

Turkish forces foil Hezbollah attack on Israeli target

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Turkish forces have prevented a Hezbollah attack on an undisclosed Israeli target in the country, Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon said. Ayalon thanked Turkey earlier this week for the successful operation and for its cooperation in meeting with Turkish journalists.

According to defense sources, the attack was meant to avenge the killing of senior Hezbollah operative Imad Mughniyeh - who died in a car bombing in Damascus in February 2008. The organization sees Israel as responsible for the assassination.

The planned attack in Turkey was exposed over a month ago, with Turkish media publishing a warning issued by the local police's senior command to its officers to take steps to prevent a Hezbollah attack on American and Israeli targets. Turkish reports said Hezbollah had set up a network of Iranian agents posing as tourists in Istanbul, with the cooperation of Iranian security agencies.

This is the third attempt by the group to avenge Mughniyeh's death. Earlier this year, Hezbollah planned an attack on the Israeli embassy in Azerbaijan, but local security forces exposed the attack and members of the group were arrested. Later on, in Egypt, a group of Hezbollah agents were arrested and accused of tracking Israelis at tourist sites as well as monitoring Israeli ships passing through the Suez Canal.

Last month, U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation director Robert Mueller visited Ankara where he asked for access to the country's biometric database, in order to identify terror activists moving in and out of Turkey. Israel believes the organization would like to carry out an attack against a distant Israeli target, without dragging Lebanon into another war with Israel.

Lebanese reports say no successor had been appointed for Mughniyeh, who served as a liaison between Hezbollah and Iran, and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah now has to contend with an officer from the Jerusalem Brigade of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which insists on monitoring the Hezbollah military force. This presence indicates an increased Iranian involvement in Hezbollah operations.

Nasrallah recently began meeting outside his hiding place, including twice with Syrian President Bashar Assad in Damascus. Although Hezbollah has won recognition of its right to bear arms by the new Lebanese government, it is still criticized for the way in which it runs its affairs independently of state authorities.

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