

Video: Israel Reinforces Troops Near Golan Heights Fearing Hezbollah Retaliation to Strikes on Syria

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The Middle East is rapidly moving towards a new round of confrontation between the US-Israeli bloc and Iranian-led Shiite forces.

On July 26, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) deployed M109 Dohar howitzers near the separation line with Lebanon. The deployment of howitzers became the latest in a series of broad measures employed by the IDF near Lebanon recently. Earlier, the 13th "Gideon" Infantry Battalion of the IDF's elite 1st "Golani" Brigade reinforced troops near the border. The number Israeli Hermes 450 drone reconnaissance flights also significantly increased over southern Lebanon. Additional IDF units were also deployed in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. On top of this, the IDF announced that it will hold the Lebanese government responsible "for all actions emanating from Lebanon".

These measures followed the July 20 Israeli strike on Syria, which resulted in the death of a member of Lebanese Hezbollah. Over the past years, Hezbollah has been one of the main supporters of Syrian Army operations against ISIS and al-Qaeda. Tel Aviv increases its strikes on what it calls Hezbollah and Iranian-affiliated targets in Syria every time when the Syrian Army launches active actions against terrorists and seems to be very concerned by the possibility of a Hezbollah response to the July 20 attack.

If Israel is really set to conduct strikes on Hezbollah targets in Lebanon to the retaliatory action by Hezbollah, this scenario could easily evolve into a wider border confrontation between Hezbollah and the IDF.

https://southfront.org/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR_27_07_2020_ENG.mp4

At the same time, tensions between local resistance groups and the US-led coalition grew in Iraq. On July 24, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, Ashab al-Kahf, announced that its forces had shot down an unmanned aerial vehicle of the US military over the province of Saladin. The group claimed that the UAV was downed by some 'new weapon' and released a photo showing the launch of what appears to be an anti-aircraft missile, likely a man-portable air-defense system.

On the same day, four unguided rockets struck the Pasmaya military camp, which is located 60km south of Baghdad. One of the rockets hit a garage for armoured vehicles, while another one targeted the barracks of the security unit. Two other rockets landed in an empty area. Despite causing some material damage, the rocket attack did not result in any casualties. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Pasmaya military camp is known to be hosting troops of the U.S.-led coalition and is used for training of Iraqi troops. On July 25, the coalition withdrew its forces from the camp and handed it over to the Iraqi military. According to the official statement, the coalition trained 50,000 personnel and invested \$5 million into the creation of training infrastructure there.

Earlier in 2020, the US-led coalition withdrew its forces from several smaller military camps across the country. Some sources tried to present this as a withdrawal from Iraq due to the increasing attacks on coalition forces by anti-US Shiite paramilitary groups. These attacks increased significantly after the assassination of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units Deputy Commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Iranian Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani in a US drone strike on Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020. The attack put the region on the brink of the US-Iranian war and caused a public outcry against the US military presence in Iraq. However, in fact, the US has not been withdrawing its troops from the country, but rather redeploying them to larger bases. The US military even brought Patriot surface-to-air missile systems to provide additional protection to its forces. It also continues isolated attacks on positions of the Popular Mobilization Units, an official branch of the Iraqi Armed Forces that Washington describes as terrorist groups and Iranian proxies.

On July 26, several large explosions rocked the al-Saqer military camp near the district of Dora south of Baghdad. The Al-Saqer military camp hosts forces of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) as well as the Iraqi Federal Police. Large quantities of ammunition, which were stored in the camp, exploded. Iraqi Security Media said the ammunition exploded as result of “high heat” and “poor storage”. Nevertheless, sources affiliated with the PMU rejected these speculations. Local sources claimed that the explosions were caused by US drone strikes. An MQ-1 Predator combat drone was spotted over the al-Saqer military camp just after the incident. This was the second situation of this kind that happened in al-Saqer. In 2019, a US drone strike hit a weapon depot at the camp.

The current situation sets almost no prospects for a de-escalation in Iraq. The main goal of attacks by local Shiite groups is to force the US to withdraw troops from the country. At the same time, the US is not planning to withdraw its forces and uses these attacks to justify the increase of its campaign against pro-Iranian forces in the Middle East.

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