

Hezbollah's Beirut Blitz

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Hezbollah Terror Blitz on Beirut

As I have warned several times over the past year, and many articles later, Hezbollah has indeed waged its expected blitzkrieg against the democratically elected Government of Lebanon. Within 24 hours, the pro-Iranian super militia blocked all accesses to the Beirut International Airport, established an exclusive security zone around the organization's headquarters in south Beirut, deployed its forces into several Sunni neighbourhoods in the capital and erected check points across the country. Within 48 hours or more the "Party of Allah" may be in control of large areas of the Lebanese Republic. In short, this could mutate into a slow motion coup d'Etat.

What's behind the blitz?

The big picture was very predictable. The Syro-Iranian "axis" which is flaring up various battlefields in the region, from Basra to Gaza, has instructed its local "force" on the Lebanese battlefield to surge against the pro-Western Government of Fuad Seniora. Hezbollah is a disciplined Iranian asset on the Eastern Mediterranean. All of the arguments advanced by its secretary general Hassan Nasrallah in his last press conference and grievances against the Government have always been around since the summer of 2005. These criticisms of the cabinet are used when a large scale action is ordered by the Tehran strategists. The local "issues" are part of the greater puzzle, but in Lebanese politics, they seem to be "the" issues at hand. What are they?

Back in September 2004, a UNSCR 1559 has asked all militias, including Hezbollah to disarm and Syria to pull out from Lebanon. The "axis" responded with a string of assassinations against Lebanese critics. An attempt against Minister Marwan Hamade in the fall of 2005 was followed by an earth shaking massacre of the former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and his assistants and friends in February 2005. A Cedars Revolution followed with one million and a half people taking the streets to demand the departure of the Syrians and the disarming of Hezbollah. Assad pulled out his troops in April of that year leaving the "second army" behind, Hezbollah. As of July 2005 a series of murders targeted Lebanese anti-Hezbollah politicians.

This state-within-the-state, receives more than 300 billions \$ annually to maintain its socio-economic dominance among Shiia Lebanese. In addition it receives loads of advanced weapons, including rockets and missiles. In July of 2006 Hezbollah triggered a War with Israel to dodge its disarming at the hands of the Lebanese Government. By November the group staged an occupation of downtown Beirut, to paralyze Lebanon's economy. In 2007 the assassinations of lawmakers resumed. In November of that year, Hezbollah and its allies blocked the election of a new President for Lebanon, to avert the selection by the majority in parliament of a leader who would actually call on the UN to disarm the militia. But as of winter 2008, a master plan was devised to overrun strategic assets of the Government, including the International Airport. Swiftly, the Pasdaran-trained operatives installed surveillance cameras on the tarmacs and obtained sensitive security information from the commanding officer of the airport, a Shia whose allegiance has been gone to Hezbollah.

The Lebanese Government finally reacted by asking Hezbollah to remove the cameras, and begin the dismantling of the parallel telephone communications system. In addition, the Government ordered the Airport commanding officer to join his headquarters at the Defense Ministry. In 24 hours, the "Hizb's" secretary general Hassan Nasrallah reacted and launched his phased coup. In his press conference he declared war against the Government and accused it of being an "agent of the Americans." Few hours after, Hezbollah's Special Forces and snipers tightened their grip around the Airport and moved into Sunni West Beirut. They seized the strategically located neighbourhood of Ra's al Nabaa overlooking both (Christian and Muslim) sides of the capital, fought their way into Hamra Street and practically controlled more than 80% of West Beirut. By midnight, three hundred thousands Lebanese Sunni found themselves under an Iranian-sponsored "occupation."

Across the former green line, the Christian sectors of the capital remained outside the control of Hezbollah, with

hundreds of armed youth taking position on the roof tops of the tall buildings. Will Nasrallah order an invasion of East Beirut or will he ask his "Christian" puppets to do the job for him? In the Chuf Mountains, south of Beirut, the anti Syrian leader Walid Jumblat is strategically besieged. The Syrian-Iranian axis had his entire district encircled and have already prepared a special task force with Druze figureheads ready for the man hunt: The March 14 Coalition seem to be physically targeted for elimination, unless a third force protects it. Where is the Lebanese Army? Well, the commander of the Lebanese Armed forces made sure his units would not side with the Lebanese Government in its struggle against Hezbollah. This was called "neutrality." That would be the equivalent of the U.S forces not intervening if a gigantic militia emerges in America and surrounds the White House, the U.S Congress and all federal buildings, "in defense of national unity." Unreal in a democracy but very real in a country where the influence of Syria and Iran have not been reduced by the mere rise of the Cedars Revolution. And that is precisely what Washington's foreign policy architects haven't been able to comprehend.

Within the beltway, lots of head scratching on both sides of the Potomac: What can the U.S do to respond to the Syro-Iranian offensive which is obliterating a young democracy so dear to the speech writers of the President and many congressional leaders from both parties? A crushing defeat to democracy in Lebanon under the eyes of an American public eager to see advances in the War on terror will be devastating. U.S warships are patrolling the international waters along the Lebanese coasts. A ten thousand strong UNIFIL force is deployed inside southern Lebanon. But what can this deployment of force do to deter Hezbollah's determination? Many had advised the U.S Government years ago to implement gradual steps to contain Hezbollah in Lebanon. The precious four years since the issuing of UNSCR 1559 have now expired and the Government of Fuad Seniora is on the verge of collapse or reduction. What can the coalition of the willing to-save-Lebanon do at this point?

It can still do few things. First move to the UN Security Council and invoke Chapter 7 of the Charter. Let the international body decide on this matter. Meanwhile go to plan "B" and extend all support possible to a democratically elected Government in jeopardy. The international community has still significant allies inside the country. An overwhelming sector of the public with most of the Sunnis, Christians and Druze plus a minority among Shia, two thirds of the Lebanese Army, a majority in Parliament, backed by millions in the Diaspora. On the ground, Hezbollah has thousands of fighters but it has never experienced "occupying" other Lebanese. The Iranian-backed organization may be tempted of eliminating other Lebanese leaders, Druze, Sunnis and Christians but that would put Nasrallah and his assistants on an international list for war crimes. The next few hours and days are crucial in Lebanon. An interim compromise may also emerge. But as the Roman adage goes, Alea lacta Est, the dice has already rolled. Hezbollah is not a "resistance" anymore, ironically, by now it is an occupier of its own country.

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