

“Israel realizes that igniting a regional war means the end of Israel.” Interview with Khalil Harb

By [Khalil Harb](#) and [Steven Sahiounie](#)
Global Research, June 12, 2024

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)
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On Monday, [Hezbollah](#) announced it shot down an Israeli Drone, the Hermes 900, over southern Lebanon. The Lebanese resistance group used air defense weapons to down the drone which fell in the vicinity of al-Rehan mountain in Jezzine District.

Hezbollah poses the largest military threat to Israel, according to Israeli and regional security experts.

In 2006, Hezbollah successfully defended an all-out assault by Israel and has only grown stronger since then by greatly expanding their weapons and technologies.

Hezbollah has said the day fighting in Gaza stops will be the day fighting in southern Lebanon will stop, referring to a possible ceasefire.

[Steven Sahiounie of MidEastDiscourse](#) has interviewed [Khalil Harb](#), a freelance Beirut-based journalist, former managing editor of the Lebanese daily Al-Safir, and has worked for the Associated Press and the Lebanese An-Nahar newspaper.

Steven Sahiounie (SS): Israeli officials are threatening Lebanon that this summer is going to be a hot summer, and they mean war. In your opinion, can the Israeli military handle a war with Lebanon, and with the current war in Gaza?

Khalil Harb (KH): It is no secret that Israel has a huge military arsenal and exceptional destructive capacity, thanks to the continuous Western support for it for more than 70 years. Regarding the ability to launch a major strike on Lebanon, this possibility is not excluded, but it is important to point out that the ability to launch a major strike does not

necessarily mean having the ability to wage a major war. Israel is literally caught in a quagmire in Gaza, and it is difficult to imagine that it can wage a war on a new front, a larger front, a front more dangerous than Gaza. As time passes, the resistance in Lebanon reveals a new qualitative weapon. In the past few days, it revealed its use, for the first time ever, of surface-to-air missiles on Israeli warplanes that were violating the skies of Lebanon.



Elbit Hermes 900 & Elbit Hermes 450 UAVs in formation (Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0)

It is true that several advanced Israeli drones were shot down in the past months, including the Hermes 450 and Hermes 900, but this is the first time that the “Islamic Resistance in Lebanon” has announced the firing of surface-to-air missiles at Israeli aircraft, which means that a new page has been opened in the confrontation, after Israel was distinguished by its overwhelming superiority over Lebanon (and all its opponents) with its air force.

Until now, the resistance in Lebanon is still committed to the geographical extent of its military response within the Israeli entity, which does not exceed 15 kilometers. It is not clear whether a comprehensive war will break out, but what is certain is that the resistance has the necessary missile capabilities to inflict significant damage on the Israeli interior in what is known as the “Gush Dan” area, which is considered the economic and financial nerve and human concentration. The question is: Is Israel willing to risk such possibilities?

SS: Lebanon is going through a massive economic crisis, which could be helped by a regional peace agreement. If there was a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, such as the two-state solution, would Lebanon be included?

KH: I am not a supporter of those who say that “peace” with Israel brings economic prosperity. If the question means the economic gains that Lebanon could reap from a peace settlement like this, then I prefer to describe them as crumbs of benefits. The repeated American promises to Lebanon to obtain electricity through arranging cooperation with Egypt and Jordan in this context have been heard by the Lebanese for years... that is, before October 7, 2023, and Washington has been obstructing for years any cooperation in the field

of energy with China, Iran and others. Keeping the Lebanese people in need, and shortages in the field of electricity allows officials of successive American administrations to make empty promises like these, or to portray them as if they were great gains that would come from the promised peace.

SS: The European Union and the United States are putting massive pressure on Lebanon over the Syrian refugees. In your opinion, how will Lebanon solve this problem, and will it affect the political crisis in Lebanon?

KH: The best, easiest and logical way to address the issue of displaced Syrians in Lebanon is through direct communication and coordination between the governments of Beirut and Damascus. There is no alternative to that. They are the two countries directly concerned with this issue, which is turning into an internal crisis in Lebanon and raising tensions. But the problem is that Washington and some European Union countries want two things: first, to try to keep Damascus isolated and prevent communication and cooperation with it in its geographical surroundings, and second, to continue exploiting the card of the displaced Syrians to weaken and aggravate the internal situation in Lebanon, but without causing it to explode, and also to keep Syria and its regime in the appearance of a unsecure and unstable state, thus obstructing the return of the displaced to their homeland.

SS: Lebanon has been without a president for over two years. In your opinion, what will it take for the various Lebanese political parties to elect a president, and what is the role of the West in this process?

KH: From afar, the best way to resolve the issue of the vacuum in the presidency in Lebanon is to prevent the American "conditions" and some Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, from imposing them on Lebanon to determine the criteria for the new president. The fear of some Lebanese leaders of angering the Americans and Saudis, who enjoy humiliating influence in Lebanon, by reaching a settlement on the issue of the presidency, prevents progress on this issue. The pretext is always the "Iranian scarecrow." Some in Washington, Riyadh, and Beirut are betting on a president who will be hostile to Hezbollah, or perhaps less friendly with the party.

SS: There is increasing pressure on the Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah internationally, and domestically, because of their operations against the Israelis. What is your take on the situation on the ground, and what might happen later?

KH: As long as Israel wages its war in this way against Gaza and against the Palestinians in general, the front on which Hezbollah is fighting will not calm down. This is at least what the party says in whispers and in public. Hezbollah is convinced that Israel's victory in the Gaza war means that the entire region will enter a more dangerous and bloody phase. This party considers that its entry into this battle to relieve pressure on Gaza as much as is available, is practically a defense of Lebanon itself. This conviction has not changed in 8 months, and I do not imagine it will change soon.

With the reckless lunatic Netanyahu in power in Israel, there is no hope of either goodness or peace. As for the internal situation in Lebanon, Hezbollah realizes, as many do, that no resistance throughout history has enjoyed popular consensus around it. Look at how there was division in some European societies even in the face of the Nazi occupation of Europe. Through the experiences of Hezbollah and the resistance factions before it in Lebanon, the Lebanese were never united around the resistance. Hezbollah also realizes this, and

therefore, I believe, there is no choice for Lebanon.

The theory of “Swiss neutrality” does not hold true here, and is not applicable. We are next to the last dangerous occupying state in the world, ruled by extremists who want to “exterminate” the Palestinians and Arabs in general and view them with clear racism. Watch their political and ideological discourse in the words of their senior officials, theoreticians and religious leaders.

The dilemma facing Israel now, in my opinion, is that it realizes that igniting a major war in the region means that it will be the Hundred Years War.

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This article was originally published on [Mideast Discourse](#).

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