



Reactions to the Hezbollah Rocket Attack on Majdal Shams

July 29, 2024

Overview¹

- ▶ On July 27, 2024, Hezbollah launched a Falaq 1 rocket from south Lebanon at the Druze town of Majdal Shams in the northern Golan Heights. The rocket hit a soccer field and killed 12 children and teenagers, and injured more than 40 other people.
- ▶ Hezbollah initially claimed it had launched a rocket at the IDF base in the Hermon area, but then published a false statement denying any connection to the attack on Majdal Shams. In view of Israel's threats of a powerful response to the attack, Hezbollah warned it was prepared for a counterstrike, even if it led to an all-out war.
- ▶ In Lebanon, politicians avoided blaming Hezbollah and called for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. The Lebanese foreign minister proposed the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry to determine who was responsible for attacking Majdal Shams.
- ▶ Iran warned that an Israeli response could expand the arena of the war, and Syria accepted Hezbollah's claim that Israel was responsible for launching the rocket which hit Majdal Shams. The Druze community in Syria blamed Hezbollah and called for the organization to be punished.
- ▶ The international community condemned the attack on Majdal Shams and warned against further escalation, which could drag the region into an all-out war. However, many of the condemnations avoided directly blaming Hezbollah for launching the rocket.

The Attack

- ▶ On July 27, 2024, at 6:18 p.m., sirens were sounded in the Druze town of Majdal Shams in the northern Golan Heights. A few seconds later, a rocket hit a soccer field and caused a violent explosion. The attack killed 12 children and teenagers between the ages of ten and 16 and wounded about 40 other people (Israeli media, July 27, 2024).

¹ Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

►The IDF spokesperson reported that Hezbollah had launched the rocket. IDF Chief of Staff Major General Herzi Halevi said an investigation of the scene indicated that the explosion had been caused by a Falaq 1 rocket with a 53 kg (117 lb)² warhead (IDF spokesperson, 27-28 in July 2024). The IDF spokesperson in Arabic stated that the person responsible for the launch was Ali Muhammad Yahya, the commander of Hezbollah's rocket launching unit in the Shebaa area (Avichay Adraee's X account, July 27, 2024). The IDF spokesperson also showed the rocket's trajectory as identified by the operational systems (IDF spokesperson's Telegram channel, July 28, 2024).



Right: The trajectory of the rocket that hit Majdal Shams (IDF spokesperson, July 28, 2024).

Left: The scene of the attack on the soccer field (IDF spokesperson, July 27, 2024)

►On the night of July 27, 2024, the Israeli Air Force carried out a series of attacks on Hezbollah targets in seven areas in south Lebanon and deep in Lebanese territory, including weapons depots (IDF spokesperson, July 28, 2024). Israeli officials warned of a "strong" reprisal, and on the evening of July 28, 2024, the political-security cabinet met to discuss options for a response. The cabinet authorized the prime minister and the defense minister to decide what Israel's response would be (Israeli media, July 27-28, 2024).

Hezbollah

►Hezbollah claimed responsibility for launching a Falaq 1 rocket at the headquarters of the Hermon Brigade, north of Majdal Shams. According to the organization, the attack was "in support of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip" and in response to "enemy attacks on southern villages and safe houses, the latest of which was in Kafirkila" (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, July 27, 2024).

►After the results of the attack on Majdal Shams became clear, Hezbollah published an unusual and false announcement claiming it had no involvement in the attack. The

² See the Appendix for further information about the Falaq 1 rocket.

announcement claimed "the Islamic resistance in Lebanon categorically denies the claims reported in some of the enemy's media and in certain other media regarding the damage to Majdal Shams, avers that the Islamic resistance had nothing whatsoever to do with the incident, and categorically denies all the false claims in this context" (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, July 27, 2024).

►"Security sources" stated that Hezbollah was on high alert, adding that the organization had evacuated a number of military sites in east and south Lebanon in preparation for an Israeli escalation (Reuters, July 28, 2024).

►According to reports, Hezbollah threatened UNIFIL after Israeli officials stated there would be a harsh response to the attack on Majdal Shams, claiming it would respond strongly to any Israeli military action, even if it led to an all-out war (Sky News network in Arabic, July 27, 2024).

►"Sources" told the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese daily al-Akhbar that a number of Western countries, especially the United States, had conveyed messages to Lebanon stating that Israel had not yet decided on the nature of its response and was examining various options to avoid harming people in densely populated areas. It was also reported that messages were conveyed to the upper echelons of the Lebanese government and to Elias Bou Saab, the deputy speaker of the Lebanese Parliament. American envoy Amos Hochstein reportedly asked Bou Saab for a commitment from Hezbollah that in avoid escalation it would not respond to an Israeli attack, but according to Bou Saab, Hezbollah made no commitments, stating only that its response would be in accordance with the nature and intensity of Israel's attack (al-Akhbar, July 29, 2024).

Hezbollah claimed responsibility for only two attacks on Israel during July 28, 2024

(Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, July 28, 2024).

Lebanese Political Reactions

►The official reactions in Lebanon condemned the "harm" to the children and adolescents in Majdal Shams, but avoided naming Hezbollah as responsible for the attack, and warned against escalation.

The Lebanese government

►The office of Najib Mikati, prime minister of the Lebanese interim government, stated that the government condemned any act of violence and aggression against civilians and called for an immediate cessation of "aggression" on all fronts. It also stated that "attacking civilians

is a blatant violation of international law and goes against the principles of humanity" (Najib Mikati's office X account, July 27, 2024). Mikati also held talks with political and diplomatic representatives in Lebanon and around the world, during which he called for a comprehensive ceasefire and the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 "to end the useless cycle of violence and not be dragged into an escalation that would complicate the situation" (Najib Mikati's office X account, July 28, 2024).

►Abdullah Bou Habib, the Lebanese foreign minister, claimed that he "didn't think" Hezbollah had carried out the attack in Majdal Shams, alleging that the organization "hits military and not civilian targets" (BBC, July 28, 2024). He condemned the killing of civilians and suggested that an international commission of inquiry determine who was responsible for the attack on Majdal Shams. He also claimed Hezbollah was prepared to withdraw beyond the Litani River if Israel stopped its "violations," adding that an all-out war was in neither Israeli nor Lebanese interest, but Hezbollah would fight "alongside" the military forces. He concluded by saying that "our choices are between bad and awful" (al-Hadath Telegram channel, July 28, 2024).

►On another occasion Habib said that Lebanon had received guarantees from "the countries concerned" that Israel's and Hezbollah's reactions would be limited. In addition, he claimed that the United States had asked Lebanon to ensure that the organization's response to any Israeli attack would be limited (al-Nashra, July 28, 2024).

Lebanese politicians

►Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament and head of the Shi'ite Amal Movement, in a conversation with Janine Hannis-Plashart, the UN special coordinator in Lebanon, alleged that Hezbollah's denial of involvement in the attack on Majdal Shams "absolutely" confirmed its "commitment" to Resolution 1701 and neither Hezbollah nor Lebanon was responsible for the incident. He added that Lebanon was committed to Resolution 1701 despite nine months of "Israeli aggression." He also called on the Palestinians and Lebanese to be careful and not [help] promote the "enemy's destructive plan" (al-Manar, July 27, 2024).

►Muhammad Khawaja, a member of the Lebanese Parliament who represents Amal's Development and Liberation Bloc, accused Israel of responsibility for the attack on Majdal Shams. He claimed that "the one who commits mass massacres and kills children and women in the Gaza Strip, and civilians in south Lebanon, was the murderer of the young people in Majdal Shams." He alleged that Hezbollah operatives "could hit a communication pole with great precision," and therefore would not launch a rocket several kilometers off course.

Therefore, he claimed, an Iron Dome aerial defense system had caused the damage (Muhammad Khawaja's X account, July 28, 2024).

►Elias Bou Sa'ab, deputy speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, claimed that Hezbollah "gained nothing from attacking Majdal Shams" and called for an investigation of the incident. He added that Lebanon did not want war and if as a result of Israel's response civilians were killed or there was damage to Beirut and its environs, the Israeli response would not be considered controlled and limited. He claimed the parties should be committed to implementing Resolution 1701, which would be possible after the war in the Gaza Strip (al-Nashra, July 28, 2024).

The Druze

►Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Lebanese Druze community and former chairman of the Socialist Progressive Party in the Lebanese Parliament, condemned harming civilians everywhere, "whether in south Lebanon, occupied Palestine or the occupied Golan." He claimed that "past and present, Israel committed and continues to commit massacres of civilians." He added that the war had to be prevented from expanding and an immediate ceasefire had to be reached (al-Mayadeen, July 27, 2024). He rejected Israel's statement that Hezbollah launched the rocket at Majdal Shams and claimed that Hezbollah "respects the rules of engagement and responds when Israel violates them." He claimed that "Hezbollah is the Lebanese resistance and part of Lebanon" (al-Jazeera, July 28, 2024).

►Wi'am Wahhab, a Druze politician affiliated with Hezbollah, demanded an independent investigation of the incident with United Nations participation (Wi'am Wahhab's X account, July 27, 2024).

►Abu Yusuf Amin al-Sayegh, the spiritual leader of the Druze community in Lebanon, told "the people of the occupied Syrian Golan" that "the region is passing a dangerous turning point and history will recount that the Druze community was and will remain the pillar of Arabism and at the forefront of the 'resistance' and defenders of Arab causes." He warned against "attempts to sow division and separate you from your environment," and urged them not to allow "those who incite strife to take advantage of the deep wound in your hearts to achieve their goals" (Lebanese News Agency, July 28, 2024).

Arab-Muslim Reactions

►Nasser Kanaani, spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, warned Israel "not to undertake any new escapade in Lebanon under the pretext of the 'incident' in Majdal Shams." He said

that any "reckless aggression by the Zionist entity" could expand the scope of the war and undermine regional security. He called on the United States to meet to its moral and international responsibility towards world peace and security (al-Mayadeen, July 28, 2024).

►Mojtaba Amani, Iranian ambassador to Tehran, said Tehran did not expect the threats of all-out war in Lebanon to come to fruition because of the "existing power equations." He claimed Iran did not want the war to expand but was not afraid of it, because its enemies could only imagine the capabilities of Iran and the "resistance"³ (X account of Mojtaba Amani, July 27, 2024).

►The Syrian foreign ministry favored Hezbollah's version of events. Its announcement alleged that "the Israeli occupation committed a heinous crime in Majdal Shams in the occupied Syrian Golan, and then blamed the Lebanese national resistance, part of the entity's attempts to escalate the situation in the region and expand the scope of its aggression" (Syrian TV, July 28, 2024).

►Sheikh Hikmat al-Hajari, the spiritual leader of the Druze community in as-Suwauda in Syria, a supporter of the Druze protest against the Assad regime, condemned the attack on Majdal Shams. He stated that "the criminal party must be brought to justice, and it is clear to everyone who the perpetrator was. We demand that he be punished through international law for what his blood-stained hands did" (Syrian opposition channel Syria TV, July 28, 2024).

►The Egyptian foreign ministry warned that starting a new war in Lebanon because of the "incident" in Majdal Shams, which could lead to an all-out regional war. The ministry called on "influential factors" in the international community to intervene immediately to prevent the peoples of the region from [suffering] "further disastrous consequences of the conflict" (Egyptian foreign ministry Facebook page, July 28, 2024).

►An "Egyptian source" stated that the attack on Majdal Shams could make the negotiations for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip a top priority, since the truce in the war would also affect the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah and make itself felt on the front in northern Israel. "The source" said the mediators would use the incident to pressure the parties to reach a ceasefire (AP, July 28, 2024).

³ Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian organizations, the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

►The Jordanian foreign ministry warned that an escalation in south Lebanon could lead to a regional war and expressed support for Lebanon and its security (Jordanian foreign ministry X account, July 28, 2024).

International Reactions

►United States Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said that all the evidence indicated that the rocket that hit Majdal Shams was launched by Hezbollah, and emphasized that the United States supported Israel's right to protect its citizens from terrorism. He added that a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip would provide an opportunity for ongoing peace on the border between Israel and Lebanon, and made it clear that the American administration did not want an escalation (Reuters, July 28, 2024).

►Adrienne Watson, spokeswoman for the United States National Security Council, emphasized that the United States placed responsibility for the attack on Majdal Shams on Hezbollah which launched the rocket from an area under its control. She said the American administration was holding talks with Israel and Lebanon in an attempt to reach a diplomatic settlement which would achieve permanent peace along the Blue Line [the Israel-Lebanon border] (Reuters, July 28, 2024).

►According to reports, messages were exchanged by the United States and Iran regarding the attack on Majdal Shams. "An official source from the region" said that "neither side wants an all-out war, at least not at the moment, but the sides made it clear to one another what the devastating consequences of further escalation would be." "The source" added that serious measures were being taken behind the scenes to prevent escalation (Nafisa Kohnord's X account, July 28, 2024).

►Senior American officials denied receiving a message from Hezbollah according to which a significant Israeli response to the "incident" in Majdal Shams would trigger a powerful response from Hezbollah which could lead to an all-out war (Joseph Haboush's X account, July 28, 2024).

►A spokesman for Antonio Guterres, UN secretary general, said Guterres condemned the killing of 12 civilians, including children, and said children should not bear the burden of aggression. He called on both sides to exercise restraint and avoid further escalation (UN website, July 28, 2024).

►Tor Wennesland, special UN envoy to the Middle East peace process, condemned the "heinous attack" on the Druze town of Majdal Shams. He called on all parties to act with

maximum restraint and said that launching rockets along the border between Israel and Lebanon had to stop immediately (Tor Wennesland's X account, July 28, 2024).

►Aroldo Lazzaro, the UNIFIL commander, and Janine Hannis-Plashart, the UN special coordinator in Lebanon, issued a joint statement of condemnation following the killing of the children and youth in Majdal Shams and emphasized that civilians should always be protected. They called on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and stop the ongoing escalation, claiming that it could drag the region into an "unbelievable catastrophe." However, they did not refer to Hezbollah directly and did not assign responsibility for the attack (UNIFIL's Telegram channel, July 28, 2024).

►Josep Borrell, EU foreign minister, called the attack in Majdal Shams "a bloodbath." He called for an independent international investigation and urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid further escalation (Joseph Borrell's X account, July 27, 2024).

►Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, issued a general statement condemning "all acts of terrorism carried out by any party," but refrained from specifically referring to Hezbollah. He said Russia condemned the attack on October 7, 2023, but added that "Israeli acts of revenge were unacceptable because they constitute a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and represent collective punishment" (RT network in Arabic, July 28, 2024).

►Annalena Baerbock, the German foreign minister, called it "horrifying" that children and adolescents who just wanted to play football were killed. She stated that "for several months, Israeli citizens have been attacked by Hezbollah and other extremists," and emphasized that action should be taken "with a clear head, since too many people have died during the conflict" (Annalena Baerbock's X account, July 28, 2024).

►David Lammy, British foreign secretary, condemned the attack on the Golan Heights "which tragically led" to the death of 12 people. He expressed concern about the danger of further escalation and destabilization, adding that "we said explicitly that Hezbollah must stop its attacks" (David Lammy's X account, July 28, 2024).

►The French foreign ministry strongly condemned the attack on Majdal Shams and stated that "everything must be done to avoid further military escalation" (AFP, July 28, 2024).

►The Norwegian embassy in Beirut called on Norwegian citizens to leave Lebanon. The embassy warned that if the situation worsened, the options for leaving Lebanon might be limited. (Facebook page of the Norwegian embassy in Beirut, July 28, 2024). Canada also called on its citizens to leave Lebanon immediately (Canadian foreign ministry, July 28, 2024).

Social Media Reactions

- ▶An anti-Israeli X account with the name Munir al-Khatir (with 93.3 thousand followers) published posts blaming Israel for the deaths in Majdal Shams. One, which presented Prime Minister Netanyahu's blaming Hezbollah, "answered" by claiming, "the Iron Dome killed them, liar." On another occasion he expressed his anger at the [Israeli] government ministers during the children's funerals and wrote that "All the Zionists come to eat bread in Majdal Shams after the occupation army killed them with an Iron Dome missile. Smotrich [Israel's finance minister] was removed from the place like a dog by the residents" (Munir al-Khatir's X account, July 27-28, 2024).
- ▶Dr. Ahmed Yassin, a Lebanese political activist living in Paris, criticized Hezbollah for the attack and claimed that Hezbollah underestimated the intelligence of the people by claiming that its own rocket had been a missile fired from the Iron Dome aerial defense system, since the video recording the fall showed it was a heavy rocket (Dr. Ahmed Yassin's YouTube channel, July 28, 2024).
- ▶Dr. Fahed a-Shalimi mocked Hezbollah for claiming it has not fired the rocket. He said Hezbollah should expect severe repercussions from Israel (Dr. Fahad al-Shalimi's X account, July 28, 2024).

Appendix: The Falaq 1 Rocket

- ▶The Falaq 1 is an Iranian-made rocket with a range of up to ten kilometers (six miles) and capable of carrying a warhead of 50 kgs (110 lbs) (according to the IDF, the warhead of the rocket which was used to attack Majdal Shams weighed 53 kgs, or 117 lbs). The rocket is 1.32 meters (about 4.3 feet) long and weighs 113 kgs (a little under 250 lbs). It can be launched from a double-barreled or multi-barreled launcher mounted on an ATV or truck. It can also be used to attack naval targets (al-Manar, January 26, 2024). Hezbollah's first declared use of a Falaq 1 rocket was an attack on an IDF base in the Golan Heights on January 26, 2024.

►The IDF spokesperson published comparison of the remains of the rocket that hit Majdal Shams with a whole Falaq 1 rocket. The findings confirmed they were the same model (IDF spokesperson, July 28, 2024).



Right: Falaq 1 rocket launcher (Hezbollah combat information Telegram channel, March 28, 2024). Left: Remains of the rocket in Majdal Shams compared with a whole rocket (IDF spokesperson, July 28, 2024)