



Tensions on the Israel-Lebanon Border Threaten a Full-Blown Conflict

As Israel's War on Gaza presses on, other conflicts in the region are on the verge of escalating. Tensions are especially evident on the Israel-Lebanon border, where Hezbollah and Israel have been exchanging cross-border attacks since the onset of the Gaza War. The situation emerged in response to Israel's bombardment of Gaza, which has resulted in the killing of more than 25,000 Palestinian civilians. Hezbollah has expressed that the goal of its actions is to divert Israeli military resources away from Gaza. As such, several commentators pointed out that Hezbollah targets had initially been limited to military ones located along the border zone. Back in early January, Israel carried out an assassination with a drone strike conducted in a populated neighborhood in the capital city of Beirut. This escalated Israel-Lebanon border tensions and led to retaliatory attacks from Hezbollah, who have since attacked Israeli military posts.

A recent Washington Post article unveiled that United States officials have privately warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against opening a second front in Lebanon, with a secret assessment from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in Washington D.C. stating that Israeli forces would find it "difficult to succeed" in a multi-front conflict in both Gaza and Lebanon. Officials fear that a full-scale conflict between Israel and Lebanon would exceed the bloodshed and damage from the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War due to Hezbollah's substantially larger arsenal of long-range and precision weaponry. Since then, Hezbollah is believed to have bolstered its arsenal to be well over 100,000 missiles, with many of these having precision capabilities. There is also concern that any further escalations could draw in other regional actors and proxy forces as well. Thus, it is in no entity's interest to get dragged into a full-scale war in which heavy losses would be incurred. U.S. and European diplomats have made trips to Lebanon and Israel to try to avoid escalation of the tensions, which could possibly lead to a larger regional conflict. The U.S. has a vested interest in achieving a peaceful resolution and putting an end to a situation that, according to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, could easily "metastasize" and lead to a large-scale conflict in which both sides would become deeply entrenched.

Thus far, attempts at achieving a peaceful solution have been unsuccessful with neither side able to find a compromise on the issue. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is supposedly looking to achieve a border deal, however Hezbollah appears focused on achieving a lasting ceasefire in Gaza. Hezbollah leaders have expressed that a ceasefire would be required before any diplomatic talks would be considered between the two countries, yet again highlighting the importance of a cessation of Israeli hostilities in Gaza.

Achieving a peaceful resolution to the situation has become an increasingly troublesome and difficult task. Benny Gantz, a senior Israeli minister and current member of Israel's emergency war cabinet, made comments that signified the possibility of military escalation with Hezbollah and stated that the chances of a diplomatic solution are dwindling. Gantz is just one of many Israeli officials who have made inflammatory remarks that stray from a diplomatic and peaceful solution. Other hawkish comments came from Yaakov Amidror, Israel's former National Security Advisor, who reported that soldiers will be sent to the northern border to prepare for a full-scale war, and from Israel's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, who stated that Israel may target Hezbollah official Hassan Nasrallah and that all options are on the table. Despite Israel's counterproductive statements, the U.S. and its European allies have continued to make attempts at finding a diplomatic solution. The departure of the USS Gerald R. Ford from

the Mediterranean Sea after an eight-month deployment signaled to Lebanon that the U.S. was serious about de-escalating the situation in the region and underscored the importance of a diplomatic approach. With tensions high, the parties involved must pursue a solution in which an all-out war is evaded, and peace is prioritized.