

“War is inevitable between Israel and Hezbollah”, Interview with Abbas Zalzali

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***Anthony Blinken** left Doha on August 20 empty-handed. He had been pushing Israel and Hamas to come to a ceasefire agreement, but the negotiations appear to have once again failed to find peace for the people in Gaza, who have suffered over 40,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of injuries since the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas. The US supported Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** in his revenge attack on Gaza, which has been termed genocide by the UN. However, the US President Joe Biden administration has forcefully demanded that Netanyahu stop the war to allow Israeli hostages out of Gaza, and prevent further Palestinian deaths. Most of the dead have been women and children in Gaza.*

Biden was assured by Netanyahu that he would sign a ceasefire, but at the last moment Netanyahu broke his promise to Biden, and this prompted Biden to end his re-election campaign. Biden was counting on a Gaza ceasefire to win the votes to put him in the White House for a second term, but had to admit defeat. It appears that Netanyahu is determined to wage a full-scale war against Hezbollah, the Lebanese resistance organization. Experts agree that the military capability of Israel and Hezbollah are on parity. The war could be avoided if Netanyahu would stop the war on Gaza, but he is looking for a military victory in both Gaza and Lebanon.

To understand the crucial issues at play as the world faces a major war in the Middle East, which may likely expand into a regional war, Steven Sahiounie of MidEastDiscourse interviewed Abbas Zalzali, news anchor, media instructor, talk show host and writer.

Steven Sahiounie (SS): On July 30, Israel assassinated Hezbollah leader Fouad Shukr in the Lebanese capital Beirut. In your opinion, did Israel take this action to provoke Hezbollah into a full scale war?

Abbas Zalzali (AZ): It was clear that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took the green light for an escalation during his visit to Washington and his speech before the US Congress. The assassination of Hezbollah leader Fouad Shukr in the Lebanese capital Beirut is a translation of this escalation and an attempt to drag Hezbollah into a large-scale war because the Israeli leadership, since the first days of Operation Flood of Al-Aqsa on October 7, has wanted to launch a military campaign on Lebanon and has been trying since that time to separate the fronts to isolate Hamas in Gaza.

SS: The tension between Israel and Hezbollah is on the highest level, especially with reports that a full scale war between the two sides might erupt any day. In your opinion, is war inevitable, and what role will the Lebanese Army play?

AZ: All indications show that war is inevitable between Israel and Hezbollah. Israel, which received a heavy blow on October 7, wants to restore its prestige as an invincible state. Hezbollah's growing military capabilities, especially what was recently revealed, and here I mean the video of the underground military facility Imad 4, makes Hezbollah an existential threat to Israel and the Israelis. If a comprehensive war does not break out this time, it will inevitably break out in the near future. Speaking of the role of the Lebanese army in the event of a war, the matter is clear: it will confront Israeli attacks in defense of the homeland because it is the homeland's army, despite its modest capabilities and lack of the capabilities ready for such a war. Here we will open the door to questions about whose interest it has not allowed the Lebanese army to be strong throughout these years.

SS: Lebanon is going through one of the worst economic crisis in their history. In your opinion, will the political and military pressure that Lebanon is going through force Lebanon to accept the conditions of the World Bank?

AZ: Lebanon is going through one of the worst economic crises in history, not because it is a poor country, but because the corruption of its officials and the sectarian system did not build a country or an economy, but rather invested state funds in strengthening their own interests and political goals.

Lebanon has no solution except to reform the sectarian system, end the quota system, and reform the administration to rise.

Again, any talk other than that is a waste of time, even if the International Monetary Fund gave \$100 billion as a grant and not a loan, because the stolen money amounts to hundreds of billions of dollars.

As for the conditions of the International Monetary Fund, of course, they are to bear obligations or abandon non-economic issues that may be related to sovereignty over Lebanese territory or to the settlement of Palestinian refugees and displaced Syrians, and here I do not think that Lebanon will accept this.

SS: Historically, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt has followed the American directives and wishes handed out from the US Embassy in Lebanon. However, he gave an interview to the UK media, SkyNews, in which he said he supports the resistance against the occupation of Lebanon and Palestine by Israel, and he supports Hezbollah. He later attended the condolences held for Fuad Shukr. In your opinion, what is the significance of this position and demonstration by Jumblatt?

AZ: If we must talk about the history of the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt or even the history of his late father Kamal Jumblatt, we must admit that the general orientation was Arab and Palestine was a fundamental issue for them. Let me add here that even in internal affairs and political disputes, Walid Jumblatt has always distinguished himself by separating any internal political dispute from the country's supreme interest.

As for his recent position after the Majdal Shams massacre and the accusation that Hezbollah was committed by Israel, Jumblatt's position was very advanced and national par excellence, blocking the road to a Druze-Shiite strife after the Al-Aqsa Flood operation blocked the road to a Sunni-Shiite strife that had been planned for years.

To conclude in this context: Walid Jumblatt is a statesman and statesmen do not deviate

from the interest of the country at all times.

SS: US President Biden has failed in stopping Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the genocide in Gaza. Biden is no longer seeking re-election and the Oval Office effectively is 'flying on auto-pilot'. This has given the green light to Netanyahu and made him reckless in his decisions. Experts believe Netanyahu wants to take this unique opportunity in US politics to attack Hezbollah with the intention of destroying the military capability of the resistance organization. In your opinion, will Netanyahu use the retaliatory reply of Hezbollah, if it occurs, to initiate a large attack on Lebanon?

AZ: It is a dangerous thing that they are supported by the West and also by the local Israeli community. After the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and Fouad Shukr in the Lebanese capital Beirut, he tried to restore the image of a superhero in the Israeli community and succeeded in this matter, and all statistics confirm the increase in the percentage of his supporters, knowing that assassinations are not considered strategic or military achievements.

As for Hezbollah's response to the assassination of "Hajj Mohsen", it is inevitable, as stated by its Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. As for its nature and timing, the matter is subject to several details that cannot be predicted, but stopping the war on Gaza may change something in this equation.

As for Netanyahu exploiting this response when it happens to launch a large-scale war on Lebanon, it cannot be confirmed or denied because opening the northern front means a regional war. Here we ask him about the American role and American desire because everything that is happening is with American approval and participation, and whoever says otherwise is naïve. If the United States wanted to stop the war, it would have stopped it within an hour.

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