



## Spotlight on Terrorism : Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria

May 29 – June 11, 2022

### Overview

- ▶ Members of the Lebanese Parliament elected Nabih Berri, from the Amal Movement, to continue as speaker of the Parliament, and Representative Elias Bou Saab, from the National Freedom faction, as his deputy.
- ▶ The Iranian embassy in Lebanon and Hezbollah's civilian institutions marked the anniversary of Khomeini's death with ceremonies and events throughout the country.
- ▶ **Exploring for natural gas** off the south Lebanon coast: Senior Hezbollah figures repeated their position that if Lebanon withdraws from the disputed area, Hezbollah would be prepared to respond, with force if necessary.
- ▶ There has been popular unrest targeting UNRWA in some of the refugee camps, with residents demanding plans to rescue the camps and expressing objections to agency's reduction of its services. In response, Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) issued a joint announcement in support of UNRWA.
- ▶ Opponents of the Syrian regime issued an increasing number reports about the presence of Iranian militias in Syria near the Jordanian border, and on the steps Jordan is planning to take against them.

### Hezbollah and Lebanon

#### Overview

- ▶ Members of the Lebanese Parliament elected Nabih Berri to continue for another term as speaker of the Parliament (his seventh consecutive term since 1991), with a majority of 65 votes. Representative Elias Bou Saab, from the Hezbollah-supporting National Freedom faction, was chosen as his deputy. He received 65 votes; Ghassan Skaff, from the Hezbollah-opposing March 14 Camp, received 59 votes (al-Ahad, May 31, 2022). The results give Hezbollah a slim majority in the Parliament since both the speaker and his deputy are Hezbollah allies.

► Opponents of Hezbollah in Lebanon claimed the organization was exploiting the Sunni leadership crisis and attempting to infiltrate into the Sunni regions of Lebanon, especially the Akkar district. A Hezbollah delegation headed by Mahmoud Qamati visited the district, following Hezbollah's offer of humanitarian and financial aid to the local residents during the past year (Janoubia website, June 4, 2022).

► The Lebanese Battalions for Resistance to the Occupation<sup>1</sup> (a military unit of Lebanese volunteers regardless of affiliation, established by Hezbollah in the late 1990s), reenacted the takeover of an IDF post to mark the anniversary of the IDF's withdrawal from Lebanon. After the reenactment, the operatives took an oath of loyalty to Khomeini, Khamenei and Nasrallah (Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, May 30, 2022).



**Attaching a Hezbollah flag to the remains of the post during the reenactment and the oath of loyalty to the leaders of Iran and the head of Hezbollah  
(Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, May 30, 2022)**

► On June 10, 2022, a short movie was projected on the wall along the Israeli-Lebanese border near Metulla. It was called "[Israel] Fell" and produced by a group called "The [Palestinian] Cause Group." It was shown for the first time on June 6, 2022, at the Days of the Resistance and Liberation art festival. The festival was held in Tunisia for the third time, a collaboration of local artists and the Hezbollah-founded Rissalat, the Lebanese Association for the Arts<sup>2</sup> (al-Mayadeen, May, 26, 2022; and the Rissalat Twitter account, June 607, 2022). The film gave a short survey of the milestones in the Israeli-Arab conflict from 1920 to the present day, as well as imaginary scenes of the future "destruction of State of Israel" and the country's takeover by the forces of the Iranian axis.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see the June 5, 2008 bulletin, "Hezbollah conducted a military exercise in which its operatives stormed a hill representing an IDF outpost."

<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the August 1, 2019 bulletin, "Art and culture used by Hezbollah as instruments of indoctrination."



Scenes from the video, left to right (top), "attacking the Kirya in Tel Aviv with rocket fire," "taking control of the Sea of Galilee," (bottom) "attacking the Knesset with rocket fire" (Twitter accounts of Muhammad Atiya and Nahaj Radwan, June 10, 2022)

## The anniversary of Khomeini's death

► **Na'im Qassem, deputy Hezbollah secretary general**, gave a speech at a ceremony held by the Iranian foreign ministry at Khomeini's grave in honor of the anniversary of his death. He said Hezbollah would not have "liberated" Lebanon and defended its people without Iran, which helped them in every way without recompense (al-Alam, June 1, 2022). The Iranian cultural attaché in Lebanon invited the public to attend the ceremony held in honor of the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Khomeini's death. It was held on June 3, 2022, in the Imam Khomeini Cultural Complex of the Iranian community in Beirut (Iranian cultural attaché Facebook page, June 1, 2022).

► Hezbollah supporters on the social networks marked the anniversary with videos and pictures, events from his life and excerpts from his will translated into Arabic (Twitter accounts of Hezbollah supporters and institutions, June 3, 2022). Hezbollah's civilian institutions also marked the anniversary, holding meetings, sporting events, exhibitions of portraits of Khomeini and trivia competitions (Facebook page of Hezbollah's civilian institutions in south Lebanon, the al-Mustafa school network and the Facebook profile of Imam Ahmed Abdallah, June 3-10, 2022).

## Exploring for natural gas near the Israeli-Lebanese maritime border

► On June 3, 2022, **Abbas Ibrahim, head of Lebanese general security**, said "the enemy is not entitled to produce oil or have possession of anything north of Line 29"<sup>3</sup> (al-Alam website, June 3, 2022).

► On June 4, 2022, an Energean floating production storage and offloading ship, constructed especially for the Karish gas field located off the Lebanese coast along its southern border, was reported passing through the Suez Canal on its way to Haifa (al-Alam website, June 4, 2022). Following the report, Hezbollah supporters and activists on the social networks issued veiled threats that the ship would be attacked.

► Lebanese President Michel Aoun said the negotiations for drawing Lebanon's southern maritime border were continuing and any action or activity in the disputed territory would be considered hostile. Aoun and former Lebanese prime minister Naguib Mikati discussed the entrance of the ship into the disputed territory, agreeing to ask Lebanese Army headquarters to formally provide exact information so that a decision could be reached. Mikati warned of increasing tension and the creation of a dangerous situation, after what he called "Israel's attempts to create a new crisis" by entering the territory of Lebanon's maritime resources. He said the solution would be to renew the negotiations on the basis that Lebanon would never waive its full rights to its natural resources and the sea (al-Mayadeen website, June 5, 2022).

► Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said in an interview that it was impossible to ignore "the measures being taken by the Israeli enemy in the Karish field." He added that Amos Hochstein, the American mediator, was expected to arrive in Beirut and would be informed that Lebanon would remain inactive in the face of such violations." He said the mediator had to take steps to stop the violations because he held the negotiations portfolio. If Hochstein did not accept the dictate or if he could not produce results, "the government will have to meet and reach a unanimous national decision, to amend Decree No. 6433, an official document issued to the UN in 2011 that indicates the coordinates of Line 23 as the country's southern maritime border and send it to the UN" (al-'Ahad, June 6, 2022).

► Muhammad Raad, chairman of the Loyalty to the Resistance faction in the Lebanese Parliament, appealed to all the political factions in Lebanon to reach an agreement regarding the choice of a company to explore for gas in the country's territorial waters, whenever

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<sup>3</sup> Line 29, according to Lebanon, is its southern maritime border; the Israeli oil and gas explorations at sea are to the north.

Lebanon decided. Raad added that if anyone was worried that the "Israeli enemy" would approach the company, Hezbollah was committed to react (al-Alam website, June 5, 2022).

► Hezbollah supporters and activists on the social networks, as well as Hezbollah opponents, exploited the calls to prevent the ship from reaching Lebanese waters to make political capital and spread veiled threats about the possibility of attacking the ship.

► Na'im Qassem, deputy Hezbollah secretary general, said Hezbollah was prepared to take steps, including the use of force, to stop Israel from exploring for gas in the disputed maritime areas. Hezbollah would go into action as soon as the government declared Israel had violated Lebanon's maritime border. He said, "When the Lebanese government says Israel is crossing out maritime border and exploring for our oil, we will be willing to make our contribution, exerting pressure, providing deterrence and taking the appropriate measures, including the use of force, to prevent Israel from trespassing into our waters and [exploring for] our oil."

► Qassem added that "the issue now has to be an unambiguous decision and opinion from Lebanese government, stating that if the ship operates in the disputed territory, then what? Will the Lebanese government decide the issues of the border and the line the negotiations will take, or not?" He called for an increase in pressure on the government to delineate the country's maritime border, and if the negotiations stalled, it should be stated that, "It is a waste of time to continue to beg the Americans and to continue to wait for them to do favor us with a visit or two and propose unrealistic suggestions which deny Lebanon its rights."

► Asked if Hezbollah gave or would give the government an extension before it did something, Qassem answered that Hezbollah did not give extensions, but rather that Lebanon came before everything and would decide its own course, and Hezbollah came last. However, he encouraged the government to make haste and decide on its own extension, otherwise the issue would remain undecided and people would not know if the border had been crossed or not, or if the territory was in dispute or not.

► Qassem again stated that Hezbollah's decision was clear. When the government said the territory was in dispute and Israel entered it, Hezbollah would react. Otherwise, Hezbollah would wait, he said, for a decision to be made by the government, and when it had, Hezbollah would decide what to do. No one had yet said where the boat was. All that had been declared was that people were concerned [the Israelis] had already entered and wanted to know if the border had been crossed. Qassem added that negotiations would be held in

the future once the new government had been formed after the elections held a month ago (al-Nashra, June 6, 2022).

► Bassem Yasmin, who formerly headed the Lebanese delegation for negotiations on the country's maritime border, said Hezbollah might intervene using force in the issue of gas exploration in the Karish field. He said that all options were open and anyone who cared about Lebanon had to be prepared to defend it. The "weapon of resistance" [i.e., terrorism], he said, was a weapon Lebanon would use to defend its land and rights (al-Nashra, June 7, 2022).

► Hezbollah gave former Parliamentary representative Nawaf Musawi the maritime border and delineation portfolio, in addition making him responsible for coordinating positions with the political forces (Sputnik Facebook page in Arabic, June 8, 2022).

► In response to a direct communiqué from the Israeli ministers of foreign affairs, defense and energy on June 8, 2022, stating that the Karish oil rig would pump gas in the disputed territory, Hezbollah supporters on the social networks said they were very doubtful, and claimed the communiqué was "booby-trapped" because the disputed territory noted was in the area between Lines 1 and 23, and not in the disputed territory currently under discussion. They said the Israeli communiqué did not refer to trespassing and was meant for international public opinion and the negotiators dealing with delineating Lebanon's maritime border (Ali Shoeib and Thaer Aldar's Twitter accounts, June 9, 2022).

► Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah devoted most of his June 9, 2022 speech to explorations for gas near the maritime border. Before the speech Hezbollah supporters started a campaign with the hashtag, #our\_resistance\_guarantees\_our\_natural\_resources. Nasrallah described the search for gas in the region as "aggression against Lebanon" and called on the Lebanese to consider the issue as having national importance no less than the liberation of the south Lebanon. He claimed Lebanon's water and other natural resources were in danger because of efforts by the United States and Israel to take as much of Lebanon's territory as possible, prevent Lebanon from exploring for and producing gas itself, and emptying the gas fields before Lebanon could realize its rights to them.

► Nasrallah added that Lebanon's objective was to prevent Israel from taking gas from the Karish field and claimed Lebanon had the power to do so thanks to its army and the "resistance" [i.e., Hezbollah]. He said the "resistance" had the military, intelligence and logistic capabilities to prevent Israel from producing gas from the Karish field, and to

overcome all of Israel's security measures at sea. He said that one of the reasons for the "resistance's" existence was to defend Lebanon. He said the "resistance" could not sit and do nothing while Lebanon's natural resources were being stolen, and would not do nothing. As far as Hezbollah was concerned, he said, all options were open. He called on Israel to stop its activities in the Karish field, and on the company working the field to remove its ship from the territory immediately (Yunis al-Zaatari's Twitter account, June 9, 2022).



**Typically labelling picture aired before Nasrallah's June 9 speech  
(Ayat Dagher's Twitter account, June 9, 2022)**

- ▶ Other Lebanese related to the issue of gas exploration (al-Alam website, June 8-10, 2022):
  - ◆ The Association of Muslim Sages in Lebanon claimed the "Israeli entity" understood only the language of force and called on Lebanon to amend Decree No. 6433 and begin exploring for oil and gas in the undisputed fields.
  - ◆ Hani Qabisi, a member of the Development and Liberation faction (which represents the Amal Movement in the Lebanese Parliament), said the "resistance" [i.e., Hezbollah], which had known how to liberate the land, also knew how to defend Lebanon's natural resources and preserve its rights.
  - ◆ Ma'an Beshor, chairman of the Arab-International Center for Communication and Solidarity, called on senior Greek officials to undertake a political, popular and media campaign to exert pressure on the Greek company operating the boat which entered the Karish field. Greece summoned the senior Lebanese diplomatic representative in the country and informed her that the boat in the Karish field did not belong to Greece (Yunis al-Zaatari's Twitter account, June 10, 2022).



## Palestinians in Lebanon and Syria

►The Palestinian organizations organized marches and rallies in solidarity with the Palestinians in the refugee camps in Lebanon at the same time the Flag March was being held in Jerusalem. Marches were held in Sidon (sponsored by the Popular Democratic Party) and in the al-Jalil refugee camp in Baalbek, the Ayn al-Hilweh refugee camp in Sidon and the al-Rashidiya and al-Burj al-Shamali refugee camps in Tyre (sponsored by various organizations) (al-Alam website, the Palestinian refugee's portal and the PFLP in Lebanon website, May 29-30, 2022).

►The PFLP marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the terrorist attack in the airport in Lod<sup>4</sup> by laying wreathes on the graves of the Japanese "shaheeds" in the Cemetery of the Palestinians Shaheeds of the Revolution in Shatila Square in Beirut (PFLP in Lebanon website, May 30, 2022). Among those laying wreathes was Kozo Okamoto, one of the terrorists who carried out the attack.



**PFLP activists, including Kozo Okamoto, lay a wreath (al-Hadaf website, May 30, 2022)**

►A delegation of Palestinian residents from the Sidon region thanked Ziyad Zaher for Hezbollah's help in finding a solution for the problem of bringing drinking water to the area. The delegation and Zaher discussed ways for cooperation and coordination in social matters to support residents living under difficult conditions (al-'Ahad website, June 1 2022).

►Two events which occurred in the Ayn al-Hilweh refugee camp near Sidon could indicate a trend of popular unrest over the high cost of living. According to reports, on June 1, 2022, owners of the electricity generators in the camp announced they would begin charging one

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<sup>4</sup> On May 30, 1972, three members of the Japanese Red Army recruited by the PFLP in Europe attacked Lod Airport (i.e., now Ben Gurion Airport), killing 26 people and wounding 80. Two of the attackers were killed, while a third, Kozo Okamoto, was captured after being wounded.



dollar a day or the equivalent in Lebanese liras, beginning this month, angering the camp residents. On June 3, 2022, a mass demonstration was held to demand UNRWA devise an urgent rescue plan for the camp, and for the Palestinian factions to help (Palestinian refugees' portal, June 1, and 3, 2022). A similar demonstration was held in the Burj al-Shamali refugee camp to demand UNRWA devise a comprehensive emergency plan. The demonstration also protested the limiting of the agency's services to the camp (Palestinian refugees' portal, June 6, 2022). On June 8, 2022, Hamas and the PFLP issued a joint announcement in support of UNRWA, calling on the Lebanese Parliament to confirm the human and social rights of the Palestinians in Lebanon (Hamas website, June 8 2022).

► The Hamas movement in Lebanon invited the public to an event marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in recognition of the firm stance and sacrifices of the Burj al-Shamali refugee camp. The theme of the event was "A day of loyalty to the resistance and shaheeds." It took place on June 5, 2022, in the hall of the Abi bin Kaab al-Sahabi al-Jalil mosque in the Burj al-Shamali refugee camp (Facebook page of the Voice of the Burj al-Shamali refugee camp news site, June 3, 2022).

## Iranian Activity in Syria

► According to reports from opponents of the Syrian regime,

◆ The Russian forces increased their patrols in Daraa because of the attempts made by the Iranian militias to expand the area under their control in southern Syria by exploiting Moscow's preoccupation with the war in Ukraine (al-Mushraq, May 31, 2022).

◆ The Iranian militias in Syria have increased their forces along the Jordanian border, including hundreds of Hezbollah operatives from the Abu al-Feisal al-Abbas Brigade, which moved from the region around the international airport in Damascus to the Set Zaynab region, where they were given assignments and heard speeches from Iranian commanders about the new posts in southern Syria. According to the sources, a number of days ago the militias deployed operatives to posts along the border with Jordan; the operatives were wearing Syrian army uniforms (SyriaTV and al-Hal websites, June 3, 2022).

◆ The newspaper *al-Medan* quoted a source from the Jaish Mu'awir al-Thura militia, who said Jordan had asked the United States to form support groups and increase its cooperation to cope with the spread of Iranian militias along Jordan's northern border

with Syria. According to the source, American and Jordanian intelligence representatives have already met, apparently at the al-Tanf base of the international coalition where the Syrian, Jordanian and Iraqi borders meet (Baladi News website, June 6, 2022).