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**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center  
at the Center for Special Studies (C.S.S)**

**Katyusha rockets fired deep into the Galilee led to a day of exchange of heavy fire between the IDF and Hezbollah, the most significant since Israel withdrew from Lebanon (May 2000)**



**The Israeli Air Force and IDF artillery attack Hezbollah posts along the northern border (Al-Manar TV May 29).**

## Overview

● May 28<sup>th</sup> was a **day of exchange of heavy fire** between the IDF and Hezbollah, **the most significant since Israel withdrew from Lebanon six years ago**. It began with Katyusha fire deep into the Galilee, continued with Israeli Air Force attacks on two Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-CG) bases and reached its conclusion with exchanges of heavy fire along the Israeli-Lebanese border between the IDF and Hezbollah (after an IDF soldier was critically

wounded by Hezbollah sniper fire near Kibbutz Menara). The day ended with a cease fire initiated by the **Lebanese government** through UNIFIL.

● In our assessment, Hezbollah’s conduct was governed by **two carefully considered but opposing factors**:

● **On the one hand, Hezbollah is presently interested in seeing how far it can go to preserve its balance of deterrence with Israel and to preserve its image as “protecting Lebanon.”**<sup>1</sup> Both are at the center of the concept of the national defense strategy it presented to the Lebanese national dialogue (clearly expressed in Hassan Nasrallah’s speech on May 23).<sup>2</sup> With that in mind, Hezbollah began firing along the border after the Israeli Air Force attack, and perhaps also allowed or enabled a volley of Katyusha rockets to be fired from the area under its control deep into the Galilee, sparking the clashes.

● **On the other hand, Hezbollah was not interested in a continued, broad escalation** of the situation with Israel because it is liable to increase the pressure exerted by anti-Syrian supporters of the New Order in Lebanon to disarm Hezbollah and the Palestinians terrorist organizations as well. Such an escalation is also liable to cause the international community to increase its pressure on the Lebanese government (which continues to show itself as very weak) to enforce its authority on south Lebanon. Therefore, Hezbollah was quick to agree to a cease fire, despite the fact that its bases along the border were badly hit by IDF fire.

● Following is a description of three main phases of the events of May 28:

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<sup>1</sup> It is an exceptional phenomenon that a terrorist organization, supported by terrorist-sponsored countries, appoints itself a the “defender” of a country.

<sup>2</sup> For further information see our Information Bulletin “Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah boasts of the organization’s ability to maintain a balance of deterrence with Israel...” at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/pdf/hezbollah\\_e0506.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hezbollah_e0506.pdf).

## Phase One: The trigger – Katyusha rockets are fired at Mt. Meiron

● At 3:40 a.m. on May 28 a volley of eight Katyusha rockets was fired at Mt. Meiron. Such rockets are 122 mm in diameter (about 4.8”) and have a range of 20.4 km (about 12.68 miles). Three of them hit an Israeli Air Force base, slightly wounding an IDF soldier. It should be noted that the base is located about 11 km (6.84 miles) from the border. It is the deepest penetration of Katyusha since Israel withdrew from Lebanon. It should also be noted that even during the confrontations with Hezbollah during the 1980s and 90s, the Mt. Meiron region was not a target for Hezbollah fire.

● The **Palestinian Islamic Jihad** (PIJ) claimed responsibility for the Katyusha fire, calling it a response to the killing of **Mahmoud al-Majzoub**, a senior PIJ terrorist-operative (Reuters, May 28, 6:28 p.m.). (For the death of Mahmoud al-Majzoub, see the **Appendix**). Shortly afterwards (possibly the result of Hezbollah pressure), the PIJ representative in Lebanon denied that the organization was responsible, claiming it had neither bases in Lebanon nor that type of Katyusha rocket (Al-Manar TV, May 28, 7:44 p.m.)



A PIJ representative in Lebanon denies the organization fired Katyusha rockets into Israel  
(Al-Manar TV, May 28)

● **Dr. Hussein Rahal**, in charge of Hezbollah “information,” said the organization had **no connection** with the attack. He added that Hezbollah did not have any

information about who had fired the rockets and claimed that his organization had no “security presence” in the area from which the rockets were fired (Sawa Radio, May 28). In our assessment, his announcement was a fabrication, since Hezbollah has **security control** of southern Lebanon and **a great deal of control over the terrorist attacks carried out there.**

## **Phase Two: The Israeli Air Force attacks two PFLP-GC bases**

● In response to the Katyusha fire, at around 10:30 a.m. the Israeli Air Force attacked two bases belonging to the PFLP-GC, a pro-Syrian terrorist organization headed by Ahmad Jibril. One base was in the **Sultan Ya’akub** area in the southern Beka’a Valley and the other was in the Al-Na’ama area south of Beirut. The Lebanese media reported that six terrorists were wounded at the base at Al-Na’ama, and three at Sultan Ya’akub.

● It should be noted that on the same day, the Lebanese newspaper Sada’ al-Balad interviewed Ahmad Jibril, and in an **exceptional statement he admitted there was terrorist-operative collaboration between his organization and Hezbollah.** He said the following (according to the Agence France-Presse report of May 28):

- **“We coordinate all [our] military [i.e., terrorist] activities with Hezbollah,”** which deploys its fighters along the Israeli-Lebanese border.
- **“Our posts have been bombed many times after Hezbollah activities because the Israelis know we are partners with Hezbollah and have fought under its flag for many years.”**
- **“We share plans with Hezbollah in every field, especially in the military field.** Presently we can conduct a military struggle in Lebanon and with the aid of Allah in the future we will [also] be able to do so from the **Golan [Heights].** The return to Palestine will only be realized **by continuing the struggle on all fronts – Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.”**
- **The PFLP-GC has 11 bases in Lebanon,** all loyal to Syria and located outside the Palestinian refugee camps. Ahmad Jibril has **opposed disarming the**

**Palestinians in Lebanon** in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1559, claiming the Israel and the United States were behind it.



**The Israeli Air Force attack (Al-Manar TV, May 28).**

### **Phase Three: The situation deteriorates – heavy IDF-Hezbollah exchanges of fire along the border after a sniper attack at Menara.**

- The volley of Katyusha fire and the Israeli Air Force’s response escalated into **heavy exchanges of fire along the Israeli-Lebanese border** after a **Hezbollah sniper** attacked and severely wounded an IDF soldier near Kibbutz Menara (3:15 p.m.). The IDF responded to the attack and Hezbollah opened fire with its artillery and snipers along the border at the central and western sectors, firing at IDF posts and near-by Israeli population centers. **In response the IDF sent fighter planes and used artillery fire to attack about 20 Hezbollah strongholds along the border.**

- During the exchanges of fire Israelis living in population centers along the confrontation line entered bomb shelters and stayed there for about an hour. The only Israeli casualty was the soldier critically wounded by sniper fire. Hezbollah announced that one of its members had been killed and two Lebanese civilians had been wounded. In addition, Hezbollah strongholds along the border were damaged, as were two Katyusaha rocket-launching vehicles. Working through UNIFIL, **the Lebanese government asked for a cease fire, which went into effect in the afternoon.**



**Vehicles carrying Katyusha rockets attacked by the Israeli Air Force (Photo courtesy of the IDF Spokesman, May 28)**

## **Israeli reactions**

- Israeli Minister of Defense **Amir Peretz** said that Israel had no intention of causing the situation to deteriorate and would do everything [necessary] to **defuse** it. He said the Lebanese government was responsible for everything occurring in its territory, and called upon it to exercise its sovereignty over southern Lebanon and to make sure the region remained tranquil.

- General Udi Adam, Chief of the Northern Command, also placed responsibility for the events on the Lebanese government (IDF Spokesman's Internet site, May 28). He reported that the IDF had severely damaged Hezbollah posts and called upon the Lebanese army to take over the positions Hezbollah had abandoned ([www.ynet.co.il](http://www.ynet.co.il), May 28).

## **Lebanese reactions**

- **Lebanese prime minister** Fuad al-Seniora issued an announcement which **mentioned** the Katyusha rockets fired at Israel but which **did not condemn** them. It blamed so-called **Israeli violations** of Lebanese sovereignty and the continued "occupation" of the Shebaa Farms<sup>3</sup> for the deterioration of the situation. Al-Seniora stressed that Israeli withdrawal from the Shebaa Farms was "the only way to stop the maelstrom of violence" (Lebanese News Agency, May 28).

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<sup>3</sup> The Shebaa Farms, on the slopes of Mt. Hermon, are recognized by the UN and the international community as part of the Golan Heights and Lebanon is not considered as having sovereignty over them.

● **The March 14 Forces Follow-up Committee** (the anti-Syrian Lebanese New Order camp) issued a more balanced statement **condemning both Israeli “aggression” and the PIJ Katyusha fire**. It called the Katyusha fire “an exhibition, a gross violation of Lebanese sovereignty and a breach of the national dialogue’s decisions.” While ignoring the part played by Hezbollah, the announcement played up the “grave dangers” resulting from the lack of Lebanese sovereignty in the south (Lebanese News Agency, May 28).

## Appendix

### The death of Mahmoud al-Majzoub, senior PIJ terrorist-operative in Lebanon



The damaged vehicle of Mahmoud al-Majzoub  
(Al-Manar TV, May 26)

- On the morning of May 26, **Mahmoud al-Majzoub**, a senior PIJ terrorist-operative in Lebanon was killed when his car exploded. Also killed was his brother, Nidal al-Majzoub, who served as his bodyguard (Ma'a News Agency, May 26). However, “security sources” in Sidon told an Al-Safir reporter that the bomb was detonated by remote control when the two left their house (Al-Safir, May 27).

- As is customary in Lebanon, the PIJ, Hezbollah and even the Lebanese government were quick to point the finger at Israel:

- **Hezbollah:** The organization issued a statement condemning the killing and accusing Israel of being fully responsible for it. According to the statement, the event again revealed the extent of Israeli penetration into the Lebanese arena (Radio Nur, May 26). Hezbollah did not try to hide its support and sympathy for the deal terrorist. **Sheikh Nabil Qaouk**, in charge of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, delivered the eulogy at Mahmoud al-Majzoub’s funeral, saying “**You were behind the killing of many Israelis... Not only the PIJ will miss you, so will all your brothers in Hezbollah and the Islamic resistance...**” (Al-Manar TV, May 27).



- **The PIJ:** Ziyad al-Nahala, PIJ deputy general secretary, blamed Israel for the killing of al-Majzoub and threatened a **harsh reprisal** (Ma'a News Agency, May 26). The PIJ's representative in Lebanon blamed the Israeli Mossad for the killing and promised to respond (Ramatan News Agency, May 26).

- **The Lebanese government:** A condemnation of the "crime" was issued, stating that the government was of the opinion that there were "Israeli fingerprints" on it, and promising that an investigation of the affair would quickly be carried out (Lebanese News Agency, May 26).