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Haifa and more:

While Israel massacres, Hezbollah advances

The occupation state's now-daily killing rampages across Lebanon have not disrupted Hezbollah's ability to retaliate. Importantly, the resistance intends to meet Israel's every crass massacre with a qualitative military thrust into the enemy's depth and vulnerabilities.

A significant shift has taken place on the southern Lebanese front in the last few days. Barely had Benjamin Netanyahu's government announced its new war goal of returning displaced settlers to their northern homes and begun the transfer of military weight to the north before Tel Aviv launched a series of incendiary strikes throughout Lebanon.

Israel's first salvo was two terror attacks conducted simultaneously in several parts of the country by detonating consumer-tech devices – pagers and walkie-talkies – that killed 39 civilians and permanently blinded and dismembered thousands more. Two days later, Israeli fighter jets bombed two residential buildings in Beirut's southern suburb, killing 54 people, including women and children, and assassinating several commanders of Hezbollah's elite Radwan Forces, including the head of the forces, Ibrahim Aqil, while expanding its air strikes to target what the Israelis claimed were Hezbollah's "military capabilities."

The Lebanese Resistance movement does not deny that the strikes on the southern suburb were painful for both Hezbollah and its supporters. But they make clear that the Israeli attacks did not affect either their military structure or operation capabilities. The evidence of this came swiftly, with an initial Hezbollah retaliation targeting the Ramat David Military Airbase – the main base for occupation airforce strikes on Lebanon and Syria – and the Rafael military industries complex, southeast and north of Haifa, respectively.

These massive retaliations were intended to mainly confirm to the occupation forces that Hezbollah has no plans to retreat from its own stated goals of pressuring Tel Aviv to end its

assault on Gaza – and that it will not allow the Israelis to separate and compartmentalize the Gaza front from the Lebanon one, as the US has sought to do throughout ceasefire negotiations.

Bombing ‘Dahiyeh’

The Israeli military’s access to the resistance’s leadership is clearly the result of years or even decades of intelligence efforts. It must be acknowledged that what happened in Dahiyeh – or Beirut’s southern suburb – last Friday showcased Tel Aviv’s ability to identify and target the location of a meeting of Radwan Forces leaders, the vaunted Hezbollah special forces that Israelis have obsessed over for years.

The execution of the assassination operation, compounded by Israeli “leaks” that a “reliable intelligence source” provided them with target intel, gives the impression that Israeli operatives were able to create a security breach close to Radwan’s inner circle.

In reality, it is impossible to verify Israel’s claims for several reasons, primarily because Tel Aviv is waging a media war of disinformation and employing psychological warfare to target both the resistance and Israel’s own domestic constituents.

For certain, no additional information was provided by Hezbollah about the Dahiyeh attack – whether a breach of security occurred in its ranks or something else. The resistance group is known for keeping tight control over information derived from internal investigations and has rarely deviated from that strategy. If Hezbollah manages to gather new information from its investigations into Israel’s pager terror attack or from the Dahiyeh bombing, it will surely use it only internally to build on its flaws and minimize vulnerabilities.

Israel’s goals

The occupation state’s violent rampage against Lebanon last week sought to achieve several goals:

First, to widely disrupt Hezbollah’s command and control system by striking its communications networks and targeting central and pivotal leaders.

Second, to pressure Hezbollah to disengage from the Gaza front, which has strategic consequences in the short and long term.

Third, Tel Aviv is trying to alter the security paradigm on its border with Lebanon and implement more advantageous conditions that give Israel an upper hand in its 11-month battle with the Lebanese resistance. The Israelis are desperately seeking new, favorable rules of engagement with their northern adversary – an ambition sought since Israel was militarily ousted from Lebanon in 2000 and then again in 2006.

Fourth, the Israelis are working to prepare the ground for a future hot war that will enable it to attack the resistance at a critical political moment that serves its interests. Lastly, Tel Aviv's recent attacks are meant to send other regional actors a hard message, in particular West Asia's Resistance Axis, by demonstrating that they can effectively target and degrade their 'masterminds.'

The fallout for Hezbollah

Hezbollah has not concealed that Israel's terror and assassination attacks last week, which continue heavily today in Lebanon's south, where hundreds of civilians have been killed since the morning, have had a chilling and demoralizing effect. However, several indicators show that the Lebanese resistance has been able to absorb these blows and adapt rapidly without impacting its structure or operations capabilities.

Thus far, it is hard to argue that Tel Aviv has succeeded in its goal of disrupting Hezbollah's command and control. Massive Israeli killing sprees throughout Lebanon will not impact a resistance movement that has fought guerrilla battles since its inception and has grown tremendously in sophistication – both tactically, strategically, and in terms of qualitative missile technology.

Instead, Hezbollah continues to firmly maintain its position on Israel ending its military assault on Gaza and has quickly rearranged its internal affairs to retaliate against the occupation state – even launching a new phase of the conflict, which it calls the “open-ended battle of reckoning,” as announced by Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem during the funeral of Commander Ibrahim Aqil in Beirut.

The announcement of the new phase was authorized by the Sunday morning strikes when the Lebanese resistance targeted the Ramat David Military Airbase southeast of Haifa and the Rafael military industries complex north of the city with Fadi 1 and Fadi 2 missiles, as part of its initial retaliation.

Messages of Hezbollah's retaliation

Through its initial retaliation and declaration of the new battle phase, Hezbollah is sending the following messages:

First, the resistance's command-and-control system was not damaged or exposed to failure. Second, Hezbollah responded to Israel's massive expansion of strikes by immediately deepening its retaliatory strikes to over 50 kilometers inside the occupation state. This is part of the resistance's deterrence formula imposed on Tel Aviv: an “expansion for expansion.”

Third, Hezbollah will meet Israeli gradualism with gradualism to shuffle the military cards constantly and push the enemy to change many of its calculations.

Fourth, it will not just launch minimal retaliations to disrupt the enemy's goals, but will meet it with forceful and demoralizing strikes as well.

Accordingly, Israel's carpet bombing in southern Lebanon all day today, its massive Dahiyeh attack, and its state terrorism on Tuesday and Wednesday have ushered in a new phase of confrontation, in which Israel's every initiative will be met with a counter. Perhaps the scene at the onset of the "open-ended battle of reckoning" phase – waves of rocket fire in and around the occupation state's prized port city of Haifa – is the clearest indicator of how Hezbollah remains cohesive, capable, and determined to compete and impose new rules at every new turn with Israel.

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