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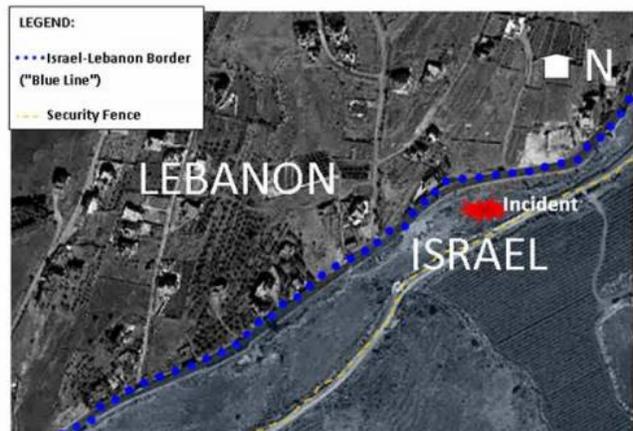
Aug. 4, 2010

LAF Provocation Demands Tough International Response

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) yesterday opened fire on Israeli soldiers performing routine maintenance on Israeli territory. This follows increasing LAF cooperation with the U.S.-designated terrorist group Hizballah, which now has amassed up to 60,000 rockets and missiles, vastly improved its weapons capabilities, and stepped up its threats against Israel. The United States and the international community must strongly support Israel in defending itself and firmly press the government of Lebanon to take concrete measures to repair the deteriorating security situation along the Israeli-Lebanese border.

The unprovoked attack by the LAF raises serious concerns about the Lebanese government's orientation and the growing influence of Hizballah.

- The LAF provoked what the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has called the “most serious incident” along the Israeli-Lebanese border since 2006.
- While the Israeli army was conducting its regular, monthly tree-trimming along the border, the Lebanese army fired on the Israeli soldiers and their commanders who were positioned 200 meters *inside* Israeli territory. One commander was killed and another critically injured.
- UNIFIL spokesman Milos Strugar confirmed that Israel had notified UNIFIL and the Lebanese army ahead of time and that the tree-trimming occurred on the Israeli side of the Blue Line—the internationally recognized border between Israel and Lebanon.
- After the initial exchange of sniper fire, the LAF asked for a brief cease-fire to remove their injured soldiers—only to fire a rocket-propelled grenade on an Israeli tank during the lull.
- This unprovoked attack is another clear violation by the Lebanese government of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended the hostilities of the 2006 war and required the disarmament of Hizballah. Lebanese President Michel Suleiman has stated that he personally guarantees the terrorist organization's right to keep its weapons.
- Lebanese military sources have openly admitted that they coordinate with Hizballah on patrols in southern Lebanon. In October 2009, when a Hizballah weapons depot exploded, the Lebanese army blocked off the area to allow Hizballah to clear out the remaining weapons.



UNIFIL has confirmed that Israeli soldiers attacked by the Lebanese army were on the Israeli side of the border.

The LAF and UNIFIL have allowed Hizballah to restock its rocket arsenal and vastly improve its weapons capabilities since the 2006 war.

- The Israeli military recently published a series of photographs showing Hizballah's weapons build-up in the villages in southern Lebanon not far from UNIFIL bases and patrols. The IDF believes that Hizballah has prepositioned three-quarters of its weapons arsenal in more than 100 villages near schools, hospitals and mosques.
- Iran and Syria are transferring increasingly sophisticated weapons to Hizballah. The terrorist organization, which has killed more Americans than any terrorist group other than al-Qaeda, now maintains an arsenal of up to 60,000 short- and long-range rockets, including hundreds of Syrian M-600 guided rockets, according to Israeli military intelligence.
- With a range of 155 miles and an accuracy to within 330 feet, these missiles are capable of striking Tel Aviv from north of the Litani River—beyond UNIFIL's area of operation—and represent a significant strategic improvement of Hizballah's capabilities.
- U.S. officials have raised concerns about the quantity and quality of Iranian and Syrian weapons shipments to Hizballah. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently said that Tehran and Damascus are transferring weapons of “ever-increasing capability” to Hizballah, which has “far more rockets and missiles than most governments.”
- Even if UNIFIL could guarantee that its current area of operation were free of weapons, this would still be insufficient to protect the majority of Israel's population from rocket strikes, because several hundred of Hizballah's most advanced missiles have ranges in excess of 100 miles.
- In response to Hizballah's increased criticism of and belligerence toward UNIFIL, the U.N. force has emphasized that it poses no threat to the terrorist organization. Spokesman Neeray Singh said that disarming Hizballah is outside of UNIFIL's mandate.

The United States must address this increasingly unstable situation to protect its interests in the region and avoid a renewed conflict.

- The increased cooperation between Hizballah, Damascus and Tehran means that Iran can further project its power into the region, use the terrorist organization as deterrence to protect its nuclear program, undermine the peace process, and thwart efforts to create a stable, democratic and Western-aligned Lebanon.
- The United States and the international community must take action to strengthen and expand UNIFIL and demand that it act to prevent arms smuggling to Hizballah.
- The United States should press the Lebanese government to enforce U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 and take meaningful steps to disarm Hizballah. If the army continues to cooperate with Hizballah, Washington must reevaluate its relationship with the Beirut government and the Lebanese Armed Forces—the recipient of significant American military aid.
- The United States should also continue to stand with Israel and prevent unbalanced and unfair criticism of the Jewish state if Israel is forced to take military action to defend itself.