

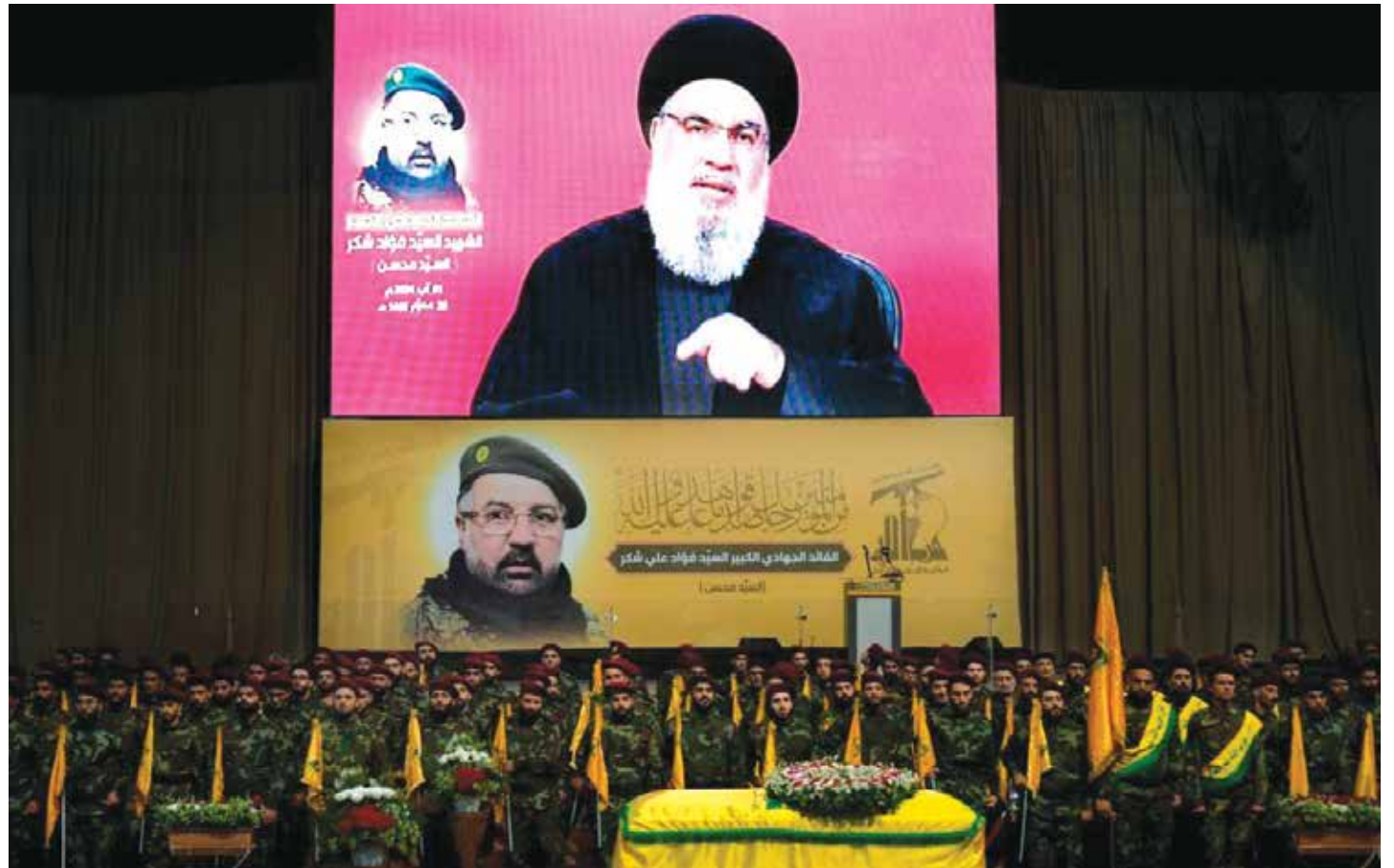
Hezbollah's information war against Israel

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PERSPECTIVE

Israel's attacks on Hezbollah and reportedly Hamas on Tuesday and Wednesday mark a significant escalation in the Gaza war and bring Israel and Iran's "Axis of Resistance" closer to all-out war than at any time since the October 7 Hamas attack. An Israeli air strike on Tuesday killed Fuad Shukur, a senior Hezbollah commander in Beirut, in response to an attack (reportedly by Hezbollah, although the resistance group denied it) on an Israeli-controlled Golan Heights on Saturday that killed 12 children and teenagers. On Wednesday, a detonation, reportedly by Israel, killed Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. The world is now watching how Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran will respond to such attacks. Iran has reportedly vowed a direct retaliation to Haniyeh's assassination. On Thursday, Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah indicated that Hezbollah is probing "a studied response" in the next few days to the killing of Shukur and what he characterized as Israeli aggression against Lebanon.

Understanding the information warfare and narratives of "purported" deterrence conducted by Hezbollah against Israel and the United States in the leading up to Israel's recent attacks is critical since it may help provide insight into the nature of Hezbollah's response to Israel's attack. Such information warfare was in response to Israel's persistent warning of a major military operation against the resistance group. In particular, the scale of Hezbollah's response, given its geostrategic proximity to Israel — and especially if it is coordinated with a direct attack by Iran — would determine if the low-level conflict will slide into a full-scale war.



At the funeral of Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur, Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah delivers a televised speech broadcast live from the Lebanese capital Beirut on August 1, 2024.

The release of drone footage that flew over the city of Haifa and Golan Heights has been framed as mounting proof of Hezbollah's penetration of Israel's intelligence capabilities and as part of Hezbollah's messaging to the Israeli military that Hezbollah possesses a bank of strategic targets that the group will strike firsthand should Israel launch an operation into Lebanon. Some analysts went on to compare Hezbollah's purported drone capabilities to Israel's air force power in the event of a major war.

Since the onset of the Israel-Hamas war, Israel and Hezbollah have traded fire along the Lebanon-Israel border. The conflict has increasingly taken an escalatory path in recent weeks. In response to the continuous elimination of many of its senior commanders by targeted Israeli strikes, Hezbollah has been more lately racking up rocket and drone attacks into northern Israel, mainly targeting what it describes as Israeli military sites, including key intelligence systems and reconnaissance centers. More aggravatingly, Hezbollah released in June and July a series of drone footage that showed what it described as detailed aerial views of Israeli military and civilian targets, including bases, infrastructure, and border areas in northern Israel. Only a few hours after the release of the first footage, Israel's military approved plans for an all-out offensive into Lebanon. The tit-for-tat between Israel and Hezbollah took a turn for the worse when a rocket attack

in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights killed 12 children and teenagers. In the lead-up to the recent attacks on Hezbollah and Hamas in Beirut and Tehran, Hezbollah's information operation, consisting of various arguments, claimed that the group is succeeding in establishing deterrence against Israel by achieving escalation dominance. Clearly, the primary goal of this rhetoric was to deter Israel from carrying out a military offensive into Lebanon. But it was also aimed at the Lebanese public, which is increasingly growing fearful of the prospect of a full-scale war with Israel that may bring devastation to Lebanon, to convince them that Hezbollah's initial decision to join the Gaza war, as well as its continuous escalatory attacks against Israel are pre-emptive in nature and are succeeding at preventing Israel from launching a major war against Lebanon. Pro-Hezbollah commentary and media reports continued

to proliferate in recent weeks, communicating the narrative that Hezbollah has gained the upper hand in establishing escalation dominance over Israel. One key argument of such claimed deterrence is the narrative surrounding the pace of the conflict between the resis-

tance group and Israel since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war. According to some commentators, the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel has consisted of three phases, with Hezbollah at each juncture controlling the pace of the combat. The first phase encompassed

Israel, with its main ally, the United States, seeking to de-escalate the conflict primarily to protect Israel. Another layer of this narrative is rhetoric surrounding Hezbollah's drone attacks against Israel, framed as escalatory in nature and seeking to establish



Hezbollah soldiers showcase an unarmed drone (front), likely to be a Houthi-made Rased or Rased 1, as well as multiple-barrel rocket launchers (back), during a training exercise in southern Lebanon on May 21, 2023.



Lebanese former president Michel Aoun (R) meets with US Senior Advisor for Energy Security Amos Hochstein (2nd-L) at the presidential palace in Baabda, Lebanon, on June 14, 2022.

the cross-border clashes, which were confined to an area of seven kilometers. The second phase, framed as the deterrence stage, occurred following the assassination of Hamas senior leader Saleh al-Arouri by an Israeli drone strike in Beirut in January when Hezbollah started targeting what it describes as strategic locations. The third phase came after the killing of Hezbollah senior commander Taleb Abdallah by an Israeli strike in southern Lebanon in June, with Hezbollah intensifying its rocket attacks and expanding the scope of the combat to 35 kilometers to reach deeper into Israel. Such a narrative portrays a deterred

a purported equivalence between Hezbollah's drone arsenal and Israel's aircraft. Claims as such describe Hezbollah's drone warfare as consisting of several escalatory phases, for instance, starting with launching four drones in February to reach over a hundred drones in June. Further commentary cited US special envoy Amos Hochstein's June visit to Lebanon, claiming that he requested Hezbollah to bring Hezbollah's drone attacks back to a few a month in an effort to curb the intensity of the conflict. Perhaps a peak narrative example of the purported effectiveness of Hezbollah's drone warfare is pro-Hezbollah