Hezbollah runs wild as UN resolution falls flat

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By Josh Lipowsky

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On Aug. 11, 2006, the U.N. Security Council issued Resolution 1701, which ended the 34-day war between Hezbollah and Israel, called for the demilitarization of southern Lebanon and reaffirmed past calls for the disarmament of Hezbollah. The resolution has failed spectacularly as Hezbollah, bristling with heavy weaponry supplied by Iran, has become a regional military player, and there’s plenty of blame to go around.

The war in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel began with a deadly Hezbollah cross-border raid into Israel. The conflict wrought devastation upon Lebanon, leaving more than 1,000 Lebanese dead and hundreds of thousands homeless.

Resolution 1701 specifically charged the Lebanese Armed Forces — with support from the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) — with the responsibility of ensuring that Hezbollah did not rearm. The Security Council also expanded UNIFIL’s mandate to assist the Lebanese government in preventing the proliferation of unauthorized weapons.

Yet today, Hezbollah is one of the main powers in the Syrian civil war, as well as the preeminent military and political power in Lebanon. Indeed, the Israeli military estimated in [April that Hezbollah possessed 130,000 rockets and missiles](http://www.weeklystandard.com/missiles-everywhere/article/2002770) — far more than it did in 2006. Hezbollah is one reason Bashar al-Assad remains in power in Syria. Anti-Assad rebels admit that Hezbollah’s military might has turned the tide of several battles. This is not a group that has disarmed.

The 1989 Taif Agreement, which ended the Lebanese civil war, specifically called for all militant groups in the country to disarm. Including 1701, the U.N. Security Council has passed at least three legally-binding resolutions calling for Hezbollah’s disarmament. But the Lebanese government seems to have accepted Hezbollah’s military presence and its own inability to do anything about it.

Earlier this year, Lebanese President Michel Aoun defended Hezbollah’s role in Lebanon’s defense strategy. In April, Hezbollah conducted a media tour of its military positions in southern Lebanon, showcasing heavy artillery and fortified posts along the Lebanese-Israeli border. At one point, according to journalists’ reports, a UNIFIL officer attempted to intervene.

That officer was instead escorted away by a Lebanese military officer accompanying the tour. It is telling that the Lebanese army, rather than disarming Hezbollah, is instead shielding it from UNIFIL’s gaze.

The failure to disarm Hezbollah has had other consequences for Lebanon, which has itself been the target of Hezbollah’s weapons. After the Lebanese government attempted to shutter Hezbollah’s private telecommunications network in May 2008, Hezbollah fighters clashed with Lebanese forces and captured portions of Beirut in what the government deemed an armed coup.

Yet, Hezbollah emerged politically stronger as a partner in Lebanon’s coalition government, thanks to a Qatar-negotiated agreement. In 2009, the Lebanese government issued a policy statement affirming Hezbollah’s right to bear arms.

Since then, Hezbollah has dragged Lebanon into the neighboring Syrian war. As a result, al-Qaeda, ISIS and other groups have murdered Lebanese civilians in attacks on Hezbollah-controlled cities and villages.

Hezbollah has also expanded beyond Lebanon’s borders into Yemen, where the internationally-recognized Yemeni government has accused it of training and fighting alongside Houthi rebels against Saudi Arabia. If 1701 had been fully enforced, Hezbollah would be playing a much more diminished role — or no role — in these countries.

Hezbollah’s participation in the Lebanese government protects it from any government or military action, as it would surely trigger another civil war. Even while Lebanon is far from the front line in the fight against Hezbollah, the Lebanese government remains bound by U.N. Security Council resolutions and its own agreements.

Until the Lebanese government is willing and able to confront Hezbollah, the Security Council should at the very least expand UNIFIL’s mandate to actively combat Hezbollah’s rearmament. Sadly, 11 years after 1701 was passed, Hezbollah’s danger to the entire region has never been greater.