

MEMO

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Mounting Threats on Israel's Borders

Today, Israel faces an unprecedented array of threats stemming from the growing instability and chaos gripping the region. Along its northern border, terrorist groups including Hezbollah, the Islamic State (IS), and Jabhat al-Nusra are gaining strength; in the south, Hamas remains in firm control of Gaza and terrorists roam the Sinai Peninsula; and to the east, Iran is set to receive about a hundred billion dollars in sanctions relief that will further fuel its support for terrorism and regional destabilization. In light of these threats, the United States must continue to meet its commitment to ensure the Jewish state has the means to defend itself.

Syria:

- Russian forces have now entered the fighting in support of President Bashar al-Assad and executed dozens of airstrikes on rebel forces. The growing number of actors in the Syrian theater raises the potential for miscalculations and escalation of the conflict.
- Russia is bringing advanced equipment into the region, with the prospect of significant additional transfers to Syrian forces and Hezbollah. Russia's presence in Syria could impinge on Israel's freedom to respond to illicit arms shipments to terrorists.
- Iran has also sent troops and military advisers to shore up Assad's rule—including on the Golan Heights—bringing Iran's malign influence directly to Israel's doorstep.
- Jihadist groups, including IS and Jabhat al-Nusra also continue to gain territory in northern and southern Syria, including along the Golan Heights.



Propping up the Assad regime, Russia and Iran have entered the conflict in Syria.

Lebanon:

- The Iranian-backed terrorist group Hezbollah dominates Lebanon's political scene and possesses more than 150,000 rockets and missiles aimed at Israel.
- Hezbollah's arsenal has grown increasingly sophisticated and accurate, and the group is now capable of striking any location in Israel.
- On Iran's orders, Hezbollah has been heavily involved in Syria fighting for the Assad regime. The combat experience the group has gained will make them a far more formidable adversary should they initiate another conflict with Israel.

Iran:

- Iran has plunged the Middle East into a dangerous sectarian conflagration, fomenting civil strife and destruction in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Bahrain, and strategically threatening Israel with its terrorist proxies.
- Iran is set to receive a windfall of sanctions relief, valued at about \$100 billion, following initial implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). These funds will greatly enhance Iran's ability and efforts to destabilize the region and solidify its status as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism.

Islamic State:

- IS has gained control over formidable territory in both Syria and Iraq. The group remains dedicated to killing all those who disagree with its particular interpretation of Islam.
- Radical Islamist groups in the Golan Heights, Sinai and elsewhere have sworn allegiance to IS and carried out terrorist attacks under the group's banner.

Egypt:

- The Sinai Peninsula remains lawless, as militant Islamists gain more power, wage an insurgency against the Egyptian government, and threaten attacks against Israel.

Jordan:

- Jordan's pro-Western monarchy faces challenges from Islamist extremists and economic strains due to the flood of Syrian refugees.

Persian Gulf:

- Iran continues to pursue destabilizing activities in the Persian Gulf to further its bid for regional primacy. Recent Iranian attempts to smuggle arms to opposition movements have been thwarted by Kuwaiti and Bahraini authorities, and Iranian backed Houthi rebels have plunged Yemen into a civil war.
- Gulf leaders have declared that their countries must receive the same nuclear rights as Iran, potentially setting off a nuclear arms race.
- In the wake of the JCPOA, the Gulf states are seeking to bolster their conventional defensive capabilities against a resurgent Iran. This influx of military hardware poses potential challenges to Israel's regional qualitative military edge (QME).

West Bank and Gaza:

- Hamas is actively rebuilding its terror infrastructure, stockpiling more advanced rockets and reconstructing attack tunnels into Israel.
- The Palestinian Authority's (PA) leaders have waged a campaign of incitement against Israel, spurring the recent rise in terrorist attacks and injecting a dangerous religious element into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The peace process remains stalled as the PA has eschewed returning to bilateral negotiations in favor of unilateral actions designed to isolate and pressure Israel.