



## The Middle East in Conflict

*Upon Hamas' victory in the Palestinian Parliamentary elections in January 2006, President Bush pledged not to support the government unless Hamas agreed to "recognize Israel, disarm, reject terrorism and work for a lasting peace." The Quartet (United States, Russian Federation, European Union and United Nations) also agreed to limit assistance to Hamas until they recognized Israel and abandoned violence. Since then, foreign aid to Hamas has been significantly decreased and the financial burdens within Palestinian areas have caused tensions between Palestinian factions.*

*In an effort to address these problems, Palestinian factions produced a National Accord Document in late May 2006, also known as the Prisoners Document, as it was originally drafted by Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli jails. This document provided for the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to negotiate with Israel.*

*While the National Accords Document established consensus among many Palestinian factions, it also created tension with some hard-line groups. These groups responded by launching attacks into Israel, which has led to the current conflict in the Middle East.*

*This paper provides a brief summary of the U.S. State Department-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) Hamas and Hezbollah involved in these attacks, a short history of Lebanon and an update of the current situation in the Middle East.*

### **Hamas**

Formed in 1987 as an outgrowth of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas is a political group comprised of civil, political and military wings based in the West Bank and Gaza. They have used violent means to pursue their goal of establishing an Islamic Palestinian state in Israel, including large-scale suicide bombings against Israeli civilian and military targets.

Hamas won an outright majority in the January 2006 elections, winning over 70 of the 132 Parliamentary seats. Immediately following their victory, many in the international community, including the Quartet, sought to limit financial assistance to the government unless Hamas agreed to abandon violence and recognize Israel; while at the same time, Israel stopped the transfer of tax and monthly custom revenues to the Palestinian government. This loss of revenue and financial assistance weakened the government's ability to conduct day-to-day operations and sparked internal dissent among Palestinian groups.

In response to the substantial problems among the factions, Palestinian leaders drafted and agreed to the National Accord Document which calls for "international resolutions as a basis to end the conflict." This document makes the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mahmoud Abbas, responsible for negotiations with Israel concerning the occupied territories and specifies that resistance will be concentrated in these territories, although it does not explicitly recognize Israel's right to exist.

The Damascus-based faction of Hamas is said to have objected to the terms of the National Accord Document and may have launched the attacks as part of a demonstration of power and dissatisfaction with the agreement.

## **Hezbollah**

Hezbollah was formed in 1982 in response to the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, and continues to operate in this region, including Beirut, and is often considered to be a “state within a state.” This Lebanese-based radical Shia group takes its ideological inspiration from the Iranian Revolution, and follows the religious guidance of Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. While Hezbollah is closely allied with Iran and often acts at its behest, it can and does act independently.

Shortly after its start in 1982, Hezbollah launched numerous attacks on U.S. and Israeli interests, including the suicide truck bombings of the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, and the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut in 1984.

Despite being ordered to disarm in 2004 pursuant to U.N. Resolution 1559, Hezbollah militias remain active within Lebanon. Hezbollah has a strong military wing although their force strength is not precisely known. It is estimated Hezbollah has 500-1000 trained field operatives with several thousand reserves, and reportedly has between 12,000-15,000 Katyusha rockets. According to the Israeli Embassy, Hezbollah has 220 mm rockets (60 km range) supplied by Syria and Nazeat (125-200 km range) and Zalzal (120-240 km range) rockets supplied by Iran.

Much of Hezbollah’s financial support, weapons, explosives and training is provided by Iran. It has been reported that between 50 and 100 members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, an Iranian military force answering directly to the Supreme Leader, are in Lebanon to help coordinate Iranian arms deliveries to Hezbollah. Syria, also a strong supporter of Hezbollah, serves as the transit route for material provided by Iran and provides political, diplomatic and logistical assistance. Since its founding, Hezbollah has rallied to the Palestinian cause providing training and material support to Palestinian militant groups as part of an overall objective to remove Israel from what it considers “occupied territory.”

The status of Hezbollah is a matter of great debate within Lebanon. Their armed presence on the border with Israel, stockpile of munitions, and terrorist members effectively make Hezbollah an autonomous entity within certain parts of Lebanon. Hezbollah has many supporters and sympathizers, but there has been a concerted effort to better define their role in the whole of Lebanese society. On March 2, 2006, Lebanese leaders organized a National Dialogue conference to address issues currently dividing Lebanon. The ground-breaking conference agreed to address a variety of issues, including arms maintained by Hezbollah.

## **Lebanon, and the Syrian Influence**

With a total population of 3.8 million people, Lebanon is an extremely diverse society, comprised of 17 recognized religious sects. Because of this broad religious pluralism, the Lebanese have traditionally allocated governmental posts according to religious affiliation.

In March 1976, Syria sent 35,000 troops to Lebanon, at the request of then-Lebanese President Sulieman Frangeih, after a civil war broke out in 1975 amid growing strife over power-sharing imbalances among differing religious groups.

Israel invaded southern Lebanon in 1978 and again 1982 to eliminate armed guerilla fighters from the area. From 1985-2000, Israel maintained a heavily patrolled, 9-mile wide, security zone in southern Lebanon. In May 2000, Israeli forces withdrew from the security zone.

The Lebanese civil war lasted from 1975 to 1990, and in 1989 Lebanese parliamentary deputies met in Taif, Saudi Arabia, to adopt a revised power-sharing agreement. Known as the “Taif Agreement,” Syria agreed to discuss possible Syrian troop redeployment from Beirut to the eastern Beqaa Valley and discuss further withdrawals after that time. However, the withdrawal discussions never took place.

Syrian troop presence in Lebanon decreased from roughly 40,000 in the late 1970s to approximately 14,000 in early 2005. However, Syria continued to exercise influence over Lebanon's domestic politics and while supported by some factions, was resented by growing numbers of Christians, Druze and Sunni Muslim communities.

In 2004, the profound tensions between the pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud and the independent Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri boiled over when the Lebanese parliament adopted a Syrian-backed constitutional amendment extending President Lahoud's tenure by an additional three years. Hariri resigned in October 2004, and aligned himself with an anti-Syrian opposition coalition. Hariri's subsequent assassination on February 14, 2005 created an international outcry and is currently being investigated by the U.N. due to the suspected involvement of Syrian government officials.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, adopted in September 2004, called for all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon, and the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militia (notably Hezbollah). In May 2005, largely because of international pressure created by the assassination of Hariri, the U.N. concluded that Syria had completed their military withdrawal from Lebanon. However, with a weak Lebanese government and widespread support for Hezbollah among residents of the southern region, Hezbollah has not been disarmed.

After Syria was forced to withdraw from Lebanon in 2005, the Lebanese conducted parliamentary elections without Syrian interference for the first time since 1972. The anti-Syrian bloc headed by Saad Hariri, son of the late prime minister, won a majority of the seats and Hariri associate Fuad Siniora became the new prime minister. In addition, Hezbollah captured 33 seats in the National Assembly and for the first time in Lebanese history a member of Hezbollah, who was part of a largely Shiite coalition that finished second in the elections, became a part of the Lebanese Cabinet.

## **Iran**

Iran has had a nuclear program for roughly 50 years, and currently has plans to build seven 1000 MW nuclear power plants arguing it will use nuclear power for domestic energy consumption in order to maximize oil and gas exports.

Iran has repeatedly asserted that its nuclear program is peaceful, and Iranian officials insist on their right to develop peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

Since February 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has been heavily engaged in verifying the Iranian program and its history. On December 18, 2003, Ambassador Salehi of Iran and the Director General of the IAEA signed an Additional Protocol to Iran's nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards agreement, granting IAEA inspectors greater access to verifying the country's nuclear program.

In August-September 2005 Iran resumed uranium conversion and later removed the IAEA seals from its enrichment facility at Natanz in January 2006. The UN Security Council (UNSC) issued a presidential statement calling for Iran to suspend enrichment and related activity and reported in April 2006 that Iran was accelerating its nuclear enrichment efforts and concealing crucial information about its program.

Iran is currently under significant international pressure to stop these nuclear development activities. The United States, EU-3, Russia and China have worked to persuade Iran to suspend enrichment activities and discuss an incentives package aimed at assisting their domestic nuclear energy needs. The six powers gave Iran until July 12 to respond, before the G8 summit in St. Petersburg that began on July 15. Despite this international pressure and a pending UN resolution against the regime, Iran refuses to suspend its current enrichment activities.

In addition to growing concerns over Iranian nuclear activities, much concern has been made about Iran's new President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, earlier call this year for Israel to be "wiped off the map," as well as long-term Iranian support for terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah.

Iran also is, with the assistance of several other countries, reportedly developing a significant medium and longer range missile capability. Among their arsenal is the Shahab-3 ballistic missile, which may have the capability to carry chemicals or a nuclear warhead and some believe could reach all of Israel and other regional targets. Recent reports indicate that Iran hopes to produce 150 of these missiles in addition to increasing their shorter range arsenal.

**Iran's ballistic missile, the Shihab-3, has a range of more than 1,200 miles and is capable of hitting Israel and parts of Europe.**



map courtesy of AIPAC

Within the context of the Middle East conflict between Israel and terrorist organizations, Iran has provided material support to Hezbollah in many forms. Since Hezbollah's inception in the early 1980s, Iran has contributed up to \$100 million a year to the organization, although it appears such large funding has declined as the terrorist organization has developed more capabilities to raise funds. In addition, Iranian arms to Hezbollah have increased in recent years – including "Stinger" anti-aircraft weapons, "Fajr-5" rockets (45-mile range), and over 10,000 Katyusha rockets (18-mile range). There are some reports of Iranian transfers of missiles with a 120-mile range, as well as a 2005 U.S. State Department report stating that Iran supplied Hezbollah with an unmanned aerial vehicle.

### **Current Situation**

On June 25, 2006, Hamas guerrillas infiltrated Israel from the Gaza Strip, killing two soldiers and kidnapping a third, 19-year-old corporal Gilad Shalit. The terrorists responsible for this attack demanded the immediate release of hundreds of prisoners within Israel for the return of the captured soldier.

In response to this attack, Israel launched a military operation in southern Gaza to weaken the Hamas-led government and rescue the kidnapped soldier. The Israelis also arrested 64 Palestinian cabinet members and officials in an effort to detain suspected terrorists. Israel continued to reject Hamas demands for large prisoner releases, and on July 10, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert stated, "trading prisoners with a terrorist bloody organization such as Hamas is a major mistake that will cause a lot of damage to the future of the State of Israel."

On July 12<sup>th</sup>, Hezbollah terrorists entered an undisputed region in Israel (just south of the Lebanese border) and killed eight Israeli soldiers, while kidnapping two. In response to this attack, Israel launched an offensive in Lebanon that targeted infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, and the airport, to limit Hezbollah's ability to re-arm, re-supply, or easily transport the kidnapped soldiers. Mr. Olmert called the Hezbollah raid "an act of war" and vowed that the Israeli response "will be restrained, but very, very, very painful."

The White House responded to the Hezbollah attacks, stating: “The United States condemns in the strongest terms this unprovoked act of terrorism, which was timed to exacerbate already high tensions in the region and sow further violence. We also hold Syria and Iran, which have provided long-standing support for Hizballah, responsible for today’s violence. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of the Israeli soldiers.”

The Israeli response was met with escalating actions by Hezbollah, including consistent rocket attacks on civilian targets, including one that targeted Israel’s third largest city, Haifa. While reports have indicated that Hezbollah has between 12,000 and 15,000 rockets of varying ranges in its arsenal, Israel believes it has eliminated close to 3,000 through targeted strikes. In addition, Hezbollah has launched approximately 1,200 rockets into Israel backed by Syria and Iran.

In response to the Hamas and Hezbollah attacks, G8 leaders issued a statement during the G8 Summit held in St. Petersburg, Russia on July 15 - 17, that read in part, “these extremist elements and those that support them cannot be allowed to plunge the Middle East into chaos and provoke a wider conflict. The extremists must immediately halt their attacks.” The G8 also called for the return of the Israeli soldiers in Gaza and Lebanon unharmed, an end to the shelling of Israeli territory, an end to Israeli military operations and the early withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

As violence continued, on July 23, Secretary of State, Condeleeza Rice, traveled to the Middle East to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. She also met with Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Saniora in a show of support for their weakened democracy as well as with the speaker of Lebanon’s parliament, Nabih Berri.

On Wednesday, July 26, Ms. Rice will travel to Rome for talks with European and Arab ministers regarding this current conflict, humanitarian assistance, and a possible international armed force possibly being sent to Southern Lebanon as part of a cease-fire and an eventual plan to disarm Hezbollah.

### Fighting (Hezbollah Rocket Attacks and Israeli Air Strikes) in Lebanon, Israel, and the Gaza Strip and West Bank



map courtesy of the Congressional Research Service

*The offices of Heather Wilson, Zach Wamp and Lincoln Diaz-Balart contributed to this paper. Sources include the Congressional Research Service, the Department of State and various news organizations. This report will be updated.*