Hezbollah's "Land of Tunnels" - the North Korean-Iranian connection

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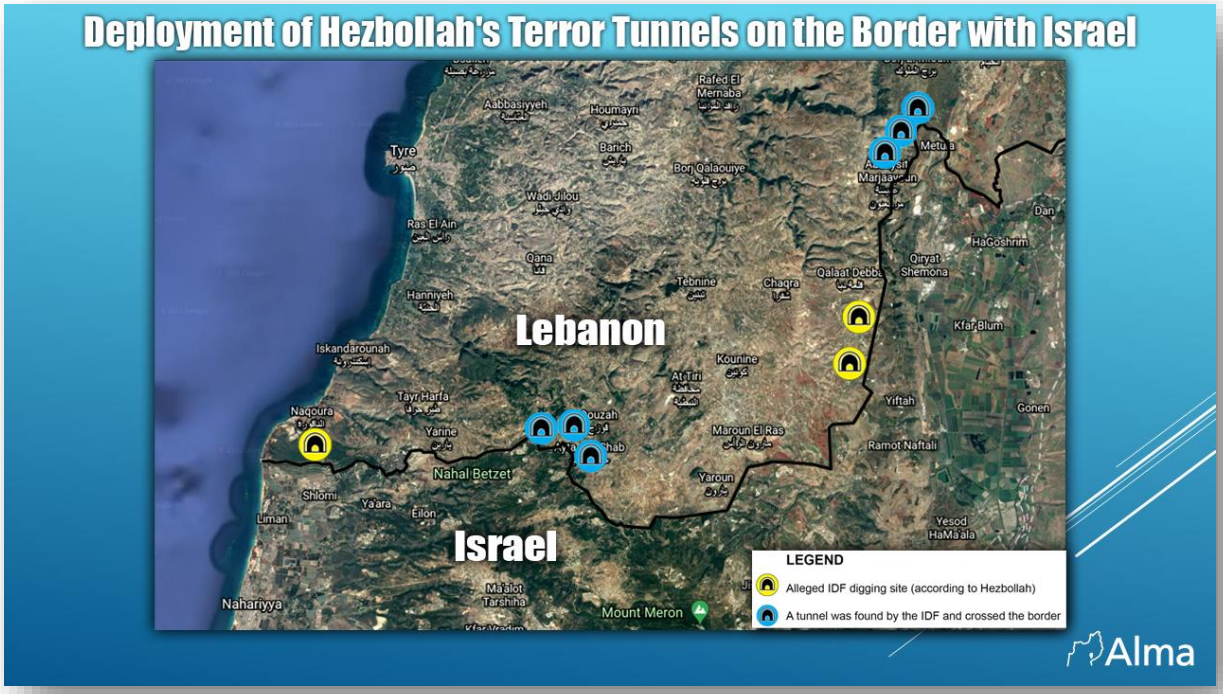
In May 2021, we were exposed to Hamas' huge network of tunnels in the Gaza Strip, nicknamed by the IDF the "Hamas Metro". In our estimation, after the Second Lebanon War of 2006, Hezbollah, with the help of the North Koreans and the Iranians, set up a project forming a network of "inter-regional" tunnels in Lebanon, a network significantly larger than the "Hamas" metro (in our assessment, Hamas used Iranian and North Korean knowledge to build its tunnels as well). It is not merely a network of offensive and infrastructure local tunnels, in or near villages, it's a network of tens of kilometers of regional tunnels that extend and connect the Beirut area (Hezbollah's central headquarters) and the Beqaa area (Hezbollah's logistical operational rear base) to southern Lebanon (which is divided into two staging areas named by Hezbollah "the lines of defense").

We call this inter-regional tunnel network "Hezbollah's Land of the Tunnels."

Various reports indicate that in the late 1980s, and even more so after the Second Lebanon War (2006), North Korean advisors significantly assisted Hezbollah's tunnel project (regarding Hezbollah's history of interaction with North Korea, see appendix A). Hezbollah, inspired and supported by the Iranians, saw North Korea as a professional authority on the subject of tunneling, based on the extensive North Korean experience that had accumulated in building tunnels for military use since the 1950s (regarding the North Korean tunnels, see appendix B.)

Hezbollah's model is the same as the North Korean model: tunnels in which hundreds of combatants, fully equipped, can pass stealthily and rapidly underground. In actuality it's two types of tunnels we're talking about: offensive tunnels and infrastructure tunnels. While in Israel, professional officials believed that breaking rocks in the mountainous areas of the Galilee on the Israeli-Lebanese border can be very difficult if not impossible, but in reality, the tunnels excavated between the two Koreas (north and south), were excavated in a mountainous terrain, which is considered even more rugged and solid than the terrain in the Galilee region. As it turned out, at least 6 Hezbollah offensive tunnels built and excavated into Israeli territory for many years, with the inspiration and support of North Korea and Iran, were exposed by the IDF in December 2018 as part of Operation "Northern Shield".



Map of Hezbollah's offensive tunnels on the border with Israel

North Korean tunnel on the border with South Korea (right) and Hezbollah's offensive tunnel near the community of Zar'it (left) – pay attention to the significant similarity between the two tunnels.

As for the infrastructure tunnels from which Hezbollah will conduct the war against Israel in Lebanon - since the Second Lebanon War in 2006, we've seen the use of infrastructure tunnels within and near the local villages. It is a network of tunnels located within and near the villages in southern Lebanon, both in the first and second staging areas ("the lines of defense" - as Hezbollah calls them).

In our estimation, after the Second Lebanon War of 2006, Hezbollah, with the help of the North Koreans and the Iranians, established the "Land of the Tunnels": a project of an "inter-regional" tunnel network of enormous magnitude.

The Arabic-language London-based newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat previously quoted a senior Revolutionary Guards officer saying that a North Korean adviser had helped build a 25-kilometer-long Lebanese tunnel with many connecting and gathering points used by Hezbollah to transport and concentrate forces. In our estimation, it's highly likely that this isn't just one sophisticated, long tunnel...

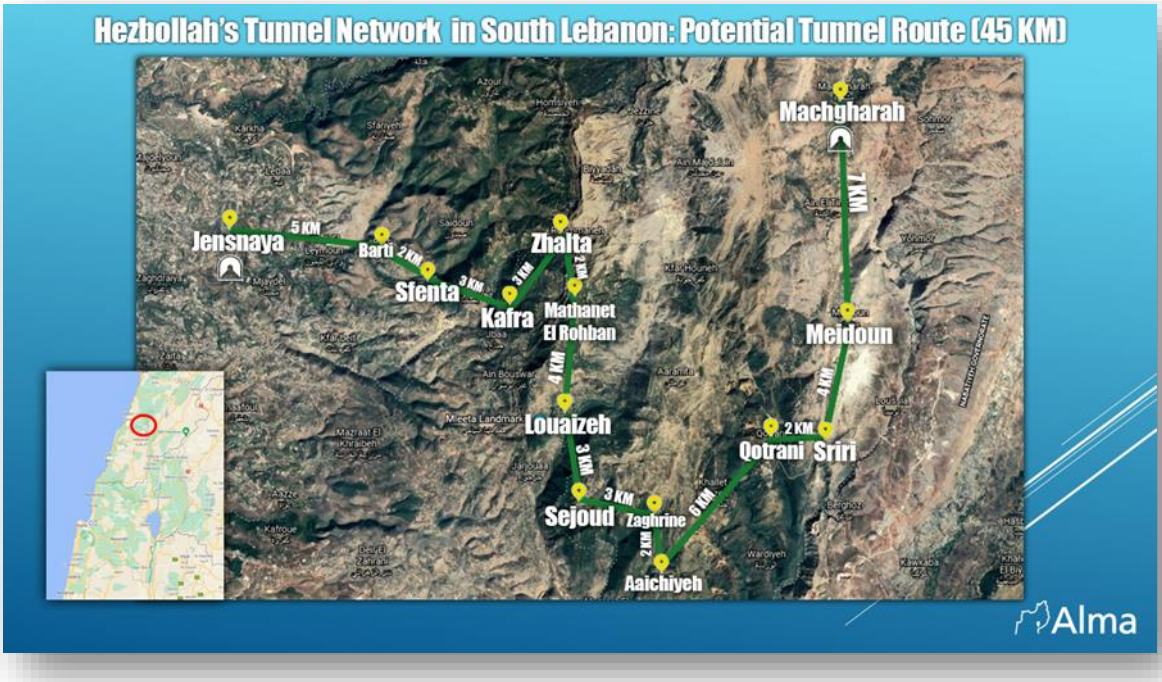
In our opinion, Hezbollah's "Land of the Tunnels" project is much larger than the Hamas "metro" project in the Gaza Strip that the IDF exposed in the last operation in the Gaza Strip in May 2021.

A unique indication from 2008[1], includes a number of testimonies and even an infrastructure map that can demonstrate the size of Hezbollah's project to us. One testimony describes an instance in which Hezbollah operatives stopped a number of local Christian residents at a checkpoint in the area of Jezzine. The Hezbollah operatives blocked the resident's path, firing live ammunition. After the residents were detained, they were extensively questioned as to their activities in the area. The residents claimed that they did not notice anything unusual in the area, and that in their opinion there was no real justification for detaining them and interrogating them at the checkpoint. As far as Hezbollah was concerned, there was a very clear justification for delaying the residents and

[1] https://www.lebanese-forces.com/2008/07/10/13688/

preventing them from continuing their movement through the area. The area of Jezzine and the surrounding villages, where the residents were detained, is the area where part of the Hezbollah's tunnels and fortifications project was being carried out. The area is located within the "second line of defense north of the Litani River" area and constitutes a "defensive line to prevent an Israeli invasion". It should be noted that this area is not a natural Hezbollah area populated by Shiites, but an area that was originally considered Christian before Hezbollah took control of it.

According to our findings, it seems that part of the project was conducted in the geographical area of the Jensnaya Wadi's - the valley between al- Hasania and Wadi el Leymoun - Barti – al-Sfenta (between Sniyeh and Bouslaiya) - Mizra Kafra - south Zhalta. In addition, in the geographical area of al-Tswuan– al -Roummaneh– Jabal Toura (radar) – Louaizeh – Sejoud – Mizra'a al-Zaghrine – al-Aishia – al-Qotrani- al- Sriri - Bracha Jabour - Meidoun - continuing to the western Beqaa. **In our assessment, a tunnel of about 45 km was built in this area.**



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According to the indications, Hezbollah carried out fortification works in those geographical areas using large quantities of construction materials, while <u>the work was carried out by a Korean company under the supervision of an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps officer.</u>

Residents living in the area were very apprehensive about the work carried out by Hezbollah. From the evidence one can learn about their displeasure stemming from the possibility that Hezbollah may plant weapons on their land, exposing them to attacks. In addition, Hezbollah treats these lands as its own. In areas where Hezbollah carried out its work, residents wanting to build a structure on their own land were obligated to seek permission from the Hezbollah security official in the area, in order to proceed.

The "Land of the Tunnels" was built with the assistance of a North Korean company specializing in the development of underground infrastructures, called the "Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation". (KOMID – the company is also known by other names, **see appendix C**). **The actual construction was carried out by Hezbollah's Jihad Construction Foundation which is in fact** a branch of the Iranian Jihad Construction which was founded in 1988. The original purpose of the Jihad Construction Foundation is to repair war damage and rebuild buildings following military events. (Regarding the Jihad Construction Foundation, please see an in-depth report by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center - https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/jihad-al-bina-association-lebanon-hezbollah-social-foundation-engaged-construction-social-projects-among-shiite-community-major-component-hezbollahs-civilian-infr/)

The Jihad Construction Foundation used civilian companies to serve as cover for the construction of the "Land of the Tunnels". One of the companies suspected of involvement in the construction and civilian cover-up is the "Bekaa Building and Contracting Company", formerly known as the "Iranian Authority for the Reconstruction of Lebanon". The company was founded in 2005 under the sponsorship of the Revolutionary Guards and **until 2013 was headed by Iranian military engineer Hassan Shateri (also known as Hessam Khoshnevis). Shateri, a Major General of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Quds Force, was assassinated in Syria in February 2013. It is highly likely that Shateri was responsible for carrying out Hezbollah's tunneling project in Lebanon.** In our assessment, nowadays, the company operates as an integral arm of the Jihad Construction Foundation **(see appendix D** – "The Company").

The "Bekaa Building and Contracting Company" and Hassan Shateri are an example of how the military organization, the IRGC, owns civilian companies, appointing military personnel to manage them. Through civilian companies, the IRGC executes its operational plans and even manages to maintain an independent and profitable economic infrastructure.

IRGC officer (Maj. Gen.) - Engineer Hassan Shateri

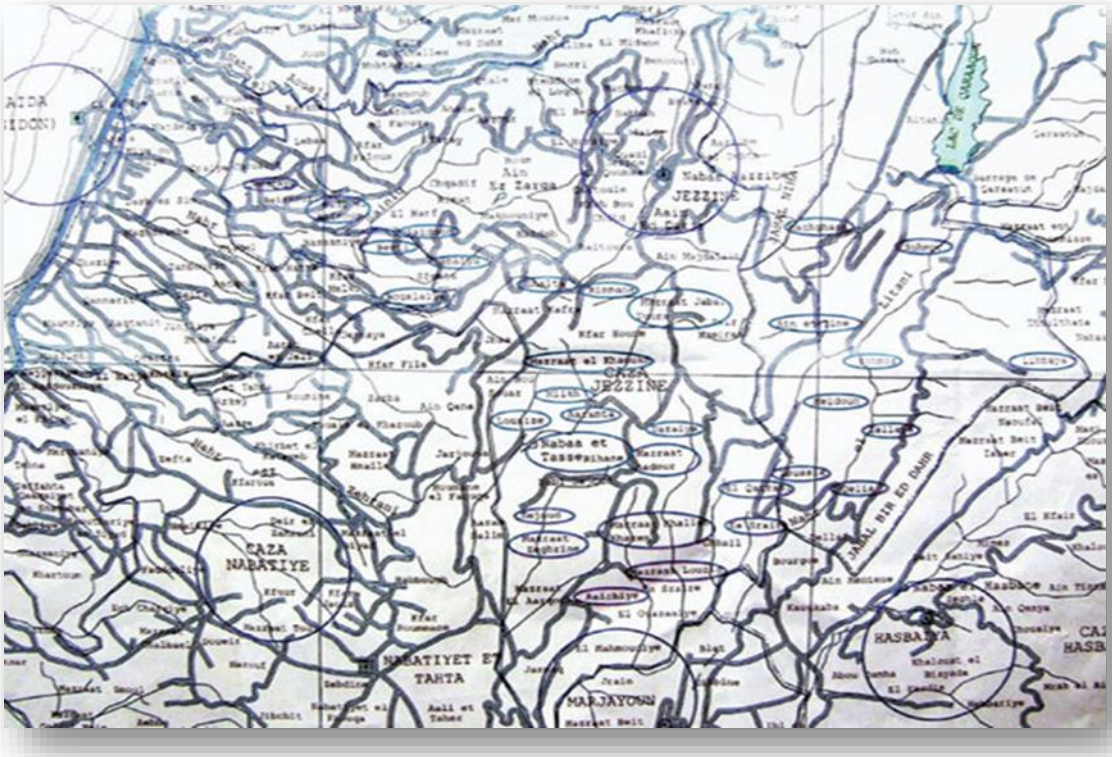
We have a map of southern Lebanon that includes the geographical area between Sidon in the west, Lake Qaraoun in the east, and Marjaayoun and Nabatieh in the south. In all likelihood, in our estimation, the map shows the "Land of the Tunnels" in the geographical area in question. The map is marked, by an unknown party, with polygons (circles) indicating 36 geographic regions, towns and villages. In our assessment, these polygons mark Hezbollah's staging centers as part of the "defense" plan against an Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Each local staging center ("defense") possesses a network of local underground tunnels. Between all these centers, an infrastructure of regional tunnels was built interconnected them.

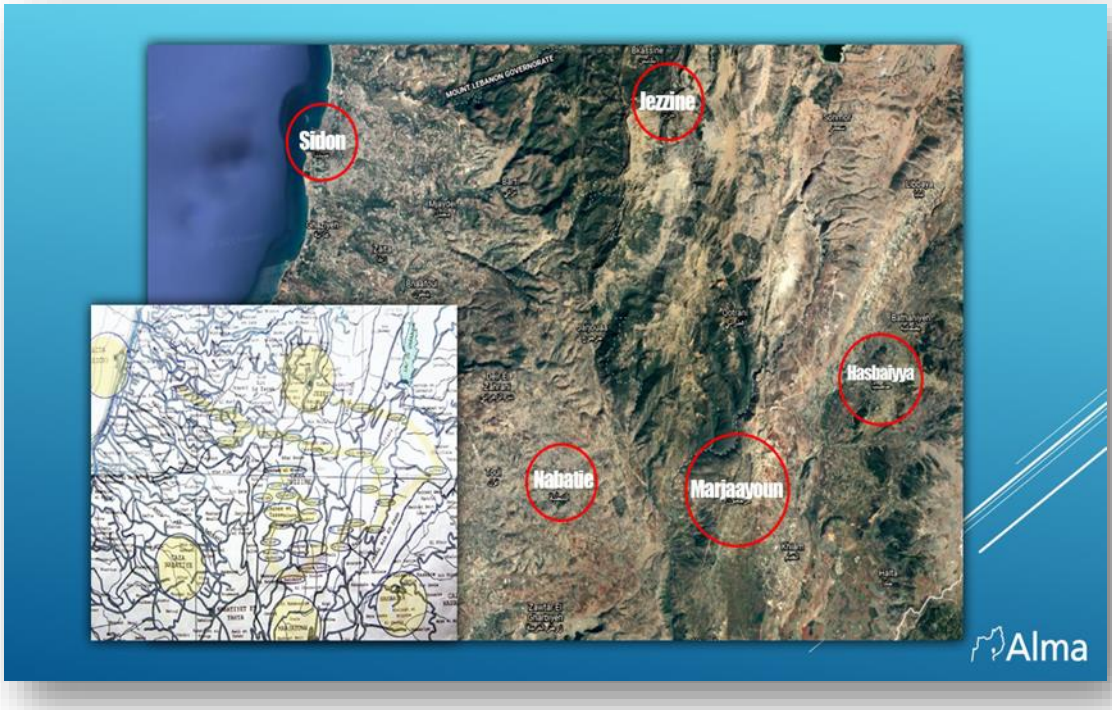
In our estimation, the cumulative length of all the tunnels in the "Land of the Tunnels" can reach up to hundreds of kilometers. Hezbollah tunnels, like Hamas tunnels, contain underground command and control rooms, weapons and supply depots, field clinics and specified designated shafts used to fire missiles of all types (rockets, surface-to-surface missiles, anti-tank missiles and anti-aircraft missiles). These shafts are hidden and camouflaged and cannot be detected above ground.

They open for a short period of time for the purpose of firing their armament and are then immediately shut closed for the purpose of reloading the hydraulic launcher with a new ordnance. Thus, the infrastructure tunnels are also used for artillery attacks.

In addition, the tunnels allow the maneuvering of forces from place to place for the purpose of reinforcing defense positions or for carrying out an attack in a safe, protected, and invisible manner. In our assessment, motorcycles, ATVs and other small vehicles can also be transported through some of the tunnels.

Original photo of the map:





Appendix A – The history of the relationship between Hezbollah and North Korea:

Various reports indicate that in the late 1980s, and even more so after the Second Lebanon War (2006), North Korean advisors significantly assisted Hezbollah's tunnel project based on the extensive North Korean experience accumulated in building tunnels for military use dating back to the 1950s (regarding the North Korean tunnels **see Appendix B**.). In 2008, Larry A. Niksch, a researcher and security expert on East Asia, presented the US Congress with a document presenting the relationship between Hezbollah and North Korea, and the support that Hezbollah benefits from this relationship. According to the information he presented, the relationship between North Korea and Hezbollah began in the late 1980s, and continued into the 1990s, when a Hezbollah team visited North Korea. During the same visit, the North Korean government provided the Hezbollah team with several months of an underground tunnel training program.

In 2000, the program expanded, with the deployment of North Korean instructors to southern Lebanon who began assisting and coaching Hezbollah personnel in the development of extensive underground facilities, including tunnels and bunkers. The "Korea mining development trading corporation" or KOMID for short, is the North Korean company responsible for the efforts of developing underground infrastructures (the company is also known by other names). Myung Liu Doo, was one of the North Korean experts that assisted Hezbollah in constructing underground structures. In early 2005, Myung Liu Doo visited Iran to assist them in building underground structures for its nuclear program, making them resilient to attacks from the air.

In 2004, a Japanese journalist named Takashi Arimoto reported on a meeting between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and senior North Korean officials, during which he sought North Korean assistance for Hezbollah in the planning and construction of underground military installations, bunkers and tunnels. These facilities, bunkers and underground tunnels helped improve Hezbollah's ability during the Second Lebanon War in 2006, when Hezbollah managed to hide about 1,500 rocket launchers inside the tunnels, making them difficult to locate by the Israeli Air Force. Also, during the Second Lebanon War, when Israeli ground forces entered southern Lebanon, Hezbollah operatives used networks of underground tunnels and bunkers to move from place to place and sometimes attack Israeli forces unexpectedly.

In September 2006, it was revealed that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and senior members of the organization, such as Hezbollah's military chief, the head of the security and intelligence service and Hezbollah's counterintelligence commander, had previously conducted training and advanced training programs in North Korea. (The names mentioned in this context are Mustafa Bader al-Din and Ibrahim Aqil).

In April 2007, the daily online publication, “Intelligence Online”, claimed that North Korea and Hezbollah were tightening ties following the Second Lebanon War. The website quoted IRGC sources as saying that Iran and North Korea had reached an agreement in which about 100 Hezbollah field commanders would receive infiltration-through-command-tunnels training (offensive tunnels), survival and counter-espionage in North Korea. The objective of the training was to enable Hezbollah fighters to improve their ability to infiltrate into Israel in the next war. With this agreement, in our opinion, Hezbollah's offensive tunnel project against Israel was conceived.

According to additional information we have found since 2014, "KOMID" signed a $13 million deal with Hezbollah for the supply of engineering materials for excavating tunnels on the border, and in addition, for the transfer of North Korean engineering technology to Hezbollah's "Jihad Construction Foundation". KOMID sent 6 of its personnel to southern Lebanon, to the area of the town of al-Hermel in the northern Bekaa near the Syrian border, in order to assist the digging of the tunnels and to aid in the building of underground missile storage sites and underground missile launch pads. As of 2014, $6 million had been transferred to the North Korean company by Lebanese and Iranian officials in China and Thailand, apparently in the form of heroin and cocaine that the North Koreans were meant to distribute in East Asian markets. (https://adengad.net/public/articles/116051).

Appendix B - North Korea and offensive tunnels:

In the 1950s, North Korea's soldiers built a system of long tunnels along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)/border with South Korea, through which they planned to send entire brigades on a ground invasion. Since the 1970s, South Koreans have discovered several offensive tunnels that were remarkably equipped with power and lighting, sleeping spaces and weapons depots. The tunnels were carved into granite and painted black to give them the appearance of coal mines in case they were discovered. Although no new tunnels have been discovered since 1990, both the South Korean military and the U.S. military have over the years expressed concerns that North Korea may have excavated thousands of additional underground tunnels; in April 2013, North Korean ruler Kim Jong Un claimed he could send 30,000 troops to the southern neighbor through assault tunnels excavated along the border.[2]

Hezbollah's model is believed to be the North Korean model: tunnels, that hundreds of fully equipped fighters can pass through in a short period of time. Moreover, in a 2014 court ruling,[3] Royce C. Lamberth, a Judge in the United States District Court of Columbia, accepted a civil suit filed by residents of the Israeli northern town of Safed, ruling that North Korea and Iran were liable for damages from the Second Lebanon War. In the ruling, the judge wrote: "North Korea has provided Hezbollah with a wide range of support and resources, including military training, intelligence training and assistance in building a vast system of underground military infrastructure, tunnels, bunkers, bases and storage sites in south Lebanon." Referring to the tunnel system on the northern border, the judge wrote that "[North Korea provided] critical assistance in building an extensive and sophisticated fortified tunnel network in the area south of the Litani River and bordering Israel. This structure proved to be invaluable to Hezbollah in the course of the 2006 war. The configuration and parameters of the tunnel system closely resemble the layout of similar systems in the demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea.".[4] [5]

While in Israel, professional officials believed that the breaking of the rocks in the mountainous areas of the Galilee on the Israeli-Lebanese border can be very difficult if not impossible, in reality, the tunnels excavated between the two Koreas (north and south), were excavated in a mountainous terrain, which is considered even more rugged and solid than the terrain in the Galilee region.[6]

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[2] https://www.inss.org.il/he/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/systemfiles/SystemFiles/%D7%90%D7%99%D7%9A%20%D7%A0%D7%94%D7%A4%D7%9B%D7%95%20%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%A0%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%AA%20%D7%9C%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%A7%20%D7%94%D7%9B%D7%9C%D7%9B%D7%9C%D7%99%20%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%A9%D7%99%20%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%96%D7%94.pdf

[3] https://casetext.com/case/kaplan-v-hezbollah-2?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=aa8bb2a4ab7afd8bae04c991cc61d7ff9462db39-1626597716-0-AS8fnOMt4tsMuZUWs3t8da7BStqOIQrIu6w_D1nCXp1jyVXHfYWQSicZDY3PVl-oxywff6e5bljalNT7qz5RjE7jHjZjQjpY2f9wk_Z7PH79WQJxh_ceqJa_WrlHg2n3ePwa_4bi7La7dfWcET8UDYkb5cbNAKaYCl0j0Tveybld4a31dqXEK32liCnjG9iRbI8Fyy8ezW-1T7vPBHsJUP7guaKRJ8IMaYcf-X0zMLmgWfptIgWq8QDZM_nw5PXU9FMG9BDUkEOBeXzlU9E3vHwn2O3HmEJZZJOo0mr8_f0AgzGGL8N8ro7cy2N0lVu8y_z0FY3nPnLXNiTP4SykvJm8jyS4ef3CN7pNIF2D1nve6SCZFQsyP8qxD4diG8WnP43pIv6_8sRO3fzsDQE7XekPAGyoIDejS5i2DTqXTJFbRCDpsIh7UO8HwFy533S4ELy_yoePdudjoKH0Z2qpiSi2boip-tF3v7EbYZ_yA_fQ

[4] https://news.walla.co.il/item/2768797

[5] https://nationalinterest.org/feature/north-koreas-hamas-connection-below-the-surface-11195

[6] https://janoubia.com/2017/03/15/%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84/

DMZ- Demilitarized Zone:

At the end of the Korean War (1953), a ceasefire agreement between the North and the South was signed, and a demilitarization zone (DMZ) was established between the two countries – about 4 km wide, covering 250 km of border and about 30 miles in total from the capital Seoul. The "Life in Korea"[7] tourist website lists the types of tunnels discovered at the DMZ that have become tourist sites:

1st Infiltration Tunnel

The first tunnel was discovered in November 1974, in the Western Sector of the DMZ near Gorang-po. With an estimated total length of 3.5 kilometers, it extends one kilometer south of the Military Demarcation Line that divides the DMZ. The walls and ceiling of the tunnel, 1.2 meters high and 0.9 meters wide, are reinforced with concrete slabs. It has the capacity to move an entire regiment per hour through it. The tunnel was lit with lamps connected to 220-volt power lines. Equipped with a narrow-gauge railway, rail cars and drainage devices were also found inside. This tunnel is located only 65 kilometers north of Seoul.

2nd Infiltration Tunnel

Twice as wide as the first tunnel, the second tunnel was discovered in March 1975 in the Central Sector of the DMZ, about 13 kilometers north of Cheorwon. Measuring two meters high and 2.1-2.2 meters wide, the arch-shaped tunnel is large enough to move heavy weapons as tanks, field artillery, and armored personnel carriers. More than 30,000 troops could move, three to four abreast (a division in strength), per hour. Bored through 3.5 kilometers of bedrock at a depth of 50-160 meters below ground, the 2nd tunnel extends 1.1 kilometers south of the Military Demarcation Line to a point 101 kilometers from Seoul. A spacious troop assembly area was carved out inside the tunnel, which has three exits.

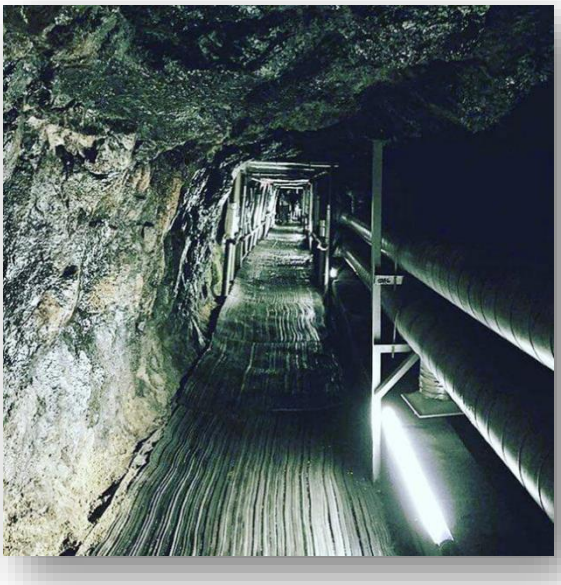
The 3rd Infiltration Tunnel

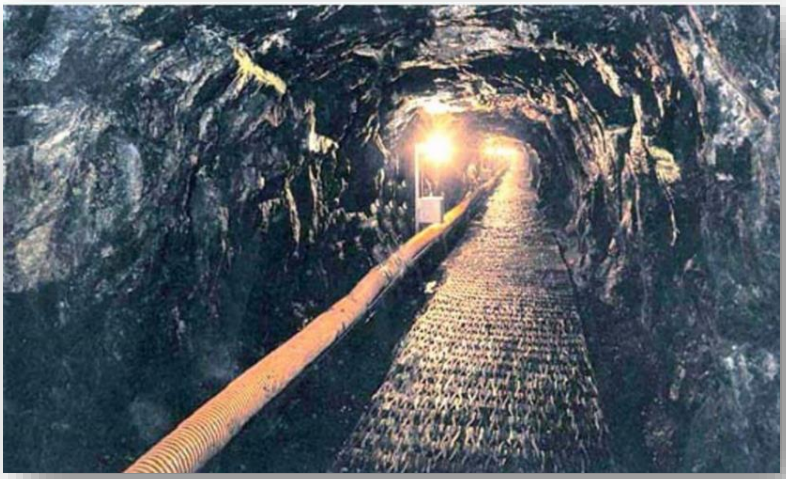
Only 44 kilometers from Seoul (less than an hour's drive), the third tunnel was discovered in October 1978. Almost identical in structure to Tunnel 2, the 1.635 kilometer-long tunnel is 1.95 meters high and 2.1 meters wide. It penetrates 435 meters south of the Military Demarcation Line at a point 4 kilometers south of Panmunjeom, running through bedrock at a depth of about 73 meters below ground. Capable of moving a full division (plus their weapons) per hour, it was evidently designed for a surprise attack on Seoul. This tunnel is only 2 kilometers from a key outpost defending the Munsan corridor leading to Seoul.

The 4th Infiltration Tunnel

The fourth tunnel, which is located along one of the most strategic routes in the Eastern Sector, was discovered in March 1990 only 26 kilometers northeast of Yanggu. This tunnel is buried at a depth of 145 meters below ground and measures two meters high and two meters wide. Almost identical with Tunnel 2 and Tunnel 3 in size and structure, the fourth tunnel intrudes 1.03 kilometers south of the Military Demarcation Line and is designed to infiltrate massive forces into the Sohwa-Wontong corridor, the major access route to the Yeongdong (Seoul- Gangneung) Expressway.

[7] http://www.lifeinkorea.com/culture/dmz/dmz.cfm?Subject=History2





Appendix C -

KOMID **– (Korea Mining Development Trading Corporation)** [8] [9] [10] [11]

1. The company is a state-owned company based in Pyongyang.[12]
2. The company was placed under U.S. sanctions in 2005 and under UN sanctions in 2009 and 2014 due to its role in North Korea's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons.
3. The company not only engages in mining but also trades in arms around the world.
4. The company is linked to a number of Iranian-led radical Shiite entities, such as banks and missile development institutes in Iran and Syria that are under sanctions. As of 2020 the company was still trading with Iran and has apparently changed its name to the Mining Development Guidance Bureau.[13]
5. Apart from Iran, in the past, the company has also traded with Pakistan, Iraq and Yemen.
6. The company is also known by the following names:

Kapmun Tosong Trade

Changgwang Shinyong Corporation

7. The names of the company's senior executives:

Yo'n Cho'ng Nam (chief representative)

Ko Ch'o'l-Chae (deputy chief representative)

Kim Kyu (external affairs officer)

Kil Jong Hun

Kim Kwang Yon

Jang Song Chol

Kim Yong Chol

Jang Yong Son

Ryu Jin

Kang Ryong

[8] https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718/materials/summaries/entity/korea-mining-development-trading-corporation
[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korea_Mining_and_Development_Trading_Corporation
[10] https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09STATE48525_a.html
[11] https://www.ifmat.org/
[12] https://deven.majalla.com/2010/02/article5515564/the-nuclear-road
[13] https://biz.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2020/04/26/2020042600406.html

Appendix D – "The Bekaa Building and Contracting Company" (the "Iranian Authority for the Reconstruction of Lebanon"):

The official name of the company today is: شركة البقاع للانشاءات والتعهدات ش.م.م Bekaa Construction and Contracting Company LLC.

In its first incarnation, when the company's name was still the "Iranian Authority for the Reconstruction of Lebanon" (الا الهيئة الإيرانية لإعادة إعمار), it was headed by a military engineer named Hassan Shateri (Hessam Khoshnevis), who was eliminated by Syrian opposition fighters in 2013.

Shateri headed the company since 2006. To our understanding, the company was probably established shortly before 2005, however most of its activities commenced after senior Iranian officials visited Lebanon in 2006 in order to examine the damage of the Second Lebanon War.

Shateri came to head the company after a long career in the IRGC. Apparently, his position as the head of the company was in an official Iranian capacity and he was still part of the IRGC while serving in Lebanon as a Brigadier General.

The company focused on construction mainly in southern Lebanon and in the Dahiya neighborhood in Beirut. The company established and renovated hospitals, schools, bridges, Muslim and Christian houses of worship and homes, and also developed and rehabilitated infrastructures and roads. In general, the company aimed to rehabilitate the destruction (mainly in the Shiite areas) after the Second Lebanon War. Another senior member of the company was the director of its office in south Lebanon, Ratha Atui.

On the first anniversary of Shateri's death (2014), as part of a memorial event attended by the company's employees, engineer Hassinin Ra'ad (the company's representative in Bekaa) announced the establishment of the Bekaa Building and Contracting Company (شركة البقاع للانشاءات والتعهدات) in Shateri's memory. Since then, we have not been able to locate any indication of the old name (the "Iranian Authority for the Reconstruction of Lebanon") and it seems that the entire company's activity is carried out under the new name "the Bekaa Building and Contracting Company" under the direction of Hassinin Ra'ad.

According to official publications the company specializes in marketing concrete and gases for the industrial sector. Data from the Lebanese Ministry of Industry shows that the company deals in the marketing of various organic chemicals, concrete and asphalt.

Phone numbers: 9613872321, 9613191600, 9613155790, 96170155790

Company email: (which strengthens Hassinin Ra'ad's involvement in the company) raadconstruction@gmail.com

Address:

The town of Taybeh, Baalbek, Jihad al-Bina building - apparently, it's the local administration of the Jihad Construction Foundation, which reinforces the assumption that this is in fact a company operating under the auspices of Jihad Construction Foundation.