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## Rumblings rise between Hezbollah, Israel

By Mel Frykberg

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RAMALLAH - Israeli intelligence has warned that a new war with Hezbollah on Israel's northern border with Lebanon cannot be ruled out, following heightened tensions between [United Nations](#) peacekeeping forces and Hezbollah supporters in the south of Lebanon.

"Israel has to be ready for any sudden provocation or outbreak of hostilities," Dan Diker from the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs tells Inter Press Service (IPS). "The same way the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war was triggered over Hezbollah capturing Israeli soldiers."

In 2006, Hezbollah guerillas captured several Israeli soldiers after laying ambush along the border. This led to the second Israel-Lebanon war, which lasted just over a month until UN resolution 1701 brought hostilities to an end.

Dr Samir Awad from Birzeit University near Ramallah, however, thinks the possibility of a military confrontation in the near future is slim, and that the current flare-up has more to do with internal Lebanese [politics](#).

"Neither side wants war at this stage. Both Israel and [Hezbollah](#) are unwilling to pay the high price of a new and bloody conflict. The events in the south are related to a power struggle in the Lebanese [government](#)," Awad tells IPS.

Israeli intelligence has reported an increase in weapons being smuggled into south Lebanon through its porous borders with Syria. There are also reports of activity by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in the area south of the Litani River.

Resolution 1701 called for this parcel of territory to be manned by the United Nations Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) troops and the Lebanese army, and for armed militias (Hezbollah specifically) to be disarmed. Israel was forced to withdraw from its self-declared "security zone" here in 2000 as a result of Hezbollah resistance.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have warned of increased military activity in the village al-Khiam in the south. They say Hezbollah cells are lying dormant in preparation for an ambush on any IDF troops that enter the area.

Al-Khiam is of particular strategic importance. In 2007 a roadside bomb alleged to have been laid by Hezbollah killed six UNIFIL troops from a Spanish battalion. The Spaniards had a reputation for confronting Hezbollah cadres.

The bombing was widely perceived to be a message to UNIFIL about the Lebanese resistance movement's ability to control the area. "Hezbollah regards Lebanon as a sub-colony of Iran. Confronting UNIFIL with provocations is Hezbollah's way of fighting what it sees as foreign interference in its country, and a way of showing the UN who is boss in Lebanon," Diker tells IPS.

UNIFIL troops have encountered increased resistance in searching al-Khiam for weapons. Over the past couple of weeks, approximately 20 confrontations have taken place between Shi'ite villagers and UNIFIL troops.

Villagers, who are sympathetic to Hezbollah, have thrown stones at UNIFIL troops, seized their weapons, climbed onto tanks and in one case removed the aerial from one of them. The weapons were returned after the intervention of the Lebanese army.

Relations between various sects in the Lebanese army have worsened as the army has tried to confront Hezbollah guerillas. Many officers in the Lebanese army are Shi'ite and sympathetic to Hezbollah.

"Hezbollah has managed to hold on to its weapons despite resolution 1701," says Awad. "It has also managed to win support away from the March 14 governing coalition, led by the pro-Western Saad Hariri.

"Moreover, it continues to successfully portray itself as Lebanese liberator due to Israel's ongoing occupation of the Shebaa Farms and the northern part of Ghajar Village."

The Shebaa Farms were declared by the UN to be part of Syrian-occupied territory in 2000. But since then the Syrians and Lebanese have agreed the territory belongs to Lebanon. A UN cartographer has conceded their point has merit, but the issue is yet to be

resolved.

"The Lebanese government has to acknowledge that it is losing more and more power to Hezbollah in the south and that it no longer controls the entire country," Awad tells IPS.

But a war in the short term seems unlikely, says Professor Moshe Ma'oz from Jerusalem's Hebrew University in Jerusalem. "This is more about Iran warning Israel, through its Hezbollah proxy, not to attack Iran. It's also about keeping mutual deterrence as both Iran and Israel exchange threats warning the other side not to attack.

"But this could change if Syria and Israel make peace," Ma'oz tells IPS. "Syria has hinted a number of times that it wants to reach a deal with Israel - on its terms obviously. If this happened Iran might step in through Hezbollah and disrupt proceedings."