

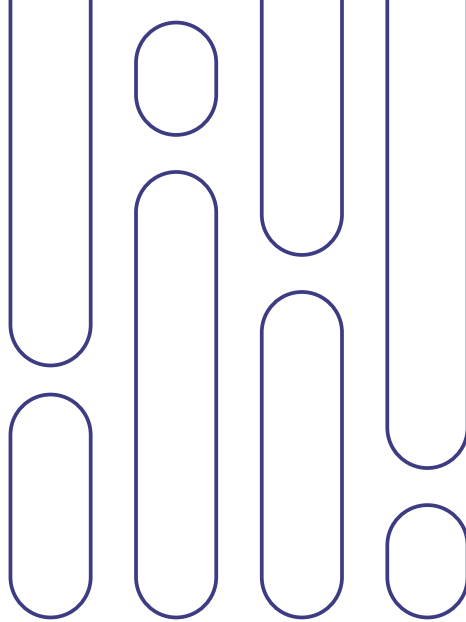
POSITION PAPER

The Consequences of Assassinating Hassan Nasrallah and the Future of the Dispute in the Middle East

September 30, 2024



RASANAHA
المعهد الدولي للدراسات الإيرانية
International Institute for Iranian Studies



CONTENTS

Introduction	3
First: The Consequences for Hezbollah and the Future of Lebanon	3
Second: Repercussions for the Militia in the Spheres of Influence	6
Third: Potential Iranian Responses to the Assassination of Nasrallah	9
Fourth: The Impact of Nasrallah’s Assassination on the Future of the Ideological and Doctrinal Cohesion of the Party’s Affiliated Fighters	11
Fifth: Potential Scenarios Regarding the Dispute in the Middle East	15

Introduction

In a significant development exposing Hezbollah's vulnerabilities to Israel, the Israeli military announced on September 27, 2024, the killing of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, along with senior party figures Ali Karaki, Ibrahim Aqil, and several other mid-level leaders. Also reported killed was Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan, assistant commander-in-chief of operations for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), during a series of airstrikes targeting Hezbollah's underground headquarters in Beirut's southern suburb. Although Hezbollah did not immediately confirm Nasrallah's death, several indicators pointed toward his assassination. Iranian officials hinted at the availability of successors for key leaders within the "Axis of Resistance," stressing that the party's strength was not reliant upon any single individual. Additionally, Hezbollah leaders admitted that they had lost communication with Nasrallah, further fueling speculation. The incident raises pressing questions about Hezbollah's future in Lebanon without Nasrallah, the potential impact on Iran-aligned militias across the region, and Iran's strategic response. These developments could significantly influence the broader trajectory of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, suggesting several possible scenarios as regional tensions escalate.

First: The Consequences for Hezbollah and the Future of Lebanon

The assassination of Nasrallah marks a crucial turning point, not only because of his central role within Hezbollah, but also due to his significant influence in both Lebanese and Iranian affairs. Nasrallah was regarded as one of the most prominent figures shaping Iran's regional policy, both within Lebanon and across the broader Middle East. His death is likely to have profound implications, potentially reshaping political dynamics in Lebanon and affecting Iran's strategic influence in the region.

1- Nasrallah and His Pivotal Role in Hezbollah

After more than three decades of leading Hezbollah, Nasrallah succeeded in transforming the group into a formidable political and military force in Lebanon, effectively establishing a “state within a state.” Under his leadership, Hezbollah built a parallel system of social services that rivaled the Lebanese government’s, which the party had long sought to undermine. Regionally, Nasrallah became a key figure, particularly in confronting Israel and managing the Syrian conflict on behalf of Iran. Despite these achievements, he faced significant challenges, including internal Lebanese tensions following the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the 2022 Beirut port explosions.

Since October 2023, Hezbollah has encountered one of its most significant challenges, facing both internal and external pressure over its reluctance to open a front against Israel to alleviate the strain on Hamas in Gaza. The group suffered losses after months of cross-border skirmishes and Israeli strikes targeting high-ranking officials within the movement. This situation was exacerbated by Hezbollah’s close ties to Iran, which had opted for a policy of restraint in response to Israeli acts of escalation, including the assassinations of key figures like Ismail Haniyeh and Fouad Shukr. Furthermore, Hezbollah’s failure to deploy its stockpiled missiles, many of which were either destroyed in Israeli strikes or became unusable due to security leaks and Israeli surveillance, turned what was once seen as a strategic asset into a vulnerability. The party’s security lapses, highlighted by the leakage of sensitive information, allowed Israel to take the initiative, culminating in the assassination of Hezbollah’s leader, Nasrallah.

2- Consequences for the Party

The death of Nasrallah marks a critical turning point for Hezbollah, particularly in light of the sudden dismantling of its lead-

ership structure. With the loss of many key figures, the organization finds itself at its most vulnerable, entering a period of operational and moral disarray. Israel's successful penetration of Hezbollah's command and communication networks further compounds this disarray. The breakdown in leadership and coordination will likely have swift and profound consequences, especially if Israel follows up with a ground invasion. Such a scenario would demand a robust command system, which Hezbollah may not be able to re-establish in time to address the rapidly unfolding developments.

Replacing Nasrallah presents an extraordinary challenge for Hezbollah, particularly following Israel's successful targeting of the group's leadership structure. Nasrallah's long tenure and leadership have been pivotal in maintaining Hezbollah's unity, and his successor will face numerous obstacles. The new leader must swiftly establish authority within the organization, navigate Lebanon's complex internal political landscape, and manage relations with regional allies. Additionally, he will be tasked with addressing ongoing military threats from Israel, all while trying to preserve the party's cohesion in the face of external pressures and leadership instability.

3- Consequences for Lebanon

The death of Nasrallah is likely to have significant repercussions on Lebanon, where Hezbollah plays a key role in both political and military affairs. The disarray within Hezbollah's ranks could lead to political instability in the country. A central challenge will be how Iran manages the Lebanese political landscape after losing one of its most crucial figures of influence. Nasrallah played a central role in balancing Iranian interests and alliances within Lebanon's political framework. In his absence, Tehran may seek to build new alliances, either by strengthening ties with other Shiite factions or even forging connections with non-Shiite groups.

Second: Repercussions for the Militia in the Spheres of Influence

Nasrallah's assassination is expected to significantly affect the performance of other Iran-aligned militias across various spheres of influence in their ongoing war with Israel. Israel's ability to strategically target and eliminate Hezbollah's leadership sends a threatening message to these militias, demonstrating that Israel can extend its reach to any of them. By successfully executing its strategy against Hezbollah — often regarded by Iran as its “crown jewel” or its primary force in the Middle East — Israel showcases its capacity to similarly expose and dismantle other Iran-aligned groups. This exposure is marked by several critical factors, which reveal the extent of Israel's operational success — as follows:

- 1- By detonating a large number of pagers and wireless devices that were in the possession of key Hezbollah figures, reflecting significant intelligence and operational infiltration.
- 2- The successful execution of Israel's carefully planned assassination of senior Hezbollah leaders, culminating in the killing of Nasrallah, highlights Israel's ability to dismantle the party's leadership and future. Israel's announcement of the assassination's success before Hezbollah confirmed Israel's unrivalled strength against pro-Iran militias. The silence surrounding Nasrallah's death mirrors Iran's similar response after the killing of former President Ebrahim Raisi.
- 3- Reports from Israeli and Western media indicate that Israeli airstrikes on Hezbollah's stronghold in the southern suburbs of Beirut destroyed half of the group's missile capabilities, delivering a critical blow to its military strength.
- 4- Israel's monitoring of Hezbollah's internal meetings in the southern suburbs showcases the party's strategic weaknesses, exposing it to Iran's longstanding influence and Is-

rael's ability to surveil its activities.

- 5- By striking at Hezbollah's strategic strongholds, Israel has severely disrupted the party's decision-making process. This has been compounded by Hezbollah's weak public statements and its evident reliance on Iranian approval for any military moves, further weakening its position.
- 6- Israel's penetration of the Rafik Hariri International Airport control tower, where it warned an Iranian plane not to land in Lebanese airspace or face military action, highlights its intention to sever potential Iranian supply lines to Hezbollah.
- 7- The invalidation of Iran's "forward defense" doctrine, once used to challenge its adversaries, marks a significant shift in regional dynamics. Israel's strikes within Iran have rendered this doctrine obsolete, further weakening Iran's ability to project power through Hezbollah.

The assassination of one of Iran's most influential leaders, Nasrallah, is likely to influence the strategic decisions and calculations of other armed militias aligned with Iran, particularly those in Iraq and Syria. These militias, which are considered the weaker links in Iran's regional network, may reassess their actions following Israel's successful strike against Hezbollah, the strongest element within what Iran refers to as the Axis of Resistance. If Israel can decisively target Hezbollah's leadership and capabilities, this demonstrates its ability to reach beyond Lebanon, threatening militias in Syria and Iraq, and even extending into Iran itself, as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu indicated in his [speech at the United Nations General Assembly](#). Israel's demonstrated capacity to neutralize Iran's responses may deter Iraqi militias from carrying out further limited strikes against Israel.

The assassination of Nasrallah is not expected to significantly impact the Houthis in Yemen regarding their stance or actions against Israel. The Houthis are likely to maintain their attacks

on Israel and international trade vessels, driven by a desire to enhance their own visibility and influence within the Middle East, often positioning themselves in competition with Hezbollah. Their situation is distinct compared to other regional factions, largely due to their geographical location, which grants them the capability to affect international trade routes. Additionally, the historical context plays a vital role in shaping their strategic decisions, particularly concerning Yemen.

Regarding the repercussions of Nasrallah's assassination on Hamas and the conflict in Gaza, it is unlikely to significantly alter Hamas's decisions in response to Israeli demands to cease hostilities in the devastated strip. However, the incident serves as a stark reminder to Hamas leaders that Israel has the capability to target its leadership. Hamas's approach to managing the conflict with Israel appears to be more adept and independent compared to Hezbollah, which often relies on directives from Iran. This independence is particularly relevant concerning the ongoing siege of the strip and the broader context of Israeli occupation. Notably, Israel has managed to eliminate a considerable number of Hezbollah leaders in a short span of time, given the latter's significant capabilities. In contrast, Israel has struggled to eliminate Hamas's senior leaders throughout the year, despite having control over the entire strip.

Regardless of the implications of Nasrallah's assassination, which represents a significant blow to Iran and the broader Axis of Resistance, its repercussions extend much further. Israel is utilizing this event to establish new dynamics in the Middle East conflict, demonstrating its capability to deter and dismantle militias before they consider engaging in war with Israel. The situation with Hezbollah exemplifies this strategy, showcasing Israel's ability to neutralize potential threats proactively. Through this action, Tel Aviv is sending a potent message: it can impose a new reality through force across the region. Under Netanyahu's leadership, the Israeli government is likely to con-

tinue escalating its operations as long as such strategies yield visible successes. This approach not only boosts Netanyahu's standing domestically but also empowers him to further escalate tensions and redefine traditional red lines to favor Israel. For Iran, which has recently emphasized a narrative of strength, resilience and support for the Palestinian cause, the landscape has shifted dramatically. Israel's ability to expose Iranian weaknesses and conduct successful strikes both domestically and internationally challenges Iran's position. This has been compounded by Iranian officials' acknowledgment of Hezbollah's difficulties in confronting Israel, further emboldening Israeli actions. As a result, there is an emerging recognition within Israel of the need to establish new equations that will shape the future of regional dynamics and conflicts.

Third: Potential Iranian Responses to the Assassination of Nasrallah

Regarding potential Iranian reactions to the assassination of Nasrallah, two trajectories can be identified:

- 1- Escalation:** The importance of Hezbollah in Iran's regional strategy may lead Tehran to authorize a significant escalation involving Hezbollah and other militias in Iraq and Lebanon. This initial phase could aim to prompt Israel to reassess its ongoing military actions by inflicting substantial losses on Israeli forces, potentially leading to a ceasefire or a halt in hostilities with Hezbollah. Such an escalation might not necessarily translate into a broader cessation of violence in Gaza, particularly if it does not revert to the pre-escalation engagement rules. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's recent statements, suggesting that Lebanon will make Israel regret its actions and asserting that the fate of the region lies with resistance forces led by Hezbollah, underscore Iran's intent to foster an environment of indirect escalation. He downplayed the impact

of the Israeli strikes on Hezbollah, contrasting these with the impact on Hamas, and criticized Israel for not learning from its experiences in Gaza. This rhetoric reflects Iran's historical approach of using proxy forces to achieve strategic gains while minimizing direct confrontation. However, Israel's tactics have shifted since the onset of the conflict in October, targeting Iran as the primary orchestrator of regional unrest. This shift may account for reports indicating preparations within Iran for a potential Israeli strike.

2- Hibernation: Iran's inability to respond effectively to the assassination of Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran highlights the failure of the deterrence strategy that Iran sought to establish by executing formal strikes against Israel in retaliation for the deaths of Quds Force leaders in Damascus. Iranian officials characterized their apparent "tactical retreat" as a conscious choice to avoid being drawn into a broader conflict with the United States, acknowledging that a direct attack on Israel would provoke a significant US response. This Iranian assessment holds some validity, as the United States has consistently shown a pattern of supporting Israel through military, financial and diplomatic means while publicly criticizing certain Israeli actions. Despite rhetoric suggesting otherwise, the United States has not curtailed its backing of Israel in the face of escalating tensions. Against this backdrop, Iran is likely to maintain its strategy of "strategic patience," a term used to describe its current passive stance aimed at preserving the ruling establishment amidst internal challenges and fragile external alliances. Engaging in a comprehensive military confrontation appears unlikely unless Iran faces an existential threat. This situation may prompt Iran to explore diplomatic avenues with Western powers, particularly the United States, as it seeks to navigate its position amid mounting pressures. The Iranian leadership's

narrative, particularly that of Khamenei, downplaying the significance of Israeli strikes against Hezbollah and portraying these as insignificant, serves primarily as domestic propaganda, aimed at sustaining morale and unity within Iran.

Fourth: The Impact of Nasrallah's Assassination on the Future of the Ideological and Doctrinal Cohesion of the Party's Affiliated Fighters

Hezbollah is fundamentally an ideological party, engaging in a war driven by ideological motivations. Its members are deeply influenced by the theory of the Guardianship of the Jurist, pledging allegiance to the Iranian supreme leader. While there may be personal and emotional ties between the party's members and Nasrallah, the highest loyalty among them rests with Iran's guardian jurist, whom they emulate in both jurisprudential and political matters.

The assassination of Nasrallah will likely have a temporary impact on party members and internal communications, particularly given the broader context of recent assassinations targeting key figures within the party. This situation has disrupted the intellectual and military framework that Hezbollah has established over time. However, the party's internal dynamics are expected to be reorganized under Iranian oversight, reinforcing its role as an extension of the supreme leader, supported by Iranian funding and revolutionary ideology. The current crisis facing Hezbollah is inherently linked to the crises within Iran itself. Recent events, such as the assassination of its military leaders in Damascus, a tepid response involving drone strikes inside Israel, and the death of President Raisi in a helicopter crash, have compounded the leadership challenges in Iran. Raisi represented a continuation of Khomeini and Khamenei's ideological legacy, promoting a culture of obedience and resistance against the West. In light of this, Nasrallah's leadership

vacuum could lead to a significant crisis for Hezbollah. Even if a new leader is appointed quickly, they are unlikely to fill the void left by Nasrallah due to his unique personality, long tenure and the fragility of Hezbollah's current standing following recent setbacks and losses among its first-ranking and second-ranking commanders.

An important observation regarding the intellectual framework of Hezbollah members is the significant shift that occurred after the party intervened in the Syrian conflict to support Bashar al-Assad's regime. This intervention, framed by the party's ideology as part of "resistance" and "jihad," led to a sense among some members that they were acting more like mercenaries, serving Iranian interests rather than their own foundational cause. Hezbollah's alignment with the Baath Party — traditionally viewed as infidels in Iranian discourse, particularly the Iraqi branch — has complicated the party's identity. This pragmatic cooperation, especially with the Syrian Baath, has led many members to feel detached from the original mission of opposing the "Zionist enemy." Instead of being defenders of a cause, they began to perceive themselves as fighters engaged in conflicts dictated by Iranian strategic interests. This ideological shift has opened the door to not only intellectual but also operational vulnerabilities within Hezbollah. The resulting internal dynamics have allowed for espionage penetration, which has reached leadership levels. This is evidenced by the targeting of senior leaders in the party, indicating that external actors, particularly Israel, have identified and exploited these weaknesses in their operations against Hezbollah.

The Succession Crisis and the Major Candidates to Succeed Nasrallah

The party is currently facing a significant crisis following the official announcement of Nasrallah's assassination during an Israeli raid. This crisis centers on the challenge of identifying

a suitable successor. Several factors complicate this process, particularly the elimination of many key first and second-tier leaders, such as Fouad Shukr, Ibrahim Aqil and Ali Karaki, in Israeli strikes. The succession process within Hezbollah is also of significance. While there may not be formal constitutional regulations akin to those governing the succession of the supreme leader in Iran, certain norms must be respected. Historically, leaders like Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi, Subhi al-Tufayli and Nasrallah were clerics who emerged from Shiite religious seminaries. This background is crucial, as Iran prefers that leaders of its affiliated factions be clerical figures or closely aligned with the religious community. This preference serves to maintain a connection between the supreme leader — who is regarded as the ultimate jurist and *mujtahid* — and the broader Shiite incubators.

Thus, the pool of candidates is narrowed to include the following:

- **Sheikh Naim Qassem:** The current situation within Hezbollah is characterized by uncertainty regarding the leadership following the assassination of Nasrallah. The deputy secretary-general of the party is at the center of this turmoil, with conflicting reports about his status and potential succession. While he has temporarily assumed leadership as deputy secretary-general, his political, religious and rhetorical charisma do not match that of Nasrallah or Hashem Safi al-Din, another prominent figure in the party. There are indications that he may serve as a placeholder leader until the party's Shura Council convenes to elect a new secretary-general. This scenario sets the stage for a competitive dynamic between him and Hashem Safi al-Din, as both vie for influence and control within the party. The outcome of this leadership contest will be crucial in determining Hezbollah's future direction, especially in light of the significant challenges and pressures the organization faces following recent events. The Shura Council's decisions will

ultimately shape the party's ability to maintain cohesion and strategic focus during this critical juncture.

- **Hashem Safi al-Din:** The figure in question, born in 1964 in Tyre, Lebanon, is both Nasrallah's cousin and Qassem Soleimani's son-in-law, positioning him uniquely within the dynamics of Hezbollah. Since 1994, he has been groomed for leadership, indicating a longstanding connection to both the party and Iranian interests. His close ties to the Quds Force and Tehran's ruling elite highlight his significance in the organization's strategic framework. Safi al-Din's experience in various roles — political, financial, social, and organizational — has made him an integral player within Hezbollah. His education in Iran allowed him to forge strong relationships with the Iranian leadership, particularly within the IRGC, which further solidified his role as a key liaison between Hezbollah and Iran. Recent Israeli intelligence reports suggest that he has effectively assumed Nasrallah's responsibilities, indicating a shift in internal decision-making within the party.

- **Subhi al-Tufayli:** The individual referenced is a former founder of Hezbollah and its earlier secretary general, who parted ways with the party in 1998, expressing opposition to the Guardianship of the Jurist and labeling it a Shiite heresy. Despite his split from the party, he maintains a base of acceptance and followers within Shiite communities, primarily due to his foundational role in Hezbollah during a time marked by increased armed operations against Israel. While his succession to Nasrallah seems unlikely, given that the selection process typically favors candidates within the party and the intricate dynamics of loyalty within Islamic organizations, there remains a possibility. Should Hezbollah seek to address its current challenges and undergo significant internal reforms, stepping away from strict Iranian influence and prioritizing national participation over dominance of political adversaries, this figure could emerge as a potential leader.

Fifth: Potential Scenarios Regarding the Dispute in the Middle East

Against the backdrop of the attack carried out by Israel through which it assassinated Nasrallah and other senior leaders, the region braces for multiple scenarios, including:

1- All-out Regional Tensions Broadening the Conflict's Scope

This scenario suggests that the recent Israeli operation could trigger a broader mobilization across various conflict zones, including Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Gaza. In response to Israel's actions, it is anticipated that operations will intensify as groups retaliate, potentially escalating the conflict. Israel, possibly with support from the United States and European nations, may respond not only within these areas but also extend its actions to Iran itself. This escalation could lead the region into an unbounded phase of conflict and confrontation, further destabilizing the region and jeopardizing crucial maritime routes and trade, particularly through vital straits and shipping lines. If Iran faces direct military action, tensions could heighten in the Arabian Gulf, sparking a popular movements in certain Arab nations against Israel's actions in Gaza. There is a growing apprehension regarding Israel's emergence as a dominant regional power, as recently articulated by Netanyahu. Moreover, this conflict may present an opportunity for major powers like China and Russia to step in, aiming to capitalize on the evolving situation to diminish US influence both regionally and globally. This scenario is underscored by the fact that, despite the recent Israeli strike representing an unprecedented escalation impacting a crucial front in the confrontation with Hezbollah, it follows earlier extensive assaults targeting the leadership of party and impairing some of its key military capabilities. Historically, military assassinations have not effectively resolved conflicts,

particularly against popular armed groups engaged in asymmetric warfare. Unlike conventional armies, groups like Hezbollah operate with a more horizontal leadership structure, allowing them to quickly regroup and restore their operational capabilities. In fact, the assassination of prominent figures often serves to galvanize further mobilization and enhance the resolve of their supporters. Moreover, this assassination could signal a shift in strategy across various conflict zones, indicating that groups can no longer afford to rely solely on measured responses to Israeli actions. Instead, they may feel compelled to impose a new reality in the conflict to deter further aggression. Iran may find itself reassessing its responses, as well as those of its allied groups, in light of these developments. The failure to re-establish a credible deterrent against Israel could jeopardize Iran's influence in the region, compromising its armed factions and undermining leadership structures that have been carefully cultivated over decades. Additionally, Russia and China may interpret Israel's recent actions as indicative of unwavering US dominance in the region. This perception could motivate them to covertly exacerbate the conflict to challenge US influence, especially since Russia seeks to leverage Middle East tensions to alleviate pressures on its Ukrainian front. Similarly, China aims to demonstrate the weaknesses of the international system dominated by Washington, as part of its broader strategy to reshape global dynamics.

2- Israel Bolstering Its Deterrence Force as the Region Prepares for the Post-Gaza War Period

This suggests that Israel may effectively deter all armed groups and establish a new status quo in the conflict. By continuing its targeted operations against sites and leaders, Israel aims to minimize threats from multiple fronts and potentially initiate the post-war phase in Gaza. Such developments would indicate a decisive Israeli victory over its adversaries, facilitating the im-

plementation of the Israeli right's agenda to reshape the reality in the occupied territories, including both Gaza and the West Bank. This reality would entail the complete absence of any acknowledgment or recognition of a Palestinian state. Moreover, Israel's strategy may involve imposing a new regional order that underscores its overwhelming superiority. This could lead to new arrangements in Southern Lebanon, reminiscent of the dynamics seen in the 1980s. To achieve these objectives, Israel may undertake a ground operation in Southern Lebanon, developed in coordination with the United States and the UK. This broader strategic framework would likely target not only Hezbollah but also the Houthis and various factions operating in Iraq and Syria.

This scenario underscores Israel's view that the ongoing battle is critical, leaving no room for half-measures or merely relying on airstrikes while allowing military power to remain with "resistance" groups. Israel perceives a unique opportunity to elevate its regional victories to a new level, akin to the significant shifts seen during the establishment of the state in 1948, the outcomes of the 1967 war, and the October War.

The evident military and intelligence superiority that Israel has established, coupled with a rapid turnaround in deterrence dynamics involving Iran and Hezbollah, further bolsters this perspective. Targeting Hezbollah and its leadership may have significantly hampered Iran's ability to effectively utilize this front. There is also potential for Iran to reassess its support for the concept of "unity of the battlefields." Moreover, US assessments align with Israel's, viewing the conflict as a chance to reshape the regional landscape and rectify past missteps in US foreign policy. This moment presents an opportunity to bolster deterrence against Iran, curtail its regional sway, and potentially facilitate Israel's integration into broader frameworks of peace and cooperation. Certain regional powers may identify opportunities for strategic gains amid these developments, particularly those op-

posed to Iran and Hezbollah. In light of these threats, Iran may contemplate a temporary de-escalation to safeguard the ruling establishment's stability, especially if there are concerns that Israeli operations could extend to targeting its leadership directly. This tactical retreat could be a strategic move to avoid severe losses that might jeopardize the ruling elite's survival.

3- A Region-wide, Protracted War of Attrition

This scenario suggests that the armed factions, facing Israeli superiority and US support, may struggle to deliver a strong response that sends a deterrent message to Israel. Consequently, they might opt to take a step back to reorganize and consolidate their ranks, while still attempting to carry out attritional strikes across various fronts to prevent Israel from achieving a decisive victory.

Within this context, Israel could potentially reduce its current escalation efforts and be satisfied with the symbolic impact of eliminating key figures like Nasrallah and other party leaders. The attrition strategy might involve ongoing limited strikes from Southern Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, possibly backed by support from Yemen, yet these operations would be conducted carefully to avoid provoking further escalation. The factions recognize that failure to respond to Israeli aggression could lead to a loss of credibility, as not retaliating may be interpreted as defeat. While Iran may be reluctant to escalate the situation comprehensively, it is unlikely to accept complete surrender, opting instead for a limited, calculated approach to escalation that avoids full-scale confrontation. On Israel's side, sustaining the current level of escalation might prove challenging, as it could strain resources and damage its global image. Additionally, with elections on the horizon, the United States may also favor a cooling of tensions to mitigate the ongoing escalation. Moreover, many regional countries are viewing the unfolding situation with concern. Despite existing rivalries, there is a shared appre-

hension about regional escalation and instability, as these developments do not serve the interests of the countries involved. Any Israeli initiatives would likely raise significant questions and reservations, particularly since these nations are hesitant to become entangled in alliances that could trigger a regional cold war.

