

Cracks in the armor of the Resistance?

Nadine Elali and Shane Farrell



A Lebanese flag appears behind Hezbollah's yellow flag. Recent events have shown that Hezbollah is not the powerhouse it used to be. (AFP photo/Joseph Eid)

An explosion in the Hezbollah-controlled area of Dahiyeh last week gave birth to a host of speculation. Initially brushed off as a gas canister explosion by Hezbollah's media relations department, which also stated that no one was injured, suspicions were raised by heightened security measures taken in the aftermath of the blast.

Hezbollah members reportedly forbade locals from loitering in the area and repaired the apartment where the blast took place in the immediate aftermath of the explosion.

Meanwhile Lockman Slim, founder of NGO Hayya Bina and a Dahiyeh resident, told NOW Lebanon that "phones were no longer working in the area."

An-Nahar reported that the explosion, which was in the Rweissat neighborhood, was caused by either a bomb or grenade. News reports speculated that Samir Kuntar, a former prisoner in Israel who returned to Lebanon during a prisoner exchange between Hezbollah and the Jewish State in 2008, was the target of the blast.

Israel's Channel 10, meanwhile, said the blast targeted Mustapha Mughniyeh, the son of slain Hezbollah military commander Imad Mughniyeh, at his office and that his bodyguard was killed by the explosion.

While the nature of the incident remains a mystery, Hezbollah members cordoned off the area around the apartment where the blast took place, preventing people—including Lebanese security officials—from gaining access to the building, and residents have reported a heightened level of security in the neighborhood.

Journalist Mustapha Fahs told NOW Lebanon that there have been immense security procedures implemented in Dahiyeh recently, including patrols and police dogs. According to Slim, the levels of nightly deployment in the area have reached levels unprecedented since the 2006 war with Israel.

This has come at the back of a sharp rise in security within Dahiyeh following allegations of Hezbollah members spying for the US Central Intelligence Agency. Hezbollah reportedly arrested more than 50 members, including three sons of high-ranking commanders, on suspicion of treason, and some have been transferred to Tehran for questioning.

The organization reportedly suspects they were involved in the assassination of Imad Mughniyeh in 2008 and that they supported the anti-government protests in Iran.

Some feel that these latest two incidents are evidence that Hezbollah does not exert complete control over Dahiyeh and is a blow for the image it seeks to portray.

“For me the most important issue [surrounding the] explosion is that Dahiyeh is not as [secure] a stronghold as Hezbollah tries to describe,” said Slim. “It is an image that was breached.”

Fahs believes that this is nothing new, and that there is already “chaos on the level of social security, [including] thefts, drugs and abuse by thugs among each other in Dahiyeh itself,” which, he said, is damaging to the party since “it reflects that Hezbollah does not have control over its own area and its own security.”

A Dahiyeh resident who spoke on condition of anonymity, on the other hand, believes that moderates, intellectuals and opponents of Hezbollah are reading into the events. He believes that the views of Hezbollah supporters have not changed.

Ali al-Amin, a journalist at *al-Balad* newspaper, put forward another explanation. “In the party itself,” he said, “there may be a group of a different political vision than the prevalent one, reflecting also the different visions currently present in Iran: one in favor of some settlement with the US and another against. So the two events may be a matter of settling accounts, to face this group and get rid of it, and what other way to do it then refer to it as treachery.”

However due to Hezbollah’s intense secrecy, Amin said that no one really knows the true answer.

He added, though, that the party is being severely tested by local and regional events. At a national level, people are anxious about the indictments of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and what it will mean for the party and its four named members.

Internally, as a party in power, Hezbollah is now more accountable to the people and cannot blame March 14 for government failures. Externally, with the uncertainty in Syria, people are worried about how events there will affect the Party of God.

He said the party is trying to control the first two factors, but is severely challenged by the third, which is out of its control.

“I believe that Hezbollah is currently going through the toughest phase of its existence,” he added.