



Hizballah's Syrian Support

Since coming into office, the Obama administration has consistently shown that it is willing to engage with the regime in Damascus. Syrian President Bashar Assad has responded by strengthening his country's ties with Iran. "We need to further reinforce relations [with Iran] if the true objective is stability," Assad said as he welcomed Ahmadinejad to Damascus. "We do not want others to give us lessons on our region, our history."

In the spring, reports began to surface about an alarming development: Syria had transferred Scud missiles to Hizballah in Lebanon. The thought of Scud missiles evokes painful memories for Israelis. In 1991, Iraq fired 42 Scuds at Israel during the Persian Gulf War. Israelis remember wearing gas masks and running to the nearest safe room in order to avoid what could have been a chemical attack from Saddam Hussein.

Given Hizballah's history of firing thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians, Israelis are deeply worried about the prospect of Scuds on their northern border. The missiles have a range of up to 400 miles and carry heavy explosive warheads; in the hands of Hizballah in Lebanon, all of Israel is in the line of fire. The Israeli Defense Forces Home Front Command has already begun issuing "individual protection kits," which include gas masks, to all citizens. The process is expected to take three years.

Even without Scud missiles, Hizballah is a constant cause of concern for the Israeli defense establishment. Israeli defense officials recently said that Syria has given Hizballah M-600 rockets, which can carry a 1,000-pound warhead to a distance of 186 miles, putting almost the entire Israeli population within Hizballah's rocket range.

Top American officials have also been increasingly outspoken about the role that Syria and Iran play in arming Hizballah. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recently noted that Hizballah "has far more rockets and missiles than most governments in the world."

President Obama has recognized the negative influence that Syria has in the Middle East. In May, Obama announced that he was renewing sanctions against Damascus. Syria's "continuing support for terrorist organizations and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the United States," Obama said in a statement to Congress.

With Syria enabling Hizballah to develop a massive arsenal on Israel's northern border, the people of Israel are sure to remain vigilant against Hizballah attacks for the foreseeable future. This problem is not going away. It's important that the United States continues to press Damascus to change its destructive behavior.