

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Middle East News

## Iranian General Was Killed on Sunday in Syria

Rocket Strike Took Place Near Border with Israeli-Controlled Golan Heights

By Joshua Mitnick and Dana Ballout  
Updated Jan. 19, 2015 1:28 p.m. ET

TEL AVIV—Iran said a general in the elite Iranian Revolutionary Guards force was killed in an Israeli helicopter strike in Syria on Sunday that Iran said also claimed six Hezbollah fighters, fanning concerns that an eight-year truce between the Shiite militia and Israel could weaken.

The officer was identified as Brig. Gen. Muhammad Ali Allahdadi, according to Fars, an Iranian news agency affiliated with the guards. A second state-controlled news agency said that Gen. Allahdadi advised the Syrian government on policy toward rebel groups and Israel.

Hezbollah, which is based in Lebanon and backed by Iran, held funerals Monday for its fighters killed in the strike near the Golan Heights border, including Jihad Mughniyeh, the son of former military chief Imad Mughniyeh, who was assassinated in 2008.

Israel officials wouldn't confirm or deny responsibility for the strike. If Israel was responsible, it would mark the first targeted assassination across the Golan border with Syria and a break with Israel's policy of limiting strikes at the border.

In an interview with Israel Radio, senior Defense Ministry official Amos Gilad said the Hezbollah operatives killed in the attack were part of an effort to exploit the chaos of the Syria civil war and establish a new front against Israel.

Both Hezbollah and Iran have dispatched personnel to Syria in an effort to bolster the government of President Bashar al-Assad, a key ally of both, against rebel groups there.

The strike ratchets up pressure on Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah to retaliate. He said last week that Syria and its allies have the right to retaliate against Israel for attacks carried out on Syrian territory. He also acknowledged last week that spies for Israel had penetrated the group's ranks, allowing Israel to strike at its operations.

Though the Israel-Lebanon border has been stable since Hezbollah and Israel fought in 2006, the power vacuum in Syria gives both sides more flexibility to launch hostilities, said **Benedetta Berti**, a fellow at Tel Aviv University's **Institute for National Security Studies**.

“The rules of the game between Hezbollah and Israel are established when it comes [to the] Israel-Lebanon border. With the opening of a second front in Syria, the rest becomes blurry,” said Ms. Berti, who added that the severity of the attack is likely to prompt Hezbollah to respond. “If the current pattern of attacks continues, it risks leading to a war.”

A spokesman for the United Nations said peacekeepers monitoring the demilitarized zone in the Golan on Sunday observed two drones flying from Israeli-held territory toward Syria. An hour later they saw smoke rising from the Syrian side, said Farhan Haq, the deputy spokesman for the U.N. secretary-general. The monitors didn’t observe the strike and the Mr. Haq declined to accuse Israel, saying details were too “murky.”

On several occasions during Syria’s nearly four-year civil war, Israel has been accused of conducting airstrikes deep inside Syria and close to the Syria-Lebanon border at targets thought to be weapons en route to Hezbollah.

Israeli experts believe that Hezbollah is unlikely to retaliate in a way that risks provoking a war with Israel, because it is too immersed in the fighting in Syria. But they noted that the severity of the blow to Hezbollah may require it to hit back.

“The Shiite organization is liable to view this as a challenge that it must respond to in order not to be perceived as weak,” wrote Amos Harel, the military commentator for the daily Haaretz newspaper. “Syrian rebel organizations don’t have helicopters and it’s doubtful they have the precise intelligence to attack senior figures” in Hezbollah.

Hezbollah released a statement on Sunday saying that a team of its fighters were conducting a field operation near Quneitra when they were hit by an Israeli rocket strike. One of those killed was Jihad Mughniyeh, the son of Imad Mughniyeh, a former Hezbollah military chief who was assassinated in 2008.

Lebanese officials from a variety of political parties and religious factions offered condolences to Hezbollah and the families of the fighters, but some noted concern about the potential fallout from attacks on Lebanon.

“There is no doubt that what happened is dangerous and we extend our condolences for the martyrs of [Hezbollah] and their families,” said Amin Gemayel, leader of the Western-backed Phalange party in a televised interview Sunday night. “But we must ask until when are we going to entangle Lebanon in wars that are bigger than the country?”

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/iranian-general-killed-sunday-in-syria-1421678099>