

Anticipation of the Damned |

Islamic Republic's Leadership Awaits Israel's Reaction

By Dr. John Bruni, Founder & CEO of Adelaide-based geopolitical think-tank & consultancy – SAGE International

As we await news of Israel's strike against Iran for its brazen [1 October](#) missile barrage against the Jewish state, we can only wonder what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has in mind.

Media [speculation](#) abounds with stories of possible massive Israeli retaliation, targeting the Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI's) [military apparatus](#), inclusive of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) bases and oil installations. Possibly a strike on Iran's key oil facility at [Kharg Island](#); and finally, and perhaps most controversially, Iran's nuclear facilities, which, despite media reporting and erroneous public speculations, has [no acknowledged](#) nuclear weapons program.

Of course, Israel could opt not to retaliate against Iran for the greater good of international stability. However, that would require a different prime minister than Israel's current one, 'Bibi' Netanyahu. Netanyahu has committed his country to the [elimination](#) of Iran's '[Axis](#)' [allies/proxies](#). Currently, a year after Netanyahu's retribution war against Hamas which began after the Palestinian group's 7 October attack, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is still fighting the hold-out Palestinian group in what increasingly is seen as a '[whack-a-mole campaign](#).' The hostages that Hamas had taken on the 7 October attack have not been released, [at least half](#) of whom had been killed by Hamas or through Israeli military action.

Capitalising on an [enfeebled](#) Biden administration, Netanyahu [ordered](#) the IDF to destroy as much of the southern Lebanese Shiite group, Hezbollah as it could. A series of strikes in Lebanon and Syria took out Hezbollah and IRGC commanders there. Further strikes decapitated Hezbollah's senior leadership cadre. More strikes have since destroyed a

good deal of known Hezbollah arms caches and rocket launch sites. And, Israeli intelligence physically hobbled the group with its covert [booby-trapping](#) of pagers and walkie-talkies, severely injuring hundreds of Hezbollah fighters, many rendered incapable of combat.

Numerous international defence and security scholars long believed Hezbollah to be the IRI's '[queen](#)' on the Middle East chess board.

Unlike Hamas, which is Arab AND Sunni and, therefore, according to some analysts, expendable, Hezbollah is [Arab AND Shiite](#). This made Hezbollah a more natural and useful ally/proxy than Hamas for the Shiite Iranians.

The IRGC spent a great deal of resources to up-arm and train Hezbollah fighters over the years. US [official estimates](#) have suggested that Iran provided as much as USD100-700 million per annum to the Lebanese group. Iran has provided Hezbollah with rockets, missiles and drones, weapons that were advanced by Iranian standards, but nowhere near the technological capacities of Israel. Nonetheless, Iranian weapons did not have to be as sophisticated as those of Israel. These comparatively cheaper

and less advanced systems provided what Hezbollah needed to strike at the very heart of Israel at a cost it could afford.

What was Iran's return on investment (ROI)?

Iran's ROI was gaining an allied group of coreligionists that shared a border with northern Israel. Hezbollah's alignment with Tehran gave Iran, a country some 1,600kms away from Israel, an ability to threaten the use of Hezbollah's growing arsenal against it.

However, there was one major caveat that slipped the observation of many.

That Hezbollah was primarily a Lebanese *political* group.

Former Hezbollah leader [Hassan Nasrallah](#) was no mere Iranian puppet in the pay of the IRGC. He represented his Shiite constituents, and Hezbollah ran a parallel state within the state of Lebanon, which had grown increasingly divided and dysfunctional due to the malignant nature of local corruption and sectarianism.

But with Netanyahu's campaign to eliminate Hamas from the Gaza Strip, Nasrallah made his [fateful decision](#) to 'support' the Palestinian group.

For months before Nasrallah's death, the IDF and Hezbollah traded strikes.

Both sides were restrained in their actions. Nonetheless, Israel evacuated some [60,000 citizens](#) from its northern border as Hezbollah's missile and rocket attacks mainly affected this relatively small part of the country.

However, it was not long before Netanyahu's war cabinet decided that since the Hamas main force in Gaza had been 'taken care of,' permanently ridding the threat posed by Hezbollah to Israel's north would further secure the Jewish state. When news of the pager and walkie-talkie attacks became known, media headlines extolled the daring do of the Israeli intelligence services.

The seemingly 'easy' elimination of Hamas and Hezbollah leadership figures suggested strongly that both groups were entirely and utterly penetrated by Israeli intelligence, which raises two significant and controversial questions that no one seems to want to ask.

- Was this the same Israeli intelligence establishment responsible for the failure to detect and prevent Hamas movements on 7 October 2023?
- Were Hamas and Hezbollah the 'existential' threats Netanyahu

and his supporters claimed them to be?

Soon, we will know whether Netanyahu will throw the dice in what could be his most audacious military move – striking the heart of the beast – Iran.

According to Netanyahu and his supporters, it is Iran and its IRGC that sit behind every anti-Israeli move in the Middle East. It is the Islamic Republic that actively supports anti-Israeli non-state actors like Hamas and Hezbollah and even the distant [Houthis of Yemen](#). The Houthis are currently firing the occasional missile or drone towards Israel and threatening international shipping passing the Bab El Mandeb into the Red Sea.

The theory goes that if the IDF strike is big enough, targeting military, economic and nuclear sites, the pain of the loss of these assets would make governing Iran impossible for the theocracy — the end game for Tel Aviv — regime change. The Iranian people might be [tired](#) of the strictures of living under theocratic rule and the poverty this has forced on them. Still, they are unable to organise a putsch against the Ayatollahs. A significant IDF nudge might tip Iranian

opposition groups into concerted and sustained anti-government action.

However, the United States tried regime change in the Middle East before. Next door to Iran, in fact, in a little place called Iraq. It didn't work out too well for Iraqis, who were forced to swap the imperfect and difficult-to-bear stability of the Hussein regime for chaos, civil war and Iranian penetration under the American-led Coalition occupation.

The threat of far greater chaos from regime change in Iran might curtail Netanyahu from undertaking this course. But, in an environment of revenge and violence that the West doesn't understand or want a part of, can discipline be maintained by Israel?

It holds all the cards. Its military is supreme, and its knowledge of 'the enemy' ranged against it, intimate. With such an advantage and with Iranian allies/proxies no longer posing the threats they allegedly once did, Iran's deterrence and strategic influence has been severely limited. Now the worst possible outcome for international order and stability might well come to pass as Netanyahu decides to reorder Israel's periphery by force.

*Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of
SAGE International*
