

Syrian opposition forces launch rocket attacks in Lebanon

Thomas Gaist
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Fighting raged in Lebanon on Sunday between Hezbollah militants and US-backed Syrian rebels, with at least 12 killed. According to a Lebanese security official, the clashes broke out as Syrian opposition elements prepared to launch rocket attacks against the city of Baalbek, in north-east Lebanon. These clashes near Baalbek come as another indication that the war is spreading beyond Syria's borders.

Eighteen rockets and mortars fell on Lebanese soil on Saturday, and the Shi'ite shrine of Sayida Khawla came under attack from gunmen around 2:30am Sunday morning. Additionally, three Syrian rockets struck the Lebanese city of Hermel, a Hezbollah stronghold, on Sunday morning.

According to the *Daily Star*, the Free Syrian Army has claimed responsibility for the attacks, saying they were launched in response to Hezbollah support for Assad.

Hezbollah is moving aggressively into Syria, helping deal serious defeats to the US-backed opposition. It is now poised to take strategic towns in the north, operating in coordination with Syrian army forces. Hezbollah's leadership has expressed confidence of achieving more victories against the opposition.

Media reports describe thousands of Hezbollah fighters massing in Aleppo province, where they have taken up positions in Shia majority towns north of Aleppo city. "The Aleppo battle has started on a very small scale; we've only just entered the game," said a Hezbollah commander, fresh from fighting in the southern Syrian city of Qusair. "We are going to go after strongholds where they think they are safe. They are going to fall like dominoes."

Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah has pledged his full support to the Assad regime, promising "victory" in Syria to his supporters during a speech

commemorating the 13th anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon.

"We will continue to the end of the road, we accept this responsibility and will accept all sacrifices and expected consequences of this position," he declared.

US-backed opposition forces have met with serious defeats in recent months. As the Assad government continues a sustained offensive against rebel positions in the strategic border town of Qusair, with the support of fresh forces from Hezbollah, the rebels appear incapable of mounting a serious counter-offensive, let alone defeating the regime.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a Qatari Sunni TV host with millions of viewers, issued a call for blood against Assad and Hezbollah on Friday, referring to the Shiite Hezbollah as "the party of the devil." He declared that "Everyone who has the ability and has training to kill" must travel to Lebanon and Syria to support the Sunni forces.

In addition to defeats on the battlefield, the opposition faces an internal crisis. On Monday, a faction within the opposition's National Coalition, the Syrian Revolution General Commission, withdrew its support, declaring that the leadership has "taken initiatives far removed from the true revolution." The SRGC is a secular element of the Syrian opposition, with ties to Western imperialist forces such as the German Left Party. It has demanded that Western air power mount operations to impose a no-fly zone inside Syria.

It has also collaborated in arming Islamist militias fighting the Assad regime since 2011. Yesterday, however, it accused foreign powers of "manipulating" the war, declaring: "Each of these countries puts their blocs up against the others, and these blocs act in line with agendas foreign to the revolution."

The imperialist intervention in Syria is at the center of a plan for restructuring the entire region, for isolating Syria's main ally, Iran, eliminating Hezbollah, and aiming to neutralize opposition to the US and Israel from other Middle East states. Fundamental commercial and strategic interests are at stake. Having insisted that Assad must go, and thus far failing to achieve this goal through a proxy war, Washington is now debating how it will escalate its intervention to support the opposition.

Increasingly, the US and its European allies are considering a direct attack on Syria using their own military forces as a serious option.

Officials announced Monday that Patriot missile batteries deployed to Jordan along with F-16s for the "Eager Lion" war games will remain there indefinitely. Senator John McCain, a leading proponent of expanded military intervention in Syria, told the *Jordan Times* that the deployment of the Patriot systems would mark a "first step" toward the carving out of a "safe zone" for rebel operations in Syria. At least 200 US troops are also being deployed to Jordan.

Israeli war planes conducted maneuvers in Lebanese airspace over the weekend. The Israelis have launched three airstrikes on Syria already, and in 2006 they destroyed much of Beirut. They are now preparing for a full scale assault on their regional adversaries, in coordination with the US.

Calls for direct imperialist intervention are emanating with increasing force from the ruling elite. Speaking on "Face the Nation," Senator McCain asked: "Remember all this talk we've heard for the last year or two—it's inevitable that Bashar Assad will fall?" Following up, he concluded, "Well, I think we can't make that statement today."

"Hezbollah has now invaded, the Iranians are there, Russia is pouring weapons in, and anybody that believes that Bashar Assad is going to go to a conference in Geneva when he's prevailing on the battlefield, it's just ludicrous," McCain said.

Tensions continue to mount between the US and Russia over the Syrian war in the run-up to international talks in Geneva. Secretary of State John Kerry and German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle issued a combined warning to Russia on Friday, claiming that the planned transfer of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to the Syrian government

threatened to disrupt peace talks.



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