Shadmani, Nasrallah and the collapse of Iran's Axis of Resistance

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 26.06.2025

Over the past year, the Iranian regime and Hezbollah have suffered unprecedented blows at the hands of Israel, which has severely damaged not only their military capabilities but also the nature of the strategic relationship between them.

Senior officials on both sides who were involved in security decision-making and managing the strategic relationship between Tehran and Hezbollah were eliminated one after another. A newly released archive photo published in Iran on June 26 shows Ali Shadmani and then-Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah together, revealing another chapter in this strategic alliance, one that will likely never return.

According to reports from Iran, Shadmani was killed during the war, after being appointed as the successor to Gholam Reza Rashid, who was eliminated in Israel's opening strike. Shadmani had served as head of Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters, the body responsible in routine times for threat assessment, force-building direction, and readiness assessment, and in wartime, for managing the entire military campaign under the direct authority of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

His death was officially reported in Iran only on June 25, following reports that he had been seriously wounded in a targeted strike about a week earlier and did not recover.

Shadmani had a long and distinguished military career. He joined the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) upon its founding in 1979 and commanded the Ansar al-Hossein Division during the Iran–Iraq War (1980-1988).

He went on to hold a series of senior positions, but the significance of the photo with Nasrallah lies in the period during which it was likely taken, after 2005. From 2005 to 2012, he held a senior role in the Operations Directorate of Iran's Armed Forces General Staff, including during the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

From 2012 to 2016, he headed the directorate and later became the deputy coordinator of Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters before ultimately taking command.

In this role, Shadmani oversaw the integration of all Iranian operational plans across the various arenas. Therefore, the very fact that a meeting between him and Nasrallah took place, now publicly revealed, adds another layer to the deep strategic relationship between Tehran and Hezbollah.

While it was known that Nasrallah regularly met with Quds Force commanders, Khamenei's advisors and Iranian foreign ministers, it now emerges that he also held meetings with senior officials in the Operations Directorate of Iran's General Staff. This connection underscores his elevated status within the Iranian regime's decision-making processes and Tehran's operational planning.

Nasrallah served as a strategic linchpin not only for Hezbollah but also for the Iranian regime and its management of relations with the organization. His assassination on September 27, 2024, marked a profound rupture for both Tehran and Hezbollah, which, in the current war, chose to remain on the sidelines.

In doing so, the organization made a historic decision that sharply contradicts Nasrallah's past declarations that Hezbollah would join any war if Iran were attacked.

The Iranian regime must now undertake a complex process of rebuilding, not only of its military command structure, but also of its cooperation with Hezbollah.

The loss of Shadmani and other senior commanders who were eliminated by Israel, including Saeed Izadi, head of the Quds Force's Palestinian branch (reportedly also responsible for facilitating Iranian support to Hezbollah), and Behnam Shahriyari, head of the Quds Force smuggling unit, presents a serious challenge.

Added to this are the deaths of Quds Force commanders for Lebanon and Syria, Mohammad Reza Zahedi, and his successor, Abbas Nilforoushan, in previous months.

In such circumstances, reconstructing the Iran–Hezbollah "Axis of Resistance" appears especially daunting, particularly in light of Israel's clear determination to prevent any attempt to rebuild Hezbollah's military capabilities in the foreseeable

future.

Published in JNS, June 30, 2025.