

Intelligence Bulletin

Transition of Power Within Hezbollah?

January 17, 2019

Information: Since early December 2018 until the date of this Intelligence Bulletin, Lebanese Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah has not appeared in public, nor has he delivered any visual or audio messages. Reportedly, he is hospitalized following a heart attack. The reports are denied by Hezbollah as well as by a Senior Iranian Official.

Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shi'ite organization, which was established by Iran in Lebanon in the early 1980's. Since then through arming, financing, and training Hezbollah, it has become Iran's most powerful and important proxy.

Analysis: Rumors about Nasrallah's health are not new. It has been reported in the past that he has terminal cancer, and that he is either being treated in Iran and/or by Iranian physicians in Lebanon. Nasrallah has mocked these rumors in televised speeches.

Middle East analysts and Intelligence Agencies are intrigued by Nasrallah's silence for two reasons: The first reason is the length of time he has not been heard from. And the second, and more puzzling reason, is the fact that – very atypical of him, he has remained totally silent following recent military and political events which are very relevant to Hezbollah.

Militarily, in early December 2018 Israel launched (and to date has concluded) Operation "Northern Shield." This was a military mission in which Israel exposed and neutralized six border-crossing tunnels which had been dug by Hezbollah from Lebanon into Israel. There is no doubt that Israel's exposure of their border-crossing tunnels shocked Hezbollah. In recent years Nasrallah has declared on various occasions that in the next military round with Israel, Hezbollah will occupy the northern part of Israel. No doubt the tunnels were a central strategic tool in that plan.

On the political front, there is the escalating political crisis in Lebanon. Since the Lebanese general elections in May 2018, politicians have failed to assemble a government. The major reason for that is Nasrallah's demand to appoint an independent Sunni Minister. Lebanon's political watershed was the Taif Agreement, signed in 1989 ending the 14-year civil war in Lebanon. As part of that agreement, there was a division of seats in the parliament and in senior governing positions that ensured representation of each community. The Parliament is half Christian half Muslim, and the Ministry positions are divided along the same lines. In the May 2018 elections, the March 8th Alliance - a coalition of parties which includes the two major Shi'ite political parties, Amal (17 seats) and Hezbollah (13 seats), and the predominantly Christian Free Patriotic Movement (with the most seats - 29) won a block majority in the Parliament. Nasrallah, who has successfully found partners within the Christian Camp, now demands to appoint a Sunni Minister who is not part of the current Sunni block, and therefore will be able to act independently. Through appointing a "Trojan Horse" within the Sunni Camp, Nasrallah hopes to further weaken the Sunni major political party "Al-Mustaqbal" (The Future) led by the Acting Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri who sustained a major defeat in the May 2018 elections (reducing his party's seats from 33 to 21). Nasrallah's demand violates the Taif Agreement, is holding up the formation of the Lebanese government, and is increasing the tension in Lebanon.

While Lebanese politicians are busy fighting each other, Lebanon continues on its slippery slope. The ramifications of its increasingly crumbling economy are becoming more apparent and making day to day life much harder. Basic services like waste management and street cleaning are practically non-existent, the power grid is crumbling making electricity increasingly scarce and the power supply unpredictable. The increasing frustration of the challenges of everyday life, spiraling corruption, and swelling polarization is increasing the pressure within the smoking volcano that is Lebanon. The frustration of the people is escalating, the discontent is spreading throughout the country resulting in mass demonstrations and an increasingly growing outcry.

As Lebanon braces to host the Arab League Economic Summit, scheduled to begin on January 21, 2019 in Beirut, a diplomatic crisis between Lebanon and Libya overshadows the event. Libya has announced that it is boycotting the summit. The reason is that Nabih Berri, the leader of the Shi'ite Amal Movement who is the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament and today the political ally of Nasrallah, has objected to the participation of Libya in the Summit. The reason for Berri's objection is the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr, a Senior Lebanese Shi'ite Clerical Leader of Iranian origin, who disappeared during a visit to Libya in August 1978. The common assumption is that al-Sadr was murdered by then Libyan dictator Mouammar Kadhafi.

The mystery surrounding Nasrallah's silence further grows given the following puzzling set of facts:

On January 15th the Iranian television station, Al-Manar, published an audio of Nasrallah allegedly mocking the reports about his medical condition. However, Daniel Salami, an Israeli Middle East journalist reported that the audio was taken from a speech Nasrallah had given in 2015.

To date, other than a January 14th report attributed to the Lebanese based Al-Jadeed news network, reporting that Nasrallah is in good shape, other Lebanese media platforms have not said a word about Nasrallah's condition.

Reportedly, on January 12th, Nabih Berri had a short medical procedure in a hospital and he was released after couple of hours. No information was disclosed about the hospital in which this procedure took place.

On January 13th the Iranian Parliamentary Director General on International Affairs [Hossein Amir Abdollahian](#), denied the rumors that Nasrallah is in bad health, arguing that it is disinformation produced by Israel. Abdollahian also stressed that *"Inevitably the day will come that Nasrallah will pray at the al-Quds Mosque in Jerusalem once Israel is erased."* That statement seems somewhat severe in contrast to the casual and emotionless language he used beforehand to deny the reports.

The speculations regarding Nasrallah's health coincide with reports that the exposure of Hezbollah's border-crossing tunnels escalated a power struggle within Hezbollah between Nasrallah who demanded the organization be silent and not react in the wake of Israel's exposure and neutralization of the tunnels, and Hezbollah's Military Chief of Staff Talal Hamieh, who demanded a reaction.

Talal Hamieh is reportedly very close with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the ultra-conservative Iranian Mullah Clerics. Which leads one to wonder: If Hamieh is indeed challenging Nasrallah's leadership following the exposure of the tunnels, is the fact that this happens at the same time that hard-liner, Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani, was nominated at the end of December to be the new head of the powerful Expediency Council in Iran - a position viewed as a gateway to the position of Iran's Supreme Leader - merely coincidental?

A further glimpse into the possible power struggle within Hezbollah can be found in an [article](#) published on December 18, 2018 by South Lebanese Shi'ite Journalist and bitter Hezbollah opponent, ['Ali al-Amin](#). Quoting an anonymous source, al-Amin reported that the map of the tunnels Hezbollah built from Lebanon into Israel was given to Israel by Iran. That information, which was echoed in other Arab media platforms. seems to be totally inconceivable given that Iran is the architect and financier of the tunnels.

The question is, why did Al-Amin, who is known to have very good access to information about Hezbollah, publish that information?

Perhaps this answers the question: In April 2018 al-Amin, who ran independently for a political position in the 2018 Lebanese general elections, openly accused Hezbollah thugs of physically attacking him. Traumatized by the attack, and probably intimidated by Hezbollah's brutality, the information that the tunnels were discovered because Iran gave the map to Israel seems to be al-Amin's way of insinuating in a "reversed engineering" methodology that accusations as to who is responsible for the tunnels' fiasco fly back and forth between Tehran and the *Dahya* - the southern quarter of

Beirut, Nasrallah's stronghold. Iran is likely furious with the exposure of the tunnels and holds Nasrallah accountable for that failure.

Therefore, Al-Amin's article may very well indicate that the reports about a major power struggle within Hezbollah are not groundless.

Evaluation: To date, and to the best of my knowledge, neither reports regarding the status of Nasrallah's health, nor the inner power struggle within Hezbollah have been confirmed or at least backed by substantial evidence.

That being said, we must bear in mind, that Hezbollah follows a strict compartmentalizing policy which is aimed to prevent the leaking of sensitive information about the organization. This is the same strategy they implemented in late 2011- which eventually failed - when they tried to hide the fact that they were fighting in the war in Syria to save Assad (of course, under the orders of Iran).

The accumulative information I have presented in this report, supports a cautious evaluation that Nasrallah's silence is not voluntarily.

Prediction: The mist and vagueness surrounding the current inner-politics of Hezbollah will not linger for a long time.

Reportedly, on February 11 and 16 Nasrallah will deliver speeches. Intelligence agencies will surely analyze every possible aspect of his speeches to detect a possible path of a transition of power.

If the speeches do not take place, one should view that as an indicator that there is a process of a transition of power carefully controlled by Iran within the terror organization.

**

The Middle East is a Link of Chains, What Happens in One Place Impacts What Happens in Another. And what happens in the Middle East does not stay in the Middle East. Simultaneously Zooming In & Zooming Out enables you to see the links in the chain and build a 3-Dimensional picture of reality.

Avi Melamed is a Strategic Intelligence Analyst and CEO of Inside the Middle East: Intelligence Perspectives. ITME is an educational intelligence praxis training students and practitioners to independently and accurately interpret the Middle East and predict the direction of future events.

For More of my Articles & Podcasts on Lebanon:

[Zoom In ~ Zoom Out | Lebanon & Iran](#)

[Lebanon and The STL as of October 7 2018](#)

[My Enemy is My Best Asset](#)

[Taking the Kidnapper Hostage: The Battle Over the Sovereignty of Lebanon](#)

[Lebanon: No Land for Beginning Politicians](#)

[The Alliance of Fear in Lebanon](#)

[Inside Hezbollah's Private Dominion](#)

Avi Melamed
Middle East Expert & Strategic Intelligence Analyst
[Because True Knowledge is a Real Asset](#)

Avi Melamed is a Strategic Intelligence Analyst and an Expert on the Current Affairs in the Arab and Muslim World and their impact on the Middle East.

He is the Founder and CEO of Inside the Middle East: Intelligence Perspectives (ITME), an empowering intelligence analysis praxis transforming students and practitioners into knowledgeable, media literate, critical thinkers.

From 2013 - 2018, Avi served as the Salisbury Fellow of Intelligence and Middle East Affairs for the Eisenhower Institute. Under his leadership, ITME grew from an undergraduate initiative, to include workshops and seminars from High Schools to Capitol Hill, directly impacting the outlook, educational path, and career trajectory of more than 100 current and future leaders. In its sixth year - now an independent 501c3, ITME has the same mission - to provide a non-partisan education on the contemporary Middle East while teaching critical analysis in an innovative and engaging fashion. ITME's goal is to ensure that the next generation of policy influencers will have be equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to independently and accurately decipher the Middle East and accurately predict the direction of future events.

Avi is a former Israeli Intelligence Official and Senior Official on Arab Affairs. In his public service, he has held high-risk Government, Senior Advisory, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorist intelligence positions in Arab cities and communities throughout the region – often in very sensitive times - on behalf of Israeli Government agencies.

He has co-authored [Separate and Unequal: Israel's Rule in East Jerusalem](#) and wrote *Ubrusi: The Novel*. His newest book, [Inside the Middle East: Making Sense of the Most Dangerous and Complicated Region on Earth](#), (also [available as an audio book](#)) – a GPS to help you navigate the dramatically changing Middle East, offers a unique insight into the Arab world, challenges widely-accepted perceptions, provides a guide to make sense of the events unfolding in the region, and offers an out of the box idea that could lead to a positive breakthrough in the Israeli- Palestinian conflict.

Avi is the founder and creator of Feenjan – *Israel speaks Arabic*, a non-profit initiative which presents contemporary Israeli society and culture to the Arab world in Arabic and is as a platform for Israelis and Arabs to discover and discuss issues of common interest. And in the private sector, facilitates relationships between Israeli and international firms and potential partners in the Arab world.

As an Author, Educator, Expert, and Strategic Intelligence Analyst, Avi provides intelligence analysis, briefings and tours to diplomats, Israeli and foreign policy makers, global media outlets, and a wide variety of international businesses, organizations, and private clients on a range of Israel and Middle East Affairs.

An Israeli Jew, fluent in Arabic, English and Hebrew, with a unique understanding of Arab society and culture, Avi has his finger on the pulse on the Arab world. He has a proven record of foreseeing the evolution of events in the Middle East and their impact on a local and regional level.

The Middle East is a Chain of Links. What Happens in one-part impacts what happens in another - And what happens in the Middle East does not stay in the Middle East. Author, Educator, Lecturer, Entrepreneur, Intelligence Analyst, Middle East Expert, Avi Melamed Takes You Inside the Middle East. His decades of experience in Government, Senior Advisory, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism in Arab cities and communities throughout the region Help You Connect The Dots and Build A Three Dimensional Picture of Reality.

Through all of his efforts, as an analyst, educator, entrepreneur, and writer, he is a bridge builder, and dedicates himself to enhancing the Arabic, English and Hebrew speaking audience's comprehensive understanding of the Middle East and of each other.

Contact Info: Israel Mobile +972-50-540-9905; US Mobile 202-316-9252; Email avi@avimelamed.com; Website www.avimelamed.com; Twitter [@AviMelamed](https://twitter.com/AviMelamed); Facebook [@InsideTheMiddelEast](https://www.facebook.com/InsideTheMiddelEast)