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Drexel GPS: Geopolitical Update

Middle East Update: Will Israel Open a Full-Scale War Front with Hezbollah in Lebanon?

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While negotiations continue for some form of a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, there is a sense that the offensive by Israel is winding down. This can be partially attributed to the lack of targets available to be attacked as a result of the devastating campaign the IDF has waged over the past 7 months on Hamas infrastructure. This is not to suggest that hostilities between the two sides have cooled to any degree because they absolutely have not.

What has occurred is a reduction in the scale of media reporting of daily airstrikes hitting critical infrastructure targets. This reduction is an ironic by-product of the fact that there are fewer existing structures to target. Criticism of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and Netanyahu's tactics against Hamas in Gaza remains high across the region and beyond. Will Netanyahu decide that the long-term advantages associated with opening up a new front with Hezbollah outweighs finding a negotiated solution that does not involve a full-scale conflict? That answer remains to be determined.

Israel-Hamas War: Potential for New Lebanon Front

GPS Assessment

Israel aims to remove Hezbollah forces from southern Lebanon and reduce their capacity to threaten northern Israel. Such a conflict would inflict significant damage on Lebanon, and critics of such an action cite Israeli intentions to apply collective repercussions to the Lebanese civilian population.

- If Israel does open up a full-scale military operation in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah could respond with targeted and indiscriminate attacks on Israeli civilian areas and strategic assets. A full-scale ground invasion by the IDF remains a possibility but would pose considerable challenges logistically and politically.
- Israel may see an opportunity for its military to regroup and potentially gain U.S. support by creating a pause in conflicts involving Gaza and Lebanon.
- Regarding Hezbollah, it is evident through a series of statements from its leadership since the outset of the current Israel-Hamas war that the group views itself as supporting, rather than leading, the Palestinian cause.
- Despite its rhetoric and actions since October 7th in support of Hamas, Hezbollah and its leadership views safeguarding Iran's regime and its nuclear interests as a priority. There is no credible or compelling argument that it would risk its military assets in a war with Israel solely for the benefit of Hamas in this conflict.

- In the event of a conflict, the United States is expected to increase its security assistance to Israel and utilize all available diplomatic means to swiftly end hostilities, aiming to prevent direct Iranian involvement.
- Any workable diplomatic solution deemed acceptable by Netanyahu would likely need to involve Hezbollah relocating its forces north of the Litani River and ceasing its drone and rocket attacks, at a minimum. Cross-border conflict between Hezbollah and the IDF has increased since the war began forcing thousands of residents of northern Israel to be evacuated as a security precaution.
- A resolution is very much contingent on the United States along with other regional powers achieving some form of a comprehensive ceasefire in Gaza beforehand.

How Much Damage Could Hezbollah Inflict on Israel?

One of the major reasons Israel views a war with Hezbollah much differently than Hamas is because Hezbollah is a much more formidable opponent. Could the IDF defeat them? Of course, but the question that needs to be answered is what would Israel define as a “win” and at what cost could that realistically be achieved? Would it involve a prolonged occupation of Lebanon?

- Hezbollah has more soldiers with better equipment and training. It is estimated that there is a fighting force greater than 100,000 personnel compared to around 30,000 for Hamas. Hezbollah also has a plethora of powerful and advanced rockets and missiles that Hamas did not possess that could inflict a great deal of damage in Israel. For additional perspective, below are some of the types of systems available to Hezbollah.
- Among the biggest threats for warheads as it pertains to guided missiles that Hezbollah has outside of an unconfirmed and limited number of Iranian-supplied Scuds are the Fateh-110 and M-600 which have ranges of 250-300 km. Both missiles carry a 450-500kg high explosive (HE) warhead and are GPS-guided.

Hezbollah has a great deal of capacity to inflict harm on Israel with its rocket/missile inventory. Here is context on the potential damage that some of the more powerful warheads in possession by Hezbollah could inflict. Below are the estimated effects of a 300kg explosive hitting within 10 meters of a target.

Explosive Type: TNT

Charge Size (kg): 300

Range from Munition to Structure (meters): 10

Damage to Windows of 4mm Thick Annealed Glass

- Small Window 0.55m by 0.55m High Hazard
- Medium Window 1.25m by 0.55m High Hazard
- Large Window 1.25m by 1.55m High Hazard

Minimum Range to No Break (meters)

- Small Window 174.05m
- Medium Window 281.16m
- Large Window 629.27m

Ground Vibration (meters)

- Maximum Effected Range 554.26m

Injury/Fatality to Personnel Range (meters)

- Fatal Distance 15.45m
- Lung Damage 24.49m
- Eardrum Rupture 62.97m

Damage to Brick Structures (meters)

- Houses completely demolished: 14.61m
- Houses badly damaged, beyond repair, require demolition: 21.62m
- Houses rendered uninhabitable, can be repaired with extensive work: 37.75m
- Houses rendered uninhabitable, can be repaired reasonably quickly: 64.85m
- Houses require repairs, serious inconvenience but remain habitable: 129.70m

Hezbollah Has a Powerful Rocket and Missile Inventory



Most Hamas Targetable Structures Have Been Destroyed in Gaza



Drexel GPS will continue to monitor these situations as they develop.

Ben Downing

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