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Israeli strikes target Hamas in Lebanon and Gaza after rocket attack

By Henriette Chacar and Nidal Al-Mughrabi



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- More than 30 rockets fired from Lebanon
- Israel blames Hamas and Hezbollah
- Rocket strikes follow Israeli raids on Al-Aqsa mosque
- UN seeks de-escalation as Security Council meets

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JERUSALEM/GAZA, April 7 (Reuters) - Israel's military hit sites in Lebanon and Gaza early on Friday, in retaliation for rocket attacks it blamed on the Islamist group Hamas, as tensions following police raids this week on the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem threatened to spiral out of control.

Loud blasts rocked different areas of Gaza, as Israel said its jets hit 10 targets including tunnels and weapons manufacturing and development sites of Hamas, which controls the blockaded southern coastal strip.



At around 4.00 a.m., the military said it had also struck three Hamas infrastructure targets in southern Lebanon, where residents around the area of the Rashidiyeh refugee camp near the southern city of Tyre reported three loud blasts.

"We strongly condemn the blatant Zionist aggression against Lebanon in the vicinity of Tyre at dawn today," Hamas said.

Two Lebanese security sources said the strike hit a small structure on farmland near the area from which the rockets had been launched earlier.

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The strike appeared to have left a large crater in farmland in the south, according to Reuters witnesses.

A member of Lebanon's Civil Defense at the scene on Friday morning said there were no casualties.

The strikes came in response to rocket attacks from Lebanon towards northern Israeli areas, which Israeli officials blamed on Hamas. The military said 34 rockets were launched from Lebanon, of which 25 were intercepted by air defence systems. It was the biggest such attack since 2006, when Israel fought a war with the heavily armed Hezbollah movement.

"Israel's response, tonight and later, will exact a significant price from our enemies," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said following a security cabinet meeting.

As the Israeli jets struck in Gaza, salvos of rockets were fired in response and sirens sounded in Israeli towns and cities in bordering areas. However there were no reports of serious casualties and only one rocket hit a target, damaging a house in the southern town of Sderot.

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The crossborder strikes came amid an escalating confrontation over Israeli **police raids** at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which this year coincides with the Jewish Passover holiday.

"We hold the Zionist occupation fully responsible for the grave escalation and the flagrant aggression against the Gaza Strip and for the consequences that will bring onto the region," Hamas said in a statement.

Although Israel blamed Hamas for Thursday's attack, which took place as Hamas head Ismail Haniyeh was visiting Lebanon, security experts said Hezbollah, the powerful Shi'ite group which helps Israel's main enemy Iran project its power across the region, must have given its permission.

"It's not Hezbollah shooting, but it's hard to believe that Hezbollah didn't know about it," Tamir Hayman, a former head of Israeli military intelligence, said on Twitter.

Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati issued a statement condemning any military operations from its territory that threatened stability but there was no immediate comment from Hezbollah. Earlier on Thursday, before the rockets were fired, senior Hezbollah official Hashem Safieddine said any infringement on Al-Aqsa "will inflame the entire region".

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UNIFIL, the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, said it had been in contact with the parties and said both sides had said they did not seek war but it said the situation risked escalation and urged all parties to halt their actions.

An Israeli military spokesman said the Israeli operation was over for the moment. "Nobody wants an escalation right now," he told reporters. "Quiet will be answered with quiet, at this stage I think, at least in the coming hours."

Feedback

U.S. CONDEMNS ROCKET ATTACKS



[1/9] Smoke and flames rise during Israeli airstrikes in Gaza, April 6, 2023. REUTERS/Bashar Talib



Palestinian factions in Lebanon, which have a presence in the refugee camps, have fired sporadically on Israel in the past. But the border area has been largely quiet since the 2006 war with Hezbollah.

The U.S. State Department condemned the launch of rockets from Lebanon and earlier strikes from Gaza and said Israel had the right to defend itself.

But it also expressed concern at the scenes in the [Al-Aqsa mosque](#), where Israeli police were filmed beating worshippers during raids that officials said were to dislodge groups of young men who had barricaded themselves inside the mosque.

The Al-Aqsa compound in Jerusalem's Old City is Islam's third holiest site, where hundreds of thousands pray during Ramadan. Known to Jews as Temple Mount, the location of the two biblical Jewish temples, it is also Judaism's most sacred site, although non-Muslims are not allowed to pray there.

It has long been a flashpoint for tensions. Clashes there in 2021 helped to trigger a 10-day war between Israel and Gaza.

There has been widespread anger among Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza over the police actions as well as condemnation from across the Arab world.

Late on Thursday, police said there were also disturbances in a number of Arab cities in Israel itself, including Umm el-Fahem, Sakhnin and Nazareth.

PLUMES OF SMOKE

The worsening security situation adds a further complication for Netanyahu's religious-nationalist government, which has faced mass protests over its now-suspended [plans](#) to curb the powers of the Supreme Court.

However, opposition leader Yair Lapid said the government could count on cross-party support following the rocket attack and Netanyahu said Israelis stood behind the security forces.

"The internal debate in Israel will not prevent us from taking action against them wherever and whenever necessary. All of us, without exception, are united on this," Netanyahu said.

In the aftermath of Thursday's rocket attack, TV footage showed large plumes of smoke rising above the northern Israeli border town of Shlomi, with wrecked cars in the streets. Israel Airports Authority said it had closed the northern airports in Haifa and Rosh Pina.

"I'm shaking, I'm in shock," Liat Berkovitch Kravitz told Israel's Channel 12 news, speaking from a fortified room in her house in Shlomi. "I heard a boom, it was as if it exploded inside the room."

The Israeli military said mortar shells were also fired across the border.

Amid fears that the confrontation could spiral further following a year of rising Israeli-Palestinian violence, the U.N. Security Council held a closed door meeting to discuss the crisis.

"It's going to be important for everyone to do what they can to calm tensions," U.S. Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations, Robert Wood, told reporters on his way into the meeting.

Thursday's attack followed a number of rocket launches towards Israel from Gaza, most of which were intercepted. Israel responded to the launches with airstrikes on sites linked to Hamas, which it holds responsible for any attacks from the blockaded coastal strip.

Speaking from Gaza, Mohammad Al-Braim, spokesman for the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees, praised the rocket strikes from Lebanon, which he linked to the Al-Aqsa incidents, but did not claim responsibility.

He said "no Arab and no Muslim would keep silent while (Al-Aqsa) is being raided in such a savage and barbaric way without the enemy paying the price for its aggression."

Additional reporting by Maya Gebeily, Laila Bassam and Timour Azhari in Beirut, Michelle Nichols at the United Nations, Daphne Psaledakis in Washington; Writing by James Mackenzie; Editing by Mark Heinrich, Frances Kerry, Grant McCool, Daniel Wallis and Lincoln Feast



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