



Spotlight on Terrorism : Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria July 21-27, 2023

Overview

- ▶ **Tension along the Israel-Lebanon border:** This past week Hezbollah and its affiliates continued provocations near the border; the most blatant was a patrol of armed Hezbollah operatives very close to Dovev, an Israeli moshav. Road construction works continued in Kafr Shuba. Lebanese politicians back Hezbollah's demands for Israel's complete withdrawal from the area of the Shebaa Farms and Kafr Ghajar.
- ▶ Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary general, delivered a speech in which he referred to the passing of Israel's Standard of Reasonableness Law and its influence on Israel's internal affairs.
- ▶ UNIFIL said in a statement that every day its forces carried out more than 450 [sic] operational activities in south Lebanon, stressing that the force acted independently.
- ▶ The presidential crisis in Lebanon continues, with Hezbollah officials continuing to support the candidacy of Suleiman Frangieh. The international attempts to resolve the crisis have led to increasing tensions between Hezbollah and Saudi Arabia. Iran might also join the countries assisting the process of electing a president.
- ▶ Riyadh Salameh, governor of the Lebanese Central Bank, is scheduled to end his term of office at the end of July 2023, after having held the position for thirty years. Salameh, who is suspected of embezzlement, is regarded as responsible for Lebanon's dire financial straits. So far his replacement has not yet been chosen.
- ▶ Hezbollah is constructing a training camp for recruits in the Deir ez-Zor region of northeastern Syria.
- ▶ Artillery was fired at Hezbollah observation posts near the border fence in the Golan Heights; the attack was attributed to Israel.
- ▶ The American magazine Newsweek published an article about the Imam Hossein Brigade, which operates in Syria and was established by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Qods Force.

Lebanon-Israel

Tension along the Israel-Lebanon border

► This past week tension continued on the Israel-Lebanon border. Hezbollah and its affiliates continued provoking IDF forces and monitoring their activities:

- ◆ On July 26, 2023, a video was issued of an IDF quadcopter hovering in the skies above Metulla while anchored to a rope. According to Ali Shoeib, a correspondent for al-Manar, it was anchored to prevent Hezbollah operatives from taking control of and stealing it (al-Manar, July 26, 2023). The report was also quoted in the London-based newspaper al-Quds al-Arabi, which reported the Lebanese had ridiculed the event (al-Quds al-Arabi, July 26, 2023).



IDF quadcopter anchored to a rope (@alishoeib1970, July 25, 2023).

- ◆ On July 25, 2023, a video was issued showing several armed Hezbollah operatives patrolling close to the border near Dovev, an Israeli moshav in the Upper Galilee. The IDF spokesperson reported they had documented the activity, adding that the operatives had remained on the Lebanese side of the border. The IDF monitored the activity and was prepared to respond if they crossed the border (Israeli media, July 25, 2023). The Lebanese media, mainly those affiliated with Hezbollah, quoted the Israeli reports. Amin Hatit, an al-Mayadeen political commentator, noted that Hezbollah had been able to carry out the operation without an Israeli response (al-Mayadeen, July 25, 2023). Journalist Hussein Murtada published a poster combining motifs of Israel's political-social crisis with documentation of the border incident entitled "The hour is nigh" (Hussein Murtada's Twitter account, July 25, 2023).



Husein Murtada's post (Husein Murtada's Twitter account, July 25, 2023).

- ◆ On July 25, 2023, according to Lebanese media reports, a group of Lebanese civilians approached the border fence near Metulla. Hezbollah flew a quadcopter over the area during their presence at the site (Hezbollah-affiliated Maymun5 Telegram channel, July 25, 2023).



Right: Hezbollah quadcopter in the skies over Metulla. Left: A group of Lebanese near Metulla (Maymun5 Telegram channel, July 25, 2023).

- ◆ Al-Manar TV correspondent Ali Shoeib reported that on the night of July 22, 2023, an IDF force approached the border near the village of Houla (west of Margalioth, an Israeli moshav), having detected suspicious movement on the Lebanese side. He claimed the soldiers fired their weapons and threw two stun grenades (alishoeib1970@, July 23, 2023).



Stun grenades al-Manar correspondent Ali Shoeib alleged were thrown by an IDF force (@alishoeb1970, July 23, 2023).

- ▶ In the meantime, road construction work continued in the Kafr Shuba area. According to al-Akhbar, the Kafr Shuba municipality is paving the road along the Blue Line not only in response to the fence erected by Israel, but as a new measure in a long, continuous series of steps to change the situation along south Lebanon's eastern border (al-Akhbar, July 20, 2023). **Qassem al-Qadri, head of the Kafr Shuba local council**, said they benefitted from the decline of Israel's deterrence following its preoccupation with its internal affairs, and the activities of the Palestinian "resistance" [anti-Israel terrorism], which prevented Israel from "opening another front with Lebanon" (al-Akhbar, July 22, 2023).
- ▶ On July 23, 2023, Elias Jarade, a member of the Lebanese parliament, paid a media-covered visit to Kafr Shuba and met with the heads of the village council. He toured the area and was interviewed near the border. He said Lebanon did not recognize the border line delineated by Israel, and local residents would not be satisfied until all their territorial rights had been realized (@alishoeb1970, July 23, 2023).



Lebanese member of Parliament Elias Jarade visits Kafr Shuba (@alishoeb1970, July 23, 2023).

- ▶ The Lebanese government continued its demands for Israel's complete withdrawal from the Shebaa Farms and Kafr Ghajar. Various Lebanese media also related to the issue, especially those affiliated with Hezbollah. **Muhammad Ra'ed, chairman of the Hezbollah faction in the**

Lebanese parliament, claimed "recently weakened" Israel should withdraw from Kafr Ghajar and all other Lebanese lands. He also claimed the borders did not need delineation as they were already recognized by the UN (al-Nashra, July 22, 2023). On another occasion he said that given Israel's situation, which was "as bad as it could be," the "resistance" had to find "equations" that would deter it and preserve "the people's sovereignty" (NAA, July 25, 2023).

► **Bouthaina Shaaban, senior advisor Syrian president**, related to the tensions on the Israel-Lebanon border, claiming the regional activity of Hezbollah and other international actors had easily revealed Israel's methods of operation on the border, giving the "resistance" in Lebanon an exact understanding of Israel's strategy. She claimed Hezbollah had its own strategy, which included erecting tents, ensuring a presence first of civilians and then of soldiers, paving roads, having members of parliament visit and remaining on the ground by whatever means necessary. According to Shaaban, the "resistance" [terrorist organizations] in south Lebanon, like that in "Palestine" and the Golan, warmed their hearts and brought the defeat of the "attackers" closer (al-Watan online, July 24, 2023).

Hezbollah reaction to Israel's passing the Standard of Reasonableness law

► On July 24, 2023, for the seventh day of the month of Muharram,¹ **Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general**, delivered a speech of mostly religious content. However, he also referred to Israel's internal affairs, claiming security was worsening day by day and the overall situation, which was the worst it had ever been, would lead to Israel's disintegration and disappearance. He also claimed that thanks to Hezbollah, the concept of the IDF as an invincible force had been dispelled (Hezbollah's combat information channel on Telegram, July 26, 2023).

UNIFIL's mandate

► In response to the deliberations regarding the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate and the Lebanese demands to limit the force's freedom of action in south Lebanon, UNIFIL noted its forces conducted more than 450 [sic] operational activities in south Lebanon daily and that most of their patrols were conducted independently. UNIFIL claimed that was the key to its

¹ Husayn Ibn Ali, Muhammad's grandson, was denied water during the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE. He died three days later. The seventh day of Muharram is a day of mourning.

success and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701² [sic] (UNIFIL Twitter account, July 26, 2023).

► **Najib Mikati, prime minister of the interim government in Lebanon**, met with **Joanna Wronecka, UN coordinator for Lebanon**, who briefed him on the Security Council's deliberations regarding Resolution 1701 (Wronecka Twitter account, July 25, 2023)

Lebanon

Reactions to the Qur'an burning in Sweden

► In Lebanon as well, the burning of the Qur'an in front of the Iraqi embassy in Sweden provoked rage and demands for the expulsion of the Swedish ambassador to Lebanon. Israel was also accused of responsibility. **Hassan Nasrallah** hinted the Israeli Mossad was behind the incident (Dunia al-Watan, July 23, 2023). Even the daily Ra'i al-Youm, which is affiliated with the so-called "resistance axis" [Hezbollah, Iran and the Palestinian terrorist organizations] and published in London, hinted at a connection between Salwan Momika, who burned the Qur'an in Sweden, and the Israeli Mossad (Ra'i al-Youm, July 23, 2023). The narrative linking Israel to the burning of the Qur'an was also circulated in Iran. **Nasser Kanaani, spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry**, claimed that "the Zionists had a hand behind the scenes in the desecration of the Qur'an" (al-Alam in Persian, July 25, 2023). **Ali Mohammadi-Sirat, Khamenei's representative in the Qods Force**, interviewed by the Persian newspaper Hamshahri, claimed the person who burned the Qur'an was an "Israeli spy" and his objective had been to deflect public attention from the crisis in Israel (Hamshahri, July 27, 2023).

Lebanese's presidential crisis

► The presidential crisis in Lebanon remains unresolved. Hezbollah continues to support the candidacy of Suleiman Frangieh (a Maronite Christian allied with Assad, Iran and Hezbollah). France's activity continues, and, **Jean-Yves Le Drian, the French president's envoy**, arrived once again in Lebanon to hold another round of meetings (Radio al-Nur, July 26, 2023). In the meantime, the LBCI network reported that Le Drian said the five-nation consultations about the presidency, which are supposed to be held in September 2023, would be the last opportunity to choose a president, and if unsuccessful, all five countries would withdraw from

² The resolution for the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in the Second Lebanon War (2006) and the deployment of UNIFIL and the Lebanese army in south Lebanon to prevent Hezbollah from operating in the area. The resolution also included Hezbollah's disarmament.

with the issue and sanctions would be imposed on those who obstructed efforts to resolve the presidential crisis (LBCI , July 27, 2023).

► A "source" close to the Shi'ite leadership stated that future meetings of the representatives of the five countries (who recently met in Qatar) might expand to include Iran (al-Diyar, July 23, 2023). It was also reported that the statement threatening measures against obstructions to resolve the presidential crisis had caused tension between Hezbollah and Saudi Arabia (al-Akhbar, July 26, 2023).

Governor of the Bank of Lebanon ends his term in office

► **Riyad Salameh, governor of the Lebanese Central Bank**, is scheduled to end his term in office at the end of July 2023, after thirty years in office. Serious accusations of corruption were made against him and his assets were frozen by court order. He was also accused of responsibility for Lebanon's current financial distress. Lebanon's interim government does not have the authority to appoint a new governor, so the position is supposed to automatically pass to his four deputies. They announced they would resign if no solution to the situation were found because they did not want future responsibility for the country's financial collapse (al-Hurra, July 26, 2023). The absence of a bank governor could cause Lebanon's financial situation to deteriorate further. The current situation, which is terrible in any case, could cause the Lebanese currency to depreciate even more and worsen the economic crisis.



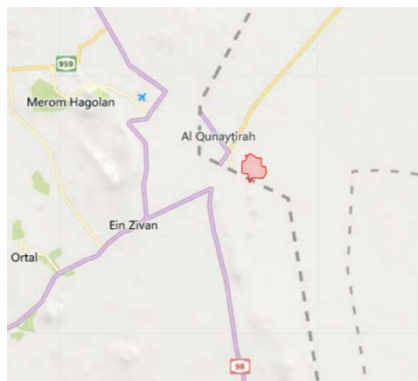
Riyad Salameh, the governor of the Lebanese Central Bank (al-Hura, July 26, 2023).

Syria

Shots fired at Hezbollah observation posts in the Syrian Golan Heights

► On July 25, 2023, artillery was reportedly fired at observation posts in the town of al-Qahtaniah, about a kilometer southeast of al-Qunaitra, a few hundred meters east of the

Syrian-Israeli border; the artillery fire was attributed to Israel. According to reports, operatives of Hezbollah and its affiliated militias are concentrated in the town and use the facilities of the Syrian internal security forces, army and auxiliary forces to conduct surveillance of Israeli territory (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, July 25, 2023).



al-Qahtaniah (in red), Syria (Bing Map)

Hezbollah constructs a training camp

► Orient News, a Syrian opposition newspaper, reported that Hezbollah intended to construct a training camp during August 2023 in the Deir ez-Zor area in northeastern Syria. According to reports, the training camp will be used for the induction of new recruits from among tribesmen of the al-Hasaka district. Hezbollah has already recruited about forty volunteers and established a training camp in the town of Hussainiya in the Deir ez-Zor region (Orient News, July 24, 2023). The reports are consistent with a report published by the American Institute of War, according to which the IRGC Qods Force and Hezbollah established a headquarters in al-Mayadeen in eastern Syria, and Hezbollah, through its construction unit Jihad al-Binaa', had begun constructing a military base in Deir ez-Zor (Institute of War, June 30, 2023).

The Imam Hossein Brigade

► Newsweek published an article about the Imam Hossein Brigade, considered the most powerful pro-Iranian militia in Syria.³ The article was based on information received from a member of an intelligence agency of a nation allied with the United States. The investigation was cited in Lebanese media, and the Lebanese daily al-Nahar reported the main findings (al-Nahar, July 21, 2023).

► Below are the main points published in Newsweek, July 21, 2023:

³ For further information see the April 16, 2023 ITIC report, "The Pro-Iranian Militias in Syria."

- ◆ The Imam Hossein Brigade was established in 2016 by the late Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, and was under his control. Hezbollah played a vital role in establishing the militia, and it is defined as an updated version of Hezbollah (Hezbollah 2.0). The militia is composed of thousands of operatives, most of them are Syrian, although some come from Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Sudan, and other countries.
- ◆ The operatives are armed with a variety of weapons, including drones and precision-guided munitions.
- ◆ The militia coordinates closely with the Syrian army 4th Division, commanded by Maher al-Assad, the Syrian president's brother, and is assisted by its infrastructure and logistics.
- ◆ During 2019 the Imam Hossein Brigade carried out several attacks against American and IDF forces.