



Nasrallah Admits Sending Drone over Israel, Says Fighters Killed Defending Lebanese-Inhabited Syrian Towns

by Naharnet Newsdesk 11 October 2012, 17:30

Hizbullah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on Thursday acknowledged that his group sent a sophisticated unmanned drone over Israel last week, saying the device was built by the Jewish state's arch-foe Iran, while denying reports that Hizbullah was fighting alongside the Syrian regime.

Nasrallah's acknowledgment of the drone which Israel shot down on October 6 came shortly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pointed at Hizbullah and vowed to defend his country against further "threats."

"A sophisticated reconnaissance aircraft was sent from Lebanese territory ... and traveled hundreds of kilometers (miles) over the sea before crossing enemy lines and into occupied Palestine," Nasrallah said in a televised address.

"It overflew sensitive and important installations for dozens of kilometers until the enemy spotted it near (the nuclear site) Dimona," Nasrallah added. He did not identify the installations.

"Israel is lying to its people by claiming that it intercepted the drone over the sea," Nasrallah noted.

Nasrallah insisted that "possession of such an aerial capacity is a first in the history of any resistance movement in Lebanon and the region."

"It's not the first time (that a drone was sent) and it will not be the last. We can reach all the zones" of Israel, said Nasrallah, referring to a less sophisticated drone sent by Hizbullah during its 2006 war against Israel.

He said the latest drone was "Iranian built and assembled in Lebanon."

"I must praise the jihadist brothers who have dedicated their talents to defend their people and developed all these defense capabilities," Nasrallah added.

“We will leave it to the Israelis to evaluate the intelligence and operational capabilities of the drone. This capability is only part of the surprises of any future war,” he went on to say.

“I must remind of the size of Israel's violations of Lebanon's airspace since (U.N. Security Council) Resolution 1701 came into force until yesterday: 20,468 violations, amid the impotence of the state and the silence of the international community and some Lebanese who are lecturing about sovereignty,” Nasrallah added.

An Israeli official questioned by Agence France Presse in Jerusalem said he was not surprised that the drone was made in Iran. "The fact that Hizbullah weapons come from Iran does not surprise anyone," the official said on condition of anonymity.

The Israeli premier earlier accused Hizbullah of launching the previously unidentified drone and vowed to protect Israeli borders against further intrusions.

"We are acting with determination to protect our borders... as we prevented last weekend an attempt by Hizbullah," Netanyahu's office quoted him as saying. "We shall continue to act aggressively against all threats."

Air force jets on Saturday shot down the unarmed drone over southern Israel's Negev desert after it entered the country's airspace from the Mediterranean Sea.

Commenting on the recent blast that killed three Hizbullah fighters at an arms cache in the Bekaa town of Nabi Sheet, Nasrallah noted that “the defense forces of any country would usually deploy across the entire country, and the same applies for their arms and warehouses.”

Turning to the issue of the recent media reports about the alleged death of a Hizbullah commander and several fighters in Syria, Nasrallah denied the claims, clarifying that the Hizbullah fighters were killed while defending Lebanese-inhabited border towns inside Syria.

“During the first days of the Syrian crisis, some Arab satellite networks claimed that Hizbullah had sent 3,000 fighters to Syria and we said that the reports were false and they are still false,” said Nasrallah.

“In Lebanon, nothing can be kept under wraps and we do not hide anything. When a martyr falls, we tell the truth to his family about when, where and how the dear brother was martyred,” he noted.

“We do not hold funerals in the dark, but rather publicly and on television. Where are the 75 martyrs that some media outlets claimed they were killed in the border town of Rableh? This is untrue,” added Nasrallah.

“Until the moment, we have not fought alongside the Syrian regime. It has not asked us to do so and who said that we have an interest in that,” he noted.

Nasrallah explained that there are 23 Syrian border towns and 12 farms that are inhabited by Lebanese residents of various religious beliefs, adding that around 30,000 Lebanese residents live in these towns.

“They maintained their ties with Lebanon and they vote in Lebanon. Some of the men of these Lebanese families have been members of Lebanese parties since decades,” he added.

“A large number of Lebanese residents of these border towns belong to Hizbullah and they have been fighting in the party's ranks since 30 years. We did not tell them how to deal with the incidents. We told them make your own choice and they chose to stay in their homes. Armed groups attacked them and carried out killings, kidnappings and even rapes,” Nasrallah clarified.

“Some of them decided to flee the area, but most of them stayed in their towns and started to arm themselves. The residents of these towns took the decision to stay and defend themselves against the armed groups and did not engage in the battle between the regime and the opposition,” Hizbullah's leader added.

He stressed that the party has decided to open a new front.

“I cannot prevent anyone, whether they belong to Hizbullah or not, from staying in the border areas. We have not opened a new front and our front is well-known,” Nasrallah added.

Hizbullah's newspaper al-Intiqad has reported that Hizbullah commander Ali Hussein Nassif, who is also known as Abou Abbas, was killed "while performing his jihadi duties." It did not say when or where he was killed.

Meanwhile, a Lebanese security official told the Associated Press that Nassif was killed in Syria and his body was returned to Lebanon through the Masnaa border crossing on Sunday. Speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media, the official said the bodies of several other Hizbullah fighters have been brought back to Lebanon in recent days.

But Nasrallah stressed that “everything said about the martyr Abou Abbas is untrue.”

“You can ask the residents of the Bekaa who know that Abou Abbas was the military official responsible for the Bekaa infantry units, and of course the young men of the border towns were under his command. These Lebanese towns come under artillery fire on daily basis and several martyrs fell there, including martyr Abou Abbas,” Nasrallah noted.

“If there ever comes a day when our responsibility demands that we fight in Syria, we will not conceal that, but there is no such thing at the moment,” he added.

Commenting on the recent threats that were voiced against his party by the rebel Free Syrian Army, Nasrallah said: “I advise some parties in the

Syrian opposition not to try to intimidate or scare us, as that will only go in vain.”

“False accusations will not do you any good and you cannot force me to apologize through false accusations,” Nasrallah added, addressing the Syrian opposition.

The rebel Free Syrian Army on Tuesday claimed arresting 13 Hizbullah fighters in the countryside of the Syrian province of Homs.

“Hizbullah is involved in the current clashes in Syria and its fighters are taking part in the ongoing battles,” Fahd al-Masri, head of the FSA Central Media Department, told MTV.

“We warn Hizbullah that if it does not stop, we are capable of teaching it a lesson it will not forget in the heart of Dahiyeh, and we tell (Hizbullah chief Sayyed) Hassan Nasrallah: we know how to find you and you are not safe from our strikes, you and all the leaders of your gang,” Masri added.

Hizbullah has stood by Syrian President Bashar Assad since the uprising began 18 months ago, even after the group supported revolts in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Bahrain. The group says it is backing the Syrian regime because of its support for the anti-Israel resistance movements in Lebanon and Palestine and because it is willing to implement political reforms.

Samer al-Homsi, an activist in Syria's central Homs province, which borders Lebanon, said Nassif was killed Saturday when a roadside bomb went off as the car he was in passed just outside the town of Qusayr. He said Nassif and several other people were killed in the blast.

"His job was to coordinate with Syrian security agencies," al-Homsi told AP via Skype.

He added that the rebels detonated the bomb "without knowing" that the target was a Hizbullah official. "We knew he was a Hizbullah official after it was announced by the group in Lebanon," he said.

Source: Naharnet