

We support you, but really... who cares...writes Tal Shalev

In the days following the assassination of Ahmad Jaabari, the fighting between Hamas and Israel raised an interesting question: Why did Hezbollah stand aside and do nothing to support its brothers in Gaza?

On Wednesday, November 14, 2012, Israel assassinated Ahmed Jaabari, the head of Hamas's military wing, as a response to the increasingly massive rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip in the last few months. Shortly after the assassination, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) retaliated by intensifying the rocket attacks and extending the range of fire to include Tel Aviv – more than 75 kilometers (46 miles) from Gaza. There were hundreds of Israeli air strikes on the Gaza strip. The two sides stood on the brink of a ground war, sirens heard in many Israeli cities. A cease-fire seems to be holding at the moment.

A day after the assassination Hezbollah condemned the "barbaric Zionist Aggression on Gaza" and called it "a desperate attempt to break the will of the resistance." The organization also urged the Arab League to carry their responsibilities and stop the 'genocide' imposed on Gaza through 'Israel's' siege, shelling, killing and destruction." Hezbollah's official websites in Arabic and English (<http://www.moqawama.org/>) and its television station, Al-Manar, provided information on the fighting almost on a daily basis. It has been confirmed that Hezbollah transferred a large amount of long-range rockets to Hamas after Israel destroyed most of Hamas's reserves from the air. However, what is more important is what Hezbollah did not do.

Hezbollah did not send fighters to Gaza to assist Hamas in fighting against Israel. The organization indeed declared its support for Hamas, as expected, but called on the Arab world to take action rather than taking action by itself. Hezbollah's most effective assistance to Hamas would be to fire rockets across Israel's northern border - diverting Israel's attention from the southern to the northern border, dividing its military force, and weakening Hezbollah and Hamas's shared enemy. Hezbollah did none. Why?

Since the assassination of Brig. Gen. Wissam al-Hassan mid-October, Hezbollah has been fighting for political survival in Lebanon. Its political enemies from the March 14 coalition claim that Hezbollah and its representative, Prime Minister Najib Mikati, are responsible for the assassination and should resign. But Prime Minister Mikati is still in office and President Michel Suleiman is trying to convince all parties to agree to national dialogue in order to establish a unity government with the opposition.

Moreover, Hassan Nasrallah, as he has proved in the past, prefers to be the initiator of his own wars rather than a second front in another conflict. The time wasn't right for Hezbollah to open a front with Israel, and Hezbollah must preserve its arsenal for the right time, even though solidarity with Hamas is important.

In addition, the Lebanese Army (LAF), which has taken more responsibility after the assassination, and U.N. peacekeeping force UNIFIL, have been patrolling the areas near the border with Israel to maintain security and prevent Hezbollah or radical Palestinian groups from exploiting the Gaza fighting to fire rockets into northern Israel to trigger Israeli retaliation.

In the end, Hamas, PIJ and other cooperating terrorist organizations in the Gaza strip stand alone. The Arab world, including Hezbollah, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority, condemned the Israeli retaliations and supported Gaza morally, but did nothing more at this point, each country and entity for its own reasons. They don't want a part in this war with Israel – it's Hamas's war – not theirs.

Tal Shalev commentates regularly at <http://talshalev.blogspot.co.il/>