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The War Front: Week of 7 October, 2024

In the past week, signs have emerged that Hezbollah has revived from Israel's relentless blows to its leadership and ranks, and that the resistance maintains command and control over the battle. This is the first in The Cradle's series of war updates for the duration of the Israel-Axis battle.

The scene in southern Lebanon has recurred daily for about ten days. Israeli bombs target Lebanese villages, kill civilians, and enemy land forces fail to penetrate territory. Hezbollah fighters remain vigilant to prevent any invasion of the border areas, galvanized by both grief and anger over the Israeli assassinations of their late Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah and other top military and political leaders.

Since the announcement of the ground operation, dubbed “Arrows of the North” and described as “limited” in scope by Tel Aviv in an attempt to downplay its objectives, Israel's stated goals are to “strike the military infrastructure” of Hezbollah - a task it found difficult during similar battles in southern Lebanon during the July 2006 war.

This time around, on just the second day of the Israeli operation, the occupation army [announced the killing of 8 officers and soldiers](#) from its "Egoz" commando unit during a clash with resistance fighters.

Israel's concern about the ground battle becomes clear when examining the number of divisions it flung into the battle and the quality of their training. Each of these divisions has been tasked with a battalion area of responsibility in terms of tactical penetration of Lebanese territory.

What teams does Israel rely on?

- 36th Division (Al-Barkan): The largest armored division in regular service in the [Armored Corps](#) In the Israeli army, this division has participated in all Israeli wars against Palestinians and Arabs.
- 91st Division (Galilee): Responsible for the entire Lebanese front from Ras Naqoura in the west to the occupied [Shebaa Farms](#) in the east.
- Division 146 (Cosmic Explosion): A reserve division affiliated with the Northern Command of the Israeli army. It was the first reserve division to join Operation “Northern Arrows” and participated in both the First and Second Lebanon Wars.
- 98th Division (Fire League): **An infantry division** consisting of paratroopers and commando brigades, specialized in encirclement via parachute drops, assault landings using attack helicopters and transport aircraft, and fighting deep into its opponent's territory.
- 99th Infantry Division (Al-Wameed): Trained to move on foot and not in armored personnel carriers and tasked to operate [drones](#) on the battlefield, these troops deal with electronic and cyber attacks - via air and land.
- Division 210 (Bashan): Established in the midst of the October 1973 War, this division was assigned the task of attacking [Syria](#) via [Lebanon](#) through a strategic encirclement operation aimed at weakening the [Syrian Arab Army](#) (SAA).

Despite this buildup, Israeli forces are still operating in the border strip, which has been subjected to thousands of raids and shells since October 8, 2023, that is, for more than a year. For example, the border village of Yaroun encountered 650 raids in a year, and 200 raids just last week.

The Israeli army adopts the method of rapid close-in raids with infantry, supported by heavy artillery and air cover, so that its forces infiltrate - about 700 meters at the maximum depth - and then return. These raids are mostly conducted for propaganda reasons, to secure footage of reassuring ground scenes to convince displaced Israeli settlers that there are military achievements that can establish safety for their return to settlements. For example, the Israeli army published a video that it claims depicts the storming of the Lebanese village of Kafr Kila. It later transpired that the footage [dates back to 2006](#).

Has Israel advanced in the south?

Some of the front-line villages in southern Lebanon on the border with Israel are considered “militarily defeated,” largely because their geographical features do not allow for defending forces to repel the enemy.

Yaron, one of these villages, has been [destroyed and abandoned for months](#). It is relatively low in elevation (780 meters above sea level), and represents a kind of protrusion inside occupied Israeli territories.

Yaroun is therefore not considered a defensive base, but is more suitable for offensive operations as a starting base. The Israeli army entered it after its complete destruction to take photos **and to destroy a mosque 150 meters from the border**.

The same applies to Lebanon's Maroun al-Ras area, where occupation troops published pictures of raising an Israeli flag in a garden of the destroyed village months ago. This area is one of the first points to be bombed after 8 October, faces the Palestinian border, and is an advanced point from Lebanese territory.

Last week, the occupation army took advantage of the presence of a UN peacekeeping troop (UNIFIL) position at the foot of the park's hill to advance to it and take propaganda photos, then quickly withdrew for fear of being targeted.

Israeli forces were also able to advance toward the two Lebanese Christian villages of Rmeish and Ain Ebel. Hezbollah's operations room took the decision to avoid targeting these villages since their residents were still within, and to preserve their lives and national cohesion, which Israel exploited to position itself in the vicinity of the two villages.

Hezbollah waits...and takes the initiative

The geography of the south plays an important role in aiding defending forces to take cover and conceal themselves from the enemy, as well as to set up ambushes. The Israeli army knows this well, and is forever reminded of how its tanks fell into a bold resistance trap in what was known in the 2006 war as the "tank massacre."

Today, Tel Aviv is limiting its objectives to control a group of sensitive border areas. It believes this approach will help it secure its border settlements, on the one hand, and facilitate its future operations deep into Lebanese territory - such as the Balat area, Jabal al-Bat, Al-Awaidah, Tal Al-Nahas, and others - on the other.

Hezbollah has already shown Tel Aviv what it could be up against. In the Al-Bat area, the resistance struck a tank that was on its way uphill - terrain that requires bulldozers, tanks, and great engineering efforts to climb these heights, which are preferred targets for anti-armor weapons to hit Israeli military vehicles accurately. Importantly, these strikes can be conducted effectively from remote and relatively safe places.

But Hezbollah isn't waiting for Israeli forces to advance. Rather, it takes the initiative to bomb the attacking enemy concentrations at border sites without interruption, to create a kind of confusion and disarray that prevents occupation forces from organizing or forming, forcing

them into “busing” diversions like taking cover and transporting their wounded to deplete their morale.

These are what are called “spoilage attacks” because they spoil the enemy’s intentions. What recently took place in Ras al-Naqoura offers a clear example of the quality of the resistance measures that struck enemy forces, and vehicles gathered at the site and hit them before they moved. Hezbollah offered a sample to the Israelis: “Here's what will happen when you position your armor in an elevated position.”

Given the strikes it expected to receive, causing deaths and injuries among its ranks, the Israeli army has employed its elite Unit 669 for air medical evacuation, at the border only. This begs the question of what occupation forces plan to do if their troops manage to penetrate a little deeper into Lebanese territory. Will there be stretcher drones for their casualties, as Tel Aviv may not want to deliberately bring helicopters deeper into the south for fear of being shot down? Israeli medevac operations will become more difficult and dangerous both to the lives of injured troops and those working to evacuate them.

Military zones increase displacement ... of Israelis too

While the occupation army seeks to exert pressure on Hezbollah by displacing its constituents and supporters from their homes in the south, the Bekaa, and the southern suburbs of Beirut - and even displacement areas such as Byblos, the north, and Beirut - in order to return its northern settlers to their settlements, Tel Aviv took a counterproductive step when it announced more closed military zones on the border, which practically amounts to expulsion for Israeli residents remaining in other, as-yet-undisturbed northern settlements.

On 6 October, [the Israeli army announced](#) that it was establishing a closed military zone, including the areas of Manara, Yiftah, and Al-Malikiyah.

Has Hezbollah lost command and control?

There is no doubt that the blow Hezbollah suffered from the assassination of Nasrallah and most of its top military commanders was painful, confusing, and had a “strategic” dimension. The late secretary-general was not just a political leader and symbol for the millions who support the resistance, but was essentially also the executive director of West Asia's Axis of Resistance, led by Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Nasrallah enjoyed wide influence in the region and strong relations with all the Axis powers. His assassination shook not only Hezbollah, but the entire Axis. In his eulogy for Nasrallah, Khamenei revealed the importance of his role and the impact of this loss by describing the late Hezbollah leaders as “the apple of my eye.”

The assassinations were not limited to Nasrallah, but included key military commanders such as Fuad Shukr, Ibrahim Aqil, and Ahmad Wehbi. These arrived amidst Israel's "pager and radio massacre" that shook Hezbollah's community and filled hospitals with party members who suffered severe injuries to their eyes and hands. These rapid, successive strikes were enough to divide the Lebanese resistance, destroy it morally, and cut off communication between its leaders.

In the subsequent few weeks, however, there are several field indicators that the movement is recovering rapidly and regaining its ability to control the battlefield, its units, and forces.

These indicators can be summarized in the following points:

- Consistency in the daily number of missiles, up to **200 projectiles**, indicates discipline among the missile crews, taking into account the needs of the battle and the expected time periods in order to maintain continuity and momentum and keep the Israel front under constant pressure.
- Consistency in the objectives, their nature and quality, as several types of objectives are adopted (concentrations in border sites and settlements, the main population centers in the north, Safad, Tiberias, Karmiel, the Krayot, Haifa, and as of recently, Tel Aviv).
- The distribution of firepower - in proportion to the availability of targets - indicates that Hezbollah's intelligence capabilities remain intact, as they are producing, discovering, and delivering daily targets through a functioning command and control system to the firing forces in real-time - such as targeting the house in which the EGOZ was stationed in Al-Adaysah.
- Planting explosives and deploying innovative ambushes on the front lines and routes adopted by Israeli forces is an indication of the presence of a field command capable of making sound assessments, anticipating the enemy's movements, and issuing orders to take proportionate and effective measures.
- Directing a large and unprecedented missile strike on the Krayot (a cluster of cities and neighborhoods in Haifa), in conjunction with Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem's televised speech, is an indication that there are those who planned, decided, implemented, and controlled, and this cannot be implemented without an effective command and control system.
- Directing a missile strike against Tel Aviv on 7 October specifically indicates the existence of a decision and intention to strike this city on this specific date.
- The way Hezbollah dealt with Israeli troops was by taking UNIFIL soldiers as human shields (positioning themselves behind them) at a critical moment. The resistance gave orders

not to engage with enemy forces in order to protect the lives of UNIFIL personnel, which confirms the existence of a high level of control.

Throughout its history, Hezbollah has been able to overcome many existential tribulations, some we have seen already in this war, but evidence and field data in the south indicate that the resistance is capable of overcoming the blow, restructuring its leadership, and adjusting its ground forces to adapt to the needs of the battle.

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