs Inc. and Maxar Technologies showed a black plume of smoke rising above a launch pad Thursday, with what appeared to be the charred remains of a rocket and its launch stand.

In previous days, satellite images had shown officials there repainted the launch pad blue.

The photo released Friday by Trump appeared to be a once-classified surveillance photo from American intelligence agencies. Analysts said the **black rectangle in the photo's upper-left-hand corner likely covered up the photo's classification.**

The image showed damaged vehicles around the launch pad, as well as damage done to the rocket's launcher. It also clearly showed a large phrase written in Farsi on the pad: "National Product, National Power."

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump

The United States of America was not involved in the catastrophic accident during final launch preparations for the Safir SLV Launch at Semnan Launch Site One in Iran. I wish Iran best wishes and good luck in determining what happened at Site One.

"The United States of America was not involved in the catastrophic accident during final launch preparations for the Safir SLV Launch at Semnan Launch Site One in Iran," Trump wrote in his tweet, identifying the rocket used.

Rabiei criticized Trump's decision to tweet about the rocket explosion.

"We don't understand why the U.S president tweets and posts satellite pictures with excitement. This is not understandable," he said. "Maybe this is because lack of Iran-related subjects that they raise such issues."

The blast followed two failed satellite launches of the Payam and Doosti in January and February. A separate fire at the Imam Khomeini Space Center in February also killed three researchers, authorities said at the time.

Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space.

Iran is preparing to launch the Nahid-1, a communication satellite, into space.

The U.S. alleges such satellite launches defy a UN Security Council resolution calling on Iran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Iran, which long has said it does not seek nuclear weapons, maintains its satellite launches and rocket tests do not have a military component. Tehran also says it hasn't violated the U.N. resolution as it only "called upon" Tehran not to conduct such tests.

The tests have taken on new importance to the U.S. amid the maximalist approach to Iran taken by Trump's administration.

Tensions have been high between the countries since Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from Iran's nuclear deal over a year ago and imposed sanctions, including on Iran's oil industry.

Iran recently has begun to break the accord itself while trying to push Europe to help it sell oil abroad.

09.03.19

Lebanon Flare-up with Israel over drones but Monday reverting to calm

Hezbollah: Flare-up with Israel over but no more red lines

Head of Lebanon terror group says in televised address that the new focus would be on targeting Israeli drones that enter Lebanon's airspace, and this would be handled by fighters in the field

Reuters|Published: 09.03.19 , 00:39

Lebanon's Hezbollah leader said on Monday that while a flare-up with Israel at the border was over, the episode had launched a "new phase" in which the Iran-backed group no longer has red lines.

In a televised speech, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said the new focus would be on targeting Israeli drones that enter Lebanon's airspace, and this would be handled by fighters in the field.

Hezbollah and the Israeli army exchanged cross-border fire on Sunday after a drone attack last week in a Hezbollah-controlled Beirut suburb. Hezbollah blamed that incident on Israel, raising fears of a wider regional conflict.

In his speech, Nasrallah said Sunday's missiles sent Israel "a clear message that if you attack, then all your border, your forces and your settlements at the border and (deep inside)" will be at risk.

His comments struck a defiant tone, although perceptions in the region are that the longtime enemies privately want to avoid all-out war at a time of soaring regional tensions.

During Sunday's flare-up, Israel faked soldier injuries to dampen any inclination of Hezbollah to escalate hostilities.

An army helicopter was photographed performing what appeared to be the evacuation of two wounded soldiers to hospital after Hezbollah launched anti-tank missiles at an army base and vehicles. Israel said there were no casualties.

But a person briefed on the evacuation, and who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the soldiers were in fact unharmed and bandaged with fake blood in what he called "a psy-ops stunt".

Hezbollah said it had destroyed an Israeli armoured vehicle, killing and wounding those inside, and it broadcast what it said was footage of two missiles hitting a moving vehicle.

Rules of engagement

Nasrallah said Sunday had marked the first such Hezbollah operation in a long time targeting Israel in positions across the border, not in the Israeli-occupied Shebaa farms.

"This is no longer a red line," the Hezbollah chief said. "I tell the Israelis, we no longer have red lines because you changed the rules of engagement."

Hezbollah, whose forces have fought in support of President Bashar Assad in Syria's years-long civil war, also said two of its men were killed in an Israeli strike in Syria last week. Israel said its attack thwarted an Iranian-led drone strike against it.

But after the Hezbollah missile volley on Sunday, scores were apparently settled and the two sides, who fought a deadly month-long war in 2006, returned to business as usual on Monday, with the border reverting to calm.

Israel had raised the stakes last week by accusing Iran of stepping up efforts to provide Hezbollah with precision-guided missile production facilities. Hezbollah denied this.

And Israel has increasingly put the blame on Lebanon as a whole for letting Hezbollah, which is part of Lebanon's coalition government, grow in military and political power.

In a video statement in Twitter on Monday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held out the prospect of future military action to prevent Hezbollah getting missiles that could be fired with increased accuracy at targets in Israel.

"We will continue to do whatever is necessary to defend Israel at sea, on land and in the air. We will continue to act against the threat of the precision-guided rockets," he said.

Foreign Minister Israel Katz said he had asked Germany to tell Lebanon that if it does not stem Hezbollah's activity against Israel, "Lebanon in its entirety will be struck and badly damaged."

Wariness of war

But neither side can afford a return to 2006 when the war was triggered after a Hezbollah cross-border raid. Nearly 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, were killed in July 2006 and 158 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

"What is constraining them is that neither side wants a war. Each wants to use it as part of their own internal propaganda machine, but neither side genuinely wants a war," said Maha Yahya, director of the Carnegie Middle East Centre in Beirut.

Netanyahu, head of the right-wing Likud party, has been projecting strength during a re-election campaign ahead of a vote less than three weeks away, but a border war could complicate his efforts.

Sources allied to Hezbollah had made it clear any response to the Israeli drones would be "calculated".

A new eruption in Lebanon could strain an already struggling economy, as authorities seek to implement long-overdue economic reforms to ward off a crisis. Fitch downgraded Lebanon's credit rating to CCC last month on debt-servicing concerns.

A senior Israeli security source said that shortly after the Hezbollah attack and Israel's military response on Sunday, messages from Nasrallah and Hariri were conveyed to Israel by three countries, which the source did not name, that "as far as Hezbollah is concerned, the incident is over".

Iran's rhetoric was also unusually low-key in response to the border fighting, saying only that Hezbollah's policy is aimed at safeguarding the interests of Lebanon.

"A full-scale war is the last thing this region needs," said a senior Iranian official.