

Israel and Hezbollah Are Escalating Toward Catastrophe

by [Dana Stroul \(/experts/dana-stroul\)](/experts/dana-stroul)

Sep 23, 2024

Also published in *Foreign Affairs*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Dana Stroul \(/experts/dana-stroul\)](/experts/dana-stroul)

Dana Stroul is Director of Research and Shelly and Michael Kassen Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.



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Both sides have major incentives to avoid a wider conflict, but they'll need help escaping the traps they laid for themselves.

For months after October 7, Hezbollah and Israel seemed able to keep the risk of war in check, but their violent choreography of incremental escalation and calculated strikes may no longer be sustainable. The shift started in late July, when a Hezbollah rocket attack killed 12 Druze children playing soccer in the Israeli town of Majdal Shams. Israel responded by targeting Hezbollah's second-in-command, Fuad Shukr, in a residential building in Beirut. At first, the dynamic appeared to be little changed: Israel used precision weapons against Shukr to minimize collateral damage. And after Israel, in late August, preemptively struck Hezbollah missile launchers set to attack military sites in Israel, Hezbollah's response signaled a limited willingness to escalate. Nasrallah made clear shortly after that he was ready to return to the incrementalism of the status quo ante. Yet in recent weeks, IDF strikes and targeted assassinations have been occurring at a pace and on a scale that indicate a higher risk tolerance and a readiness to enter a new phase of the conflict...

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