



Hezbollah holds a military display in south Lebanon and threatens Israel

May 22, 2023

Overview

- ▶ On May 21, 2023, Hezbollah held a military exercise in south Lebanon using live fire, which was well-covered by the media. The organization displayed its capabilities, reiterated its intention to obliterate the State of Israel and promoted the "unity of the arenas" narrative.
- ▶ Scores of media personnel were invited, including foreign correspondents, to watch while Hezbollah operatives simulated breaking through Israel's border, taking control of an Israeli post or community and abducting soldiers. Weapons such as multiple-barrel rocket launchers mounted on armored vehicles, quadcopters and machine guns were displayed, but no missiles or UAVs.
- ▶ The event was held to mark the 23rd anniversary of the IDF's withdrawal from Lebanon and its slogan was "We swear we will cross [the Israeli border]." In addition to displaying weapons, threats were issued against Israel.
- ▶ In ITIC assessment, Hezbollah tried to send a message both internally and externally that it would not lay down its arms or abandon its role as "Lebanon's defender," raise the morale of its operatives in preparation for a possible confrontation with Israel and promote the "unity of the arenas" narrative to the region in general and its "resistance axis" collaborators in particular.

Events

- ▶ On May 21, 2023 Hezbollah held a military display using live fire in south Lebanon with the slogan "We swear we will cross [the Israeli border]." In reality, it was a showcase display held at a Hezbollah camp in the village of Aramta, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) north of Metulla. It was held as one of the events marking the 23rd anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon (marked every year by Hezbollah on May 25 as "the holiday of resistance and liberation," and an opportunity for the organization to reiterate its calls for the destruction of Israel in the near future and its promotion of the concept of the "unity of the arenas."

► Several hundred operatives participated in the exercise, which included a simulation of breaking through the Israel-Lebanon border, abducting an IDF soldier or the body of an IDF soldier from a vehicle and attacking an Israeli community or IDF post. The operatives also exhibited their physical fitness and high morale. Various weapons were displayed, including multiple-barrel rocket launchers mounted on armored vehicles, quadcopters and machine guns, some of which were apparently intended to intercept IDF UAVs (Agence France-Presse and Telegram, May 21, 2023).



Dozens of Hezbollah operatives at the beginning of the exercise
(@Jaafar584044510 Twitter account, May 21, 2023).



Self defense exercise and breaking roof tiles with karate chops (al-Mayadeen, May 21, 2023).



Simulating the takeover of an Israeli post



Explosion and breaking through Israel's "border wall" under the slogan, "We swear we're coming." Fighting Israel on the border (al-Mayadeen, May 21, 2023).

► Some of the weapons had been adapted for a modern battlefield, to conditions in the field and by lessons Hezbollah learned while fighting in Syria. Some of the weapons exhibited were machineguns for intercepting quadcopters, motorcycles and light vehicles, including ATVs to improve operatives' mobility and vehicles with mounted multiple-barrel rocket launchers (to challenge Israel's interception capabilities).¹ No precise missiles or UAVs were exhibited, apparently for reasons of securing the information.



Right: A machine gun apparently used to intercept Israeli drones. Left: Small ATVs to improve operatives' mobility (telegram, May 21, 2023).

¹ In the past such vehicles carried between 10 and 12 barrels, but in the current display rocket launchers with capabilities to fire more than 30 rockets at a time were exhibited.



Multiple-barrel rocket launchers mounted on armored vehicles (Telegram, May 21, 2023).

► Hashem Safi al-Din, chairman of Hezbollah's Operations' Council, gave a speech threatening Israel. He claimed the point of the exercise was to inform the "Zionist enemy" that the "resistance which [in the past] achieved victories is not tired and does not retreat despite political pressure and economic siege." He added that Hezbollah was committed to victory and establishing an "equation of deterrence" against Israel. He claimed Hezbollah was prepared for any confrontation with Israel and threatened that "if there is anyone in the Zionist entity who wants to do something foolish to change the rules of engagement, we will rain our precise missiles and all our weapons on it." He said they had not exhibited the missiles to prevent Israel from examining them, claiming that "we have no need to display them today and we have many...the enemy will be exposed to them [when they land] in the middle of its settlements." He also noted the importance of the doctrine of "unity of the arenas" against Israel as a multiplier of force that could overcome Israel (al-Mayadeen, May 21, 2023).



Hashem Safi al-Din gives a speech at the beginning of the exercise (al-Mayadeen, May 21, 2023).