

## Phares comment on Beirut bombing reports

Contributed by Mideastwire, CRNews  
 Wednesday, 16 January 2008  
 Last Updated Wednesday, 16 January 2008

"Syria's Jihadists and Hezbollah are two arms"

Mideast Newswire and CRNews, January 16, 2008

In a first report issued by Stratfor on January 15, 2008, the intelligence report wrote: "

The possibility remains that the attack was the work of jihadists operating in Lebanon. Many of these jihadist groups, which steadily are building up their presence in the country, are handled by Syrian military intelligence officers who might have an interest in destabilizing Lebanon and making life difficult for the U.S.-backed government of Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora — who is resisting demands by Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon's ongoing political stalemate"

Asked by Mideast Newswire to comment, Professor Walid Phares, the director of the Future terrorism Project at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies in Washington said: "When we say the work of Jihadist on the strategic level, it should mean that the decision is taken by al Qaeda and its chapters independently from a Tehran Damascus decision. For it is always possible, that a decision to carry out attacks is taken by the "axis" and transferred to the "hands" of the Jihadists for execution, with or without their knowledge.

In a second report Startfor added: "We earlier discounted the idea that Hezbollah would be behind the attack if U.S. diplomatic personnel were indeed the target, as Lebanese officials have alleged. Hezbollah is heavily focused on its internal political situation in Lebanon and is not looking for what would inevitably be a major confrontation with the United States over the killing of a U.S. government employee."

Dr Phares commented that "Hezbollah is not uni-dimensional" It can deal with Israel, the United States, the Lebanese Government and Arab Governments at the same time. For behind Hezbollah you have the powerful Iranian Revolutionary Guards with their worldwide networks. Besides, the so-called internal situation in Lebanon is part of the regional web stretching from Iran. And an attack against a minor US asset in Lebanon doesn't lead directly to a major confrontation with the US. It is a message and a test.

The Statfor report said also that: "In recent days, the militant Shiite group also has sent special forces into Beirut for key operations, which could include an attack like the most recent incident. The fighters reportedly are equipped with state-of-the-art communications gear and report directly to a security officer codenamed Abu Jafaar, who maintains his operations in the Ain al-Abed neighborhood in the southern suburbs."

Commenting on this information, Dr Phares said: Isn't interesting to see how back in the fall of 2007 Western-based media, friendly to hezbollah, attacked an American journalist reporting from Beirut, Tom Smith, for daring to mention that Hezbollah has ever deployed forces in Beirut, while according to this report, the organization is sending in -not only regular militiamen, but special forces. This report, unless proven false too vindicates Smith, I believe.

Startfor also added that "These jihadist factions have a working relationship with a number of Syrian military intelligence officers operating in Lebanon. Many of these jihadist groups work with a Syrian security official brigadier named Ali Mamluk, who collaborates with Islamist militant sympathizers in the Syrian cities of Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Deir al-Zur. Syria is unlikely to run the risk of ordering attacks against Western targets. Despite its deep involvement in mafia-style violence in Lebanon, the Syrian government is far more cautious in its dealings with the West. Stratfor has observed how Damascus has been playing with fire in working with these jihadist factions, however, and that it was only a matter of time before Syria began to lose its grip."

Phares said: "If anything these information underline the reality that the Syrian regime has its hands in the Jihadist networks and pushes them into a clash with the US and moderate Arabs. This is not playing, this is sponsoring.

The Startfor report concluded that Shiite militant group Hezbollah would be unlikely to take the risk of drawing attention from the United States by carrying out such an attack. The likely perpetrators of this bombing are jihadists who have been funneled into Lebanon in increasing numbers over the past several months. According to a source in the Lebanese military, a new group of al Qaeda-linked militants, numbering about 15 men, have recently entered Lebanon via Syria.

Dr Phares, who teaches Jihadist strategies at the National Defense University said: "What is strange in the analysis is that it says that Hezbollah is unlikely to carry an attack against US target, but Jihadists controlled by Syria are very likely to do so. But these are two arms from one Terror body, the Syro-Iranian axis."