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The imminent Hezbollah-Nusra war

Lebanon will become al-Nusra's alternative battlefield



The Syrian Salafist group Jabhat Al-Nusra **declared** in Jordan that it has set the confrontation with Hezbollah militants in Syria as a top priority. Jordan-based al-Qaeda-affiliate Mohammad Al Shalabi, alias Abi Sayyaf, said that Jabhat al-Nusra has taken a decision to fight Hezbollah militants, who have become "our Jihadists' main target" across Syria.

This came after Hezbollah's secretary general Hassan Nasrallah declared last week that Hezbollah will stand by Syria and help it become a **state of resistance**. He announced that Hezbollah is ready to receive any sort of qualitative weapons even if it is going to disrupt the regional balance.

For the Syrian rebels, al-Nusra and others, this is a declaration of war against them, knowing that what Nasrallah really means is that Hezbollah is now in charge of Syria, upon Iran's decision. Hezbollah and Iran are running the show and if the Syrian rebels want to prevail, they need to target Hezbollah, not Assad or the Syrian regime.

Assad has been pushed to the background to make way for Hezbollah. Therefore, it is not strange that Al-Nusra has decided to shift its priority to fighting Hezbollah as its main enemy.

Al-Nusra's main mission is not to free Syria of its dictatorship and move to build a modern democratic state. Their goal is the *umma* and they will fight the enemies of the *umma* wherever they are. Therefore, their fight against Hezbollah will not stay in Syria and will eventually move to Lebanon. They do not differentiate between Hezbollah and the Shiite community just as they do not differentiate between Assad and Alawites.

This will lead to two dangerous consequences for Lebanon.

One, Shiites will be targeted by al-Nusra and other Sunni jihadist groups, especially that the sectarian tension among Lebanese Sunnis and Shiites has already reached unprecedented levels. In fact, while Hezbollah sends its fighters to Syria, many Lebanese Sunni groups are also moving to Syria to fight alongside the rebels.

What's happening is that the Lebanese Sunni-Shiite civil war is already taking place, but in Syria. It is only a matter of time before it moves to Lebanon. These fighters will return to Lebanon with increased hatred toward each other; hatred rigged with blood and a desire for revenge.

Al-Nusra are not organized enough to fight against Hezbollah in a conventional war, but they could cause great damage by organizing bomb attacks and suicide bombers against Hezbollah's bases and public squares in the southern suburbs of Beirut or the South.

Their fighting tactics are usually based on bomb attacks, not bombing cities with rockets. They are an al-Qaeda-affiliated group, and they don't usually dissociate between a militant and a civilian. They just target a place aiming at the maximum damage. Therefore, Hezbollah's supporters and the Shiite community in general will be in danger.

Also, there are plenty of Lebanese jihadist and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups that had a presence in Lebanon before the Syrian conflict and can now be mobilized to target Hezbollah. Organizations like Fatah al-Islam, Jund al-Sham or Osbat al-Ansar have had bases in Lebanon for years, but they never engaged Hezbollah in direct confrontations. However, after the beginning of the Syrian conflict, jihadists **reportedly** regrouped in a new radical organization inspired by the emergence and successful military operations of Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria.

Two, Lebanon will become al-Nusra's alternative battlefield. There are no state institutions to control their growing presence in Lebanon or the spread of arms. The current void in government is not helping and Prime Minister designate Tammam Salam seems to be incapable of forming a government that does not meet Hezbollah's conditions, one that facilitates its involvement in Syria.

So how can we protect Lebanon and the Shiites from the looming disaster?

Let's start with the reality that the Shiite community in Lebanon is not one single bloc that supports Hezbollah. The diversity among the Shiites is wider than it is among other sectarian communities, for religious reasons related to the diversity of religious references (Marja') and different interpretations of the Qur'an. On the political level, this community has never been as divided over Hezbollah as it is today. The feeling that Hezbollah is dragging them to hell is translating into serious discussion and refutation inside the community.

There is an urgent need to repeat this over and over. Every Lebanese official and media outlet should aim to highlight this diversity. Hezbollah will not save the Shiites. They have already determined that Lebanon and all the Lebanese will have to sacrifice their lives for their mission to serve Iran and its interests in the region. The Lebanese need to save themselves.

That's why it is also important to safeguard Lebanon today by fighting Hezbollah's hegemony over state institutions. A government that empowers Hezbollah and maintains Iran's control over state institutions should not be an option. PM-designate Tammam Salam and President Michel Suleiman should not succumb to any threats. A government to save Lebanon is urgently needed now, more than ever.

If this is not achieved, Lebanon will be naturally linked to Hezbollah and the Hezbollah-Nusra war will not spare anyone. If we lose this chance, we lose everything.