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P.O. Box 175 • Station H Montreal • Quebec • H3G 2K7  
cijr@isranet.org 514-486-5544 www.isranet.org

You are cordially invited to join us for an informal cocktail reception to celebrate our milestone of the 3,000<sup>th</sup> Isranet Daily Briefing, *Tuesday February 26, 2013 at 5:30pm* RSVP 514-486-5544 [yvonne@isranet.org](mailto:yvonne@isranet.org)

## LEBANON LANGUISHING UNDER WEIGHT OF SYRIAN REFUGEE INFLUX, SHIFTING SECTARIAN DIVISIONS, HEZBOLLAH'S MISSILE MISCHIEF

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## LEBANON AND THE SPILLOVER FROM SYRIA

*David Schenker*

[Real Clear World](#), Feb. 5, 2013

Last week's Israeli attack on a Hezbollah convoy in Syria -- reportedly en route to Lebanon carrying advanced Russian anti-aircraft systems -- highlights the ongoing impact of the war on Syria's western

neighbour. As with the other states on Syria's border, Lebanon has been deluged with refugees and suffered significant economic consequences from the crisis, both positive and negative. But Lebanon has also suffered sectarian reverberations of the violence next door, as tensions spike between the state's Sunni Muslims -- who back the rebellion in Syria -- and the Shiite militia, Hezbollah, which backs and militarily supports the Assad regime. Notwithstanding exogenous pressures, however, Lebanon is consumed with domestic issues, in particular, debates over the state's next electoral law and civil marriage.

According to the United Nations High Committee on Refugees (UNHCR), among neighbouring states, Lebanon currently hosts the highest number of registered refugees from Syria. With a population of just 4.25 million and facing economic difficulties in large part due to the crisis in Syria, the refugees have proven an untimely and expensive burden for Lebanon....

While Lebanon is providing public education to more than 30,000 Syrian children, Lebanon, unlike Jordan and Turkey, has not constructed camps to accommodate the exiles. Indeed, because Lebanon is already home to nearly 400,000 Palestinian refugees, the state is sensitive about the prospect of more long-term expatriate residents, so much so that it is illegal to even set up tents. As a result of this policy, refugees have had to scramble to find housing. To date, most have established residence in Lebanese towns and cities in the north and the Bekaa, but the most destitute have reportedly moved into some of Lebanon's twelve Palestinian refugee camps....

While the refugees have been a burden, the impact of the war in Syria has not been entirely detrimental to the Lebanese economy. To be sure, high-end tourism from the Gulf has fallen dramatically. After a kidnapping threat was issued against Saudis in Lebanon last year, tourists from oil-rich Gulf States stopped coming, and as a result, tourism plummeted by 17.5 percent to 1.36 million visitors in 2012, the lowest number since 2008. This figure is significant because during the high season, which runs from May until October, 40 percent of consumption in Lebanon is driven by Arab tourism, which has all but disappeared.

At the same time, official Lebanese exports to Syria -- if not the more-significant amount of smuggling -- have dropped, reportedly from 4 percent to 1 percent. And with overland exports through Syria curtailed, Lebanon's foreign trade has increasingly had to rely on more-expensive sea transit. Worse, violence in Syria has spooked investors, drying up foreign direct investment. Consider that in 2012, there was a 20 percent decline in building permits issued in Lebanon. Meanwhile Lebanese banks, one of the most profitable endeavours in the state, took significant losses on their holdings in Syria....

Notwithstanding these costs and the harsh regional environment, Lebanon still managed to create more than 2 percent growth in GDP in 2012. It turns out that the flood of refugees generated additional demand for services such as for doctors and private schools, as well as for consumer products like food. Likewise, even though high-end Beirut hotels were empty, the demand for lower-cost hostels and furnished rental apartments was high. Indeed, the arrival of over 200,000 homeless Syrians has proved a boon to Lebanon's stagnant real estate market. According to the Lebanese daily *Al Akhbar*, the price-of-housing index rose by 44 percent in December 2012 compared to the same month in 2011....

The war in Syria has undercut economic growth, sharpened sectarian fault lines, and increased the population of Lebanon, at least temporarily, by 5 percent. While these developments continue to have a great impact, they are not currently dominating Lebanese headlines. Indeed, the biggest topics of discussion right now in Lebanon are the electoral law under which the state will hold the 2013 parliamentary vote and the debate over whether civil marriage should be legalized. In recent weeks, no less than the Grand Mufti, the president, the prime minister, and the leader of Lebanon's Sunni Muslim community have all weighed in on the merits of civil marriage. It is a divisive issue in Lebanon -- last month the Mufti issued a fatwa essentially excommunicating Muslims who marry outside the mosque -- but it is one that resonates with Beirut's strong and militantly secular constituency....

Even more controversial is the electoral law, another dispute that conjures the very heart of Lebanon's dysfunctional sectarian political system. At issue is whether the electoral law -- which has produced pro-West anti-Hezbollah parliamentary majorities in Lebanon in the last two elections -- will persevere, or whether this majority will be put in jeopardy in favour of an unprecedented system that allows Christians, Sunnis, Shiites, and Druze to vote only for their co-religionists. The proposed change, proffered by the so-called Orthodox Gathering, counts not only Hezbollah and its Christian coalition partners as supporters but also several Christian leaders affiliated with the pro-West "March 14" bloc.

It is not clear how these debates, which overlap sectarianism and ideology, will be resolved. For the time being, it is these domestic issues, rather than the war raging next door, that are dominating Lebanese politics. Still, if the past is any precedent, Syria will soon once again become a priority issue in Beirut. Perhaps Israel will target the next Syrian weapons shipment to Hezbollah in Lebanon, triggering a crisis. Or maybe the Shiite militia -- sensing itself isolated and increasingly cornered after Assad falls -- will again take pre-emptive military action against domestic rivals. Regrettably, the continued deterioration in Syria -- leading to a mass influx of refugees and/or jihadis -- could by itself undermine the relatively stable status quo that has prevailed in Lebanon.

*David Schenker is director of the Program on Arab Politics at the Washington Institute.*

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## NO LOVE LOST IN THE SOUTH

*Raphael Thelen*

[Now Lebanon](#), Feb. 18, 2013

Fadi Chamieh is sitting in his office in the heart of Saida. A gray winter storm splashes big raindrops against the window. A neon tube in the ceiling throws harsh light across his desk. "The majority of Syrian refugees are pro-revolution, so they go to areas where they are welcome. But now these areas are full and they started to go to other places," says Chamieh.

On the TV behind him flickers muted grainy footage from opposition protests across Syria. Raised fists, silent opened mouths, the green-white-black flags of the revolution. A browser open on his computer shows the website of Mustaqbal News, a pro-March 14 news outlet.

Chamieh is part the Humanitarian Association Collaboration, an umbrella organization that coordinates humanitarian aid to Syrians arriving in southern Lebanon, a region that has seen few refugees until recently. "We are worried," says Chamieh. "We cannot cope with the refugees we have here already and if fighting increases in Damascus, we won't be able to manage."

International aid organizations are also ringing the alarm. Already, 2,000 to 3,000 refugees cross into Lebanon every day. With more than 250,000 already here, Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees of every countries that shares a border with Syria. In recent weeks, Syria's opposition has pushed the front line closer and closer to Damascus. This city of 2.5 million lies less than 50 kilometers from the Lebanese border. With ever fiercer fighting, more and more Syrians are expected to become refugees.

Lebanon's border areas in the eastern Beqaa Valley and north of Tripoli -- as well as neighborhoods in Beirut -- are hosting Syrians in private homes, empty schools, and abandoned construction sites. But these capacities are increasingly exhausted. Towns like Aarsal saw its population swell by 30 percent since the onset of the war.

With refugees now increasingly streaming into predominantly Shiite south, tensions are on the rise. "There are complaints from the people of Tyre," says Ayman Alghazal, head of the Tyre municipality, "every day we have new arrivals." Syrian families are sleeping in the street, until they are able to register

with the municipality as refugees and receive help. “The economic situation in Tyre is especially bad. The big numbers of refugees came as a shock.”

The city is famous for its long white beaches and picturesque ancient ruins. But international tourists that used to be a major source of income in the city are nowhere to be seen these days. Instead, pick pocketing is on the rise. “Crime has increased as refugees come here with nothing,” says Alghazal.

The Shia-aligned Amal movement is providing counseling for traumatized children, French classes, and help to shoulder hospital bills. The United Nations refugee agency is providing help as well. “The Syrians hosted us in 2006, so we have to do it now. It doesn’t matter to us if they are pro- or anti-revolution,” says Alghazal, who works as a facilitator between all aid organizations and refugees.

In Nabatieh, deep into the Shiite heartland and the unofficial Hezbollah capital, the situation is drastically different. The question of pro- or anti-revolution constantly hovers over the heads of the refugees. Too often it is less a question of politics than of religion. As Hezbollah is generally known to support the regime of Bashar al-Assad, one of the first questions arriving refugees are asked is about their sect, says a local activist who wished to be known as Dana. “Shiites and Alawis are welcomed, while Sunnis are facing daily pressure.”

Nabatieh is hosting approximately 8,000 – 10,000 refugees. Those supporting the revolution are wise to keep their opinions to themselves. According to one account, a woman who lost her brother, who was a fighter with the Free Syrian Army, had to hide her grief. Otherwise she feared that she would face repercussions. Sunni migrant workers that lived in the south prior to the war have faced repercussions already. As the fighting grew ever more violent, they increasingly faced physical and psychological pressure. Many of them moved elsewhere....

Back in Saida, Chamieh flicks through the website of Sunni-aligned Mustaqbal News. “The damage in Syria is so great, it will take years until the refugees can go back,” he says. “Even though most of them are from my sect, I want them to go. They are creating problems.”

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## **IRAN AND ISRAEL FIGHT, LEBANON LOSES**

***Tony Badran***

[Now Lebanon](#), Feb. 15, 2013

It’s been more than two weeks since the Israeli airstrike in Syria against the arms convoy headed for Hezbollah in Lebanon. Bits of information, coupled with ominous warnings, are coming out from Jerusalem regarding the purpose of the strike. Since 2006, Israel has waged a major campaign against Iran’s supply network, transferring strategic weapons to its assets in the Levant. Looking at the operation in historical context, the strike in Syria can be seen as the latest instalment in an integrated campaign against Iran’s forward positions on Israel’s northern and southern borders.

At a conference in Jerusalem on Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made clear that Israel would not allow “chemical and strategic” weapons from Syria to reach Hezbollah. Netanyahu’s concern over strategic weapons in the hands of Israel’s enemies is well-founded. Since the 2006 war, Iran has aggressively moved to bolster the capabilities of Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as those of its allies in Gaza. This effort has centered primarily, though by no means exclusively, around supplying Tehran’s assets with long-range rockets and ballistic missiles. The deployment of these weapons in Lebanon and Gaza would enable Iran, through Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, to strike at any city in Israel, not to mention its infrastructure and sensitive facilities, including offshore gas platforms.

“The chemical weapons issue is important,” notes former Mossad operations officer Michael Ross. However, he adds, “it is tangential to the overall issue of Israel’s enemies possessing long range missile

capability and other advanced technological weapons systems. Stemming the flow and technological upgrade of these rockets and missiles is a top priority for Israel's military and intelligence community." This is what Israel has been doing for the last six and a half years.

According to Hezbollah lore, senior Iranian, Syrian, and Hezbollah leaders made a decision following the 2006 war to focus on developing their missile and long-range rocket capabilities. They also decided to implement these measures in Gaza. As Qassem Qassir chronicled in a story last year, Hezbollah's military commander, Imad Mughniyeh was at the heart of this effort, in partnership with Syrian and Palestinian military officials. Behind it all, of course, stood Iran.

Once this strategy became apparent to Israeli intelligence, it began targeting this Iranian network of strategic weapons transfers, assembly and distribution centers, and the top people running the operation. The spate of assassinated Iranian, Syrian, Hezbollah, and Hamas commanders since 2008 were directly involved in the Iranian network supplying strategic weapons to Tehran's assets in the Levant.

The first target was Mughniyeh himself. He was assassinated five years ago this past Tuesday, in a car bomb in the heart of Damascus. A few months later, in August of 2008, it was Syrian General Muhammad Suleiman's turn. Suleiman was President Bashar Assad's Special Advisor for Arms Procurement and Strategic Weapons. Suleiman was also involved in the Syrian covert nuclear plant at al-Kibar, but was also reportedly in charge of arms transfers from Syria to Hezbollah. Indeed, Suleiman's name pops up in several accounts of Iran's strategic weapons supply network. For instance, according to Qassir's account, Suleiman was responsible, along with Mughniyeh, for overseeing the development of this new system of ballistic missiles and long-range rockets.

In January 2010, a year after the end of Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, a senior Hamas military commander in the group's Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Mahmoud al-Mabhouh was assassinated in Dubai. Mabhouh's role was in developing ties with the Revolutionary Guards' (IRGC) Quds Force. Mabhouh was also in charge of logistics and was responsible for procuring rockets from Iran to Gaza through Sudan and Egypt.

When Israel struck a Gaza-bound convoy in Sudan during the 2009 war with Hamas, one report claimed that Mabhouh was behind the convoy, which was believed to be carrying Iranian rockets that could reach Tel Aviv. According to Ross, when Mabhouh was assassinated, his seized briefcase proved a "treasure trove of information detailing what items Hamas procured from the Iranians and the logistics of getting them to Gaza."

Then in November 2011, a mysterious explosion at a military base outside Tehran killed General Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, a top IRGC commander. At the time, the general's brother revealed that Moghaddam had "visited Lebanon and created Hezbollah's missile unit there." Similarly, a senior Guards officer, Mostafa Izadi, wrote in a eulogy how Moghaddam's ideas "undoubtedly... assisted in the victories of Hezbollah in the 33-day war and Hamas in the 22-day war." Others noted that Moghaddam had also worked closely with both General Suleiman and Hamas's Mabhouh.

One year after Moghaddam's death, Israel assassinated Mabhouh's replacement, Ahmad Jabari. The Jabari hit came after yet another Israeli airstrike in the Sudan, this time against the Yarmouk military complex, from where Hamas was transferring Iranian Fajr-5 rockets to Gaza. Jabari had built on his predecessor's close relationship with the IRGC, and, in keeping with the Iran-inspired doctrine, had worked on developing "military technology focusing on long-range missiles."...

In March 2011, Israel intercepted a vessel, which had sailed from the Syrian port of Latakia, carrying, among other things, Iranian anti-ship missiles intended for Hamas. In addition, as I wrote over two years ago, the Assad regime had indicated it would supply Hezbollah with the Russian-made Yakhont (P-800) anti-ship cruise missile. However, much of these systems were kept safely on the Syrian side of the border.

With the situation in Syria deteriorating, the Shiite group is forced to move these assets to Lebanon, despite the risk. The assassination on the Beirut-Damascus highway of IRGC commander Hassan Shateri – whose importance one mourner compared to Mughniyeh’s – underscores the risks Hezbollah and the IRGC now face in Syria.

Months before the airstrike, there were reports in the Israeli media about Hezbollah seeking to move Scud-D’s and similar type rockets, as well as advanced anti-aircraft systems, from Syria to Lebanon. At the time, Defense Minister Ehud Barak explained that the IDF was “following... the possible transfer of advanced munitions systems, mainly anti-aircraft missiles or heavy ground-to-ground missiles.” He added that he “instructed the military to increase its intelligence preparations so that... we will be able to consider carrying out an operation.”

The strike two weeks ago was precisely such an operation. As sensitive as it is, given the situation in Syria, it is but the latest in a campaign that dates back to 2008, targeting Iran’s supply network of strategic weapons. As some Lebanese officials are starting to realize, the next operation may very well be in Lebanon – and not just south Lebanon, for Hezbollah has placed these strategic weapons in population centers throughout the country. As Israel is warning, this could be a high-casualty war.

*Tony Badran is a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.*

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## **ON TOPIC**

**Hezbollah, Part 1: Origins and Challenges:** Mohammad Harfoush, *Al-Monitor Lebanon Pulse*, Feb. 18, 2013—Hezbollah is considered the most influential and widespread among Islamic parties and movements in Lebanon and the broader Middle East. It is a party that cannot be compared to any other contemporary political Islamist movement, be it fundamentalist or revivalist. Hezbollah’s beginnings, discourse, programs, agendas and goals are unlike any others.

**Lebanese Opposition Bashes Hezbollah Over Burgas Attack:** Elhanan Miller, *Times of Israel*, Feb.7, 2013—A day after Hezbollah was named as responsible for a bus bombing in Bulgaria that killed five Israelis and a Bulgarian in July, the Shi’ite terror group was scolded by its domestic opposition for “holding Lebanon hostage” to its own narrow interests.

**Deputy Speaker Makari: 'We Do Not See Stability in Lebanon':** Elie Hajj, *Al-Monitor Lebanon Pulse*, Feb. 10, 2013—Al-Monitor asked Lebanese Deputy Speaker Farid Makari his opinion regarding the impact of the accusations made by the Bulgarian authorities that Hezbollah is responsible for the bus bombing in Burgas. He responded, "In my personal opinion, at least based on policies we have observed up until now, European states will not classify [Hezbollah] as a terrorist organization."

**If Iran and Israel Fight, Lebanon Will Be the First Battlefield:** Jonathan Schanzer, *The Globe and Mail*, Feb. 1, 2013—“Do you remember South Lebanon? All of Lebanon is now South Lebanon.” These were the words of a senior Israeli official in a closed-door meeting in Jerusalem on Tuesday, just hours before Israel warplanes attacked a truck convoy suspected of carrying advanced weapons systems from Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

**European Union Must Respond to Hezbollah’s Attack in Bulgaria:** Editorial Board, *Washington Post*, Published: February 5, 2013—On Tuesday the Bulgarian government confirmed what most of the world has known for months: The bombing of a bus carrying Israeli tourists in the Black Sea resort of Burgas last July 18 was carried out by members of Lebanon’s Hezbollah organization.

**Death of a Master Terrorist: How the ‘Iranian Jackal’ Was Killed:** Erol Araf, *National Post*, Feb 12, 2013

On the fifth anniversary of the assassination of Imad Mughniyah, a.k.a. “The Iranian Jackal,” much new information about the hunt for the terrorist most wanted by Mossad and the FBI has emerged. It’s a story of high-tech surveillance and old-fashioned espionage, and it’s just starting to be truly told now.