Iran pays $830 million to Hezbollah

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Two years after the nuclear deal was signed by Iran and world powers, the Islamic Republic is reported to have boosted its financial support to Hezbollah to $800 million a year, a dramatic increase from the $200m. it was said to be giving its proxy when sanctions were in place.

Hezbollah, one of the most prominent terrorist organizations in the world, has become bogged down fighting in Syria for Bashar Assad. Of its approximately 22,000 fighters, about 7,000 are fighting for the Assad regime, and some 2,000 have been killed in the four years the group has spent in Syria.

The US and European countries lifted sanctions against Iran in January 2016, releasing roughly $100 billion in assets after international inspectors found that Iran had dismantled large parts of its nuclear program. According to US media, officials say President Donald Trump is ready to extend those waivers that were issued under the Obama administration.

According to IDF assessments, while Hezbollah has increased its military capabilities due to its fighting in Syria, the group has spread its troops across the entire Middle East and is hurting financially.

The finances of the Lebanese Shi’ite group, designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by dozens of countries around the globe, also has been hit hard due to years of sanctions by the United States.

In June, a US congressional committee met to discuss enhancing sanctions targeting Hezbollah met with four security experts for advice on additional legal actions against the group’s financial network.

According to the committee, the 2015 Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act (HIPA), which threatens sanctions against anyone who finances the group in any significant way, was a good start but needs enhancing because Hezbollah continues to remain a significant threat to Israel.

Iran also is reported to be spending hundreds of millions of dollars for its militias in Syria and Iraq, as well as supporting Houthi rebels in Yemen who are fighting pro-government forces backed by a Saudi-led coalition.

Although HIPA placed major restrictions and other measures of the Lebanese banking sector, lawmakers in Washington believe it needs to be widened to cripple the group, which is involved in fighting in those countries.

Tehran, which froze its financial support to Hamas in the Gaza Strip after the group refused to support the Assad regime in 2012, is now reported to be providing the Gazan terrorist group some $60m.-70m.

In August, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar said ties have been restored and that Iran is “the largest backer financially and militarily” to Hamas’s military wing.

Meanwhile, the IDF on Thursday afternoon announced the end of the large-scale Or Hadagan military drill in northern Israel. The exercise, with tens of thousands of soldiers from all branches of the army simulating a war with Hezbollah, was the largest IDF drill in almost 20 years.

“The objective of the exercise was to improve the Northern Command, the Northern Corps and the ability of its divisions to fight the multi-branch operational system in the Northern Command, with an emphasis on the Lebanese front,” the Spokespersons Unit said.

During the drill, large numbers of aerial, naval and land vehicles and equipment were used and troops were trained in joint exercises. Both defense and offensive capabilities, as well as fire power, intelligence and simultaneous military maneuvers were practiced in several sectors of the northern front.

The Home Front Command also practiced implementation of the plan to evacuate residents of communities that sit on the border with Lebanon.

Although the primary threat posed by Hezbollah remains its missile arsenal, which has been rebuilt with the help of Iran since the 2006 Second Lebanon War, the IDF believes the next war will see the group try to bring the fight to the home front by infiltrating Israeli communities to inflict significant civilian and military casualties.