

# Israel: Hezbollah and the Yeshiva Attack

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A group called the "Galilee Freedom Battalions – the Martyrs of Imad Mughniyah" has claimed responsibility for the March 6 shooting at a yeshiva in Jerusalem, Hezbollah's Al Manar television reported. Though the attack does not bear the hallmarks of Hezbollah, Israel now has an excuse to engage the radical Shiite group in a military confrontation in Lebanon.

## Analysis

A group calling itself the "Galilee Freedom Battalions – the Martyrs of Imad Mughniyah" was behind the March 6 attack on a yeshiva in Jerusalem, Hezbollah's Al Manar television reported. Meanwhile, Hamas stopped short of claiming responsibility for the attack, but blessed the operation and said "it won't be the last." The attack involved one Palestinian gunman dressed as a yeshiva student opening fire in a packed dining hall, killing at least eight students and injuring around nine others.

According to a Haaretz report citing the Jerusalem District police chief, "The gunman entered the yeshiva, pulled out an automatic weapon from his bag and began firing in all directions. An Israel Defense Forces paratrooper who had his weapon with him engaged the terrorist in a gun battle, and two police detectives who arrived on the scene also fired at the assailant." A yeshiva student claimed he shot the gunman twice in the head with a rifle while positioned atop the rooftop of a nearby building. There are conflicting reports as to whether or not the attacker was wearing an explosive belt, but no explosion has been reported.

Israel has been bracing itself for Hezbollah's expected retaliation for the Feb. 12 assassination in Damascus of its top commander, Imad Mughniyah. The yeshiva shootout fits within the timeframe Hezbollah would be expected to take to retaliate for the Mughniyah killing, but the attack does not bear the modus operandi of Hezbollah. In fact, a single gunman opening fire in a crowded dining hall with no backup appears more like a lone wolf attack than anything else. There are a number of motives for such an attack given Israel's aggressive military action in the Gaza Strip over the past several days.

Soon after the attack Hezbollah's Al Manar TV flashed a statement that read: "Galilee Freedom Battalions – the Martyrs of Imad Mughniyah and Gaza claimed responsibility for the Jerusalem operation." Though this claim was made on Hezbollah's television network, the headline does not necessarily indicate a direct link to Hezbollah itself.

Nevertheless, Israel now has an opportunity to start a military confrontation with the Shiite militant group in Lebanon. Israel has already given a number of indications that it is readying itself for another military confrontation with Hezbollah, and this yeshiva attack could be the trigger. Israel must be watched closely to see if it intends to link the shooting to Hezbollah or treat it as an isolated attack and limit its retribution to the Palestinian territories.

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