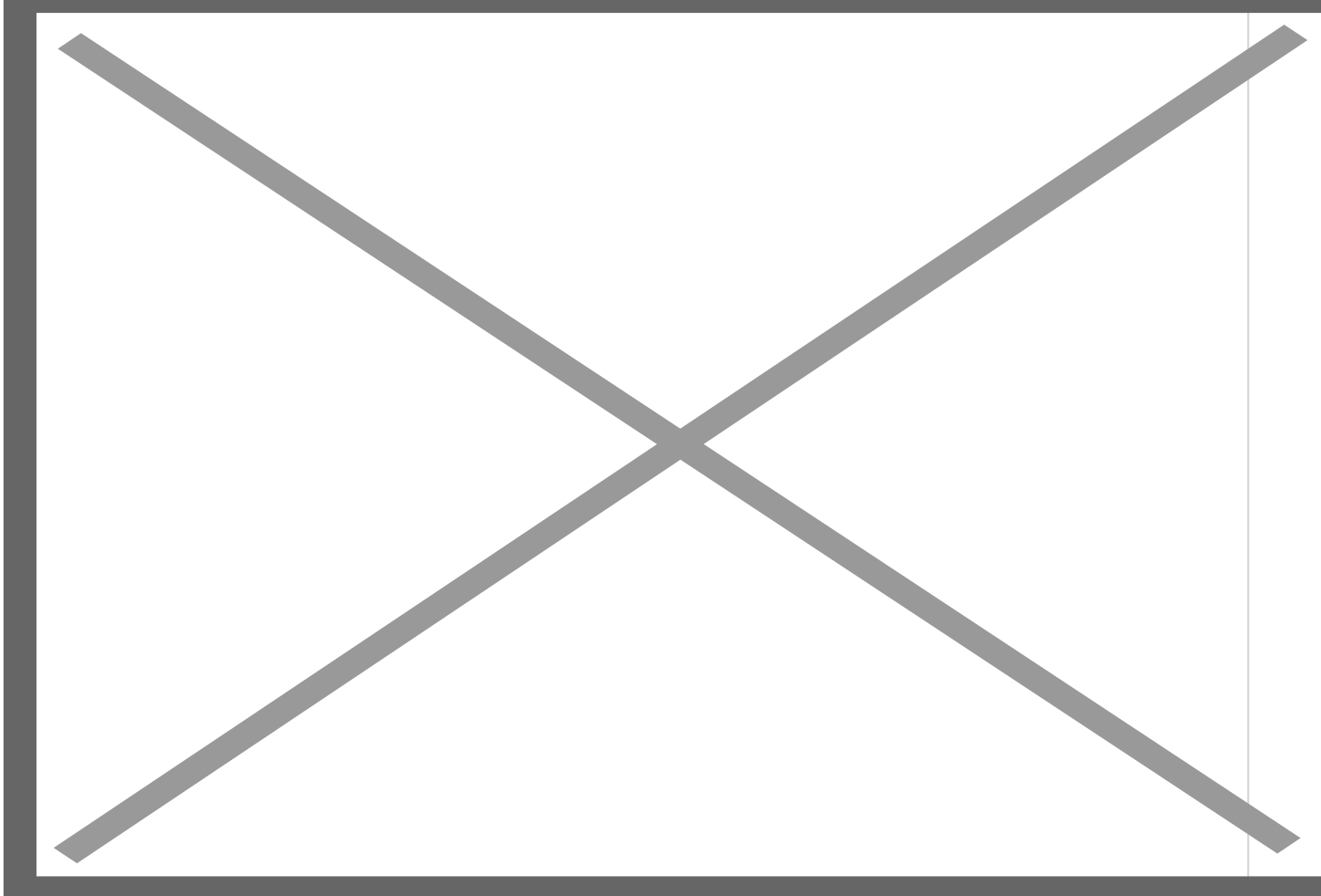


Hezbollah deputy delivers defiant message following killing of Nasrallah

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Lebanon's Hezbollah deputy leader Sheikh Naim Qassem delivers an address from an unknown location, September 30, 2024, in a still image from video from al-Manar TV/Reuters TV (Reuters)

Beirut, September 30 (RHC)-- Hezbollah's deputy chief has pledged that the Lebanese armed group is ready to meet an Israeli ground offensive, despite killing of its leader and many senior commanders.

Israel has not hit Hezbollah's military capabilities, said Sheikh Naim Qassem on Monday as he delivered a message of defiance in a public address. Despite the setbacks suffered during the bombardment of Lebanon in recent days, he insisted that the Iran-linked armed group will continue to fight.

Hezbollah's operations have continued at the same pace and more since the killing of leader Hassan Nasrallah on Friday, Qassem asserted. He added that Hezbollah will install a new leadership soon via "internal mechanisms." The choice of new leadership is clear, Qassem continued, without offering further details.

"We are quite ready, if the Israelis want a ground incursion, the resistance forces are ready for that," Qassem declared.

Hezbollah will continue with its main goals despite Israel's aim of creating chaos with aggression and massacres against civilians in Lebanon, Qassem continued.

"Israel is committing massacres in all areas of Lebanon until there is no house left without traces of Israeli aggression in it," he said. "Israel attacks civilians, ambulances, children and the elderly. It does not fight fighters, but rather commits massacres."

Qassem also underlined the role of the US, which he called "a partner with Israel, through unlimited military support – culturally, politically, financially." "We will win, just as we won in our confrontation with Israel in 2006," said the deputy chief as he ended the video message.

Al Jazeera's Zeina Khodr, reporting from Beirut, said Qassem's message was intended to reassure Lebanon's Shia population, who feel vulnerable after losing Nasrallah, whom they saw as a father figure.

"He was trying to reassure his people that Hezbollah still has the military capabilities to fight, telling Israel it's not ready to surrender," Khodr said. However, Khodr also noted that Hezbollah needs to regroup after a wave of Israeli assassinations that has decimated its leadership.

The armed group will also have to assess whether and how to use its arsenal of weapons – including long-range missiles – against a military power who has already inflicted significant damage on Lebanon.

"The question is, if they do hit population centres in Israel, what kind of response will there be from Israel – carpet bombing?," Khodr said.

More than a 1,000 people have been killed in the past two weeks in a wave of ferocious Israeli attacks mostly on southern and eastern Lebanon.

The dramatic escalation has come as Israel has shifted its focus from fighting Hamas in Gaza to its northern frontier where it has traded nearly daily cross fire with Hezbollah since the start of the war in Gaza in October. Israel's stated aim in its offensive into Lebanon is to allow the return of tens of thousands of Israeli civilians to their homes in the country's north.

However, its operations against Hezbollah, including the detonation of electronic communications devices that killed 39 and injured thousands and killing of Nasrallah, appear to have raised confidence that it could destroy its longstanding enemy in Lebanon.

For the first time since stepping up its attacks on Lebanon, Israel on Monday struck a central area of the capital Beirut signalling further potential escalation towards an all-out war.

Hezbollah's insistence that it can defend Lebanon was supported by backer Iran, which appears wary of the risk of wider regional war that any direct confrontation with Israel would carry.

Tehran will not deploy forces to Lebanon or Gaza to confront Israel, its foreign ministry said on Monday, despite Israel's bombardments of both.

"There is no need to send extra or volunteer forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran," said foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani, adding that Lebanon and fighters in the Palestinian territories "have the capability and strength to defend themselves against the aggression".

However, with signs building of a likely Israeli ground offensive, Lebanon's caretaker prime minister, Najib Azmi Mikati, said on Monday in a news conference that the government remains committed to an immediate ceasefire.

With that in mind, he said, Beirut is prepared to deploy the army in the south of the country to implement a UN resolution aimed at preventing war with Israel by ending Hezbollah's armed presence south of the Litani River.

Mikati said Lebanon was ready to fully implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and deploy the army south of the river, which lies about 30 km (around 20 miles) from Lebanon's southern border.

[Source: Al Jazeera]

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