



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 5, 2013

Hezbollah Commander Assassinated in Lebanon

Hassan al-Laqis, a senior Hezbollah commander, was shot on December 3 outside his home two miles southwest of Beirut, dying a few hours later on December 4. A statement released by Hezbollah said that al-Laqis was killed as he returned home from work around midnight.

An AP report carried in [USA Today](#) cited an official close to Hezbollah who said that al-Laqis held some of Hezbollah's most sensitive portfolios and was close to the group's secretary-general, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah.



"The brother martyr Hassan al-Laqis spent his youth and all his life in this honorable resistance since its inception up until the last moments of his life," the statement said.

Lebanon's [Daily Star](#) cited an unnamed high-ranking security official who told the paper that "at least one unidentified gunman, using a 9-mm silenced gun, shot and wounded Lakkis in the head and the neck five times outside his home in Hadath."

The Lebanese daily also quoted a statement from Hezbollah: "The Israeli enemy tried to kill Lakkis many times ... but its attempts failed until this foul assassination overnight."

Hezbollah, whose name means "Party of God" in Arabic, is a Lebanon-based Shiite Islamic militant group and political party. The group was founded in Lebanon during the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982.

During its occupation, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) expelled the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), thereby eliminating Syrian influence over Lebanon, and installed a pro-Israeli, Christian government led by Bachir Gemayel. Gemayel's subsequent assassination resulted in further chaos in the country, and the lengthy Israeli occupation (1982-1985) following the invasion created resentment in Lebanon and led to the establishment of Hezbollah as an anti-occupation resistance movement. During its founding, Hezbollah received financial assistance from the Shiite leadership of Iran and its forces were trained by a contingent of 1,500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards — a branch of Iran's military.

Following the withdrawal of Israeli troops in 1985, it would have been thought that Hezbollah's purpose would have disappeared, but the militant group only grew in size, influence, and power. It continues to receive support from Iran and Syria. The entire Hezbollah organization is regarded as a terrorist group by the United States, Israel, Netherlands, France, Canada, Bahrain, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Hezbollah's military wing is considered to be a terrorist organization by the United Kingdom and the European Union and its external security organization has been labeled as terrorist by Australia.

A report in the [Jerusalem Post](#) stated that a previously unknown group, the Ahrar al-Sunna Baalbek brigades, ("Free Sunni Brigades in Baalbek") claimed responsibility for the attack in a message on Twitter. The *Post* writer observed that the group's name suggested it had Lebanese Sunni Muslim connections.



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A broadcast on the official Hezbollah television station, Al-Manar, said al-Laqis was “one of the leaders of the Islamic resistance” against Israel who had been frequently targeted by the Jewish state.

“The Israeli enemy tried to get to our martyr brother several times, in more than one location, but these attempts failed until this repugnant assassination,” said the Hezbollah statement, asserting that Israel would “bear full responsibility and all the consequences for this heinous crime.”

In response to the allegation that Israel was behind the killing, Israel’s foreign ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said:

This has strictly nothing to do with Israel.

Hezbollah has made a fool of itself in the past with these automatic and groundless accusations against Israel.... If they are looking for explanations as to what is happening to them, they should examine their own actions.

The *Post* report noted that previous attacks against Hezbollah’s interests in Beirut which Iran blamed on Israel included a twin suicide attack last month on Iran’s Beirut embassy that killed at least 25 people.

Though the Iranian foreign ministry spokeswoman blamed Israel for that attack, responsibility was claimed by a Lebanon-based al-Qaeda-linked group, the Abdullah Azzam brigades.

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said he believed the group had support from Saudi Arabia — Iran’s main regional rival — whose backing for Syrian President Assad’s enemies has “pushed it deeper into a proxy conflict in Syria against Tehran.”

Abdullah Azzam “is not a fictitious name,” Nasrallah said in an interview broadcast on Lebanese television on the night of December 3.

“This group exists ... It has its leadership ... and I am convinced it is linked to Saudi intelligence,” he said. “Saudi Arabia is the one who runs these kinds of groups in several places in the world.”

(In our article posted on December 2, “[Iran Reaches Out to Saudi Arabia](#),” we traced the history of the sometimes-tense rivalry between the two Muslim states, as well as the recent ease of tension.)

A report by Israel’s [Haaretz](#) news described the al-Laqis slaying as “a clean and especially professional assassination” and “the biggest operational blow to the Lebanese organization since ... Imad Mughniyeh. Mughniyeh, who was described as the Hezbollah chief-of-staff, was assassinated in Damascus in February 2008.”

Haaretz noted that Western intelligence officials have described al-Laqis as having a “brilliant mind” and that “his death strips Hezbollah of a[n] ‘intelligence source’ — a person whose experience and widespread connections to Syrian and Iranian intelligence organizations served Hezbollah well for almost three decades.”

Regarding the claim of responsibility made on Twitter by the “Ahrar al-Sunna Baalbek brigades,” *Haaretz* notes:

Since anyone with a basic knowledge of Arabic and familiarity with the relevant Internet forums can present himself today as an extremist Sunni organization, it is hard to judge the reliability of the report. As far as Hezbollah is concerned, there is no question that if the organization believes that Israel is responsible, it will retaliate.



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Another report by Lebanon's [Daily Star](#) quoted a statement made by Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Ghazanfar Roknabadi, in an open message to Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah: "I offer my condolences... over the martyrdom of brother Hassan Lakkis who had a long history of teaching the Zionist enemy harsh lessons in humiliation and whose actions were heroic acts in the face of [Israel]."

"While we adjoin this heroic martyr to the convoy of martyrs who sacrificed their lives to serve their nation and its sacred cause, mainly the Palestinian cause, we believe that these cowardly acts by the Zionist enemy and its agents would only make the resistance more determined to achieve its goals of eliminating [Israel] from existence," he added.

The al-Laqis assassination is but the latest event in troubled Lebanon that has resulted from the tiny nation's inability to gain control of its own destiny. Once it was a predominately Christian Arabic nation, where Maronite Christians and moderate Muslims coexisted peacefully. However, that peaceful state ended with the influx of Palestinian refugees, which, due to PLO influence, became increasingly militarized. With the expulsion of the PLO by Israeli forces, Hezbollah arose and grew in strength, further destabilizing the country. And outside intervention by Syria and Iran bolstered the more militant Islamic groups, such as Hezbollah.

It will take a miracle for Lebanon to regain its former peaceful state, where citizens of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds used to live together peacefully, and the nation had earned the nickname "Switzerland of the East."

Photo of Lebanese mourners carrying the coffin of Hassan al-Laqis in Beirut December 4: AP Images

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