

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQS

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Israel's Defensive Actions in Lebanon and Gaza

Is Israel's response to Hizbollah terrorism disproportionate?

Israel's military response is not at all disproportionate when viewed in the wider context of the intolerable danger emanating from the territory of a neighboring state. Some one million Israelis are at risk from the nearly 14,000 rockets stockpiled by Hizbollah since Israel fully withdrew from southern Lebanon in May 2000. In the past year, Hizbollah forces have repeatedly bombarded northern Israel with Katyushas. Locating and destroying as much of this dangerous terrorist arsenal as possible before it is launched or moved to new hiding places has been the central focus of Israel's massive air campaign. Israel is committed to using all necessary force to rescue its soldiers and reduce the longstanding threat of rocket attacks on its civilian population.

Why has Israel hit civilian targets in Lebanon?

Israel has carefully targeted infrastructure that directly or indirectly supports Hizbollah's attacks on the Jewish state. Targeting airfields, major roadways, ports and TV stations is done to limit the terrorists' ability to escape, re-supply or issue propaganda. Extreme measures have been taken by the Israeli military to minimize the risk of civilian casualties among the general Lebanese population, even in circumstances where Hizbollah has deliberately hidden its forces and weaponry in residential neighborhoods and villages in order to use the local population as human shields. Israel has dropped leaflets warning of impending strikes and encouraging Lebanese civilians to evacuate potential combat zones.

As in any war, innocent civilians will be killed or injured and property destroyed. But in the current conflict—imposed upon Israel—there is a profound difference between unintended loss of life and destruction in Lebanon that may occur in spite of the Israeli military's best effort to avoid it, and the intentional launching of indiscriminant rocket barrages into Israel's civilian communities with the express purpose of terrorizing a population and inflicting the maximum degree of death and devastation. As precise as Israel's weaponry may be, it is also powerful, and cannot help but impact the lives of Lebanese civilians among whom the Hizbollah fighters have hidden.

Isn't Israel making Lebanon weaker with its attacks?

Ultimately, the containment and demilitarization of Hizbollah will strengthen Lebanon. It's Hizbollah—and Syria--that have weakened the Lebanese polity by subverting the ability of the central government in Beirut to control its territory and eventually make peace with Israel. That said, the Lebanese government does bear some responsibility for not acting more resolutely against Sheik Nasrallah's terrorist group and has paid a resulting price in the current conflict. Israel has nevertheless focused its military operations on degrading Hizbollah and largely struck only those Lebanese civil and military targets related to that goal.

Why is Israel demanding that the Lebanese government disarm Hizballah and deploy its troops to the border with Israel? Isn't the Lebanese government too weak?

Terje Larsen, the U.N.'s Middle East envoy, reported in April 2006 that the Lebanese Army has the capacity to take up positions in southern Lebanon. "The Lebanese Army Command has informed me that it faces no operational constraints in creating a presence in the south and along the Blue Line, but has not received political instructions to take such action," Larsen said in his report. Rather than disarming Hizballah, as required by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, the Lebanese government has allowed the terrorist group to simultaneously maintain its arms while joining the current government. The failure to disband Hizballah has forced Israel take the current actions to defend its citizens.

Why doesn't Israel want a cease-fire? What does Israel hope to achieve in Lebanon?

What Israel wants is peace. A stable peace ultimately depends on the elimination of Hizballah—an organization committed to Israel's destruction—as a strategic terrorist threat to Israel. While the Israeli military has made substantial progress, this goal has not yet been achieved. The use of force to degrade the radical Islamic group's strength and capabilities is required to establish a realistic basis for such a process. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said a cease-fire would not be sufficient "if that cessation of violence is hostage to Hizballah's next decision to launch missiles into Israel or Hamas' next decision to abduct an Israeli citizen, then we will have gotten nowhere." Prime Minister Ehud Olmert defined the goals of Israel's military actions in Lebanon in terms that are virtually identical to those articulated by the international community through the G-8 statement: "Bringing home the soldiers, complete peace and quiet, removing Hizballah from the area, putting into force U.N. Resolution 1559," which requires Hizballah's disarmament.

Is Israel complying with the U.S. request to show restraint?

Yes. Unlike Hizballah, which fires rockets aimlessly into civilian population centers and specifically targets innocents, Israel carefully plans its operations to avoid and minimize civilian casualties. Unfortunately, Hizballah uses residential areas and even private homes to launch rockets and store its weapons, putting Lebanese civilians in danger and complicating legitimate Israeli military operations. Despite this cruel exploitation of civilians, Israel takes extreme care to reduce the risk to civilians—often at the cost of operational advantages. For example, leaflets are dropped urging residents to avoid certain Hizballah installations, even though such prior warning reduces Israel's element of surprise.

What is Israel doing to ensure humanitarian concerns are met in Lebanon and Gaza?

Israel is doing its utmost to ensure the humanitarian needs of both the Lebanese and Palestinian people are addressed. Despite continued Qassam rocket attacks and threats by Palestinian terrorists against the Israel-Gaza border crossings, Israel has kept the crossings open and is transferring large shipments of food, health, and energy supplies into Gaza to avert a humanitarian crisis. Last week, Israel facilitated the passage of more than 400

truckloads of food and health supplies into Gaza. Yesterday alone, another 147 trucks full of supplies moved into Gaza. In Lebanon, food and medical supplies are available and Israel is committed to ensuring this continues to be the case.

Israel is also working with the international community to ensure foreign citizens who wish to leave Lebanon are evacuated in a safe and secure manner. Thousands of European and other citizens have already been evacuated and American evacuation plans are currently being implemented

Isn't Israel using the current situation as an excuse to reoccupy Gaza and Southern Lebanon?

Israel's full withdrawals from southern Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005 were carried out as acts of peace and goodwill. Since the pullouts, Hizballah and Hamas have carried out unprovoked attacks from the areas Israel had evacuated against Israelis, forcing the Jewish state to take strong action to deter further attacks against its citizens. Israel's current operations are aimed at securing the release of kidnapped soldiers and degrading the ability of Hamas and Hizballah to threaten Israeli civilians with ongoing rocket fire. Israel has no intention of remaining in Gaza or Lebanon longer than is necessary to achieve these goals. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has reiterated Israel's recognition of the international borders both with Lebanon and with Gaza, and stated that "the stability and tranquility of a free Lebanon, free of foreign forces, and an independently run Palestinian Authority is something that Israel wishes for."

What are Syria's and Iran's roles in supporting Hizballah's attacks against Israel?

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) helped establish Hizballah in 1982 and the terrorist organization has since received substantial amounts of financial aid, weaponry, and training from both Iran and Syria. In recent years, Hizballah expanded its cooperation with both Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad while Iran and Syria signed a defense pact last month solidifying an anti-Israeli and anti-American front that stretches from Tehran, through Damascus, and into the Palestinian territories via Hizballah. It is this terrorist alliance that is responsible for the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers and barrage of Iranian- and Syrian-origin rocket attacks on Israel that have caused the current upheaval.

Why are Hamas and Hizballah prisoners being held by Israel?

Israel is holding members of Hamas and Hizballah, both U.S.-designated terrorist organizations, who have been convicted or awaiting trial on terrorism charges. In the last few weeks, Hamas and Hizballah have kidnapped three Israeli soldiers from sovereign Israeli territory. There is no legal or moral basis for the demands of Hizballah and Hamas that Israel release terrorists responsible for the deaths of innocent civilians in exchange for soldiers kidnapped from sovereign Israeli territory. Under the 1949 Geneva Convention, members of armed militias who target civilians are not entitled to the status of prisoners of war.

Is there a role for international peacekeepers to help reduce the violence along Israel's northern border?

Any potential international force introduced into Lebanon could only serve an effective role if it has a clear and strong mandate to help the Lebanese government fully implement Resolution 1559, which requires the disarming of Hizballah.. For the past 28 years, the United Nations Interim Force stationed in southern Lebanon has been deployed along the border between Israel and Hizballah, but has taken no steps to prevent Hizballah attacks on Israel.

What kind of defense capabilities does Israel have to defend against the rockets hitting Israeli population centers?

Currently, Israel has Patriot missile batteries deployed, but they have a limited capacity to intercept Hizballah's shorter-range rockets and are more effective for longer-range missiles such as those that can reach Tel Aviv. The Israeli Arrow is also deployed, and its radar is helping detect incoming projectiles and providing the population with a short warning before impact. But the overall system is designed to intercept ballistic missiles from Syria and Iran, not short-range rockets. Israel is also embarking on a new missile defense effort to counter the threat posed by Katyushas and Qassams, and there may also be a reevaluation of the THEL laser project jointly undertaken by the United States and Israel during the past decade. In the meantime, the Israeli Navy is considering using ship-based Barak missiles in Haifa to see if they can intercept some of the incoming Katyusha and Fajr rockets. Right now, the best defense Israel has is to maintain its air campaign to locate and destroy the Hizballah rockets and launchers on the ground before they are fired into Israel. Ultimately, if fully implemented, UNSC Resolution 1559 will ensure that Hizballah is disarmed and its rocket arsenal destroyed.