

Israeli intel: 40,000 missiles, rockets in Lebanon

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TEL AVIV — Israel's intelligence community has reported to the government that the Iranian-sponsored Hizbullah has accumulated an arsenal of more than 40,000 missiles and rockets in Lebanon.

On the eve of the 34-day war in July 2006, Hizbullah was believed to have possessed 14,000, Middle East Newline reported.

The Hizbullah rocket and missile arsenal has exceeded 40,000 weapons, according to the assessment by military intelligence, the Mossad and the Israel Security Agency.

In an assessment relayed to the Cabinet on July 9, the intelligence community also said Hizbullah has deployed at least 2,500 fighters in southern Lebanon near the Israeli border. The fighters were said to have restored weapons and rocket bunkers linked in an advanced command and control network.

The intelligence community said Hizbullah has both short- and long-range rockets that could strike deep within Israel. Over the last two years, officials said, Iran expanded Hizbullah's authority to conduct strategic rocket attacks against the Jewish state.

"Before the last war, Iran kept tight control over all long-range rockets," an official said. "Today, Hizbullah controls the operations of those rockets."

Hizbullah's arsenal also contains advanced anti-tank guided missiles from Russia. Officials said this included the AT-14 Kornet, used in the 2006 war with Israel.

In 2008, the assessment said, Hizbullah expanded its authority in Lebanon. The intelligence community said Hizbullah controls the military and much of the government as well as Beirut International Airport.

The latest Israeli intelligence assessment has been disputed. Yoram Kehati, a leading researcher at the state-financed Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, said Hizbullah has not increased its force or rocket and missile arsenal since early 2006.

"The number of [Hizbullah] rockets is not known," Kehati said.

Officials said the United Nations has failed to block the return of Hizbullah to the Israeli border. They said the UN Interim Force in Lebanon has refused to act on Israeli intelligence of Hizbullah weapons shipments and troop movements.

"UNIFIL is consumed by the need for force protection and does not want a confrontation with Hizbullah," the official said. "That means UNIFIL does nothing."

Israel has urged European Union members of UNIFIL to increase efforts to stop Hizbullah infiltration south of Lebanon's Litani River. But the officials said EU countries, particularly France, were moving toward a reconciliation with such Hizbullah allies as Syria.

"Israel will not be able to accept the ongoing and growing undercutting of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which is not being implemented, and the continued smuggling of all types of weapons into Lebanon, upsetting the delicate balance along Israel's northern border," Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said.

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