

Nasrallah shatters Israel's red lines on arms

By Hussein Dakroub

BEIRUT: Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah said Thursday Syria would supply his party with “game-changing” weapons in response to last week’s Israeli airstrikes on Damascus that reportedly targeted shipments of sophisticated Iranian arms destined for the group.

In a fiery televised speech devoted mostly to responding to the Israeli air raids in Syria, Nasrallah said Hezbollah would assist other resistance groups seeking to liberate the Syrian Golan Heights from Israeli occupation.

His remarks are bound to heighten tensions in the already volatile region, especially after he clearly hinted that the advanced weapons his party would receive from Syria could upset the balance of power with Israel.

Nasrallah said the Israeli airstrikes were aimed at achieving two objectives: neutralizing Syria in the decades-long Arab-Israeli conflict, and preventing Hezbollah from further bolstering its arsenal, which includes thousands of long-range missiles that can hit any target in Israel, according to the Hezbollah leader.

Following the Israeli attacks in Damascus, Nasrallah said, Syria would provide Hezbollah with advanced weapons which it has not had before. “Syria’s first response to Israel’s airstrikes was to tell Israel that if your goal was to prevent the capabilities of the resistance [Hezbollah] from growing, then take note ... [Syria] will provide the resistance with sophisticated weapons that the resistance has never had before,” Nasrallah said, speaking through a giant screen via a video link. “We mean game-changing.”

“Syria’s second strategic response is to open the Golan front and to open the door to popular

resistance in the Golan,” he said, drawing cheers from the crowd.

“The third response is to prepare rocket launch pads and give orders for firing missiles without returning to the command. This has frightened the Israelis who sent messages to calm the situation,” he added.

Nasrallah was addressing a Hezbollah rally south of Beirut marking the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the party’s Al-Nour radio station.

He said his group was ready to use such strategic weapons in its fight against Israel. “We, the Lebanese resistance, are ready to receive any kind of game-changing weapons, even if it upsets the balance of power [with Israel]. ... We deserve such weapons, and we will use them to defend our people and our country.”

“Just as Syria stood by the Lebanese people and gave moral and financial backing to its people’s resistance, we announce that we stand by the side of the Syrian popular resistance,” Nasrallah said. He pledged “moral, financial and logistical support, cooperation and coordination and for the liberation of the Syrian Golan” which was captured by Israel in the 1967 War.

Israel carried out two airstrikes near Damascus on May 5, bringing the total number to three this year. Western media, quoting Israeli sources, said the warplanes targeted advanced Iranian-made guided missiles bound for Hezbollah, while the Syrian government said the air raid hit a military and scientific research center near Damascus and caused casualties.

Israel has repeatedly warned that it won’t allow war-torn Syria to transfer advanced weaponry to Hezbollah, saying this would cross a red line. It has voiced concern that Syria’s stockpile of sophisticated weaponry could fall in the hands of Hezbollah and other anti-Israel militant groups.

Nasrallah denied media reports that 300 Syrian soldiers were killed in the airstrikes. “According to my information only three or four martyrs from the Syrian military were killed,” he said.

Nasrallah said the Israeli air raids were aimed at removing Syria from the equation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He added that Syria and its strategic ally, Iran, were the main sources of strength of the region’s resistance movements.

“Everyone knows how much Syria has given to the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance” against Israel, Nasrallah said. “In all of Arab history, no other Arab regime has given us as much as

President Bashar Assad's regime has."

Nasrallah, a staunch supporter of Assad, has acknowledged his party's involvement in the Syrian fighting, saying Hezbollah fighters were helping Lebanese Shiites living in Syrian towns near the border with Lebanon defend themselves against rebel attacks.

Nasrallah, who hinted last week that Syria's allies, Iran and Russia, would intervene militarily to prevent the fall of the regime, praised Assad's approach to deal with the Israeli attacks.

"Everything that is happening today indicates that Syria has a strong leadership that is managing the battles with the [Israeli] enemy in a wise, calm and courageous manner that will achieve victory in the future, God willing," he said.

While he reiterated that the only solution to the crisis in Syria was through a compromise between the regime and the opposition, Nasrallah slammed Arab countries for not acting to end the 26-month-long bloody conflict.

"It's shameful the U.S. is the one seeking Syria's interests while the Arabs seem to be the ones destroying Syria, which is something serving the enemy's interests."

On domestic issues, Nasrallah reiterated his party's demand that the next government be made up of political parties according to their size in Parliament.

"Given the domestic and regional circumstances ... there should be a government of true national partnership ... and national unity rather than a government of challenge," he added.

Nasrallah also reiterated that his party's lawmakers would vote for the Orthodox Gathering's electoral proposal if it is put up for a vote during next week's Parliament session. "Hezbollah will vote for the Orthodox Gathering's draft law because we have already given our word on that and we were clear," he said. – Additional reporting by Dana Khraiche and Thomas El-Basha

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