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Israel Eliminates the Hezbollah Leadership; Iran Launches Missile Strikes on Israel

The Israel Defence Force (IDF) on X (formerly Twitter) announced on 28 September that ‘Hassan Nasrallah will no longer be able to terrorise the world’. The killing of the head of Hezbollah in an air strike by the Israeli Air Force (IsAF) on a building in a Beirut neighbourhood was a dramatic re-affirmation of Israel’s long-held policy of targeted killing of terrorist leaderships. Before the strike on the building alleged to have been the headquarters of the Hezbollah in the Dahiya neighbourhood of Beirut, other senior Hezbollah commanders were also eliminated by the IDF in targeted air strikes. These included the head of Hezbollah’s Aerial Command, Muhammad Hussein Srour on 26 September, Commander of Hezbollah’s Missiles and Rockets Force, Ibrahim Muhammad Qabisi on 24 September, head of Hezbollah’s operations unit and Commander of elite Radwan Forces, Ibrahim Aqil on 20 September and Fuad Shukr, a high-ranking military commander of Hezbollah, on 30 July.

The IDF stated that these individuals were legitimate targets under international law as their actions were endangering the lives of Israeli civilians. The IDF charged that Hezbollah was a radical Shiite movement that used terrorism to advance its agenda which included the establishment of a jihadist republic in Lebanon and eliminating Israel through armed struggle. It noted that the organisation had in its possession more than 150,000 rockets, projectiles and cruise missiles – most of which were precision-guided, with ranges from 20 km to 700 km.



On 1 October, the IDF launched ‘Operation Northern Arrows’, which it termed a ‘limited, localised and targeted ground raid’ against Hezbollah targets and infrastructure in southern Lebanon. The IDF noted that Hezbollah infrastructure in these border villages posed an immediate threat to Israeli communities in northern Israel. It stated that the Israeli Air Force and IDF artillery were also supporting the ground forces with precise strikes on military targets. The IDF ground incursion into Lebanon was the first time since the 2006 34-day Israel-Hezbollah war that IDF troops entered the country. During that war, Hezbollah was able to score significant hits such as a strike on an Israeli warship (INS Hanit) in the Haifa port among other actions that enhanced the profile of the non-state armed group and led to the resignation of the head of the IDF during the war, Air Force General Dan Halutz, a few months after the war. Gen Halutz was only the second Air Force officer to have headed the IDF in its history.

Iran, meanwhile, launched more than 200 ballistic missiles against Israeli military targets on 1 October. Most of the missiles were intercepted while some of the missiles struck central and southern Israel. Some of the missiles impacted two Israeli air bases – Tel Nof in central Israel and Nevatim, in southern Israel. This was the second time that Iran directly launched missiles against Israel after more

than 300 missiles and drones were launched in April. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed that there would be an Israeli response to the Iranian strikes. The Chief of the IDF Lt Gen Herzi Halevi affirmed that the IDF “know[s] how to strike with precision and power... We have the capabilities to reach and strike any point in the Middle East”.

On the first anniversary of the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel, Gen Halevi stated that the IDF was in the “midst of a complex, multi-front war” and that many challenges lay ahead despite significant and extensive achievements. While acknowledging that the IDF “failed in its mission to protect the citizens of the State of Israel” on 7 October, Gen Halevi listed the return of the hostages as well as “returning civilians to their homes” as top priorities. CENTCOM Commander Gen Michael Kurilla also visited Israel on 7 October and reiterated the strength of the “ironclad military-to-military commitment” between CENTCOM and the IDF. 40 out of 1200 murdered people and 12 out of 251 hostages taken on 7 October were US citizens.

The IDF also upped its military action against the Houthi rebels in Yemen. On 29 September, the IsAF struck power plants and a seaport allegedly being used by the Houthis to transfer Iranian weapons to Hezbollah. The IDF charged that the Houthis have been operating ‘under the direction and funding of Iran, and in cooperation with Iraqi militias, to attack the State of Israel, undermine regional stability and disrupt global freedom of navigation’. The IDF affirmed that it was determined to ‘continue operating at any distance -near or far- against all threats to the citizens of the State of Israel’.

ASEAN and East Asia Summit 2024: Key Outcomes

The ASEAN Summit held in Vientiane, Laos (October 8-11) represents a pivotal moment in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) ongoing efforts to address significant regional and global challenges. The Summit underscored the essential themes of resilience and connectivity, reflecting ASEAN's intent to



adapt effectively to a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. The leaders from member states engaged in discussions aimed at reducing dependence on external networks by enhancing supply chain integration within the region.

Central to the summit was the acknowledgement of ASEAN's expanding role in the Indo-Pacific, a critical interconnection for global trade and political influence. ASEAN leaders reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the region, carefully navigating the complexities of South China Sea tensions and the broader U.S.-China competition. By positioning itself as a neutral party while simultaneously advocating for economic collaboration,

ASEAN aims to secure vital trade routes essential for regional prosperity. This balancing act underscores the urgency for ASEAN to assert its influence in discussions affecting the geopolitical landscape, reinforcing its centrality in promoting stability and dialogue among member states.

Moreover, sustainable agriculture emerged as a significant focus during the summit. Given the sector's critical importance to many ASEAN economies, leaders highlighted the urgent need for environmentally sustainable agricultural practices to ensure food security and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. With millions of people across the region relying on agriculture for their livelihoods, this emphasis on sustainability is vital. Concurrently, ASEAN leaders reiterated their commitment to environmental protection, advocating for adherence to international climate agreements and promoting green energy solutions. This commitment is especially pertinent considering Southeast Asia's vulnerability to climate-related challenges such as rising sea levels and extreme weather events.

In addition to these geopolitical and economic discussions, the summit showcased ASEAN's forward-looking approach to cooperation in emerging fields, particularly the digital economy and the green transition. Recognising the potential of the digital economy to drive growth, leaders stressed the importance of bridging the digital divide within the region to ensure equitable access to technology and resources. This is crucial for fostering inclusive growth across all member states and positioning ASEAN as a competitive player in the global economy. The integration of environmental sustainability into economic development plans was emphasised, with discussions on promoting green energy and reducing carbon emissions. This transition is essential not only for addressing climate change but also for ensuring that ASEAN remains competitive in a global market increasingly prioritising sustainability.

The summit culminated in the adoption of nearly 90 documents, reflecting a broad agenda encompassing economic cooperation, environmental protection, and regional integration. The volume of agreements underscores ASEAN's evolving role in shaping regional responses to global challenges, demonstrating its commitment to addressing both immediate and long-term issues facing member states.

Following the ASEAN Summit, the 19th East Asia Summit (EAS) further underscored ASEAN's critical role in promoting regional security and cooperation among key nations, including China, India, Japan, and the United States. The summit emphasised the need for multilateral cooperation to navigate an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape, particularly concerning ongoing conflicts like those in the South China Sea and the Korean peninsula. Leaders highlighted ASEAN's centrality in fostering stability and dialogue among member states to prevent misunderstandings and build trust. On the issue of the South China Sea, Southeast Asian leaders urged a swift agreement on a Code of Conduct (CoC) for the South China Sea, grounded in international law, particularly the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Rising

tensions between China, which claims most of the sea, and ASEAN members such as the Philippines have been challenged, with Philippine President Bongbong Marcos confronting Chinese Premier Li Qiang. Marcos emphasised that economic cooperation is tied to political security, calling for faster progress on the CoC. The U.S. also expressed concern over China's actions, pledging to uphold freedom of navigation.

Significantly, the summit addressed the situation in Myanmar, where ASEAN leaders called for concrete actions from both the military junta and opposition groups to cease violence and pursue diplomatic solutions. This marked the first in-person discussion with a senior junta representative in over three years, reflecting the ongoing challenges ASEAN faces in mediating the crisis since the military coup in February 2021. The summit served as an essential platform for affirming the commitment of ASEAN and its partners to address pressing issues affecting regional stability and security.

Six Nations Hold Joint Naval Exercise off the Philippines' Northern Luzon Island

The Philippines, the U.S. along with four other nations conducted a joint naval exercise from 7 October 2024 in the vicinity of Subic Bay which is on the west coast of the island of Luzon in the Philippines. The two weeks of maritime engagements were designed to enhance interoperability and strengthen security ties among regional partners. Called 'Sama Sama', which means 'together' or unity in Tagalog, the 2024 edition reflected not only the long-standing alliance in the region but a sustained commitment to enhancing regional collaboration. This bilateral exercise between the United States and the Philippines has grown into a multilateral and multiplatform operation, that brought together like-minded partners from across the Indo-Pacific, indicative of a collective commitment to stability and security in the region. The 2024 edition of the exercise apart from the Philippines and the U.S. included participants from Australia, Canada, France, and Japan.



'Sama Sama' 2024 is part of the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) series which is a multinational exercise series designed to enhance U.S. and partner navies' abilities to operate together in response to traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. This year marked the 30th iteration of CARAT, making it the U.S. Navy's oldest and longest continually-running exercise in South and Southeast Asia.

During the eighth edition of the 'Sama Sama', the participating navies engaged in specialised training across a wide range of disciplines, including medicine,

legal operations, engineering, logistics, and public affairs. Participating assets from the United States included the Navy's Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Howard (DDG 83), and a P-8A Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft. Personnel from the U.S. 7th Fleet; Command Task Forces (CTF) 76, 75 and 72; Command, Destroyer Squadron Seven (DESRON 7); and the Marine Corps Marine Rotational Force – Southeast Asia (MRF-SEA) were part of the joint exercise.

From the Philippines side, the Navy's BRP Jose Rizal (FF 150); BRP Waray (LC-288); BRP Nestor Reinoso (PC 380); along with Force Reconnaissance Group, Naval Special Operations Unit 2; and supporting units of medical and media team participated. The Royal Canadian Navy's assets included the Halifax-class frigate HMCS Vancouver (FFH 331) and a CH-148 Cyclone helicopter. Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force Shin Maywa US-2 amphibious aircraft and Kawasaki P-1 maritime patrol aircraft also participated in the joint naval exercise.

Working alongside naval vessels and maritime surveillance aircraft, the 2024 edition of 'Sama Sama' involved high-intensity drills focusing on anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, anti-air warfare, and maritime domain awareness. While the joint naval exercise was planned months in advance, coincidentally it took place a week after the Chinese People's Liberation Army conducted its military exercise in the South China Sea (SCS) from 30 September to 1 October. Rear Admiral Todd Camicata of the U.S. Navy told reporters that forging alliances with important allies has a "deterrent effect," although he clarified that the exercises were not directed against any particular nation but intended to build interoperability. This would help enhance the navies' abilities to operate together in response to traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

There is rising tension between the Philippines and China in the SCS on account of an increasing number of incidences at several disputed features in the region. China's coercive actions include the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) ramming their vessels into Filipino ships, harassing Filipino crew members by firing water cannons at them and a Chinese Navy missile boat using a military-grade laser at a Philippine aircraft. These incidents have raised concerns of a full-scale confrontation in the region. As a result, the Philippines has been participating in several multi-national drills and patrols to build resilience and deterrence against an aggressive China. Before the 'Sama Sama', on 28 September, the Philippines along with the United States, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, conducted joint military exercises in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the SCS.

Manila has also initiated an extensive enhancement of its infrastructure and military capabilities in response to China's aggression. For instance, Subic Bay in which the recent joint exercise was held is situated around 100 kilometres northwest of Manila Bay, near the disputed Scarborough Shoal. Given its strategic significance, the Philippines is considering developing a new naval base and a military station at Subic Bay to improve its capabilities for force projection and aerial reconnaissance in the SCS.