

ISRAEL'S ESCALATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

'One state solution is the only long-term solution'

As Israel's expansion of the conflict creates havoc in Lebanon and Gaza, Dr Bashir Saade, lecturer of Politics and Religion at the University of Stirling and author of 'Hizbullah and the Politics of Remembrance', talks to Ramisa Rob of The Daily Star in an exclusive interview about what lies ahead and the solution to the geopolitical wildfire in the Middle East.

How would you analyse the escalation of the conflict so far?

This war between Israel and Hezbollah so to speak, is largely an information war, similar to 2006, but what has changed now is that Israel has really upped its game in that regard. However, since the 1990s, Israel has not been "militarily" able to grab any territories. The last time that happened was in 1982 in Lebanon, and before that, 1967 in Palestine, all of which led to the creation of this axis of resistance such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

The killing of Hezbollah General Secretary Nasrallah was of course related to the pager attacks which created a shock in the system of the organisation. It's definitely all connected, and it's definitely a big escalation, but not in the sense of an all-out war yet. But a surprise event did occur—as we were not expecting that Israelis would go that far to kill Nasrallah, because the decision to kill such a leader is a large political decision, where there must be a greenlight from the powers that be, as well as a concerted effort to kill such a leader. The political implications of Israel's actions, of killing the head of the organisations they're in combat with, is essentially shooting down the possibilities of negotiations and ceasefires. So, Israel has in many ways gone all out to eliminate Hezbollah, the way it did to eliminate Hamas—but largely ended up killing civilians.

The fact that Israel was able to weaken Hezbollah, terrorise the population of Lebanon, and plan a ground invasion to take over parts of southern Lebanon, definitely emboldened Israel. I also think Israel is doing what they're doing, thinking that there won't be much of a retaliation from Iran and Hezbollah because the latter has been restrained. There's something quite dark about this: Israel can go to lengths disregarding international law and killing civilians and be immune from accountability in the international stage, whereas the resistance has to go to many lengths to ensure they don't kill civilians—not that they want to—or commit any massacres similar to Israel.

I didn't think Israel would be so audacious in doing what they did, and in the pace that they've set off, but that being said, I still

think on the military ground level, not much has changed. Hezbollah is shooting way more targeted rockets, and Israelis are not being able to do much about the northern front. The point I am trying to make is that despite what Israel has done, much of how Hezbollah is functioning at the military ground level has not drastically changed. Israel is losing soldiers so they're trying to pressurise in different ways, like striking civilian areas to force Hezbollah to budge and give up.

Can you unpack the strategies and the games underlying the tit-for-tat exchanges between Iran, its proxies and Israel and the US?

So, for Iran, I do think the strikes so far have been effective, as they have been able to show they can destroy important military structures in Israel, and their main goal for the opponent, especially the US, is to send a message: Israel should not make it bigger than it is. In terms of their own strategy, since the current regime is fortified by the US from all directions, they do everything to not be attacked. On the other hand, the sole goal of Hezbollah, a guerilla organisation—which is obviously a lot weaker than Israel—is to create a sense of fear and make Israel accept a ceasefire in Gaza.

Israel is playing a completely different game though. They killed Haniyeh, who was the negotiator for Hamas, and Nasrallah, a moderate and pragmatic person for the resistance, which means Israel is aiming to eliminate the resistance completely because they're not willing to negotiate at all. Matters such as the Palestinian cause or Lebanon's sovereignty, for example, do not bother Israel. If there is a Palestinian cause, Israel wants to decide what it's going to be. The sovereignty of Lebanon, for Israel, is something they can decide the terms of. So, for example if Israel takes down Hezbollah—which they can't but let's just hypothetically say they do—then they will take over the south of Lebanon to just colonise the place and that way, they don't lose anything. But if Hezbollah stays, then Israel has to recognise that Lebanon has a national interest, the people have rights and Israel would have to compromise.



People inspect the site of an Israeli air strike, amid ongoing hostilities between Hezbollah and Israeli forces, in Beirut, Lebanon on October 11, 2024. PHOTO: REUTERS



Dr Bashir Saade

We are very far from that scenario now because Israel's strategy is to completely eliminate the opponent and force Iran to stop funding the resistance against Israel. But the Iranian strategy on the other hand is to continue funding the axis of resistance, because it's Iran's only way of keeping its hold in the region from a political pragmatic point of view. After the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, and Arab states' normalising relations with Israel, the only option that Iran really has is to keep pursuing these bridges and make allies in order to survive. But Iran's position in the region is defensive, to protect its position.

Israel's strategy at the moment is really not sustainable and there's also the internal politics of Netanyahu—dragging this on to continue being the prime minister and not go to prison. The US, on the other hand, has quietly profited off of this situation because they've always locked heads with Iran. In many ways, it's not in the US interest to directly confront Iran, but if a major retaliatory strike happens from the US and Israel, it would be because the US has

weighed that a confrontation will not be as damaging but rather draw a theatrical strike from Iran to save face. In other words, this is a zero-sum game. In the long-term, Israel's elimination strategy will not work because resistance will happen again—someone else will come and they will be a lot angrier. What Israel and the US have to accept at some point is that in the long-term, this Zionist project and apartheid regime, cannot continue—which is really what the conflict is all about.

What do you think is the solution to this ongoing conflict in the long-term but also, what is the short-term solution to achieve that long-term solution?

In the long-term, I think the only solution is the one state solution—one state that is pluralistic where Muslims, Jews, Christians and just people from all religions live together and there's no stolen land or settlements and where everyone can strive for equality. In the short-term, we are obviously very far from this because Israel has the whole world behind them, supporting them, and powerful countries like the US unilaterally funding

them to do the opposite. They have the full power and license to defend itself as a Jewish state, so as long as that's the rationale, this conflict will continue.

The resistance, a force that comes from within to challenge the colonial power to stop it from killing and a mindset that they can just eliminate the opponent, will continue to just get bigger and bigger. This is exactly what happened in South Africa and Vietnam. You can kill people, but there will always be another generation—that's what they will have to get. So, say Israel destroys Hamas—which they can't—there will always be another Hamas or Islamic Jihad and so on. Let's not forget, first it was the Palestinian Liberation Organization and now it's Hamas, so the cycle has continued and it will continue as long as this structural problem remains. Zionism is the satellite of imperialism, the last experiment of modern-day colonialism—first it was by the British and then now it's in the hands of the US—and there will be a time when it will just have to end.

US elections: Can dystopian darkness descend on Earth?



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The US presidential and congressional elections on November 5 are approaching fast. Can anybody predict who will win the presidency? According to polls, it is a toss-up. New polling numbers by different organisations are appearing quickly, and the chances of Trump or Harris winning the election are on a roller coaster ride. Trump's illusory exposé of dog eating illegal aliens during the last and only presidential debate did not make a dent in the support of his cultist followers.

According to FiveThirtyEight's polling average, Kamala Harris led Donald Trump by 2.5 percent nationally until the day of the presidential debate. The average lead increased to 2.8 percent on October 2 and dropped to 2.4 on October 13. These polls, with margins of error, are no guarantee of her election victory. We should not forget that Hillary Clinton garnered nearly three million more votes than Donald Trump in the 2016 election but could not win the presidency. In the United States, becoming president rests on securing a majority of 538 electoral college votes. Each state has an electoral college share, calculated by adding the number of House of Representative members—based on the state population—and two Senate members. To win the presidency, one must win 270 electoral college votes.

With a few exceptions, a candidate typically gains a state's allocated electoral college votes by winning a simple majority of general election votes in that state. Of the 50 states 43 are either Republican Party or



Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump and Democratic Presidential Candidate Kamala Harris share a surprise handshake before the US Presidential Debate hosted by ABC in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on September 10, 2024. PHOTO: REUTERS

Democratic Party strongholds, and one can easily estimate the electoral college votes each candidate will get from those 43 states. According to Newsweek, in late September, "RealClearPolling predicted 225 electoral votes locked in for Harris, compared to Trump's 219. Ninety-four votes across seven

battleground states are considered a toss-up." Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin are the seven swing states where neither party has a stronghold. Different combinations of outcomes in those seven swing states generate several pathways to an electoral college victory for each candidate. Pennsylvania, with 19 electoral college votes, appears to be the most crucial in this election cycle.

(76 percent) are the leading issues. Just 18 percent of Trump supporters say racial and ethnic inequality is very important. And even fewer say climate change is very important (11 percent)." For Harris supporters, "issues such as health care (76 percent) and Supreme Court appointments (73 percent) are of top importance. Large majorities also cite the economy (68 percent) abortion (67 percent) as very important to their vote in the election."

It is difficult to predict how independent and party-line-crossing voters, who have yet to make up their minds, will embrace the two candidates' policies. Their policies differ significantly on many issues, including abortion, foreign affairs, global warming and climate change, health care, immigration, taxation, and international trade and tariffs.

Donald Trump plans to increase tariffs to a whopping 60 percent for Chinese imports and 10 percent worldwide, to expand his tax cut of 2017 for mega-corporations and wealthy individuals, to eliminate environmental-friendly regulations, to restrict all immigration drastically, to support draconian state laws against a woman's right to abortion, to weaken global alliances with non-autocratic nations, and to allow fossil fuel production on government land and sea.

By contrast, Kamala Harris plans to cut middle-class taxes significantly, increase taxes for mega-corporations and wealthy individuals, restore and codify abortion rights at the federal level, address the housing shortage for lower incomes by funding construction for new housing units and down-payment support for first-time homeowners, mitigate the causes of climate change through investments in renewable energy, and to expand health care subsidies for needy Americans under the Affordable Care Act.

Recently, an unpredictable factor has been added to the election statistics due to Israel's attack on Lebanon by exploding pagers and walkie-talkies on September 17 and 18, killing Hezbollah leader Nasrallah via

an airstrike that dropped a two-thousand-pound bomb provided by the Biden-Harris administration, and finally launching an invasion into Lebanon on October 2. These could upset Arab American voters, nearly 91,000 in Michigan with 16 electoral college votes, which could cost Kamala Harris this crucial state. Many of these citizens had cast their votes for a third-party candidate Jill Stein as protest votes in the primary because Biden-Harris supported the Israeli invasion of Gaza. However, these voters are registered as Democrats. This situation could tilt the election in favour of Donald Trump.

The most alarming tendency of Donald Trump is to advocate for dismantling US institutions—what he dubs the Deep State—that act as guardrails against autocracy. Remember, he bragged about his endorsement by Victor Orban, the racist leader of Hungary, during the presidential debate. He exchanged letters with the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un. He maintains a cozy relationship with Vladimir Putin and other extreme right-wing neo-Nazi leaders of Europe. His monarchist mindset is vivid in his appointment of kin to top governmental and Republican Party positions. These are alarming signs of his dynastic inclinations. His willingness to use executive power in bigoted ways manifested in his Muslim bans early in his term.

Pre-election polling indicates that the election is a toss-up—either candidate can win. If Trump wins, a radical transmigration might follow. US democracy could be ruined because of Trump's willingness to remove two-century-old guardrails put into place by the US's founding fathers against dictatorship. The impact on the world could be catastrophic. Because the US is the biggest superpower in the world currently, its metamorphosis into an autocratic state could encourage extreme nationalism, racism, bigotry, and dictatorship in many regions of the globe. Dystopian darkness might descend on Earth.