

A CLOSER LOOK

ANALYZING THE NEWS
THAT MAKES A
DIFFERENCE

How Dangerous Is Hezbollah Now?

NASRALLAH SENDS
THREATS ISRAEL'S WAY

When the head of a terrorist group pulls out a map during a broadcast, you know that he's never going to be showing the best places in the region to find a falafel. And indeed, during a recent media appearance by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, his brandishing of a map of Israel did not involve any food recommendations.

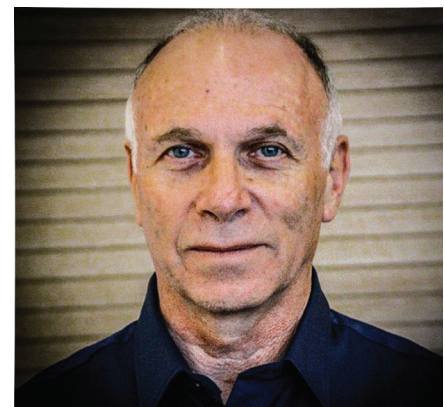
Instead, Nasrallah carefully pointed out the exact targets that he said Hezbollah would target if the conflict between the US and Iran went further. He told Al-Manar: "Iran is able to bombard Israel with ferocity and force. When the Americans understand that this war could wipe out Israel, they will reconsider."

At the same time, Nasrallah played down the idea that he wanted to attack Israel. He claimed that Israel's fear of Hezbollah would keep it from attacking, and he said that the Saudis and other Gulf states had no interest in inciting a war between the US and Iran.

It's clear, however, that Hezbollah is still trying as hard as possible to arm itself for a fight with Israel, and not just through the overland route through Syria, which Israel has disrupted numerous times. Israeli ambassador to the UN Danny Danon told the UN Security Council on Friday that Iran was sending missile technology and other armaments to Hezbollah through the Port of Beirut, using commercial companies as cover. He said that both sea and air routes into Beirut were being used. "The Port of Beirut has become the Port of Hezbollah," he said.

Nasrallah rejected the claim, stating that Danon had just made it in order to justify an Israeli takeover of the port during an invasion to come.

How dangerous is Hezbollah now? Does the use of the Port of Beirut mean that Israel's attempts to stop the arms flow from Tehran to Hezbollah has failed?



YORAM SCHWEITZER,
HEAD OF THE PROGRAM ON
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CONFLICT AT INSS



“ Hezbollah and Iran are always trying to smuggle precision weapons to Lebanon through various channels—air, land, sea. These precision weapons are a serious threat.

“Israel is trying to prevent this as much as possible, on all fronts. And Iran is also trying to build up a presence in Syria, not just Lebanon.”

In regard to Nasrallah’s tone in his interview: “Nasrallah knows exactly what will be the cost to the organization and Lebanon if Israel is provoked. He’s playing a game of deterrence, verbal deterrence.

“People should know that Israel will not be as restrained as it was in 2006 [when it fought with Hezbollah]. At that time, it spared the Lebanese infrastructure, but I’m not sure it will in the future. That’s because Hezbollah’s missiles will cause more damage than they did in the past.

“And Nasrallah wants to cause all sorts of surprises during any conflict, such as incursions.

“I think that those parties that can influence Hezbollah to not attack should, for the sake of Lebanon.”

In regard to the claims of analysts that Hezbollah was seriously debilitated by the war in Syria: “It wasn’t decimated. Many Hezbollah fighters were wounded and the organization has a lot of expenses. It has been affected by Iran’s economic crisis, as well; funding from Iran made up 70 percent of Hezbollah’s budget.

“But it also improved its fighting capabilities and learned to function as an army. The conflict in Syria was not all negative for Hezbollah.”

In regard to Hezbollah’s calculations: “Hezbollah is now practically in control of the Lebanese government. They have veto power in the legislature. That’s partly because they have their own military, which gives them not just military power but political power as well.

“But the fact that the group has gained power makes Hezbollah’s calculation about war more difficult. It has a lot to lose. Still, that won’t prevent it from attacking if Iran wants it to.

“People do not appreciate the potential destruction that another war in Lebanon could have, and the global repercussions it could have.”



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DR. YOSHI MANSHAROF,
RESEARCH ASSOCIATE AT JISS AND
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“In regard to the threats by Nasrallah in regard to the US and Iran: You have to first realize that Hezbollah is not an independent actor. It is fully subordinated to Iran. Iran will use its military capabilities whenever that serves its interests.

“The situation in the Gulf shows that while there is tension, the Americans do not have an appetite for a larger military intervention, and Iran doesn’t have any interest in provoking such an intervention. They’re engaging in brinkmanship.

“Trump, for whatever reason—ideological or because of the election schedule—doesn’t want to be dragged into a war.

“And Hezbollah is being kept by Iran for a rainy day.

“Israel is struggling against attempts to arm Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as trying to prevent a pro-Iranian front in southern Syria.

“And there is no longer a distinction between Lebanon and Hezbollah—which some Americans, who are sending weapons to the Lebanese army, don’t realize. Hezbollah’s control of the Lebanese government gives Iran greater confidence that they will be able to do the same in Syria. If they succeed in Syria, they will try to do the same in Jordan.”

“Hezbollah has become a major threat to Lebanese society. They’ve made the port and the airport targets, and one out of three or four houses in southern Lebanon is being used to store Hezbollah equipment. Israel would have to damage major parts of Lebanon in any war.

“Israel signaled to Hezbollah and Iran that they should stop using civilians, but they didn’t.”

On Hezbollah’s missiles: “They are problematic, but not yet a strategic threat. That was explored by the IDF head of military intelligence Tamir Heiman at a conference that I also spoke at two months ago. He noted that Hezbollah only has a few precise missiles.”

On Nasrallah’s threats: “If Hezbollah would attack Israel because of a US-Iran conflict, it would be the third time it would be dragging the Lebanese—and particularly the Shiites—into a war that doesn’t relate to them, as it did in the 2006 war with Israel and in 2011 with the Syrian civil war.

“I think that Nasrallah is doing his best to deter Israel and the US from starting a conflict.” ●

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