Israel must compel Lebanon to adopt the ‘Black September’ model

written by Prof. Zaki Shalom | 06.03.2026

Following the Six-Day War in 1967, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians moved into Jordan. Palestinian terrorist organizations soon began launching a variety of terrorist attacks against Israel. Gradually, these organizations acquired an autonomous status within the kingdom, creating what amounted to a “state within a state.”

At the same time, Palestinians – who constituted a majority of Jordan’s population – initiated acts of rebellion aimed at undermining the authority of King Hussein, whom they strongly opposed. Their activities escalated dramatically in September 1970, when they hijacked four international passenger aircraft, forced them to land in Jordan, and subsequently blew up three of them before the eyes of the world.

The Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Golda Meir, faced a complex strategic dilemma. King Hussein’s regime was clearly pro-Western, and the United States had a vital interest in preventing its collapse. It was widely understood that Israeli retaliatory actions against the infrastructure of the Hashemite Kingdom might destabilize Hussein’s rule.

At the same time, officials in the US administration repeatedly emphasized the king’s inherent weakness and urged Israel to focus its actions exclusively against Palestinian organizations. Jordan, they reminded Israeli leaders, had maintained clandestine contacts with Israel for many years and functioned, in effect, as a tacit partner. From this perspective, Israel’s national interest coincided with that of the West: preserving the stability and survival of the Hashemite regime.

Golda Meir listened carefully to these arguments but was not entirely persuaded. Israel did indeed strike directly at Palestinian militant organizations, as Western states recommended. Yet it was clear that a decisive solution could emerge only if the Jordanian government firmly imposed its authority over these groups. Meir understood that Jordan would act only if it realized that continued inaction would

carry a substantial cost for the kingdom.

The Jordanian government feared, with good reason, a direct confrontation with Palestinian militants. Western backing could not be taken for granted, as the United States was still deeply entangled in the Vietnam War.

Eventually, Israel acted with great resolve. Contrary to the clear preference of Washington, Israel targeted key Jordanian infrastructures. The most significant of these actions was the destruction of the Ghor Canal, which supplied irrigation water to Jordanian farmers. Jordanian agriculture suffered severe consequences.

Only then did King Hussein decide to launch a full-scale campaign against the Palestinian militant organizations. When Syrian forces attempted to intervene on behalf of the Palestinians, they were deterred by the threat of Israeli air strikes—an option encouraged by the Nixon administration.

At a high human cost, King Hussein succeeded in restoring full control over his kingdom. Since then, the stability of his rule – and that of his successors – has remained largely intact, and hostile activity against Israel from the Jordanian frontier has been minimal.

Lebanon, for unclear reasons, has long enjoyed an informal "insurance policy" that shields it from direct Israeli pressure. On the first day of the Second Lebanon War, an intense debate arose over a fundamental question: against whom should Israel focus its retaliation – Hezbollah or the Lebanese state?

Only if the state of Lebanon suffers an unbearable cost, former IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz argued, will its government wage a determined campaign against Hezbollah. Such a course would almost certainly exact a heavy toll on Lebanon itself. Yet there was no other effective option.

At present, as the Iranian regime absorbs significant blows, a strategic opportunity may be emerging. This could be the moment for the Lebanese government to act decisively against Hezbollah. Israel alone has the capacity to push Lebanon toward such a decision. It should therefore adopt the strategic precedent of the "Black September" model of 1970. In the long run, such a course could serve the interests of both Lebanon and Israel alike.

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