

As far as the Israeli cabinet is concerned, the Hezbollah attack, using 340 rockets and multiple drones, was useless.

"I can confirm that there were no hits at the Gilot base," a spokesperson for the Israeli military said.

Judging by the experience of the last ten months, the Israeli army and its spokespersons have little credibility, as they constantly undermine the damage, to both military equipment and personnel, inflicted by the Resistance, despite the fact that the latter documents most of its attacks using videos and other means.

Indeed, while Palestinian Resistance in Gaza documents many of its operations, Hezbollah uses highly precise monitoring equipment to authenticate its accounts regarding its ongoing resistance in south Lebanon and at Israel's northern borders.

With all of this in mind, an important question must be asked: has Hezbollah, in its latest attack on Israel, managed to restore deterrence, thus denying Israel any strategic achievement following the assassination of top Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr on July 30?

Revisiting 'deterrence'

On October 6, 2023, the rules of engagement that governed the relation between Israel and the Lebanese Resistance were predicated on Israel's military presence across all border regions, and active Israeli military operations in the occupied areas of south Lebanon as well.

This equation allowed Israel to operate unhindered above the Lebanese skies, often breaking the sound barrier over Lebanon while conducting aerial operations and bombings over Syria.

Those 'rules' were themselves the outcome of the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, where Israel failed to occupy parts of the south of the country with the hope of pushing Lebanese Resistance north of the Litani River.

It can be argued that the Lebanese, Palestinians, and their allies are justified in describing the outcome of that war as an outright defeat for Israel. That defeat, however, still did not change the relationship between the two sides in a way that would allow Lebanon to retrieve its occupied territories or discourage Israel from habitually violating Lebanese sovereignty.

Ten months into the war, the nature of the relationship seems to have been fundamentally altered. Both sides have pushed toward the creation of new rules of engagement, thus raising the serious possibility of an all-out war.

This leads to another question: who has the upper hand in these new rules of engagement?

Transparency, denial

Israel is known for either denying or undermining its military losses on both the Gaza and the Lebanese fronts. Hezbollah, however, has been transparent about its own losses whether among civilians or military personnel. When Israel assassinated Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr in south Beirut, it also killed a number of civilians. Though Hezbollah could have used the killing of civilians to justify future retaliatory attacks against Israeli military bases, it, within hours, declared that indeed, its top commander had been assassinated. The group could have hidden the news of the murder of its commander, simply because very few, whether in Lebanon or outside, knew of the man's identity. Indeed, Shukr's identity was so well protected to the extent that, for days after his assassination, news networks in the Middle East continued to share the wrong photo of the man. Only when Hezbollah published Shukr's actual photo, did we become familiar with the man's actual appearance.

That Hezbollah declared the death of its top commander was indicative of the group's immediate desire to avenge him and to, thus, once more, establish new rules of deterrence and change the old rules of the game altogether. In many ways, this reflects the Lebanese

Resistance's growing confidence in its ability to match the Israeli escalation with even greater escalation, denying Tel Aviv any kind of political leverage or victory in Lebanon — as the Gaza Resistance has denied Israel victory in the Strip as well.

For nearly a month, Hezbollah repeated that the response would be stronger than anything that Israel had expected, raising panic in Israel, a state of emergency throughout the military, and long lines of customers hoping to store needed food supplies as they remained inside or close to their bomb shelters.

That collective psychological impact was only part of the retaliation. It was followed by a massive volley of rockets and drones that reached many parts of Israel, including the Meron Base, the Negev Ziv Artillery Position, the Zaouira Artillery Position, the Ramot Naftali Barracks, among others.

The Hezbollah attack also included a "sensitive target," which turned out to be the Gilot military base, where the army's 8200 intelligence unit is headquartered. Again, Israel denied that any serious damage had happened to this base or any other. Instead, Israel said that it had struck hundreds of Lebanese targets preemptively, destroying thousands of rockets and preventing the Hezbollah attack from being much worse.

What can we learn from Israeli claims?

Avoiding escalation

While Hezbollah used the assassination of Shukr as a way to showcase its power and outreach, Israel constantly undermined the importance of Hezbollah's responses to avoid further escalation. This implies that what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is hoping for is an escalation that would lead to a regional war, which would involve the US, not a limited war between Israel and Hezbollah. Israel knows that it is unable to fight a war against Hezbollah alone, and, unlike the outcome of the 2006 war, the outcome of a future war with Lebanon would be much more destructive for Israel.

As for the "preemptive strike," one does not need to consult with Nasrallah's statement that "many valleys that the enemy considers to contain ballistic missile platforms and installations... were empty or already evacuated areas." We know for a fact that Israel cannot possibly know the location of Hezbollah's rocket arsenals, simply because the group's military capabilities are in constant movement. Additionally, we also know, per Israel's own claims, that the Israeli army has been informed — most likely by the US — that Hezbollah is preparing a response, only a short time before the response had in fact begun.

How is it possible that Israel, within a matter of minutes, managed to acquire extensive details of Hezbollah's moving positions, thus striking them down with great accuracy, as the Israelis claim? Obviously, the Israeli strikes were carried out for propaganda purposes, to convey a sense of confidence in its beleaguered military, nothing more.

Thus, by exaggerating the effectiveness of its supposed "preemptive strike," while completely denying any damage inflicted by Hezbollah, Israel has conveyed the exact opposite: weakness, not strength. Weakness because the Israeli narrative seems to have been perfectly tailored to avoid any further escalation, thus once more, giving Hezbollah the last word and the upper hand.

While the Israeli cabinet of Benjamin Netanyahu is now busy celebrating the re-establishment of the so-called deterrence on the northern front, the Israeli military, many in the media, and political analysts as well, know that the opposite is true. It is Israel that has lost its deterrence in Lebanon, and if things continue to move from bad to worse for the Israeli army, this time may be forever.

The article first appeared on *The Palestine Chronicle*.

Middle East on brink Netanyahu's reckless gamble



By Osama Al Sharif
Journalist

OPINION

last 11 months have delivered one stern reality: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is in the driver's seat, and he is pushing the Middle East to a precipice.

The Israeli leader has been derailing all efforts to reach a deal that would end the war, free Israeli captives, and pave the way for the long and painful process of Gaza reconstruction. He is against all three goals. He is manipulating the Biden administration in a controversial election year with a straightforward objective: prolong the war until after the US presidential elections.



The illustration shows US President Joe Biden (L) and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
● KELLY CAMBERG/
THE DAILY BEAST

By doing so, he hopes to keep his far-right coalition alive and rein in Hezbollah and Iran through the presence of the largest number of US battle groups in the Eastern Mediterranean since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, all while decimating the Gaza Strip and its 2.2 million inhabitants.

The region has been on edge since October 7. The US has wavered in its approach towards Israel. Iran and its backed groups have stepped in to engage Israel. All parties have now been sucked into a dangerous vortex of high-stakes confrontation. It is only natural that America's allies have looked to Washington for some courageous and moral leadership — both were missing on this occasion. The Biden administration has been saying something and doing the opposite. It's been calling for a ceasefire while giving Netanyahu the political and military cover he needs to pursue a war that even his generals now say has no military sense anymore.

The Americans admit that Netanyahu is yet to deliver a workable day-after scenario. They understand the fears of their Arab allies that Netanyahu and his extremist partners are using the war to annex the West Bank and destroy the

Palestinian Authority.

But Israel has always been a US domestic issue. In an election year, both parties compete to demonstrate their unconditional support of Israel. No one understands the intricacies of US politics when it comes to backing Israel than Netanyahu.

And while his war on Gaza has damaged Israel's standing around the world and delivered unprecedented legal liabilities in the international arena, US leaders have been unable, or unwilling, to distinguish between their support of Israel and providing Netanyahu with the military and political backing he needs to continue with his reckless war.

Not peace on horizon

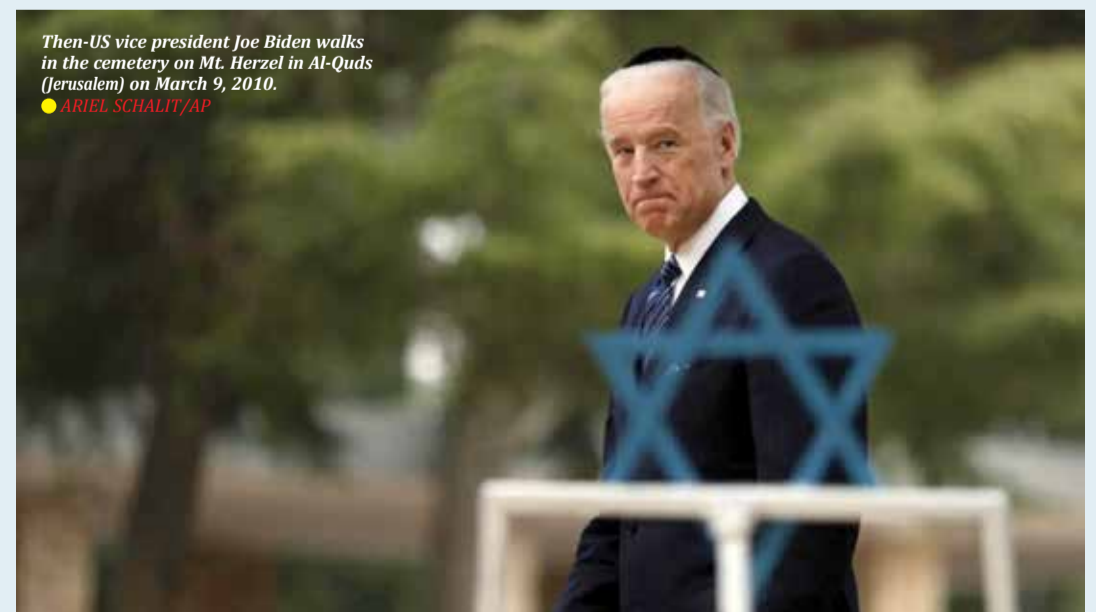
The war on Gaza has underlined the region's need for a reset. When the war finally ends, the Middle East cannot go back to a business-as-usual state. It is unlikely that the outcome of the US presidential elections will bring positive change to the region. Neither Donald Trump nor Harris will be able to address the complex geopolitical challenges that will haunt the area once the Gaza war ends.

The two-state solution is dead; the West Bank is being carved into enclaves, with Israeli set-

tlers now calling the shots. A war against Iran could quickly spiral into a global war.

The failures of the US Middle Eastern policy over the last 30 years are too many to tally. However, the US remains a powerful and significant player in this region. Its blind support of Israel's expansionist policies has complicated the issues to the point that most have become intractable. The regional peace that was promised is becoming intangible. Regional leaders need to send a united message to the next US administration that underlines the need to initiate a reset and restore a sober and responsible dialogue that preserves the interests of the peoples of the Middle East following a chaotic US-led phase that has contributed to regional imbalances, wars, and the swell of terrorism. Netanyahu and his extremist allies must not be allowed to take the entire region hostage while destroying the concept of Palestinian nationhood. The Middle East has never been so close to rampant violence and the spectre of wholesale destruction. The rest of the world must hear such a united message loud and clear.

The full article first appeared on *GulfNews*.



Then-US vice president Joe Biden walks in the cemetery on Mt. Herzl in Al-Quds (Jerusalem) on March 9, 2010.
● ARIEL SCHALIT/AP