

Netanyahu in New York: a decoy for Nasrallah in Beirut?

By Lev Tsitrin

Many decades ago, when I was a ten-year-old Soviet kid, I read a thrilling story about Italian police catching a major Mafia boss. After their painstaking sleuthing identified his hiding place, the police needed to make sure he was home when they came to arrest him. Afraid of alerting him by heavily patrolling the neighborhood, they asked the local TV station to air a documentary about his bloody exploits, counting that he would not be able to resist the temptation to yet again see himself on the screen – and would be home to watch. They were right – when the heavily armed police pounced, he was exactly where they wanted him to be, right in the living room, in front of the TV set.



Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the 79th United Nations General Assembly at U.N. headquarters in New York, U.S., September 27, 2024. (Reuters)

That long-forgotten story popped back into my head when I read that the strike on Beirut's Hezbollah headquarters

happened an hour after Netanyahu's address in the UN.

I cannot help wondering: was there a link? As I write this, no information is available on who was hit in the strike – only on who was the intended target: Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah. Indeed, it is hard to believe that Israelis would have bombed a large apartment complex that hid the command center built under it if not in the hope of killing a very senior figure. The question is, how would they know that Nasrallah – who is notoriously cautious, and whose whereabouts are Hezbollah's super-hyper-top secret, was there?

Or – did the Israelis hope to lure him to Hezbollah headquarters, given that there was indeed the urgent need to confer and discuss the latest situation, to assess the magnitude of blows taken by Hezbollah in the last two weeks, and to weigh the French-American proposal of a three-week truce? The meeting needed to happen – and it needed to happen in-person since Hezbollah's electronic communications were unreliable, being in all likelihood breached by Israel. So why not combine the business with watching Netanyahu talk in the UN on a big screen, exchanging impressions and ideas with the surviving lieutenants to better articulate Hezbollah's response?

Of course, there were plenty of reasons for Netanyahu to be in New York other than luring Nasrallah to Hezbollah's headquarters – he did need to explain Israel's stand to the world. But, though this sounds crazily conspiratorial – as I would be the first to admit – liquidating Nasrallah along with what remains of the top echelon of Hezbollah would have been alone worth the round trip across the ocean during the war. What reinforces such impression of the purpose, is that Netanyahu is not staying for further meetings, but is heading right back home, instead of schmoozing with other world leaders as is always done during UN General Assembly week.

Surely, there is a war to be waged and won. But I wonder whether Netanyahu's New York speech was also part of that war – and not just the one of getting his country some sympathy by

telling the world Israel's side of the story – but also luring one of Israel's chief enemies out of his hiding place, so he could meet his doom, just like his Mafia predecessor did many decades ago.