



The Lebanese Arena as a Hamas Fighting Front

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► Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman recently related to Hamas' attempt to construct a military infrastructure in south Lebanon as a base for terrorist attacks against Israel. He said, "[Hamas] in the Gaza Strip is in a very difficult situation, which makes it hard to carry out attacks [from Gaza], so [the organization] **is trying to open new fronts, first of all in south Lebanon.**" **"What worries me is their effort to develop a terrorist infrastructure in south Lebanon and to threaten the State of Israel from there...**The sudden friendship between senior Hamas figure Saleh al-Arouri and Nasrallah is something we are watching. We will provide a suitable response to every development" (Avigdor Lieberman quoted by Amos Harel in Haaretz, January 21, 2018).



Saleh al-Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, experienced in handling terrorist squads in Judea and Samaria, meets in Beirut with Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary general (al-Mayadeen, November 1, 2017).

► **About six months after Operation Protective Edge senior Hamas figures called for new fronts to be opened in the next round of fighting, in all the Arab countries bordering on Israel, especially Syria and Lebanon.** For example, **senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar called on the Syria and Lebanese authorities to allow Hamas to establish military squads in the refugee camps.** That would enable the squads "to conduct the

'resistance' [i.e., terrorist attacks] from northern Palestine and participate with [Hamas] in the liberation [of Palestine]."¹

► At the time, Hamas spokesmen said that **operatives of Hamas' military-terrorist wing had already launched rockets into Israel from Lebanese territory during Operation Protective Edge, and implied rocket fire would be expanded in the next confrontation.**

In fact, during Operation Protective Edge a number of attempts were made to attack Israel with rockets fired from Lebanon:

- ◆ On **July 11, 2014**, a rocket was launched from Lebanese territory. It blew up in the region of the northern Israeli city of Metulla. No casualties were reported. The Lebanese army command issued a statement claiming an "unknown element" had launched three rockets from the region of Marjayoun-Hasbiyah (al-Akhbar and al-Nashra, July 11, 2014).
- ◆ On **July 13 and 14, 2014**, a number of rocket hits were identified in the western Galilee. No casualties or damage were reported (IDF spokesperson, July 14, 2014). The Lebanese army command issued the names of two Palestinians, claimed to be involved in the rocket fire (Lebanese News Agency, July 16, 2014).

In ITIC assessment, Hamas seeks to open new fronts for the next round of fighting with Israel, especially in Lebanon. Their objective is to formulate a new method that will provide **a response to the military difficulties currently experienced in the Gaza Strip**, implementing the lessons learned in Operation Protective Edge. The solutions found by Israel to deal with the rockets and attack tunnels **have posed difficulties for the types of military engagements Hamas has been preparing since Operation Protective Edge.** In ITIC assessment, **the Israeli solutions have increased the attraction of constructing a military infrastructure in the Lebanese arena, which will be put into action in the next confrontation with Israel.**

► **The construction of a military infrastructure in south Lebanon has, for Hamas, several prominent advantages:** it is relatively easy to recruit Palestinian manpower from the refugee camps in Lebanon; **Hamas operatives are present in Lebanon**, the most senior and important of whom is **Saleh al-Arouri**, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau;

¹For further information, see the March 15, 2015 bulletin, "Senior Hamas figures publicly call for the opening of new fronts in the next campaign against Israel, with an emphasis on carrying out attacks from Lebanese territory."

there are **a weak central administration and a dominant Hezbollah presence**, which has the capabilities to assist Hamas in constructing a military infrastructure.

► However, there are also brakes that may impair Hamas' ability to establish itself in Lebanon. **First and foremost are the memory of the era during which the terrorist organizations established themselves in Lebanon** (which ended with the First Lebanon War in 1982) and the desire of all Lebanese, of every sectarian group, not to allow the Palestinian terrorist organizations to do it again. In addition, Hezbollah, which enjoys a **dominant and exclusive position** in internal Lebanese affairs, is **expected to limit Hamas' activities in Lebanon** if the organization's policies and strategies differ in any way from those of Iran and Hezbollah.



Senior Hamas figure Saleh al-Aroui (left) meets in Beirut with Hossein Amir Abdollahian, special international affairs advisor to the speaker of the Majlis (Sama, August 2, 2017).