

Guerrillas kill Israeli-allied men in Lebanon

■ **Hezbollah claims responsibility for rocket attack near Israeli border.**

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — Guerrillas killed two Israeli-allied militiamen in southern Lebanon on Tuesday and wounded a third, Lebanese security officials said.

A militiaman from the South Lebanon Army was killed and another was wounded when guerrillas fired rockets at the Hardon military outpost, two miles north of the Israeli border, officials said.

Shortly afterward, an SLA militiaman was killed when a roadside bomb exploded while a patrol drove by near Houla village, 25 miles southeast of Hardon and a little over a mile north of the Israeli border.

The Iranian-backed Hezbollah group claimed responsibility for the attacks.

In a statement issued in Beirut, Hezbollah said its guerrillas ambushed a patrol outside Hardon as it attacked the outpost and two nearby positions.

It boasted about the Houla attack, saying its guerrillas infiltrated close to the Israeli border "despite the enemy's security and military measures."

Lebanese guerrillas have been waging a campaign of bombings and rocket attacks in an attempt to drive Israel's 1,500 soldiers and the 2,500-strong SLA militia from occupied south-

ern Lebanon. Israel set up the zone in 1985 with the aim of guarding against cross-border guerrilla strikes. Seven Israeli soldiers and a dozen SLA militiamen have been killed this year.

On Feb. 29, Hezbollah guerrillas killed five SLA militiamen in a bomb ambush in the occupied zone. A Jan. 30 Hezbollah bombing killed the No. 2 SLA commander.

The latest attack kept up the pressure on the SLA, whose members face an uncertain fate after Israel announced Sunday it was ending the occupation of southern Lebanon by July.

The Israeli Cabinet decision Sunday affirmed what Prime Minister Ehud Barak has been saying for months. A withdrawal from the zone without the agreement of Syria and Lebanon could leave the SLA and those who collaborated with Israel subject to revenge attacks by guerrillas or prosecution by the Lebanese government.

The government and the guerrillas consider SLA members traitors who should be put on trial. Hezbollah on Monday warned countries where SLA members might be considering seeking refuge against allowing them in.

In Jerusalem on Monday, Israel's Supreme Court rejected a request for political asylum from SLA fighters.

Israel has pledged not to abandon the militiamen or their families, but officials have refused to publicly detail safety arrangements. Last week, Israel's deputy defense minister, Ephraim Sneh, said they would not be given asylum in Israel.



AN OFF-DUTY ISRAELI SOLDIER looks across the Israel-Lebanon border in Metulla, Israel, April 9, 1998. The Israeli Cabinet voted Sunday to withdraw its soldiers by July from the self-declared southern Lebanese security zone they have occupied for 15 years.

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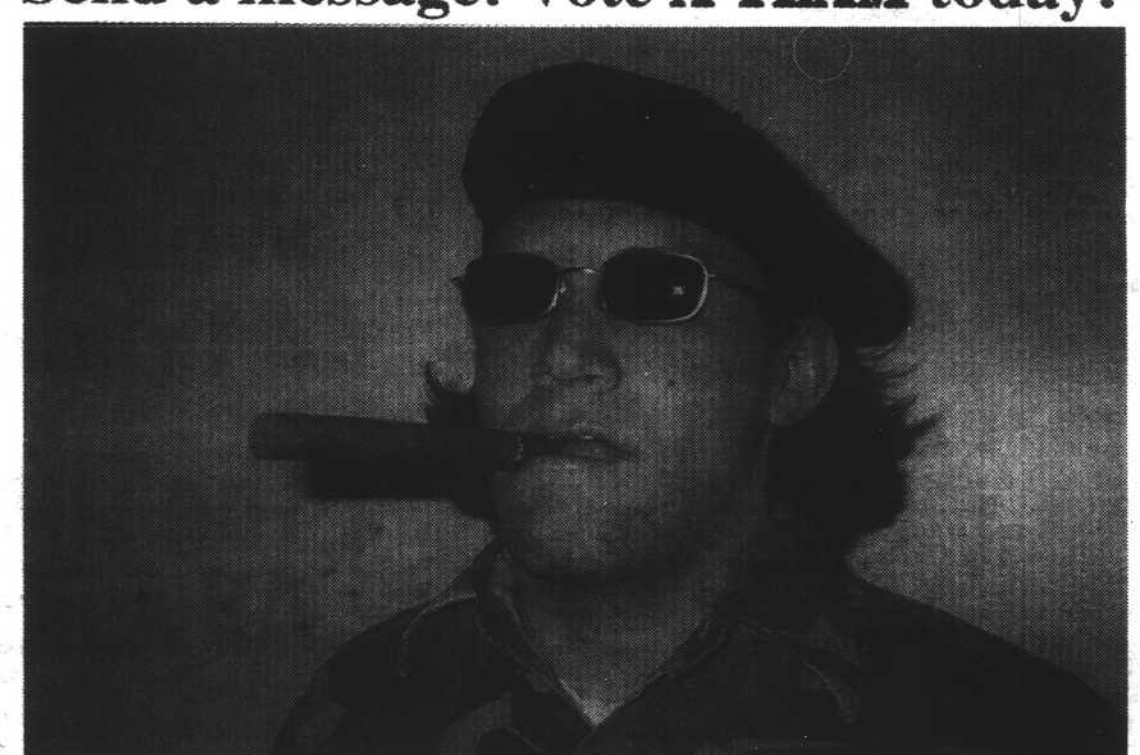


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