The Iranian nuclear program should be the next target

written by Elie Klutstein | 30.09.2024

The assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah closes a circle for Israel. It's not just the precise execution in the heart of Hezbollah's stronghold in Beirut, the infamous underground bunker of Nasrallah's, supposedly impenetrable, or the additional surprise suffered by the terrorist organization, which perhaps didn't think Israel would dare to carry out such an operation. Beyond all these, the assassination is a move with profound significance in the long-term strategic view, which can also point to the next options open to Israel.

Since the IDF stepped up operations in Lebanon against Hezbollah, it has demonstrated superiority on all fronts, especially in intelligence – the main area where it failed last October. Who would have believed less than a year ago that these are the capabilities we would demonstrate today?

Looking back at the past year, some optimistic trends are nevertheless revealed: Hamas has been dealt a crushing blow. The Gaza terrorist organization has not been eliminated, but most of its leadership has been wiped out, its military structure dismantled, and it is no longer capable of harming Israel in the same way as before October 7. Israel, of course, needs to continue the pressure on it, advance the release of the remaining hostages held in Gaza by any means possible, and not let up until it succeeds in eliminating the entire threat posed by Hamas. However, the intensity of the fighting in Gaza has decreased and is not expected to return to the same scale as before. As Israel continues to carry out targeted operations, it will further erode the capabilities of the terrorist organization and its members, and the threat from it will continue to diminish.

In the northern arena, Hezbollah has been revealed in many ways as a paper tiger. Apart from rocket fire, it has not carried out significant actions so far, despite all the blows inflicted on it in the last two weeks. Although we shouldn't underestimate the Shiite organization and its capabilities, the elimination of many of its senior officials, including its senior military commanders, the head of the Southern Front Ali Karaki (who was killed with Nasrallah), the leader of the organization himself, and the heads of the Radwan force, greatly reduce its ability

to carry out quality terrorist operations against Israel. This doesn't mean it can't carry out sporadic rocket fire – in recent days, we've seen only a trickle of rockets, though nothing close to the pessimistic forecasts heard here – but the motivation has been hit, the fear has increased, and the capabilities have decreased.

It's also worth taking into account the shock the terrorist organization has entered, its fear of using means of communication and the many surprises it has suffered within a few short weeks. In the absence of an orderly command structure, this is a blow that will be very difficult to recover from quickly. In these weeks, it should be noted, Israel has suffered almost no casualties at all, while Hezbollah counts its dead in many dozens, including almost all of its military leadership. May it stay that way.

It's also worth dwelling a bit on the implications of the organization leader's departure from the scene: Nasrallah is not just another senior commander of the organization. He is not one of many. Nasrallah is not ostensibly a military commander, not a field man who guides the soldiers, but he is the charismatic figure, the gifted orator, the supreme leader to whom the fighters of the Shiite organization look up. He is their absolute symbol.

But in many ways, Nasrallah is much more than that. He turned Hezbollah into the largest and most heavily armed terrorist organization in the world. Since he took over the position previously held by Abbas al-Musawi in 1992, who was also eliminated by Israel, Nasrallah managed to position the Shiite organization at the forefront of the struggle against Israel, drive it out of Lebanon, inflict a painful blow on it in the Second Lebanon War and establish deterrence against it. Nasrallah also armed his organization with tens of thousands of missiles and rockets, advanced weapons, explosive devices, and missiles, using his connections with Iran and the money his patrons from Tehran poured on him. His absence in Hezbollah will be felt greatly, and he leaves behind very big shoes to fill.

One thing can probably be said with quite high certainty: a large part of Israel's deterrence has been restored. The cheers of many citizens in Syria over the IDF's successes in recent weeks can be heard all the way to the northern Golan Heights, and it's hard to believe there are many in the Sunni Arab states who are now crying over the bitter fate of the arch-terrorist from Beirut. The leaders in Arab capitals are certainly looking at Israel with renewed respect after the last

three weeks, even if they publicly expressed condolences over his death.

When talking about a new regional architecture, whose promotion in the form of normalization with Saudi Arabia may have been cut short with the outbreak of the war, this is the kind of behavior that Israel needs to adhere to in order to rehabilitate this opportunity. In the Middle Eastern neighborhood, alliances are not made with the weak and fearful, but with the strong. Israel is restoring its status and, incidentally, the possibilities for true normalization from a correct position of strength, facing countries that will see it as equal to them and even more powerful, one that has the ability to assist them in times of trouble. Thus, for example, the statement published this week and attributed to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, that he's not really interested in Israel's actions in Gaza – didn't come in a vacuum.

That's why Israel must not fold now, must not stop. We need to continue pressing the pedal in Lebanon as well to bring about a new reality for the border residents. We must continue to act in Gaza and in other arenas.

Now we must also set our sights on the one big problem that still hovers over Israeli heads, which has not been dealt with since the beginning of the war: the Iranian nuclear program. In addition to the many reports in recent years about the accumulation of highly enriched uranium in quantities sufficient to build several bombs, recently, it has also been claimed that the Iranians may have begun to restart the activities of the "weapons group" – the group responsible for turning the fissile nuclear material into an actual bomb, and then assembling it on a missile.

Now is the most appropriate time to act against the Iranian nuclear program for other reasons as well: The Iranians are looking at the close election system in the US and fear another term of Former President Donald Trump in the White House. Despite his conciliatory words in recent days in favor of reaching an agreement with Tehran on the nuclear program, they know that he is not a predictable person and that he sometimes also advocates using force to achieve his goals.

Therefore, they understand that the few weeks remaining until the elections themselves, and also the weeks between the elections and the entry of the new president into the White House, are critical to presenting the Americans with a reality in which an Iranian nuclear bomb is a fait accompli. Now, they must push

forward in order not to reach a situation where there will be another option in the White House to do something about it.

From Israel's perspective, a strike on Iran would now come at a convenient time from an international perspective as well. The Americans may not be pleased with the Israeli moves and the escalation against Hezbollah, but President Joe Biden also doesn't want to be recorded in the annals of American history as the president who allowed Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. The fact that the president is a lame duck until after the elections means that he will find it difficult to stop significant moves that Israel chooses to make.

If Israel knows how to "sell" the attack to the president correctly, it can also paint it as something that will give the Democratic candidate, Kamala Harris, an electoral boost. Instead of an agreement with Saudi Arabia or a ceasefire in Gaza, eliminating the Iranian nuclear program can be perceived in Washington as a first step towards truly shaping the new regional architecture. It is certainly much more significant than a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, which will lead to nothing in the long run, and it will greatly increase the Israeli standing in the eyes of the Saudis, for example.

Moreover, the Iranians are also in an inferior position vis-à-vis other Western countries after being caught transferring UAVs to the Russians for the war in Ukraine and connecting to the "bad guy" of the neighborhood. They suffered sanctions and lost a lot of the legitimacy they might have had before. In addition, the IAEA declared publicly that it is unable to know what is happening in Iranian nuclear facilities and monitor them, and in fact, has made any possibility of cooperation now meaningless.

But the most important fact from Israel's point of view is that the most powerful "whip" that Iran held over our heads, Hezbollah, is now perceived as something that can be dealt with. Even before that, following the attack in April, Israel understood that Iran is not a significant threat to its security – even when it launched hundreds of missiles and UAVs towards us. At the same time, the Lebanese terrorist organization is not what it was three weeks ago, and along with it, Iranian deterrence towards us following a possible attack on nuclear facilities has decreased greatly.

Perhaps the fact that should most indicate this is the claim that Iran's leader, Ali

Khamenei, was taken to a “hidden and safe” place following Nasrallah’s assassination. Even in routine, the Iranian leader is certainly tightly secured, with the best defenses Iran has to offer, but his concealment indicates that the Iranians don’t know exactly what to expect now. These things are added to the publication that even the Revolutionary Guards stopped using their communication devices following the operation against Hezbollah, which indicates their fear of Israeli penetration.

Now is the time to act. Israel has already proven in April that it can attack in Iran, and later did something similar in Yemen. The IDF and security forces have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to operate in distant arenas and Israel’s excellent intelligence. The rise in Israeli morale and reconnection following recent successes can increase internal legitimacy for an attack now. In addition, our defense arrays are on high alert and in immediate readiness.

However, we must not act alone. We must convince the America and our other allies to join the struggle against the Iranians before it’s too late. We need to emphasize to them how the region might look if Iran has nuclear weapons and what could have developed after October 7 if Tehran had a nuclear umbrella sheltering the head of Hamas and Hezbollah. This reality must be prevented now.

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