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HEZBOLLAH IN SYRIA, AL-NUSRA (AL-QAEDA) IN LEBANON — TWO COUNTRIES, ONE WAR?

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IRAN'S ARMS SUPPLY TO HIZBULLAH: INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS

Dore Gold, JCPA, May 17, 2013

In an exceptional political signal, a senior Israeli official contacted Mark Landler of the New York Times and explained that the Israeli government was determined to continue to prevent the transfer of advanced weapons to Hizbullah. The official, who remained anonymous throughout the report, added that if Syria President Bashar al-Assad reacts to this policy by attacking Israel – either directly or indirectly through a proxy force – he will “risk forfeiting his regime, for Israel will retaliate.”

Israel's policy of preventing the supply of advanced weapons to Hizbullah has been in place for some time, but in the past was primarily the responsibility of the Israeli Navy which intercepted Iranian weapons ships in the Mediterranean. According to U.S. sources, Israel has more recently concentrated this effort in Syria territory. The Syrians may have had an interest in assuring that some of their more advanced weaponry not fall into the hands of the Sunni extremist groups they have been fighting that are linked to al-Qaeda, like

Jabhat al-Nusra. Should the Assad regime retreat to Alawite areas near the coast, it would not want to see those advanced weapons in the hands of the Sunni forces, with whom it may be fighting for years to come.

But a new motive appears to have become far more predominant in recent weeks. Iran appears to have decided that it must prevent a situation arising in which it loses its grip on Syria, which has been characterized by an Iranian institute tied to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the “35th district of Iran.” As a result, Iran appears to be providing itself with an option to take over Syria, if Assad falls. It has not only directly intervened by itself and deployed its own Revolutionary Guard forces on Syria soil, but it has also sought to build up an expeditionary army made up of Lebanese Hezbollah and other Shiite militias from Iraq as well. Iran is training and equipping these forces. It is also providing Hezbollah with state-of-the-art weapons, partly as a reward for the services the organization is providing.

In the past, Israeli defense officials have said the supply of “game-changing weaponry” will not be tolerated and they have focused in their briefings on several specific types of arms transfers to Hezbollah:

a. Chemical weapons.

b. Iranian surface-to-surface missiles equipped with heavy warheads, like the Fateh 110, which has a highly destructive 600 kg. warhead as compared to the 30 kg. warhead on Hezbollah’s Katyusha rockets that it launched against Israel in the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

c. Long-range anti-aircraft missiles, like the Russian-manufactured SA-17, which can limit the freedom of action of the Israeli Air Force if deployed by Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. The SA-17 uses a mobile launcher. Israeli diplomacy has been especially concerned with the Russian sale of even more robust S-300 anti-aircraft missiles by Russia to Syria, though there are no indications that Hezbollah is a potential recipient of this system.

d. Long-range anti-ship missiles, like the Russian supersonic Yakhont cruise missile, that has a range of 300 km. and can strike at Israeli offshore gas rigs in the Eastern Mediterranean. Russia recently sent a shipment of the missiles which will be added to an initial inventory of 72 missiles received first in 2011.

In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2012, Lt.-Gen. Ronald L. Burgess, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, pointed to the Yakhont as a threat to the U.S. Navy as well: “DIA remains concerned with the proliferation of advanced cruise missiles, such as Russia’s supersonic Yakhont anti-ship cruise missile which Moscow sold to Syria and Vietnam. The 300-km.-range Yakhont poses a major threat to naval operations particularly in the eastern Mediterranean.”

There is another international context to Israel’s position on Iran’s weapons shipments to Hezbollah. At the end of the Second Lebanon War, the U.S. and France drafted the text of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which was adopted unanimously on August 11, 2006, with Russian and Chinese support. Article 15 states that the resolution prohibits all UN member states from allowing their nationals to engage in “the sale or supply to any entity or individual in Lebanon of arms and related material of all types.”...

Those who recall the UN Security Council resolutions that were adopted against Iran’s nuclear program might not recall that they entailed an arms embargo on Iranian weapons exports as well. Thus, UN Security Council Resolution 1747, adopted on March 24, 2007, specifically stated in paragraph 5: “Iran shall not supply, sell or transfer directly or indirectly from its territory or by its nationals or using its flag vessels or aircraft any arms or related materiel, and that all States shall prohibit the procurement of such items from Iran by their nationals, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, and whether or not originating in the territory of Iran.” ...

Israel, in taking measures against this activity, is not only acting in accordance with its own security interests, but in a manner consistent with the repeated decisions of the international community.

Unfortunately, since the UN never effectively implemented its own resolutions, Israel was left with no choice but to act in its own self-defense.

Iran continues to ignore these UN resolutions and flagrantly violates them. Israel is receiving strong international support from the U.S. and Britain for the stance it is taking against Iranian weapons supplies to Hizbullah. But clearly, should Israel come under criticism in the future, it can point to the fact of the failure of the international community to halt Iran's airlift to its proxy forces like Hizbullah.

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NASRALLAH'S HARANGUE

Editorial, [Jerusalem Post](#), May 29, 2013

Hassan Nasrallah's stirring and impassioned defense of Damascus despot Bashar Assad went far beyond the Hezbollah chief's by-now expected bravado. This was something intrinsically different. Nasrallah is a proven master at toying with the emotions of both supporters and foes in Lebanon. This time, though, and perhaps for the first time, he displayed genuine emotion.

It may have been Nasrallah's usual braggadocio when he vowed to stay in the Syria conflict "to the end of the road" and to bring victory to his beleaguered ally Damascus despot Bashar Assad. But the significant portions of his harangue were those in which he listed the consequences to Lebanon if Assad should fall. Nasrallah predicted a catastrophic outcome, from his point of view, in such an eventuality. He said Lebanon would be the next to cave under. The subtext is that Hezbollah would collapse in the Lebanese content. His Shi'ite organization would, in other words, lose its stranglehold over Lebanon.

It was always apparent that Assad was Hezbollah's patron and benefactor. But now Nasrallah had admitted in no uncertain terms that Assad is not merely an ally but an indispensable mainstay. Hence Nasrallah must do absolutely everything to keep Assad in power, because Nasrallah's own power hinges on that. The fates of Assad and Hezbollah are one and the same. If Assad loses his struggle to maintain its sway over Syria, Hezbollah would lose its ability to maintain its sway over Lebanon. Hezbollah is not merely repaying a trusted confederate; Hezbollah is waging the ultimate fight for its power base in Lebanon....

Nasrallah keeps pouring more and more manpower into Syria and anti-Assad forces have now aimed their rockets at Hezbollah's stronghold in Beirut. Just as Syria is considered a legitimate battleground for Hezbollah, so its Syria enemies are likely to consider Lebanon a legitimate target for retaliation. Nasrallah has compelling reasons to fear that Assad's defeat would send his enemies into Lebanon to root out the last vestiges of Assad's prime accomplice, i.e. Hezbollah. This is not a conflict of choice for Hezbollah but a desperate fight to the finish.

Hezbollah's investment in Assad's preservation has now superseded all its other agendas – including its enmity for Israel. The attacks – attributed to Israel – on convoys transferring weapons of mass destruction from Syria to Lebanon appear to bother Nasrallah remarkably less than the fear for the future of the Assad regime. Hezbollah is not, of course, the only player in Syria's immediate vicinity that has a vested interest in safeguarding Assad. The biggest stake in Assad's well-being is held by the godfather of the pro-Assad axis – Iran. To a great extent Hezbollah is fighting as Tehran's surrogate....

Nasrallah's fiery oratory notwithstanding, his organization faces odds it never encountered in the past. It is not only pitted against Israel and domestic Lebanese opponents. The entire coterie of fanatic Sunni baddies from all around the Muslim world both castigates and actively opposes it. Hezbollah is more vulnerable and far weaker than at any previous juncture. This is a heartening development for Israel and a welcome byproduct from its policy of non-intervention.

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SYRIA DEVASTATION IS A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES

Sam Dagher, [Wall Street Journal](#), May 29, 2013

By any measure Syria's economy has been devastated by the uprising turned civil war, which entered its third year in March. But the fallout has been a tale of two Syrias. The regime has adapted to a shrinking economy as well as U.S. and European sanctions, while average Syrians bear the brunt of the pain.

Economists and some Syria government officials estimate the country's gross domestic product, which stood at almost \$60 billion in 2010 according to the World Bank, has shrunk by nearly 45 percent over the past two years. Since March 2011, the Syria pound has lost 70 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar. The World Bank estimates inflation exceeded 50 percent last year.

So far the government remains able to pay salaries, provide basic services and subsidize essentials like bread in areas under its control, mostly in the central and western parts of the country. Syria is estimated to have had about \$18 billion in foreign currency reserves on March 2011 and one Syria economist believes the government can sustain itself for two more years if there are no dramatic changes in the current situation.

Iran and Iraq are now supplying the regime with almost all of its oil and gas needs, according to a senior official at Syria's Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources and a Syria businessman in charge of organizing fuel truck convoys from neighboring countries and within Syria. Iran has extended to the regime this year credit lines of up to \$4 billion to finance imports and oil and gas purchases, Syria Central Bank Governor Adeb Mayaleh told the official Tishreen newspaper Monday.

He also said Iran is finalizing a \$4 billion loan to the regime. Syria has also set up barter deals with Baghdad. For example exports of Syria cement to Iraq have skyrocketed in recent months according to figures compiled by a Damascus-based economist. The outside help is often coordinated by businessmen with close ties to the regime.

The streets of Damascus and other towns and cities under regime control appear normal. Markets and retail stores are well-stocked and businesses are functioning, albeit at a fraction of their capacity. But among average Syrians, the erratic exchange rate over the past few weeks, the dramatic rise in prices of many goods and talk that the government may lift subsidies estimated at half a trillion Syria pounds (\$3.3 billion) a year is setting off alarm bells.

"Intentions to Lift Subsidies...Last Mercy Bullet," screamed a headline in the Syria daily newspaper Baladna Monday. The paper estimated that prices of most goods have gone up on average by 240 percent since March 2011. Minimum monthly wages, meanwhile, have largely stayed the same, ranging from the equivalent of \$200 to \$300 depending on the exchange rate.

Much of the talk about ending subsidies has been fuelled by a government mandated increase this month in the price of gasoline (petrol) and cooking gas, which is distributed in metal jars. Another privately-held newspaper Al-Watan said Monday that there were sharp disagreements inside the current government over whether to increase salaries or lift subsidies.

The paper quoting a "source" present at a cabinet meeting earlier this month said that Qadri Jamil, deputy prime minister in charge of economic affairs, was in favour of lifting subsidies and raising salaries of government employees by 200 percent.

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LEBANON: FAULT LINE FOR HEZBOLLAH'S WAR ON 'TAKFIRIS' IN SYRIA

Nasser Chararah, [Al-Monitor Lebanon Pulse](#), May 29, 2013

With the fall of two rockets (a third failed to launch due to a malfunction) last week on the shiite-majority Chiyyah neighborhood in Beirut's southern suburbs, Lebanon has entered a new phase of rising tension that threatens to import the conflict in Syria between Jabhat al-Nusra and the Syria opposition on the one hand and Hezbollah on the other. The rockets were fired from Bsaba in mount Lebanon toward Chiyyah, an Amal and Hezbollah stronghold.

The rockets were fired only hours after Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah announced in a speech the party's decision to fight in Syria alongside the Syria regime. This means that military cells that support the Syria regime are present in Lebanon and can carry out attacks at any time they are ordered.

According to Lebanese security forces, the attack had been expected for several days. It was considered likely that Jabhat al-Nusra might retaliate for Hezbollah's participation in the fighting in Syria. During the middle of last week, Hezbollah was concerned that Jabhat al-Nusra might target the liberation day celebrations held in Mashghara, Bekaa (liberation day is about the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the security zone it had established in Lebanon's south). In the celebration, Nasrallah gave a speech on a giant screen and announced that his party is fighting in Syria....

Lebanese security sources expect the war between Hezbollah and Jabhat al-Nusra to escalate in the next few days. According to available information, Jabhat al-Nusra controls Lebanese and Palestinian Salafist groups in northern Lebanon, in the Ein al-Hilweh refugee camp near the southern city of Sidon, and in Beirut and its suburbs, especially in the Burj al-Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp.

For weeks, pro-Jabhat al-Nusra salafist groups in Lebanon have been training dozens of displaced Palestinians from Syria in at least two locations in the Ein al-Hilweh camp. Lebanese intelligence said that Osama al-Shehab, an al-Qaeda operative, supervises those two locations in Ein al-Hilweh camp.

According to a Lebanese security assessment, Jabhat al-Nusra can fight a war against Hezbollah in Lebanon. There are hundreds of thousands of displaced Syrians who wish to see Syria president Bashar al-Assad toppled and who live among the Lebanese Sunni community in Lebanon. Jabhat al-Nusra can use those displaced Syrians in its fight against Hezbollah.

Recently, there have been political and on-the-ground signs that the war between Jabhat al-Nusra and Hezbollah is heading toward becoming an open war in both Syria and Lebanon. Among those signs was when Nasrallah described the Islamist opposition in Syria as "takfiris."...

Can there really be a war between the two sides in Lebanon?

In his speech last Saturday [May 25], Nasrallah said that they would fight only in Syria and asked his Lebanese opponents who wish to fight Hezbollah to do so in Syria and keep Lebanon outside the fight. But some of Nasrallah's supporters were critical of his speech. One of them told al-monitor, "Nasrallah may have made a mistake in revealing his weak spot. So [his opponents] may choose to fight Hezbollah in Lebanon, which Nasrallah is trying to keep out of the fight." The same source told *Al-Monitor* that Hezbollah can fight on two fronts at the same time.

On the same day when the two rockets fell on Chiyyah, another rocket was fired toward Israel. This raised questions on whether the two incidents are connected. Some said that the party that launched the rockets in the morning is the same one that fired the rocket on Israel in the evening as a message to the Lebanese government that if you don't pressure Hezbollah to pull out of Syria, the Syria opposition will blow up the security situation in Lebanon, whether internally or by means of re-activating the Israeli front.

Since the beginning of this week, many Lebanese have started feeling afraid because of all these developments. Economic activity has markedly slowed since the developments started.

Nasser Chararah is a contributing writer for al-monitor's Lebanon pulse and for multiple arab newspapers and magazines.

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IRAN'S STRATEGY IN SYRIA

Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday & Sam Wyer, [Real Clear World](#), May 3, 2013

The Islamic Republic of Iran has conducted an extensive, expensive, and integrated effort to keep President Bashar al-Assad in power as long as possible while setting conditions to retain its ability to use Syrian territory and assets to pursue its regional interests should Assad fall.

The Iranian security and intelligence services are advising and assisting the Syrian military in order to preserve Bashar al-Assad's hold on power. These efforts have evolved into an expeditionary training mission using Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces, Quds Force, intelligence services, and law enforcement forces. The deployment of IRGC Ground Forces to conflict abroad is a notable expansion of Iran's willingness and ability to project military force beyond its borders.

Iran has been providing essential military supplies to Assad, primarily by air. Opposition gains in Syria have interdicted many ground resupply routes between Baghdad and Damascus, and the relative paucity of Iranian port-visits in Syria suggests that Iran's sea-lanes to Syria are more symbolic than practical. The air line of communication between Iran and Syria is thus a key vulnerability for Iranian strategy in Syria. Iran would not be able to maintain its current level of support to Assad if this air route were interdicted through a no-fly zone or rebel capture of Syrian airfields.

Iran is also assisting pro-government Shabiha militias, partly to hedge against Assad's fall or the contraction of the regime into Damascus and a coastal Alawite enclave. These militias will become even more dependent on Tehran in such a scenario, allowing Iran to maintain some ability to operate in and project force from Syria....

Iraqi Shi'a militants are also fighting in Syria in support of Assad. Their presence became overt in 2012 with the formation of the Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Brigade, a pro-government militia that is a conglomerate of Syrian and foreign Shi'a fighters, including members of Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraq-based Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah. Like other paramilitary forces operating in Syria, these militants escalated their involvement as the conflict descended into civil war. The open participation of Iraqi Shi'a militants in Syria is an alarming indicator of the expansion of sectarian conflict throughout the region.

The Syrian conflict has already constrained Iran's influence in the Levant, and the fall of the Assad regime would further reduce Tehran's ability to project power. Iran's hedging strategy aims to ensure, however, that it can continue to pursue its vital interests if and when the regime collapses, using parts of Syria as a base as long as the Syrian opposition fails to establish full control over all of Syrian territory.

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ON TOPIC

[Kerry Getting Out-Foxed By Russia Over Syria](#): James P. Rubin, *New Republic*, May 29, 2013—Secretary of State John Kerry has gotten off to a fast start as America's chief diplomat, already racking up a half a dozen sessions with his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

[The Folly of Waiting for a More Perfect Syrian Opposition](#): Shadi Hamid, *The Atlantic*, May 28 2013—Today, the debate over Syria focuses once again on the composition of the Syrian National Coalition. And while the United States, Europe, and Saudi Arabia push the opposition to expand its ranks to include more liberals, the Assad regime continues to make significant gains against rebel forces, who report a loss of morale and lack even the most basic equipment.

[Syrian Fault Lines In Lebanon's Bekaa Valley](#): Martin Armstrong, *Al-Monitor Lebanon Pulse*, May 29, 2013—In a former classroom in Arsal, Sekra al-Ahmad, 60, gently grips the forearm of her grandson. With her other hand she gently applies a lotion to a shallow wound near the child's elbow, the result of government shelling that claimed the life one of Ahmad's other grandchildren in Qusair.

[Jordan, Informal Militias Form To Guard Against Syrian Attacks](#): Taylor Luck, *Washington Post*, May 30, 2013—Mohammed Hamad and his cousins, many handling a firearm for the first time, awkwardly balanced Kalashnikov rifles on their shoulders and shot practice rounds into watermelon targets here at the edge of the Yarmouk Valley separating Jordan and Syria.