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MIDDLE EAST: THE DEATH OF HASSAN NASRALLAH MARKS A DECISIVE STRATEGIC TURNING POINT IN THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR

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Prologue

At mid-morning on Saturday, the Tsahal headquarters announced that the leader of Hezbollah, **Hassan Nasrallah**, had been killed on Friday evening in a massive strike on the ***Dahieh Janoubyé*** ("Southern Suburbs") district, Hezbollah's stronghold in Beirut. This unprecedented targeted elimination marks a **real turning point in Israeli strategy**: until now, Tsahal and the Hebrew State's intelligence services had "only" targeted leaders of the terrorist organisation's military wing, without going after its political wing.

Early on Saturday afternoon, **Hezbollah announced the death of its leader**.

Hezbollah is now decapitated and totally disorganised. However, it will not be able to remain without reacting to this unprecedented blow. Similarly, **Iran, whose "proconsul" Nasrallah was in Lebanon**, will certainly want to avenge his death. **One of their weapons could be a campaign of attacks against Israeli interests and Jewish communities around the world**.

1- The 27 September strike and its immediate consequences

The strike carried out on Friday evening by the Israeli air force targeted a block of buildings in ***Dahieh Janoubyé***, under which the bunker housing the organisation's operational headquarters was located. **Several GBU-28 Bunker Buster bombs** were used. Weighing **more than two tonnes** (with an explosive charge of **286 kilos**), the GBU-28 **can penetrate 30 metres of earth or 6 metres of concrete before exploding**.

Several buildings (6 according to the Lebanese authorities) were blown up by the explosions and underground installations were completely destroyed.

At the time of the bombing, all of Hezbollah's political and military leaders were meeting in the bunker to discuss the reorganisation of the movement and its strategy.

The operation comes **after the targeted elimination of several senior members of Hezbollah's armed wing**, including **Fuad Shoukr** - Nasrallah's military adviser and head of operations against Israel - on 31 July, **Ibrahim Aqil** - founder and commander of the al-Ridwan Force, Hezbollah's special forces - on 20 September, **Ahmed Mahmoud Wahbi**- Aqil's lieutenant - on the same day, **Ibrahim Qubaisi** - head of the "missile unit" - on 24 September, **Mohamed Srour** - head of the drone unit - on 26 September. In most of these strikes, the closest associates of the targeted officials were also killed.

It also comes **after the explosions of the pagers (on 17 September) and walkie-talkies (on 18 September)** which left **dozens dead and more than 4,000 injured, several hundred of whom are still in a serious condition** in the ranks of the Shiite militia and, in particular, **After targeted strikes in southern Lebanon, the Bekaa plain and South Beirut destroyed significant quantities of missiles stockpiled by the organisation** (Israeli sources estimate that **up to 30%** of Hezbollah's **ballistic capabilities** have been destroyed).

On Friday, all the remaining Hezbollah leaders attending the meeting chaired by Hassan Nasrallah were reportedly eliminated.

Middle East observers and military analysts estimate that **almost all of Nasrallah's "inner circle" will be wiped out**. Only one of the twenty or so commanders, Abu Ali Rida, is thought to have survived.



To date, only **an unknown number of n-1 or n-2 level commanders** remain in the running, **most of them trained in Iran or Syria by the al-Quds force of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).**

1.a. A (permanently?) weakened organisation

These well-trained officers, who enjoy Tehran's support and are close to their men, are certainly ready to take over, but they will first have to devote a large part of their efforts to assessing the real losses and reorganising Hezbollah's structures and its chain of command. For its part, Iran will have to replenish the movement's arsenal.

This task will be made all the more complicated by the fact that **a number of senior IRGC officials in Syria (through whom all the logistics and weapons from Tehran pass) have also been eliminated and the Israeli air force is relentlessly bombing Iranian bases, arms depots and convoys** transporting equipment and munitions to the Bekaa plain.

A further complication is that **since the pagers and walkie-talkies exploded, Hezbollah has been deprived of all its modern means of communication.** To transmit its orders and operational reports, it now has to rely on **wired telephony** (which can easily be neutralised by strikes on telephone exchanges) and **human couriers**, which considerably lengthens transmission times.

It is true that Hezbollah **still has the means to strike deep into Israel.** Its **Fajr 3** and **Fajr 5** missiles - the latter with a range of 75 kilometres - **can reach Galilee and the city and port of Haifa**, a strategic location for Israel, while the **Zelzal-1** missiles, with a range of 150 kilometres, **are capable of hitting the Gush Dan** (Tel Aviv region).

But it is clear that such offensives would lead to further decisive operations by the Israeli air force and intelligence services. These actions could be all the more effective given that **the various operations carried out over the last two weeks have amply demonstrated that MOSSAD has extremely well-established local networks in the various territories controlled by Hezbollah** (southern Lebanon, southern Beirut, Bekaa) and **first-rate human sources within the movement.**

And in the most extreme case, Tsahal always has the **option of carrying out a massive ground operation to try to push the organisation away from its borders.**

2- What response?

Yet it is clear that **Hezbollah (and Iran) must (and will) react.** But how?

2.a: Hezbollah

Apart from continuing its bombardments in the north (see centre) - but we have just seen that the Israeli response could be devastating, and weaken Hezbollah even further, as it desperately needs a "break" to reorganise - which remains an option, **the organisation has the possibility of resorting to one of its favourite weapons: terrorism.**

This could affect Israel, of course, but also **Israeli interests around the world and Jewish communities**.

In a speech delivered last week in Beirut, Hassan Nasrallah threatened Israel with "*terrible punishment and just retribution, **where it expects it and where it does not***".

And last Wednesday, **Israel's National Security Council** warned of **possible attacks on Israelis and Jews abroad during the Tishri holidays (Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, from 2 to 4 October this year and Yom Kippur, from 11 to 12 October) and the anniversary of 7 October**.

The Council's warning was aimed more specifically at **Sinai, Jordan and Turkey**. But in fact, Hezbollah's operational terrorist capabilities are much more extensive. It can, for example, count on Lebanese Shiite communities in **West Africa** and **Latin America**, communities in which it has no shortage of sympathisers (remember the attacks on the **Israeli embassy in Buenos-Aires in 1992** and, **two years later, on the AMIA Jewish mutual society** in the same city).

But the organisation **can also strike in Europe**. As a reminder, on 18 July 2012, a Hezbollah attack on a bus carrying Israeli tourists at **Bourgas airport (Bulgaria)** left **6 people dead and 32 injured**. And in **2015**, European police **discovered very large quantities of ammonium nitrate** (a highly explosive component of nitrogen fertilisers) **in Cyprus (8.2 tonnes) and London (3 tonnes)**. These stocks had been built up by Hezbollah in anticipation of possible attacks on Israeli diplomatic missions.

2.b. Iran

For its part, Iran **might hesitate to attack Israel directly**, which would give Jerusalem **the opportunity to strike at its military capabilities and nuclear programme**. But Tehran also has the option (and the habit) of using terrorist weapons.

However, several recent investigations in Europe (mainly in France and Germany) show that **the mullahs' regime has resumed an old practice of using local criminals to carry out terrorist acts** against Jewish communities, Israeli nationals and diplomats and opponents in exile.

In this so-called "**Marco Polo**" case, **three arrests have been made in France** since last spring. In a confidential report revealed a few days ago by the press, the **DGSI** wrote last May: "***From 2015, the Iranian services resumed a practice of targeted assassinations... The threat has become even more acute [...] in the context of the war between Israel and Hamas.***"

The cell targeted **leading figures in the Paris region, Berlin and Munich**, and was allegedly responsible for **at least four arsons of businesses belonging to Israelis** in the south of France.

It is obvious that such capabilities could be made available to Hezbollah by its sponsors in Tehran.

All the conditions are now in place for the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah to spill over into Europe.