



## (U) The Current Israel-Hizballah-Lebanon Hostilities -- What Caused Them?

FROM: [REDACTED]  
SINIO for the Near East and South Asia (S17)  
Run Date: 07/27/2006

(U) An Israel-Hizballah conflict erupted suddenly on 12 July 2006 and appeared to be ratcheting toward broader regional hostilities by the 15th. Israel's conditions for a cease-fire are two-fold: the safe return of the two soldiers Hizballah elements kidnapped on 12 July; and the removal of Hizballah military elements from the southern part of Lebanon and its replacement by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) or a proposed international peacekeeping force.

(U) Concurrently, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) is conducting operations in the Gaza Strip to effect the release of another soldier whom Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) kidnapped on 29 June. Most observers conjoin these separate incidents as emblematic of the root causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

(U) Hizballah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers during a cross-border operation sparked a harsh Israeli response, including air strikes on Lebanese transportation infrastructures intended to prevent Hizballah from moving the kidnapped soldiers out of Lebanon. IDF naval forces imposed a blockade, while Israeli air assets bombed Rafiq Hariri (formerly Beirut International) Airport's runways and fuel storage tanks, other smaller airfields throughout Lebanon, and the land routes connecting Lebanon with Syria. IDF ground units have conducted small-scale incursions into southern Lebanon in an effort to eradicate the close-in military threat.

(U) Few observers doubt that Hizballah operates under Iran's and Syria's watchful guidance. The coincidence of the 12 July operation with the international community's deadline for Iran to respond to an proposal of incentives to coax Iran into ending its nuclear fuel cycle enrichment program is unmistakable, and seems to link Iran to Hizballah's operational timing. However, there no empirical evidence to prove the linkage has surfaced to date. Syria disavows any control over Hizballah's military wing, and claims that it has fulfilled its UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1559 responsibilities in vacating Lebanon. Most observers, though, believe that a remnant, covert Syrian presence interacts with Hizballah leaders.



(U) Israel faces growing international criticism for its "disproportionate" retaliation, but the somewhat surprising, low-key Arab reaction indicates a possible degree of satisfaction that Israel is addressing the radical Islamic threat with a firmness that threatened Arab regimes feel constrained to implement. In Cairo, 18 Arab foreign ministers adopted a resolution calling for UNSC intervention. But moderates, led by Saudi Arabia and joined by Egypt and Jordan, denounced the Lebanese guerrilla group's action in provoking the conflict.

### **SERIES:** **(U) Middle East Hostilities**

1. The Current Israel-Hizballah-Lebanon Hostilities -- What Caused Them?
2. [Mideast: Complexities of Predicting the Spread to a Regional Conflict](#)
3. [Prognosis: 'More of the Same' for Middle East Strife](#)

(U) Israel's conditions for ending its operations in Lebanon will be difficult to achieve in full. Most observers agree that the Lebanese government (GOL) is impotent to move against Hizballah. Fears that the LAF could splinter into sectarian factions, as occurred early in the Lebanese civil war, or that the government itself could collapse, fuel GOL reluctance to deploying the LAF to dislodge Hizballah from the south.

(U) Aside from its stated objectives, Israel is motivated by a set of intangible factors to deal firmly with what it considers existential threats from Islamic radicals, their patrons, and from states that allow safe haven or permissive operating environments for these elements. Israel's security establishment has faced continuing criticism from the hard-line, religious right, who claim that Israel's formerly unquestioned deterrent--devastating and immediate retaliation--had been rendered invalid through years of disuse. Maintaining Israel's credibility as the defender of the Jewish nation looms constant in its military planning.

(U) Politically, former Prime Minister (PM) Ariel Sharon's untimely departure from the political scene left the leadership of the ruling Kadima Party with relatively little military experience, and questionable security credentials. PM Olmert and Defense Minister Peretz presumably feel the necessity to prove their security acumen and willingness to employ convincing force in defending Israel. Israel views this moment as historic, apparently intending to deal a decisive deathblow to Hizballah's military elements. PM Olmert has vowed to punish "all parties responsible" for the deadly rocket attacks on Israeli populations, including those in Haifa, Israel's third largest city. Israeli leaders presumably include Syria and Iran in this pronouncement.

---

*(U) Watch for part two of this article, "Complexities of Predicting the Spread to a Regional Conflict," coming soon.*

---

(U//FOUO) Do you have thoughts on this topic? Post them on the [SID today Blog](#).

**"(U//FOUO) SIDtoday articles may not be republished or reposted outside NSANet without the consent of S0121 ([DL sid comms](#))."**

---