



# THE COUP AND THE ZOOM CALL

## ANATOMY OF A NARRATIVE ESCALATION IN LEBANON'S MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
Methodological Note	4
<b>CONFIRMED CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>THE NARRATIVE UNFOLDING</b>	<b>8</b>
The First Mover	8
The Coup Narrative	10
The Zoom Call Narrative	13
<b>AMPLIFICATION ACROSS NETWORKS</b>	<b>15</b>
The Authority Voices	15
The Transnational Network	16
The Phantom Source	18
Merger, Normalization, and Recirculation	20
<b>KEY FINDINGS</b>	<b>25</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report examines how two unverified narratives emerged and spread in the aftermath of Israel's April 8, 2026 airstrikes on Lebanon, known as "Operation Eternal Darkness." The first claimed that Hezbollah officials had been tracked through a Zoom meeting and targeted via their IP addresses. The second claimed that the strikes had pre-empted an imminent Hezbollah coup attempt against the Lebanese government. Drawing on 52 documented instances across social media, WhatsApp, broadcast media, official statements, and secondary commentary, the research reconstructs how these two narratives appeared separately, reinforced one another, and eventually merged into a single explanatory story.

The analysis finds that both narratives originated in weakly sourced or anonymous material, then acquired credibility through repeated amplification by partisan commentators, political figures, media outlets, and regional broadcasters. Unsupported attributions to "Israeli Channel 24," later reinforced by confusion between ME24 and i24NEWS, further strengthened the appearance of external confirmation. Over time, the narratives moved from rumor and insinuation into television coverage, English-language commentary, pan-Arab broadcast, and opinion journalism.

The report does not seek to determine the factual truth of the underlying allegations. Its focus is on narrative propagation: how unsupported claims gained traction, how verification failures enabled their spread, and how the Lebanese and regional media ecosystem handled high-stakes information during a moment of acute crisis. Its central conclusion is that, in the absence of strong verification practices, politically consequential narratives of unclear origin were able to circulate across platforms and audiences with limited critical thinking and increasing legitimacy.

# INTRODUCTION

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On April 8, 2026, at 2:15 PM, Israel launched what it called “Operation Eternal Darkness,” a wave of approximately 100 near-simultaneous airstrikes across Lebanon in less than ten minutes, targeting what it said was “Hezbollah infrastructure.” The operation took place shortly after a U.S.-Iran ceasefire announcement. The scale of the casualties and the geography of the strikes quickly raised broader questions about the nature of the operation and its human cost. It was one of the deadliest single days in Lebanon in the current phase of the war, and among the most violent episodes Beirut had experienced since the 1982 Israeli invasion. The [Israeli army said](#) the operation was intelligence-based and had been planned over several weeks.

Shortly after the strike, two narratives began circulating on social media before moving into local and international media coverage. The first framed the attack as analogous to the September 17, 2024 pager operation, claiming that an intelligence breach had occurred through a Hezbollah Zoom meeting. The second claimed that Israel had pre-empted an imminent Hezbollah plan to seize the Lebanese government and key state institutions, evoking comparisons to Hezbollah’s May 7, 2008 Beirut and Mount Lebanon military operation. The two narratives emerged separately, then gradually merged into a single explanatory story that moved from fringe circulation into broader public discourse.

## METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This brief is based on open-source narrative tracking conducted across the period from April 8, 2026, at approximately 2:15 PM to April 13, 2026, at 12:37 PM. It reconstructs the emergence, circulation, merger, and normalization of two unverified narratives following Operation Eternal Darkness: first, that Israeli intelligence intercepted a Hezbollah Zoom meeting and tracked participants’ IP addresses before striking; second, that the strikes pre-empted an imminent Hezbollah coup attempt against the Lebanese government and key state institutions.

The analysis relies on a chronological evidence chain of 52 documented instances drawn from publicly accessible and privately circulated material that later entered public discussion. These include social media posts, WhatsApp voice notes and documents shared into broader circulation, media articles, television segments, mobile alerts, official statements, and selected secondary commentary that played a demonstrable role in amplifying, reframing, or legitimizing the narratives under review. The aim is not to establish the factual truth of the underlying allegations, but to examine how they

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were introduced, how they acquired apparent credibility, and how verification failures shaped their movement across platforms, languages, and audiences.

Where possible, the research distinguishes between confirmed events, attributed claims, observable amplification patterns, and analytical inference. It does not claim to prove formal coordination where the evidence does not support that conclusion. Rather, it documents the visible sequence through which unsupported claims moved from anonymous or weakly sourced origins into wider political, media, and policy circulation. The findings should therefore be read as an analysis of narrative propagation and ecosystem vulnerability, not as a criminal or intelligence attribution exercise.

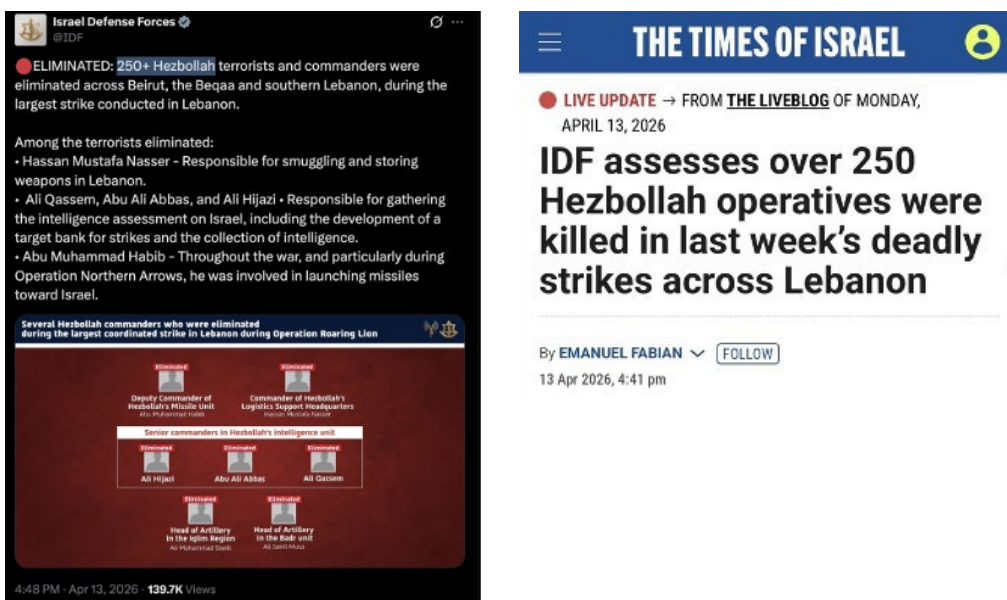
# CONFIRMED CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

On April 8, 2026, at approximately 2:15 PM, Israel launched what it called “Operation Eternal Darkness,” a wave of airstrikes and artillery fire across Lebanon without prior warning. According to Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz, the operation involved around 100 targets struck within roughly ten minutes, using about 50 fighter jets and approximately 160 munitions, and was presented as targeting Hezbollah infrastructure. Katz also described the operation as Hezbollah’s heaviest blow since the 2024 pager attack, one of the earliest documented instances in which that analogy appeared in post-strike framing.

Reporting by [Al Jazeera](#), [Reuters](#), and [MTV Lebanon](#) confirms the scale and simultaneity of the strikes. The attacks hit multiple densely populated areas, including Beirut’s southern suburbs, parts of central Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, and the Bekaa Valley, [overwhelming](#) hospitals and causing large-scale destruction to civilian infrastructure.

By April 13, [death toll estimates](#), reported by Al Jazeera, had exceeded 357, with many more wounded, making the operation one of the deadliest single days in Lebanon since the current phase of the war began. On the same day, the Israeli army’s official account framed the strikes as a major blow to Hezbollah’s military capabilities and claimed that [more than 250 Hezbollah operatives](#) had been killed. Measured against the official Lebanese Health Ministry toll of 357, that figure would imply that a substantial share of those killed, more than 100, were civilians, even on the basis of Israel’s own public accounting.

**Figure 1. Israeli reporting on the operation’s death toll**



Israeli officials presented Operation Eternal Darkness as a carefully planned and intelligence-driven operation. About 30 minutes after the strikes began, the Israeli army international spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani wrote on X that the operation was “based on precise intelligence” and had been “planned meticulously over weeks.”

**Figure 2. Israeli army’s framing of the operation**



Lebanese state officials, including the [presidency](#) and the [Grand Serail](#), as well as the [United Nations](#), condemned the strikes. Prime Minister Nawaf Salam declared Thursday, April 9, a national day of mourning while his cabinet ordered reinforced state security measures in Beirut and banned the carrying of non-state weapons in the capital.

On April 12, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak criticized the operation in an interview with Britain’s [Channel 4](#), describing it as “very disgusting” and saying it was “not something that we can be proud of.” He questioned the strategic rationale behind the strikes, asking what long-term objective could justify such devastation and loss of civilian life, while also maintaining that Hezbollah’s rocket arsenal remained a serious threat to be addressed. His remarks were notable as one of the few instances of senior Israeli political figures publicly questioning the conduct of the operation.

On April 15, Lebanon’s Foreign Ministry said in a [statement](#) that, “based on Cabinet Decision No. 14 dated April 9, 2026,” it had requested that “Lebanon’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations submit an urgent complaint to the UN Security Council and the Secretary-General in response to the April 8 airstrikes, particularly those targeting the capital, Beirut.” The Ministry added that it had also requested that the complaint be circulated as an official document of both the General Assembly and the Security Council.

# THE NARRATIVE UNFOLDING

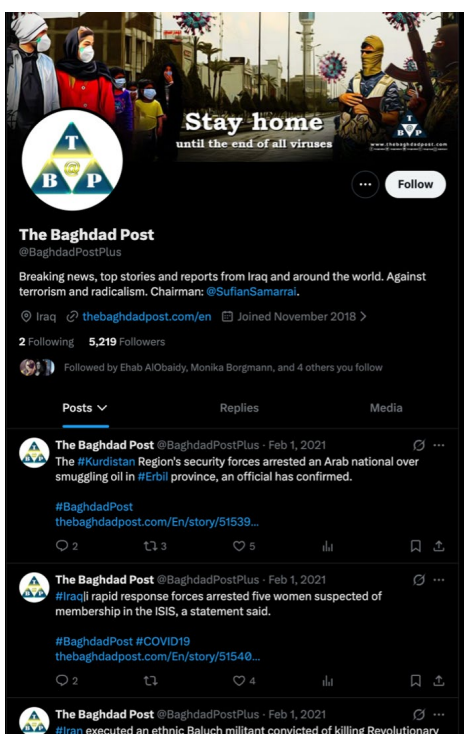
## THE FIRST MOVER

Before tracing the timeline, it is necessary to examine the actor who first seeded both narratives and the degree of scrutiny his claims received in real time.

Sufian al-Samarrai presents himself as an Iraqi journalist and Chairman of The Baghdad Post, an English-language news outlet he says he has led since August 2016. His LinkedIn biography describes him as an experienced television anchor and lists prior roles with Orient TV in Detroit (2006–2007), Radio Network NAWA in London (2005–2006), and the Arabic News Network in London (2009–2012). It also lists studies at Baghdad University and Al-Turath University, while his publicly stated location varies between Baghdad and the United Kingdom depending on the platform.

Open-source checks, however, leave important parts of that profile unverified. The Baghdad Post website is currently inaccessible. Its X account has been inactive since 2021.

**Figure 3. A dormant X account**



The Baghdad Post Telegram link, listed in Sufian al-Samarrai's biography, is [broken](#). Open-source review has not identified verified employees, staff journalists, or editorial bylines for The Baghdad Post beyond al-Samarrai himself. Public business-directory data, such as [ZoomInfo](#), also attributes to the outlet a scale of staffing (employing 250-499 people) and revenue (\$10-25 million) that is difficult to reconcile with its current digital footprint. The outlet's Facebook page adds a further [irregularity](#): its last post, dated December 2, 2020, contains an anonymous attack and accusations of collusion with Israel of a media figure whom a commenter identifies as Sufian al-Samarrai. Whether this reflects a hack, an internal dispute, or some other explanation cannot be determined from open sources. What can be said is that the institutional record behind the identity that Sufian al-Samarrai presents is marred with substantial grey zones. For example, his claimed tenure at the Arabic News Network leaves no retrievable footprint: no archived broadcast segments, no staff listings, no contemporaneous references in any publicly available record.

The same applies to some of the institutions associated with him. A May 2024 [interview](#) by the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs (JCFA) identified him as chairman of both The Baghdad Post and the New Iraq Centre. Yet the latter appears to have little or no independent open-source footprint: no identifiable website, no clearly verifiable institutional record, and no obvious evidence of independent activity.

What is more readily traceable than Sufian al-Samarrai's professional background is the network through which he acquired visibility. His interviews, citations, or amplification appear repeatedly within a relatively consistent cluster of outlets and organizations broadly aligned around pro-Israel, anti-Iran, and anti-Qatar positions. That network includes:

- [JCFA](#), an Israeli conservative think tank whose stated mission includes producing Arabic-language content to "send messages in Arabic on social media to present what Israel is, what radical Islam is" and to "positively influence" Arab public opinion toward Israel;
- [MEMRI](#), the Israeli-American media monitoring organization;
- The Jerusalem Post, which cited him in [three separate articles](#);
- [DefendJerusalem](#), a legal activism initiative to support Israel;
- [Aurora Israel](#), an Israeli Spanish-language outlet.

He was also cited in [Haaretz](#), whose left-liberal editorial line sits outside the pro-Israel advocacy ecosystem that built his profile, in relation to a separate viral video of the Israeli army Arabic spokesman Avichai Adraee.

The [Zawia3](#) media monitoring finding identified Sufian al-Samarrai as a key active node in the coordinated hashtag campaign [#QatarExpelsHamis](#) and the use of AI-generated imagery within that anti-Qatar, anti-Iran influence effort. Moreover, his posting behavior on X is consistent with a human operator: multiple posts daily, real-time engagement, original Arabic prose of varying register, no signs of automation, no crypto promotion, no phishing.

These media appearances are not intended to discredit him. Nevertheless, they show that much of his public visibility appears to have been built through repeated citation within a relatively closed ecosystem rather than through broad-based verification by neutral regional outlets, major international wires, or newspapers of record. Those findings do not establish control, sponsorship, or direction in relation to his April 8 posts. It does, however, place him within a documented context of coordinated online narrative activity.

On April 8, Lebanese and regional media ecosystems treated claims originating from al-Samarrai with far more credibility than his verifiable profile warranted. That failure matters because his posts helped seed the two narratives that would go on to shape public understanding of the deadliest day in Lebanon in the current phase of the war. The central issue, therefore, is not whether every aspect of his identity can be resolved conclusively from open sources. It is that an unverified or insufficiently verified actor was able to influence the explanatory frame through which hundreds of deaths were interpreted in real time.

## THE COUP NARRATIVE

The first strike hit at approximately 2:15 PM. The first detected narrative intervention arrived at 4:03 PM.

The strikes were still ongoing when explanatory narratives began to fill the information space. This was the most consequential phase of the cycle: a population in shock, social media saturated with graphic footage from some of Beirut's busiest intersections, and a near-total absence of verified official information. Lebanese security institutions had not yet spoken in any meaningful detail. The Israeli army had not yet issued a full public account either. Hospitals were overwhelmed. In that vacuum, early explanatory claims had a strong chance of shaping how the event would be understood.

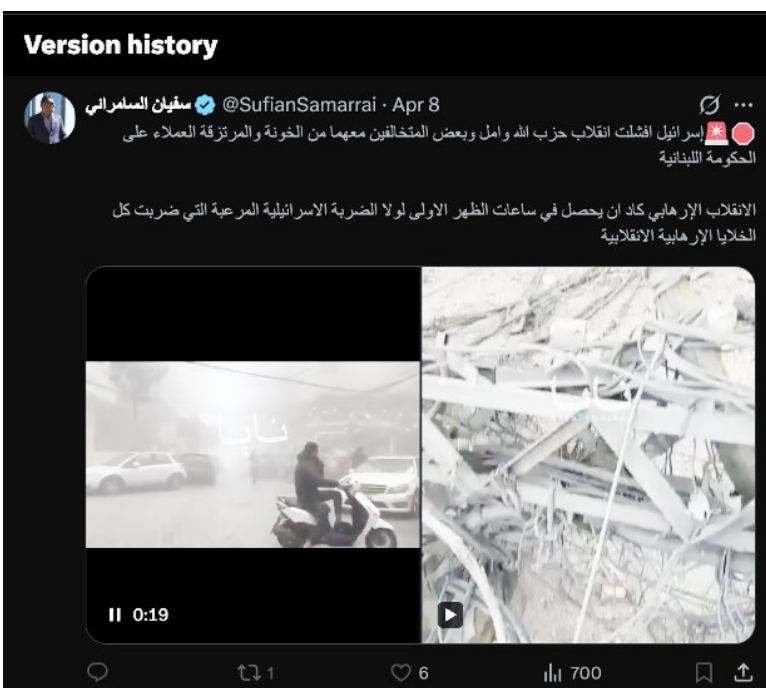
At 4:03 PM, approximately one hour and forty-eight minutes after the first strikes, Sufian al-Samarrai posted what would become the first major framing intervention. He described the operation as an intelligence penetration of extraordinary scale, greater than the 2024 pager attack and even more significant than the killings of Khamenei and Nasrallah. His post did not yet mention a coup. It established that Israel had reached Hezbollah positions simultaneously through a level of intelligence superiority not yet explained. By April 13, the [post](#) had reached approximately 39,000 views.

Figure 4. The first framing post

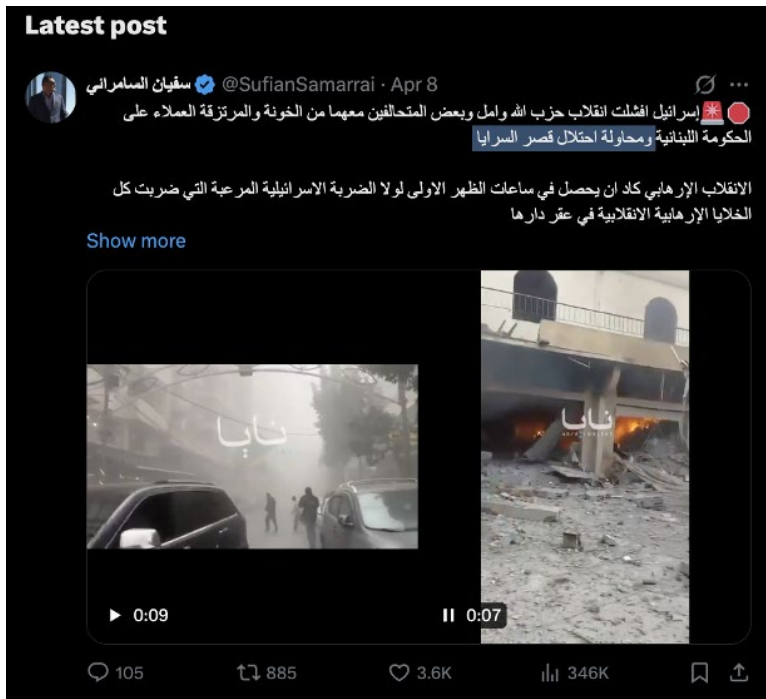


At 4:23 PM, the coup claim appeared. Four minutes later, the post was edited to add the Grand Serail and the notion of “zero hour.” By April 13, it had reached roughly 345,000 views.

Figure 5. First version of the coup post



**Figure 6. Second version of the coup post**



At 4:46 PM, Sufian al-Samarrai shared footage of rescue workers pulling civilians from rubble and used it to reinforce the same narrative, claiming that Hezbollah coup cells had been sheltering among civilians while awaiting the moment to move against the government and the Grand Serail following Iran's defeat.

At 6:06 PM, al-Samarrai shared a [post](#) by @mirsadeye, an account operating within the same anti-Iran, anti-Hezbollah online ecosystem.

That post transformed the earlier claims into a more elaborate political narrative. It named Naim Qassem and Nabih Berri as figures behind the alleged coup, implicated the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), and presented the strikes as a precise pre-emptive response to an imminent threat. The claim now had named actors, a strategic rationale based on Hezbollah wanting to negotiate as a governing power rather than a militia, and a broader political frame. It was presented in the language of analysis rather than rumor. By April 13, the post had reached approximately 264,000 views, 26 times Mirsadeye's average per-post performance of approximately 10,000 views on an account with 29,000 followers and typical engagement of 50 to 300 likes. The extent of its wider circulation cannot be fully reconstructed from the open-source record, but its reach clearly extended well beyond the account's normal audience.

It was into this environment, already shaped by the coup narrative, that the second story began to emerge.

## THE ZOOM CALL NARRATIVE

At approximately 5:59 PM an anonymous [WhatsApp voice note](#) was already circulating on Lebanese messaging networks claiming that Hezbollah officials had been holding a Zoom meeting, that Israel had tracked their IP addresses across more than one hundred locations, and that the strikes followed within minutes. No speaker was identified and no source was given. The claim entered the information environment as a forwarded audio message of unknown origin.

Translation of the voice note's transcript: "These strikes... they were doing, according to information that reached me, they were doing a Zoom meeting, doing a Zoom meeting to decide what to do, how to move, how to do this and that... all responsible people, they struck them in all the areas where they were doing the Zoom meeting... on the signal, on the IP address."

The significance of the voice note lies not only in its technical claim, but in the way it interacted with the narrative environment that had already begun to form. By that point, the coup narrative had already introduced the idea that Hezbollah had been preparing a major move against the Lebanese state. The Zoom voice note supplied an apparent mechanism: Israel had discovered the plan by intercepting or tracking the meeting through digital means. The two narratives were separate in origin, but mutually reinforcing in effect. The coup story provided motive and the Zoom story provided method. Together, they made the broader account appear more complete and more coherent than either claim did on its own.

It is worth noting that the Zoom note appeared roughly 96 minutes after Sufian al-Samarrai's coup claim. Whether this reflected coordination, organic convergence, or the rapid construction of a complementary explanation within an already active rumor environment cannot be established from the open-source record. What can be established is the functional relationship between the two claims: each made the other more plausible within the logic of the emerging narrative.

At 6:18 PM, Georges Hayek, a member of the Lebanese Forces executive council and president of its cultural department, circulated the same claim publicly. His post marked an important step in moving the Zoom meeting narrative from private messaging chains into more visible political circulation.

**Figure 7. The Zoom narrative entering the Lebanese partisan arena**



At 7:15 PM, Lebanon Files published a brief item stating that information was “circulating on social media” about a Zoom intercept. That formulation was accurate in one limited sense: the claim was indeed circulating online. But by naming it and publishing it, Lebanon Files, an established media outlet, turned an anonymous WhatsApp voice note of unknown origin into a reportable media item. At the same time, Lebanon Files publisher, Rabih El Haber, was discussing the same claim live on Al Jadeed, introducing it to a national television audience. The clip was then shared again on social media, giving the narrative an additional layer of circulation.

### Figure 8. The Zoom claim on Lebanon Files



During the segment, the Al Jadeed anchor raised the most important objection to the claim: whether Hezbollah, after the 2024 pager attack, would still be relying on vulnerable phone and internet-based communications. Rabih El Haber did not answer the question directly. Instead, he replied: “I don’t know, but it is said that the locations of these IPs were targeted.” When the anchor pressed again (“Is this information, Mr. Rabih?”), he acknowledged the uncertainty more clearly: “This message has been circulating like this; as for its accuracy, nobody knows.”

That caveat mattered, but it came after the claim had already been introduced on air and framed as something serious enough to discuss nationally. In effect, the anonymous voice note had acquired its first institutional relay: it now existed both as a published website item and as the subject of a live television segment. The central verification question had been raised but was deflected and left unanswered on air.

# AMPLIFICATION ACROSS NETWORKS

By 7:15 PM both narratives were in circulation and entered parallel amplification cycles. This phase is best understood through two overlapping channels: first, amplification by established Lebanese voices with domestic visibility, political relevance, or professional media standing; second, amplification by a transnational network of partisan accounts operating across multiple countries and languages.

**Figure 9. Avatar accounts circulating the double narrative**



## THE AUTHORITY VOICES

On the coup track, **Jean Riachi** – a Lebanese banker, verified commentator, known for opposing both his fellow bankers and Hezbollah – posted in Arabic at 7:26 PM, and his post later reached approximately 60,000 views by April 13. Although he provided a caveat at the beginning of his tweet (“Information still needs confirmation”), citing “some sources,” he built a broader political interpretation around it, suggesting that Israeli strikes had likely killed figures involved in the alleged plot and that Prime Minister Nawaf Salam now stood as “one of the last barriers within state institutions” against the coup plotters and Lebanon’s “deep state.” Later that evening, in a reply beneath the Mirsadeye post, he introduced an important qualification: “if the rumors of a coup are true, its disruption by the Israeli killings appears to be purely coincidental. I doubt they had any real concern for the fate of Nawaf Salam’s government.” That caution mattered, but it appeared in a low-visibility reply, reaching only 88 views, while the earlier and more assertive post continued circulating on its own.

Figure 10. Visibility comparison of Jean Riachi’s posts



At 9:11 PM, Member of Parliament (MP) for Beirut Fouad Makhzoumi addressed the matter publicly, saying he had heard threats about toppling the government and he expressed his opposition to any return to the language or logic of May 7 (2008). He did not explicitly endorse the coup claim. But his intervention is still significant, because it shows that the narrative had moved far enough into political discourse that senior Lebanese figures were responding to it in public.

At 11:06 PM, Tom Harb, a Lebanese-American commentator and co-chair of a Republican Party-aligned political organization, added a further layer of apparent credibility by claiming that warnings of a coup had been circulating within Lebanese official circles, including the Baabda presidential palace, for about a week. That detail was important because it implied prior institutional awareness, and therefore gave the broader narrative the appearance of retrospective confirmation. No independent verification of the Baabda claim appears in subsequent reporting. Even so, it circulated with little visible friction, helped by its association with an established public figure and by attribution to “Israeli Channel 24,” a source that is unsupported by any verifiable report.

## THE TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK

Running in parallel to the authority relay was a looser but still consequential amplification network that carried both narratives across languages and into international audiences. The accounts included Lebanese anti-Hezbollah voices, members of the Iranian opposition diaspora, American-Israeli activists, and UK-based pro-Israel news-style accounts. They do not appear, from the open-

source record, to be linked by any visible formal coordination structure. They are identifiable accounts with consistent posting histories and clear ideological positions. What they appear to share is not an observable command structure, but a common political orientation: strongly anti-Hezbollah, anti-Iran, and supportive of Israeli military action against the “Axis of Resistance.” On April 8, that shared political orientation produced a similar pattern of behavior, characterized by the rapid, cross-lingual amplification of two unverified narratives that reinforced a coherent geopolitical interpretation of the strikes.

Within this network, several posts played distinct roles in the narrative’s expansion.

- At 7:43 PM, the account @aghaK77 produced the first documented post explicitly merging the coup and Zoom narratives.
- At 8:14 PM, the avatar account Ziad Bou Semaan introduced the “Channel 24” attribution that would later become central to the apparent sourcing of the coup claim.
- At 9:12 PM, UK Report framed the Zoom narrative as “BREAKING” and attributed it to “pro-Hezbollah forums,” presenting a claim circulating in pro-Israeli networks as though it had emerged from Hezbollah-aligned spaces.
- At 9:25 PM, France-based Lebanese analyst Maya Khadra carried the “Channel 24” attribution into French.
- At 9:47 PM, Jacob Linker escalated the sourcing language from “Channel 24 claims” to “i24 is now reporting,” giving the narrative the form of a live media confirmation and calling it “the most credible sourcing thus far.”
- At 10:22 PM, Marc Zell, vice-president of Republicans Abroad, stated the coup claim as fact and tagged @mirsadeye.

Such an exposure suggests that by the evening of April 8, repeated circulation had already given the claim the appearance of sufficient credibility.

By midnight, the coup claim and the Zoom narrative were already circulating in English across multiple platforms through accounts such as Linker, Zell, Harb, UK Report, and even an unofficial account using Mossad imagery.

None of these accounts appears to be automated, and the available record does not establish technical coordination among them. What the pattern does show is a transnational ideological echo chamber capable of functioning as an informal amplification structure during breaking news events. Across languages and audiences, compatible claims were repeated, reformulated, and upgraded in apparent credibility with each relay. Whether or not any direct coordination existed, the effect was cumulative: each repetition made the broader narrative easier to receive as plausible.

The following morning, at 6:04 AM, commentator Shanaka Anslem Perera posted that rumor said Israel had tracked Hezbollah officials’ IP addresses during a Zoom meeting and then struck 100

locations within ten minutes. At 6:50 AM, Iranian opponent Reza Sad presented the Zoom claim as a plausible explanation for Israel's demonstrated intelligence success and ability to identify 100 positions and hit them simultaneously. By April 13, that post had reached approximately 1.9 million views. At that point, the claim was no longer circulating merely as a rumor. It was being presented as a credible explanation for a documented military outcome.

At 9:14 AM, Mario Nawfal, whose X account reaches a large international audience interested in Middle East affairs and geopolitics, posted that rumors were circulating that Hezbollah had planned a coup and that Israeli strikes had pre-empted it, while noting that the claim remained unverified. Despite the caveat, the structure of the post still gave the underlying allegation broad exposure to audiences far removed from the Lebanese-language chain that had produced it. By April 13, the post had reached roughly 150,000 views. In this context, the "unverified" label did not prevent circulation; it accompanied and facilitated it.

With each relay, the claims moved closer to the appearance of established fact. At the same time, some accounts operating within the broader Israeli media ecosystem began describing them as "Israeli media reports," a framing that gave Arabic-language social media claims the appearance of institutional Israeli sourcing even though no verified Israeli outlet had reported them.

## THE PHANTOM SOURCE

Several key amplifiers of the coup narrative on April 8 and 9 cited the same source: "Israeli Channel 24." Jacob Linker wrote that "i24 is now reporting." Tom Harb referred to "Israeli Channel 24." ME24 later referred to "a report on Israeli Channel 24." Across these posts, the source was presented as though it were a real and verifiable Israeli media report confirming what had already been circulating on Lebanese social media since 4:23 PM.

No such report has been identified in the open-source record reviewed for this research.

An extensive review of i24NEWS's English, French, and Arabic output – including its website, live blogs, and available news archives for April 8 to 10, 2026 – did not identify any published article, broadcast segment, or verifiable report containing the coup claim, the alleged Nawaf Salam overthrow scenario, or any comparable allegation. i24NEWS covered Operation Eternal Darkness extensively, including the strikes, casualty figures, official Israeli framing, and international reactions. But no evidence has been found that it reported a Hezbollah coup plot. Nor did the accounts invoking "Channel 24" produce a link, screenshot, transcript, or other verifiable record of such a report during the period documented here.

What appears to have happened is more consequential than a simple sourcing error or misattribution. The "Israeli Channel 24" attribution entered the documented chain at 8:14 PM through Ziad Bou

Semaan, without any verifiable underlying report. It then circulated for several hours through multiple amplifiers before ME24 - Middle East 24, on X as @MiddleEast\_24, published a formatted English-language version of the claim at 1:05 AM on April 9. ME24 did not originate the unsupported attribution, but it repackaged it in the visual style of a breaking-news media post and gave it a more authoritative appearance.

That distinction matters because ME24 is not i24NEWS. Yet its name, branding, and presentation style appear close enough to create confusion under fast-moving crisis conditions. i24NEWS uses a widely recognized blue-and-white visual identity associated with the Israeli broadcaster. ME24 uses a similar blue palette, resembling typography, the same “24” suffix, and a comparable visual register. For a user scrolling rapidly through crisis content, the two could be easily conflated.

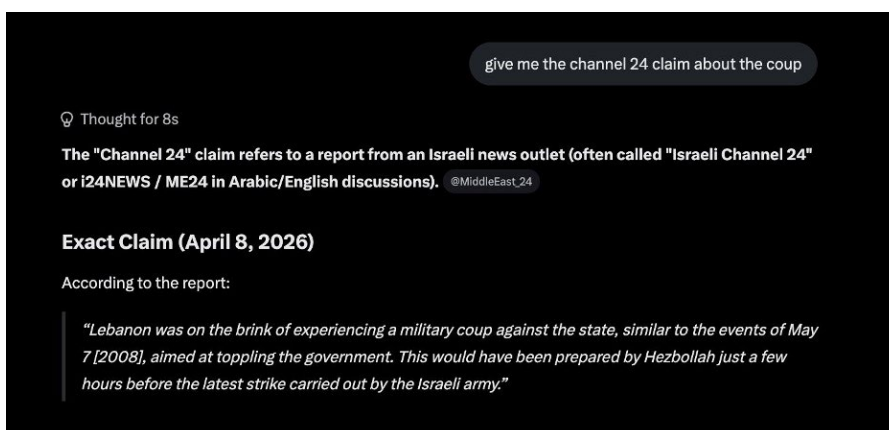
**Figure 11. ME24 and i24 logo comparison**



This does not in itself prove intentional impersonation, yet the visual and naming proximity created conditions in which an unsupported claim could be read as if it had been carried by an established Israeli broadcaster. In practice, that proximity enabled credibility transfer.

The same confusion appears to have affected automated systems as well. During this period, Grok – X’s AI assistant – treated the coup claim as though it were sourced to i24NEWS when responding to user queries. An AI system trained to identify authoritative sources made the same pattern-matching error that human readers made, at scale, in real time.

**Figure 12. Source misattribution by Grok**



The attribution chain can therefore be reconstructed as follows. At 8:14 PM, Ziad Bou Semaan introduced the first documented “Israeli Channel 24” citation. No verifiable Channel 24 report has been identified behind it. At 9:47 PM, Jacob Linker escalated the wording to “i24 is now reporting,” giving the claim the form of a live media confirmation. At 10:08 PM, Marc Zell stated the coup as fact without citing any source, suggesting that repeated circulation had already made attribution seem unnecessary. At 10:59 PM, Tom Harb again invoked “Israeli Channel 24,” extending the unsupported attribution into another wave of circulation. At 1:05 AM, ME24 packaged the claim into a formatted post that included a headline, the Baabda foreknowledge detail, the May 7, 2008 comparison, and imagery consistent with the visual grammar of conflict reporting. The [post](#) then circulated further as though it rested on a credible media source, reaching 24,900 views and 206 retweets by April 13, 2026.

## MERGER, NORMALIZATION, AND RECIRCULATION

The afternoon and evening of April 9 gave both narratives their most significant institutional reinforcement so far, moving them beyond social media and partisan amplification into pan-Arab broadcast coverage and higher-tier sourcing claims.

[Al Hadath](#), a Saudi-owned pan-Arab news channel, broadcast the Zoom narrative in full, reporting that Israeli sources had confirmed Mossad tracked the digital address of a Hezbollah leader during a Zoom meeting in Beirut, simultaneously identifying 100 fighters and striking all of them within ten minutes. The report attributed the claim to Israeli sources without independent verification. Coming from a major regional broadcaster with pan-Arab reach, it gave the Zoom narrative an institutional amplification distinct from and broader than anything the social media chain had produced to that point.

Later the same day, [Al Arabiya](#), owned by the same Saudi group as Al Hadath, carried the same version of the narrative into its pan-Arab audience. What makes this report analytically significant is that the presenter explicitly acknowledged that the claim had already been circulating as rumor before saying that Israeli sources had now spoken about it. In effect, a narrative already known to be circulating informally was elevated through attribution to unnamed Israeli sources, even though the Israeli military had not publicly confirmed that account in its own official statements. [MTV Lebanon](#) relayed the Al Arabiya report the same day, extending its reach further into Lebanese audiences.

**Figure 13. MTV amplifying the Al Arabiya report**



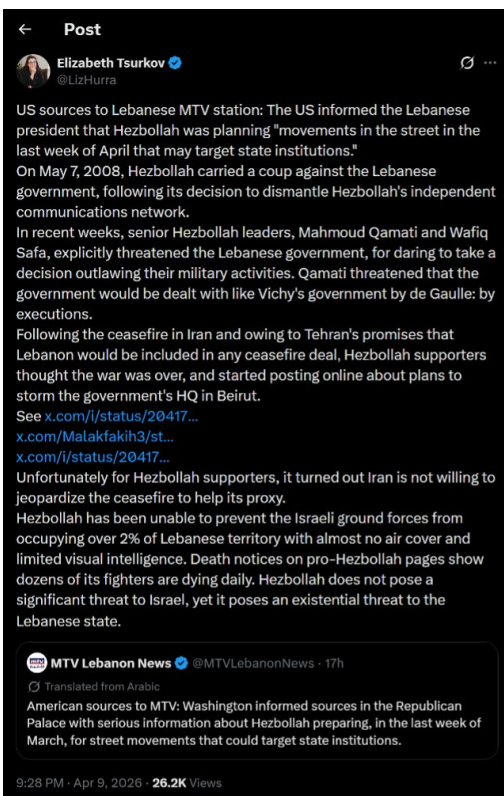
MTV then introduced a separate and more consequential sourcing layer of its own. It reported that American sources had told the network that Washington had informed the Lebanese presidential palace that Hezbollah was preparing street movements that could target state institutions. This represented a different order of authority from the earlier claims: not a social media account or a partisan commentary ecosystem but purported American diplomatic sourcing. Whether those sources were relaying verified intelligence or reproducing a narrative already circulating publicly cannot be determined from the available open-source record. What can be observed, however, is the effect.

**Figure 14. MTV referring to unnamed American sources**



At 9:28 PM, Elizabeth Tsurkov, an American researcher with an established following in Western policy circles and a former hostage, drew on the MTV report in a thread arguing that Hezbollah supporters had been discussing plans to storm government headquarters. In that form, the narrative entered English-language policy discussion with the appearance of diplomatic or intelligence corroboration.

**Figure 15. MTV’s reporting getting international exposure**



At 9:37 PM, pro-Trump U.S.-Israeli commentator Eyal Yakoby [linked](#) the coup narrative directly to the Lebanese government's emergency measures issued that day, including reinforced state security in Beirut and the ban on the carrying of non-state weapons in the capital. Those measures were real and publicly documented. They were adopted in the aftermath of one of the deadliest days in Lebanon in the current phase of the war. But in this framing, they were presented as indirect confirmation of the coup claim. A genuine governmental response to documented mass violence was thus folded into the narrative as apparent supporting evidence of the conspiracy.

By that point, Hezbollah critic and columnist Ali al-Amine, speaking to [Sky News Arabia](#), pushed back directly on the circulating story. He described the coup narrative as "not based on accurate and reliable sources" and called the idea of a Hezbollah coup "madness" and "suicidal." His intervention was one of the clearest skeptical responses in the documented chain. But it came after the narrative had already passed through several rounds of amplification and institutional reinforcement, reaching audiences that had by then been exposed to the opposite claim for more than a day.

At 10:16 PM on April 9, roughly 32 hours after his first post, Sufian al-Samarrai [posted](#) again. He wrote that Mossad had infiltrated a meeting of Hezbollah coup plotters via Zoom and had then struck all participants within ten minutes.

At that point, the two storylines that had circulated separately since the afternoon of April 8 became a single explanatory account. The Zoom element supplied the mechanism: interception, IP tracking, and rapid targeting. The coup element supplied the motive: an alleged active plot against the Lebanese government. Each claim strengthened the apparent coherence of the other. Together, they recast the strikes not as a broad and devastating military operation hitting densely populated areas, but as a precise and pre-emptive response to an imminent attempt to overthrow the government, executed through a specific intelligence vulnerability that Hezbollah's own operational carelessness had created.

The same night, cybersecurity expert [Roland Abi Najem](#) posted a blunt criticism of the documented chain, mocking media outlets that had elevated a forwarded WhatsApp voice note into a source-worthy claim. His rebuke went to the heart of the problem: an anonymous audio message of unknown origin and unverified speaker had by then traveled from private messaging into television coverage and international commentary. But his intervention reached only a limited audience and did not interrupt the broader relay.

[The Truth International](#), an English-language website based in Pakistan, published a quasi-analytical article by Naqi Akbar that treated the Zoom/IP claim as an unverified but serious question about Israeli intelligence capability. Formally, the article retained a caveat. Substantively, it gave the claim further analytical legitimacy by treating it as worthy of structured examination.

By the morning of April 10, the merged narrative had moved well beyond its origins in anonymous messaging and partisan amplification. It was now being repeated through broadcast, alerts,

commentary, and opinion writing in ways that gave it increasing editorial and analytical legitimacy and sustainability.

At 12:09 PM, Open Source Intel, an established OSINT X account that aggregates Israeli media content, summarized the Israeli press as saying that Mossad had tracked a Hezbollah leader during a meeting and identified roughly 100 fighters. This appears to have been a relay of the Al Arabiya report from the previous day, now framed more broadly as Israeli media reporting.

At 12:37 PM, Red TV Lebanon teased a dedicated broadcast segment titled “The Trap in a Zoom Meeting?”

In the opinion press, **Alain Sarkis** wrote in Nida’ al-Watan (in a piece syndicated on MTV), as though the failed coup were an established political fact, incorporating it into a broader reading of Hezbollah’s posture against the Salam cabinet. At that point, the claim was being used as a premise for further analysis.

Beirut Times added another layer by giving the Zoom narrative a more elaborate conceptual frame. Drawing a comparison with the 2024 pager attack, it presented the alleged Zoom-based tracking as a progression from physical penetration to digital penetration, from devices to communications infrastructure. That framing did not verify the claim but made it appear more coherent and technically plausible by embedding it within a larger story of Israeli intelligence evolution and superiority.

Al Mashhad published one of the few pieces in the documented chain that treated the narrative as contested rather than established. Referring explicitly to the coup story as an “Israeli narrative that is shaking Lebanon,” it set out the two competing readings: that the story was either a pretext used to justify a devastating attack, or a real warning of an attempted repeat of May 7, 2008. It also raised questions that most outlets had avoided until then, including whether civilian sites were in fact being used for military purposes and whether the narratives themselves were functioning as justification for broader destruction. That skeptical framing arrived only after the story had already circulated widely for nearly two days.

By then, the narrative had also returned to WhatsApp in a more elaborate form. The anti-Hezbollah Khabar Ajel WhatsApp group circulated a detailed document purporting to describe Hezbollah’s operational coup plan: the arrest and execution of the prime minister, the kidnapping of the foreign minister, apartments rented near political targets, rocket launchers positioned to shell the Grand Serail if the initial operation failed, army officers identified as collaborators, and former MP Sleiman Frangieh allegedly promised the presidency by the Revolutionary Guard. The document named specific people, places, and tactical steps, but carried no author, no institutional attribution, and no date or provenance.

Figure 16. The plot as per Khabar Ajel

Channel • 18K followers • \* الاخبار العاجلة المحلية، الدولية المهمة، بيانات \*  
 24/24 خبر عاجل

!!! متداول !!!

!!! معلومات استخبارية وصلت لجهاز الموساد عن نية حزب الله لاحتلال بيروت في حال حدوث هدنة و توقف القتال . احد العملاء أوصل تفاصيل الخطة وهي نقل مقاتلين الحزب المنسحبين من الجنوب وتوزيعهم بمناطق شمال و شرق و وسط بيروت لقطع الطرقات و ترهيب الناس.

مجموعة 1- تحاصر السراي الحكومي بمساعدة ضباط وعناصر قوة أمنية متعاونة مع الحزب. نشر راجمي صواريخ وتوجيهها نحو السراي في حال فشل اعتقال رئيس الحكومة نواف سلام وإعدامه في بيروت.

مجموعة 2- اختطاف الوزير يوسف رجي و إعدامه بشكل غير علني.

3- مجموعات صغيرة مستأجرة شقق بالقرب من قيادات سياسية لاحزاب مناهضة للحزب هذه مجموعة مهمتها تنفيذ اغتيالات. احد الشقق استجرتها سيده بجانب منزل شقيقة الرئيس جوزاف عون بنفس الطابق تم اغتيال زوجها ( قائد في لواء القدس الإيراني ) . شقة أخرى تم استهدافها بجانب قيادي بالقوات اللبنانية أيضاً سيدة استجرتها لعنصر بالحرس الثوري ( كانت تقيم علاقة حميمة معه بالشقة ) .

4- ضباط بقوى الأمن متورطين بخطة الانقلاب مهمتهم إغلاق الطرق لمنع وصول اي تعزيزات لفك الحصار عن السراي الحكومي و تنفيذ اعتقالات بقائمة من مدرء مؤسسات حكومية الجزء الأخير من الخطة كان قصف قصر بعدا و حصاره لاجبار جوزيف عون على الاستقالة او سيتم اغتياله.

سليمان فرنجة شريك بالخطة و قد ظهر قبل قصف بيروت ليعلم نصر المحور ( أعطى وعود من الحرس الثوري بتعيينه رئيسا للبنان )

النهاية كانت بمراقبة اسرائيل لتجمعات عناصر و قيادات الحزب وهي تتجمع داخل مربعات سكنية و أهتمامهم ان هناك هدنة لاستجراهم لأكبر تجمع قبل تنفيذ الخطة بساعة بدأ قصف تجمعاتهم بغارات مكثفة داخل بيروت وصفها مسؤولون اسرائيليون إنها اعظم من عملية البيجر 3000 عنصر للحزب بين قتل و جريح و تم تدمير راجمات صواريخ بوسط بيروت كان قد نصبها الحزب.

الحكومة اللبنانية تتكتم عن خسائر الحزب و تعترف فقط بعدد الضحايا المدنيين 250 تقريباً. الوضع الحالي للحكومة اللبنانية وللرئيس عون محرج للغاية.

خيانات و تواطؤ من قيادات بقوة الأمن و من ضباط بالجيش اللبناني مع الحزب.

في حال طلب الرئيس عون استخدام القوة ضد الحزب من وزارة الدفاع سينقلب ثلث الجيش ضد الحكم بالإضافة لقوات امن الدولة و قوة الامن العام.

ولو قرر تنظيف الجيش و قوات الامن من عناصر الحزب سيواجه تمرداً تحت مسمى التدخل بتعيينات الطائفة الشيعية و سيدفع بالشارع الشيعي للانتفاضة بالشوارع .

شارك رابط قناة خبر عاجل الإخبارية <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VbVbIMF2phHNa7zYxp>

10:51 PM

The narrative had thus returned to the same channel through which one of its central elements had first entered circulation: private WhatsApp networks. It began with an anonymous forwarded voice note and later reappeared as an anonymous forwarded document. In between, it had passed through social media, television, pan-Arab broadcast, policy commentary, push alerts, and opinion journalism. Yet throughout that chain, no named primary source produced a verifiable on-record claim establishing either the Zoom meeting or the alleged coup plot.

# KEY FINDINGS

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## **Finding 1: The Zoom claim is difficult to reconcile with Hezbollah's communications posture**

Since the 2024 pager attack, Hezbollah's documented communications practices have pointed toward heightened caution, including reliance on handwritten orders, older radio systems, and physical couriers. A Hezbollah field commander told NPR in April 2026: "We don't trust anything anymore." In that context, the claim that senior Hezbollah figures were conducting an operational Zoom meeting requires a high evidentiary threshold. The contradiction was raised on air by an Al Jazeera anchor on April 8, but it was not meaningfully pursued in subsequent coverage.

## **Finding 2: The Israeli army's own public framing does not support the Zoom narrative**

Israeli officials described Operation Eternal Darkness as an intelligence-based operation planned meticulously over several weeks. That framing sits uneasily with the widely circulated account of a real-time Zoom intercept leading to rapid identification of more than 100 targets. A pre-planned, large-scale simultaneous strike and an opportunistic digital interception are not necessarily impossible to reconcile, but they are not naturally aligned as explanations. No documented Israeli official statement identified a Zoom meeting as the trigger for the operation.

## **Finding 3: The Coup Claim Conflates Political Pressure with a Paramilitary Plan**

Hezbollah's political pressure on the Salam government in April 2026 is documented. The coup narrative transformed that political confrontation into a claim of imminent armed seizure of state institutions. The analogy to May 7, 2008 played a central role in that transformation, importing the memory of an armed takeover into the interpretation of current events. Yet no verifiable evidence of a specific operational coup plan was produced in the reporting chain documented by this brief.

## **Finding 4: The Channel 24 attribution is unsupported**

No verifiable i24NEWS report containing the coup allegation was identified in the period reviewed for this brief. The "Israeli Channel 24" citation entered the chain through social media and was then repeated by multiple amplifiers as though it referred to an independent external report. One of the narrative's most authoritative-looking sourcing layers therefore rested on an attribution for which no verifiable underlying report has been found.

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**Finding 5: Confusion between ME24 and i24NEWS enabled credibility transfer**

ME24 is not i24NEWS, but the similarity in naming, branding, and presentation style appears to have created confusion under crisis conditions. That confusion helped unsupported claims circulate as though they had been carried by a recognized Israeli broadcaster. The same confusion appears to have been reproduced by Grok, X's AI assistant, which treated the coup claim as though it were sourced to i24NEWS when responding to users during the reporting window.

**Finding 6: The Sufian–Mirsadeye sequence suggests a seeding-and-amplification pattern**

The relationship between the Sufian al-Samarrai posts and the later Mirsadeye amplification suggests a pattern in which an initial claim is quickly expanded, elaborated, and given greater reach by a second actor within the same broader ideological ecosystem. The April 8 Mirsadeye post significantly outperformed the account's usual engagement levels. Similar patterns appear elsewhere in the posting histories examined, including in relation to the documented #QatarExpelsHamis campaign. Whether this reflects formal coordination or ideological alignment cannot be established from open sources alone, but the functional pattern of seeding followed by scaling is visible in the record.

**Finding 7: The anonymous WhatsApp voice note as a recurrent delivery format**

Across separate strike events on April 4 and April 8, anonymous voice notes appeared within a similar post-strike window, in a similar intimate conversational register, and with a similar function: to supply an interpretive frame before authoritative accounts had stabilized. This indicates a recurrent format well suited to the vulnerabilities of the Lebanese information environment: high emotional stress, limited official information, rapid forwarding behavior, and strong social trust within private messaging chains. The regularity of timing, register, and narrative function is difficult to dismiss as incidental.

**Finding 8: The media ecosystem failed repeatedly at key verification points**

Across the documented chain, a small number of skeptical interventions did appear, but they remained limited in reach and had little effect on the broader circulation of the narrative. Core verification failures recurred at multiple stages: the original sourcing was not resolved; the "Channel 24" attribution was repeated without verification; the Baabda Palace's knowledge claim was not substantiated; and Al Arabiya acknowledged the rumor status of the Zoom claim before amplifying it through attribution to unnamed sources. The pattern that emerges is one of systemic verification weakness under crisis conditions. In practical terms, that weakness allowed an unverified narrative to travel across platforms, languages, and institutions with remarkably little constructive doubt.

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