

Following Israel's strike on its top military commander, the ball is in Hezbollah's court

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 23.11.2025

The precise surgical strike in a Beirut suburb against Hezbollah's Chief of Staff, Haytham Ali Tabatabai, is clear evidence of the distress Hezbollah finds itself in.

Since the assassination of the vast majority of the Jihad Council, Hezbollah's General Staff, with an emphasis on Nasrallah and the organization's top military command, the group has been trying to promote an interim period of regrowth and rehabilitation.

As part of this process, Hezbollah attempted to appease its social base, which was severely damaged in the war, and signaled its bitterness and fatigue with it. Given the significant importance of this base, as it provides the organization's manpower and electoral support, Hezbollah promoted a narrative of victory and sacrifice.

In addition, Hezbollah, with Iranian assistance, worked to financially compensate the many families whose homes were destroyed or who were forced to flee from the war's threat. Simultaneously, Hezbollah advanced an intensive rehabilitation project, aided by smuggling from Iran and based on local production capabilities.

Hezbollah has been investigating how Israel penetrated it

In the period since the war, the organization conducted an investigation to determine the sources of the leak that allowed the deep Israeli penetration into its ranks. It also began a reorganization process to adapt to the new situation in the confrontation against Israel, and recruited new members.

Consequently, in an attempt to emerge from the historical crisis it was plunged into by the war, Hezbollah's leadership, headed by Secretary-General Naim Qassem, chose to adopt a policy of containment in the face of the Israeli attacks, despite the resentment and unrest this policy caused among field commanders.

The new political climate in Lebanon, centered on signs of the Lebanese state's resurgence and its desire to consolidate the results of the war to end its occupation by Iran and Hezbollah, also influenced the organization's containment

policy.

The assassination of Tabatabai catches Hezbollah at a time when a complex equation rests on the scales. If Hezbollah chooses to retaliate against Israel, it risks losing the achievements it has garnered since the ceasefire and playing into the hands of Israel, which seeks to deepen the waves of attacks against it.

On the other hand, a lack of response will project significant weakness, damage Hezbollah's image in Lebanon, and may even lead to pockets of internal rebellion within the organization.

It is also difficult to see Tehran coming to Hezbollah's aid and once again directly entering the cycle of fire against Israel. In addition to the various crises plaguing it, an internal legitimacy crisis, water and energy crises, and an economic crisis, the decision adopted by the IAEA Board of Governors complicates Tehran's predicament.

The decision requires Iran to update the Agency on its uranium stockpile and the facilities bombed during the Iran-Israel War of June 2025, and it could serve, as happened a few days before that war, as a means for Israel to build legitimacy to renew the attack against the IRI.

The Houthis, even if they join the campaign alongside Hezbollah, will not be able to provide Hezbollah with the necessary support against Israel. Even Hamas and Islamic Jihad, in their current state, are not interested in renewing the fighting against Israel in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, Hezbollah being alone in a possible campaign is expected to influence its decision regarding the scope of the expected response on its part.

Accordingly, and especially in light of the internal pressures within the organization, it seems that Hezbollah will choose to enter into several limited "days of fighting," as Tabatabai was indeed assassinated. In this way, it can allow the field ranks to let off steam and respond to Israel's attacks. Conversely, after the blow it is expected to absorb from Israel, it will resume its rehabilitation process.

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