



Operation Northern Shield on the Israel-Lebanon Border for the Destruction of Hezbollah Tunnels Penetrating into Israel (The situation on the ground updated to noon, December 5, 2018)

December 5, 2018

Overview

On December 4, 2018, the IDF began an operation on the Israel-Lebanon border. **It is called Operation Northern Shield and is being conducted in Israeli territory, led by the Northern Command. Its objective is to expose and neutralize Hezbollah terrorist attack tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory.**

- ▶ According to the IDF spokesman, since 2014 a joint military intelligence-Northern Command team has been dealing with the intelligence, technological and operational aspects of the issue of the tunnels. Large IDF forces are participating in the operation to remove the threat of Hezbollah tunnels on the northern border, which are **a gross violation of Israeli sovereignty and UN resolutions, especially UN Security Council Resolution 1701¹**. The IDF has reinforced its forces in the north and is on high alert. The IDF spokesman in Arabic warned Hezbollah and the Lebanese army not to approach the attack tunnels being dealt with by the IDF (IDF spokesman, December 4, 2018).
- ▶ The Hezbollah and Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese media disseminated **two main messages**:
 - ◆ Despite the IDF activity, the routine daily life of the local population continues unaffected;
 - ◆ As long as Israel does not cross the Israel-Lebanon border, Hezbollah will not react. However, if the "axis of resistance," i.e. Iran, Syria and Hezbollah, feel threatened they will defend themselves.
- ▶ **Hezbollah operatives on the ground are monitoring IDF activity and so far have avoided military friction.** Statements from Hezbollah may indicate that as long as the IDF

¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1701 was passed on August 12, 2006. It called for a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in the Second Lebanon War. According to the resolution, UNIFIL and Lebanese army forces would be deployed in south Lebanon and **Hezbollah was forbidden to carry out activities in the region,**

forces operate in Israeli territory, and as long as no Hezbollah operatives are harmed, Hezbollah will not enter into a conflict with the IDF.

IDF Activity

► The IDF spokesman reported that since October 2014 a joint military intelligence-Northern Command team has been dealing with the intelligence, technological and operational aspects of the issue of the tunnels. The team developed extensive knowhow and capabilities, and constructed an exact as possible intelligence picture. Dealing with the tunnels is a challenge, combining complex operational, intelligence and technological issues. According to the IDF spokesman, the IDF initiated the operation before the tunnels reached an operational stage and became a threat to Israel (IDF spokesman, December 4, 2018).



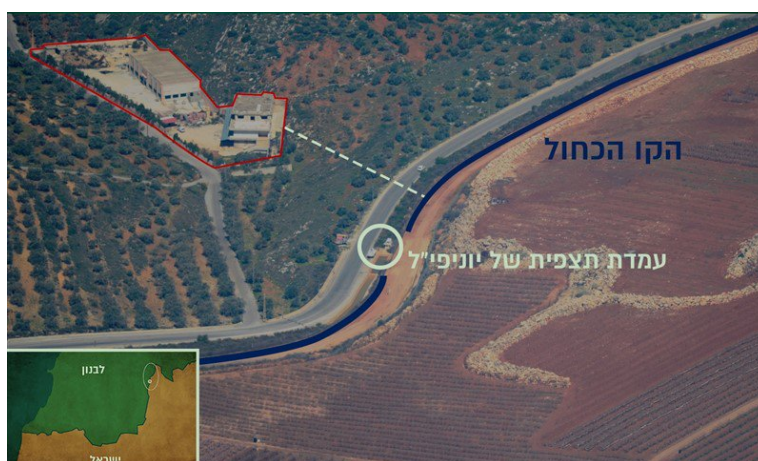
IDF activity on the Israel-Lebanon border seen from the Lebanese side (Shehab, December 4, 2018).

Locating a Tunnel Penetrating from Kafr Kila to the Outskirts of Metulla

► On the afternoon of December 4, 2018, it was reported that IDF forces had located a terrorist tunnel south of Kafr Kila, a Shi'ite village on the Israel-Lebanon border (with a population of 15,000). **The tunnel crossed the border into Israeli territory, but according to the IDF did not yet present an immediate threat to local residents.** The IDF spokesman reported that **the tunnel had been dug over a period of two years** from a building in the southern part of Kafr Kila (IDF spokesman, December 4, 2018). Apparently **its objective was to reach the orchards on the outskirts of the northern Israeli town of Metulla.**



Right: The tunnel leading from Kafr Kila. Left: The route of the tunnel extending 40 meters into Israeli territory (IDF spokesman, December 4, 2018).



The cement factory in Kafr Kila from which the tunnel began

► According to the IDF spokesman, **the tunnel is about 200 meters (220 yards) long and extends about 40 (43.7 yards) meters into Israeli territory near Metulla. It is about two meters high and two meters wide, and dug at a depth of about 25 meters.** There are

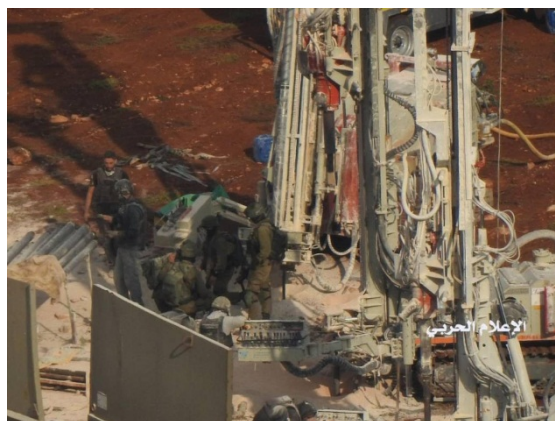
electricity and ventilation inside the tunnel. It passes very close to a UNIFIL post and is in a region where UNIFIL routinely carries out patrols.

- ▶ **The tunnel begins in a former civilian industrial unit for the manufacture of concrete blocks on the outskirts of Kafr Kila.** The unit's activities stopped in 2014 because of the construction of the tunnel. Beginning in 2014 unusual movement of [Hezbollah] camouflaged vehicles was noticed near the plant, as "civilian" vehicles evacuated the dirt from the digging of the tunnel. In October 2015 a military generator was brought to the site and a month later a guard post was erected.
- ▶ IDF forces inserted a camera into the tunnel. **Pictures taken show Hezbollah operatives moving through the tunnel towards the camera.** A small device was fastened to the camera that exploded, causing the operatives to flee. A short time later a larger device was detonated to prevent the tunnel from being used.

Reactions from Various Groups in Lebanon

Hezbollah

- ▶ On the evening before the IDF activity, Hezbollah apparently suspected the IDF was planning to carry out some kind of operation on the border. Therefore, the day before, Hezbollah's combat information unit issued a video threatening Israel. It warns Israel not to dare to do something it will regret (Twitter account of Ali Shuaib, an al-Manar correspondent on the Israel-Lebanese border, December 3, 2018). During the IDF activity the unit published pictures documenting the activity, as well as pictures threatening Israel with captions like "We are waiting for you," and "[Keep on] training, we returned victorious from the war [in Syria]."
- ▶ The Hezbollah-affiliated media (especially **al-Manar**, Hezbollah's official TV channel, and **al-Ahad**, the organization's website) **did not immediately react to the operation and only responded to the IDF spokesman's announcement three hours later.** During the day they issued informative reports about the IDF activity, and reported conversations with correspondents on the ground directly from the border. **The media stressed that despite the IDF activity near the border, routine daily life in Lebanon continued and the local population was not influenced.** A Hezbollah correspondent reporting from the area said that **as long as Israel operated in its own territory and not inside Lebanon, it would be only Israel's business.**



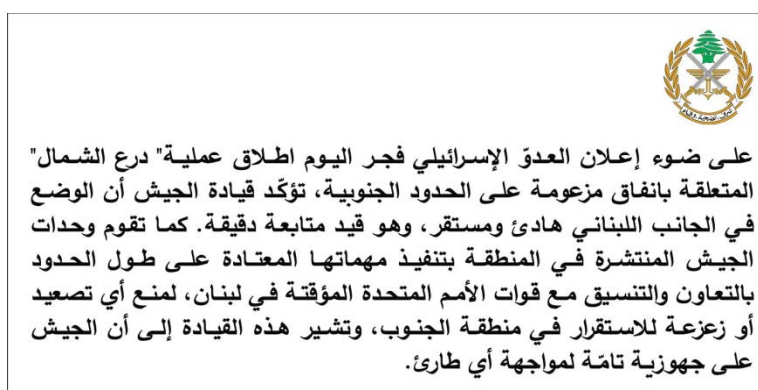
Pictures published by Hezbollah's combat information unit documenting the IDF activity on the border

► So far no comments have been heard from senior Hezbollah figures. The only person whose voice was heard was **Hassan Huballah, a member of Hezbollah' political council**. He stressed that the "resistance" was on alert and monitoring Israel's actions on all the fronts. He said Hezbollah would not allow Israel to isolate any one of the "resistance" fronts and that the command on the ground would determine reactions. He also said the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip could not be separated from the "resistance" in Lebanon, because there was one enemy and one "resistance," even if it operated on many fronts (Shehab Agency, December 4, 2018).

► **Abbas Isma'il, an expert on Israeli affairs, told Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV** that the operation served the internal goals of the Israeli leadership and not its external goals. **He said Israel did not want an escalation or to confront Hezbollah**. He added that **so far Hezbollah remained unconcerned in the face of Israel's activity, but if the "resistance axis" [Hezbollah, Iran and Syria] felt threatened in any way, they would act to protect themselves**. He stressed that Hezbollah could lift [the threat of] Israel from the north and south if it wanted to. However, he said, **as long as Israel did not cross the border the operation would have no consequences** (al-Mayadeen, December 4, 2018).

The Lebanese government and media

- ▶ Immediately after the IDF's announcement about the beginning of the operation it was quoted by **the Lebanese media**. They reported that the Lebanese army and the UNIFIL forces, which had been responsible for the defense and oversight of south Lebanon since the end of the Second Lebanon War, had reinforced their forces in the region. The objective was to monitor the IDF activity, and that the daily life of the local residents continued unaffected.
- ▶ Lebanese President Michel Aoun held a telephone conversation with Nabih Berri, **the speaker of the Lebanese parliament; Sa'ad Hariri, the Lebanese prime minister;** and **General Josef Aoun, commander of the Lebanese army**. They assessed the situation in light of the data about the IDF operation. Michel Aoun asked the Lebanese security services to monitor the situation closely (Michel Aoun's Facebook page, December 4, 2018).
- ▶ **The headquarters of the Lebanese army** issued an announcement stressing that the situation on the Lebanese side of the border was calm, quiet and stable. He added that **the army units deployed in the region were carrying out their normal duties along the border in collaboration with UNIFIL in order to prevent an escalation or a destabilization of the area**. The announcement added that the Lebanese army was prepared to deal with any unexpected development (official Lebanese army Twitter account, December 4, 2018).



Announcement from the headquarters of the Lebanese army (official Lebanese army Twitter account, December 4, 2018).

- ▶ Commanders in the Lebanese army headquarters spoke with Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Lebanese parliament, and discussed how to deal with the developments on the border. **The American Ambassador to Lebanon also contacted Nabih Berri. It was reported that he told the ambassador he doubted the existence of tunnels in south Lebanon**, claiming the "Israeli version" of the existence of a tunnel in Kafr Kila was questionable. He said Lebanon demanded the exact coordinates of the tunnel Israel claimed existed. He added that

if Israel wanted to dig up the land it had occupied [i.e., in its own territory] it could do what it liked and dig to its heart's content. However, but if Israel wanted to turn its digging towards Lebanon, "that is an entirely different matter." He said that on December 5 a meeting would be held in Naqoura (where UNIFIL has its headquarters), attended by Lebanon, Israel and UNIFIL, where the issue would be raised. "Our position is clear," he said, "and the Lebanese representative will state it [at the meeting]" (al-Jumhuria, Lebanon, December 5, 2018).

UNIFIL

► UNIFIL headquarters reported they had been updated by the IDF when the operation began. They said they were cooperating with all the sides to preserve stability. Later in the day, a UN mission headed by the Canadian ambassador to the UN and the commander of the UNIFIL forces in the eastern sector patrolled the entrance to the village of Adaisseh in south Lebanon (UNIFIL website, December 4, 2018).