

## **Don't Believe the Rampant Disinformation over Israel's Escalation in Lebanon**

*The US is misrepresenting the strike on Majdal Shams and even the geography and political status of where it took place.*

Israel has been trading strikes with Hezbollah, the Lebanese political party and armed group, ever since October. So far, the [strikes have killed](#) at least 542 people in Lebanon, including 114 civilians and at least 22 soldiers and 25 civilians in northern Israel and Israeli-occupied territory. But one recent back-and-forth has heightened the tension at the border between the two countries, provoking fears that a broader regional war could be on the horizon, even as Israel continues its genocidal campaign in Gaza.

The latest escalation began after a tragic attack on the village of Majdal Shams in July, located in Syria's Golan Heights, which is under Israeli occupation. The population of Majdal Shams is predominantly Arab Druze, an ethnic and religious community that is spread out across the region.

[Israel](#) blamed Hezbollah for the attack on Majdal Shams, saying it was “an Iranian rocket and Hezbollah is the only terror organization which has those in its arsenal.” While acknowledging a series of rocket attacks on Israeli positions in the Golan that day, Hezbollah [said](#) it “categorically denies” it was responsible for the tragedy.

The attack on the Majdal Shams soccer field, which killed 12 children, is not the reason for Israel's acceleration of strikes in Lebanon — it is the excuse.

In the United States, politicians of both parties are misrepresenting the circumstances of the killings, the conditions under which Israel could stop Hezbollah's attacks, and even the geography and political status of where the initial attack took place.

There are no indications that the attack was deliberate. Hezbollah would have no motivation to kill Arab civilians living under Israeli military occupation.

U.S. leaders' attempts to claim that the strike on Majdal Shams was a “terrorist attack” appear to have little merit, and are a striking departure from the tendency in Washington to insist that Israeli attacks on civilian targets in Gaza, even in cases where they apparently deliberate, were simply tragic mistakes. Indeed, just three weeks prior to the attack on Majdal Shams, [an Israeli rocket](#) hit a soccer field in the Gaza Strip, killing 29 players and spectators, but without similar condemnation from Washington or an insistence that Palestinians therefore had the right to retaliate.

Ever since cross-border attacks began in October, Hezbollah has made clear that it would cease its shelling of northern Israel and the Israeli-occupied Golan if Israeli forces ended their attacks and occupation of the Gaza Strip. As a result, if Israel does not want Hezbollah to attack Israel and Israeli-occupied territories, they would agree to the proposed ceasefire in Gaza. Instead, Israel has responded by sending over nearly four times as many attacks of its own, as an *Al Jazeera* analysis has [found](#). The insistence by the Biden administration that Israel has “no choice” but to bomb Lebanon in response to these attacks is therefore patently false.

One of the most disturbing aspects of Washington's reaction to the attack at Majdal Shams has been the claim it took place in “northern Israel,” as Kamala Harris's National Security Adviser [Philip Gordon described](#) it in a statement following the attack. He added that “Israel continues to face severe threats to its security, and the Vice President's support for Israel's security is ironclad.”

Majdal Shams is actually located in southwestern Syria in the Golan Province, two-thirds of which has been under Israeli military occupation since its 1967 invasion of the mountainous region. At that time, Israel ethnically cleansed over 100,000 Syrian Arabs and [destroyed over 100 villages](#), leaving only five Druze villages. Soon thereafter, it began colonizing the occupied territory with illegal Jewish-only settlements.

**In 1981, Israel announced it was annexing the territory, violating the long-standing tenet in international law** prohibiting any country from expanding its territory by force. In response, the [United Nations Security Council](#) unanimously — with the support of the Reagan administration — passed a resolution declaring the annexation “null and void.”

When Israel tried to impose Israeli citizenship following the annexation decision, the people of Majdal Shams and the other villages engaged in a monthslong [nonviolent resistance campaign](#) in the face of widespread repression. Over 80 percent of Golani Druze have exclusively maintained their Syrian nationality, so [Washington’s claim](#) that Israel is “defend[ing] its citizens” by escalating its attacks on Lebanon is also inaccurate.

Given Israel’s history of repression against the Golani Druze, including curfews, mass arrests, beatings, building illegal settlements on confiscated land, the performative outpouring of concern from the Israeli government and its supporters for the people of Majdal Shams should not be taken seriously. [Netanyahu was heckled](#) when he visited the village by a crowd of residents accusing him of being a war criminal and calling for him to “get out of free Arab land!”

**In 2019, [Trump reversed U.S. policy](#) and became the only government in the world to recognize Israel’s illegal annexation of the Golan.** Much to the chagrin of career State Department officials, Middle East scholars, human rights groups and the international community, **the Biden administration has upheld this policy, with all U.S. government maps incorrectly showing the Golan as part of Israel, effectively recognizing the right of conquest, which the international community had formally renounced with the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945.**

The decision to buck international law and recognize Israel’s annexation of the Golan raises serious questions regarding the U.S. position on Ukraine. The Biden administration has attempted to justify its support for Ukraine in its war against Russia by citing the principle that no country has the right to unilaterally change international boundaries or expand its territory by force. [Russia](#), meanwhile, has specifically cited U.S. recognition of Israel’s illegal annexation of the Golan as an example of U.S. double standards, underscoring in a recent UN Security Council debate how the Biden administration’s policy of recognizing Israel’s territorial expansion has weakened the international case against Russian aggression.

Since the attack on Majdal Shams, Israel has escalated its attacks on Lebanon, including killing Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukur in the Lebanese capital of Beirut. Lebanese authorities [said](#) at least five civilians were also killed in the strike, and dozens more were wounded. The Lebanese government has condemned both the Israeli bombing of their country and the attack of Majdal Shams.

That strike was followed by the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, also presumed to be done by Israel. That killing, along with Israel’s attacks against Hezbollah, a close ally of Iran, has raised the risks of a broader war, with Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowing a “harsh punishment” of Israel.

A full-scale conflict between Israel and Hezbollah would not be nearly as one-sided as Israel’s war on Gaza. Hezbollah, which has a closer relationship with Iran than Hamas does, has tens of thousands of sophisticated Iranian-made rockets that could do serious damage to Israel’s military and civilian infrastructure. However, Israel could do far worse damage to Lebanon with the knowledge that the United States would likely support the Israeli military and block the United Nations from stopping it.

Hezbollah and Iran, who are both dealing with pressing domestic concerns and reaping political benefit from growing outrage at the Israel and its Western supporters, seem inclined to keep the conflict with Israel at a low level, rather than pursue a full-scale war. However, the Israeli government, recognizing that a conflict with Hezbollah and Iran would provide it with much greater domestic and international support than the ongoing war on Gaza, might be seeking to provoke just such a conflagration.

**If a full-scale war does eventually erupt, Washington’s refusal to consistently stand up for international law will have been a major reason for it.**

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