

Nasrallah leaves Israel with no choice

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The story may be apocryphal since I am unable to retrace it, but I seem to remember reading that after hearing of an attack on Pearl Harbor and telephoning President Roosevelt, Churchill remarked that “in a way, this greatly simplifies matters.”

What Churchill meant, was that there was no longer any doubt of America’s course of action: despite isolationism, the attack pushed the US into the war – and thus, in Churchill’s view, into saving Britain from Hitler. There was to be much “blood, sweat, and tears” ahead – but no hesitation on what needed to be done.

As I read [Jerusalem Post’s report](#) of Nasrallah’s much-anticipated speech outlining Hezbollah’s plans in the wake of pager/walkie-talkie explosions that killed some, and maimed many more of its fighters, I had a similar feeling that he made Israeli decision-making much simpler,



Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah gives a televised address, Lebanon, September 19, 2024, in this screenshot taken from a video.
(photo credit: Al-Manar TV via REUTERS)

Earlier in the week, two Israeli messages – one rhetorical, another substantive – told Nasrallah that Israel is no longer willing to tolerate the status quo created by Hezbollah’s incessant drone and rocket rocket fire that killed several dozen Israelis since it started on October 8, 2023, uprooting and exiling some 60,000 Israelis who lived along the Lebanon border. The rhetorical message was cabinet’s decision to add the safe return of those refugees to their homes to the official list of war goals. The non-rhetorical message (whose purpose was to reinforce the rhetorical one – and impress upon Hezbollah leadership that Israel meant business) was simultaneous explosion of some 2,300 pagers carried by rank-and-file Hezbollah members (and Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon too, as it turned out). Since the message of the pagers has not been internalized, it was reinforced the next day by that of 400 or so Hezbollah’s walkie-talkies.

So what did Nasrallah tell Lebanese in his speech? Did he graciously bow out of the war with Israel by saying “we did

what we could for Hamas by rocketing the Israelis for close to a year, and now is the time to step back” – as was reasonable to assume he would, given the blow in personnel, and communication systems his organization suffered?

Not at all. It appears from his speech that Nasrallah is consumed by messianic hopes of divine assistance, and pledges to press on to victory over Israel. His hopes and plans are made obvious by a couple of passages that reveal his state of mind. Bizarrely, Nasrallah decried pager explosions as the “declaration of war.” So where was he for the last eleven months? What did he think Hezbollah was doing when firing on Israel in the last eleven months if not waging war? I guess he listens to Putin’s speeches too much (Putin swears to heavens that Russia is not fighting a war in Ukraine – it is just

“Special Military Operation”) and likewise, Nasrallah apparently does not see Hezbollah as being at war with Israel for nearly a year now – he calls it “rendering assistance to Hamas” or some such like, but not war! Well, if you asked Ukrainians, they interpret the bombs falling on them as war – so why be surprised that Israelis see Hezbollah’s drones and rockets as a war, too – and act accordingly by hitting Hezbollah under the belt. Nasrallah can feign surprise and righteous indignation all he wants (just as Russia accuses Ukraine of terrorism when its territory is hit) but the war started long ago – by Hezbollah, not Israel. So Nasrallah’s astonishment at what Israel did is completely misplaced.

But even more interesting – and more revealing of his priorities when it comes to Lebanon and his own fighters – is Nasrallah’s admission that he rejected Israeli offer that it will not proceed with more pager-style attack in exchange for ending attacks on Israel, thus inviting the walkie-talkie blasts (and sacrificing some 400 more of Hezbollah members). To him, people – his own people, the members of Hezbollah – are expendable. Insofar as Nasrallah is concerned, Lebanon – and the region – might as well go to hell. Apparently, he is

eager to use his precision long-distance rockets on Israel, daring Israel to a fight – “We are waiting for your tanks, and we will see this as a historic opportunity,”

It is worth repeating that one should be careful of what one wishes for. In the wake of Pearl Harbor attack, Hitler declared war on America – and it didn't work out too well for him. But the real bottom line is that after Nasrallah's speech the political battle lines are clearly drawn. The only way for Israel to regain its northern region is through militarily pushing Hezbollah back to the positions assigned it by UN resolution 1701 that ended the Second Israel-Lebanon war. It will not go back on its own.

Nasrallah's speech greatly simplified Israeli-decision-making. It was, I am sure, full of great rhetoric – but was not a great act of statecraft, I'm afraid. Not even close.