

# Haaretz: Iran Getting More Involved in Hizbullah Operations to Fill the Gap

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Iran assuming Mughniyeh role inside Hezbollah

Haaretz: Iran Getting More Involved in Hizbullah Operations to Fill the Gap

Iran is increasing its involvement and control of Hizbullah's operations since military commander Imad Mughniyeh was killed a year ago, the Israeli daily Haaretz reported Thursday.

It quoted senior Israeli defense officials as saying that Mughniyeh's assassination in a Damascus car bombing in February last year left a large gap in the party's leadership, adding that Hizbullah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah "is now stuck dealing with operational matters he never handled in the past."

"Hizbullah has not yet found someone of similar stature to replace Mughniyeh. Therefore, the Iranians have taken some responsibility for Hizbullah operations, using a large number of Iranian Revolutionary Guard and intelligence officers in Lebanon," the newspaper said.

"This means operational cooperation between Iran, Syria and Hizbullah has increased regarding all potential actions against Israel. Iranian officers, most of whom prefer to be based in Syria, often visit Lebanon and tour the Israeli border," the daily added.

The Iranians are directly involved in running Hizbullah operations in southern Lebanon, and hundreds of the Shiite group's fighters travel to Iran every month for training, according to Haaretz.

About last Saturday's rocket attack from southern Lebanon, Haaretz said the rocket that struck a western Galilee village was most likely fired by the extremist Sunni organization Osbat al-Ansar.

The organization considers Hizbullah a major rival, and Saturday's rockets were fired without the Shiite group's approval, the daily said.

However, it said Hizbullah gave its approval for the firing of rockets on northern Israel by Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command during the Jewish state's offensive on the Gaza Strip last month.

Haaretz said Israel sent a severe warning to the Lebanese government via UNIFIL and foreign diplomats after last Saturday's incident.

The Jewish state reportedly informed the Lebanese government that it expects the army and the cabinet to take action against Osbat al-Ansar the same way they dealt with Fatah al-Islam in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp almost two years ago.

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<http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&4686229BB77E8FBFC225756900292EAF>

Iran assuming Mughniyeh role inside Hezbollah  
By Amos Harel, Haaretz Correspondent

Iran has been increasing its involvement and control over Hezbollah's operations since terror operations head Imad Mughniyeh was killed a year ago.

Hezbollah has not yet found someone of similar stature to replace Mughniyeh. Therefore, the Iranians have taken some responsibility for Hezbollah operations, using a large number of Iranian Revolutionary Guard and intelligence officers in Lebanon.

This means operational cooperation between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah has increased regarding all potential actions

against Israel. Iranian officers, most of whom prefer to be based in Syria, often visit Lebanon and tour the Israeli border.

The Iranians are directly involved in running Hezbollah operations in southern Lebanon, and in addition, hundreds of Hezbollah militants head for Iran every month for training and exercises.

Senior Israeli defense officials told Haaretz that Mughniyeh's assassination, which Hezbollah blames on Israel, left a large hole in the organization. Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah is now stuck dealing with operational matters he never handled in the past, say the Israeli officials.

Nasrallah has much less knowledge and experience on these matters than Mughniyeh, who was very careful about secrecy and compartmentalization of information. His death caused quite a bit of fear and anxiety among senior Hezbollah officials, the officials said.

The Katyusha rockets that struck northern Israel during Operation Cast Lead last month seem to have been fired by a Palestinian organization, Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command. The organization is believed to have acted with Hezbollah's approval, even though Hezbollah itself fired only a limited, symbolic number of rockets and prevented Palestinian attempts for more widespread attacks.

The rocket that struck a western Galilee village last Saturday was most likely fired by the extremist Sunni organization Usbat al-Ansar, a splinter group that identifies itself with the Islamic Jihad movement and is influenced by Al-Qaida. The organization considers the Shi'ite Hezbollah a major rival, and Saturday's rockets were fired without Hezbollah approval.

Three members of a Christian Arab family were slightly injured. The Israel Defense Forces responded to the Katyushas with eight artillery rounds. No one was injured.

After the incident, Israel sent the Lebanese a severe warning via UNIFIL and foreign diplomats, saying the Lebanese government must take responsibility for preventing terror attacks on Israel launched from its territory. Israel told Lebanon that it expects the Lebanese government and the army take action against Usbat al-Ansar, a Palestinian splinter group in the southern Lebanon Ein el-Hilweh refugee camp in southern Lebanon, with the same determination it used against similar groups in the Nahar el-Barad camp in northern Lebanon over a year ago. The army destroyed large sections of the camp, and dozens were killed in the battles between the extremist groups and the Lebanese Army.

UNIFIL has recently uncovered about 60 Katyushas, though Israeli defense officials are divided over whether UNIFIL and the Lebanese army can - or want to - take action in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL operates effectively and with determination in open areas, say the officials, but avoids built-up areas in the Shi'ite villages, saying it is not included in their mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1067036.html>

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