



Armed Conflicts Report

Israel-Lebanon (Hezbollah) (2006 - first combat deaths)

Update: February 2007

Summary

Type of Conflict

Parties to the Conflict

Status of the Fighting

Number of Deaths

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Background

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Summary:

2007 This conflict has been removed from the report since, while political instabilities within Lebanon continue to grow, the conflict between Lebanon and Israel has all but dissipated. There were no deaths as a result of this conflict in 2007, and rebuilding efforts began throughout Lebanon with funds from Israel, Qatar, Iran, Hezbollah, and the Lebanese government. United Nations peacekeepers have extended their stay in the country for another year, as internal strife is threatening a peaceful post-war reconstruction.

2006 Following a July 12 cross-border raid in which Hezbollah forces killed 8 and kidnapped 2 Israeli soldiers, full-scale armed conflict broke out as Israel launched a major military offensive against southern Lebanon. The war resulted in the deaths of over 1,110 Lebanese and 156 Israelis as well as the displacement of more than half a million Lebanese civilians. The conflict ended in August with a UN-brokered ceasefire and the deployment of Lebanese and UN forces into southern Lebanon. Internal Lebanese politics remained shaky as tension between pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian politicians continued, with the Hezbollah leader threatening to bring down the government unless a national unity formula was reached.

Type of Conflict:

Inter-state conflict

Parties to the Conflict:

1) Government of Israel

Israel's current government is headed by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his Kadima party, who were re-elected in March, 2006. Olmert became the acting Prime Minister in January 2006, when former leader Ariel Sharon suffered a major stroke and fell comatose. Olmert officially took the post of Prime Minister on April 14, 2006.

"Internal security is the responsibility of the General Security Service (GSS)--(Shin Bet, or Shabak), which is under the authority of the Prime Minister's office. The police are under the authority of the Minister of Interior Security. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are under the authority of a civilian Minister of Defense. The IDF includes a significant portion of the adult population on active duty or reserve status and plays a role in maintaining internal security. [*Israel and the Occupied Territories: Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, January 30, 1997]

Supported by:

United States Government: The U.S. government continues to be the largest supplier of military aid to Israel, as well as a strong backer of Israeli military policies. The U.S. also opposed early calls for a cease-fire in the summer conflict of 2006.

2) Government of Lebanon

Lebanon is currently governed by a coalition made up of the elected President Emile Lahoud and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Lahoud was originally elected in 1998 for a 6-year term, which was extended for 3 more years in 2004. The government has been marred by tension and threat of collapse due to conflict between pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian politicians. The government is believed to lend at least tacit support to Hezbollah, and has yet to enforce calls to disarm the group. The government controls the 72,000-member strong Lebanese Armed Forces.

"The security forces comprise the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which may arrest and detain suspects on national security grounds; the Internal Security Forces (ISF), which enforce laws, conduct searches and arrests, and refer cases to the judiciary; and the State Security Apparatus and the Surete Generale, both of which collect information on groups that may jeopardize state security." [*Lebanon Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US State Department, January 30, 1998]

3) Hezbollah

Hezbollah, or the "Party of God," led by Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah is a paramilitary organization and one of two main political parties in Lebanon representing the country's Shi'a population. Hezbollah emerged in the mid-1980s to combat the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon after Israel's 1982 invasion. Hezbollah's armed faction is estimated to be about 2,000-members strong. [*Military Balance 2006*]

"Hizbullah is an Islamic freedom fighting movement founded after the Israeli military seizure of Lebanon in 1982, which resulted in immediate formation of the Islamic resistance units for the liberation of the occupied territories and for the expulsion of the aggressive Israelis forces." [*From the Hizbullah website*, <http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324/324.2/hizballah/>]

"In recent months, Hizbullah has come under new pressure from the United States and the international community—principally, to disband the robust militia it has maintained in south Lebanon. Hizbullah and its ally Syria seemed under particular pressure in late February when an anti-Syrian movement provoked by the recent killing of the former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri succeeded in forcing the new pro-Syrian premier, Omar Karami, to resign... But despite that apparent setback, Hizbullah has remained significant presence on the Lebanese political scene." [Helena Cobban, *Boston Review*, April/May 2005]

Supported by:

Government of Syria

Syria and Iran have been the biggest international supporters of Hezbollah. The Syrian government also has a long history in Lebanon, including a strong military presence that only left Lebanon in 2004. Syria's links to current politicians have been a source of tension for domestic Lebanese politics.

4) Armed Palestinian Groups

A number of other armed Palestinian groups, such as Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) continue to operate from Palestinian refugee camps inside Lebanon.

5) United Nations

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been in Lebanon since 1978. Following the 34-day war in 2006, UNIFIL's strength was increased to 15,000 members with approximately 12,000 being deployed to the southern region of the country by year's end. The following countries have contributed troops to UNIFIL: Belgium, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Korea, Luxemburg, Malaysia, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania and Turkey. A number of other humanitarian, health, and development programs are administered by the UN in Lebanon.

"Originally, UNIFIL was created by the Security Council in 1978 to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the area. Following the July/August 2006 crisis, the Council enhanced the Force and decided that in addition to the original mandate, it would, among other things, monitor the cessation of hostilities; accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the south of Lebanon; and extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons." [From the UNIFIL website]

"The UN has expressed cautious confidence it will be able to immediately raise about 3,500 troops for the new, revamped UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) entrusted with the task of monitoring the ceasefire between Israel and Hizbollah... The extra troops will reinforce the existing 2,000 UNIFIL personnel already on the ground. The UN is still short of 9,500 troops to meet the targeted 15,000 troops called for under the UN Security Council in a unanimous resolution adopted on 11 August to end the war between Israel and Hizbollah. The UN has set 4 November as the date to complete the full UNIFIL deployment." [Jane's Defense Weekly, August 23, 2006]

Status of Fighting:

2006 Cross-border fighting erupted in May between Israel and both Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine after rockets were launched in response to the killing of an Islamic Jihad leader in the south. Following a July 12 cross-border raid in which Hezbollah forces killed 8 and kidnapped 2 Israeli soldiers, full-scale armed conflict broke out as Israel launched a major military offensive against southern Lebanon. The war lasted 34-days and resulted in the displacement of more than half a million Lebanese civilians. Israeli's military offensives included artillery shelling, raids and air attacks on Lebanese towns and infrastructure (mainly in the Shi'a regions of the country), while Hezbollah launched 4,000 rockets into Israel in return. The war ended with a UN-brokered cease-fire on August 14, and the Lebanese army and a strengthened UN Force (UNIFIL), that numbered approximately 12,000 by year's end, were deployed to southern Lebanon.

"Israeli bombs yesterday killed at least 34 children and 22 adults as they slept in this village [Qana] believed by the Israelis to be the source of terrorist missiles fired at Israel." [Besty Pisik, *The Washington Times*, July 31, 2006]

"Israel intensified its attacks against Lebanon on Thursday, blasting Beirut's international airport and the southern part of the country in its heaviest air campaign against its neighbour in 24 years. Nearly three dozen civilians were killed, officials said... The shockwaves from the fighting began to be felt a day after Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers in a cross-border raid... Israel said it was seeking to end once and for all Hezbollah's presence on Lebanon's southern border, while the guerillas insisted that they would release the soldiers only in exchange for Israel's freeing Arab prisoners." [Sam F. Ghattas, *Associated Press*, July 13, 2006]

Number of Deaths:

Total: Between 1,200 and 1,600 people have been killed since intensified fighting between Hezbollah and Israel broke out in 2006. Of these deaths, almost 1,000 were civilian.

2006 1,000 to 1400 Lebanese and 156 Israelis were killed in the 34-day conflict between Hezbollah and Israeli forces. One source estimates that 900 Lebanese civilians and 500 Hezbollah fighters were killed. Other isolated cross-border fighting and a number of political killings resulted in the deaths of 5-10 others. At least 25 people died after the August 14 ceasefire due to cluster bombs used by Israeli forces during the summer conflict.

"The incident brought to 25 the number of people killed by cluster bombs since the August 14 ceasefire, with 137 others wounded, according to a tally being kept by AFP." [AFP, December 20, 2006]

"Israeli casualties: 119 servicemen, 41 civilians. Lebanese casualties: At least 900 civilians and 500 Hizbollah fighters." [Jane's Defense Weekly, August 23, 2006]

"With about 1,110 Lebanese and 156 Israelis killed, both sides were counting the cost. Beirut and many towns across southern Lebanon have been shattered by Israeli bombs, tanks, artillery shells and bulldozers. Israel has suffered rocket damage to homes, offices, hospitals and schools." [Daniel McGregor and Stephen Farrell, *Times Online*, August 15, 2006]

"Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Saniora said the country's death toll from the fighting had reached more than 900, with 3,000 injured." [Hamza Hendawi, *The Globe and Mail*, August 3, 2006]

"Sami Yazbek shakes his head when asked about the official death toll of approximately 400 Lebanese during Israel's two-week-old assault on this country. 'That number is false.' Sayus the director of the Red Cross office in this beleaguered front-line city. 'Without a doubt, there's a lot more dead than that.'" [Mark MacKinnon, July 27, 2006]

Political Developments:

2006 Discussion between pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian politicians continued throughout the year over issues such as the fate of pro-Syrian President Lahoud and the disarming of Hezbollah. UN investigations into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri continued. Israel's military campaign against Hezbollah was decried by international actors as a disproportionate use of force, but the U.S. resisted early calls to support a cease-fire agreement. On August 14, however, a UN brokered cease-fire—Resolution 1701—came into effect, calling on Hezbollah to move north and allowing the Lebanese army and a strengthened UN force (with an authorized troop capacity of 15,000) to move in to southern Lebanon. The EU's slow response to provide troops to this mission, however, raised concern about the UN's mandate, though by year's end the force numbered approximately 12,000. At an August conference in Stockholm, 940 million USD was pledged by international donors to help rebuild after the war. Despite a number of UN resolutions which called on the Lebanese government to disarm Hezbollah and other militia groups, Hezbollah maintained significant influence in parts of the country, and Palestinian militias retained control of refugee camps. The coalition government came close to collapse at the end of the year, and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said they would bring down Siniora government unless the national unity formula was restored.

"An advance party of Qatari troops have arrived in Lebanon, becoming the first Arab contingent in a UN peacekeeping force policing a ceasefire between Hezbollah militants and Israel... UNIFIL currently has about 11,000 blue-helmeted soldiers in Lebanon, most of them from European countries." [AFP, December 20, 2006]

"France told Israel Wednesday that it would increase its commitment of troops to a multinational peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon in the coming days, as Syria warned that the positioning of any multinational force near its border would be seen as a 'hostile position'. France has offered to lead the proposed 15,000-strong multinational force authorized by a United Nations resolution earlier this month. Then it announced last week that it was sending just 200 troops to join the 200 it already has deployed as part of the current United Nations International Force in Lebanon." [Craig S. Smith, *New York Times*, August 23, 2006]

"After a month of fighting, with 8,000 Israeli troops still struggling to establish a hold in a narrow strip north of the Israeli-Lebanese border, the draft resolution phrased for the UN Security Council calls for the demilitarization of southern Lebanon, but not for the disarming of the Islamic Resistance (the armed wing of the Lebanese Shi'ite Party of God—Hizbullah). According to the draft resolution, the IDF should withdraw from south Lebanon and the Lebanese Army deploy some 15,000 personnel to the south, reinforced by a multinational force. The mandate of the 2000-strong UN Interim Force in Lebanon would be expanded, granting the peacekeepers the authority to enforce UN resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter." [Alon-Ben-David, *Jane's Defense Weekly*, August 16, 2006]

"Israel, with U.S. support, intends to resist calls for a cease-fire and continue a longer-term strategy of punishing Hezbollah, which is likely to include several weeks of precision bombing in Lebanon, according to senior Israeli and U.S. officials. For Israel, the goal is to eliminate Hezbollah as a security threat... For the United States, the broader goal is to strangle the axis of Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria and Iran, which the Bush administration believes is pooling resources to change the strategic playing field in the Middle East, U.S. officials say." [Robin Wright, *Washington Post*, July

16, 2006]

"The Europeans have rediscovered their backbones. 'The EU condemns the loss of lives caused by disproportionate use of force by the Israeli Defence Forces and the humanitarian crisis it has aggravated,' Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency, said on July 7. The Swiss were even blunter, condemning what Israel is doing in the Gaza Strip as 'collective punishment', which is contrary to the Geneva Conventions." [Gwynne Dyer, *www.straight.com*, July 13, 2006]

Background:

Lebanon gained independence in 1943, as a Christian-dominated state carved out of the French Protectorate of the Middle East. A 1943 agreement mandates that the President of Lebanon must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of Parliament a Shi'a Muslim. While Lebanon was predominantly Christian when the country gained independence, Muslims now outnumber Christians, and the majority of Muslims are Shi'a. Divisions between the country's four principal religious-ethnic groups—Shia Muslim, Sunni Muslim, Druze and Maronite Christians--were influential in determining the distribution of power in the country's government, and continue to play a key role in Lebanese politics today. After the creation of the state of Israel in 1947 and the ensuing Arab-Israeli war, large numbers of Palestinian refugees arrived in Lebanon, but were never fully welcomed or integrated into the state. In 1964, The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded with support from the Arab League, and soon led the struggle for a Palestinian state. Though Lebanon professed neutrality towards the Israeli conflict, after the PLO was expelled from Jordan in 1970 the organization took root in Lebanon. The presence of the PLO and ensuing attacks by Israel compromised Lebanese sovereignty.

Between 1975 and 1990 a civil war in Lebanon among several Christian, Palestinian, Muslim and Druze groups seeking state control killed more than 144,000 people. During this time, conflict between Israel and the PLO also continued in Lebanon's southern territory. In response to Lebanese-based PLO attacks, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, when over 12,000 people, including 500 Israelis, died. The second Israeli invasion drove the PLO from Lebanon and, upon withdrawal in 1985, Israel created a southern "security zone," patrolled by the proxy, initially Christian, South Lebanese Army (SLA), and intended to prevent attacks on northern Israel. Also in response to the 1982 attacks, backed by many of the country's Shi'a Muslims, as well as Iran and Syria, Hezbollah emerged as a paramilitary organization with the stated aim of putting an end to Western imperialism in the region, and to resist Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon.

In spite of interventions by the United States, European countries, Iran, the United Nations (UNIFIL troops have been in Lebanon since 1978), and the Arab League, and invasions and occupations by Israel, relative stability did not emerge until 1991, when the Syrian army gained control. Since elections in 1992, the Lebanese government, backed by Syria, successfully unified the Lebanese army and many militias have been disarmed, though both Israel and Syria maintained a military presence in the country. Growing domestic political opposition to Israeli troop casualties in occupied southern Lebanon led Israel to accept a 20-year-old UN resolution calling for withdrawal from Lebanese territory, and Israeli troops left the region in May 2000. In 2005, the assassination of PM Rafiq Hariri prompted large-scale demonstrations against Syrian influence, and Syria withdrew its 15,000 troops in April of that year. Tensions remain however in the disputed border territory of Shebaa Farms that was captured from Syria in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Israel's occupation of this territory continues to be used as justification for military offensives against Israel, and resistance by Hezbollah to disarm its military factions.

Arms Sources:

The United States is by far the largest foreign arms supplier to Israel which also has a substantial domestic arms industry. Germany and France are also recent suppliers, although Germany suspended most of its arms sales temporarily in 2002 in response to Israel's aggression in the West Bank. Hezbollah and other Palestinian opposition groups are believed to receive arms from neighbouring Arab states, especially Syria and Iran. The Lebanese government has recently received military aid from the US amounting to \$40 million in 2006 and ongoing support in 2007. Unidentified Arab countries are also reported to have sent weapons to Lebanon.

"In 2006, Lebanon received \$40 million in U.S. military aid. The assistance was allocated for the purchase of combat vehicles, upgrades and repairs, munitions and training. ... On May 22, Arab League secretary-general Amr Mussa said unidentified Arab countries have sent weapons to the Lebanese army. Mussa did not elaborate." [*WorldTribune.com*, May 24, 2007]

"Defense officials explained that the IDF did not use or buy cluster bomblets manufactured by Israel Military Industries (IMI), since Israel bought its bomblets in the United States with the \$3 billion it receives annually from the US government in military aid." [Yaakov Katz, *The Jerusalem Post*, November 21, 2006]

"The United Nations on Tuesday asked Lebanon to explain reports of arms shipments crossing the Syrian border destined for the Lebanese guerilla groups Hizbollah Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, a foe of Syria, said over the weekend that truckloads of arms and missiles had crossed the border intended for 'armed groups' inside Lebanon. He alleged that the Lebanese army intercepted the shipment but allowed delivery to Hizbollah and possibly Palestinian groups. The army said on Monday Jumblatt was incorrect and the weapons had been stocked inside Lebanon and shipped south to the 'Lebanese resistance.' ... 'If this information were to be confirmed it would be an alarming development in clear violation of resolution 1559,' the spokesman said." [Evelyn Leopold, *Reuters*, February 15, 2006]

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