An Imminent Threat on Israel’s Northern Border

Hezbollah—an Iranian-backed proxy group—poses an imminent threat to Israel. Situated over Israel’s northern border throughout southern Lebanon and in Beirut’s suburbs, Hezbollah maintains an advanced military arsenal larger than many national armies. With an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles and up to 40,000 fighters, Hezbollah is positioned to inflict significant casualties and damage throughout Israel. Israeli security planners consider Hezbollah to be one of the greatest threats facing Israel today.

Hezbollah calls for the destruction of Israel.

Led by Shia clerics, Hezbollah follows the doctrines of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini—leader of Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran—and calls for the destruction of the State of Israel. The group’s chief, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, often refers to Israel as a “cancerous growth” and has said, “The only solution is to destroy it without giving it the opportunity to surrender.”

Hezbollah possesses an advanced rocket and missile arsenal.

In 2006, Hezbollah provoked a war with Israel during which it launched thousands of rockets into densely populated areas of northern Israel. Today, Hezbollah’s bigger and more destructive weapons stockpile includes between 120,000 and 150,000 rockets and missiles. Several thousand medium- and long-range munitions are equipped with sophisticated guidance systems that support pinpoint targeting—every Israeli city, town and military installation is now within reach. In a future conflict, Hezbollah could launch well over 1,500 rockets per day (compared with 120 per day in 2006).
Hezbollah can challenge Israel’s air superiority and threaten it from underground.

Hezbollah can threaten Israeli military and civilian aircraft deep within Israel. Hezbollah reportedly possesses advanced surface-to-air missile systems, including Russian-designed shoulder-mounted SA-7 and SA-17 mobile platforms. The SA-17 system can engage up to 24 targets simultaneously at high altitudes at a distance of up to 30 miles—far into northern Israel. Hezbollah also now has drones for intelligence collection and possible use for direct attacks as well as advanced Yakhont cruise missiles to strike Israel’s offshore gas platforms and naval vessels. It is also believed that Hezbollah is constructing offensive infiltration tunnels into Israel, similar to Hamas’ tunnels originating in Gaza.

Hezbollah’s ranks are now battle-tested from fighting on behalf of the Assad regime in Syria.

Hezbollah has sent 6,000-8,000 of its fighters to prop up the Bashar al-Assad regime in the Syrian civil war, now in its sixth year. Fighting alongside Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, Hezbollah’s troops have gained significant battlefield experience and expertise. The group has become so crucial to Assad’s war effort that it often spearheads and organizes joint military attacks, and many Syrian units reportedly will not fight without Hezbollah forces in the lead.

Hezbollah uses human shields.

Hezbollah continues to place Lebanese civilians at extreme risk in any future conflict by embedding its forces, missiles and weapons caches in civilian areas. Local inhabitants—men, women and children alike—are exploited as human shields by the terrorist group positioning its weaponry within mosques, homes, hospitals and schools. Today, virtually all of southern Lebanon is a Hezbollah fortress of underground bunkers, rocket launch sites and interconnecting tunnels. According to an Israeli defense official, “The [Lebanese] civilians are living in a military compound.”

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