

Israel: Lebanon is responsible for Hezbollah's actions

Contributed by Barak Ravid, Haaretz
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Israel will hold Lebanon responsible for any attacks against Israel, in particular for any Hezbollah efforts to avenge the death of its military leader Imad Mughniyeh. This decision on Wednesday by the security cabinet represents a change in Israeli policy, after always firmly separating Hezbollah and the Lebanese government.

According to defense establishment recommendations adopted by the security cabinet, Israel will treat the Lebanese unity government, which is headed by Fouad Siniora and includes Hezbollah, as responsible for any event that takes place in its sovereign territory or events for which Lebanese nationals are responsible.

A senior Jerusalem source said if Hezbollah attacks Israel from inside Lebanese territory, shoots at Israel Air Force aircraft or carries out a terror attack abroad as revenge for the Mughniyeh assassination (which it attributes to Israel), then Israel will hold Lebanon responsible and respond appropriately. In the coming weeks, Israel plans to start transmitting this message to the United Nations, United States, Russia and European nations, and primarily to Syria and Hezbollah itself.

In the Second Lebanon War, Israel avoided damaging Lebanese civilian infrastructure such as power stations, ports or government institutions, despite the recommendation of then-chief of staff Dan Halutz, due to pressure from Washington on Israel. The U.S. claimed that bombing Lebanese infrastructure would topple the moderate Siniora government.

Defense officials noted in the cabinet meeting that two developments supported a change in policy. The first is the fact Hezbollah is now a partner in a Lebanese unity government and holds veto rights. The second is that the guidelines of the new Lebanese government guidelines, approved by President Michel Suleiman, allow Hezbollah to continue its military activity against Israel.

The defense establishment believes these new conditions improve Israel's deterrent power as Hezbollah understands the severe ramifications of the new situation should there be any action against Israel in Lebanon or overseas.

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