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Sunday, Sep 29, 2024

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# After Nasrallah's killing: seven takeaways from Israel's attack on Hezbollah chief

Here's how Nasrallah's assassination will likely impact the region, the world, and India.

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New Delhi | Updated: September 29, 2024 08:42 IST



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Families in Beirut's Martyrs' Square after fleeing the Israeli airstrikes, on Saturday. AP

Hasan Nasrallah, leader of the Shiite militant group Hezbollah, has been killed in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut. As Israel's government celebrates what Defence Minister Yoav Gallant described as one of the most important "countermeasures" in the country's history, and Hezbollah and Hamas mourned, here's how Nasrallah's assassination will likely impact the region, the world, and India.

### **A seismic episode, in its context potentially as big as the killing of Osama bin Laden**

Nasrallah, 64, had been Hezbollah's feared leader for the last three decades. His killing by the Israeli military is viewed as a seismic moment — something similar, with contextual differences, to the killing of al Qaeda's leader Osama bin Laden by US Navy SEALs in Pakistan.

Nasrallah, who became the leader of Hezbollah in 1992 after his predecessor Abbas al-Musawi was assassinated in an Israeli helicopter strike, had escaped several attempts on his life in the past. The Israelis had been aware of his whereabouts for some time, and had decided to strike now because they feared he would move to a different location soon, The New York Times reported.

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Under Nasrallah's leadership, Hezbollah fighters had forced Israel to withdraw from Lebanon at the end of the wars of 2000 and 2006. After the October 7, 2023 attacks by the Palestinian militant group Hamas in southern Israel, Nasrallah had harassed Israel in the north, which led to the evacuation of about 63,000 Israelis from near the country's border with Lebanon.

Hezbollah under Nasrallah has been by far the most powerful of the armed groups opposing Israel. His killing has ended one of the most serious military threats to the Jewish nation.

**Over the past 10 days, Israel has taken out the bulk of Hezbollah's senior leadership**

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Less than two weeks ago, targeted pager and walkie-talkie blasts had killed or seriously injured a very large number of senior Hezbollah leaders. Israel had attacked about 3,500 Hezbollah members — the middle-to-senior-level leadership of the group that it views as a terrorist organisation.

These leaders, who were in positions akin to the ranks of Colonel to General, communicated securely through pagers and walkie-talkies, and were most likely those with the ability to take decisions and to organise the group for retaliatory strikes and to pre-empt threats from Israel.

unable to mount a counter-attack after Israel began aerial strikes in southern Lebanon and Beirut. The command and control structure would have been impacted significantly, leading to a vacuum of decision-making, security gaps and intelligence-sharing within Hezbollah.

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This likely exposed the coordinates and locational details of Nasrallah, the top leadership of the Radwan force, and other commanders of the group.

### **Hezbollah is the strongest of the Iran-backed 'Axis of Resistance'; Nasrallah's killing is a power moment for Israel.**

The Axis of Resistance is Iran's term for the groups targeting Israel — Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis in Yemen. Hezbollah, the most powerful of these Iranian proxies, has launched more than 8,000 rockets at northern Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights since the terrorist attacks by Hamas last year, fired anti-tank missiles at armoured vehicles, and attacked military targets with explosive drones.

Nasrallah's assassination is the crowning moment of Israel's campaign against Hezbollah's leadership that began with the killing of Fuad Shukur in July. Israel has also killed the political head of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, and the military commander who planned the October 7 attacks, Mohammed Deif. Only Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar remains alive.

The Houthis are a relatively smaller group with limited capabilities focused mainly on targeting the international maritime traffic in the Red Sea.

### **The future of Hezbollah depends largely on the plans that Tehran has for the group.**

Hezbollah has suffered a debilitating setback, but much will depend on how Iran — its main backer and the arch rival of Israel — reacts now.

Following the killing of Nasrallah, Supreme Leader Imam Khamenei was quickly moved to a secure location. Haniyeh was killed in a government safe house in

Iran does not want to take any chances now.

For Hezbollah, which is said to have about 100,000 members in Lebanon who are backed, trained, and equipped by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, this is a moment to lie low and try to rearm and regroup.

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Whether Tehran continues to give it support and leadership, and helps to groom a new generation of leaders, will determine the future and direction of Hezbollah. The killing of Nasrallah is the biggest setback in its history, and survival will be its priority for now.

**This could be a significant moment for Lebanon as well.**

For decades, Hezbollah has been the most powerful entity in a country with chronically weak power structures. It is both a militant and a political group, with strongholds in Beirut and bases in the countryside, where it has built networks of tunnels and accumulated formidable military assets.

However, Hezbollah's once significant mass support — the product of its charitable activities as well as deep networks of propaganda — has dwindled since 2019, when it faced protests by masses of Lebanese people who saw the group as part of the country's corrupt and inefficient establishment.

While there were protests in the streets by people mourning Nasrallah on Saturday, his killing also presents an opportunity for Lebanon to loosen some of Hezbollah's iron grip on the country.

**Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar have a key role to play going forward.**

Whether Nasrallah's killing marks a point of dramatic escalation or a gradual lowering of temperatures in the West Asian crisis remains to be seen.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar will be watching to see how quickly the conflict can now be brought to an end. They will be looking at Iran's next move — whether



...aining down of tensions.

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One of the challenges will be to conclude the stalled hostage deal — there are 101 hostages in Hamas' captivity, some of whom are feared dead. Their return could signal an end of the conflict.



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**For India, an early return of peace in the region works best.**

Like its partners in West Asia, especially, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, New Delhi would want stability to return soon, so that they can go back to the connectivity initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, and work on the prosperity of the region and beyond.

New Delhi's concern since the beginning of the conflict has been the safety and security of the about 9 million Indians who live and work in the West Asian and the Gulf region. A wider conflict will jeopardise their safety and security.

The other concern from New Delhi's perspective has been energy security — since about two-thirds of India's needs for energy (both crude oil and natural gas) are served by the West Asian and Gulf region.



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New Delhi is watching its partners in Israel and Iran's next steps in the coming weeks — it had already issued security and travel advisories for Lebanon this week.