

Beat: News

Lebanon says army sniper `acted alone` in killing Israeli soldier

-, 16.12.2013, 19:33 Time

USPA News - A Lebanese army sniper who shot and killed an Israeli soldier on the Israeli side of the border was acting alone when he opened fire, the Lebanese army said on Monday. Two Lebanese soldiers were shot by Israeli troops in a second incident.

The initial incident occurred at around 8:30 p.m. local time on Sunday when a Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) sniper fired at a civilian vehicle near the community of Rosh Hanikra on the Israeli side of the border, killing 31-year-old Israeli Master Sgt. Shlomi Cohen. There were no other casualties. "The IDF has protested this outrageous breach of Israel's sovereignty with UNIFIL and has heightened its state of preparedness along the border," Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman Lt. Col. Peter Lerner said. "We will not tolerate aggression against the State of Israel, and maintain the right to exercise self-defense against perpetrators of attacks against Israel and its civilians." Hours after the killing, at around 1 a.m. local time on Monday, a second incident occurred in which Israeli troops opened fire after detecting "suspicious movements" along the border area. An Israeli spokeswoman said two Lebanese soldiers were shot, but their conditions were not immediately known and a report by Lebanon's state-run news agency did not report any Lebanese casualties. After an emergency meeting with officials from Israel, Lebanon and the United Nations (UN) at a nearby border crossing on Monday afternoon, the Lebanese army issued a brief statement that said the sniper is a member of the armed forces but was acting alone when he opened fire at the vehicle. It said a military commission was in charge of the investigation. "This was a grave incident of shooting across the Blue Line which led to tragic loss of life and I stressed at the meeting that this must remain an isolated incident," said UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Commander Major-General Paolo Serra. "All the circumstances of this incident are not clear at this time, but preliminary findings indicate that it was an individual action by a soldier in contravention of the existing operational rules and procedures." Serra said "concrete steps" were discussed at the meeting to strengthen existing security arrangements along the Blue Line to prevent other incidents in the future. "I was encouraged by the discussion at the tripartite meeting and by the way the parties approached the issues at hand," he commented. "They affirmed their full commitment to the cessation of hostilities." The so-called Blue Line was established by the United Nations in 2000 to determine whether Israeli troops had withdrawn from Lebanon after its 1982 invasion. The line covers a stretch of the Israeli and Lebanon border area which has been disputed by both sides, and tensions in the area have remained high ever since.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1659/lebanon-says-army-sniper-acted-alone-in-killing-israeli-soldier.html>

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