



Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah said he would retaliate for the quadcopter attack in Beirut which he claimed Israel had carried out, and for the killing of two Hezbollah operatives in an Israeli attack in Syria.

August 27, 2019

Overview

► On August 25, 2019, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah gave a belligerent speech claiming Israel was behind the two attacks in Lebanon and Syria: **a quadcopter attack on the southern Shi'ite suburbs of Beirut** (Israel did not claim responsibility) **and the aerial attack on a base southwest of Damascus** (Israel did claim responsibility). The attack in Syria disrupted an Iranian Qods Force plan to launch armed quadcopters to attack northern Israel. Nasrallah greatly exaggerated the so-called threat to Lebanon inherent in the use of explosive quadcopters ("suicide quadcopters") which he claimed set a precedent in the attack on the southern suburb of Beirut.¹ Such a precedent was liable, he claimed, to turn Lebanon into another arena for Israeli attacks (as he claimed Israel had done in Iraq). He repeatedly stressed that **"We of the Islamic resistance [i.e., Hezbollah] will not allow [Israel to tread] that path, regardless of the cost."**



The audience watching Nasrallah's speech projected onto a giant monitor (al-Manar, August 25, 2019).

¹Hezbollah's media office issued an announcement after Nasrallah's speech claiming that an examination of the quadcopter which fell indicated it was also an explosive quadcopter. Thus, the southern suburb was attacked, according to Hezbollah's claim by two "suicide quadcopters" (see Appendix B).

With that in mind, Nasrallah announced that **"From now on we will confront the Israeli UAVs in the skies of Lebanon. When the Israeli UAVs enter Lebanese airspace we will shoot them down."** In ITIC assessment, it was a concrete, well-defined threat, different from the strategic threats Nasrallah usually makes against Israel in his speeches (for deterrence by stressing Hezbollah's military capabilities, especially its precise missiles).

► Nasrallah then proceeded to the attack on the facility in Aqrabeh southwest of Damascus. The facility served **as a base for the Iranian Qods Force**, which handles the Shi'ite operatives advancing the plan to launch armed quadcopters to attack Israel. Nasrallah claimed **the attack in Syria targeted a facility belonging to Hezbollah, not the Iranian Qods Force**. He said two Hezbollah operatives were killed in the attack (the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese newspaper *al-Akhbar* published an unusually detailed report about them two days after their deaths). **Nasrallah expressly threatened retaliation for their deaths**, mentioning the retaliatory attack Hezbollah carried out in January 2005 (firing anti-tank missiles and mortar shells at an IDF force in Har Dov (the slopes of Mt. Hermon), killing two IDF soldiers) **This time, he threatened, Hezbollah would respond in Lebanon and not in the Shebaa Farms** (Har Dov, the slopes of Mt. Hermon).

► Nasrallah's insistence that the Israeli Air Force attack targeted a Hezbollah facility and not the Qods Force is, in ITIC assessment, **part of Iranian media strategy to keep Iran from being incriminated by an attempt to launch armed quadcopters into Israel from Syrian territory**. The Iranian strategy has been expressed by **statements from senior Iranian officials** who denied that Israel hit an Iranian target in the Damascus area and expressed support for the response of Hezbollah (or of any country in the region) to the "Israeli aggression."²

² **Mohsen Rezaee, secretary of the Iranian Expediency Discernment Council and formerly commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps**, said, after the attacks attributed to Israel in Iraq and Syria, that the joint activities of Israel and the United States in Syria and Iraq violated international law. He added that the attacks would **soon meet with a response from "the defenders of Syria and Iraq."** He denied the reports about an attack on Iranian targets near Damascus, claiming that Israel and the United States did not have the capability to attack Iranian targets (ILNA, August 25, 2019). **Ali Rabiei, spokesman for the Iranian government**, also related to the alleged Israeli attacks in Syria and Iraq. He said Israel would bear the consequences of its aggressive activities. He said Iran would be prepared to help Iraq deal with Israeli aggression if requested by the Iraqi government. He said that Iran **supported every response made by Hezbollah or one of the regional countries to Israeli aggression** (Fars, August 26, 2019).

After falsely and manipulatively describing the recent events in Syria and Lebanon, Nasrallah threatened the residents of northern Israel and the IDF [to wild cheering from the audience] saying, "**I say this to the Israeli army on the border: as of tonight, hide and live in fear...Wait for us. One day, two, three, four – just wait for us...**"

In ITIC assessment, Nasrallah's threats are specific and concrete, and Nasrallah may carry them out within a short period of time. The type of response is uncertain, but a Hezbollah-affiliated commentator said it would be based on the "**principle of mutuality, i.e., an eye for an eye.**" That was the case after the Israeli attack in Quneitra (2015), when two Israeli soldiers were killed in retaliation for the killing of Hezbollah operatives in the northern Golan Heights (see Appendix C).

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Nasrallah's Main Themes in His Speech Regarding Israel

Overview

► On August 25, 2019, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah gave a belligerent speech for the anniversary of the liberation of the northern Beqa'a Valley from the jihadist organizations (the so-called "second liberation").³ **The first part** of the speech was devoted to internal Lebanese affairs and the campaign Hezbollah waged against the jihadist organizations in the northern Beqa'a Valley and the ridges along the Lebanon-Syria border (in

³ The liberation of the town of Aarsal in the northern Beqa'a Valley from the al-Nusra Front and the battles waged by Hezbollah on the al-Qalamoun ridges on the Syria-Iraq border against the jihadist organizations in 2017, called by Hezbollah the "second liberation." The "first liberation" was the liberation of the security zone in south Lebanon.

the al-Qalamoun mountains). **The second part** was devoted to the quadcopter events in the southern Shi'ite suburbs of Beirut, and the IDF attack in the Damascus area. **Nasrallah threatened to retaliate against Israel for the events in Syria and Lebanon.** The main themes of his speech regarding Israel follow (according to al-Manar, August 25, 2019).

The quadcopter event in Beirut

Initial version

On the morning of August 25, 2019, Lebanese army headquarters reported that before dawn two Israeli quadcopters had penetrated the airspace of the southern suburb of Beirut at 0230 (the neighborhoods of Mouawad and Hay Madhy). The first fell to earth and the second exploded in the air, causing property damage. The Lebanese military police began an investigation of the event (Lebanon24 website, August 25, 2019). No casualties were reported.

No claim of responsibility was made.



Scenes of the events in Beirut's southern suburb (Lebanese Forces' website, August 25, 2019).



Fragments of the two quadcopters (Lebanon24 website, August 25, 2019).

► **Hezbollah sources claimed an attack had been made on the building housing Hezbollah's media unit in Beirut's southern suburb (according to another version, the "political office in the southern suburb of Beirut" was attacked).** Hezbollah reported it had not intercepted even one of the quadcopters, but the first, which fell without causing damage, was in its possession. Reportedly Hezbollah was currently examining the background of its launching and the mission it was carrying out (interview with Muhammad Afif, responsible for Hezbollah's media unit, to Iranian al-Alam TV, August 25, 2019; Reuters interview with a senior Hezbollah figure, August 25, 2019). **Note:** Later on Hezbollah announced a corrected version (see Appendix B).

Nasrallah's response to the events

► In his speech Nasrallah related extensively to the quadcopter event in Beirut, which he referred to as "particularly serious." His main points were the following:

- ◆ The first quadcopter that entered the Mouawad neighborhood was **an unarmed reconnaissance quadcopter**. It flew at a low altitude between the buildings to transmit precise pictures. Hezbollah did not intercept it but young men in the neighborhood who saw it said it was two meters (about six feet) long and flew between the buildings. They threw rocks at it and it fell to earth. According to Nasrallah, it might have fallen because of a technical mishap or because of the rocks thrown at it (Nasrallah claimed that one of the rocks hit it, leaving a mark that could be seen on its body).
- ◆ After two minutes **another quadcopter arrived, a "suicide quadcopter"** which attacked "a certain target" (unnamed by Nasrallah) and exploded. Some of the neighboring buildings were damaged but no casualties were reported. Nasrallah added that the two quadcopters are not sold on the Israeli free market.
- ◆ The attack was the first Israeli act of aggression since August 14, 2006 [the ceasefire before the end of the Second Lebanon War]. It was, he said, "an obvious, overt act of aggression." He added that "all the Israeli media are talking about one or two suicide quadcopters that attacked the southern suburb of Beirut." By implication, he said, "the Israeli media and the atmosphere created in effect admit that Israel carried out the aerial attack" [**Note:** No authorized Israeli source has related to the quadcopter event in Beirut].

◆ Nasrallah repeatedly stressed it was "the first obvious major violation" since the war of July 2006 [the Second Lebanon War]. **If, he said, no response is made it will pave the way** [here Nasrallah banged on the table] **for an Israeli course of action with great future danger for Lebanon.** It means that every two or three days a suicide quadcopter will arrive in Lebanon and attack some building or structure, some place, farm, mosque or compound.

◆ To illustrate the threat to Lebanon, **Nasrallah related to events in Iraq.** He said that for the past few weeks quadcopters had been flying to the facilities of the popular mobilization [an umbrella body of Shi'ite militias, most of them pro-Iranian] and exploding (Nasrallah said it was unclear if they fired missiles or simply exploded). He added that there were already five explosions the Israelis claimed responsibility for. He said the Iraqis had to deal with the situation, it was Iraq's business. **"We [i.e., Hezbollah] will not allow such a course of action here... We will do everything to prevent the creation of such a course of action..."** [cheers from the audience].

◆ According to Nasrallah, Lebanon may use diplomatic measures which include an appeal to the Security Council or to the Americans and Europeans. Those are positive steps, he said, but will not stop the dangerous course of action that **will destroy Lebanon a second time.** Raising his voice, he said that **"We of the Islamic resistance [i.e., Hezbollah] will not allow [Israel to create] such a course of action, regardless of the cost."** [Cheers from the audience, and Nasrallah raised his voice even louder]. He said "the time is over when Israeli planes fly in, attack a site in Lebanon and all the territory of the oppressive entity in Palestine is safe" [cheers from the audience].



Hassan Nasrallah threatens Israel
(Twitter account of al-Manar news in English, August 25,2019).

► Nasrallah **then related to the response that could be expected from Hezbollah.** He spoke directly to the residents of northern Israel and all the residents of "occupied Palestine:" "You won't live, you will have no rest, you will not feel safe, and don't think even for a minute that Hezbollah will allow such a course of action and such aggression to continue." He said that from now on Hezbollah would confront the quadcopters in the skies over Lebanon and shoot them down.

► Nasrallah said that after 2000 and then since 2006 "we have become used to seeing Israeli UAVs [and/or drones] in the sky above Lebanon." Hezbollah has had the capability, he said, to shoot down the Israeli UAVs [and/or quadcopters] but did not, so that no one in Lebanon would accuse Hezbollah of wanting to draw the country into a confrontation and harm its tourism and economy. **However, from now on, Hezbollah's approach has changed. As far as Hezbollah is concerned, the Israeli UAVs [and/or quadcopters] that enter Lebanon are not meant to violate Lebanese sovereignty or collect intelligence. As far as Hezbollah is concerned, they are attack UAVs [and/or quadcopters] meant to explode and kill.**

At this point Nasrallah reached the bottom line of the quadcopter event, saying that "from now on Hezbollah will confront the Israeli UAVs [and/or quadcopters] in the skies of Lebanon. **When Israel UAVs [or quadcopters] enter Lebanese airspace Hezbollah will shoot them down.** Let the Israelis pay attention from now on [cheers from the audience]. We [Hezbollah] will not wait for anyone in the world. Hezbollah will not agree that its cities and villages be powerless, without sovereignty, without security and [vulnerable to] killing. It is over. And if someone in Lebanon wants to avoid a problem, let him talk to the Americans and have the Americans talk to the Israelis, and make them leave. Let them leave!" [Cheers from the audience.]



Right: Operatives in uniform carrying Hezbollah and Lebanese flags cheer Nasrallah before his speech. Left: The audience waves Hezbollah flags (al-Nahar, August 25, 2019).

Preventing a drone attack on Israeli targets from Syrian territory (initial information)

Main points

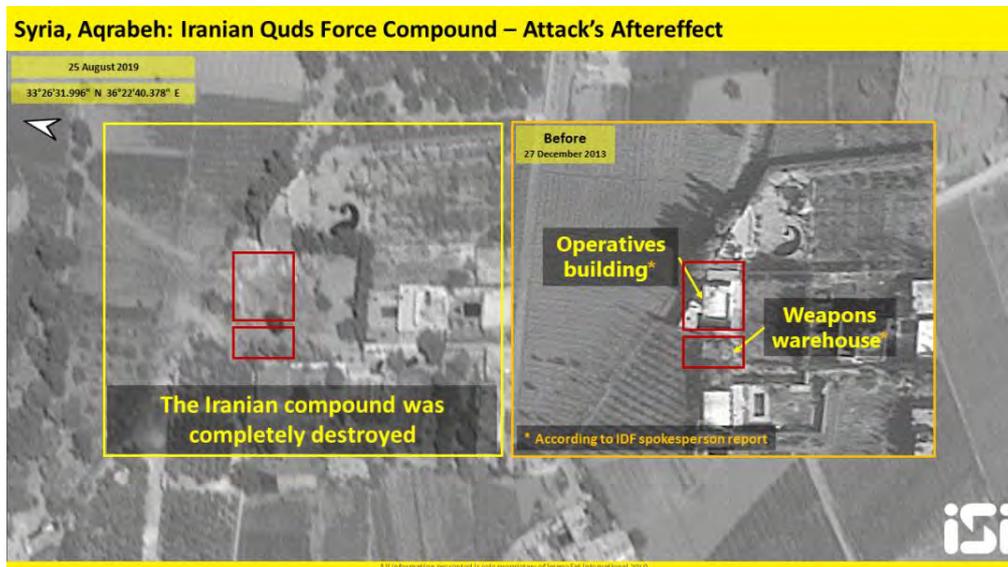
On August 24, 2019, the IDF attacked a number of targets in the town of Aqrabeh (about 30 miles southwest of Damascus). **The attack was directed against Iranian Qods Force operatives and Shi'ite militias preparing to attack Israeli targets from Syria.** The Israeli Air Force strike killed two operatives of the Shi'ite militias handled by the Qods Force to launch drones (IDF spokesman, August 26, 2019).



The two operatives who were killed on one of their flights with Mahan Air, en route to Iran for training (IDF website, August 26, 2019).

- ▶ The operatives planned to launch a number of armed drones to attack Israeli targets (IDF spokesman, August 25, 2019). The IDF spokesman said that in recent days the IDF had been monitoring Iranian Qods Force operatives and it was evident that they were planning to

launch armed drones to attack Israeli targets in the northern part of the country. On Thursday, August 22, 2019, the squad attempted to launch several armed drones into Israel, but IDF forces disrupted the activity and prevented the attack (IDF website, August 24, 2019).



Israeli Air Force attack on the Qods Force facility in Aqrabeh: Before (right) and after (left) the attack (picture courtesy of iSi, ImageSat International)

Nasrallah relates to the IDF attack in Syria

► Nasrallah said that on August 24, 2019 a facility was attacked in the village of Aqrabeh in southwest of Damascus. However, he emphasized that Netanyahu had boasted that the target was a Qods Force center. Nasrallah claimed that **Netanyahu was lying and the Israeli Air Force had not attacked an Iranian Qods Force center, but rather a Hezbollah facility.** He claimed that only Lebanese young men from Hezbollah were at the site that was attacked. Nasrallah added that two Hezbollah operatives were killed in the attack, the shaheed Hassan Yusuf Zubayb and the shaheed Yasser Ahmed Dhahir.

► Nasrallah said Hezbollah does not joke when its operatives are killed in Syria. He reminisced that after Hezbollah operatives ("our brothers, our dear ones") were killed in Quneitra [January 2015] **"you saw later that we weren't joking."**⁴ The operatives killed in

⁴ On January 18, 2015, a convoy of Hezbollah operatives was attacked in the northern Golan Heights. Reportedly, six Hezbollah operatives and a senior Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps officer were killed. Israel was blamed. The Hezbollah operatives and the Iranians were in the region as part of efforts made by Iran and Hezbollah to establish an "additional front" against Israel in the Golan Heights. On January 28, 2015, Hezbollah carried out a retaliatory attack of anti-tank and mortar fire against an IDF force in the Har Dov region (the slopes of Mt. Hermon).. Two IDF soldiers were killed. Hezbollah claimed responsibility and signaled that as far as it was concerned it was a fitting response to the attack on its operatives (which it related to Israel) and that it was not interested in continuing an

Syria "are from our villages, from our families, they are our boys." Hezbollah has a clear commitment to them: "**If Israel kills any brother in Syria** [raises his voice] **we will respond to the killing in Lebanon and not in the Shebaa Farms, we will respond in Lebanon, and not in the Shebaa Farms.**"

Thus Nasrallah threatened Israel: "**I say this to the Israeli army on the border, as of tonight, hide and live in fear...Wait for us. One day, two, three, four, just wait for us...**[cheers from the audience]. I say this to the Israelis, **not only those on the border, because here, the two things are intertwined**, we have two issues here that in effect are one issue [i.e., quadcopters in the southern suburb of Beirut and the aerial attack in Syria]. Eventually even if I ignore what happened in Damascus, [the event in Beirut] **is enough to cause us to behave differently. Therefore – no! What happened last night will not be passed over [without a response]! We will not let it pass by!**"

► Nasrallah ended by saying, "Brothers and sisters, on this important day for us, we are Lebanese – army, people, resistance, security forces, country, political forces, people, sects, families, tribes – we, with our own hands created our security in the Beqa'a, in the south and in Lebanon. We created our security ourselves, with the blood of our soldiers and operatives of the resistance. We carried the load so that Lebanon would be an oasis of security and peace for the entire region, which America and its regional allies are destroying. We will not let the clock turn back. **We did not allow Lebanon to become a no man's land, we say no to bombs, no to killing, no to explosions and no to harm to our honor. As far as we're concerned that is a red line.** We all have to bear the responsibility. We hope for a united national position, strong and brave. **We will defend our country on all its borders: south, east, north and the sea. Now we will defend our skies** responsibly and wisely, in accordance with our interests. **That is the new stage the enemy has forced on us.**"

escalation. Hassan Nasrallah sent another message in his speech to deter Israel, saying that **Hezbollah's activities in Lebanon and Syria are the same thing.**

Two Hezbollah operatives killed in Syria

Hezbollah is making a media effort to represent the Israeli attack in Syria as directed against one of its own facilities and not at one belonging to the Qods Force. To reinforce the message, the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese newspaper *al-Akhbar* published a detailed article called "The shaheeds of Damascus," about Hassan Yusuf Zubayb and Yasser Ahmed Dhahir, two Hezbollah operatives killed in the IDF strike on Aqrabeh (*al-Akhbar*, August 26, 2019). It was an exceptional revelation since Hezbollah usually waits a number of months (and sometimes years) before giving detailed biographical information about its shaheeds.



Left: Yasser Ahmed Dhahir. Right: Hassan Yusuf Zubayb (al-Akhbar, August 26, 2019).

- ▶ The main topics of the article were the following:
 - ◆ The two Hezbollah operatives who were killed in the attack on Aqrabeh were Hassan Yusuf Zubayb, 23, from the village of Blida in south Lebanon, and Yasser Ahmed Dhahir, 23, from the village of Nmairiyyeh in south Lebanon. They were friends from school, and continued together through high school and university.
 - ◆ Five years ago they asked Hezbollah's education recruitment (unit) for a grant to study at a university in Iran. They agreed they would only go to Iran together, would study the same profession and would live together in Iran. They received grants and went to the Iranian city of Qazvin for an eight-month preparatory course in the Persian language.
 - ◆ Once they finished the course they were sent to different universities. Yasser Dhahir was sent to Mashhad and Hassan Zubayb was sent to Isfahan. Nevertheless, they kept

trying to transfer to the other's university. After repeated attempts and pleas they managed to transfer to the Iman al-Hussein University in Tehran where **they studied aeronautical engineering**. The Imam al-Hussein University is a private institution whose degrees are not recognized by most countries, including Lebanon. However, that did not prevent them from studying there since **they had already decided to join the ranks of the resistance [i.e., Hezbollah] and to exploit what they had studied in Tehran [i.e., aeronautical engineering] to develop Hezbollah's capabilities [possibly in the UAV field]**.

◆ They continued working together for Hezbollah. They pleaded with those in charge to allow them to always be in the same place at the same time, and stayed in the same house in the Aqrabeh region. There were other Hezbollah operatives with them and **they all spent their days preparing to attack the enemy**.



Right: The coffins of the bodies of the two operatives who were killed in Syria, draped with the Hezbollah flag (Twitter account of Usama Nur al-Din, August 26, 2019). Left: The two operatives in their graduation picture from the al-Mahdi-Shahed high school (Twitter account of Zahara Nur al-Sin, August 25, 2019).



Hassan Zubayb visits the graves of Hezbollah shaheeds in Beirut (Twitter account of Hussein, August 25, 2019).

► According to other information, Hassan Yusuf Zubayb was the only son of Hajj Yusuf Zubayb, engineering director of al-Manar TV and a member of its board of directors (Sida Sur website, August 25, 2019).

Hezbollah's corrected announcement after the examination of the quadcopter that fell in the southern suburb of Beirut (according to al-Manar, August 27, 2019)

Hezbollah's media office announced that an examination of the quadcopter that fell in the southern suburb of Beirut indicated **it was carrying an IED and was not meant for reconnaissance but rather for purposes of attack**, exactly like the other quadcopter. (Note: That corrects Nasrallah's version of one attack quadcopter and one reconnaissance quadcopter.)

Statement from the Islamic resistance

- ▶ After Islamic resistance experts disassembled the first quadcopter that fell in the southern Beirut it was found to contain wrapped and well-insulated C4 explosive weighing 5.5 kilos (about 12 pounds).
- ▶ Based on the new data, we confirm that **the objective of the first quadcopter was not reconnaissance but rather to explode**, exactly like the second quadcopter.
- ▶ Following that information, we confirm that on the night of last Saturday the Dahia was the target of an attack carried out by two quadcopters carrying explosives, the first of which had a technical fault and the second of which exploded.
- ▶ We present new confirmed data to the Lebanese, to public opinion and to the honored residents of the southern suburb.

Main points of an al-Akhbar column concerning Hassan Nasrallah's speech (al-Akhbar, August 26, 2019)

► Ibrahim al-Amine, editor of the Hezbollah-affiliated *al-Akhbar*, published a column after Nasrallah's speech entitled "**The first test of blood of the deterrent campaign between the resistance [i.e., Hezbollah] and Israel.**" He analyzed Israel's policies, the objectives of the attacks it reportedly carried out in Beirut and Damascus, and the campaign it is waging against the "axis of the resistance."

► The following are the main topics from the second part of the column, dealing with Hezbollah's response to the attacks in Syria and Lebanon:

- ◆ The attacks in Beirut and Damascus signal the **entrance into a "test phase"** of the campaign of deterrence waged by the two sides. Hezbollah (the "resistance") will respond to the attacks with **"punishing attacks that will return the enemy to the path of [mutual] deterrence."**

- ◆ Israel ("the enemy"), according to al-Amine, knew that the attack on the "resistance" facility in Damascus would kill Hezbollah operatives located there. Israel did it consciously, not necessarily intending to cause losses, but because the implementation of the mission was impossible without taking the risk of killing someone.

- ◆ **Hezbollah's response will be based on the "principle of mutuality"** (an eye for an eye) which has been in force since the attack in Quneitra (2015). That principle necessitates dealing the enemy painful blows that will cause him to choose which of his soldiers is willing to die on the Lebanese border.

- ◆ In view of Hezbollah's expected response Israel will have few options: it may contain Hezbollah's response ("the enemy will accept the painful response and keep quiet"). With that option Israel will lose the value of everything it did in its two recent attacks and will "lose more cards." Alternatively, **Israel will suffer a series of painful attacks** ("insane" actions) **which may lead to a broad-scale war.**

- ◆ Nasrallah's speech made it clear that **the phase of silence regarding Israeli attacks in the countries and arenas of the "resistance axis" is coming to an end.** That is something Israel "senses." In effect Israel is of the opinion that the objective of attacking the Hezbollah site south of Damascus was to prevent suicide quadcopter

attacks. Therefore Israel was determined to state that the target of the attack was the Qods Force, and with it Shi'ite militias commanded by Qassem Soleimani. In that way Israel tried not to put the blame on Hezbollah for what its jihad fighters do, who were the targets of the attack. However, the question is, **if the enemy refused to say the word "Hezbollah" in its announcement regarding the attack in Damascus, why did it do what it did in the southern suburb of Beirut?**

◆ Al-Amine ended by saying that all Lebanon has to do now is **wait for developments in the coming days and for the results of the new phase of the confrontation**. Everyone is tense, he said, however, in the meantime, the tension of the enemy will be unprecedented. Who in Israel is brave enough to measure the pressure on the [Israeli] public and on Israel's decision makers?