

Middle East war

Four Israeli soldiers killed in Hizbollah drone strike

Attack is one of deadliest by Iran-backed militant group since Israel stepped up its Lebanese offensive



An Israeli soldier secures a road after the drone attack in Binyamina on Sunday © Amir Levy/Getty Images

Neri Zilber in Tel Aviv and Raya Jalabi in Beirut 22 MINUTES AGO

A Hizbollah drone attack on a military base in the centre of Israel has killed four soldiers and injured about 60, in one of the deadliest strikes by the Iran-backed militant group since Israel escalated its air and ground offensive in Lebanon three weeks ago.

Seven soldiers were seriously injured in the attack by the Lebanese militants on Sunday evening, according to the Israel Defense Forces.

As [Israel](#) fights on multiple fronts, an Israeli air strike near a hospital compound in the centre of Gaza killed at least 20 people, health authorities in the shattered enclave reported on Monday.

The Israeli military confirmed it had struck the Shuhada al-Aqsa hospital in the city of Deir al-Balah. It said the “former” hospital was now being used by Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, as a “command and control centre”.

Israel has launched an offensive on hospitals across the strip, claiming Hamas was using them for military means. The Israeli strikes have pushed Gaza’s health system towards collapse. Hamas denies it uses hospitals for military purposes.

Videos from the scene uploaded to Palestinian social media showed fire enveloping tents and people who had reportedly taken shelter on the hospital grounds.

[Hizbollah](#) took credit for the drone attack near the town of Binyamina, 40km south of Haifa, saying it was in response to Israel’s escalating attacks on Lebanon and to show off its capabilities.

In the statement, it said it targeted the Israeli military’s Golani brigade, launching dozens of projectiles to overwhelm Israel’s air defences in tandem with the squadron of attack drones.

One drone evaded Israeli air defences and struck a cafeteria on an army training base. Israeli media reported that many of the victims were Golani brigade cadets. Witnesses said no warning sirens were activated before the strikes. The IDF said it was still investigating the incident.

US defence secretary Lloyd Austin spoke to Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant and expressed his condolences for the IDF soldiers’ deaths, the Pentagon said.

Earlier, the US said it was [sending an advanced antimissile system to Israel](#), a move that will boost Israel’s defences as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government plans retaliatory strikes against Iran. The ground-based terminal high-altitude area defence system is designed to shoot down ballistic missiles.

Israel’s conflict with Hizbollah has intensified in recent weeks. It has battered Lebanon with thousands of air strikes, killing much of the group’s leadership and launching a [ground invasion](#) two weeks ago.

Israel has faced widespread international criticism after several UN peacekeepers in south Lebanon were injured by Israeli fire last week. On Monday, the EU’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said member states had taken too long to condemn Israeli attacks on the Unifil troops.

“We should be against Israeli attacks against Unifil,” he said, referring to the UN-mandated force deployed along the de facto border between Israel and Lebanon.

“Our soldiers are there, many soldiers are there,” added Borrell, speaking at a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg

Unifil accused Israel of a “flagrant violation” of international law on Sunday, after Israeli tanks broke into a position stationed by peacekeepers in southern Lebanon, hours before Netanyahu told the international forces to withdraw from combat areas.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 2,300 people over the past year and forced at least 1.2mn from their homes, mostly in the past two weeks, according to Lebanese authorities. They have also caused widespread destruction in southern Lebanon.

On Sunday, air strikes killed at least 51 people — one of the deadliest single days for the country, according to the health ministry. Nearly half of those were people killed in Lebanon’s Chouf district, where many people from the south of the country had sought refuge.

More than a year of fighting in Gaza has left more than 41,000 Palestinians dead, according to Palestinian health officials.

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