

Hezbollah Pulled Between Resistance to Israel and Defense of Syria

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Despite being bogged down in Syria, Hezbollah still has the willingness and capacity to retaliate against Israeli interests abroad, as demonstrated by recently foiled plots in Thailand and Peru.

On January 18, 2015, an Israeli airstrike on Syria's Golan Heights targeted a Hezbollah convoy, killing several senior operatives. Among the dead were Jihad Mughniyeh, the son of late Hezbollah terrorist leader Imad Mughniyeh, and Iranian Revolutionary Guard General Mohammed Allahdadi, aide to Qods Corps commander Qassem Suleimani. Within days, Hezbollah retaliated by firing two rockets at an Israel Defense Force (IDF) convoy in the disputed Sheba'a Farms area along the Israeli-Lebanese border, killing two Israeli soldiers. The rare flare-up sparked one of the most violent exchanges of fire between the two sides since the 2006 war. And yet, the flare-up was contained and short-lived. One reason for this is that Hezbollah's overt reaction to the Israeli strike was almost certainly only part of its planned response. Authorities fear that the remainder of the retaliation will be executed abroad using covert operatives acting under reasonably deniable circumstances.

This article examines the strategic calculations behind Hezbollah's retaliation. First, it explains why retaliation was an absolute necessity, not a choice, from Hezbollah's perspective, despite the group's interest in avoiding a full-fledged war with Israel. It then probes the nature of Hezbollah's retaliation in light of the organization's involvement in Syria, popular sentiment among its Lebanese Shi'a constituents, and its current operational capacity. It finds that Hezbollah's retaliation is likely to be two-pronged: an overt attack targeting the Israeli heartland and international attacks targeting Israeli and Jewish interests abroad...

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<https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/hezbollah-pulled-between-resistance-to-israel-and-defense-of-syria>. ❖

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