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CIA intelligence fiasco in Lebanon

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Hezbollah has dealt a heavy blow to CIA operations in Lebanon, forcing the intelligence agency to curtail its espionage activities in the country, US officials say.

According to current and former US officials, CIA operations in Lebanon have been badly damaged after the resistance movement identified and captured a number of US spies this year, AP reported.

They have also said that CIA officials have secretly been scrambling in recent months to protect their remaining spies, foreign assets or agents working for the agency, before Hezbollah finds them.

Giving credit to Hezbollah for uncovering the espionage rings, the US officials blamed negligence by CIA managers and sloppy practices used by the spies for their networks being discovered in Lebanon, which is considered a key watching post for collecting crucial intelligence on Middle East countries including Syria and Iran. It remains unclear whether anyone has been or will be held accountable in the wake of this counterintelligence disaster.

Hezbollah Secretary General Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah in June announced the arrest of several spies affiliated with the CIA, who had infiltrated the ranks of the group. Nasrallah said that CIA officers, posing as diplomats at the US Embassy in Beirut, had recruited them in early 2011.

At the time, US officials denied the report, but now current and former US officials concede that

Hezbollah busted several US spy rings and arrested a number of American spies, which affected CIA espionage activities in Lebanon.

"Beirut station is out of business," said one source using the CIA terminology.

In April 2009, Lebanon launched a nationwide crackdown on spy cells, mostly Israeli networks, arresting nearly 100 people, including members of the country's security forces and telecommunications personnel, on suspicion of espionage for Mossad.

A number of the suspects have admitted to their role in helping Israel identify targets inside Lebanon, mostly belonging to Hezbollah, which Tel Aviv heavily bombed during its 2006 war against the country.

If convicted, the spies will face life sentences with hard labor. Should they be found guilty of contributing to the loss of Lebanese lives, the agents will face capital punishment.