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Hidden fronts: Intelligence and assassinations in the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict

In a high-stakes strategy, Israel’s assassinations of Hezbollah leaders aim to boost morale and show strength. At the same time, Hezbollah adapts and improves its intelligence, keeping the conflict in a relentless cycle of surprise and counteraction.

In addition to the [escalation](#) between Israel and Hezbollah, the occupation state has intensified its [assassinations](#) of Lebanese resistance leaders at various levels, specifically targeting field commanders directly involved on the frontlines. These assassinations are part of a longstanding conflict between the two sides, not merely a reaction to the events following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on 7 October.

The elimination of these resistance leaders is often framed within the occupation state as a significant achievement. However, it often serves more to influence [perceptions](#) within the settler community and the security establishment than to achieve strategic victories against Hezbollah.

Intelligence-driven warfare

The ongoing war between the Lebanese resistance and the occupation army differs fundamentally from conventional military conflicts. This confrontation's asymmetric nature necessitates intricate intelligence operations and adaptive strategies. [Both sides](#) continually enhance their intelligence capabilities to support direct military engagements.

In southern Lebanon and northern occupied Palestine, the security dimension of the conflict is clear. The resistance has notably advanced its [knowledge of Israeli positions](#),

surprising Israeli intelligence and creating a heightened state of alert within the occupation army.

The recent killings of key figures like [Abu Talib](#), head of the Nasr unit, and [Abu Naama](#), leader of the Aziz unit, demonstrate the complexities of the conflict.

Frontline commanders remain vulnerable targets despite stringent security measures. Their deaths do not equal a significant victory but rather a tactical maneuver within the broader scope of the war.

In addition, security clashes become easier during military warfare for both sides and not the occupation army alone.

Israel's objectives behind assassinations

The primary objectives of these assassinations go beyond mere score-settling. Israeli officials have historically debated the effectiveness of targeting resistance leaders, recognizing that the resistance operates as a system rather than a set of individuals.

Amit Saar, former head of the research unit in Israel's military intelligence, emphasized this point, noting that targeted assassinations do not fundamentally change the resistance's trajectory.

The assassination of the Secretary-General of the Allah Party, Abbas al-Moussawi, did not change the course of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and there are those behind him, and the confrontation is over. As well as the assassination of Palestinian leaders, whether military or political.

When asked about the possibility of assassinating Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, he said: "Should we kill him? I don't focus on assassinating one person in a confrontation with a system. But he could be a target in any future battle."

What Saar, who [resigned](#) after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, said helps to understand the objectives of the assassinations carried out by the occupation army in Lebanon now.

Despite this, the Israeli security establishment pursues these assassinations for several reasons, chief among them psychological impact, boosting the morale of the Israeli military and public. Another reason is internal competition, showcasing achievements within the establishment.

Additionally, these actions compensate for the occupation forces' "defensive" posture, unprecedented since the establishment of the occupation entity in 1948. Lastly, there is an element of settling historical scores by targeting leaders with long records of resistance.

Resistance adaptation and intelligence

Contrary to Israeli narratives, the resistance, whether in Lebanon or Gaza for that matter, has not been significantly impacted by the assassinations. Instead, these events have driven the resistance to enhance its reconnaissance capabilities. Many of Hezbollah's recent successes stem from intelligence gathered [after 7 October](#), demonstrating its ability to adapt and respond effectively.

Public statements align with behind-the-scenes assessments, revealing that the assassination of several field commanders did not deter the resistance. Instead, these losses catalyzed the development of operations, particularly in intelligence gathering.

Gathering intelligence on new points and headquarters requires extensive security efforts. According to some reports, this intelligence work is what troubles the Israeli security establishment the most, as it directly impacts ground operations.

While Israelis might see targeted assassinations as achievements, these are often just tactical points scored in an ongoing conflict. Meanwhile, the resistance strengthens its intelligence and security capabilities, maintaining mobile and fixed target banks.

This dynamic affects Israel's operations, especially in scenarios where [clashes may expand](#) – something the occupation army fears.

Hezbollah's fierce retribution

Examining the response to the assassination of Abu Naama, commander of the Aziz unit operating in the western sector of southern Lebanon, reveals several strategic considerations. The resistance chose to retaliate from the eastern sector, specifically from the Nasr unit's area, whose commander, Abu Talib, was also assassinated. This tactical decision was intended to deliver several critical messages to the enemy:

First, Hezbollah's response from an unexpected area caught the occupation army off guard, as it anticipated retaliation from the area controlled by the Aziz unit. This highlighted a failure in accurately predicting the resistance's reactions.

Second, by responding from the Nasr unit's territory, the resistance aimed to convey that the assassination of Abu Talib, followed by its counteraction, did not disrupt its operations. So, the assassination of Abu Naama would similarly not impact the resistance operations.

The recent retaliation for the assassination of Abu Naama, coupled with a response to another resistance fighter's death in the Bekaa, demonstrated the resistance's resilience. Notably, for the [first time since 1973](#), it targeted a long-range technical and electronic reconnaissance center in Mount Hermon, within the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

The resistance's capabilities remain robust and evolve to deliver more impactful military and security responses. It is committed to ongoing support operations as deemed necessary until the aggression in the Gaza Strip ceases.

The response to the assassinations of its leaders indicates that Hezbollah's structure and operations remain largely unaffected. Its actions, whether within the 'security belt' in northern occupied Palestine or in more distant areas targeted by its strikes, continue to impact the occupation army.

This is evident in both the current confrontation and potential future conflicts, as inferred from Israeli military performance and statements from senior officers, particularly former ones.

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