



## Targeting Hezbollah

### Context:

- The Israeli attacks on Hezbollah targets in southern Lebanon following what it called “cross border fires” mark a significant escalation in the crisis that has been building up along the border in recent years.

### What is the background?

- Hezbollah, a Shia militia-cum-political party in Lebanon, and Israel, which have fought two wars before, have been observing a tenuous ceasefire for 14 years.
- It is considered an Iranian-funded terrorist group by both Israel and the United States.
- Tensions began after Israel’s targeting of Iranian weapons and supplies within Syria.
- Israel fears that Iranian supplies to Hezbollah via Syria would leave them stronger, enhancing Israel’s security challenges in the northern border.
- In the recent attacks, Israel targeted an observation post, which the Israeli Defense Forces claimed was used by Hezbollah for intelligence collection.
- The exchange was the latest of several recent spikes in tension along the heavily militarized border, which has been monitored by United Nations forces since the two countries fought a war in 2006.

### Details:

- Hezbollah has been a tough target for Israel.
- Israel, which has bombed Gaza several times since its 2005 withdrawal from the strip, had been careful when it came to Hezbollah.
- In 2000, after 18 years of occupation of southern Lebanon, Israel was forced to withdraw mainly due to the fighting of Hezbollah.
- In 2006, Israel invaded Lebanon, aimed at destroying Hezbollah’s military capabilities. But after a month of Israeli aerial and land attacks, even on the day of the ceasefire, Hezbollah fired hundreds of short-range rockets into northern Israel. Ever since then, both sides have been wary of another open conflict.

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- The militants, on the other side, turned their focus to capacity building after the 2006 war, and, since 2011, to the civil war in Syria.

### What are concerns?

- The raid, at a time when Israel was carrying out an air campaign in Gaza, shows the growing appetite of the newly formed unity government of Netanyahu for war as a means to address the simmering border problems.
- The Baathist Syria has been a vital link between Hezbollah and Iran ever since the group was founded in the early 1980s.
- Assad (President of Syria) has survived the civil war, and Iran has substantially increased its footprint in Syria, bolstering the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis.
- Israel sees this axis as a growing security challenge and hence, started the bombing operations in Syria, risking another conflict with Hezbollah.

### Way forward:

- The past two wars suggest that it would not be easy for Israel, despite its military might, to defeat the battle-hardened Hezbollah fighters at their base.
- Hezbollah, on the other side, might resist an Israeli attack, but risks pulling Lebanon (already battling an economic crisis, political instability and the after-effects of the Beirut blast) into a wider war.
- Both sides should avert such an outcome and stick to the ceasefire.