



November 15, 2015

## Combined ISIS Suicide Bombing Attacks in the Shi'ite Suburb of South Beirut



The scene of the attacks in the neighborhood of Burj al-Barajneh, in Beirut's southern Shi'ite suburb, which is controlled by Hezbollah (Al-Manar TV, November 12 and 13, 2015)

### Overview

1. In the late afternoon on November 12, 2015, **ISIS carried out combined suicide bombing attacks in Burj al-Barajneh, the southern Shi'ite Hezbollah-controlled suburb of Beirut. Forty-three people were killed, most of them passersby, and 240 were injured** (according to Al-Jazeera, quoting the Lebanese ministry of health). The blasts also destroyed a considerable amount of property (the mayor of Burj al-Barajneh reported that ten buildings collapsed and 55 stores were destroyed). **The attacks were carried out by two suicide bombers wearing explosive belts.** They blew themselves up **near the Al-Rasoul al-A'zam hospital.** A third suicide bomber nearby was probably killed before he could detonate his explosive belt.
2. **ISIS in Lebanon claimed responsibility for the attacks via its social media.** According to the announcement, ISIS operatives had succeeded in carrying out an attack in the Hezbollah stronghold of Burj al-Barajneh **using a booby-trapped motorcycle**, attacking crowded areas in the southern suburb of Beirut (Muslims-News.net, November 12, 2015).



Left: The neighborhood of Burj al-Barajneh in the southern suburb of Beirut (Google Maps). Right: ISIS in Lebanon claims responsibility for the mass-killing attack in Beirut (Muslims-News.net, November 12, 2015).

3. It was the first suicide bombing attack carried out in the Hezbollah stronghold of Burj al-Barajneh since the summer of 2014.<sup>1</sup> It was also the most serious attack carried out in Lebanon since the beginning of Hezbollah's involvement in the fighting in Syria. For a relatively long period of time, the achievements of the Syrian army and Hezbollah in the Qalamoun Mountains, along with Hezbollah's preventive measures in Lebanon in general and Beirut in particular, had hampered the military capabilities of ISIS and the other jihadist organizations, and prevented them from carrying out their planned terrorist attacks in the Shi'ite neighborhoods of Beirut. **This time, however, ISIS managed to carry out combined suicide bombing attacks in the heart of Hezbollah's stronghold, killing and wounding many.**

4. It is probable **ISIS considers the attack in Beirut as an operational and propaganda achievement**, joining two other "successes:" the multiple simultaneous mass killing attacks in Paris, carried out by three terrorist squads (killing at least 132); and blowing up the Russian airplane over the Sinai Peninsula, apparently with a bomb planed on board (killing 224 passengers and crew). Those **three showcase attacks, carried out within a period of two weeks, were aimed at sending a message intended to deter ISIS's various enemies, i.e., Russia and Egypt, Hezbollah and Iran, France and the West in general.** With regard to ISIS's operational capabilities, the events showed **ISIS could carry out terrorist attacks**

<sup>1</sup> On June 25, 2014, a suicide bombing attack was attempted at the Du Roy hotel in Beirut, but failed. About half a year earlier (January 2, 2014), a suicide bombing attack was carried out in the southern suburb of Beirut near several important Hezbollah institutions.

**far from its power base** in Syria and Iraq. In all probability **ISIS can be expected to continue attacks against its enemies, including Israel and the Jewish people.**

## Hezbollah's Position

5. ISIS's most recent attack in Lebanon **presents a security, political and media challenge for Hezbollah**, which justifies its involvement in Syria on the grounds that it is defending Lebanon from jihadist terrorism. The attack illustrated the limits of Hezbollah's power and its inability to protect its own strongholds against ISIS and other jihadist organizations over long periods of time. Therefore, when the dust settles, **internal Lebanese criticism of Hezbollah's involvement in the fighting in Syria may increase**, despite the relative restraint still shown by Hezbollah's rivals in Lebanon.<sup>2</sup>

6. On November 14, 2015, two days after the attack, Hassan Nasrallah tried to respond to the challenge with a speech in which he **bundled the attack in Burj al-Barajneh with the attack in Paris**. He claimed the attack in Burj al-Barajneh had clearly been the work of ISIS. He claimed it had been carried out by two terrorists of Syrian origin and that the Lebanese security forces had operatives in custody who confessed they had links to and received instructions from ISIS. He claimed the detentions carried out after the attack led to the exposure of a network which had gathered intelligence for ISIS and rented safe houses for it in Beirut and Burj al-Barajneh (Al-Manar, November 14, 2015).

7. **Nasrallah's speech was intended as a response to ISIS and his own rivals in Lebanon**. He claimed that the attack had two objectives: **the first was to incite a civil war in Lebanon** (i.e., by Hezbollah's opponents) that would serve the interests of Israel and ISIS. He called on the Lebanese not to get dragged into a civil war and not to inflame emotions against the Syrian refugees and the Palestinians (although he demanded the Syrian refugees in Lebanon not allow terrorists to operate from among them). **The second objective**, according to Nasrallah, was to exert pressure on Hezbollah to withdraw from the struggle against ISIS in Syria and "other places." Thus, he said, **the attack would only serve to strengthen Hezbollah's resolve to continue fighting in Syria** ("They only strengthen our determination...after this attack we are engaged in an ongoing war with ISIS and will fight it more resolutely...")

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<sup>2</sup> Lebanese Prime Minister **Tammam Salam** called for greater coordination between the Lebanese security forces and for an increase in security. Hezbollah's opponents (Samir Geagea, Sa'ad Hariri) condemned the attack but have not [yet] attacked Hezbollah for its involvement in the fighting in Syria.

