

Netanyahu: 'Those Behind the Attack Will Pay the Full Price'

One day after two Israel Defense Forces soldiers were killed by Hezbollah anti-tank missiles on the northern border, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Iran of being responsible for the attack.

"Iran is the one behind yesterday's attack. The same Iran that is now trying to negotiate a deal with world powers that will let it develop nuclear weapons. We are firmly against such a deal," Netanyahu said at a memorial service for late Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Netanyahu quoted Sharon, who said that radical powers in the region were focusing their efforts on two things: weapons of mass destruction and funding terrorism in Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority and elsewhere in the world. "This radical power Ariel Sharon spoke about was, and still is, Iran," Netanyahu said. "Today Iran is the one arming, organizing, funding and sending its terrorist satellites to our borders, both north and south."

On Wednesday, immediately following the attack, Netanyahu said that "those behind the attack today will pay the full price."

Netanyahu made the remarks as he met with security chiefs for an emergency briefing on the deadly attack, apparently a retaliation for the Jan. 18 airstrike in Syria in which top Iranian and Hezbollah fighters were killed. Both Hezbollah and Iran attributed the strike to Israel and vowed to avenge the deaths.

"For some time, Iran—via Hezbollah—has been trying to establish an additional terrorist front against us from the

Golan Heights. We are taking strong and responsible action against this attempt," Netanyahu added.

"The Lebanese government and the Assad regime share responsibility for the consequences of the attacks emanating from their territories against the State of Israel. In all of these events, our mission is to defend the State of Israel. Our only consideration is the security of the State of Israel and its citizens. Thus we have acted and thus we will continue to act."

On Wednesday, Staff Sgt. Dor Chaim Nini, 20, and Maj. Yochai Kalangel, 25, were killed and seven others were wounded when Hezbollah anti-tank missiles hit a convoy of Israeli patrol vehicles. The IDF responded immediately with artillery fire into Lebanon, but the fighting wound down toward the evening.

The incident began at around 11:30 AM. Several military vehicles manned by the Tzabar battalion of the Givati Brigade made their way back from a patrol in the Har Dov area, after having been dispatched to the border several days prior, as tensions began to escalate. When they turned onto route 999—a civilian road—about 2 kilometers from the border and not far from the border town of Ghajar, an anti-tank missile, apparently a Kornet, hit one of the vehicles. A company commander and another fighter were killed as a result. The deputy company commander and six others sustained moderate to light injuries.

Immediately after the first missile strike, soldiers manning the other vehicles in the convoy disembarked, preventing further casualties. An initial investigation revealed that Hezbollah fired five anti-tank missiles, while a sixth may have hit a home in Ghajar.

Shortly after the incident, the IDF responded with 50 artillery shells and 50 smoke shells. In addition, the military took a number of steps to prevent subsequent

terrorist infiltrations and possible abductions.

In a separate incident, mortar shells were fired at IDF positions in the Har Dov area and on Mount Hermon.

IDF Spokesperson Moti Almoz announced Wednesday that the IDF artillery fire was “not necessarily the final response,” adding that the IDF also hit a Hezbollah target in Lebanon from the air.

IDF Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz convened an emergency meeting of the Northern Command. A high-ranking IDF official explained that “we are thinking about our future moves. Our level of preparedness is very high. There are meetings at different levels and we will see how this goes.”

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, currently visiting China, said Wednesday that “we have to break away from the existing Israeli attitude and respond to this missile fire into our sovereign territory with fierce and disproportionate force, the way that China or the U.S. would respond to similar aggression.”

Security officials surmised, however, that the tension would ultimately subside. The officials remarked that Hezbollah chose a measured and calculated response to the Jan. 18 airstrike attributed to Israel. Hezbollah only targeted military positions, in an area it views as disputed territory. The officials said further that Hezbollah sent a message to Israel by way of UNIFIL, that the score had been settled and that it would not seek to escalate the situation further.

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