

Hezbollah downed army helicopter: Martyr Samer Hanna Laid to Rest

Contributed by Naharnet, AFP, AP, Fox, Agencies
 Saturday, 30 August 2008
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Hezbollah Hands Over Killer of Lebanese Helicopter Pilot

Martyr Samer Hanna Laid to Rest

Army 1st Lieutenant Samer Hanna, who was killed when gunmen opened fire on his helicopter over Sojod hills in south Lebanon, was laid to rest on Friday in his hometown of Tannourine.

Residents of the northern province of Batroun thronged the streets to welcome the body of the slain officer whose coffin, draped in the Lebanese flag, was carried by his comrades.

Representatives of President Michel Suleiman, Premier Fouad Saniora and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri in addition to MPs and officials attended the funeral.

Mariam Issa, Hanna's fiancée, mourned over his coffin during his funeral and expressed sorrow over the killing of Samer by the hands of his fellow citizens not the enemy.

Beirut, 29 Aug 08, 21:44

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Hezbollah hands over militant who shot at helicopter (2nd Roundup)

Middle East News

Aug 29, 2008, 18:51 GMT

Beirut - The Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah Friday handed over to Lebanese authorities the militant who opened fire on a Lebanese army helicopter killing a crew member, official sources said.

The official sources did not name the militant or say if he was a Hezbollah member, but security sources told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa confirmed the militant was a member of the Lebanese Shiite group.

Defence Minister Elias al-Murr had already said: 'the minimum accepted condition is surrendering the elements who opened fire on the Army helicopter so that they could be arrested.'

Hezbollah said earlier that shots fired at a Lebanese army helicopter resulting in the death of one of its crew were 'regrettable and painful' but stopped short of admitting responsibility.

In a statement, the group pledged to cooperate with the Lebanese army, a day after a helicopter came under fire from gunmen in the south of Lebanon and was forced to make an emergency landing.

'Our group and the judicial authorities are dealing with the issue,' the statement by Hezbollah said. Hezbollah stressed it would 'fully cooperate with our dear brethren in the Lebanese army and with judicial sides so that the truth is uncovered.'

There was unanimity Friday that Hezbollah was behind the attack over the Sujed hills, but conflicting reports as to the circumstances.

One report said the helicopter was still on the ground when it came under fire and the assailants, after killing army officer Samer Hanna, assaulted another crew member.

A Lebanese army communique, however, has said the helicopter came under fire from unidentified 'armed persons,' who killed Hanna.

Sources close to Hezbollah cited poor coordination between the group and the Lebanese army regarding the helicopter's flight, coupled with tension among the fundamentalist group's ranks as a result of threats and intensified overflights by Israeli aircraft.

The Lebanese daily An Nahar, on the other hand, quoted well-informed sources as saying that the helicopter was not shot down but made an emergency landing in rugged terrain between Sujod and Armati after it was hit by gunfire.

Other Lebanese media said the gunmen opened fire from a distance of only 10 meters, forcing the helicopter to land.

The reports said three army helicopters dispatched to the aid of the stricken aircraft were denied entry and the crew informed that no one could approach the area without Hezbollah permission.

Earlier in the day, Lebanese security sources said 'army investigators are almost certain the guns used to shoot at the helicopter were the same as those used by Hezbollah.'

The army deployed in southern Lebanon, along with a UN-reinforced peacekeeping force, after Israel's 33-day war with Hezbollah in 2006.

Despite the army presence, Hezbollah militiamen still maintain 'unseen positions in the area' where they say they monitor Israeli activities on the other side of the fence.

Hezbollah Hands Over Killer of Lebanese Helicopter Pilot
 Friday, August 29, 2008

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Hezbollah handed over a man suspected of firing at a Lebanese army helicopter into military authorities, a judicial official said Friday, amid media reports that the fatal shooting was a mistake by the militant group.

Military court magistrate Jean Fahd refused to identify the suspect, but told The Associated Press that Hezbollah turned him over to authorities as the person who opened fire at the helicopter.

A Lebanese army navigator was killed by the gunshots Thursday in the country's south and the helicopter made an emergency landing.

Fahd's announcement came hours after a top Lebanese newspaper reported that Hezbollah had opened fire at the helicopter mistaking it for an Israeli craft in Hezbollah's stronghold of Iqlim al-Tuffah where the group is believed to have bases and concealed positions.

The As-Safir daily quoted unidentified "multiple sources" as saying that gunmen mistook the helicopter for an Israeli aircraft dropping off soldiers in southern Lebanon. The paper often receives leaked information from the Shiite militant group.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, described the shooting in a statement Friday as "very unfortunate and painful."

The group added the case is now in the hands of the judiciary and that Hezbollah will cooperate to the "maximum extent" with the army in the investigation. It did not say whether its members had been involved and would not comment further.

A senior military officer, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media, said the investigation was ongoing and there was no comment on the media report.

Hundreds of people took part in the emotional funeral Friday of the slain navigator, 1st Lt. Samer Hanna, who was buried in his hometown of Tanourin, north of Beirut. Some in the angry crowd spoke out against Hezbollah, blaming it for the killing.

Another daily, Al-Akhbar, said a joint committee of the army and Hezbollah opened an investigation into the incident.

The shooting has raised political tensions in the country. If Hezbollah guerrillas were behind it, this could be used by the anti-Syrian parliamentary majority to increase their calls for Hezbollah to disarm.

Strong Hezbollah critic and former legislator Fares Soeid asked whether the "Lebanese army needs permission to fly over Lebanese territories."

Speaking Thursday to reporters, he wondered whether there is a "border between the state of Lebanon and the state of Hezbollah."

Grand Mufti Mohammed Rashid Kabbani, the spiritual leader of Lebanon's Sunni Muslims, described the incident as "an aggression against the army." Defense Minister Elias Murr said he will accept "nothing less" than handing over and arresting the perpetrator.

As-Safir said the shooting resulted from a "lack of coordination" on the helicopter flight. The army and Hezbollah often inform each other of their movements.

Hezbollah was the only militia allowed to keep its weapons after the end of the 1975-90 civil war, on the grounds it was fighting Israeli troops occupying part of Lebanon until 2000.

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<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,413641,00.html>

Hezbollah downed army helicopter: Paper
Web posted at: 8/30/2008 3:58:3
Source ::: REUTERS

Beirut • A Lebanese army helicopter that was hit by gunfire in south Lebanon was targeted by Hezbollah fighters who thought the aircraft was Israeli, a Lebanese newspaper reported yesterday.

The pilot of the aircraft was killed in the shooting on Thursday over Iqlim Al Touffah district. The area is controlled by the powerful political and military group Hezbollah, which fought a 34-day war with Israel in 2006.

As Safir newspaper reported the aircraft had landed and taken off again in a training drill. Hezbollah gunmen in the area "thought that there was an Israeli landing attempt (under way) and opened fire in the direction of the helicopter, hitting it", it said.

Hezbollah did not confirm that its gunmen had fired on the aircraft but said in a statement it would cooperate fully with an investigation into the matter. The group described what happened as a "very tragic and painful incident".

The army said on Thursday the helicopter had made a forced landing after it came under fire from "armed elements". It said the incident was under investigation.

The army deployed in the southern border region, along with a reinforced UN peacekeeping force, after Israel's war with Hezbollah guerrillas in 2006. The incident occurred north of a region where the UN peacekeepers have a mandate to operate.

Hezbollah's weapons are already a controversial issue in Lebanon and were at the heart of an 18-month political crisis that pushed the country to the brink of a new civil war.

The Iranian- and Syrian-backed group, whose military wing is far stronger than Lebanon's army, says it needs the weapons to defend the country from Israel. Hezbollah enjoys generally good ties with the army.

The policy statement of a new national unity government recognises Hezbollah's right to use all means possible to liberate Israeli-occupied land claimed by Lebanon.

August 30, 2008
World Briefing | Middle East
Lebanon: Suspect Handed Over
By ROBERT F. WORTH

Hezbollah on Friday handed over a gunman suspected of firing on a Lebanese Army helicopter a day earlier, killing its pilot, army officials said. The Shiite group said in a statement that the killing was "very unfortunate and painful," but it did not say if its members were involved. The pilot, First Lt. Samer Hanna, died when his helicopter came under fire in southern Lebanon over an area that Hezbollah controls. Hundreds of people attended his funeral on Friday, and his death has become a rallying point for calls for Hezbollah to relinquish its weapons.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/30/world/middleeast/30brief-lebanon.html?_r=1&ref=world&oref=slogin

Hezbollah surrenders member suspected of shooting Lebanese army chopper, reportedly by mistake

By BASSEM MROUE | Associated Press Writer
7:07 PM EDT, August 29, 2008

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) _ Hezbollah on Friday handed over a man suspected of firing on a Lebanese army helicopter a day earlier that killed a navigator, the militant group said.

Hezbollah described Thursday's shooting as "very unfortunate and painful," but some media reports claimed the Shiite militant group had mistakenly opened fire on the helicopter.

The shooting has raised political tensions in the country. If Hezbollah guerrillas were behind it, this could be used by the anti-Syrian parliamentary majority to increase their calls for Hezbollah to disarm.

Prime Minister Fuad Saniora called the incident a "challenge to the state's authority," according to Information Minister Tarek Mitri who quoted him after a Cabinet meeting Friday.

Strong Hezbollah critic and former legislator Fares Soeid sarcastically asked whether the "Lebanese army needs permission to fly over Lebanese territories" and wondered on Thursday whether there is a "border between the state of Lebanon and the state of Hezbollah."

Hezbollah deputy leader Sheik Naim Kassem confirmed the handover, but declined to say whether it had fired by mistake. He told Hezbollah's Al-Manar Television that the group will "abide by whatever the army and judicial investigation says" in the matter.

Military court magistrate Jean Fahd said Hezbollah turned the man over as the person who opened fire at the helicopter in Hezbollah's stronghold of Iqlim al-Tuffah, where the group is believed to have bases and concealed positions. The chopper made an emergency landing.

The As-Safir daily quoted unidentified "multiple sources" as saying that the gunmen mistook the helicopter for an Israeli aircraft dropping off soldiers in southern Lebanon. The paper often receives leaked information from the Shiite militant group.

Hezbollah's deputy chief downplayed the incident, saying it was marked by "confusion" and had no political or security implications.

"We are not two camps. We are in the same camp confronting Israel," Kassem said of the Lebanese army and Hezbollah guerrillas.

As-Safir said the shooting resulted from a "lack of coordination" on the helicopter flight. The army and Hezbollah often inform each other of their movements.

Hezbollah was the only militia allowed to keep its weapons after the end of the 1975-90 civil war, on the grounds it was fighting Israeli troops occupying part of Lebanon until 2000.

Hizbullah hands over chopper shooter
Aug. 29, 2008
Associated Press , THE JERUSALEM POST

Hizbullah handed over a suspect who allegedly fired at a Lebanese army helicopter the previous day, a judicial official said Friday, amid media reports that the fatal shooting was a mistake by the terrorist group.

Military court magistrate Jean Fahd refused to identify the suspect, but told The Associated Press that the man was surrendered to authorities by Hizbullah as the person who opened fire at the helicopter.

A Lebanese army navigator was killed by the gunshots Thursday in the country's south and the helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing.

Fahd's announcement came hours after a top Lebanese newspaper reported that Hizbullah had opened fire at the helicopter mistaking it for an Israeli craft.

The As-Safir daily quoted unidentified "multiple sources" as saying that the gunmen mistook the helicopter for an Israeli aircraft dropping off soldiers in southern Lebanon. The paper often receives leaked information from the Shiite group.

Hizbullah, meanwhile, described the incident in a statement Friday as "very unfortunate and painful."

The group added the case was now in the hands of the judiciary and that Hizbullah would cooperate to the "maximum extent" with the army in the investigation. It did not say whether its members had been involved and would not comment further.

The incident took place in Hizbullah's stronghold of Iqlim al-Tuffah where the group is believed to have bases and concealed positions.

A senior military officer, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media, said the investigation was ongoing and there was no comment on the media report.

Hundreds of people took part in the emotional funeral Friday of the slain navigator, 1st Lt. Samer Hanna, who was buried in his hometown of Tanourin, north of Beirut. Some in the angry crowd spoke out against Hizbullah, blaming it for the killing.

Another daily, Al-Akhbar, said a joint committee of the Lebanese army and Hizbullah opened an investigation into the incident shortly after it happened.

The shooting has raised political tensions in the country. If Hizbullah guerrillas were behind it, this could be used by the anti-Syrian parliamentary majority to increase their calls for Hizbullah to disarm.

Strong Hizbullah critic and former legislator Fares Soeid asked whether the "Lebanese army needs permission to fly over Lebanese territories." Speaking Thursday to reporters, he wondered whether there is a "border between the state of Lebanon and the state of Hizbullah."

Grand Mufti Mohammed Rashid Kabbani, the spiritual leader of Lebanon's Sunni Muslims, described the incident as "an aggression against the army." Defense Minister Elias Murr said he would accept "nothing less" than handing over and arresting the perpetrator.

As-Safir said the shooting resulted from a "lack of coordination" on the helicopter flight. The Lebanese army and Hizbullah often inform each other of their movements.

Baroud Wants More Answers About the Sujud Attack

Interior Minister Ziad Baroud said the attack by Hizbullah fighters on a Lebanese Army helicopter requires "interpretations, not justifications."

"We also want details," Baroud said in a radio interview, which indicates that the judiciary has not been allowed to interrogate Hizbullah fighters who were in the Sujud southern region where the chopper was attacked on Thursday.

Hizbullah turned over one suspect to the judiciary saying he was the person who opened fire at the helicopter.

The issue, Baroud said, is linked to the Army's "morale."

He said the judiciary would "follow up the case to the maximum." He did not elaborate on the remark.

Beirut, 30 Aug 08, 11:32

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Mitri and the Non-Sufficient Army-Hizbullah Coordination

Information Minister Tareq Mitri said the "attack" against a military helicopter by Hizbullah fighters in the southern Sojod region raises "questions regarding the extent of coordination between the Lebanese Army and Hizbullah."

Mitri, in a television interview, said "resisting an external attack is a non-controversial issue. This is the duty of the Lebanese people."

The problem, according to Mitri, is in "blocking the re-creation of the state for tens of years."

"I represent the majority, but I am not member of any political party," Mitri stressed.

Beirut, 30 Aug 08, 10:24

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Hizbullah Terms Helicopter Incident 'Regretful', Pledges to Cooperate with Army

Hizbullah on Friday termed the helicopter incident "regretful and painful" and pledged to cooperate with the Lebanese army, a day after a military chopper came under attack by gunmen in south Lebanon.

In a statement issued by Hizbullah, the group said judicial authorities are dealing with the issue.

Hizbullah stressed it would "fully cooperate with our dear brethren in the Lebanese army and with judicial sides so that the truth is uncovered."

There was unanimity Friday that Hizbullah was behind the gunfire attack on the helicopter that killed an officer over Sojod hills in south Lebanon.

There were conflicting reports about the incident which took place around noon Thursday.

Among the worst reports was that the helicopter was attacked while it was still on ground and that the assailants, after killing 1st Lt. Samer Hanna, assaulted another officer.

The semi-official report, however, said that the helicopter came under gunfire upon take off from a hilltop.

A Lebanese army communiqué, however, has said that a Lebanese army helicopter came under gunfire from unidentified "armed members" killing Hanna.

The daily As Safir gave another version on Friday.

It cited poor coordination between Hizbullah and the Lebanese army regarding the helicopter overflight and the tension among Hizbullah ranks as a result of Israeli threats and intensified Israeli overflights over the past few days as reasons for the confusion that led to the helicopter shooting.

An Nahar newspaper, on the other hand, quoted well-informed sources as saying that the helicopter was not shot down but was forced to make an emergency landing after it was hit by gunfire from gunmen and that the co-pilot landed the chopper at a rugged terrain between Sojod and Armati.

The Central News Agency (CNA), for its part, reported that the gunmen opened fire at the helicopter only 10 meters away, causing an emergency landing.

It added that three army helicopters dispatched to the area to assist the chopper that was hit were denied entry and that the crew was informed that no one can approach the area without Hizbullah permission.

CNA quoted Hizbullah sources as saying the group knows nothing about the shooting.

Another report said that the helicopter came under fire as it flew over Sojod and that after making an emergency landing it came under gunfire, killing Hanna.

A different version of the story was put this way: After the helicopter landed in Sojod as part of a routine mission and as it attempted to take off again it came under gunfire, killing Hanna.

Al Manar television, mouthpiece of Hizbullah, reported that a helicopter came under gunfire from "unidentified" gunmen.

A joint committee from the Lebanese army and Hizbullah opened an investigation into the incident.

Beirut, 29 Aug 08, 09:16

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Hizbullah Turns Over Culprit in Army Helicopter Case to Military Authorities

Hizbullah on Friday handed over to military police a man suspected of firing on a Lebanese army helicopter a day earlier that killed a navigator.

"Hizbullah has handed over the person who fired at the helicopter to military police," a source told Agence France Presse.

"The person behind the attack is in the hands of military officials who are investigating the incident."

The identity of the person turned over has not been revealed.

First Lieutenant Samer Hanna was killed when his helicopter was hit by gunfire on Thursday during a training mission in a region known as a Hizbullah stronghold in southern Lebanon.

Hizbullah had earlier described the incident as "regrettable and distressing."

"We ask that all political parties refrain from baseless speculation on the incident whose circumstances remain unknown," it said in a statement.

Former Prime Minister Salim Hoss, who is considered close to the Hizbullah-led opposition, pointed the finger of blame at the Shiite group.

"The area where this distressing incident took place is, as everybody knows, under the control of the Resistance (Hizbullah)," Hoss said.

"Hizbullah must explain and not justify what happened, because the death of a brilliant officer cannot be justified whatever the circumstances of the incident," Hoss said in a statement.

Beirut, 29 Aug 08, 21:01

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Fingers Pointed at Hizbullah in Helicopter Attack ... No Comment from Group Yet

There was unanimity Friday that Hizbullah was behind the gunfire attack on a Lebanese army helicopter that killed an officer over Sojod hills in south Lebanon the day before with no response from the group yet.

There were conflicting reports about the incident which took place around noon Thursday.

Among the worst reports was that the helicopter was attacked while it was still on ground and that the assailants, after killing 1st Lt. Samer Hanna, assaulted another officer.

The semi-official report, however, said that the helicopter came under gunfire upon take off from a hilltop.

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CNA quoted Hizbullah sources as saying the group knows nothing about the shooting.

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Al Manar television, mouthpiece of Hizbullah, reported that a helicopter came under gunfire from "unidentified" gunmen.

A joint committee from the Lebanese army and Hizbullah opened an investigation into the incident. (AFP photo shows a general view of the area where the helicopter was shot)

Beirut, 29 Aug 08, 09:16

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&6967034246DF8108C22574B40021EBAC>

Army Helicopter Attacked Over South Lebanon, Captain Killed

Gunmen opened fire on a Lebanese army helicopter flying over a southern village on Thursday killing an officer, a military communiqué said.

The communiqué identified the victim as 1st Lt. Samer Hanna.

It said the helicopter came under fire by a military group, which it did not identify.

An army official earlier told AFP that the helicopter was conducting a training mission over the southern village of Sojod when it came under fire and was forced to make an emergency landing and several of the crew were also wounded.

The origin of the fire was not immediately known.

An AFP correspondent in the area said that the army had bolstered its presence and had set up roadblocks.

The Telal Sojod area lies some 20 kilometers north of the Israeli border.

The area was considered a Hizbullah stronghold during the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and witnessed fierce battles before Israel's withdrawal in 2000.

As part of the ceasefire deal that ended the devastating 2006 war between Hizbullah and Israel, the army deployed in southern Lebanon along with a strengthened United Nations peacekeeping force.

Nine Lebanese soldiers and five civilians were killed in a bombing at a bus stop in the northern port city of Tripoli earlier this month in an attack thought to have targeted the army.(Naharnet-AFP)

Beirut, 28 Aug 08, 12:36

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Murr: Surrendering Culprits in Helicopter Incident is the Minimum Accepted

Defense Minister Elias Murr said on Friday the minimum that could be done is to surrender the gunmen who opened fire on an army helicopter in south Lebanon.

Murr made his remark prior to a cabinet session held under President Michel Suleiman at Baabda Palace.

Murr insisted that "the army commander is appointed by a decision from the defense minister and not elected and what happened in the previous days were just consultations concerning this decision."

"While it is true that the army commander should maintain objectivity and remain at an equal distance from all groups," he added, "the naming of the army commander does not have to be subject to general consensus."

Beirut, 29 Aug 08, 19:30

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Geagea Condemns 'Dangerous' Attack on Army Helicopter

Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea on Friday denounced the attack on a Lebanese Army helicopter in south Lebanon as "dangerous" but refused to rush to conclusions.

Thursday's attack that resulted in the killing of 1st Lt. Samer Hanna was "dangerous and regrettable as it happened on Lebanese territory," Geagea said.

The LF leader also urged an "immediate" investigation into the incident and said the country has no hope if its security forces were threatened.

He refused to rush to a conclusion about the incident even if "it was carried out by unknown gunmen."

Beirut, 29 Aug 08, 12:42

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Gemayel Denounces Attack on Army Helicopter

Phalange Party leader Amin Gemayel denounced the attack on a Lebanese Army helicopter in south Lebanon on Thursday as "very serious" and urged the army command to be decisive.

"I had repeatedly warned against such a serious development. Less than two weeks ago I warned that the situation in some southern areas is very serious, especially in the Jezzine region and its surroundings where there are security zones that we do not know who is in charge of," Gemayel said in a radio interview.

"The message has been received and the Army Command should be decisive in handling this issue … the government also should take the needed measures and should be frank to the Lebanese people," he added.

He said it is "the Lebanese people's right to be informed of the situation in the south and the people have the right to know the truth about the situation in the south, the Bekaa, the north and Beirut."

"It is our right to know in which direction the nation is headed and who is responsible for its sovereignty and the people's security," Gemayel stressed.

Beirut, 28 Aug 08, 21:28

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

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It said the helicopter came under fire by a military group, which it did not identify.

An army official earlier told AFP that the helicopter was conducting a training mission over the southern village of Sojod when it came under fire and was forced to make an emergency landing and several of the crew were also wounded.

The origin of the fire was not immediately known.

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The area was considered a Hizbullah stronghold during the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and witnessed fierce battles before Israel's withdrawal in 2000.

As part of the ceasefire deal that ended the devastating 2006 war between Hizbullah and Israel, the army deployed in southern Lebanon along with a strengthened United Nations peacekeeping force.

Nine Lebanese soldiers and five civilians were killed in a bombing at a bus stop in the northern port city of Tripoli earlier this month in an attack thought to have targeted the army. (Naharnet-AFP)

Beirut, 28 Aug 08, 12:36

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Souaid: Hizbullah Setting No-Fly Zones and Demarcating Borders with Lebanon

March 14 coordinator Faris Souaid on Thursday criticized the attack on a Lebanese Army helicopter in south Lebanon and blamed it on Hizbullah.

"Is it the process of demarcating borders between the state of Lebanon and the Hizbullah state?" Souaid asked in reference to the attack on the military helicopter that was launched from a Hizbullah stronghold.

"Did Hizbullah try to set a red line for the Lebanese Army on Lebanese territories?" he added.

"We ask all these questions today and we wait for the outcome of the investigation," Souaid added after receiving U.S. state department official in charge of Lebanon David Hale.

He said the Lebanese Army should not be in a position to ask for permission to carry out any assignment on Lebanese territory.

Souaid made the remark in comment on the attack that targeted a Lebanese Army helicopter while on assignment in south Lebanon, which resulted in killing its pilot.

"I find it strange that the Lebanese Army is in a position to ask for permission if it wanted to carry out any assignment on Lebanese territory," he said.

"Do we now have no-fly zones like the off limits security zones?" he asked.

"Is it true that the attack was carried out against the helicopter from a short distance while taking off and is it true that the officers were held and interrogated?" he added.

Souaid reiterated support by the March 14 forces for the army and security forces.

Beirut, 28 Aug 08, 19:03

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

MP Butros Harb for Punishing Culprits in Ugly Attack on Army Helicopter

MP Butros Harb denounced the "ugly attack" on a Lebanese Army helicopter that was flying over south Lebanon on Thursday and the killing of its pilot.

Harb, in a statement distributed by the state-run National News Agency (NNA), said the attack that was carried out north of the Litani River "fuels doubts and raises questions."

He called for "speedy investigation in the attack, especially that preliminary information sparks concern and raises so many questions about the targets of this attack," he added.

"Attacks against the Lebanese Army should not go unpunished," he stressed.

Beirut, 28 Aug 08, 17:56

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>

Sheikh Qabalan Accuses Israel in Chopper Attack

The Highest Shiite cleric in Lebanon on Thursday said an Israeli agent could have opened fire at a Lebanese Army helicopter, killing its captain.

Sheikh Abdul Amir Qabalan made the charge and urged the army command to launch "speedy and just investigation" into the attack.

He also called for "punishing whoever carried out this crime and whoever is behind it."

Qabalan, who heads the Higher Shiite Islamic Council, also called for "wisdom" in tackling the attack.

Beirut, 28 Aug 08, 17:23

<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&D1710C5899DD405BC22574B40067E5BD>
