



Hassan Nasrallah again boasts of Hezbollah's offensive capabilities, emphasizing its ability to hit strategic targets and the population in the center of Israel

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Overview

On July 12, 2019, **Hassan Nasrallah** was interviewed and again boasted of Hezbollah's **improved offensive capabilities to attack Israel**. He particularly emphasized **Hezbollah's ability to attack strategic targets in the center of Israel with rockets and precision missiles**. To illustrate the threat he used of **map of Israel marked with demographic data, a list of designated strategic targets and pictures to illustrate vital targets in Israel (Ben-Gurion International Airport, the nuclear facility in Dimona, the power plant in Hadera and the ammonia tank in Haifa Bay)**. Among the strategic targets mentioned by Nasrallah were **the Kirya in Tel Aviv (IDF headquarters), the ministry of defense, Ben-Gurion International Airport, Israeli Air Force bases, nuclear facilities, the Ashdod port, Israeli Military Industries facilities, and Israel civilian, commercial and financial facilities**. In addition to its rocket and missile capabilities, Nasrallah mentioned **Hezbollah's elite units, its UAV force and its improved intelligence coverage of Israel** (al-Manar, July 12, 2019).



Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah during the interview. On the table in front of him is a map of Israel. To the right are pictures illustrating the threats he referred to during the interview. They included an attack on an Israeli navy vessel; a building in Haifa that was directly hit by a rocket during the Second Lebanon War; Israeli soldiers crying during a funeral and demonstrators carrying pictures of Iranian leader Khamenei (al-Manar, July 12, 2019, uploaded to the QAPTAN14M YouTube channel).

- **Hassan Nasrallah's threats to wreak havoc and destruction upon Israel with Hezbollah's rockets and missiles were not new. The only exception was the large number of details about attacks in the center of the country ("from Netanya to Ashdod"), where, he said, 90% of the country's institutions and facilities are located.** At least since 2012, **from time to time Nasrallah threatens Israel**, giving examples of strategic sites that are in Hezbollah's crosshairs (for the February 16, 2017 "ammonia speech," see the **Appendix**). The main themes appearing in his speeches are Hezbollah's increased offensive capabilities against Israel, especially with rockets and missiles which can wreak destruction upon Israel in the next war; Hezbollah's ability to carry out mass attacks on the Israeli civilian population; the lack of an Israeli response to the missile/rocket threat; and the "balance of terror" between Hezbollah and Israel, which deters Israel from starting a war (see the **Appendix** for past statements made by Nasrallah regarding Hezbollah's improved military capabilities).
- In ITIC assessment, Nasrallah's years-long, ongoing threats against Israel's vital infrastructure and population have two objectives: **at the strategic level**, they are intended to deter Israel from initiating an attack on Hezbollah in Syria or Lebanon, especially at times when Hezbollah's "level of concern" rises. **At the operational level**, Hezbollah wants to create an "equation," which during a war will deter Israel from carrying out aerial attacks on Hezbollah's military infrastructure (which is situated within the civilian Shi'ite population in south Lebanon). It can be assumed that Nasrallah has internalized statements made by senior Israeli figures about the great damage Israel can do to the Dahia, the Hezbollah-controlled Shi'ite suburb in southern Beirut.
- Moreover, Nasrallah's interview should be examined in **the context of the current tension between the United States and Iran** (which Nasrallah related to at length). It is possible that the Iranians used Nasrallah as a conduit for sending messages **to warn the Americans not to carry out an offensive move** by stressing the great harm Hezbollah can do to Israel, America's close ally. However, **Nasrallah did not commit himself to a military response against Israel in a scenario in which the situation deteriorates or in a war between the United States and Iran, merely stressing the great potential damage Hezbollah was capable of doing.**

In ITIC assessment, **Nasrallah's threats express his growing self confidence (and of his sponsor, Iran), based on the significant improvement in Hezbollah's offensive capabilities since the Second Lebanon War.** Those capabilities are a function of a large arsenal of rockets and a relatively small number of precision missiles that cover strategic targets in Israel (in one interview, it was claimed that according to Israeli statements, Hezbollah has an arsenal of 130,000 rockets and several dozen precision missiles). Hezbollah also has **an arsenal of UAVs which can be used for offensive purposes, and elite units with combat experience gained in the fighting in Syria.** As far as Nasrallah is concerned, **all of the above deter Israel from initiating a war. In addition, Nasrallah believes that in a war Hezbollah's offensive capabilities will enable it to strike Israel hard and keep it from being victorious.**

Main Points Made by Hassan Nasrallah (al-Manar TV, July 12, 2019)

► On July 12, 2019, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was interviewed by the al-Manar TV channel, the main Hezbollah-affiliated media outlet. Nasrallah related extensively to the qualitative and quantitative improvements made in Hezbollah's military capabilities since the Second Lebanon War. He especially emphasized Hezbollah's ability to fire rockets and missiles to hit strategic targets in the center of Israel, and **"send Israel back to the stone age"** ("Can the Zionist entity deal with that? Withstand it? Returning to the stone age?").



Hassan Nasrallah during the interview
(al-Manar, July 12, 2019, uploaded to the QAPTAN14M YouTube channel).

► At the beginning of the interview Nasrallah was asked how Hezbollah had changed in the 13 years since the Second Lebanon War. He answered that today, despite the sanctions imposed

on it, **Hezbollah was stronger than ever. It had considerably improved its military capabilities in the intervening years, both qualitatively and quantitatively.** The Israelis recognize that, he said, and often speak about it.

► He then related to the areas in which Hezbollah's capabilities had improved: **the number of operatives** ("jihad fighters") had multiplied itself many times over. Their offensive capabilities had significantly improved, while formerly most of their capabilities were defensive. Today Hezbollah has offensive infantry units. At their core are the **Radwan Force and the al-Abbas Troops, both elite units.**¹ They specialize in offensive attacks, are armed with the most modern weapons, are highly motivated and have accumulated experience (a probable reference to combat experience acquired fighting in Syria). All of the above were absent in 2006 [during the Second Lebanon War].



Hezbollah's al-Abbas Troops operatives (pictures from Hezbollah's combat information unit, retweeted July 13 and 15, 2019).



Hezbollah's al-Abbas Troops operatives (pictures from Hezbollah's combat information unit, retweeted by Ali Shoeib, July 12, 2019).

► Hezbollah also has **a UAV arsenal** that has increased significantly ("In 2006 we had a few UAVs and we tried to do something [with them], but we were at the beginning..."). Today, Nasrallah said, **the UAV force is large and strong, with considerable resources.** In addition,

¹ The **Radwan Force** is an elite Hezbollah unit that participated in the fighting in Syria. They are meant to carry out offensive missions in Israeli territory during the next war. The **al-Abbas Troops** is an elite unit established several years ago, and also specializes in offensive activities inside Israel (lebanon24 website, July 16, 2019).

Hezbollah has **improved intelligence coverage of Israel**, which [allegedly] is also "more comprehensive than ever," as well as qualitative developments in weapons (which Nasrallah refused to reveal, saying that "some things have to be kept hidden, as surprises").



Pictures of Hezbollah UAVs exhibited in the Mleeta Museum in south Lebanon (lebanon24 website, August 10, 2019).

Hezbollah's rocket and missile capabilities

► **At the core of Hezbollah's offensive capabilities is its rocket arsenal**, which **Nasrallah claims has grown both qualitatively and quantitatively** since 2006. From a qualitative standpoint, the precise rockets, he said, worry both Israel and the United States. Nasrallah added that in the past the Israelis said it was forbidden to let Hezbollah develop missiles. Later, the Israelis said it was forbidden for Hezbollah to have precision missiles or weapons [in Lebanon], which would "change the balance." However, he said, **nevertheless, Hezbollah developed weapons which can wreak destruction upon Israel.**

► **Nasrallah strongly stressed the destruction Hezbollah's rockets and missiles could cause Israel.** He claimed the organization had tens of thousands of rockets and missiles (saying he did not want to publicly announce the exact numbers) that could hit **any target anywhere in Israel, including the south ("...beyond Eilat")**. He emphasized that central Israel was within the range of Hezbollah fire. He said there was a kind of rectangle in central Israel, from Netanya to Ashdod, about 43 miles long, by 12 miles wide. He said it was a small, densely populated area, **housing about 90% of strategic targets and more than half of Israel's population ("Israeli settlers")**.

Nasrallah referred to the designated strategic targets located in central Israel [listed on a map he had brought with him], vital to the State of Israel. They include IDF headquarters, government offices, the ministry of defense, Ben-Gurion International Airport, Israeli Air Force bases, military installations housing unconventional weapons, nuclear facilities, chemical plants, the Ashdod port, the military industries, civilian commercial and industrial zones, financial centers like the stock market, important power plants and desalination facilities. Therefore, he claimed, **Israel would not be able to withstand hits on those vital sites and would be sent back to the stone age.**

► Nasrallah claimed that in the war in 2006 the Israeli home front became vulnerable. Thirteen years have passed, he said, and the IDF carried out many exercises, but senior Israelis are still saying that the home front is vulnerable. He added that in Israel they **are saying that today Israel cannot deal with evacuating two million Israelis from their homes.** The Israelis also claim that Israel is vulnerable because its ground forces are not fighting fit. Israel's only superiority is in its air force, but **Israelis understand the air force cannot determine a war** and compensate for the weakness of ground forces, it can only cause destruction. **The result, claimed Nasrallah, was that Hezbollah's capabilities deterred Israel.** The Israeli leadership, he claimed, fear Hezbollah and "have a million considerations about it, more than ever, even more than in 2006." **Nasrallah said he was confident of Hezbollah's ability to achieve a decisive victory over Israel in the next war.**



Pictures illustrating Nasrallah's interview. It shows a rocket launching and views of Israeli infrastructure facilities (top row, second from left). The ITIC identified them as (left to right clockwise) the ammonia tank in Haifa Bay, the power plant in Hadera, the nuclear research facility in Dimona and Ben-Gurion International Airport.

Nasrallah' use of a map of Israel for propaganda and threats

► During the interview Nasrallah used a map of Israel ("occupied Palestine") **to illustrate the threat of the destructive capabilities of Hezbollah's rocket and missile arsenal.** He said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu specializes in using maps at the UN, and so does the American president. The map shown to the TV audience was not of particularly high quality. It apparently showed population data in central Israel, and under the map was a list of the types of vital targets in the center of the country, which Nasrallah read aloud during the interview.



Hassan Nasrallah and the map of Israel he brought to the interview

► Imad Mermel, the Lebanese journalist who conducted the interview, said that a few minutes before it began Nasrallah told him he was planning to use the map. **The producer of the program asked Mermel for a closeup of the map during the explanations Nasrallah was planning to give.** The interview began at 2100. During the first break one of Nasrallah's aides entered the studio and brought him the first reactions from Israel. According to Mermel, Nasrallah smiled and said, "**The first series of messages hit the target**" (al-Jumhuria, July 15, 2019).

Appendix

Hezbollah's military capabilities emphasized by Hassan Nasrallah (since 2012)

Over the past seven years, in his speeches and interviews Nasrallah has **often emphasized Hezbollah's improved military capabilities**. He has particularly boasted of **Hezbollah's precision missiles and their ability to hit vital Israeli infrastructure facilities and cause the mass killing of Israeli civilians in the next war and their mass displacement**. Thus the most recent interview did not reveal anything significantly new, although it did include **considerable detail regarding the destruction Hezbollah's rockets and missiles could cause in central Israel**.

► Nasrallah's main boasts since 2012 were the following:

◆ **January 3, 2018:** Interviewed by Lebanon's Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV, the interviewer asked for a comment regarding Israeli estimates that Hezbollah had an arsenal of 130,000 rockets. Nasrallah answered that "When you look at [Israeli] society and [Israel] and that entity, you will see **its army and security services, its people, its power plants, airports, and nuclear and petrochemical facilities**. Believe me, it has nothing to do with the number of rockets. To defeat the Israeli army you don't need a hundred thousand or two hundred thousand rockets... **Israel says to itself, Hezbollah doesn't need a hundred thousand rockets... [It says,] if Hezbollah has several dozen precision missiles, and it chooses its targets exactly, it can bring a catastrophe on us.**" Asked how Hezbollah operatives will penetrate the Galilee [in a ground war], Nasrallah avoided giving a direct answer, saying that in a comprehensive war, "anything is possible." The IDF, he claimed, was weaker than ISIS, and anyone [i.e., the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis] who could defeat ISIS, **would certainly defeat the IDF, and with greater ease**. Nasrallah added that the **IDF's only superiority was in its air force, but that was not enough to decide a war.**²

◆ **February 20, 2017:** Interviewed by Iran's IRIB1 TV channel, Nasrallah claimed that the [sic] victory in 2006 [the Second Lebanon War] **created a "balance of terror" between**

² For further information, see the January 23, 2018 bulletin, "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."

Hezbollah and Israel. He said "we do not seek war, we are defending ourselves." However, **"if Israel wants to force a war on Lebanon and invade it... Hezbollah will not be committed to red lines. The ammonia tank [in Haifa Bay] and even the nuclear reactor in Dimona are not secure. Every place in occupied Palestine can turn the Israeli regime into black ash."** Asked if Hezbollah would really attack Dimona, Nasrallah answered that **"We are prepared for it and we have the courage to do it..."** (IRIB1, February 20, 2017).



**Hassan Nasrallah interviewed by Iran's IRIB1 TV channel
(IRIB1, February 20, 2017)**

◆ **February 16, 2017:** Nasrallah gave the "ammonia speech," in which he boasted of Hezbollah's ability to cause Israel immense damage by attacking vital infrastructure targets:

- Nasrallah claimed that the Israeli decision to move the ammonia tank from Haifa Bay was made because of a threat in a speech he had made the previous year, where he said that [an attack on] an ammonia tank was "like [detonating] an atomic bomb." In the current speech he said that **even if the ammonia tank is moved to another location Hezbollah will still hit it, and that Hezbollah has the capability to hit an ammonia tanker ship** [repeatedly mentioned in the Israeli media]. He added that, "Naturally, the residents of Haifa thanked Hezbollah, since for 20 or 30 years they had been begging [for the tank to be moved] without success."
- **Nasrallah claimed Hezbollah's missiles could hit the nuclear facility in Dimona and called on Israel to dismantle it.** He claimed that "The reactor is ancient, it is old and does not function, and there is no need for many missiles [to damage it]. He added that Israel was aware that "if [Hezbollah's] missiles hit the

reactor it will be damaged, their entity will be damaged." **Nasrallah boasted that Hezbollah could turn Israel's nuclear threat into an opportunity, that is, a nuclear threat against Israel.** He said, "We will turn it into a threat against Israel, its entity, its residents, its settlers and occupiers, who occupy occupied Palestine."³

- **February 16, 2017:** To deter Israel, Nasrallah stated Hezbollah had precision missiles that could strike **Israel's ammonia tank in Haifa Bay**, which would cost Israel dearly. Nasrallah said that **800 thousand people lived in Haifa, and an attack on the ammonia tank would kill tens of thousands.** He quoted an unnamed Israeli expert who said the effect of such a hit would be like an atomic bomb. Nasrallah compared Hezbollah's ability to cause damage in Israel to the Israeli Air Force's ability to cause damage to [the Hezbollah-controlled southern Beirut suburb] the Dahia, as stated by the Israeli Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkott when he was commander of the Northern Command (2008).⁴

- September 3, 2012: During an interview with the Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV channel, he was asked what he meant when he said **he could turn the lives of hundreds of thousands of Israelis into a living hell.** He answered that in the next war Israel would not be able to carry out a preemptive strike and destroy Hezbollah's rocket arsenal. That was because even after the first strike, **Hezbollah would still have "a few missiles that could turn the lives of hundreds of thousands of Israelis into a living hell."** He said Hezbollah had a "list of designated targets," including civilian, economic and industrial sites, power plants and nuclear facilities. **"They have," he said, "power plants in the center of the country,** and if they are hit, not only will there be a blackout, but the economic influence will be enormous." He said that **"Every target in the length and breadth of occupied Palestine...can be hit by the missiles of the 'resistance' "** (al-Mayadeen TV, September 3, 2012.

- **August 17, 2012:** In a speech given for Iranian-sponsored Jerusalem Day, Nasrallah boasted that Hezbollah had **"precision missiles, a small number of**

³ For further information, see the March 2, 2017 bulletin, "An analysis of threats against Israel made by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah."

⁴ For further information, see the February 25, 2016 bulletin, 037-16 February 25, 2016 "Hassan Nasrallah's 'Ammonia Speech:' The Threat for Israel and Its Significance."

which can hit pin-point targets." He added that Hezbollah had a number of precision missiles which could hit a large number of Israeli targets whose coordinates were in Hezbollah's hands. Hitting those targets, Nasrallah boasted, would **"really turn the lives of thousands of Zionists into a living hell."** He said **Israel would suffer tens of thousands of fatalities, not 300 or 400 or 500** (al-Manar TV, August 17, 2019).

Nasrallah's repeated themes about Hezbollah's improved military capabilities

► In all of his statements about Hezbollah's military capabilities, including during the most recent interview, **Nasrallah repeats four main themes:**

- ◆ **Hezbollah's ability to seriously damage the Israeli infrastructure:** Hezbollah's rockets and missiles, including its precision missiles, can hit vital infrastructure targets, causing great destruction. Hezbollah has a "list of designated targets" which includes power plants, nuclear facilities, petrochemical plants, and military infrastructure.

- ◆ **Hezbollah's ability to seriously harm the Israeli civilian population:** There are 800 thousand people living in the Haifa Bay area and an attack on the ammonia tank would kill tens of thousands of people. Attacking the targets on the "list" would "turn the lives of Israelis into a living hell." Israel knows, he claimed, that it could not cope with evacuating two million people from their homes.

- ◆ **Israel's lack of response to the Hezbollah's rocket and missile threat:** The State of Israel has no appropriate response today for Hezbollah's rockets and missiles. Moreover, the IDF is not superior to Hezbollah in ground combat. The IDF's only superiority is in its air force, but that would not enable it to decide a war.

- ◆ **Hezbollah has deterred Israel from an attack:** Thanks to Hezbollah's improved capabilities, especially its rocket and missile threat, there is now a kind of "balance of terror" between Hezbollah and Israel. That balance is what keeps Israel from attacking Hezbollah.

► **The above themes began appearing in Nasrallah's speeches only after the Second Lebanon War**, after Hezbollah became more powerful through massive military support from Iran, and he regained his self confidence. Before the war Nasrallah's rhetoric was more **apologetic and defensive**. Before the Second Lebanon War he defended Hezbollah's refusal to disarm (as it was required to by the 1989 Ta'if Agreement and UN Security Council

Resolution 1559.) At the time he claimed that Hezbollah needed its weapons to help the Lebanese army defend Lebanon from "Israeli aggression." Before the war Nasrallah stressed that Hezbollah maintained low visibility on the ground and did not challenge the Lebanese government or harm Lebanon's sovereignty. Until the Second Lebanon War Nasrallah did not threaten to hit Israel's strategic targets and civilian populations with its arsenal of rockets and missiles.