Hezbollah weakened, not defeated: If war returns, Israel aims to finish the job

written by Prof. Kobi Michael | 28.10.2025

During the months of September and October 2024, Israel succeeded in inflicting a series of severe blows on Hezbollah, which greatly weakened the organisation. Since the ceasefire and in the spirit of the side understandings with the US, Israel has been careful to act steadily and resolutely to thwart Hezbollah's efforts to rearm and to shape new rules of the game.

In the wake of October 7, Israel has resolved that what existed in Lebanon can no longer be tolerated. The rules of the game have changed: Israel will not accommodate or contain Hezbollah's attempts to rebuild. It treats the group's intentions and declarations as serious threats even in its weakened state. Since the ceasefire, Israel has maintained military positions at five sites in southern Lebanon and reserved full operational freedom to counter any attempt by Hezbollah to reconstitute its strength — a move Israel regards as a breach of the agreement. The border zone remains deliberately depopulated; Shiite villages and towns close to the frontier have been kept empty and their residents denied return.

Hezbollah, humiliated and badly weakened by last year's blows – exposed to deep Israeli penetration of its ranks and intelligence – is trying to restore its standing, with the help of its patron Iran. Israel therefore proceeds with determination, perseverance and vigilance, preparing both to deter and, if necessary, to escalate. If fighting resumes and Hezbollah bets it can overturn the new equation, it will face an army that is trained, battle-hardened, well-equipped and no longer distracted by large-scale operations in Gaza. Today's Israel prefers to consolidate the new security reality by measured means; but should it be forced into a major escalation, the destruction of Hezbollah would almost certainly become the principal war aim – and Israel would likely find partners who view such a campaign as an opportunity to complete a long-needed regional realignment.

Israel has two partners in its effort, each for its own reasons. The Lebanese

president and the Lebanese government want Hezbollah to be disarmed and politically weakened. At the same time, Syria is working against Hezbollah by systematically thwarting the remnants of its infrastructure in Syria, disrupting attempts to smuggle weapons from Syria to Lebanon, and even attacking Hezbollah forces on the Syrian-Lebanese border. Syria sees Hezbollah and its patron Iran as a threat and is working to prevent Tehran's influence in Syria and its attempt to establish military capabilities and infrastructure in Syria against Israel.

The organisation's leader, Naim Qassem, a pale man, devoid of charisma and, above all, experience like those of Hassan Nasrallah, is unable to step into the latter's shoes. Many of the organisation's senior and talented commanders have been eliminated by Israel, and the organisation has been deeply penetrated by Israel.

However, the organisation, humiliated and imbued with revenge, has not lost its determination and Iran has not lost hope. Despite the severe damage that Israel has inflicted on Hezbollah's infrastructure and capabilities, as well as on the organisation's military and political chain of command, the group remains capable of attacking Israel as well as Israeli and Jewish targets abroad.

Since the ceasefire, the organisation has worked to restore its capabilities, rebuild command-and-control structures, close intelligence vulnerabilities, and placate Lebanon's Shiite population – the source of its power – which was badly hit by the war, with many losing their homes and now living as displaced persons.

The organisation is also trying to restore its political status in Lebanon and fight the efforts of the Lebanese president and the prime minister to weaken it. Iran, for its part, continues its efforts to strengthen Hezbollah. After losing Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and after the severe attacks that Israel inflicted on the Houthis in Yemen, and especially after the attack on Iran itself in Operation "Rising Lion", Hezbollah remains Iran's last chance to restore its regional status and rebuild deterrence against Israel. It also needs Hezbollah in the event that it is attacked by Israel or decides to attack Israel on its own initiative.

Iran, though, is facing significant difficulties in its efforts to help Hezbollah recover. Its ability to smuggle weapons and components for the production of missiles and other precision weapons into Lebanon via Syria has been severely

affected by the change that has occurred in Syria since the fall of the Assad regime and the suppression efforts of the Syrian regime led by Ahmed al-Sharaa. At the same time, Israel is working to thwart these efforts both in Syria and in Lebanon. Just last week, the Israeli Air Force bombed a fortified facility dug into a mountain in the Lebanese Bequa Valley as a protected base for storing and launching missiles. Iran's efforts to use civilian aircraft to smuggle weapons and money into Lebanon for Hezbollah are also not going well. Many of these attempts are thwarted by the Lebanese authorities. It is reasonable to assume that some of the intelligence about these Iranian efforts is reaching Lebanon from Israel, either directly or through the Americans.

Israel, Syria, and Lebanon now share a common interest in weakening Hezbollah and dismantling its capabilities. Each has found ways to cooperate toward this goal, with the United States – alongside France and Saudi Arabia – providing strong backing to the Lebanese president and his government.

This cooperation lays the groundwork for closer regional ties and creates more favourable conditions for eventual accession to the Abraham Accords, in line with President Trump's vision – a process likely to unfold gradually over time rather than in a single step.

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