

Lt.-Col. Imanuel Morano killed in raid in east Lebanon

Yaakov Katz, THE JERUSALEM POST

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UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced Saturday night that the IDF activities in Baalbek, in the Bekaa valley in southern Lebanon, constitute a violation of the UN cease-fire resolution that went into effect on Monday.

[For a Jerusalem Online video of events [click here](#)]

In a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Annan discussed the Lebanese claims that Israel was in violation of UN Resolution 1701 after IDF troops raided Baalbek overnight Friday - less than a week after the ceasefire went into effect between Israel and Hizbullah.

Earlier, UN Middle East envoy Terje Roed-Larsen said that "if what was reported is true, this is a clear violation of the cease-fire."

Lt.-Col. Imanuel Morano, 35, of Tlamim, was killed during the raid, in which soldiers from Sayeret Matkal (General Staff Reconnaissance Unit) thwarted the transfer of weapons from Syria to the guerrilla group.

Two other soldiers were wounded, one seriously and the other lightly.

Defense Minister Amir Peretz claimed Saturday night that the operation in Baalbek was not a breach of the UN-brokered ceasefire that went into effect last Monday. "This was an operation that was meant to prevent the rearmament of Hizbullah," Peretz said. Three Hizbullah gunmen were reportedly killed during the incident, though the terrorist organization denied it had suffered any losses.

Baalbek is said to be the birthplace of the Iranian and Syrian-backed Hizbullah and is located in the eastern Bekaa Valley some 100 kilometers north of the Israeli border. Earlier in the month, Sayeret Matkal and Shaldag raided the area and took five captives after killing over 15 gunmen. A high-ranking IDF officer revealed last week that throughout the last month of fighting, commandos had carried out dozens of covert operations inside Lebanon.

Lebanon's prime minister accused Israel of violating the cease-fire and said he would take up the issue with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. "The landing carried out by the Israeli occupation forces today in the Bekaa was a flagrant violation of the cessation of hostilities announced by the Security Council," Prime Minister Fuad Saniora said in a statement. He added that he had complained to a UN delegation that visited him Saturday, and would take up the matter with Annan.

The IDF said the commandos entered Lebanon "to prevent and interfere with terror activity against Israel, especially the smuggling of arms from Iran and Syria to Hizbullah." The military claimed that the force completed its mission successfully, and that such operations would be carried out until a multinational force was in place to prevent Hizbullah's rearmament.

According to Lebanese reports, two IAF helicopters dropped two Hummer jeeps near the village of Boudai, some 15 kilometers west of Baalbek, close to 100 km from the Israeli border. According to the reports, IAF aircraft provided air cover for the vehicles and even fired missiles at a Hizbullah headquarters nearby.

Clashes between the IDF troops and Hizbullah guerrillas ensued and the helicopters returned to the area and evacuated the vehicles and the troops. Lebanese media said Sheik Mohammed Yazbeck, a senior Hizbullah official in the Bekaa Valley and a member of the Shura council of the group, may have been the target. Yazbeck is a native of Boudai. Other Arab reports claimed that the operation was connected to the two abducted Israeli soldiers, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev.

The IDF said it was aware that the operation was risky and could spark a new round of violence with Hizbullah including the possible renewal of Katyusha rocket attacks on northern Israel. Despite the risk, the IDF decided to go ahead with the operation, which it said could not have been carried out by the air. A senior officer said last week that the IDF was allowed to bomb weapon convoys crossing into Lebanon from Syria on their way to Hizbullah.

Lebanese Defense Minister Elias Murr threatened to halt deployment of Lebanese troops if the United Nations did not intervene against Israel. After an evening meeting with UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen, Murr said the UN official was traveling to Israel and would discuss the matter there. "We have put the matter forward in a serious manner and the UN delegation was understanding of the seriousness of the situation," he told reporters. "We are awaiting an answer."

"If there are no clear answers forthcoming on this issue, I might be forced to recommend to the Cabinet early next week the halt of the army deployment in the south," he said.



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