

media commentary, reports, and social media comments surrounding the above-mentioned drone videos that flew over the Israeli city of Haifa and the Golan Heights. The first part, a nine-minute video dubbed "Hudhud," claims to film residential areas in Haifa, the Haifa port, a naval base, and aerial defense systems like the Iron Dome and David's Sling. The second part, also nine minutes, claims to show aerial views of Israeli military and intelligence bases in the Golan Heights. The third part, more than eight minutes, is said to show an Israeli airbase in the north.

The release of such footage has been framed by pro-Hezbollah commentators 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. Another commentator even framed such footage as demonstrating Hezbollah's spying superiority over Israel, arguing that Hezbollah has shown capabilities of gathering intelligence on critical strategic targets. At the same time, Israel has only succeeded to date in targeting Hezbollah's personnel and commanders. Overall, most commentators, apparently as part of coordinated messaging, purported that the public release of the drone footage aims to deter Israel while showing that Hezbollah is ready for combat.



A drone carries a flag of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement above Aaramta bordering Israel on May 21, 2023, ahead of the anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000.

ANWAR AMRO/AFP

On the whole, commentary about the drone footage appears to borrow and endorse arguments (and word selection) made by Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah in his speech in June following the release of Hudhud footage. Nasrallah described the drone footage as a "comprehensive and real bank of targets" inside Israel, the targeting of which would destabilize the foundations of Israel. On a broader level, this speech and additional following speeches by Nasrallah have since been portrayed by various pro-Hezbollah commentaries and reporting, primarily by the Al-Mayadeen news outlet, as strategically designed to deter Israel from launching a major operation into Lebanon. Mainly, the rationale behind such "strategic deterrence" characterization was that the more Hezbollah intensifies its rhetoric of war, the more it serves its strategic deterrence purposes. Further rhetoric portraying a deterred Israel with the main argument that this is due to Hezbollah's newly shown missile and drone capabilities has been presented by Nasrallah himself in a recent speech almost three weeks ago commemorating the death of the senior Hezbollah commander Muhammad Nimah Nasser. Nasrallah put forward two claims in this regard. First, he claimed that Hezbollah's readiness for war had been evidenced by its unrestrained response to the killing of its commanders by Israeli strikes, revealing more of its missile and drone capabilities and each time targeting a broader range of sensitive targets. He further contended that after coming upon Hezbollah's newly divulged fighting capabilities, statements by Israeli military officials show a reduced objective of war against Lebanon. Instead, they now refer to limited opera-

tions in Southern Lebanon, like pushing Radwan forces beyond the Litani River, falling short of previous intentions.

In more combative speeches more than two weeks ago commemorating Ashura, Nasrallah even broadened the argument and went far to describe a declining Israel. For what appears to be the first such characterization since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war, he made references to religious scriptures, including Jewish texts, to argue Israel is on the brink of collapse — notably, such characterizations by Nasrallah mirror and reiterate ones made by Hamas' military spokesman, Abu Obaida. Nasrallah portrayed an Israel largely plagued by soldiers' deaths and injuries and large shortages of weapons and munition, claiming as evidence statements made by Israeli officials and media reports. In further elaborating on the Axis' military achievements, he stressed the asymmetric nature of the Axis' warfare along with Shia doctrine and its emphasis on martyrdom.

Broadly, Iran's Axis of Resistance was also engaged in information warfare aimed at deterring Israel from launching a military offensive into Lebanon. As reported by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), an anonymous commander from the Islamic Resistance in Iraq confirmed to Western media that military advisers had been sent to Lebanon to help Hezbollah. Iranian-backed officials also indicated that thousands of fighters from across the Middle East are ready to join the conflict. Former IRGC commander Mohsen Rezaei warned on July 28 that a war between Israel and Hezbollah

would be more dangerous for Israel than its conflict with Hamas. Commentary by Lebanese analysts cites (unspecified) reports that thousands of fighters from the Houthis, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, and the Iran-backed Afghani and Pakistani Shia resistance groups, the Fatemiyoun and Zainebiyoun Brigades, have already joined or are ready to join Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in an eventual war with Israel. Not surprisingly, Iranian media has readily picked up the saga of the Hudhud drone and amplified its messaging to serve its psychological warfare machine.

On a political level, the above-described information war has also been occurring against the backdrop of continuous Israel-Hamas cease-fire talks in Qatar, which appear now to be at risk. Reports indicate that Hezbollah and Hamas continue to discuss and coordinate around Israel-Hamas cease-fire talks and battlefield developments in Gaza. In almost all his speeches that coincided with ongoing Israel-Hamas cease-fire talks, Nasrallah explicitly made references to the Gaza negotiations while reiterating conditioning the end of Hezbollah's attacks against Israel on a permanent cease-fire in Gaza. As mentioned above, Nasrallah said in his speech Thursday that Hezbollah will deliver a powerful strike against Israel in the next few days, aside from the routine cross-border attacks that resumed the day after his speech. Hezbollah's most valid option is to launch an attack against the Israeli military its series of drone footage has claimed to show. Such an attack will most likely throw the region into a full-blown war.

The full article first appeared on The National Interest.

West offers huge incentives to Lebanon, but why?

By Syed Ali Hassan
Iran Daily's
correspondent in
Pakistan

PERSPECTIVE

Additionally, Western countries offered to prosecute Lebanese politicians and senior civil and military bureaucrats who illegally sent funds to Western countries. Western envoys also promised financial guarantees to fund projects linking Lebanon with electricity and gas from Jordan and Egypt. Lebanon has been facing an economic crisis since 2019, resulting in a financial loss of over \$70 billion and a 95% devaluation of its national currency.



The photo shows a billboard with portraits of slain leaders, Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas (L), Iranian Quds Force chief Qasem Soleimani (C), and Hezbollah senior commander Fuad Shukur, on the road to Beirut airport on August 3, 2024.

IBRAHIM AMRO/AFP

The Beirut government has announced legal action against senior officials involved in financial embezzlement, but these influential individuals have sought refuge in Western countries. Although European banks have frozen the funds at Beirut's request, they have refrained from handing over the frozen assets or prosecuting the criminals.

The package of incentives offered by Western envoys also includes resolving the deadlock over the election of a new president. Since the mandate of Michel Aoun expired in October 2022, Lebanon has been without an elected president. The US and Western allies have been hindering consensus on the election of a president due to a divided parliament, resulting in twelve failed attempts so far. Hezbollah's supporters in parliament back Suleiman Frangieh, while their opponents support former minister Jihad Azour. Hezbollah has stated that internal conflicts and issues cannot be linked to a war with Israel.

Then, there's the promise of linking the energy-strapped Lebanon to the Egypt-Jordan pipeline project, which has been stalled for two years due to a lack of financial resources. In June 2022, Lebanon signed an agreement to import 650 million cubic meters of gas from Egypt and Syria, and a similar agreement with Jordan to supply electricity through Syria. This project was supposed to receive World Bank funding, but it was delayed due to US sanctions. Now, the US has assured the Lebanese government that if Hezbollah shows a cautious response to avenge Fuad Shukur's killing, the sanctions on this project would be relaxed. However, the question arises as to why Western countries are making such attractive offers to limit Hezbollah's response.

Western intelligence agencies have informed their governments that Hezbollah is planning to carry out multiple serious attacks inside Israel in response to the killings of Fuad Shukur and Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh. Hezbollah's targets include Israeli naval installations

and some strategic facilities that could cause significant destruction in Israel. Iran has also subtly confirmed Western intelligence reports. The Iranian mission at the United Nations stated on Saturday that Hezbollah is expected to carry out deep strikes within Israel, not just in the north. Since the Israeli aggression on Gaza, Hezbollah has been targeting military positions in Israeli-occupied areas in the north regularly. Still, Hezbollah plans to choose deeper targets inside Israel to respond strongly to its war crimes.

in Gaza, Lebanon, and Yemen, Washington has deployed additional fighter jets to the Middle East to defend Israel. An American military official told Arab media on condition of anonymity that US forces in the Middle East are increasing combat readiness and taking necessary measures to counter any threat from Iran or resistance movements. According to The Washington Post, the US has deployed 12 naval warships in various regions of the Middle East, with more than 4,000 Marines and sailors on



UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy (front-R) and UK Defence Secretary John Healey (front-L) talk with Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri in Lebanon on April 1, 2024.

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The fear and panic of the Israeli public are palpable at all international airports in Israel, as settlers are seeking ways to flee. However, not all Israelis were able to leave as the flights were delayed or canceled due to suspicious "malfunctions" and overload. A Western diplomat in Tel Aviv leaked to the media that Western countries have prepared emergency plans to evacuate Israeli citizens. The US embassy in Beirut issued an advisory on Saturday for American citizens to leave Lebanon on the first available flight. This indicates the severity of the threat Israel faces from Iran and regional resistance movements.

To reduce the threat from Yemen, the US military attacked several Yemeni missile launchers on Saturday evening. In response to declared vows of retaliation by Iran and resistance movements

three ships.

Through Qatar, Iran has made it clear that if the US attempts to retaliate, American bases in the region will be targeted. Israel's domestic security agency, Shin Bet, has restricted the movement of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and cabinet ministers and prohibited them from visiting insecure locations.

By killing Ismail Haniyeh in Iran and Fuad Shukur in Lebanon, Israel has not only endangered its security but also created a global crisis. Russia and China will not remain indifferent to this situation. Reports suggest that Russia has swiftly started providing Iran with high-tech technology and strengthening its air defense systems with missiles. Both countries have warned the US to refrain from overstepping boundaries in ensuring Israel's security.