



Spotlight on Terrorism : Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria

June 30 – July 13 , 2023

Overview

- ▶ **Growing tension along the Israel-Lebanon border:** The Lebanese government, in coordination with Hezbollah, deliberated Israel's [alleged] trespass into Lebanese territory in the tiny village of Ghajar instead of directly addressing Israel's demand for the removal of the tents Hezbollah erected on the Israeli side of the border (the Blue Line). In the meantime, Hezbollah continued its provocation along the border, which included firing an anti-tank missile from the Ghajar region, an attempt to vandalize the border fence, in which three civilians were injured, and an arson attempt.
- ▶ On June 12, 2023, Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech for the 17th anniversary of the Second Lebanon War, relating to the current events along the border. He claimed the tent erected by Hezbollah was located in Lebanese territory and any forcible Israeli attempt to remove it would be met with a "military" response. According to Nasrallah, the territory of the Shebaa Farms [Har Dov] is Lebanese and Israel had to withdraw. He also related to the maritime border between Israel and Lebanon as "a model which had proved itself," because, he claimed, Hezbollah's threats against the Karish offshore drilling rig had been a factor in the successful arrangement of the issue. However, he claimed, it was not a legitimate border delineation because Hezbollah did not recognize Israel and only sought its annihilation.
- ▶ The Lebanese presidential crisis continues with no resolution in the foreseeable future.
- ▶ The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps' (IRGC) Qods Force and Hezbollah are strengthening their foothold in Syria.
- ▶ Information was revealed about an Iranian company's provision of missiles and UAVs to Hezbollah and Russia.

Lebanon

Growing tension along the Israel-Lebanon border

► **During the past two weeks tension has grown along the Israel-Lebanese border:**

◆ On **July 12, 2023** several individuals of unknown identity wearing civilian clothes attempted to vandalize the barrier between Israel and Lebanon; they were repelled by IDF forces (IDF spokesman, July 12, 2023). According to the al-Nashra website, they were three workers who were erecting a watch tower near the border in the al-Bustan region, southeast of the village of Yarin (near Zarit, an Israeli moshav). They were reportedly injured by an IDF hand grenade (al-Nashra, July 12, 2023). Muhammad Afif, head of Hezbollah's media information department, said three Hezbollah operatives had been wounded in an incident on the border in "circumstances which had not yet been clarified," and they had been evacuated to a hospital in Tyre. It was also reported that Lebanese army and UNIFIL forces had been put on alert along the border to control the situation (al-Istiqlal, July 12, 2023). In response, Candice Ardell, deputy director of the UNIFIL media office, said the agency was aware of the Blue Line incident and was monitoring the situation. She added that the situation was "sensitive" and UNIFIL had called for a halt to any activity that might cause escalation (Lebanese National News Agency, July 12, 2023). In his speech Nasrallah claimed the July 12 incident on the border was still under examination (al-Manar, July 12, 2023).



Pictures from a video of the event. Suspicious figures approach and an explosion halts and distances them (IDF spokesman's Twitter account, July 12, 2023)

◆ Somewhat later on July 12, 2023, several suspicious individuals approached the border security fence near Metulla, Israel's northernmost city, threw rocks and tried to light a fire in Lebanese territory near the fence. IDF fighters fired shots to repel them and they retreated (IDF spokesman, July 12, 2023). Their actions may have been related to the 17th

anniversary of the Second Lebanon War. The Lebanese media issued pictures of several young Lebanese climbing the border security fence near Metulla and trying to cover its security cameras (@alishoeib1970 Twitter account, July 12, 2023).



Lebanese cover Israel's border-monitoring cameras near Metulla (LBCI, July 5, 2023; @alishoeib1970 Twitter account, July 12, 2023).

► The events were preceded by several clashes in the area of the village of Shuba, apparently instigated by Hezbollah, to disrupt IDF engineering activity: on July 5, 2023, after an IDF activity to remove underbrush near the fence, local residents came, planted 40 trees and installed an irrigation system. In the meantime, Lebanese army soldiers claimed an Israeli bulldozer engaged in engineering activities at the site had entered Lebanese territory. They informed UNIFIL, which temporarily halted the activities (LBC, July 5, 2023; @alishoeib1970 Twitter account, July 12, 2023). Later, two Lebanese crossed the border and approached the IDF bulldozer. IDF fighters fired into the air to repel them. Several others crossed the border but left after a discussion with officials (Ynet, July 9, 2023).



Right: Trees planted at the site. Left: Lebanese army soldiers and a UNIFIL representative near the IDF bulldozer (@alishoeib1970 Twitter account, July 5, 2023)



**Hezbollah documents the "violation" of the Blue Line
(@alishoeib1970 Twitter account, July 4, 2023).**

► On July 6, 2023, an explosion was reported near the village of Ghajar. IDF forces arriving on the scene reported mortar shells had been fired at Israeli territory near the border. An examination revealed an anti-tank missile had been fired (IDF spokesman, July 6, 2023). Its source was unclear. The Lebanese media reported a rocket had been fired from south Lebanon which landed in the al-Wazzani region near Ghajar. Lebanese "security sources" claimed the rocket had been fired from the area around Shuba (al-Nashra, July 6, 2023). UNIFIL said in an official announcement that it could not confirm the source of the rocket fire and had sent forces to investigate, adding that the UNIFIL commander was in contact with the Israeli and Lebanese authorities and had informed them they had to practice restraint and avoid taking measures that could lead to war (UNIFIL Twitter account, July 6, 2023). In the meantime, according to reports, Najib Mikati, interim Lebanese prime minister, was following the events and maintained contact with both Lebanese army and UNIFIL headquarters (Lebanese government Twitter account, July 6, 2023).

► On July 9, 2023, about 30 armed Lebanese army soldiers and unarmed Hezbollah operatives crossed the border for a short period of time. The IDF asked UNIFIL to return them to Lebanese territory and they withdraw (IDF Radio, July 9, 2023). In the meantime, five members of the Lebanese parliament held a demonstration near the village to Ghajar to protest what they referred to as Israel's "annexation of the northern part of the village." They called for pressure to be exerted on Israel to stop its annexation and called on the Lebanese army to confront Israel (al-Nashra, July 9, 2023).

► In his speech (see below), Hassan Nasrallah related at great length to the tension along the border and the situation in Ghajar. He said that the previous year Israel had built a fence to annex the northern part of the village, which he claimed was "Lebanese territory which had international recognition from the UN." He complained that no objections were made when

Israel turned Ghajar into a tourist attraction, while the UN indicated objection to Hezbollah tents, implying that the UN had a double standard . He rejected the claim that Israel had annexed Ghajar because of tents erected at the site and that erecting the tents had merely renewed the whole border situation. He claimed the time had come to deal with Israel's violations in Ghajar after 17 years, as the maritime border between Israel and Lebanon had been arranged following Hezbollah's threats to attack the Karish offshore natural gas drilling rig. He complained the international community had a double standard, saying nothing about Israel's [alleged] "violations" in Ghajar, but reacting swiftly to the erection of the tents. He claimed entering the Shebaa Farms [Har Dov] and erecting the tents had been legitimate because they were in Lebanese territory, and Lebanon had the right to build whatever it liked. He added that Israel was not as strong as it had been and therefore it could be challenged with the erection of tents. He threatened that if the tents were attacked Hezbollah's operatives would receive orders "to deal with the situation."

► In the wake of the erection of the tents, over the past two weeks the Lebanese government and Hezbollah initiated **complaints that Israel had violated UN Resolution 1701**.¹ According to al-Quds al-Arabi and the Deutsche Presse-Agentur News Agency, Lebanon informed the UNIFIL commander that "Hezbollah's two tents were on Lebanese land" and "starting from the location of the tents, UNIFIL had to begin delineating the land borders and write finis to the entire issue" (al-Quds al-Arabi and DPA, July 11, 2023).

► The Hezbollah-affiliated media outlets reported that Lebanon had ordered its UN delegation to lodge a complaint with the UN secretary general and Security Council and for Israel to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from all Lebanese territory (al-Manar, July 11, 2023). A few hours before Nasrallah made his speech he discussed the tents with Lebanese media personnel. He claimed that in early June 2023 Israel had asked UNIFIL to remove them by force, and "[H]ere we are, a month and a half later..." Nasrallah's threat of a Hezbollah attack should the tents be forcibly removed was preceded by a warning sent to Israel through several channels claiming if Israel removed them, regardless of the method used, Hezbollah would declare war (al-Akhbar, July 4, 2023).

¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1701, passed at the end of the Second Lebanon War, deals with the deployment and responsibilities of the Lebanese army and UNIFIL in south Lebanon. For further information see the December 19, 2018 report, "Security Council Resolution 1701 and Its Systematic Violation by Hezbollah and Iran." For the text of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, see <https://peacemaker.un.org/israellebanon-resolution1701>.

► **Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib** initiated a round of talks with the foreign ministers of the Security Council members to initiate the process for delineating Israel's land border. According to the report, he also discussed the idea at a meeting attended by interim Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, the UNIFIL commander and himself. Habib complained that there were still many problematic issues to be dealt with regarding Israel and the border, and therefore they were convinced that delineation was the best solution. He stressed it did not mean recognition or normalization of relations with Israel (MTV and Telegram, July 11, 2023).

► Senior officials in both Hezbollah and Amal, including Hashem Safi al-Din, chairman of Hezbollah's executive council, and Wafiq Safi, head of Hezbollah's liaison and coordination unit, held a coordination meeting. It ended with the publication of a joint statement warning Israel against taking "aggressive action" at various sites along the border, including "new aggression" in the form of erecting a fence in the northern Ghajar area, which they claimed was Lebanese territory in the Shebaa Farms (al-'Ahed, July 4, 2023). Nabih Berri, speaker of the Lebanese parliament and head of the Amal movement, said the tent had been erected on Lebanese territory and the international community had to force Israel to implement Resolution 1701 and withdraw from the northern area of Ghajar, from the Shebaa Farms and from the hills around the village of Shuba (Nabih Berri's Twitter account, July 10, 2023).

► Muneir al-Rabi', a Lebanese political commentator, said Western agencies had proposed Israel withdraw from the northern area of Ghajar in return for Hezbollah's removing the tents. However, he claimed, that would be the wrong approach for Hezbollah because all the territories were Lebanese and they were not part of any disputed areas. He also said that "according to assessments," Hezbollah had set a time limit for restoring the status quo ante in Ghajar, otherwise escalation would be unavoidable. He added that all the developments had opened doors to many possibilities for negotiations to delineate the land borders, especially since Hezbollah, with Lebanon behind it, did not agree on the locations of several sites marked on the Blue Line (al-Medan, July 9, 2023).

► According to Lebanese sources, the Americans entered the picture and the United States administration asked interim Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati to promote understandings with UNIFIL regarding its position. Dorothy Shea, the American ambassador to Lebanon, demanded an urgent meeting with Mikati regarding Hezbollah's position, presenting him with messages from Israel and the United States. The United States, she said, expected the

Lebanese government to reach understandings with the Lebanese army and UNIFIL to deal with the crisis of the Hezbollah tents. She told Mikati that the United States did not want to see any military activity from Lebanese territory towards Israel. It was also reported that Mikati passed the message to Hezbollah (al-Akhbar, July 4, 2023).

Hassan Nasrallah's speech

► On July 12, 2023, Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech for the 17th anniversary of the Second Lebanon War (al-Manar, July 12, 2023). In addition to the above, his main points were the following:

- ◆ **The Second Lebanon War:** According to Nasrallah, the war in 2006 was particularly significant for Lebanon and the entire region, and its consequences were still felt today. At the time the United States tried to introduce the concept of "the new Middle East," in which Israel would control the entire area as an American proxy. The concept failed in the wars in Lebanon and Iraq and in the Palestinian arena.

- ◆ **The equation of deterrence:** Since the war, he claimed, Hezbollah had created a new equation of deterrence with Israel, while Israel's deterrence was consistently deteriorating. That was obvious, he said, because since the war Israelis had lived in fear while Lebanese lives had been tranquil. That was because they had faith in the efficacy of the balance Hezbollah had created, despite the war in Syria and the struggle against radical Islam headed by ISIS. He added that Hezbollah had created the balance for the sake of Lebanon's security, whose three foundations were the forces of Hezbollah, the Lebanese army and the Lebanese people themselves. Israel's attempts to restore its deterrence had resulted in chaos, which was obvious in Operation Shield and Arrow in May 2023 and the activity in Jenin in June 2023.

- ◆ **The Palestinian "resistance:"** He said the Palestinian "resistance" [anti-Israel terrorism] had become stronger. He quoted a new Palestinian public opinion poll which found that two thirds of the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria were of the opinion that not only would the entire region be "liberated," but Israel would soon cease to exist. He said that since Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon [2006] the "resistance" had "liberated" Gaza [i.e., Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip] and the idea of a "greater Israel" had collapsed.

- ◆ **Israel's [alleged] violations of the Lebanese border:** He said that according to Resolution 1701, Israel was supposed to stop its hostile activities against Lebanon and

the situation was supposed to be under Lebanese army and UNIFIL supervision, but in reality Israel routinely violated Lebanon's air space and sea and land sovereignty to attack Syria.



Hassan Nasrallah (al-Manar, July 12, 2023).

UNIFIL mandate extended

► The UNIFIL mandate was extended, and senior figures in the Lebanese government are trying to curtail its forces' freedom of activity in south Lebanon. To that end Najib Mikati, interim Lebanese prime minister, met with Abdallah Bou Habib, the Lebanese foreign minister. Habib said Lebanon had an interest in UNIFIL performing its function smoothly and therefore it would be best if the Lebanese army accompanied it. He said that 80% of UNIFIL's patrols were accompanied by Lebanese army forces, and they wanted the percentage to be higher to prevent problems, because local residents were more "comfortable" if Lebanese army forces were present on patrols (Lebanese government Twitter account, July 12, 2023). UNIFIL said in a statement that all its activities were coordinated with the Lebanese army and in 20% of its ground activities Lebanese soldiers were present, and the patrols were the key to monitoring violations of Resolution 1701 (UNIFIL Twitter account, July 13, 2023).

Hezbollah and the Palestinian issue

► Hezbollah condemned the "Zionist aggression against the Jenin refugee camp," saying the silence of the international community and the Arab states encouraged Israel to continue its "violent acts of terrorism." Hezbollah also stressed its total support for the Palestinian [terrorist] organizations, with all means they wanted to use, to deter Israel and defend the Palestinian people (al-Alam al-Harbi, July 2, 2023).

17th anniversary of the Second Lebanon War

► July 12, 2023, marked the 17th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second Lebanon War, for which Hezbollah's al-Manar website posted articles, pictures and videos. One video showed

the abduction of three Israeli reserve soldiers, which began the war (al-Manar, July 12, 2023). In all the posts, as well as in Hassan Nasrallah's speech, the role of Hezbollah as "Lebanon's defender" was repeatedly emphasized.

Hezbollah and the protests in Israel

► Hezbollah is carefully monitoring Israel's internal situation and the protests against the "legal reform." Most of its reporting rests on Israeli media coverage. Hezbollah's articles claim that Israel's internal crisis put the fate of the country in danger. One article related to the petition signed by more than 100,000 reserve Israeli Air Force soldiers and a letter sent by 211 reserve soldiers and officers to senior officials and officers in the Ministry of Defense and IDF (al-Manar, July 12, 2023).

The Lebanese presidential crisis

► The Lebanese presidential crisis continues. So far no political camp has been able to achieve a majority for its candidate. Hezbollah remains determined to support the candidacy of Suleiman Frangieh, affiliated with both Hezbollah and the Syrian regime, and apparently will continue to frustrate attempts to elect a different candidate (icibeyrouth.com, July 2023).

► The Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese daily paper al-Akhbar reported that France was planning to propose to Saudi Arabia that Iran be included in contacts related to the Lebanese presidential issue and even possibly in the committee composed of Saudi Arabia, the United States, Qatar, Egypt and France. Such a possibility would depend on contacts France held with all the other committee members (al-Akhbar, July 4, 2023).

Syria

Qods Force and Hezbollah strengthen their foothold in Syria

► The American Institute of War issued a report on June 30, 2023, according to which the IRGC's Qods Force and Hezbollah had erected a headquarters in the city of al-Mayadin in eastern Syria, and Hezbollah, through its construction company Jihad al-Binaa, had begun building a military base in Deir ez-Zor, not far from al-Mayadin. According to the report, the base has storerooms for weapons, a training facility and housing for pro-Iranian militia operatives and their families. In addition, the pro-Iranian militias handled by the Qods Force and Hezbollah recently constructed a new military headquarters and housing for soldiers south of Damascus near the Shi'ite shrine of al-Sayyidah Zaynab. The sites are part of Hezbollah and the Iranian

regime's efforts to secure the main roads in Syria and their connections to the Golan Heights and Lebanon (The Institute of War, June 30, 2023).

Iranian Support for Hezbollah and Russia

► A groups of Iranian hackers calling themselves "Lab-Dookhtegan" gave Iran International, the opposition channel, information about a company called Tik, affiliated with the IRGC and, according to the hackers, providing Russia and Hezbollah with UAVs and missiles. The group revealed pictures related to the company and the names of its management. According to the information, the company provided Hezbollah and the Russian army with instructions and information about the missiles and the manufacture of the UAVs, and about their command and control systems. Tik's CEO is Rasul Sirati, and the top person in charge of instructing Hezbollah is Heshmat Parsaifard (Iran International, June 29, 2023).