

Political

update: Gaza crisis update – 12 July 2006

Key points

- **Hezbollah kidnap two Israeli soldiers**
 - **Lebanese militia open fire along Israel-Lebanon border**
 - **Israel continue air strikes in Gaza**
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Latest developments

- Shiia fundamentalist group Hezbollah have claimed to have captured two Israeli soldiers during an exchange of fire across the Lebanese-Israel border early on Wednesday morning.
- Fighting broke out after Syrian and Iranian backed Hezbollah launched Katyusha rockets at the northern Israeli town of Shlomi and IDF positions in the Sheba Farms area and along Israel's northern border.
- Several people have been injured in the attacks although there are no reported killings.
- The exchanges of fire are the biggest upsurge of fighting on the Lebanese-Israeli border since May this year.
- Arab Television station Al Jazeera have reported that 7 Israeli soldiers have been killed by Hezbollah in the attacks
- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is to convene a security cabinet this morning, to discuss the abducted soldiers, after he has met with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.
- IDF sources have suggested that the Hezbollah attacks were in response to Israeli air strikes in Gaza, aimed at targeting senior Hamas bomb maker Mohammed Deif, which killed six people including women and children. Deif is not thought to be among the dead.

Speaking from a joint press conference with US secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on a visit to Washington, UK Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett commented on the situation in the Middle East:

“we are very mindful of the period of time since the Israeli soldier has been abducted. I spoke recently to President Abbas and shared with him our view, which I know you share, that we want to see that soldier returned unharmed and speedily and that we want to see the easing of those

