

The Golan Ablaze: Are Hezbollah and Iran Behind It?

by Jerry Gordon and Ilana Freedman (February 2015)



IDF soldiers aid wounded comrade on Golan

Source: AFP/Getty Images/NYPost.com

The Golan is suddenly ablaze with rocket and anti-tank missiles launched from Lebanon and Syria incurring IDF casualties. *Israel Hayom* reported on January 28, 2014, [“Hezbollah missile hits IDF vehicle; casualties feared”](#):

Overnight, IAF struck several military targets in Syria in response to four rockets fired from Syria into Golan Heights on Tuesday. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, “We will respond with force against those who try to challenge us.”

According to preliminary reports, an anti-tank missile fired from Lebanon hit an Israel Defense Forces vehicle patrolling the border in the Har Dov area on Wednesday morning. The vehicle went up in flames and multiple casualties were [reported].

Lebanese authorities said the IDF then fired at least 35 artillery shells into Lebanon following the incident.

[...]

After Wednesday’s incident, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was visiting Sderot, said, “to anyone who is challenging us along the northern border I say this: Look at what happened in the Gaza Strip – last summer, Hamas sustained the most debilitating blow it faced since its establishment. The IDF is ready to strike with force on all fronts.” The prime minister cut short his visit to Sderot and headed to IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv for an emergency briefing.

Meanwhile, several IDF positions in the northern Golan Heights near the borders with Lebanon and Syria were also hit by mortar shells. Subsequently, the IDF evacuated civilians from the Mount Hermon area. Residents of border-adjacent communities in the north were instructed to enter bomb shelters.

On the Lebanese side of the border, there were no immediate reports of casualties from the IDF response. Officials based in south Lebanon, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said that the incident was believed to be a sophisticated Hezbollah operation “targeting Israeli vehicles along the border.”

The Wall Street Journal reported that two IDF soldiers were killed and several others wounded in the attack for which Hezbollah has allegedly claimed responsibility, “[Two Israeli Soldiers Killed in Attacks Claimed by Lebanon’s Hezbollah](#).”

Some Israeli and foreign mainstream media believe this may be retaliation by Hezbollah for the [IAF attack](#), January 18th that took out a convoy in Quneitra, Syria, on the Golan frontier, killing 4 and injuring 6 senior Hezbollah and Iranian commanders. The casualties were confirmed by Hezbollah’s Nasrallah and Iran’s Supreme Ruler, Ayatollah Khamenei. They included Iranian Revolutionary Guards General Allahdadi and Jihad Mughniyah, son of the terrorist mastermind, Imad Mugniyah.

The elder Mughniyah had been the most sought after terrorist prior to 9/11. He was involved with several spectacular events. Among his terrorist exploits were the 1983 Beirut truck bombings of barracks that killed 241 US Marines and 58 French Paratroopers, the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish Center in Buenos Aires in which 85 were killed and hundreds injured. He was accused in the [9/11 Iran Links](#) federal case in New York of having facilitated the travel and training of the 9/11 perpetrators. Imad Mughniyah was, allegedly [killed](#) by Israel’s Mossad in a February 2008 bombing of his vehicle following his attendance at a celebration at the Iranian Embassy commemorating the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Hezbollah leader Sheikh Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah [confirmed](#) that a Senior Hezbollah leader had been arrested and confessed as a possible agent for Israeli Intelligence.

Nasrallah also declared that further Israeli attacks on weapons deliveries inside Syria or in Lebanon would be a *causes belli* for reaction by the so-called Axis of Resistance; Iran, Assad’s Syria and Hezbollah, Iran’s proxy in Lebanon. He [warned](#) about possible invasion of the Galilee in Israel and use of “sophisticated missiles.” Israel’s air force conducted raids last month on Damascus international airport and Dimas on the Lebanese border. Those raids on December 8, 2014 may have destroyed Russian equipment that might have deployed to [counter](#) a proposed no-fly Zone inside Syria. The IAF has conducted several prior raids that included targeting longer range Iranian-supplied [Fateh-110 missiles](#). Hezbollah has been engaged in actions in Syria and along the Lebanon border fighting Sunni opposition forces. Its casualties in the nearly four year civil war have steadily mounted.

This latest cross border exchange followed the January 18th Quneitra, Syria IAF attack. This may be reflective of the Hezbollah threat cited by former Israeli National Security Adviser Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Armidror in a Begin-Sadat Center Strategic Studies [report](#):

“The strongest of [threats facing Israel] is Hezbollah, which was formed with a dual purpose in mind. It represents Iran’s long reach in the area and against Israel, while at the same time it aims to control Lebanon, where the Shi’ites are the largest ethnic group.”

Hezbollah most closely resembles an army, and its arsenal has more than 150,000 missiles and rockets, several thousand of which can target any area in Israel.

“This rare and substantial firepower apparently even exceeded the firepower possessed by most of the European states combined,” Amidror said in the report.

Additionally, Hezbollah is armed with surface-to-sea missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, drones and modern anti-tank missiles.

“It is well organized into a military-style hierarchy and appears to possess command and control systems of high quality. It was established by Iranian leaders, but its leadership has always consisted of Lebanese people who were closely linked to Iran’s interests,” the report continued. “Hezbollah assisted the Shi’ites by providing for their needs in the civilian sphere as a base for building its military power.”

Arutz Sheva reported on the possible existence of Hezbollah terror tunnels being dug below Israel’s vulnerable northern frontier, [‘Hezbollah Terror Tunnel’ Video Shatters Ya’alon’s Claims](#):

Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon has tried to allay fears claiming digging sounds residents on the northern border have been hearing for years are not Hezbollah constructing terror tunnels. A new video records what clearly appears to be the sound of underground digging.

When asked about the noises earlier this month, Ya’alon claimed “no tunnels have been

located on the northern border. Noises that were heard beneath a home turned out to be a neighbor's [Hassan Nasrallah](#), the situation isn't great, and the strike caught him at a really bad time. If it were up to him, he would rather not face the dilemma of whether to retaliate against Israel or to keep quiet.

Bergman attributes that assessment to several factors, among them:

Since February 2008, when [Jihad Mughniyeh](#), who Nasrallah wanted to turn into a symbol in order to prove that the Mughniyeh legend is alive and kicking the Zionist enemy.

[...]

In the past three years, Hezbollah has sent hundreds, maybe even thousands of fighters to help Syrian President Bashar Assad with the civil war. In fact, if there is one main reason Assad has yet to be defeated, it's because of Hezbollah and Iran's support....Hezbollah has suffered many casualties in the battles in Syria, and by joining a regular army it has exposed its forces, which are used to secret activities, to the infiltration of hostile intelligence forces.

[...]

Hezbollah's participation in the war in Syria has been met with very strong criticism in Lebanon. Why – the Sunnis, the Druze and the Christians are asking – does Hezbollah claim to be a militia whose goal is to fight Israel, but is in fact helping massacre Syria's citizens?

The support for Assad has also led to attacks by the Sunni Syrian organizations, some of which are affiliated with global jihad, against Hezbollah and Iran's representatives. Nasrallah, therefore, has opened another front against him.

[...]

Nasrallah also has a serious problem with the International Criminal Court. A special tribunal has been dealing since early 2014 with an unusual procedure in which five activists, one of whom belongs to the Mughniyeh family, are on trial for the murder of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. If they are convicted, Nasrallah's claims that he is a politician who cares for all Lebanese citizens will look like a rude lie.

Ronen concludes:

All this is only the essence of Nasrallah's troubles, which will likely stop him from rushing into a general state of war against Israel or taking the risk of a limited response which could lead to such a war.

Keying off Ronen's assessment, it may be that the rockets, mortars and anti-tank weapons fired into the Golan from Lebanon and Syria that set off IDF responses may have been from both Al-Nusrah and ISIS. These Jihadists are fighting both Assad and Hezbollah forces left in the vicinity. However Bergman's assessment of Hezbollah's future plans may be overly simplistic.

Nasrallah is caught between a logistical rock and a hard place. On the one hand, his mission to strike an annihilating blow against Israel is an integral part of Hezbollah's founding mission:

Our primary assumption in our fight against Israel states that the Zionist entity is aggressive from its inception, and built on lands wrested from their owners, at the expense of the rights of the Muslim people. Therefore our struggle will end only when this entity is obliterated. We recognize no treaty with it, no cease fire, and no peace agreements, whether separate or consolidated.

To this end, Iran has been supplying Hezbollah with its immense armory of over 150,000 rockets and missiles (50,000 more than four years ago) and the military equipment to support them. They have also constructed a complex network of tunnels throughout southern Lebanon to facilitate their secret transport across the country.

Nasrallah's forces are stretched thin, with thousands of his fighters in Syria, supporting the government of Iran's client, Bashir Assad, against the terrorist forces of ISIS, al Qaeda, al Nusrah and several other smaller, less organized terrorist groups. The possibility of opening up a second front against Israel while Hezbollah forces are so badly divided may give Nasrallah pause.

The complicating factor here is the fantasy that drives Islamist terrorism: that they believe their own rhetoric, far beyond the scope of reality. Following the recent attack in Quneitra, Deputy Hezbollah leader [Sheikh Naim Qassem](#) accused Israel of trying to lay down new rules in its conflict with Hezbollah. He said, "Israel is too weak to be able to draw new steps or new rules. . . . We will continue our jihad and we will be where we should be without (allowing) anything to stand in our way." He no doubt believed his own words.

Qassem did not consider two things: Israel is anything but weak, and, in a battle for its survival, Israel is prepared and will do what is necessary to prevail. In the end, however,

everything will depend on the dynamics of the evolving war that is expanding throughout the Middle East. The flash point may be in Iraq or Syria, or it may be on the Israeli border. The decision does not have to be logical or militarily sound. This is, after all, the Middle East.

Israel has moved batteries of Iron Dome missiles as its first line of defense against Hezbollah missiles, but these are defensive systems. Israel will not start a war without serious provocation. All the more reason why they must be ready for whatever Nasrallah decides to do, whether it begins with a small cross border attack or a major assault with rockets and missiles.

Also see Jerry Gordon's collection of interviews,