



Israeli army: heaviest tank losses in over 40 years

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within 24 hours on March 26 . [The Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah has reported the results of several ambushes against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon; 21 Israeli Merkava battle tanks](#) are said to have been destroyed

are reported to have been destroyed since the start of Israel's renewed offensive against Lebanon [A total of 100 battle tanks](#) . The group reported dozens of successful hits within 48 hours, dubbing it the "Merkava Massacre." The attacks, using guided missiles and drones, targeted multiple sites, including Debel, Al Qantara, and Taybeh. Analysts highlight the cost disparity between inexpensive missiles and high-priced tanks.

Further consequences of the fighting included the firing of over 60 rockets at targets in the Galilee region that day, supplemented by much longer-range attacks against Israeli targets launched by Hezbollah's close strategic partner, Iran. Hezbollah artillery units also targeted Israeli command posts in the Taybeh, Rab Thalathin, and Oudaiseh areas, while simultaneously shelling Israeli reinforcements sent to evacuate the wounded. Hezbollah reported further attacks: "the headquarters of the Israeli Ministry of War (Kyria) in central Tel Aviv and the Dolphin

Barracks of the military intelligence branch north of Tel Aviv, using a series of specialized rockets."

The majority of the losses of Israeli tanks occurred in a single engagement between the towns of Taybeh and Qantara, after Israeli units reportedly "advanced to conduct a maneuver to seize control of the area".

In its official statement, Hezbollah said its forces had "observed them and prepared to lure the enemy into a well-planned ambush," which resulted in its forces "succeeding in thwarting the enemy's maneuver and inflicting losses, including 10 Merkava tanks and D9 bulldozers."

The results of the Hezbollah units' successes represent the heaviest losses suffered by the Israeli armored forces in over 40 years – since the early stages of the Lebanon War, when Merkava tanks and older US-supplied tanks clashed with the Syrian army's newly commissioned T-72 tanks and anti-tank guided missiles.

The latest setbacks for Israeli operations follow reports that Hezbollah [has used](#) its Radwan special forces for counter-offensives against Israeli units . These units had not previously been deployed in combat with Israeli forces, but observations of their counterinsurgency operations in Syria have led analysts to conclude that they are significantly more capable than Hezbollah's regular units.

The presence of Radwan's troops on the front could be a major reason for the higher losses suffered by Israeli tanks since mid-March.

Merkava tanks had previously [suffered a number of losses](#) during Israeli army operations against Palestinian paramilitary groups in the Gaza Strip from the end of 2023, but the far smaller number of equipment, the poorer fortifications and the lower training standards in the area of operations meant that the losses were negligible compared to those in battles with Hezbollah.

Cooperation between the Shiite Hezbollah and Lebanese Christians

A [report by The Telegraph](#) from Ras Baalbek, a Catholic Christian city in the northern Bekaa Valley of Lebanon near the border with Syria, paints a different picture than is often reported in the West.

The city, which boasts two Byzantine churches, has allied itself with Hezbollah to preserve its cultural heritage and protect its 6,000 devout Catholic inhabitants.

The two communities are so close that the Iranian-backed militant group buys a Christmas tree for the village every year.

"The relationship between the village and [Hezbollah](#) is stronger than the one with the Pope," Rifiat Nasrallah, 60, a quarry worker and village headman whose marble sarcophagi line the village cemetery, told The Telegraph during a visit in the midst of the war.

"The Vatican has done nothing for us, but Hezbollah has shed its blood to protect us. The Pope has only offered prayers."

Two Lebanese army soldiers, whose political leaders have vowed to disarm Hezbollah, are sitting in Nasrallah's house while he explains local politics. On one wall of the room hangs a crucifix next to a portrait of Hassan Nasrallah (no relation), the former Secretary-General of Hezbollah.

Christian, Sunni and Shiite Muslim villages lie close together.

While The Telegraph travels there, Israeli jets and drones are hunting Hezbollah positions in the hills to the west, after the militants fired one of their long-range surface-to-surface missiles at "the entity" last night.

I visited the Bekaa Valley in 2018 and 2021, including the town of Zahle (pronounced Sachle) with its large churches, mosques, and a number of informal refugee camps, as well as the fascinating ancient Roman city of Baalbek. The valley, which borders directly on Syria, is simultaneously beautiful, dangerous, and cosmopolitan. In 2018, Israeli fighter jets and helicopters repeatedly flew over the region at varying altitudes, in violation of all international law.

Incidentally, there is an excellent Lebanese restaurant in Vienna where you can get excellent wine from the Xsara winery in Zahle.