

On the Brink of Another War? Israel To Hold Lebanon's Government "Responsible" if Hezbollah Retaliates over Air Strikes

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Global Research, March 01, 2014

[Silent Crow News](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Israel has warned the Lebanese government that it would be held responsible for any retaliation by Hezbollah after this past Monday's airstrike by the Israeli Air Force that struck areas held by Hezbollah near the Lebanese-Syria border. The Washington Post reported that *"Hezbollah said it would " choose the right time and place and the proper way to respond."* Israel is prepared to strike targets in Lebanon associated with Hezbollah strongholds. *"An unspecified number of Hezbollah militants were killed in the airstrike, according to pan-Arab news channel Al Arabiya"* the Jerusalem Post said in their report which also stated Israel's position on the matter:

Israel sent a warning to the Lebanese government in Beirut by way of UNIFIL that it would be held responsible for any attacks by Hezbollah that are launched from Lebanese soil, reported al-Akhbar News Agency on Friday

The Israeli Air Force recently launched strikes that hit Hezbollah targets on the border between Syria and Lebanon claiming that they were preventing missiles from reaching Hezbollah coming from Syria. The Washington Post quoted Maj. Gen. Eyal Ben-Reuven on Monday's actions undertaken by the Israeli government as he said *"Israel has to act in order to prevent the transfer of game-changing weapons," said retired Maj. Gen. Eyal Ben-Reuven, speaking from northern Israel. "Although I can't confirm what happened ... it is very clear that we are trying to prevent this."*

The Washington Post also quoted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's comment on the military strike when he said *"We will do all that is necessary to defend our citizens."* Hezbollah disagreed with the Lebanese media claiming that the strike targeted *"a missile storage center and killed at least four Hezbollah fighters"* Hezbollah said that the site *"was only partially damaged"* according to the report which also confirmed that a Lebanese intelligence official said that *"the strike did target a shipment of missiles that had crossed the border from Syria."*

Tensions are rising on the border between Israel and Lebanon since the Syrian civil war began in 2011. Israel has been in preparation to counter Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza since both groups are on their borders. *"It is self-evident that we see Lebanon as responsible for any attack on Israel from the territory of Lebanon,"* Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz told Israel radio *"It is the duty of the Lebanese government to prevent any terrorist attack - whether a terrorist or missile attack, or any other kind - on the State of Israel,"* the Jerusalem Post stated. Israel violated another

UN resolution as “Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil condemned the Israeli strikes saying that Israel was in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 that ended the 2006 Second Lebanon War, according to the Lebanese news outlet” the report said. The Brookings Institute issued a Report in 2011 called ‘The Next War: How another Conflict between Hizballah and Israel Could Look and How Both Sides Are Preparing for It’ stated how Israel and Lebanon have been in preparation for war:

Israel also has been busy implementing the lessons it learned from 2006 in preparation for the possibility of another conflict with Hizballah. The IDF has instituted greater logistical autonomy and sustainability in its combat units, and has strengthened the ability of its ground forces, navy, and air force to carry out joint operations. It also has trained extensively in large-scale ground operations, employing rapid maneuver techniques and using more robust and flexible equipment to reduce tactical vulnerability. The IDF created several urban warfare centers shortly after the 2006 war, the largest of which, the Urban Warfare Training Center (UWTC), simulates a variety of Lebanese villages, towns, and refugee camps.

The IDF has also introduced a number of new technologies that it is expected to use in any new conflict with Hizballah. These include a multi-tiered missile defense shield to intercept and destroy both Hizballah’s short-range and long-range weapons and Iran’s ballistic missiles. Also, all new tanks are now fitted with the Trophy defense system to protect against anti-armor projectiles. How these new systems cope in a war situation, and with Hizballah’s rocket barrages and anti-armor tactics remains to be seen.

The Brookings Institute also says that Hezbollah is prepared for a war scenario with Israel:

Since the end of the 2006 war, Hizballah has undergone the largest recruitment and training drive in its thirty-year history, swelling its ranks with dedicated cadres and reviving its former multi-sectarian reservist units. In terms of weapons procurement, Hizballah has focused on acquiring long-range rockets fitted with guidance systems to target a list of specific military and infrastructure sites in Israel. Hizballah also is believed to have received training on more advanced air defense systems that could pose an increased threat to low-flying Israeli air assets, such as helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles

Israel can use the “Dahiyah Doctrine” proposed in 2008 that calls for a bombing campaign against civilian infrastructure all across Lebanon which would, according to Israeli officials, deter Hezbollah and the Lebanese government from retaliating with a military attack on Israel since the civilian population would suffer enormously. The Brookings Institute’s report states the following on a possible war between Lebanon and Israel:

Ultimately, the likelihood of renewed war between Hizballah and Israel remains high in the mid- to long-term. It is critically important that as the Middle East convulses with the shockwaves engendered by the “Arab Spring,” the international community continue to pay close attention to the nascent conflict under preparation in Lebanon and Israel.

Given that an accidental trigger is the most likely cause of the next war between Hizballah and Israel, diplomatic efforts should focus on ways to prevent misunderstandings from developing into conflict.

With the United States and the European Union closely watching what happens in the Ukraine on Russia's border, Prime Minister Netanyahu would possibly seize the opportunity to strike Israel's perceived enemies in the region. At any given moment, a new Middle East war could escalate on Israel's borders. Maybe, a diplomatic solution would come into play, but with a Western-funded conflict in Syria that continues to plague the Middle East and Washington calling for the removal of President Bashar al-Assad, diplomacy at this stage is impossible.

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