

Calls for intervention: Will Iran send forces to aid Hezbollah against Israel?

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 11.10.2024

In the Iranian media discourse since the assassination of Nasrallah, initiatives from various factions have emerged, calling for the deployment of forces to support Hezbollah's fight against Israel.

The Iranian regime appears to be blocking these initiatives, likely because it recognizes that the damage from such a move would outweigh the potential benefits.

But the question remains: Will Iran send forces to Lebanon to fight against Israel?

The ideological and emotional connection with Nasrallah

Since the assassination of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, along with Quds Force Commander in Lebanon Abbas Nilforoushan, on September 27, initiatives have surfaced within the Iranian regime and its supporters, calling for the Islamic Republic to send volunteer forces to Lebanon to aid Hezbollah in its time of crisis.

The unprecedented blows Israel has dealt to Hezbollah not only place the terrorist organization in a difficult situation but also create a problematic scenario for Iran.

The Lebanese arena, and Hezbollah in particular, represent the most successful model of exporting the Islamic Revolution. Hezbollah is seen as "the jewel in the crown" of Iran's proxy network, which it has cultivated since the early 1980s.

Beyond Hezbollah's strategic importance to Iran's national security concept, many within the Iranian regime had an ideological and emotional connection with Nasrallah, a relationship that developed over many years.

These ties grew when Nasrallah studied in religious seminaries at the leading spiritual center in Iran, the city of Qom, in the second half of the 1980s, before

Nasrallah was appointed Hezbollah leader following Abbas Musawi's assassination by the IDF in 1992.

Since then, his personal connections have grown stronger. This was driven by his close collaboration with Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, who assumed the role in 1998.

Nasrallah's landmark achievement in 2000, with the IDF's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, further solidified his position, and his rise as a senior figure in Iran's proxy network intensified even more after Soleimani's assassination by the US in 2020.

'Iran cannot be indifferent to the blows Hezbollah is suffering'

In light of this, it was Ayatollah Mohammad Hassan Akhtari (born 1939) who, on September 28, the day after Nasrallah's assassination, proposed to the regime to send volunteer forces to Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.

Akhtari, known as one of Hezbollah's founding fathers, played a senior role in establishing and nurturing the organization while serving as Iran's ambassador to Syria from 1986 to 1997.

Currently, Akhtari heads the "Committee for the Support of the Islamic Revolution of the Palestinian People," under the office of the Iranian president, established through the 1990 law to promote support for the Palestinian struggle against Israel.

Akhtari explained that Iran cannot remain indifferent and must participate directly in the fighting; thus, it should send young volunteers to Lebanon and the Syrian Golan to fight against Israel.

The Basij, a volunteer paramilitary militia within the IRGC, also opened social media accounts to register citizens for deployment to Lebanon.

On September 30, a group of students and residents from Qom arrived at Tehran's airport and demanded that the regime send them to fight in Lebanon.

Subsequently, Mohsen Rafighdoost, one of the founders of the Revolutionary

Guards, stated in a media interview on October 3 that the option of sending military forces to Lebanon and the Syrian Golan is on the table for Iranian decision-makers.

The regime restrains initiatives to send forces to Lebanon and the Syrian Golan

However, the Iranian authorities quickly clarified that they had no intention of responding to these calls. On September 30, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani announced that Tehran would not send volunteer forces to Lebanon, explaining that Lebanon has the capacity to defend itself.

The deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohammad Reza Naqdi, added on October 6 that Tehran does not intend to send forces to Lebanon, stating that the commanders of the resistance front have not reported a manpower shortage and, therefore, they have not requested such assistance from Iran.

A senior official in Iran's religious seminaries echoed this sentiment in a media interview on October 6, explaining that the physical presence of Iranian elements in Lebanon would not be beneficial at this time and, therefore, no volunteers should be sent to Lebanon unless Iran's leader, Khamenei, approves it.

In the past year, following assassinations attributed to Israel targeting senior Quds Force officials, particularly Hassan Mahdavi, the Quds Force commander in Syria and Lebanon, Khamenei has led a significant shift in Iran's security strategy.

In April, he decided to attack Israel directly with ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones. In early October, he again led a direct attack on Israel, this time consisting of around 200 ballistic missiles.

Before this, for decades, Iran overwhelmingly preferred to attack Israel indirectly through its proxy network.

Earlier, in the second half of the last decade, Khamenei had already sent thousands of fighters from the Quds Force, the Iranian army, and even the Iranian police and Basij to the battlefield in Syria and Iraq to fight against ISIS, which

posed an existential threat to Iran.

However, the shift Khamenei is leading is not all-encompassing and does not include sending fighters for direct combat against Israel.

It appears Khamenei is aware that such a move would place Iran squarely in the spotlight in the fight against Israel and push Israel to launch significant attacks on Iranian territory.

This goes beyond the risky gamble Khamenei already took with his recent missile strike, which presents Israel with an excellent opportunity to strike back at Iran with considerable international legitimacy.

Moreover, sending fighters would leave Iran exposed to attacks from Israeli troops on the ground and other retaliatory strikes from Israel.

Khamenei, whose entire regime, and especially the nuclear program, are his life's work, would not want to put them at high risk.

Reformists have voiced concern through their media outlets, warning that Khamenei might be dragging Iran into an Israeli trap designed to provoke Iran into a full-scale regional war involving the US.

Therefore, while the initiatives to send forces to Lebanon and the Syrian Golan may continue, Khamenei is expected to manage the risks carefully and avoid escalating beyond the already high level of risk he has placed on Iran.

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