



## **Rocket Fire from Lebanon and Its Implications**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The recent rocket fire from Lebanon into Israeli territory connects with Hamas's overall strategy of expanding the scope of the confrontation between itself and Israel that sharpened during the war in Gaza in May of this year. It is by no means clear that Israel is equipped to prevent this from becoming a regular event.

The two rockets recently launched from Lebanon into Israeli territory were not the first of their kind. They were preceded by a similar incident during the Gaza War in May 2021. Both incidents apparently involved Palestinian elements affiliated with Hamas who acted with the tacit consent of Lebanon's real ruler, Hezbollah.

Events that were once perceived as exceptions sometimes become the rule. What may have begun as a kind of identification of Palestinian elements in Lebanon with Hamas may become a permanent course of action that will characterize these elements and stifle the quiet reality maintained in the northern sector since the 2006 Second Lebanon War.

A scenario in which Hamas-affiliated elements in Lebanon occasionally fire rockets toward northern Israel has a good chance of materializing. It would be in line with the organization's strategic trend, as expressed both before and during the Gaza war, of shattering the local context of the conflict with Israel and connecting it to the general situation in the Middle East. It comports with Hamas's primary short-term goal, which is to disrupt the trend toward Israeli-Arab normalization. To that end, Hamas has an interest in both heating up the West Bank and Israel's Arab community and expanding the military conflict to Lebanon.

The firings from Lebanon toward Israel not only serve Hamas's effort to expand the framework of the overall confrontation with Israel but also fit in

with its need to manage and rehabilitate the Gaza Strip while confronting Israel. In the months that have followed the May war, Hamas has been relatively cautious in its dealings with Israel, sending incendiary and explosive balloons toward Israeli territory while avoiding rocket fire that could reignite full-blown hostilities. Activating the Lebanon front could provide Hamas with a tactical-operational tool against Israel that moves the potential scene of clashes from Gaza to south Lebanon. This could give the Gaza Strip a degree of confidence about the likely response of Israel, which has revealed some embarrassment about the shootings in the north.

These developments are taking place against the backdrop of the sociopolitical disintegration of Lebanon (which has never really functioned properly). This state of affairs not only allows Hamas-sympathizing elements in Lebanon to use its their territory for firing on Israel, but also weakens the Lebanese army's ability to enforce its authority over rebellious Palestinian elements.

It is still unclear what Hezbollah's role was in the two recent rocket firings: whether it gave prior approval, or whether the events took place under its nose. Regardless, Hezbollah will find it difficult to prevent similar events from taking place. As a result, repeated patterns of fire from Lebanon by Palestinian elements affiliated with Hamas could pose a significant challenge to Israel.

The Israeli response has been characterized by artillery fire into Lebanese territory with almost no defined purpose, along with public statements by the political and military echelons that Israel will not accept this development. But statements and deeds aside, the new reality is that shooting incidents could turn the north into a scene of renewed clashes against the background of the disintegration of Lebanon. Israel would then have to deal with the parallel questions of how to prevent shootings and respond to them when they do occur. Will the address for the response be Lebanon—a country in a state of collapse, with a weak military that has little ability to prevent such events—or Hezbollah, which would expose Israel to the possibility of exchanging blows with the organization? This is a complex dilemma. It is not at all clear that Israel currently has the tools or ability to prevent individual drizzles from becoming scattered showers.

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