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Israel Warns of Al Qaeda Attack on Lebanon Peacekeepers

Friday, December 08, 2006

Associated Press

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JERUSALEM — Israel has warned the U.N. force in Lebanon that Al Qaeda is planning an attack on international peacekeepers, Israel TV reported Friday.

The report said Israel had received intelligence that Al Qaeda's deputy chief, **Ayman al-Zawahiri**, had issued the order to attack the peacekeepers. It did not give details on the source of the information or when the attack might take place.

There were no new videos or messages from al-Zawahiri posted Friday on militant Web sites where he usually releases statements.

But in a video released this year marking the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the U.S., al-Zawahiri denounced the beefed-up U.N. peacekeeping force in Lebanon.

The force, known as **UNIFIL**, was deployed under a U.N.-brokered cease-fire that ended a monthlong war last summer between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon.

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Just under 10,000 UNIFIL troops patrol a buffer zone in southern Lebanon alongside an estimated 17,000 Lebanese soldiers. The force, in which France and Italy are the biggest contributors, is mandated to go up to a maximum of 15,000. UNIFIL officials were not immediately available for comment on the Israeli TV report.

The peacekeeping troops have put in protections against possible Al Qaeda suicide attacks, including setting up checkpoints and positioning their bases in remote, elevated areas.

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Israel and Syria have both warned of an increasing al-Qaida presence in Lebanon, though attacks there have been rare.

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Lebanese security forces broke up several cells believed linked to Al Qaeda early in the year. On Nov. 28, the leader of a Syrian militant group blew himself up on the Syrian side of the border with Lebanon in a clash with guards there in what may have been an attempt to infiltrate Lebanon.

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