



Operation Northern Shield on the Israel-Lebanon Border for the Destruction of Hezbollah Tunnels Penetrating into Israel (The situation on the ground, December 18, 2018)

December 18, 2018

Overview

On December 15, 2018, **a fourth tunnel was exposed crossing the border from Lebanon into Israeli territory**. IDF forces continue their activities along the border, so far without serious friction with Hezbollah or the Lebanese army, which are monitoring the activity. **Hezbollah continues to keep a low media profile regarding the IDF's activity**. Some of its spokesmen have made indirect statements stressing Hezbollah's and Lebanon's strength to send Israel a message of deterrence.

- ▶ **The UN Security Council is supposed to meet on December 19, 2018, to discuss the issue**. On the eve of the discussion UNIFIL issued an announcement confirming that it had carried out technical examinations and found two tunnels that crossed the border into Israeli territory, **a violation of Resolution 1701¹ causing great concern**. **The UNIFIL announcement made no mention of the fact that the tunnels belong to Hezbollah and that Hezbollah systematically violates Resolution 1701**.
- ▶ On December 17, 2018, CNN showed one of the tunnels. According to the description, the tunnel was "sophisticated," equipped with electricity and ventilation, and high enough for an NBA player to walk upright [i.e., more than six feet].

IDF Activity

- ▶ The IDF forces continue carrying out Operation Northern Shield to locate Hezbollah tunnels. IDF forces located **a fourth Hezbollah attack tunnel** that crossed the border from Lebanon into Israeli territory. The tunnel, like the tunnels exposed before it, was booby-trapped by the IDF and its route is being investigated.
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¹ For further information, see the December 17, 2018, bulletin, "Security Council Resolution 1701 and Its Systematic Violation by Hezbollah and Iran."



Right: IDF soldiers in Operation Northern Shield on the Israeli-Lebanese border (IDF spokesman, December 16, 2018). Left: Hezbollah's fourth attack tunnel, exposed by the IDF (IDF spokesman, December 18, 2018).

UNIFIL and International Activities

Following an appeal from Israel, **the UN Security Council announced that on December 19, 2018, it would hold a meeting to discuss the Hezbollah tunnels exposed in south Lebanon.** The meeting will deal with **Hezbollah's violations of Security Council Resolution 1701.** In the meantime, Israel and the United States are proposing a resolution to the Security Council to designate all of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization (the European states have designated only Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist organization) (news sites, December 17, 2018). Russia asked Lebanon to take action against the tunnels on its territory to preserve the implementation of Resolution 1701 and not to harm Israel's territorial integrity (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 17, 2018).

► On the eve of the UN Security Council meeting, UNIFIL issued an announcement. According to the announcement, UNIFIL has been actively following up on developments relating to the discovery of tunnels along the Blue Line by the IDF. UNIFIL technical teams have undertaken a number of site inspections south of the Blue Line in order to ascertain the facts. **UNIFIL has so far confirmed the existence of all the four tunnels close to the Blue Line in northern Israel.** After further technical investigations conducted independently in accordance with its mandate, **UNIFIL at this stage can confirm that two of the tunnels cross the Blue Line. These constitute violations of UN Security Council resolution 1701.** UNIFIL has requested the Lebanese authorities to ensure urgent follow-up actions in accordance with the responsibilities of the Government of Lebanon pursuant to resolution 1701. The situation in UNIFIL's area of operation remains calm. UNIFIL's leadership is fully engaged with the parties to ensure stability along the Blue Line and prevent misunderstandings in order to keep the area of operation calm (ITIC emphasis) (UNIFIL website, December 17, 2018). **The**

announcement does not state that the tunnels belong to Hezbollah, or refer to Hezbollah and Iran's responsibility in violating Security Council Resolution 1701.

► Following the announcement, on December 17, 2018, Stefan Del Col, the UNIFIL commander, met with Lebanese President Michel Aoun, Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri and the commander of the Lebanese army.

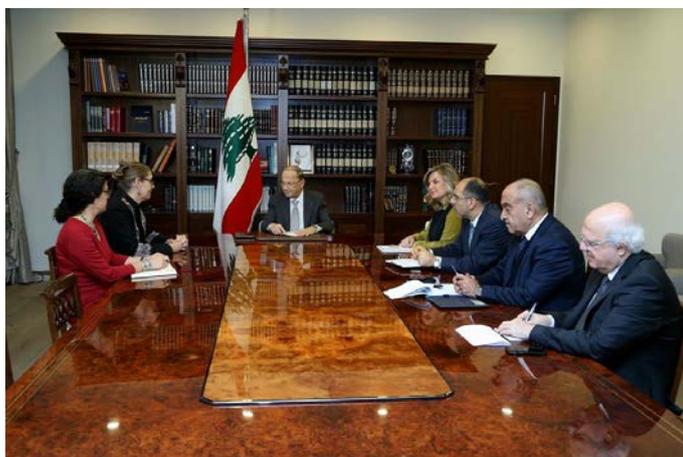
Reactions in Lebanon

Hezbollah

► Senior Hezbollah leaders continue to remain silent. Other prominent figures who refer to the tunnels make only indirect references. **Nabil Qaouq, a member of Hezbollah's Central Council**, made a speech in which he said that the force of the "resistance" and the strength of Lebanon in the face of Israel's threats had grown with the constellation of "the army – the [Lebanese] people – the resistance," He said the "resistance" and its surprises tied Israel's hands, and that it would think twice before it attacked Lebanon.

The Lebanese government

► Lebanese President Michel Aoun met with Pernille Dahler Kardel, acting UN special coordinator for Lebanon, to discuss the situation in south Lebanon. Aoun said that Lebanon was waiting for the UNIFIL report that would confirm whether or not the tunnels did in fact cross the border. He added that Lebanon would deal with the situation so that Israel would not exploit it to destabilize Lebanon. He said Lebanon was committed to Resolution 1701, while, he claimed, Israel continued violating Lebanese sovereignty (Lebanon24, December 13, 2018).



Lebanese president Michel Aoun meets with the UN coordinator in Lebanon (Michel Aoun's Facebook page, December 13, 2018).

► Three days later Gebran Bassil, the Lebanese foreign minister, paid a visit to the Israel-Lebanon border to see the activity first hand. After the visit he tweeted that Lebanon was defended by the army and its "resistance," but that more importantly it was defended by its pluralism and diversity, which would overcome Israel's regime and racism (Gebran Bassil's Twitter account, December 16, 2018). **Representing the "resistance," i.e., Hezbollah, as defending Lebanon is a direct violation of Security Council Resolution 1701**, which states that the Lebanese army and government are the only sovereign entities and the only ones permitted to bear arms.



Gebran Bassil, the Lebanese foreign minister, visits south Lebanon (Gebran Bassil's Facebook page, December 16, 2018).



**From the Facebook page of Gebran Bassil, the Lebanese foreign minister:
"Lebanon is defended by the army and its resistance..."
(Gebran Bassil's Facebook page, December 16, 2018).**

► The London-based daily newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat quoted "sources involved in the exposure of the tunnels" as saying that they expected Israel to make new data public to support its complaints to the Security Council. According to the sources, **Lebanon has to organize a similar "file" to oppose the Israeli narrative and prove its commitment to Security Council Resolution 1701**. Then Lebanon can use the recent UNIFIL reports to

announce its intention to destroy the tunnels because they cross the border and thus embarrass Israel and deflect criticism away from Lebanon's violations. The sources also said that verifying the existence of the tunnels was the responsibility of the Lebanese army, which would receive instructions from the government on how to proceed (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 17, 2018).

The Lebanese army

► After a number of days during which the Lebanese media covered the tunnels, the issue has become less prominent. A Hezbollah correspondent in south Lebanon **documented an argument on the border between Lebanese army forces and IDF forces**. According to the report, the IDF forces withdrew a number of yards behind the Blue Line after Lebanese army soldiers pushed them back when they tried to string barbed wire in the area of Meis al-Jabal (Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, December 17, 2018).



With UNIFIL personnel present, Lebanese army soldiers prevent IDF soldiers from stringing barbed wire on the Blue Line near Meis al- Jabal area (Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, December 17, 2018).

► Hezbollah-affiliated al-Manar correspondent Ali Shoeib reported that **Lebanese army soldiers prevented IDF soldiers from stringing barbed wire along Israel's border with Lebanon in the region of Meis al-Jabal because the Lebanese army topographic team was not present**. He also reported that the Lebanese army then distanced civilians from the site and went on alert. UNIFIL forces also went on alert. A UNIFIL delegation arrived at the site with a Lebanese army topographic team to mark the locations where in their opinion the IDF had crossed the border (Lebanese news agency al-Ahed, December 17, 2018).



Lebanese army soldiers observe the IDF activity in the Meis al- Jabal area (Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, December 16, 2018).



Lebanese civilians demonstrate near IDF activity in the Meis al-Jabal area (Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, December 16, 2018).