



An interview granted by Hassan Nasrallah intended to reinforce the deterrent message towards Israel by emphasizing Hezbollah's military capabilities, especially high-precision missiles enabling Hezbollah to damage essential infrastructure facilities in the next war

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Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah being interviewed on the Lebanese Al-Mayadeen TV channel (Al-Mayadeen's YouTube channel, January 3, 2018)

Overview

- ▶ On January 3, 2018, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah gave an interview to a reporter of the Lebanese Al-Mayadeen TV channel, which is affiliated with Hezbollah. The interview lasted about two and a half hours. The interviewer was **Sami Kleib**, a Lebanese media personality who identifies with Hezbollah's positions.

In the ITIC's assessment, the interview, like its predecessors, **was intended first and foremost to strengthen the deterrent message against Israel, primarily by emphasizing Hezbollah's military capabilities, and especially its high-precision missiles.**¹ According to Nasrallah, the Israelis have said that these missiles could damage essential infrastructure facilities and cause a very serious disaster in Israel. Nasrallah noted that Hezbollah's military capabilities created a **"balance of terror"** between it and Israel **and deter Israel from starting a war.**

¹ See the ITIC's Information Bulletin from March 2, 2017: "An analysis of threats against Israel made by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah." Nasrallah said that Hezbollah was displaying patience "until further notice" and added: "And I do not say that we will always show patience."

► At the same time, **Nasrallah spoke cautiously and avoided making provocative statements** regarding sensitive issues on the agenda between Iran and Hezbollah, on the one hand, and Israel on the other. For example, when asked **why Hezbollah did not respond to Israel’s attacks in Syria**, he replied that **caution against deterioration is a tactic that serves the preparations for the “great war,” “for the sake of the great strategic interest.”** He added that [despite the attacks in Syria] **Israel cannot prevent the upgrading of Hezbollah’s [military] capabilities and readiness in Lebanon.** At the same time, Nasrallah qualified his statements, saying that Hezbollah **would not always show patience, especially “if pressured.”**

► **Hassan Nasrallah was asked about his ties with the United States and Europe.** He claimed that during the Bush administration, **he had received a message from US Vice President Dick Cheney with a long list of “inducements” in return for complying with a series of demands** (not to fire at Israel, not to supply the Palestinians with money and weapons, and to cooperate with regard to Al-Qaeda). According to Nasrallah, **Hezbollah refused the offer** and refrained from direct contact with the Americans. According to Nasrallah, an American attempt was also made to contact Hezbollah **during the Obama administration**, apparently with the aim of enlisting Hezbollah in the campaign against ISIS, but Hezbollah refused once again. **As for Europe, according to Nasrallah, contact has been made with a “senior member of a European security service” and information is shared.**

In the ITIC’s assessment, Nasrallah’s description of Hezbollah’s contacts with the US and Europe is tendentious and biased, and it may serve trends of psychological and political warfare aimed at embarrassing the US (given its sensitivity where Hezbollah is concerned). **It was also aimed to illustrate the attractiveness** of Hezbollah which, according to Nasrallah, is being wooed by the West.

Nasrallah’s answers on the issues on Hezbollah’s agenda

The “balance of terror” between Hezbollah and Israel

► The interviewer noted that the Israelis say that while Nasrallah speaks about a “balance of terror,” he refrains from appearing before the Lebanese, but “speaks on screen” because Israel could kill him. Nasrallah replied that the [existing] **“balance of terror” is [the one that] currently prevents the Israeli enemy from starting a war. “That’s what we have achieved [...].”**

The high-precision projectiles will sow destruction in the next war

► The interviewer asked Nasrallah to comment on Israeli assessments that Hezbollah had a stockpile of 130,000 rockets. “Does [Hezbollah] have more or fewer than that?” Asked the interviewer. **Nasrallah’s response:** “When this society [Israeli society], and this state [Israel] and this entity is placed before you, you will see the [enemy’s] army, its security services, its people, its **power plants, its airports and seaports, its nuclear and petrochemical plants.** Believe me, **[this] has nothing to do with the number of rockets.** In order to inflict a defeat on the Israeli army, you do not need a hundred or two hundred thousand rockets [...] **It [the Israeli side] says [itself] that Hezbollah does not need 100,000 rockets [...], [The Israeli side says] that if Hezbollah has dozens of high-precision projectiles, and if it chooses its targets carefully, then we [the Israelis] will suffer a very big disaster.”**

The weakness of the IDF

► The interviewer asked Nasrallah **how Hezbollah operatives would infiltrate Israel beyond the Galilee** (when there is a total war). Nasrallah (who refrained from answering directly) replied that in a total war, “everything is possible.” According to him, the IDF is weaker than ISIS and anyone who managed to defeat ISIS (i.e., the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis) **will surely manage to defeat the IDF more easily.** Nasrallah added that **the IDF’s only advantage was the air force, but that alone was not enough to decide the war.** He also ridiculed the IDF and its officers, claiming that they were **defeatists, cowards and lacking fighting spirit**, which was evident in both Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.

Hezbollah’s failure to respond to Israel’s attacks in Syria

► The interviewer expressed surprise that **“[Israel] is attacking you in Syria and you are not doing anything or retaliating.”** “What is the reason [for this]?” Nasrallah replied that this **“serves the preparation for the great war”** at this stage. According to him, **everyone is being careful not to reach a deterioration “unless we are pressured.”**

► According to him, the Israelis are attacking some [of Hezbollah’s] targets in Syria. Sometimes this succeeds and sometimes it does not. In the meantime, **the Israelis cannot prevent Hezbollah from raising its level of readiness and its [military] capabilities in Lebanon.** “This is a matter for which we are showing patience **until further notice – and I am not saying that we will always show patience – for the sake of the great strategic interest.”**

The elimination of the State of Israel

- ▶ The interviewer asked Hassan Nasrallah whether there was **a chance of reconciliation with Israel**, or whether “it is a cancerous mass that must be uprooted.” Nasrallah replied that **no one had the right to give up Palestine from the sea to the river** and that he refused to recognize the “oppressor entity,” **even if the whole world recognized it.**

Hezbollah, Iran and the Palestinian organizations

- ▶ Hassan Nasrallah spoke extensively about the relations between Iran and Hezbollah, on the one hand, and the Palestinians on the other:

- ◆ The interviewer asked Nasrallah **whether Hezbollah was coordinating or instigating a third Palestinian intifada.** Nasrallah replied that he had indeed met with representatives of Hamas, Fatah and other organizations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, As-Sa’iqa, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. According to him, they all agreed **on the importance of the Jerusalem issue, the coordination of an intifada within the “occupied territories,” demonstrations, and putting pressure [on Israel].**

Nasrallah said that **Hezbollah had helped organize demonstrations and “other activities.”** He added that **Hezbollah provided political, financial, and media assistance to Palestinian organizations, as does Iran,** which provided financial aid to the wounded and to families whose homes were destroyed during the Al-Quds Intifada. **Nasrallah stressed that this was not a total war but rather a “popular uprising” that should be strengthened.**

- ◆ **Iran supports all organizations belonging to the “Palestinian resistance”** (i.e., all terrorist organizations). According to Nasrallah, this is why the United States is imposing sanctions on Iran, since the pretext of the Iranian weapons is no longer relevant. He noted that **Iran provided aid to the Palestinians directly rather than through Hezbollah.** The “resistance” in Palestine (i.e., the terrorist organizations) **is in need of weapons and military capabilities.** Providing aid [to the Palestinians] in these areas [implicitly by Iran] **is a permanent policy that is not dependent on one decision or another.**
- ▶ **Hassan Nasrallah was asked whether Hezbollah would intervene militarily in the next war in the Gaza Strip.** Nasrallah (**who refrained from giving a direct answer**) replied that **the “resistance” organizations preferred guerrilla warfare, wars of attrition, and the**

accumulation of achievements such as the one that led to the withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon. However, in his opinion, the “axis of resistance” countries should prepare for war (total war, implicitly) and plan how to turn this threat into an opportunity. **Nasrallah refused to answer the question of whether the war would take place in three arenas – Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian** – because he allegedly did not know how the war would develop.

► Nasrallah added that if President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu impose a total war on the region, **this would be an opportunity to liberate Jerusalem and not just the Galilee.** Speaking about the components of the “axis of resistance,” Nasrallah noted that apart from the members of the axis [i.e., Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah], there is also the Houthi “Yemeni element.” According to him, **the Houthis have promised to send thousands of fighters to the area, if necessary.**

Hezbollah, Iran and the Syrian arena

► The interviewer asked whether a new force of the “resistance” had been established in southern Syria to act against Israel. Nasrallah replied that **Israel should indeed be concerned**, since “the young Syrians” have accumulated considerable experience in guerrilla warfare and have already established an operational network. According to him, **it is “the right of the Syrian Popular Resistance” to defend itself against Israel and even to liberate the Golan Heights someday.** Nasrallah claimed that **in the future, Hezbollah might have a presence as part of the “resistance” in southern Syria**, similar to the one it had before 2011, **a “rear base” of sorts with a foothold [implicitly Hezbollah’s] and cooperation** [implicitly with Syrians that will operate on the Golan Heights front]. According to Nasrallah, if Israel attacks Hezbollah, they will return there.

► **Hassan Nasrallah expressed his assessment that the war in Syria had reached its final stages and would probably end within a year or two.** With reference to his statement that Hezbollah operatives would leave Syria in 2018, **he denied this**, noting that it **depended on achieving the goals in Syria** (without specifying which goals). Nasrallah ranked the factors that allegedly led to the “victory” in Syria. He ranked the **Syrian regime and President Assad as the leading factor, followed by Iran.** He expressed his admiration for the Syrian army, claiming that Hezbollah had learned classic warfare methods in various environments such as deserts and cities from the Syrian Army.

The situation in Iran according to Nasrallah

- ▶ In the interview Nasrallah, who conveyed the propaganda messages of the Iranian regime, **tried to downplay the significance of the protest in Iran.** According to him, the current incidents are not similar to those that took place in 2009, and most of them have already been contained by the Iranian regime. He claimed that while in the previous protest the problem was political, now it is economic, and originated in bankrupt companies and banks.
- ▶ Nasrallah claimed that groups of opponents of the Iranian regime, such as the Iranian organization Mojahedin Khalq, had taken advantage of the situation and intensified the protest. According to him, the number of demonstrators was low relative to the general population. He added that the Iranian regime contained the situation wisely, and that the Revolutionary Guards refrained from intervening. Nasrallah quoted intelligence sources in the United States and Israel who reported that these protests had already died down.
- ▶ In response to the demands made during the protest marches, Nasrallah claimed that **most of the Iranian people supported the regime's attitude in the context of the "resistance"** (i.e., assistance to Hezbollah and other regional terrorist organizations) **and Jerusalem.** According to him, the authorities explained to the people that if Iran did not help the Syrians, the Iraqis, and the Lebanese against ISIS, it would become a problem in Iran as well. Nasrallah said that the Iranian people contributed voluntarily to the war in Syria.

Hezbollah's ties with the US administration and European countries²

The United States

Sami Kleib: Did you recently disclose information about the offers that you [i.e., Hezbollah] received from the Americans? Many offers? And we understood that there were also offers from previous American administrations, the Clinton administration and the Obama administration [...] Did they come back to you with additional offers?

Nasrallah: The George Bush administration.

Sami Kleib: And during the Obama administration?

Nasrallah: During the Obama administration there was an attempt to contact Hezbollah via intelligence services, but we refused each of these types of contacts. Of course, they [the

² In order to avoid altering the contents of the interview in any way, and the context in which they were made, we preferred to translate this section in full, with a number of clarifications on the ITIC's part in brackets.

Americans] deny it, but there were live eyewitnesses who conveyed these messages on more than one channel, and by more than one person. All of them are still alive.

Sami Kleib: American [contacts]?

Nasrallah: None of them were Americans. **There is no direct dialogue between us and the Americans.** They [the Americans] spoke with figures who could be considered mutual friends. In Lebanon and in the Arab world there are many mutual friends.

Sami Kleib: What was the objective of the Obama administration?

Nasrallah: On the subject of Hezbollah, he was ready to put [Hezbollah] on the list of terrorist [organizations]. But **[at the same time]**, using his security and intelligence logic, **he tried to open channels and conduct a secret dialogue behind the scenes, possibly in order to conduct a security and political dialogue or in order to seek an exchange of information.** For example, in 2000 and 2001, and especially after September 11, some media outlets reported that an American citizen of Lebanese descent came to me **and handed me a letter from Dick Cheney**, who was then US Vice President. In the letter there were **inducements with a beginning but no end.** The inducements are related to borders, prisoners, money, and our [Hezbollah's] participation in the Lebanese government. This is because, at that time, there was a veto on our presence in the government, and this has something to do with our being removed from the terrorist lists, **but at the same time [Dick Cheney] demanded commitments.**

Sami Kleib: And they are?

Nasrallah: This was discussed at the time, of course, in the media, **but the American ambassador in Beirut at the time denied it**, and I justify [the denial], because he did not know about it. It was not through the US State Department but directly from Dick Cheney. He sent a written letter. **I did not take it so as not to take a stand**, but I wish I had taken it, **since it would have served as evidence [against the Americans].**

Sami Kleib: Don't you have any recordings or photos made under the table [i.e., clandestinely]?

Nasrallah: We do not work that way. [Cheney] said at the time that we [i.e., the Americans] are prepared to first remove Hezbollah from the terrorism list according to the principle of forgiveness. He used this expression. We [the Americans] will remove the names of the figures. We will also return prisoners [held by Israel] to you. At that time Sheikh Abd al-Karim [Ubeid] and Hajj Abu Ali al-Dirani and the other brothers were in the prisons of the [Israeli] occupation. He said we [i.e., the Americans] would return all the Lebanese prisoners to you. He said we [the Americans] would lift the veto on your participation in the government. We did not know about that, but all we had was an interpretation. In any event, we did not ask to participate [in the government].

[Dick Cheney] said that we [i.e., the Americans] will recognize you and establish diplomatic relations for you around the world because we [i.e., Hezbollah] cannot obtain a visa in the world. He said that they would remove all the restrictions imposed on you [Hezbollah]. We'll give you money, at the time there was talk of billions of dollars. I asked him then: **A billion dollars for us or for the Lebanese government? And he replied, for you, for Hezbollah.** I asked him: What will the money be given for? He replied that it was for the areas that were damaged from 1982 to 2000, for rehabilitating and strengthening your public and popular situation. I told him that this was a very generous offer. What's more, he said that **you would keep your weapons.** Of course, no one spoke at the time about missiles to Haifa, and beyond Haifa, and far beyond Haifa. The only thing in the minds of the Americans at that time was a Katyusha and, at best, an advanced Katyusha. He said that **you would keep your light and medium weapons but not the Katyushas.** You should understand that at the time he was speaking, we had no need of this weapon, only after 2000. [Dick Cheney] said that in return, we [i.e., the Americans] do not demand that you recognize Israel; you can continue to speak against Israel as you please.

[Dick Cheney] said that we **want three things from you in return: the first condition – not to fire in a confrontation with Israel.** I told him: What if Israel attacks and enters the country [Lebanon]? He replied that you [i.e., Hezbollah] have no right to respond and you can turn to the UN Security Council. In other words, Hezbollah is allowed to have weapons inside Lebanon provided it does not fire a single bullet at the Israeli enemy. **Second condition – not to provide any aid to the Palestinians,** not to give them weapons or money or [military] capabilities [such as] military training and knowhow. **Third condition – to cooperate on the**

issue of Al-Qaeda, particularly in light of the Americans' distress following September 11. **Of course, we absolutely refused to do so** [...]

Sami Kleib: What about the Trump administration?

Nasrallah: Definitely not. The last attempt, to be precise, **was after Trump was elected but before he took office.**

Sami Kleib: With the same demands?

Nasrallah: **Nothing new came out** of what had been discussed. The last attempt was that we [the Americans] wanted to meet and talk [with Hezbollah]. [They said] we can cooperate. The Americans came with a concept called **the common enemy**, in other words, [the common enemy is] ISIS and the "*takfiri* [infidel] forces" [other Salafist-Jihadi organizations]. In response, we told them that **they were not a common enemy. They are our enemy, that is true, but they are your friend and ally [of the United States]**. Trump said for a year that the ones who created ISIS were Obama and Clinton.

Europe

Sami Kleib: There is currently talk **of European countries that tried to contact you**, some of them [even] succeeded. Delegations from European countries came to you so that you would help them fight terrorism. Can you specify which countries they are?

Nasrallah: To be polite, I will not reveal this information **because there is an agreement regarding its non-publication. But many European countries**, and you know that they are in the European Union, have placed Hezbollah's military wing on the terrorist list, **but as a result of European security needs, they contacted us.** In order to improve the atmosphere, **at one of the meetings with a senior member of a European security service, I sent the brothers [i.e., Hezbollah operatives] to meet with him. Of course, we have no brigadier general and colonel; we have operatives with the title of Hajj** [i.e., Muslims who have fulfilled the religious obligation of making a pilgrimage to Mecca].

Sami Kleib: Did **the senior European security official** speak French or German?

Nasrallah: He spoke in one of the European languages. I told the men [the Hezbollah operatives]: When you meet with this senior person, tell him that I am Hajj X or Hajj Y, **and**

that we are from Hezbollah’s military wing and not from its political wing. In other words, tell him that you [i.e., the senior European security official] are meeting with people [from Hezbollah] which the European Union has classified as a terrorist organization. **This is in order to emphasize that we [Hezbollah] are not a terrorist organization and that we are prepared to cooperate even with you [the Europeans] in order to prevent harm to any people of the world.**

Sami Kleib: Did you cooperate with them?

Nasrallah: Yes. There is cooperation [in the transfer] of information, and we have no problem with that.

A few minor matters on the margins of the interview

► Following are a few minor matters on the margins of the interview (NTV, January 6, 2018; Al-Mayadeen TV, January 3, 2018):

- ◆ The reporter who interviewed Nasrallah was **Sami Kleib**, a Lebanese media personality and program host on the Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Mayadeen channel (Nasrallah is usually interviewed by **Ghassan Bin Jiddo**, the director of Al-Mayadeen TV). The interview was coordinated by **Hezbollah’s information chief Hajj Muhammad Afif**, whom Sami Kleib refers to as a “professional” who recognizes the importance of such interviews.



Interviewer Sami Kleib at the beginning of the program on Al-Mayadeen TV (Al-Mayadeen TV, Lebanon, January 3, 2018)

- ◆ Sami Kleib met with Muhammad Afif on the afternoon of the day of the interview. He says, “**afterward, a journey began in various cars and with stops in various places. I did not know where the interview was being held.**” He says that for security reasons

he was not allowed to take his phone “or even glasses [...] Hezbollah employs special security measures [...]” **Sami Kleib refrained from referring to the location of the interview took place.**

◆ At the end of the interview, he asked Nasrallah what he was doing these days. He replied that he was concentrating on reading reports, commentaries **and translations from Hebrew.** He claimed that **his salary at Hezbollah was about \$1,300 a month.**