



## Spotlight on Terrorism : Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria August 21 – September 5 , 2022

### Overview

- ▶ Hezbollah's militant rhetoric has escalated significantly due to concerns that disputes over the Israeli-Lebanese naval border will lead to an outbreak of fighting. Hezbollah's tactics include a propaganda campaign intended to weaken the morale of IDF soldiers. On September 4, 2022, a group of boats set sail in a demonstration as part of the campaign to "protect national wealth" [the natural gas and oil fields]. Boats flying the Lebanese flag and with signs hung on the railings sailed from all parts of Lebanon to the naval border at al-Naqura in south Lebanon.
- ▶ On the second anniversary of the explosion in the Beirut harbor there was an increase in public outcry regarding those responsible, presumably Hezbollah. However, Hezbollah has successfully prevented legal steps from being taken against its senior figures.
- ▶ The UN Security Council renewed the UNIFIL forces' mandate in south Lebanon. There was a physical altercation between residents of the south Lebanon Christian village of Rmeish and Hezbollah operatives situated in a nearby Green Without Borders<sup>1</sup> facility. Lebanese security forces located a cell of suspected ISIS operatives in the south Lebanon village of Bint Jbeil.
- ▶ In the wake of Operation Breaking Dawn in the Gaza Strip, Hezbollah has been collaborating with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The Palestinian organizations in the Rashidiya refugee camp want to establish their own joint operations room.
- ▶ International coalition force aircraft attacked operatives of the Fatemiyoun militia and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps in eastern Syria. In response, American bases were shelled with artillery fire. Senior Hezbollah figure Tareq Yassin al-Ma'youf<sup>2</sup> returned to Syria

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<sup>1</sup> Green Without Borders is a Lebanese environmental NGO mainly occupied with planting trees. It operates a number of stations along the Israeli-Lebanese border which are used by Hezbollah. For further information, see the February 24, 2020 bulletin, "Green Without Borders: a Lebanese environmental organization that collaborates with Hezbollah and supports its activity near the Israeli border."

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ma'youf has often been accused of buying real estate for the IRGC and smuggling drugs into Lebanon from Syria for Hezbollah.

after a two-year absence. His return might indicate Hezbollah has transferred its focus in Syria from the northern front to the eastern part of the country.

► A local militia in southern Syria is fighting against the presence of Hezbollah operatives, Syrian intelligence agents and drug dealers.

## Hezbollah in Lebanon

### Hezbollah threats against Israel

► In view of the conflict over the delineation of the naval border between Israel and Lebanon, there had been a recent increase in statements in Lebanon about Hezbollah's intention to confront Israel. Hezbollah has been intensifying its efforts to prepare the public for such a confrontation.

◆ **Ibrahim al-Amin, the editor of the Lebanese al-Akhbar and a senior figure in Hezbollah media**, described the preparations the organization was making for the confrontation and analyzed the various possibilities for an outbreak of violence with Israel and the United States. He said Hezbollah's objective was to destroy the IDF, and Hezbollah had capabilities which even Iran did not possess. The article was accompanied by pictures of UAVs and infographics of the kinds of Iranian-made rockets in Hezbollah's arsenal, along with rocket trajectories and UAV ranges (*al-Akhbar*, August 26, 2022).



**Picture of a UAV that accompanied the article (*al-Akhbar*, August 26, 2022).**

◆ In addition, the Twitter accounts of activists affiliated with Hezbollah, such as **journalist Ali Shoeib** and the Tansikeya website, posted militant tweets to weaken the morale of IDF soldiers. For example, a notice was posted with a caption, in Hebrew, reading, "Say goodbye to your mother," along with quotes from Ibrahim al-Amin's article.



**Hezbollah notice in preparation for a possible confrontation with Israel (Twitter account, the Tansikeya website, August 26, 2022).**

- ◆ Following instructions from Hezbollah to its operatives not to make pilgrimages to Karbala because of the "internal situation in Iraq," the **Beirut-based journalist Hassan Oleik** said the claim that the internal situation in Iraq might prove dangerous to Shi'ite pilgrims going to Karbala was baseless. In reality, he claimed, the instructions to Hezbollah operatives were intended to prevent them from leaving Lebanon because of concern over potential fighting with Israel (al-Mahatta Twitter account, August 25, 2022).

### "Flotilla" sails in campaign to protect Lebanon's national wealth

- ▶ As part of the campaign to "protect national wealth," on September 4, 2022, a "mini-flotilla" was organized of boats flying the Lebanese flag with signs hung on the railings to support Lebanese sovereignty over the gas fields. According to reports, dozens of boats set sail from as far away as Tripoli and were joined by others along the Lebanese coastline en route to al-Naqoura, where the naval border is expected to be delineated. The boats returned to their moorings in the late afternoon. No exceptional events were recorded (al-'Ahad, the *al-Nashra* website, September 4, 2022).



**Boats with Lebanese flags and signs. The Hebrew sign reads, "When you leave our land and water, you will no longer be part of history" (al-Nashra website, September 4, 2022).**

► **Lebanese President Michel Aoun** praised the Lebanese who participated in the mini-flotilla. He said they adhered to Lebanon's full rights to its water and resources. He said their united position guaranteed their rights for the sake of the coming generations, who expected their aspirations would be met (Michel Aoun's Twitter account, September 4, 2022).

### **Marking the anniversary of the explosion in the port of Beirut**

► The events marking the anniversary of the explosion in the port of Beirut<sup>3</sup> included a demonstration at the entrance to the port. It was held by the families of the casualties, who protested the event was being ignored and those responsible had not been punished. They called for the dead and wounded and their families not to be forgotten (*al-Nahar*, August 25, 2022).

► Many Lebanese consider Hezbollah responsible for the explosion, an issue which is a significant component of Lebanese opposition discourse. Eleven international organizations appealed to the Lebanese government not to involve politics in the investigation of the explosion and not to give "immunity from formal investigation to high-ranking political figures" (*al-Ain al-Ekhbariya*, August 4, 2022). The expression "high-ranking political figures" is a euphemism for the pressures and threats Hezbollah exerted on the investigating judge, Tareq al-Beitar, to prevent him from finding the truth about the causes of the worst civilian catastrophe in Lebanon's history.

► It can be considered a political victory for Hezbollah when the judge ended his investigation without mentioning the names of the responsible parties. Hezbollah again proved the depth of its influence on Lebanese politics (and thus also on its judicial system), as it had done

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<sup>3</sup> On August 4, 2020, there was an explosion in the port of Beirut which killed 218 people, wounded more than 7,000, and caused extensive property damage.

previously in the international tribunal's investigation of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. However, the renewed interest in the explosion is liable to put pressure on senior Hezbollah figures and contribute to the organization's militant rhetoric.

## South Lebanon

### UNIFIL mandate renewed

► After deliberation, on August 15, 2022 the UN Security Council renewed UNIFIL's mandate in south Lebanon for six months, until the end of February 2023, with no significant change in the force's operations. This time most of the deliberations dealt with UNIFIL's ability to patrol without a Lebanese army presence and its capabilities to prevent armed groups which do not belong to the Lebanese army [mainly Hezbollah] from bearing arms in areas for which the force is responsible. Also deliberated were the conditions under which the Lebanese army could provide support for training and logistics, given Lebanon's extreme financial hardships (UN Security Council report, August 30, 2022).

► The Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese *al-Akhbar* claimed the report issued by the UN Security Council on the eve of renewing the mandate, and the Council's resolution were severely critical of the activity of Hezbollah ("the resistance") in south Lebanon, but were clearly tolerant of Israel's conduct and its "violations" (al-Akhbar, September 3, 2022).

### Physical altercation between Christian civilians and Hezbollah operatives

► On July 30, 2022, a physical altercation broke out between the residents of the Christian village of Rmeish in south Lebanon, near the Israeli border, and Hezbollah operatives situated in facilities belonging to the Green Without Borders NGO. The fight began over felling trees near the Hezbollah facility. Lebanese army intervention was unsuccessful and the Hezbollah operatives took out their guns and threatened to drive the local residents out. Lebanese army soldiers were forced to separate the two sides (News Folio, July 30, 2022).

### ISIS terrorists detained

► On August 29, 2022, operatives of Lebanon's General Security Directorate detained several men in Bint Jbeil on suspicion of being ISIS terrorists. They were accused of fighting in the ranks of ISIS in Syria, illegally infiltrating into Lebanon and dealing drugs and counterfeit currency (Bint Jbeil website, August 29, 2022).

## Lebanese government ministers tour the border with Israel

► At the invitation of Lebanese Minister of Culture Mohammad el-Mortada, eight Lebanese government ministers and the secretary of the government toured along Lebanon's border with Israel to increase public awareness of the southern part of the country. They began at al-Naqoura in the west and drove along the border to the villages of Houla and Adaisseh in the east, where they threw rocks at the Israeli border. The tour ended at the Hezbollah memorial site in the village of Mleeta in south Lebanon (Lebanon 24 website, August 30, 2022).



**Lebanese government ministers on a tour of south Lebanon  
(Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, August 30, 2022).**

► A video uploaded to the social media after the tour showed Walid Fayad, minister of water and energy, and Hector Hajjar, minister of social affairs, throwing rocks at Israel; the video went viral. Many social media users were critical of the ministers, noting that while the ministers were making jokes and having fun throwing rocks at the border, the Lebanese had one hour of electricity a day and 80% lived below the poverty line. On the other hand, Ali Shoeib, who works for al-Manar TV, supported the rock-throwing as "part of the agenda against Israel" (Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, August 31, 2022).

## Event in Tyre commemorating Musa al-Sadr

► August 25 was the day the imam Musa al-Sadr<sup>4</sup> disappeared, and every year it serves as an opportunity to demonstrate the strength of the Shi'ites, especially those belonging to the Amal movement, which al-Sadr founded. On August 31, 2022, Amal held a conference in Tyre to mark the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disappearance. The key speaker was Nabih Beri, chairman of the Amal movement and speaker of the Lebanese parliament. He did his best to encourage his audience and motivate them to support the movement. He called on his supporters to

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<sup>4</sup> Musa al-Sadr was a Lebanese Shi'ite leader, one of the founders of the Amal movement, who vanished on August 25, 1978, while on a visit to Libya.

believe in Lebanon again, saying that despite the country's severe hardships, Lebanon had not yet gone bankrupt (Ya Sur website, August 31, 2022).

## Palestinians in Lebanon

### Lessons from Operation Breaking Dawn

► Immediately after Operation Breaking Dawn, Hezbollah enabled the PIJ to use its media platforms to spread its propaganda. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah even met with PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah to discuss and analyze the tactical, political and media aspects of the operation in the Gaza Strip (al-Mayadeen, August 24, 2022). For Hezbollah, the most recent round of fighting served as a field for testing weapons to see how Israel dealt with extensive rocket fire. It can be assumed the organization will draw its own conclusions from the operation.

► On August 24, 2022, "Muqawama" ["resistance"], Hezbollah's official website, posted an article by Ihsan Attia, PIJ representative in Lebanon, in which he revealed to his hosts the insights he gained from the operation in the Gaza Strip. He listed the organization's "achievements," the foremost of which was Israel's inability to deal with rocket fire targeting the center of the country despite support from the United States, and Israel's failure to destroy the PIJ's military capabilities (Muqawama website, August 24, 2022).

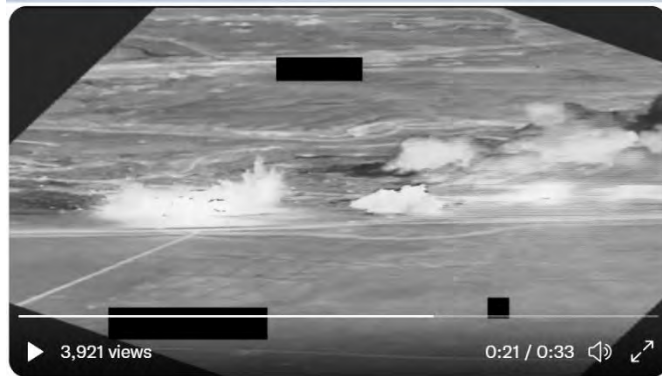
► On August 28, 2022, Dr. Mustafa Yusuf al-Daoudi, former Hamas representative in Syria and later in Lebanon, posted an article to the official website for the Rashidiya refugee camp. It elaborated on the need to establish a joint operations room of all the Palestinian organizations the camp. According to al-Daoudi, there was a pressing need for a joint operations room to be able to deal with emergency situations, especially situations resulting from the "struggle" with Israel (official website of the Rashidiya refugee camp, August 28, 2022).

## Iran and Hezbollah in Syria

### Attack on Iranian militia targets in eastern Syria

► On August 24, 2022, American and international coalition aircraft attacked targets belonging to the Iranian militia in eastern Syria near Deir al-Zor, Albukamal and al-Mayadeen, as well as ammunition storehouses in al-Ayash west of Deir al-Zor. The targets were identified as targets of the Shi'ite Fatemiyoun militias from Afghanistan and of the Iranian

Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). According to American sources, six people were killed in the attack; ten according to Syrian sources. A short time later two American bases in eastern Syria were attacked by artillery fire.<sup>5</sup> According to reports, after the attack the IRGC cancelled training for various militias arriving in eastern Syria from Hama and Homs in the central part of the country (Deir al-Zor 24, August 24, 2022).



**Weapons storehouses of the Afghan militias under American aerial attack (IntelliTimes Twitter account, August 25, 2022).**

### **Iranian medical aid for the Deir al-Zor-Albukamal area**

► A few days after the IRGC clinic was evacuated in the al-Qusor neighborhood of Deir al-Zor, a new clinic was opened by the Iranian cultural center in the al-Filat neighborhood. The clinic is run by Hajj Rasoul, the director of the cultural center, in cooperation with Hajj Kamil, commander of the IRGC militia in the eastern part of Syria. The clinic also gives nursing training courses for both men and women, and a new class of female nurses was immediately put to work in the clinics of the IRGC militias (Euphrates Post website, August 30, 2022).

### **Presence of a Hezbollah operative in Syria**

► Senior Hezbollah figure Tareq Yassin al-Ma'youf Abu Aqil was recently seen in the town of Hatla, southeast of Deir al-Zor, after an absence of two years, most of which he spent in the al-Qusayr-Idlib-Aleppo sector in northern Syria (Deir al-Zor 24 website, August 28, 2022). His return might indicate the transfer of Hezbollah's focus from the northern Syrian front to the east. According to various sources, he had been involved in transferring populations from the al-Qusayr area on the Lebanese-Syrian border and dealt with purchasing real estate for the IRGC, and smuggling arms and drugs through the border.

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<sup>5</sup> For further information, see the September 1, 2022 bulletin, "Spotlight on Iran."



## Local struggle against Hezbollah's presence in southern Syria

► The anti-terrorism force and forces belonging to the independent Druze movement Rijal al-Karameh in Suwayda, southwestern Syria, operated against operatives suspected of belonging to Hezbollah and Syrian regime intelligence, and of dealing drugs. During the past month the forces carried out detentions and raids to enforce order in the Suwayda area. On August 30, 2022, Rijal al-Karameh and anti-terrorism forces raided a house in the village of Qanawat with the intention of detaining Salim Hamid, accused of working for military intelligence. After the raid four additional suspects were detained and later released. Salim Hamid, who had been released from Rijal al-Karameh custody a short time before, was not apprehended (al-Suwayda ANS Facebook page, August 30, 2022).

► In the meantime, Rijal al-Karameh reached an agreement with Nasser al-Saudi, called a senior Hezbollah figure in the Suwayda area. According to the terms of the agreement, al-Saudi will surrender his weapons to the popular committee and abstain from any activity that might harm the residents of Suwayda. According to critics of the agreement, al-Saudi can still maintain connections with Hezbollah and deal drugs (al-Suwayda ANS Facebook page, August 29, 2022).



**A Rijal al-Karameh anti-terrorism force (al-Suwayda ANS Facebook page, November 17, 2021).**