

# Iran, Hezbollah are unable to fully respond to increase in Israeli attacks: Experts



An Israeli artillery gun fires into Lebanon, 2016. (File photo: 2016)

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Iran and its proxies in Syria and Lebanon do not have the maneuverability to respond to increasing Israeli attacks against them and are unlikely to carry out a large-scale retaliation, said experts, ahead of the border skirmish between Hezbollah and Israel on Monday.

Israel has upped its attacks on Iranian targets in the region in recent months, striking Iranian and Hezbollah positions in Syria. But Iran and its proxies still seem to be following a strategy of non-escalation when it comes to Israel, said experts, pointing to Iran's limited capabilities in Syria.

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A month after Israel last struck Iranian targets in Syria, fresh airstrikes attributed

to Tel-Aviv targeted on July 20 several Iranian interests near the capital Damascus.

The alleged Israeli attacks came in two waves, destroying weapons and ammunition warehouses while killing five Iranian-backed non-Syrian and Syrian militiamen and wounding four others in south and southwest Damascus, according to the Syrian Human Rights Observatory.

Seven members of the regime's air-defense forces were injured, with two suffering serious injuries.

"Hezbollah announced one martyr at least but more could follow as Hezbollah rarely releases names in one go," said one source close to the party. Hezbollah's fallen fighter Kamel Mohsen was known by his nom de guerre Jawad. The Syrian Ministry of Defense also announced that several soldiers were wounded as a result of the Israeli airstrikes on the southwestern suburbs of Damascus.

The geographic targets Israel chose for this strike were similar to previous attacks, namely falling in the vicinity of Sayeda Zeynab, Qeswa, Mazzeh, Daraya, Quneitra regions, on a regular basis, Syria expert Naswar Shaaban from the Omran Dirasat Center told Al Arabiya English.

"The first conclusion that can be drawn is that Iran does not have the capability to move its equipment and fighters around freely, which means that its margin of maneuver is severely limited by the Russians, within the capital Damascus, which leaves it vulnerable to Israeli attacks," Shaaban said.



Syrian Air defenses respond to Israeli missiles targeting south of the capital Damascus, on July 20, 2020. Israeli strikes south of the Syrian capital wounded seven Syrian soldiers, state media reported, in an attack which a war monitor said hit several positions of regime forces and Iran-backed militias.

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In recent years, Russia has established the rules of engagement for Iran and Israel in Syria, turning a blind eye to Israeli strikes on Iranian interests in Syria while preventing any retaliation by Iran or Hezbollah.

The Israeli strategy in Syria primarily seeks to target equipment and weapons, rather than military personnel and commanders, but the July attack appears to have been different from a strategical standpoint, Middle East Strategy Intelligence analyst Avi Melamed said.

Seeing an opportunity to escalate strikes in Syria before the upcoming US elections, Israel has upped its war on Iran and its proxies in Syria, said Brahim Beyram, a Lebanese expert close to Hezbollah circles.

The November presidential elections could usher in a US president less amenable to the Israeli cause, and in the last few months dozens of attacks have targeted

Iranian interests there, said Beyram.

The most recent attacks that took place in Syria, Beyram added, are part of the ongoing war taking place between Iran, backed by its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, and Israel.

“Israel wants to stop Iran and Hezbollah from entrenching themselves in Syria. Iran is working on creating a line of confrontation similar to the one it created in Lebanon. Hezbollah also has several bases in Aleppo, Homs, Damascus, and close to the Lebanese border that it will not abandon,” Beyram said.

Beyram and Melamed agree that Syria’s escalation cannot be dissociated from the covert war taking place in Iran in the form of mysterious explosions and fires, the most lethal of which being the recent blast at the Natanz enrichment site.

It is difficult for Iran and Hezbollah to retaliate at this time given complex conditions at home and around the region, Melamed said.

Hezbollah’s mysterious retaliatory operation showed that both Iran and its Lebanese proxy are treading carefully in these uncertain times and that they want to maintain any military operation’s scope and nature as limited as possible so that they will not find themselves in a full-blown conflict.

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Source:

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