



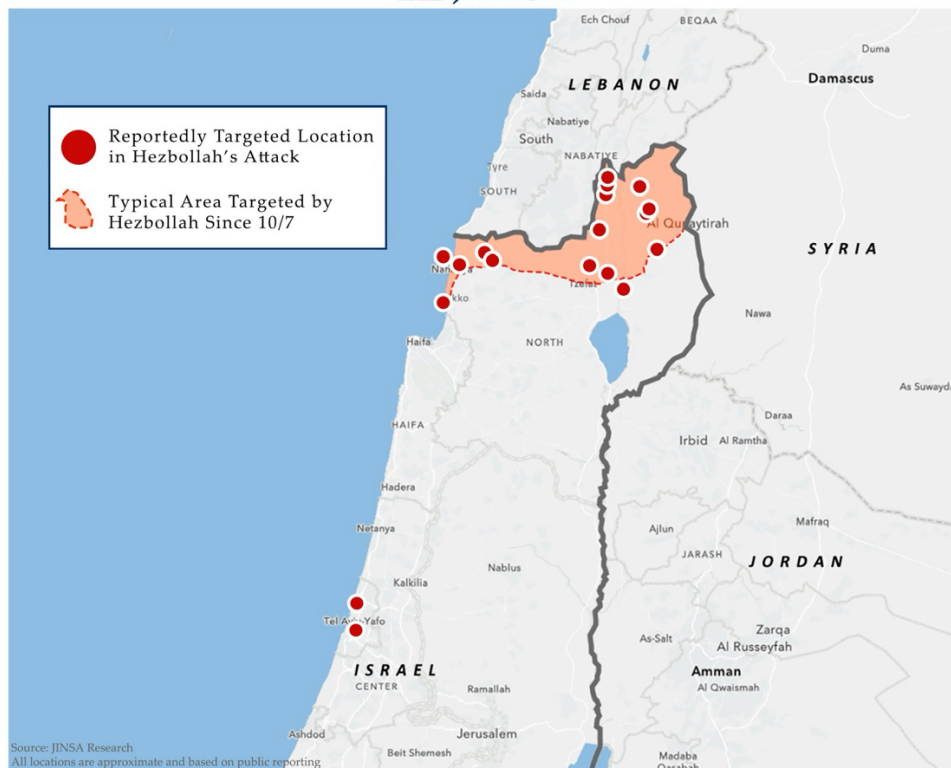
Israel Preempts Hezbollah Attack

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On August 25, Israel disrupted a planned, massive Hezbollah attack by preemptively striking and neutralizing roughly two-thirds of the projectiles that the terrorist group planned to launch from southern Lebanon. Hezbollah nevertheless managed to fire at least 230 rockets and 20 drones in retaliation for the Israeli strike that killed its most senior military commander, Fuad Shukr, on July 30.

Israel's preemptive strike combined with its successful air defenses marked substantial victories that strengthened its deterrence and signaled its ability to thwart a large attack from Hezbollah. That Hezbollah delayed its retaliatory strike for almost four weeks, that it limited its attack relative to the 4,000 rockets it is capable of launching daily, and that Iran chose to stay out of the fighting entirely all demonstrate the deterrent impact of close U.S.-Israeli coordination and the deployment of strong military forces to the Middle East. These factors also indicate that neither Hezbollah nor Iran want to escalate to a full-scale war at this moment. To deter further escalation, the United States should maintain its strong deployment of naval and air assets in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean regions and closely coordinate with Israel to help defend against further Hezbollah or Iran-linked attacks.

HEZBOLLAH'S AUGUST 25 ATTACK AGAINST ISRAEL



What Happened?

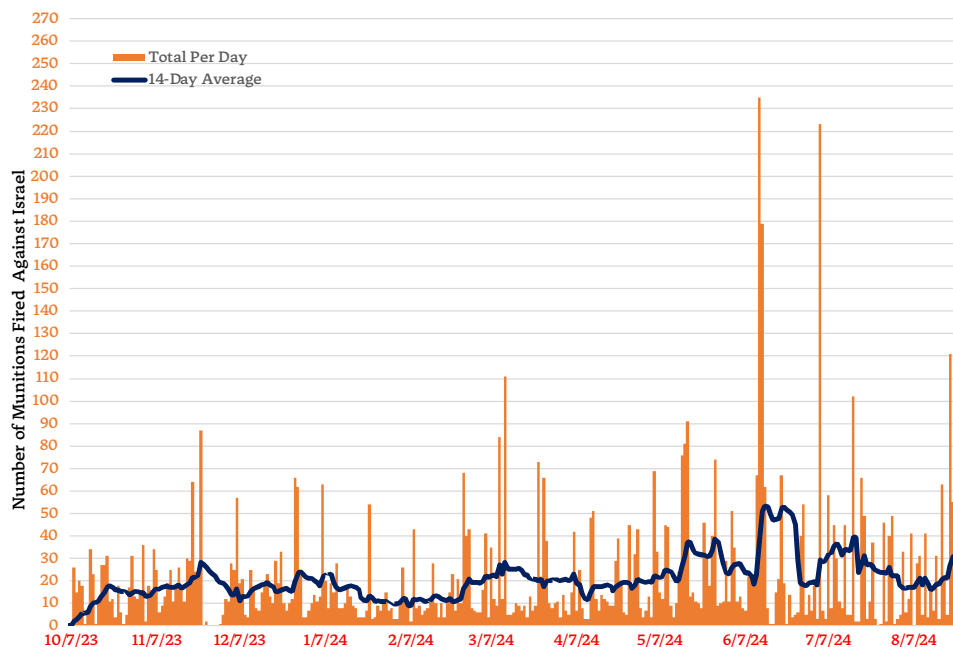
- On August 25, Israel preemptively struck long range rockets and missiles that Hezbollah was preparing to fire as part of its retaliation for the IDF strike that [killed](#) its most senior commander, Fuad Shukur, on July 30. Israel had targeted Shukur in response to a Hezbollah [rocket attack](#) on July 27 that killed 12 Druze children and teenagers in the Golan Heights town of Majdal Shams.
 - » The IDF [indicated](#) that “approximately 100 IAF fighter jets ... struck and destroyed thousands of Hezbollah rocket launcher barrels that were located and embedded in southern Lebanon” at “more than 40 launch areas in Lebanon.”
 - Israel destroyed two thirds of the projectiles that Hezbollah planned to launch, according to an [Israeli official](#) who spoke with CNN.
 - » Israel [chose targets](#) to limit collateral damage, hit launchers that were about to be used, and remove Hezbollah storage capabilities, according to IDF MG (ret.) Yaacov Ayish, JINSA’s Julian and Jenny Josephson Senior Vice President for Israeli Affairs.
 - » The Israeli [strikes](#) killed two individuals in the southern Lebanon village of At Tiri and a third person in the town of Khiyam. The Hezbollah-allied Amal movement also claimed that a strike killed one Hezbollah fighter in Khiyam, but it was unclear if that was the same individual.
- Shortly after Israel’s preemptive action, Hezbollah continued with its planned attack by [launching](#) over 230 rockets and at least 20 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) at locations in northern and central Israel, according to the IDF.
 - » Hezbollah claimed that it launched over 320 projectiles. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [indicated](#) that the group targeted 11 military sites in Israel, including the headquarters of the IDF Military Intelligence’s Unit 8200 and headquarters of the Mossad, although the locations of the strikes demonstrates that civilian locations were also targeted.
 - » Nasrallah stated that Hezbollah [launched](#) the large number of rockets to distract Israeli air defenses while the UAVs attacked elsewhere.
 - According to IDF MG (ret.) Amikam Norkin, a JINSA distinguished fellow, Hezbollah’s UAVs were the [critical platform](#) because of their “very accurate capabilities with a small airhead, and they aimed those drones towards the strategic targets.”
 - » Israel indicated that it intercepted all UAVs targeting central Israel, most rockets impacted in open areas, and that Israeli air defenses intercepted many of the rockets headed to populated areas.
 - » One Israeli Navy sailor, David Moshe Ben Shitrit, 21, was killed and two others were injured “either directly from an Iron Dome interceptor or from falling shrapnel from the interceptor that accidentally hit a Dvora-class fast patrol boat after [intercepting](#) a UAV,” according to an IDF official.
- The United States [helped](#) Israel track Hezbollah projectiles targeting Israel but did not participate in Israeli strikes in Lebanon.

Why Is It Important?

- The IDF's preemptive strikes and successful defense of the rockets and drones that Hezbollah did manage to fire marked a substantial victory for Israel. The lack of Iranian participation, despite nearly a month of threats to attack Israel directly, demonstrated the importance of the close U.S.-Israel cooperation and U.S. military deployments that took place both prior to and during the April 13-14 attack and in the last four weeks.
 - » As JINSA [anticipated](#) following the deaths of Shukr in Beirut and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, the response was limited and from Iran's proxies, not Iran itself.
- Israel's preemptive action and successful defense of the Hezbollah attack marked substantial successes that bolstered the credibility of Israeli intelligence, military capability to operate in Lebanon, and air defenses against Iran-backed attacks.
 - » After the failure of Israeli intelligence to warn about the October 7 attack, the ability to identify and quickly thwart the Hezbollah attack helped bolster Israel's credibility as the Middle East's most capable military and intelligence force.
 - » The IDF's preemptive strikes in Lebanon prevented Hezbollah from launching attacks against central Israel.
 - » Although Hezbollah launched its rockets and drones in waves to confuse Israeli air defenses, Israel was able to intercept the vast majority of incoming projectiles that threatened population centers.
- Even with Israel's preemptive strikes eliminating much of its planned attack package, Hezbollah's attack on August 25 was its largest since the war began. Its attempts to target central Israel demonstrated its willingness to escalate beyond the regular exchange of fire that has occurred since the war began.
 - » In the last four months, Hezbollah has launched over 3,640 projectiles at Israel from Lebanon, compared to roughly the same amount during the first seven months of the war, according to JINSA's [Iran Projectile Tracker](#). That amounts to a 77 percent increase in the average daily fire against Israel.

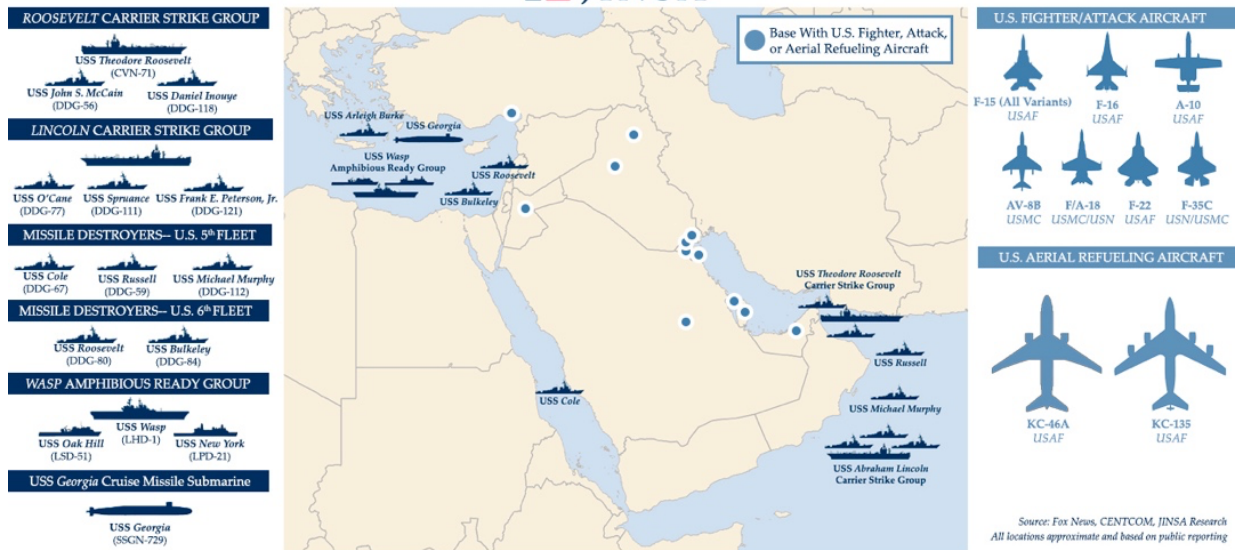
Hezbollah's Escalation Against Israel Since 10/7

JINSA



- While Iran may choose to conduct an independent or joint attack with Hezbollah at a later date, by not joining the Hezbollah attack on August 25, Iran signaled that it lacks the desire and/or capacity to support its proxies with large attacks against Israel.
 - » After the death of Hamas’s political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Iranian officials had claimed that it would retaliate against Israel. However, it is not clear that they will choose, or are able, to mount a major attack on Israel.
 - After an Israeli strike that killed senior IRGC officers in Syria on April 1, Iran responded on April 13-14 with a massive aerial attack against Israel of over 350 drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles that the United States, Israel, and other partners almost completely thwarted.
 - As former U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander General Kenneth “Frank” McKenzie noted during a JINSA webinar after the April 13-14 attack, that strike [depleted](#) much of Iran’s ballistic missiles and other launch capabilities that could reach Israel. Therefore, it is unlikely Iran could mount a bigger salvo so soon afterward.
 - » It is also not certain that Iran would want to expend significant assets for the sake of Haniyeh.
 - Iran’s proxies exist to wage war against its enemies and protect it from attacks, not the other way around.
- However, Hezbollah’s response to Shukr’s death was delayed and limited compared to the 4,000 rockets it could fire per day in a larger conflict, but it threatened further escalation.
 - » After the deaths of Shukr and loss of roughly 500 Hezbollah operatives since the war began, Hezbollah and Iran likely did not want to risk further escalation with Israel.
 - » Delaying the attack meant that Israeli and U.S. forces had to stay on high alert for weeks, imposing real costs in terms of readiness. But the delay also allowed Israel to prepare its defenses and the United States to deploy additional assets to the region.
 - » Hezbollah, with its arsenal of 150,000 rockets, missiles, and UAVs, could launch a much larger attack than Iran and inflict heavy damage because of its closer proximity to Israeli territory.
 - » Nasrallah indicated that the August 25 attack was only the first round of its retaliation for Shukr’s death, meaning that Israeli and U.S. forces will have to remain on guard for further attacks.
 - » Nasrallah [stated](#) after the attack that “if we decide that this initial response isn’t enough and needs completion, that can come later, at another time,” but “at the current stage, people can take a breath and relax.”
- The success of the Israeli operations, the muted response from Hezbollah, and Iran’s decision to stay out of the fighting indicated the importance of the close U.S.-Israel defense cooperation that took place in the weeks before the attack and the value of the strong military deployments to the region.
 - » On August 2, the U.S. Department of Defense [announced](#) that it was [positioning](#) the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group in the Mediterranean Sea, [shifting](#) “additional ballistic missile defense-capable cruisers and destroyers” to the Middle East, and deploying an additional fighter squadron and “additional land-based ballistic missile defense” assets to the region.

U.S. MILITARY ASSETS IN THE CENTCOM AOR AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN



- » CENTCOM GEN Michael “Erik” Kurilla [visited](#) Israel twice in early August to coordinate defenses with IDF leadership.
- » Following the attack, U.S. officials continued to show their support for Israel’s right to defend itself against Hezbollah attacks.
 - Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen C.Q. Brown arrived during the evening of August 25 in Israel as part of a [trip](#) to Israel and other Middle Eastern nations that was announced before the attack.
 - Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin also spoke with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant after the attack, in which he “reiterated Israel’s right to defend itself and the United States’ ironclad resolve to support Israel’s defense against threats from Iran and its regional partners and proxies,” according to a Defense Department [state-ment](#).
 - After the attack, Austin ordered two carrier strike groups to remain in the region indefinitely.
- » These deployments and the continued close coordination are important given that, in June, Brown had [argued](#) that “from our perspective, based on where our forces are, the short range between Lebanon and Israel, it’s harder for us to be able to support [Israel] in the same way we did back in April.”
- While Hezbollah’s attack plan did not succeed, the terrorist group and its Iranian benefactors launched a disinformation campaign attempting to spin it as a success.
 - » After the attack, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [claimed](#) that “talk about how the resistance [Hezbollah] was going to launch 8,000 or 6,000 rockets and drones and that [Israel] thwarted this... are false claims” and that only “dozens of rocket launchers” were destroyed. Nasrallah baselessly claimed that the IDF was hiding the extent of the damage from the attack.

- » Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani [posted](#) on X, “despite the comprehensive support of states like the United States, Israel could not predict the time and place of a limited and managed response by the resistance. Israel has lost its deterrence power.”
- Hezbollah’s August 25 attack will likely have little effect on the ceasefire and hostage release talks but may slightly increase Israeli leverage by avoiding moving toward a full-scale regional war.
 - » The new leader of Hamas, Yahiya Sinwar, was likely hoping that a Hezbollah and/or Iranian escalation would provoke a broader regional war that would increase his leverage and further delay negotiations.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- The closer the United States stands with Israel, the more likely Iran will be deterred from attacking, as JINSA argued in its June 2023 report, [No Daylight: U.S. Strategy if Israel Attacks Iran](#). Therefore, U.S. officials should:
 - » Make clear in public statements that the United States supports Israel’s right to self-defense by targeting the leaders of terrorist organizations;
 - » Deliver a message to Iran that any effort to retaliate against American troops, citizens, or interests in the region, or to strike the core political and economic interests of Gulf nations, will trigger a severe U.S. military response, including against vital interests of the Iranian regime itself; and
 - » Conduct an immediate and comprehensive resupply effort for Israel’s self-defense, prioritizing air and missile defense interceptors, precision-guided munitions (PGMs), ammunition, and spare parts.
 - The United States should prepare to deploy Patriot missile defense systems to Israel under U.S. control to assist in Israel’s air defense.
- The United States must continue to coordinate with Israel and other regional partners to coordinate regional air defenses against a multifront attack by Iran, Hezbollah, and other Iranian proxies, including the Houthis in Yemen.
- The U.S. Department of Defense should maintain the deployment of two carrier strike groups and additional ballistic missile defense capable destroyers and cruisers in the Middle East.
- The Pentagon and CENTCOM should prepare for Iranian proxies in Iraq and Syria to target U.S. forces, as they have done previously in response to Israeli strikes. These preparations should include increased force protection measures and rapid, forceful strikes against Iranian and proxy fighters and leaders responsible for attacks against U.S. troops.
- The U.S. State Department should update threat guidance for U.S. civilians abroad in anticipation of Iranian or Hezbollah attacks against Israeli dual national and Jewish citizens.
- U.S. intelligence agencies and embassies should work with foreign partners, including Israel, to identify and thwart potential Iran-linked terrorist attacks.