



Operation Northern Shield on the Israel-Lebanon Border (The situation updated to noon, December 5, 2018)

December 9, 2018

Overview

Despite the stormy winter weather, Operation Northern Shield continues. Its objective is to expose and neutralize Hezbollah terrorist attack tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory. On December 8, 2018, **a second tunnel was exposed** crossing the Israeli-Lebanese border. The route of the tunnel in Israeli territory was booby-trapped by IDF forces. The IDF spokesman reported that the tunnel project is part of Hezbollah's plan to move fighting into Israeli territory in the future. Hezbollah's project was supposed to be secret and was known to very few people, including within the Hezbollah leadership (IDF spokesman, December 8, 2018).

- ▶ The Hezbollah media continue reporting information about the IDF activity, quoting the Israeli media. **Senior Hezbollah leaders, including Hassan Nasrallah, do not directly relate to the IDF activities.** A Lebanese commentator said that Hezbollah's silence, in the face of Israel's media publications, is part of Hezbollah's traditional strategy, adding **the organization is currently studying the events on the ground and learning Israel's intentions** (al-Nashra YouTube channel, December 9, 2018).
- ▶ The commander of the UNIFIL force, who visited the region of the tunnel near Metulla, said that based on the information he had, UNIFIL could confirm that **there was in fact a tunnel on the Israeli-Lebanese border.** The commander of the IDF Northern Command attended an Israeli-UNIFIL-Lebanese meeting at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura, and **demanding UNIFIL make sure the tunnel would be neutralized on the Lebanese side of the border.**



The second Hezbollah tunnel exposed by the IDF on Israel's northern border (IDF spokesman's Twitter account, December 8, 2018).

IDF Activity

► On December 4, 2018, the IDF began Operation Northern Shield on the Israeli-Lebanese border. Its objective is to expose and neutralize Hezbollah attack tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory. According to the IDF spokesman, the forces are operating in three areas along the border: **the area across from Kafr Kila** (i.e., the Metulla region in the eastern sector), **the area across from the Labbouneh area** (i.e., the Hanita-Rosh Haniqra region in the western sector), and **the area across from Ramyeh** (i.e., the Zar'it-Shtula region in the central sector). Despite the stormy winter weather of the past few days, the IDF's activity continues uninterrupted, with plans to continue for many months (IDF spokesman, December 8, 2018).



IDF activities to locate Hezbollah tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory on the Israeli-Lebanese border (IDF spokesman, December 7, 2018).

► On December 8, 2018, a second tunnel was exposed that crossed the Israeli-Lebanese border. The route of the tunnel in Israeli territory was booby-trapped by the IDF, so that

anyone entering it from the Lebanese side would be risking his life. The IDF is investigating the tunnel route (IDF spokesman, December 8, 2018).

► The IDF reported that north of the security fence in the eastern sector IDF forces **identified three figures wearing civilian clothing. Apparently all three were Hezbollah operatives**, who approached the fence and under cover of the fog covering the area and **tried to steal IDF technical equipment**. An IDF force fired shots and **the three fled back to Lebanese territory** (IDF spokesman, December 8, 2018).

► Along with the IDF activity to expose the tunnels, **Israel had been making diplomatic efforts with the Lebanese government, UNIFIL and the international community**. To that end, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu showed foreign ambassadors the region where the first tunnel was exposed and explained Hezbollah's tunnel project to them.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu shows Hezbollah's tunnel project to a delegation of foreign ambassadors (Israeli prime minister's website, December 6, 2018).

UNIFIL Activities

► On December 5, 2018, a meeting was held at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura, Lebanon, attended by representatives of the IDF, UNIFIL Commander Major General **Stefano Del Col**, and a senior representative of the Lebanese army. The commander of the IDF Northern Command gave the UNIFIL commander **a map of the village of Ramyeh** (a Shi'ite village in the central sector of south Lebanon) **showing groups of houses from which another Hezbollah terrorist tunnel was dug penetrating into Israeli territory**. He said the tunnel had already crossed the border but did not yet pose an immediate threat to Israeli

civilians. He demanded that UNIFIL ensure the tunnel would be neutralized on the Lebanese side of the border (IDF spokesman, December 6, 2018).

► On December 6, 2018, **the UNIFIL commander, along with a technical crew he had brought with him, visited the site of the tunnel exposed in the Metulla region.** In the name of the IDF, the commander of the Northern Command protested in the strongest possible terms, stating Israel's objections to the violation of its sovereign territory by Hezbollah, whose objective was to harm Israeli civilians. He said it was additional proof that Hezbollah ignored UN resolutions, especially Security Council Resolution 1701 (IDF spokesman, UNIFIL website, December 6, 2018).



The commander of the IDF Northern Command and Major General Stefano Del Col, the commander of UNIFIL, at a tunnel penetrating into Israeli territory (IDF spokesman' Twitter account, December 6, 2018).

After the visit, the commander of the UNIFIL forces issued a statement saying **that based on the information he had he could confirm that there was a tunnel at the Israeli-Lebanese border.** The statement added UNIFIL forces reported they were cooperating with the sides to continue monitoring the issue, and would send their information to the relevant Lebanese officials (UNIFIL Twitter account, December 6, 2018). On December 7, 2018, Stefano Del Col, the UNIFIL commander, met with Joseph Aoun, the commander of the Lebanese army. The meeting was held at Lebanese army headquarters in Yarze (southeast of Beirut) (lebanon24 website, December 7, 2018).



General Joseph Aoun, commander of the Lebanese army (left), and Major General Stefano Del Col, commander of UNIFIL, meet to discuss the exposure of the tunnels on the Israeli-Lebanese border (lebanon24 website, December 7, 2018).

Reactions in Lebanon

► After the first two days, during which the Lebanese media dealt extensively with the IDF activity in south Lebanon, coverage waned somewhat.

Hezbollah

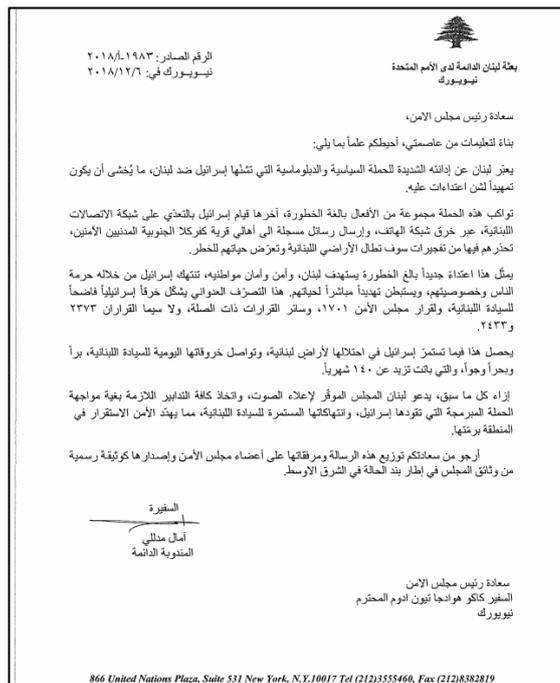
► Hezbollah and its affiliated media outlets al-Manar and al-Mayadeen reported very little original information, preferring to quote the Israeli media. As of this writing, **senior Hezbollah figures, including Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, have not yet directly related to the events. Qassem Na'im, Nasrallah's deputy**, interviewed by an Iranian newspaper, did not directly mention Operation Northern Shield, saying that the entire Israeli home front was exposed to Hezbollah missiles and **there was nowhere in Israel that could not be hit by the missiles, including Tel Aviv** (al-Wifaq, December 9, 2018).

► Two Hezbollah operatives, Hashem Safi al-Din and Wafiq Safa, met with representatives of the Executive Committee of the (Shi'ite) Amal movement. The two organizations issued **a joint statement calling on the Lebanese government to take a decisive stand in the face of what they called "Israel's cruelty" towards Lebanon**. They said the "resistance" [i.e., Hezbollah] was prepared to respond to any act of Israeli aggression and prevent Israel from getting what it wanted (al-Manar, December 6, 2018).

► Ghassan Jowad, a Lebanese commentator, told al-Nashra TV that Hezbollah's **silence in the face of the Israeli media coverage was a traditional Hezbollah strategy**, and **the organization is currently studying the events on the ground and learning Israel's intentions** (al-Nashra's YouTube channel, December 9, 2018).

The Lebanese government and media

- ▶ Joseph Aoun, the commander of the Lebanese army, said **the army would remain on alert in order to carry out its duty** (Radio al-Nur, December 8, 2018). The Lebanese News Agency said **the Lebanese army had reinforced its patrols and deployed tanks near the Israeli border**. The Lebanese claimed that was because IDF soldiers had crossed the border near the village of Meis al-Jabel and operated in Lebanese territory (Ma'an, December 9, 2018).
- ▶ **Amal Mudallali, the permanent representative of Lebanon to the UN**, sent a communiqué to the UN secretary general and the president of Security Council on orders from Gebran Bassil, the Lebanese foreign minister. According to the communiqué, Lebanon condemned Israel's diplomatic campaign against it. In addition, the communiqué claimed, **Israel's activities clearly violated Lebanese sovereignty and international decisions**. Lebanon was concerned that **the campaign was preparing the ground for future attacks on Lebanon** (al-Nashra, December 6, 2018).



The communiqué sent by the Lebanese ambassador to the UN secretary general, condemning Israel's activity on its northern border (al-Nashra, December 6, 2018).

- ▶ The Lebanese daily newspaper al-Jumhuria reported that **Elizabeth Richard, the American ambassador to Lebanon**, had paid a visit to the presidential palace and transmitted serious warnings to the Lebanese regime from Israel, which stated that "There is a limit to restraint." **Senior Western diplomats expressed dissatisfaction with the response of the Lebanese government to the issue of Hezbollah's tunnels**. They want the

Lebanese government to solve the problem with Hezbollah and not demand that Israel implement UN Resolution 1701. The Lebanese leadership is concerned that the position of the United States on Israel's actions against the tunnels indicated support for Israel in [possible] additional [future Israeli] campaigns (al-Jumhuria, December 5, 2018).