

LEBANONâ€™S OFFICERS UNDER TERROR ATTACK?

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On December 12 a top Lebanese Army commander, Brigadier General Francois Hajj, was killed in a Terrorist bombing in the suburb of Baabda southeast of Beirut. Hajj, 54, who was close to army commander Michel Sleiman and tipped to be his successor, was killed along with his bodyguard in a rush-hour blast. This was the first assassination of a high ranking officer of the Lebanese Armed Forces in decades. The first set of questions is: Why was he murdered, who may have perpetrated this terror attack and what could be the consequences of this dramatic development?

1) General Francois Hajj was born in the Christian town of Rmeish in southern Lebanon. His home village had a history of resistance against Terror forces since the late 1960s. Many of its inhabitants enrolled in the Lebanese Army over the past decades. A number of them were involved in opposition to the Syrian occupation and Hezbollah. Hajj joined the Lebanese army Academy in 1972 and graduated in 1975. He also commanded the Special Forces brigades (Maghawir) before he was promoted to LAF operation chief. According to many sources in Lebanon, he was selected to become the next commander of the Lebanese Army. Hence, the assassination aimed at preventing Francois Hajj from being appointed by the next President, yet to be elected, as the top military man in Lebanon. General Michel Soleiman, who has been nominated by the majority coalition in Parliament for the Presidency was grooming Hajj to become his successor. In addition the slain commander had in past months and years refused to accept Hezbollah's exclusive areas of control in south Lebanon and in the Bekaa valley. Moreover he was credited for coordinating the Lebanese Army offensive against the Fatah Islam Terror group in Nahr al Bared camp in north Lebanon over the summer. The strike can be understood as a message to the Lebanese Army not to attempt to confront terror groups in the future, including Hezbollah.

2) The parties that can execute such operations in Lebanon, and have an interest in it, fall under the umbrella of the Syrian-Iranian Mihwar (Axis) which includes the Syrian intelligence, the Pasdaran network, Hezbollah, Ahmad Jibril Palestinian group, as well as other smaller pro-Syrian militias. This "axis" has been accused by the Cedars Revolution of perpetrating a series of assassinations since 2005, including against Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and a number of leaders and MPs, last of whom MPs Walid Eido and Antoine Ghanem, all opposed to the Syrian occupation and in favor of disarming Hezbollah.

3) With the assassination of Hajj, the pro-democracy majority is now facing the reality of terrorism again. But this time the violence was directed against the very institution which is supposed to protect this democracy, the future President, the Parliament and civil society: The Lebanese Army. What seems to be a logical next step is for the current Government in Lebanon and its legislative majority to ask the United Nations Security Council to issue a new resolution calling for the following vital measures:

- a. Put Resolution UNSCR 1559 (withdrawal of Syrians, disarming Hezbollah and electing a new President) under Chapter 7 of the Charter
- b. Supervising the election of a new President of the Republic under UN protection.
- c. Extending a UN support to Lebanon's Army to confront the Terror campaign.

However the March 14 Coalition and the Seniora cabinet have been intimidated by many assassinations: Thus the likeliness of seeing them initiate these dramatic moves is not high at this point, but not impossible eventually. International –including US, European and Arab- support is covered by a good number of UN resolutions, a Franco-American understanding, and a bipartisan set of resolutions issued by the US Congress and Arab moderate frustration with Iranian-sponsored violence in Lebanon. It will boil down to the rise of a courageous group of leaders out of Lebanon calling for help. And it is precisely that group which is targeted by the "axis."

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