



## Israel Assassinates Hezbollah Leader, Starts Ground Operation in Lebanon

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In an intensified series of airstrikes against Hezbollah targets in Lebanon, the Israeli military has succeeded in killing the organisation's longtime leader, Hassan Nasrallah. The attacks increase the risk of a regional escalation, while Israel's ground operation launched on 30 September may perpetuate in Lebanese society the image of Hezbollah as the only entity capable of defending the country's territory against Israeli attacks.

### What were the circumstances of Nasrallah's death?

Hezbollah's secretary-general was killed along with a group of the organisation's senior commanders in an Israeli air raid on a command centre in Beirut's Dahieh district on 27 September. The attack was part of an Israeli operation launched in recent weeks, [escalating the ongoing conflict with Hezbollah](#). It began with a pre-planned attack on the organisation's communication devices (including pagers and walkie-talkies), which killed dozens and wounded several thousand of its members, as well as a significant number of civilians. In the following days, Israel carried out a series of airstrikes against Hezbollah targets on Lebanese and Syrian territory, eliminating the command of the Radwan strike unit and leaders of other armed groups.

### What does his death mean for the organisation?

In response to the attack, Hezbollah increased the range of its rocket fire on Israeli territory, but given the losses suffered and the disruption of the chain of command, the scale of retaliation remains limited. The assassinations of Nasrallah and Hezbollah's high-ranking staff indicate deep infiltration by Israeli intelligence. This busts the myth about Hezbollah's high security, built up over decades, and contributes to its limited decision-making capacity (e.g., regarding retaliation). Nonetheless, Hezbollah maintains significant operational capabilities (more than 100,000 missiles and around 100,000 fighters) and the

successive Israeli attacks in Lebanon and increasing number of civilian casualties (nearly 500 people were killed on 23 September) may facilitate the recruitment of new members. Sources close to Hezbollah also indicated that in recent weeks, the organisation has stepped up preparations for war by developing a network of border tunnels and increasing arms smuggling from Iran. This means that the complete elimination of the organisation through military action is unlikely and that a temporary weakening will not prevent hostile actions against Israel in the future, including outside the region.

### How will the weakening of Hezbollah affect the political situation in Lebanon?

Hezbollah remains one of the main political forces in Lebanon that has managed to convince the society (including those critical of the organisation) that it is the most effective force defending Lebanon's borders against Israel. This was highlighted by the reaction of the leaders of political parties opposed to Hezbollah who condemned Nasrallah's assassination and called for unity among the Lebanese to avoid antagonising any group. Hezbollah's image of strength was influenced by the end of the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000 as a result of, among other things, its actions and the 2006 war with Israel, which is often considered a success for the organisation. This feeling has been reinforced by the weakness of the Lebanese state and its history of external interference, including by Israel. On 30 September, Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati

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declared the authorities' support for a ceasefire and willingness to deploy the army on the border with Israel to prevent Hezbollah activity. Support for the Lebanese army in the face of Hezbollah's weakening could increase the chances of successful de-escalation efforts and reduce the organisation's legitimacy as the only force in Lebanon effectively resisting Israel.

## What are the next steps and conditions on the Israeli side?

Israel launched a ground operation in southern Lebanon on 30 September, seeking to exploit the tactical initiative it has gained and aiming to weaken Hezbollah forces as much as possible. The Israeli side reports the operation as limited in nature and currently focused on disrupting the organisation's border infrastructure. The actual planned scope and timing of the operation remain unspecified. The declared aim is to push Hezbollah forces away from the border with Israel and enforce a ceasefire, which would allow the return of evacuated residents from the north of the country and, in the longer term, [a buffer in southern Lebanon per UNSC Resolution 1701](#). In the context of the confrontation with Hezbollah, the Israeli government can count internally—and to a greater extent than in the case of the war in Gaza—on political consensus and popular support. The course of the Israeli offensive in Lebanon so far, [together with other operations in the region](#), strengthens

the image and political stance of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

## What could be the regional consequences of Nasrallah's killing?

An extended and prolonged ground invasion will exacerbate the destabilisation of Lebanon and the region as a whole and through increasing displacement. In Lebanon, nearly 1 million people have already left their homes since 8 October last year, and in recent days, more than 30,000 have fled to neighbouring Syria. The lack of support and response from Iran and Hezbollah's regional partners—militias in Iraq and Yemen or [the regime in Syria](#)—indicates the weakening of the so-called Axis of Resistance and the importance of Iran's national interests over aid to allies. The Iranian foreign ministry has rejected the possibility of sending military support to Hezbollah or the Houthis in Yemen, where Israel has also carried out airstrikes. This indicates the will of the Iranian authorities to avoid further regional escalation. Israel is counting on the weakening of Hezbollah—so far an essential organisation of the Axis of Resistance—to allow it to win tactically over its other elements as well. Leaders from the Middle East and Western countries seek to counter further escalation (France proposed a three-week ceasefire on 26 September). Still, the chances that the parties—especially the Netanyahu government—will accede to such initiatives are slim.