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Israeli airstrike in Beirut targeted Hezbollah leader, officials say

The strike's munitions could be heard in thundering succession across Lebanon's capital, followed by the wail of ambulances.

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BEIRUT — A massive Israeli airstrike leveled several residential buildings in the southern suburbs of Beirut on Friday evening in what Israel's military said was an attack aimed at the "central headquarters" of Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group.

Hasan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary general, was the target of the strike, according to a person familiar with information Israel provided later to the United States, who spoke on the condition of anonymity about the sensitive matter.

[...]

Even if Nasrallah had survived Friday's strike, the attack marks a significant expansion of Israel's campaign against that group, according to **Yoram Schweitzer, head of the program on terrorism and low-intensity conflict at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies.**

"It's a signal that Israel is not reluctant to go after the higher echelons of the organization," he said.

Israel began to signal that its campaign against Hezbollah had expanded in July when it targeted one of the militant group's senior commanders, Fuad Shukr, in Beirut's southern suburbs. Previously, the low-grade conflict between Hezbollah and Israel was largely confined to the border region in southern Lebanon.

Since then, the tempo of strikes targeting Hezbollah's senior-most ranks has only increased. **Schweitzer** said while Hezbollah has weathered leadership deaths before, losing so many members who hail from the group's early days will have a cumulative impact.

"It's not devastating yet, but the organization is badly damaged," he said.

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