



# Hezbollah's Escalation Threatens Full-Scale War

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*Hezbollah launched 870 anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), rockets, and one-way attack drones against Israel between June 1 and June 20, already marking a single-month record thus far in the war and a 43 percent increase in the number of total munitions fired compared to all of May. These projectile attacks are causing increased damage and casualties in northern Israel, escalating tensions and risking a full-scale war.*

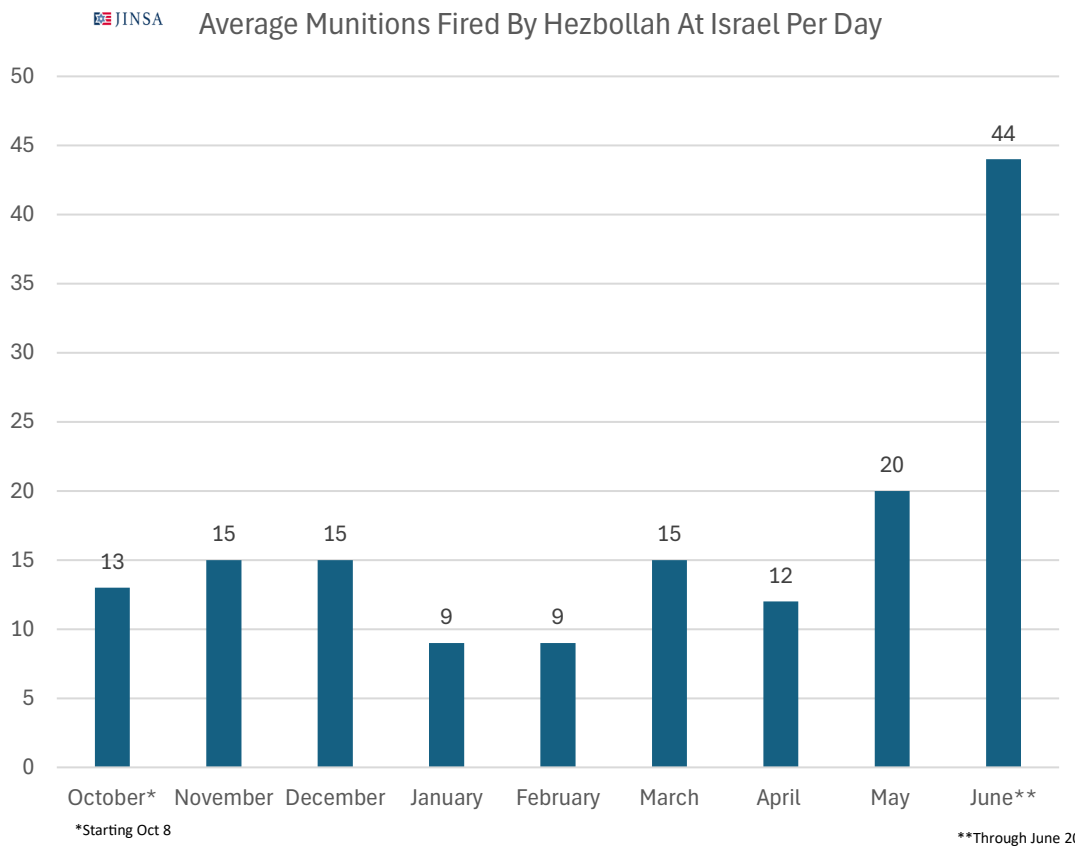
*This escalation suggests that Hezbollah is feeling pressured by Israel's consistent strikes targeting Hezbollah's senior leadership in southern Lebanon, which have eliminated over 340 Hezbollah operatives. Hezbollah is likely seeking to dissuade Israel from launching more such strikes by increasing its own attacks against Israel. This escalate to deescalate strategy increases the risk that Hezbollah will miscalculate and launch an attack that sparks a broader conflict, particularly in light of Israel approving operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon. To dissuade Hezbollah from further escalation, the United States should make clear that it will fully support Israel in the event of a full-scale war with Hezbollah.*

## What Happened?

- June has marked the single-largest escalation by Hezbollah of any month thus far in the war. Since June 1, Hezbollah has launched at least 870 munitions, [killing](#) one person, [causing](#) over 20 [injuries](#), and [destroying](#) over 3,500 acres of land across northern Israel.
  - » On June 12, Hezbollah [fired](#) approximately 215 rockets—the largest attack since the war began—and several missiles and drones at northern Israel, prompting Prime Minister Netanyahu to hold an emergency security assessment that evening.
  - » The attacks continued into June 13, when Hezbollah [claimed](#) to have launched over 100 rockets at Israel simultaneously and said it targeted nine IDF sites with rockets and drones, and June 14, when Hezbollah [fired](#) at least 35 rockets towards northern Israel.
  - » On June 18, Hezbollah released footage [purporting](#) to show one of the terror group's drones flying over the Israeli city of Haifa. The following day, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [threatened](#) that if a “total war” broke out, Hezbollah would fight with “no rules” and added that “no place [in Israel] ... will be spared.”
- On June 18, the Israeli military [announced](#) that senior Israeli military officials “held a joint situational assessment in the Northern Command. As part of the situational assessment, operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon were approved and validated.”
  - » On June 20, *The Times of Israel* [reported](#), citing Israel's *Kan* media outlet, that U.S. special envoy Amos Hochstein, who has been leading indirect negotiations to reach a diplomatic resolution, “told [Lebanese] officials that a diplomatic solution was needed to force the Iran-backed terror group back from the Israel-Lebanon border, or else Israel could launch a limited attack with the backing of the United States.”

## Why Is It Important?

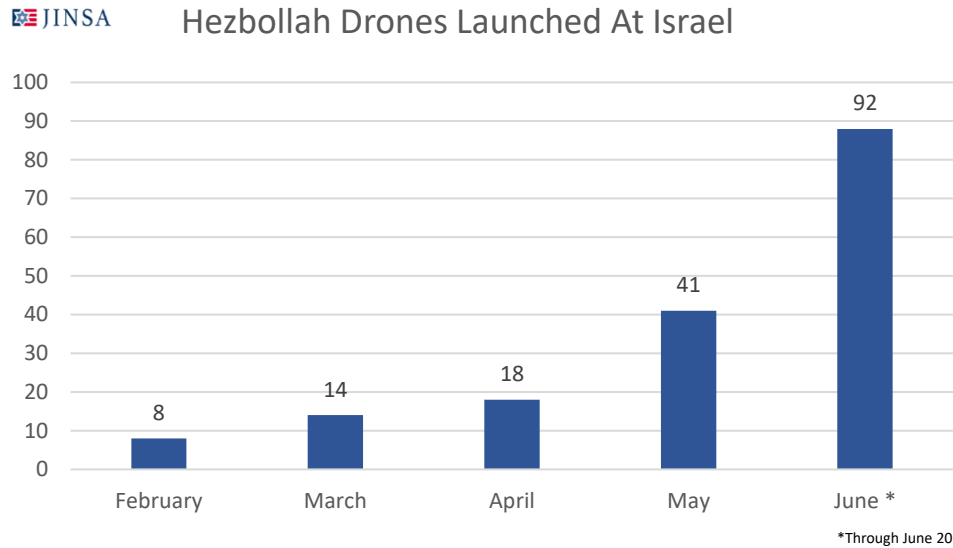
- Hezbollah's June escalation—including its largest attack since the war began and the single-month record for munitions fired in Hezbollah's history—suggests the Iran-backed terror group is feeling the pressure and impact from Israel's regular strikes on Hezbollah's tactical leadership, which have eliminated [over 30](#) Hezbollah commanders and [more than 340](#) Hezbollah operatives.
  - » Hezbollah's apparent escalate to deescalate strategy suggests that the terror group will continue to escalate until it feels it has elicited a satisfactory decline in IDF operations against it. This increases the risk of Hezbollah miscalculating and launching an attack that sparks a broader conflict.
  - » Successfully responding to Hezbollah's escalation will require both steadfast U.S. rhetorical support for Israel's right to self-defense and U.S. leaders providing the IDF with the necessary capabilities to quickly and accurately target Hezbollah military assets.
- Since October, Hezbollah has launched more than 4,000 projectiles targeting Israel, including over 830 in the first two weeks of June alone—more than any other month and a 37% increase over the more than 600 projectiles the terrorist group launched in May—according to JINSA's [Iran Projectile Tracker](#).



Source: JINSA's [Iran Projectile Tracker](#)

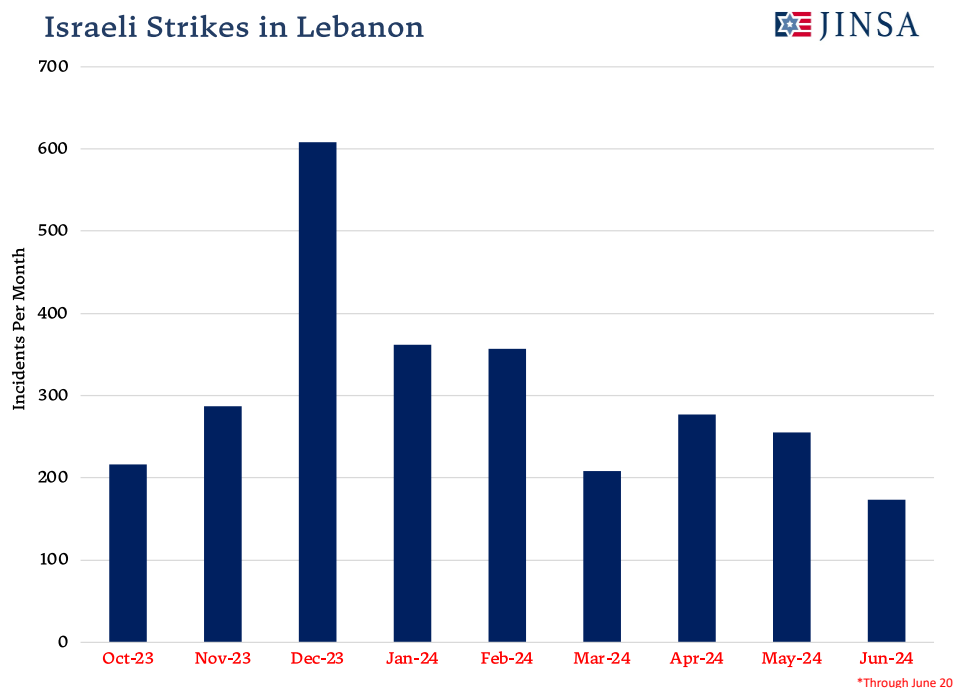
- » In particular, Hezbollah's June escalation has featured a significant use of drones. In the first two weeks of June, according to JINSA's [Iran Projectile Tracker](#), Hezbollah launched 88 drones towards Israel, more than any other month of the current war and 28 percent of the total number of drones it has launched during the war (at least 320 total).

- » This marks a notable shift in the capabilities Hezbollah has used to attack Israel. Before the war, Hezbollah had only launched a total of approximately 19 drones since 2001, according to JINSA's [Iran Projectile Tracker](#).



Source: JINSA's [Iran Projectile Tracker](#)

- To respond to Hezbollah's attacks, the IDF has largely pursued a decapitation strategy through strikes on Hezbollah's senior leaders, eliminating hundreds of Hezbollah operatives and further underscoring the necessity of greater IDF military pressure on Hezbollah.
  - » JINSA has tracked over 2,700 IDF airstrikes in Lebanon since the war began. On March 12, the IDF stated it had [conducted](#) strikes against over 4,500 Hezbollah targets—a number which includes both airstrikes and artillery shelling—and as of June 20, the IDF has [eliminated](#) over 340 Hezbollah operatives.



Source: JINSA's [Iran Projectile Tracker](#)

- » Over 30 Hezbollah commanders have been [killed](#) throughout the war in total, according to the IDF. In addition to the [loss](#) of Taleb Abdullah, commander of one of Hezbollah's regional divisions, in a June 12 IDF strike, Hezbollah's losses also include the deaths of other key senior personnel, including:
  - Ali Hussein Barji, [head](#) of Hezbollah's drone operations in southern Lebanon; Ismail Baz, [commander](#) of Hezbollah's coastal division; Qassem Salawqi, [head](#) of the rocket and missile unit in Hezbollah's coastal division, and; Wissam al-Tawil, a [senior commander](#) in Hezbollah's elite Radwan forces.
  - In addition, an April 1 drone strike in Syria [killed](#) Mohamed Reza Zahedi, a senior commander in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) who oversaw all Iranian weapons shipments to Hezbollah and coordinated the IRGC's intelligence activities in Lebanon.
- » Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [announced](#) on April 24 that "half of the Hezbollah commanders in south Lebanon have been eliminated" since the war began, underscoring the tactical success of Israel's military operations against Hezbollah.
- Hezbollah's recent escalation is likely a response to Israel's decapitation strikes and an effort to deter Israel from inflicting further damage on Hezbollah.
  - » After Israel eliminated Abdullah, the seniormost Hezbollah commander killed thus far the war, on June 12, Hezbollah official Hachem Saffiedine [stated](#) that Hezbollah's response to Abdullah's death "will be to intensify our operations in severity, strength, quantity and quality."
  - » IDF MG (ret.) Ayish [posited](#) in a JINSA webinar on June 11 that Hezbollah's escalation "is clear proof that they are under a lot of pressure ... tactical leaders, operational leaders, intelligence leaders [are being killed] almost on a daily basis."
- Hezbollah's increased volume of projectile attacks may also be an effort to secure a more favorable position in Western-brokered negotiations to de-escalate the situation.
  - » In early May, Israel's cabinet reportedly [began reviewing](#) a proposal [advanced](#) by France that would involve Israel ending "all military action in Lebanon," including aerial operations, in exchange for Hezbollah dismantling its installations near the border and withdrawing its forces to 10 kilometers north of the border.
    - However, on June 4, *Al-Monitor* [reported](#) that U.S. special envoy Amos Hochstein, who has been leading the indirect negotiations to reach a diplomatic resolution, told Lebanon's Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri that negotiations will likely need to be placed on hold until a ceasefire has been reached in Gaza.
    - As a result, Hezbollah may be escalating its attacks in an effort to force Israel back to the negotiating table and extract concessions in any deal, particularly if Hezbollah believes the deal may not be fully enforced.
  - » Any negotiated settlement will require enforcement of the deal's terms. However, former Israeli officials have [voiced concerns](#) that any deal may follow the course of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701 (2006), which Hezbollah has flagrantly violated with its ongoing presence south of the Litani River (some 15 kilometers north of the border) and projectile attacks against Israel.
    - Despite [maintaining](#) a presence in southern Lebanon, the parties who were designated responsibility for enforcing UNSCR 1701—United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeepers and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)—have not been able to curtail Hezbollah's more than 800 projectile attacks, according to JINSA's [Iran Projectile Tracker](#), against Israel since the resolution went into effect.

- The same parties—UNIFIL and the LAF—will likely also be partially or entirely responsible for enforcing any deal that attempts to address Hezbollah’s belligerence against Israel. France’s proposed arrangement would reportedly be [enforced](#) by a combination of UNIFIL peacekeepers and 15,000 troops from the Lebanese military.
- Israel has a strategic need, particularly given Hezbollah’s continuous efforts to penetrate Israel’s air defenses, to eliminate Hezbollah operatives and degrade the terror group’s capabilities.
  - » As IDF MG (ret.) Ayish said in early May, “in terms of deterrence, that is a precondition if you want to [restore](#) security along our borders. I think we are not yet there ... it is definitely unacceptable, when I’m thinking about the 60,000 Israelis that were uprooted from their houses ... already more than six months out of their houses, without schools.”
  - Ayish added, “we have [inflicted](#) severe damage on Hezbollah’s military infrastructure all over Lebanon, not only the southern part of Lebanon. We have created severe damage to their military infrastructure, to include hundreds of their operatives that were killed by us. But with that [approach] you don’t win a war. That is why we can see that the attrition war between us and Hezbollah continue[s].”

## What Should the United States Do Next?

- The United States should support Israel against the Hezbollah threat by strongly signaling, through both [arms transfers](#) and officials’ [rhetoric](#), its support for Israel in its efforts to address the Hezbollah threat.
  - » Currently suspended U.S. arms transfers to Israel should be expeditiously advanced to Israel’s arsenals. The continued [hold-up](#) of certain arms, which Israel relies upon for its current campaign against Hezbollah and which would be indispensable in a full conflagration with Hezbollah, has immediate impacts on both Israel’s material readiness and the perception of it by Israel’s enemies.