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# Crisis seen as chance to reshape Mideast

The Boston Globe

## Vying powers look for an edge

By Anne Barnard, Globe Staff | July 15, 2006

JERUSALEM -- The escalating Hezbollah-Israeli confrontation is just one of several political and military showdowns playing out simultaneously as competing players vie to reshape the Middle East according to their own interests.

One arena is the exchange of Hezbollah rockets and Israeli airstrikes that Israeli and Lebanese officials alike have begun to call a war. Another is the bloody confrontation between Israel and the Hamas ruling party in the Gaza Strip.

A wide array of players -- from the militant groups Hezbollah and Hamas to their backers, Syria and Iran, and their biggest enemies, Israel and the United States, all with different goals -- hopes to seize on the growing crisis.

The Lebanese-based militant group Hezbollah triggered the current escalation by kidnapping two Israeli soldiers in a cross-border raid Wednesday and sending a volley of rockets into northern Israel. That clash occurred two weeks after Hamas fighters crossed into Israel and captured an Israeli soldier and killed two others, prompting fierce Israeli raids into Gaza.

"Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria, and Iran are working in alliance, and their agenda isn't just internal, it's regional . . . to change the balance of power in the Middle East," said Ahmad Moussalli, a political science professor at the American University of Beirut.

 **GLOBE GRAPHIC:** [An intricate web](#)

Moussalli said that Hezbollah's aggressive move was aimed at showing that Arabs can still deal military blows to Israel and indirectly to the United States by staging such a brazen raid, as well as help its state backers, Syria and Iran, flex their muscles at a time when both are on the ropes. Iran is threatened with international sanctions over its alleged nuclear arms program and Syria wants to regain its regional influence after its embarrassing ouster from Lebanon last year.

Israel, on the other hand, wants to win international support for its newly

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aggressive stance against Hamas and Hezbollah, and paint its enemies as part of a larger anti-Western coalition led by a nuclear-hungry Iran. An obstacle to the Israeli goal is that even though Hamas and Hezbollah are both shunned as terrorist groups by many countries, they have won power through democratic elections -- Hamas ruling the Palestinian Authority and Hezbollah fielding a bloc in the Lebanese parliament.

Mark Regev, a spokesman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry, said Israel wants not just to stop Hamas and Hezbollah from firing rockets into Israel, but to force the total disarmament of Hezbollah -- a well-organized military group that operates as a state-within-a-state in southern Lebanon alongside the weak Lebanese government -- and to win strong international action against Iran and Syria.

Even more broadly, he said, Israel wants to build international consensus that armed groups should not be allowed to run in elections and to convince its allies that Hezbollah and Hamas have now made "irrelevant" the decades-old assumption that Israel can unilaterally push for Middle East peace by giving up territory.[Continued...](#)

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