

Hizballah: Amassing Arms in Unstable Lebanon

Hizballah is a terrorist organization—supported by Iran and Syria—with global reach that poses a direct threat to Israel and to American interests at home and abroad. Hizballah has killed more Americans than any terrorist group other than al-Qaeda and has exploited Israel’s full withdrawal from Lebanon to bring about a bloody war in 2006. Today, the U.S.-designated terrorist group has amassed more than 42,000 rockets aimed at Israel.

Israeli Withdrawal from Lebanon Met with Hizballah Build-up and War

In May 2000, Israel unilaterally withdrew its forces from a security zone in southern Lebanon, ending an 18-year presence that began when Israel sought to defend its citizens from regular Palestinian attacks against northern Israel. By ending one of Hizballah’s stated pretexts for its persistent attacks against Israel, the withdrawal raised hopes that tensions would ease along the Israeli-Lebanese border.

Instead, Hizballah used the Israeli withdrawal to take control of southern Lebanon, amassing an arsenal of 14,000 rockets and missiles.

On July 12, 2006, Hizballah conducted a cross-border raid, killing five soldiers and kidnapping



Hizballah has amassed more than 42,000 rockets since the 2006 war between Hizballah and Israel.

two others (whom it ultimately killed as well), initiating a 33-day war with the Jewish state. During the war, Hizballah—which pledges allegiance to Iran’s supreme leader and calls for the destruction of the United States and Israel—launched an estimated 4,000 rockets at northern Israeli towns and cities.

Hizballah Rearms in Violation of U.N. Security Resolution

Today, with the help of Iran and Syria, Hizballah has reportedly amassed more than 42,000 long- and short-range rockets and missiles—tripling the rocket inventory it had before the 2006 war and directly violating numerous elements of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended the war and called for Hizballah to be disarmed. The

resolution also called for the deployment of Lebanese soldiers and an enlarged United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon. Although U.N. forces in Lebanon are specifically authorized to “take all necessary action ... to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind,” UNIFIL has done little to prevent Hizballah from rearming, rebuilding its command-and-control infrastructure, and sending select forces to Iran for training. Nor has the Lebanese army taken any significant measures to stem Hizballah’s illicit build-up in southern Lebanon.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates wrote in the January/February 2009 issue of *Foreign Affairs* that Hizballah’s “restocked arsenal of rockets and missiles now dwarfs the inventory of many nation-states.”

Hizballah-Iran Alliance Threatens Entire Region

Iran’s Islamic regime has utilized Hizballah since it founded the terrorist organization in the early 1980s as a vehicle for exporting its Shiite revolutionary ideology, using the group to destabilize Lebanon. Egyptian security has discovered and dismantled a large Hizballah cell that had planned to attack targets in Egypt and help Hamas attack Israel. Iran provides Hizballah with tens of millions of dollars a year, as well as arms and training, and provides direction during frequent meetings with Hizballah leaders. Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair has testified to Congress that Hizballah is the “largest recipient of Iranian financial aid, training, and weaponry.”

Arab states were extremely critical of Hizballah for precipitating war with Israel in 2006.

Most of the Arab nations—other than Syria—are increasingly troubled by the Hizballah-Iran alliance. After Hizballah initiated the 2006 war with Israel, several Arab states—Saudi Arabia and Egypt in particular—were extremely critical of Hizballah for risking a major war and trying to spread its revolutionary agenda.

Hizballah Gains Political Power

In May 2008, Hizballah launched attacks on civilian neighborhoods in Beirut, an act seen by many as an attempted coup and one that placed the country on the brink of civil war. On May 21, 2008, after five days of intense negotiations in Doha, Qatar, all major Lebanese parties signed an accord to elect Michel Suleiman as president, and to form a national unity government with 11 out of 30 cabinet positions held by the opposition, thus enabling Hizballah to veto any governmental decision.

However, on June 7, 2009, Hizballah suffered a blow, with the pro-Western alliance led by Sa’ad Hariri defeating the Hizballah alliance in Lebanese elections. The outcome left the pro-Western coalition with 71 seats, while Hizballah’s coalition only garnered 57 seats.

Despite this setback for Hizballah, the pro-Western March 14 coalition, in its efforts to form a national unity government, acquiesced to the demands of the Hizballah-led opposition. The new government includes two Hizballah ministers, in addition to eight other opposition cabinet ministers, thus allowing Hizballah to influence government policy and block efforts to disarm the terrorist group.

LAF Killing of IDF Officers Brings New Scrutiny to U.S. Aid to Lebanon

On August 3, 2010, Lebanese snipers targeted a routine IDF maintenance detail, killing an Israeli soldier and severely wounding another. A Lebanese soldier and a reporter were killed in the Israeli response. The entire LAF attack was staged south of the Blue Line, in Israeli territory.

Since the 2006 Israel-Hizballah War the United States has increased both economic and financial support for the government of Lebanon to approximately \$1 billion overall, of which over \$700 million is military aid and support. The George W. Bush administration, primarily through the Department of Defense, made U.S. support for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) a very firm and public commitment as part of U.S. efforts to strengthen the central government and prevent Hizballah and its Iranian supporters from further destabilizing the country or taking it over completely. These efforts continued under the Obama administration.

Despite these efforts, the power of the elected government of Lebanon has decrease and Hizballah and Syria's influence increased. Lebanon remains a terrorist incubator. In

addition to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Fatah al-Intifada, which operate in the Syrian-Lebanese border regions, extremist groups have developed in the Palestinian refugee camps. New evidence of the widespread coordination and intelligence sharing between the LAF and Hizballah, and the growing possibility of U.S. weapons supplied to the LAF being used against Israel, has also emerged.

Hizballah an Increasing Threat to Israel and Regional Stability

In light of these developments, Hizballah has effectively neutralized the Lebanese government and increased its capabilities to threaten not only Israel, but the stability of the entire region. In November 2009, Hizballah released a new party platform, the first since its original 1985 mission statement. Reiterating Hizballah's opposition to any recognition of Israel, the new statement also expanded Hizballah's goals to include armed opposition to the United States specifically.

Hizballah's calls for Israel's destruction and its ongoing amassing of rockets may harbinger future war if left unchecked. In the coming year, members of Congress and the administration will need to focus on the danger posed by Hizballah's continuing military build-up and to examine whether UNIFIL is carrying out this mandate. It also will be essential for Congress to review the U.S. program of assistance provided to the Lebanese army to ensure that the LAF understands the purpose and goals of the program, and does not seek further conflict with Israel.