



Hezbollah's Retaliation to Israel's Assassination of Its Senior Commander and the Latest Concern Over the Potential of an All-Out War

The long-expected retaliation by Hezbollah to Israel's targeted assassination of its senior commander Fuad Shukr back in late July took place this past weekend with the firing of more than 300 rockets at Israeli military bases and barracks, as Israel also struck more than 30 southern Lebanese towns and villages in its largest attack since October. Understandably, this back-and-forth exchange yet again evoked concern regarding the potential of deterioration into an all-out war. Thus, while there was relief that the latest hostilities did not escalate any further, the prolonging of the destructive Gaza War means that the conditions still exist for circumstances to expand and spiral out of control into a larger-scale regional conflict. Ultimately, without a halt to the atrocities in Gaza, the delicate situation along the Israel-Lebanon border remains one where any sudden miscalculation risks exacerbating and dragging in others such as the United States and Iran.

Hezbollah's retaliation came several weeks after Israel's assassination of Shukr, as well as that of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. Both of these targeted Israeli killings were denounced by peace advocates as bellicose actions deliberately seeking to thrust the region into full-blown conflict. They were also in line with the prevailing belief held by many fair-minded observers that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials have been derailing mediated efforts of reaching a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, as on the contrary, the continuation of hostilities there serves their political interests. Rather than quell tensions, Israeli officials would have calculated to trigger additional escalations with the targeted assassinations, thus allowing for the prolonging of military operations in Gaza. It is suspected that Hezbollah may have delayed their retaliation for a couple of reasons related to this: partly to allow the Gaza ceasefire talks to proceed and also potentially due to the presence of U.S. warships in the region and a concern that Israel was intentionally aiming to provoke the involvement of the United States. Nevertheless, as the preceding months have gone by, it has become evident that the initiation of a ceasefire in Gaza is essential to putting an end to hostilities in the region. This is clear with regards to the situation along the Israel-Lebanon border, which has been fueled by outrage at the calamitous Gaza War.

Some analysts have speculated that Hezbollah's timing for its retaliation this past Sunday may have purposely come shortly before Gaza ceasefire talks in Cairo were slated to take place as a means of compelling the United States to ramp up its pressure on Israel regarding reaching an agreement. All of this comes at a time when Netanyahu and Israeli officials have been adding new conditions for a potential deal, making the achievement of one increasingly challenging. There is also concern that Netanyahu – as was the case with the two recent targeted assassinations – could again try to stoke a regional escalation that would drag in the United States and Iran, a strategy that is becoming more apparent. As experts have pointed out, the assassinations were not the first such attempt. Back in April, Israel carried out a belligerent airstrike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, an incident which many including U.S. President Joe Biden viewed as an effort to provoke a war involving the United States and Iran.

The root cause of the current hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah is the longstanding conflict in Gaza. Without a Gaza ceasefire deal, the prospect of further escalations along the Israel-Lebanon border will remain, even if the latest occurrence this past week appears to have been curbed for now.