



Speech given by Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah and reactions in the Arab world

November 7, 2023

Overview¹

- ▶ On November 3, 2023, Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah delivered a speech entitled "Martyrs who died on the way to Jerusalem." it was Nasrallah's first public appearance since the outbreak of Operation Iron Swords. The speech, which raised high expectations in the Arab world, claimed the war in Gaza was completely Palestinian. He threatened the United States and Israel and emphasized that "all options are open."
- ▶ He claimed, straight-faced, that he had no advance knowledge of the Hamas attack, and that Hamas was winning, therefore by implication they did not need external aid. He noted Hezbollah's contribution to the war effort through its operatives' attacks on northern Israel and was proud they were forcing Israel to keep a significant portion of the IDF forces in the northern arena because Israel was concerned about having to fight on another front. As for further aid in the future, Nasrallah was ambiguous, apparently to keep Israel tense while claiming that all options were on the table.
- ▶ Reactions to the speech in the Arab world were diverse, as reflected in the media and social networks. Some supported the speech and its messages, while others criticized him for not fulfilling their high expectations. Some people felt that Nasrallah had abandoned the Palestinians, after having spent several months talking about the "unity of the arenas," but that when put to the test he betrayed his partners and did not keep his promises. Reactions on social networks mainly expressed disdain and ridiculed Nasrallah for boasting but actually doing too little.
- ▶ Representatives of Hamas and the other Palestinian terrorist organizations avoided directly criticizing the speech, and some publicly expressed public appreciation for the speech and his contribution to the war effort. The Iranians supported the messages, which they claimed

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reflected his willingness to fight for the Palestinians, while acting with “discretion” and preventing the entire region from being dragged into a war.

Nasrallah’s Main Points

►After considerable preparation and a build-up of expectations, on November 3, 2023, Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general, gave a speech entitled, "Martyrs who died on the way to Jerusalem." It was broadcast to large audiences, who watched it live in the squares of major cities in Lebanon. It was the first public speech he had given since the beginning of the war and as many had expected, he presented the organization's position on the war in the Gaza Strip.



Right: Hassan Nasrallah delivers his speech. Left: A crowd gathered in the Dahia, the Shi'ite southern suburb of Beirut, to hear the speech (al-Manar, November 4, 2023)

►**Nasrallah’s key message** (al-Manar, November 3, 2023):

- ◆ **Nasrallah claimed that he did not know about the attack and that it was a "100% Palestinian attack" which had been kept in absolute secrecy.** Nasrallah distanced Hezbollah and Iran from the invasion and claimed they had no connection to or prior knowledge of the barbaric attack in the Gaza Strip.
- ◆ **Operation al-Aqsa Flood, he claimed, was a success and proved Israel was weak and could not stand on its own.** He described the attack as a “watershed in the history of the ‘resistance’”² that led to an ‘earthquake’ in Israel and exposed its weakness.” He added that the quick positioning of the United States at Israel's side, and Israel's request for financial aid, proved that Israel was weak and could not stand on its own.
- ◆ **He claimed Hamas was winning and its victory had regional importance:** Hamas was winning, and therefore, by implication, did not need Hezbollah's assistance. Its victory was important for Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and for all the Middle

² Terrorism whose objective is to destroy the State of Israel.

Eastern countries. He said two goals had to be achieved now: the cessation of attacks against Gaza and the victory of Hamas.

◆ **Hezbollah's contribution to the fighting in Gaza:** Nasrallah claimed that Hezbollah's attacks on Israel on the northern border since October 8, 2023 were unprecedented, as Hezbollah had forced Israel to transfer forces to the north that would otherwise be operating in the Gaza Strip. According to Nasrallah, a third of the IDF's forces, an important part of which were special forces, were deployed along the land border with Lebanon, half of Israel's naval forces were deployed off the Lebanese and Haifa coasts, and half of the anti-rocket defense systems were also deployed towards Lebanon. Another achievement, according to Nasrallah, was that tens of thousands of Israelis had been displaced from their homes in the north and 58 cities, towns and villages had been evacuated near the Gaza Strip and the surrounding area. He noted that Hezbollah had casualties in the war, as did the "other organizations" operating in Lebanon [the Lebanese Resistance Companies and the military-terrorist wings Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in Lebanon].

◆ **Words of praise for the Palestinians and Iran's proxies:** He praised Hamas and the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip. He also praised the Palestinian residents for their firm stand in the Gaza Strip, and thanked the Shi'ite militias in Iraq and the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen for "entering the heart of the campaign."

◆ **The IDF was responsible for the October 7 massacre:** He claimed that because Israel harmed civilians in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, the IDF was responsible for the massacre in the Gaza Strip, and claimed the investigations which would be conducted later would make that clear.

◆ **Israel's threat to eliminate Hamas:** He claimed that in the past Israel had threatened to bring down Hezbollah and Hamas, but could not because it was weak.

◆ **The threat of escalation:** Nasrallah left the issue of escalation in the north vague, stating that "all options are open" along the Lebanese border, further escalation was possible in the north and Israel should take that into account. He added that escalation on the northern border depended on two things: the way events played out in the Gaza Strip, because Hezbollah supported Gaza; and Israel's conduct towards Lebanon. He warned against further attacks on Lebanese citizens, since they could cause Hezbollah to return to the equation of "a [killed Israeli] citizen for a [killed Lebanese] citizen." He

emphasized that "the enemy will commit the biggest folly in its history if it attacks Lebanon."

◆ **The United States:** According to Nasrallah, the United States was directly responsible for all the killing in the Gaza Strip and was conducting the fighting there. He called the American threats against Hezbollah "futile." Hezbollah, he claimed, was not afraid of the American fleet in the Mediterranean and was prepared for it. The solution was not to threaten the "combatants," to stop the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, which was within American capabilities, because "those who wish to prevent a regional war must stop the aggression against Gaza."

◆ **The issue of the abductees:** In Nasrallah's assessment, they would be released only as part of an exchange deal.

◆ **A call to the countries of the world:** He called for international and regional involvement to stop the IDF's fighting in the Gaza Strip, transfer aid to the Palestinians, end economic ties with Israel and not supply Israel with oil or food products.

Reactions

► Nasrallah's speech received extensive coverage in the media and social networks in Lebanon, Arab countries and among the Palestinians. Reactions were mixed: some supported what he said and represented him as a "responsible leader" who did not argue and made decisions while weighing a variety of considerations. Others pointed out that although he drew equations for the conflict, he was ambiguous regarding future moves and gave Israel an ultimatum, thereby protecting Lebanon and improving the organization's deterrent power. On the other hand, others criticized his speech, claiming it had not lived up to their expectations.

Lebanon

► **Mohammad Raed, a Hezbollah member of in the Lebanese parliament,** claimed with satisfaction that Nasrallah's words had answered everyone's questions except Israel's, and now Israel was confused and hesitant, did not know which direction to take or what Nasrallah was hiding (Lebanese News Agency, November 5, 2023).

► **Dr. Hussein al-Hajj Hassan, a Hezbollah member of the Lebanese parliament,** claimed Nasrallah's speech had strengthened their faith, hope and certainty that victory would come in Gaza to the Palestinians, to Hamas and to all the "resistance" [terrorist] organizations

against the aggression of Israel and the United States. He also claimed the speech increased confusion, worry and tension in Israel (Lebanese News Agency, November 5, 2023).

► **Weaam Wahhab, head of the Arab Unification Party** in the Lebanese Parliament (and former minister of the environment), a Druze affiliated with the March 8 forces led by Hezbollah and Amal, attacked the critics of Nasrallah's speech. He stated that the campaign against Nasrallah, which some people were working for, was financed by pro-Israelis, and that whoever was dissatisfied with Hezbollah's involvement in the fighting in Gaza could either go there and fight or remain silent (Weaam Wahhab's Twitter account, November 4, 2023).

► Former **Lebanese Parliament member Fares Souaid** noted that Nasrallah's speech sought mainly to convey a message to the United States and the world that Iran and Hezbollah had not been involved in the attack on October 7, 2023. He added that Nasrallah had supported Gaza in words but not deeds, and clarified that the Iranian interest was preeminent (MTV, November 3, 2023). On the other hand, **Nadim al-Jameil, a Phalanges Party member of the Lebanese Parliament**, said the speech emphasized contradiction and embarrassment, and the Phalanges and the people of Lebanon refused to have Lebanon enter a destructive war whose consequences would be intolerable (Lebanese Phalanges Party Twitter account, November 4, 2023).

► **Muneir al-Rabi', author and commentator for al-Medan**, wrote that Nasrallah's speech walked a tightrope: he did not scare the Lebanese, but he also did not give Israel security, he left all options open in a "well-considered and balanced speech" (al-Medan, November 4, 2023). According to an article published in the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese al-Akhbar, reactions to the speech were mixed and ranged from congratulating Nasrallah for having controlled his emotions despite the situation, to those who were disappointed because they expected stronger statements towards Israel (al-Akhbar, November 4, 2023).

The Palestinians

► Apparently the Palestinians were supposed to have been disappointed by the speech because despite the support they received, he explicitly stated it was a Palestinian campaign and did not say what Hezbollah's assistance would be beyond what they were currently receiving. Meanwhile, the Palestinians were careful not to publicly criticize the speech.

► **Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas figure who lives in Beirut**, said Hamas appreciated Nasrallah's speech and the role of "the brothers in Hezbollah and the resistance forces against Israel." He claimed Nasrallah's speech was clear: Hezbollah, along with Palestinian

“resistance” forces, entered the conflict on October 8, 2023. Nasrallah had made it clear that all options were open, and emphasized that the main goals were to stop the “aggression” against the Strip and achieve victory for Hamas and the “resistance.” He said, “the effort is appreciated” (CampsPostPlus Facebook page, November 4, 2023; Hamas' Judea and Samaria Telegram channel, November 4, 2023).

► Asked by an interviewer about Nasrallah’s speech, **Zaher Jabarin, who holds the prisoner file in Hamas**, evaded giving a direct answer and said that in general Hamas demanded all the resistance forces, led by Nasrallah, and the entire [Muslim] nation to fulfill their [jihad] obligation and help the Gaza Strip with all force and means at their disposal (al-Jazeera, November 5, 2023).

► **Daoud Shehab, a senior PIJ figure**, said Nasrallah's speech gave the Palestinian people broad moral and political support and opened possibilities for the Palestinian “factions” and the “resistance.” He claimed the speech reflected the vision of the “axis of resistance”³ regarding the events in the Gaza Strip, and the “axis” was ready to pay any price to ensure a victory for Gaza (al-Mayadeen, November 3, 2023).

► **Muneir al-Jaghoub, a senior Fatah figure**, commented on the speech in a series of tweets, stating it reflected Nasrallah's decision to prioritize Lebanon's security over greater involvement in the campaign against Israel, and used that to attack Hamas for dragging the Palestinians into the “adventure” (Muneir al-Jaghoub’s Twitter account, November 3, 2023).

► **Ibrahim al-Madhoun, a Hamas political commentator who lives in Turkey**, noted that Hezbollah's equations were “complex” and had Lebanese and regional considerations. He claimed Nasrallah's speech was realistic and acceptable, given the current unusual and turbulent circumstances. He gave a fair description of the opposition and left the door open for the future (Ibrahim al-Madhoun’s Twitter account, November 3, 2023).

► **Fayiz Abu Shamala, a Hamas-affiliated political commentator**, wrote that by mentioning the gradual escalation with Israel, Hezbollah had calmed the atmosphere in order to create an element of surprise later on. He expressed trust in the capabilities of the “resistance” in Gaza and sent Lebanon the message that Hezbollah did not seek war, but instead “had fallen into it” (Fayiz Abu Shamala's Twitter account, November 4, 2023).

³ Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian terrorist organizations, the Houthis in Yemen and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

►According to **Palestinian commentator Hani al-Masri**, Nasrallah's speech opened a new stage. Although Nasrallah did not announce Hezbollah was joining the war, he did not close the door to it either. Al-Masri believed Hezbollah was not currently ready to enter an all-out war in the Middle East (aljazeera.net, November 5, 2023).

Iran

►The speech was widely covered and received positively by Iranian speakers and media. **Mohsen Razai, the former commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)**, tweeted that Nasrallah's speech was the beginning of a new "resistance front" strategy in the region against Israel and the United States. He claimed that from now on, none of the "resistance" groups would be watching from the sidelines and the "resistance front" would act in a unified way until it achieved the victory of the Palestinian "resistance" (Mohsen Razai's Twitter account, November 3, 2023).

►An op-ed piece which appeared in Tasnim, which is affiliated with the IRGC, claimed Nasrallah's speech may not have convinced those who observed regional developments from a Hollywood point of view and expected something big and unprecedented. However, Nasrallah proved that Hezbollah made its decisions based on a sober analysis that took regional and international considerations into account. Nasrallah, claimed Tasnim, achieved several key goals in his speech, including uniting the "resistance front" and the people of the region against the "crimes of the United States and Israel" in the Gaza Strip, strengthening solidarity between the elements of the "resistance front" and representing the United States as the main actor responsible for the conduct of the war. Moreover, he preserved ambiguity regarding Hezbollah's future moves and improved the organization's deterrence in the face of a possible attack by Israel. According to Tasnim, a response by Hezbollah while the IDF and the governments in the United States and Israel were on high alert might not bring the desired results, and special events always occur when no one expects them (Tasnim, November 4, 2023).

►The Iranian-affiliated website Asr-e Iran praised Nasrallah for leaving all options open, maintaining ambiguity and refraining from issuing an ultimatum to Israel regarding a cease-fire. Such an ultimatum could have led to a preemptive Israeli strike against Lebanon which would not have served the interests of Hezbollah and Iran. The speech proved that Nasrallah was "a wise and balanced statesman" who knew Israel well. According to the supreme leader of Iran, Hezbollah should not be expected to carry the entire Muslim and Arab world on its

shoulders, even though in the past the organization had demonstrated its willingness to go to war when necessary (Asr-e Iran website, November 3, 2023).

►An unusual response was published by the reformist journalist and critic of the regime **Ahmad Zeidabadi**, who claimed it would have been better if Nasrallah had kept silent. He said Nasrallah had raised expectations among his supporters and tried to gloss over his inability to declare Hezbollah’s entry into the war by using a militant tone of voice. However, he did not hide his unwillingness and practical inability to enter the war (Ahmad Zeidabadi's Telegram account, 3 in November 2023).

Ridicule on the social networks

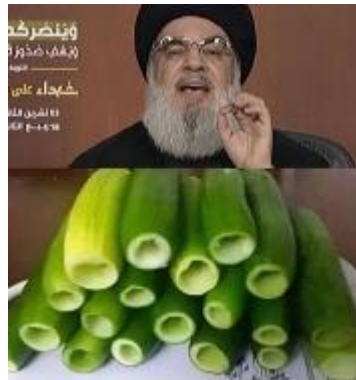
►There were also Arabic social network activists who turned Nasrallah's speech into a joke and ridiculed Nasrallah. He was described as a rabbit, a cowardly mouse, a clown, a spinner of tales. A recurring motif was ridiculing Nasrallah by using a play on words, so his statement “all options are open” appeared next to a photograph of hollowed-out cucumbers, since in Arabic “all options are open” also means "all cucumbers are open.” There were also photographs and video clips of people throwing shoes at their laptops and TV screens during Nasrallah's speech as an expression of anger and frustration.



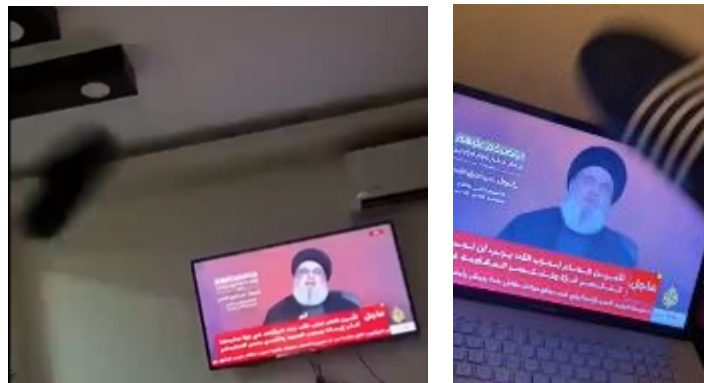
Right: Nasrallah as a mouse (Mi RA Facebook page, November 4, 2023). Left: Nasrallah as a clown holding a marijuana leaf (Ahmed al-Rihawi’s Twitter account, November 3, 2023)



Nasrallah as a Zionist (al-Farouq TikTok account, November 4, 2023)



Nasrallah's quote next to hollow cucumbers, meaning what he said was worthless nonsense (Syrian journalist Feisal al-Qassem, November 3, 2023)



Throwing shoes at the screen during Nasrallah's speech (Twitter accounts Abu Faras al-Halali and Saryah Amen, November 4, 2023)



Top: The traditional Arabic spinner of tales. Bottom: The contemporary spinner of tales (Twitter account Yahya al-Shakir, November 3, 2023)