



(U) Mideast: Complexities of Predicting the Spread to a Regional Conflict

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(U) In yesterday's article (part 1 of this series), we looked at how the situation in the Mideast got to this point. What may happen next?

(U) Having warned Iran and Syria that it will hold all parties responsible for Hizballah's actions accountable, Israel may take the opportunity to strike Hizballah's and HAMAS' patrons. While showing restraint thus far, Israel may punish Syria militarily as firm evidence emerges showing that Syria supplied Hizballah with munitions that caused Israeli civilian casualties in the rocket attacks against Haifa and the north of Israel.

(U) Israel seems to be more constrained to use direct military force against Iran for the moment. This may owe to logistical issues, or concern for western equities in expanding the conflict in a dramatic fashion. However, the Iranian presence in Lebanon, including its Beirut embassy and alleged Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force and Ministry of Intelligence and Security presences, could prove "convenient" targets and provide a modicum of plausible deniability as "collateral damage."

(U) Israeli media reported on 18 July that the IDF had destroyed a number of Hizballah rockets with a 200-kilometer range, implying that they had been supplied by Iran. As such evidence mounts, Israel may become more willing to hit Iranian targets, probably without seeking U.S. approval.



(U) Women shout slogans while holding a picture of Hizbollah leader Nasrallah during a demonstration in support of Hamas and Hizbollah in Tehran (Reuters)

(U) However, regional dynamics, intense international diplomatic efforts, and Israel's satisfaction that its objectives have been achieved could prevent the conflict's spreading to include other players. Israel has expressed its desire to live in peace with Lebanon. Some Arab states secretly applaud Israel's striking a blow to Islamic extremists who represent similar threats in their own back yards.

(U) There is an element of "lip-service" to the level of support that the Arab states are willing to offer to the Palestinians. Many Arabs are weary of the Palestinian cause and have provided relatively little material or financial support to their "oppressed brothers" and none has offered any sanctuary for the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees living in squalid camps in Lebanon and Syria.

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

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