
An overview of the political situation in Lebanon and an assessment of the political and military strength of Hezbollah.

IN BRIEF

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN LEBANON IS A DERIVATIVE OF THE VARIOUS ALLIANCES AND THE INTERNAL DIVISION WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN CAMP. THE MILITARY SITUATION IS CLEAR: HEZBOLLAH IS THE STRONGEST MILITARY FORCE, EQUIPPED WITH ADVANCED WEAPONRY, TRAINING AND OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCE, WHICH IT GAINED DURING THE YEARS IT FOUGHT ISRAEL AND THE CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA.

THE FACTS

Since Michel Aoun's election, Hezbollah has restored much of its former political capital. **The close relationship between the prime minister and the organization play into Hezbollah's hands, helping it maintain a political advantage over its rivals.**

For years Hezbollah claimed that it was legitimate to bear arms in its role as the protector of Lebanon from Israel. Since 2011, despite criticism regarding its involvement in Syria, Hezbollah has expanded this argument to portray the organization as a protector against terror spilling over from Syria.

KEY DETAILS

- ▶ In recent years, Lebanon has experienced multiple political crises stemming from domestic power struggles. Most of Lebanon's problems come from its weak economic situation. Despite getting financial assistance from Europe and the Gulf states, Lebanon failed to devise a serious reorganization plan, while the approved state budget cut down on soldiers' pensions and hurt the banks. Another factor is the rampant corruption in the country, in which Hezbollah plays a big part. **The combination of Hezbollah's involvement in government and the municipal systems coupled with its military strength and being the largest employer in the Shi'ite sector, as well as a major international criminal organization, amplifies its stranglehold on the country.**
- ▶ **Additional political crises in recent years stem from the energy shortage in Lebanon.** Lebanon doesn't have enough power plants to service its entire population and large parts of the country rely on generators and power producing ships on loan from Turkey. On that note, **Hezbollah has its claws into the generator owners committee and therefore it is directly involved in any government decision in the energy field.**
- ▶ **The political situation in Lebanon is a derivative of the various alliances and the internal division within the Christian camp.** The strongest political alliance in Lebanon is the "March 8th Coalition," currently 72 parliament members strong, of which Hezbollah and Amal are members, along with Michel Aoun's party. Its largest opposition is the "March 14th Coalition," currently at 47 parliament members, which includes the Sunni, part of the Christian camp and the Druze.
- ▶ Hezbollah has strengthened its hold on the Lebanese political systems over the years. Its political involvement is part of **Hezbollah's duplicitous strategy: it presents a pragmatic façade, but in reality it partakes in military-terrorist activities.**
- ▶ Most often than not, the ministries Hezbollah requests—and receives—serve its non-for-profit organizations: The Industry and Agriculture ministries touch on Jihad Al Bina's, Hezbollah's development enterprise areas of business, as they deal with agricultural projects, small business assistance and local industry assistance. Additionally, the Labor and Industry ministries cooperate with the labor unions; Education and Sports ministry overlaps with Hezbollah educational system as it is in charge of kindergartens, schools and higher education, youth movements such as Imam Mahdi Scouts and youth sports teams; the Healthcare ministry overlaps Hezbollah's Muslim Health Authority and deals with hospital management, clinics, pharmacies and the Wounded Institute that assists Hezbollah's wounded combatants; the Parliamentary Affairs ministry, by virtue of **its coordination and cooperation with the parliament functions enables Hezbollah greater control on the government-parliament work process.**
- ▶ In 2011-2013, during the Mikati government, **Hezbollah had significant impact on decisions regarding ministers and effectively paved the governments' path.** The disagreement it had with prime minister Mikati over the involvement in the Syrian civil war led to the resignation of the former and the weakening of Hezbollah's stature in the Salam government.

- ▶ **Hezbollah's representation in parliament may be numerically small, but its true influence on Lebanese politics relies on the organization's military wing, which poses a threat to Hezbollah's opposition.**
- ▶ Per the Lebanese constitution, a two thirds majority is required to pass government resolutions. **Based on Hezbollah's government participation numbers, it can veto whatever it chooses. This fact enabled Hezbollah to frustrate government resolutions that were not aligned with its interests.**

HEZBOLLAH'S WALKING THE LINE POLICY

Hezbollah is aware of the limits of its power and therefore carefully navigates among the various players. The organization managed to withstand all crises and even rehabilitated its relationship with its Syrian and Iranian patrons, Lebanese public opinion, and particularly the Shi'ite population. Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader since 1992, has adopted a policy of "walking the line" when it comes to Lebanon, and regional and international organisms, and has made the most out of every field Hezbollah operates in. He plays the internal Lebanese game and works to defuse concerns regarding the imposition of Sharia law, while he builds up logistic and terror infrastructure in Lebanon and globally. **The involvement in Lebanese politics is part of Hezbollah's modus operandi, separating theology (based on the rule of cleric and pan-Islamism) from practical day to day activities to achieve Hezbollah's goals. This separation enables the organization to develop its theology and be active in the political system without sacrificing one at the expense of the other.**

HEZBOLLAH'S SURVIVAL, SUCCESS AND EXPANSION RELIES ON TWO FUNDAMENTALS:

1. **Regulatory element:** the ability to build effective core competencies that draw from internal and external sources including an efficient hierarchy, military capabilities, funding and enforcement.
2. **Legitimacy:** Hezbollah's internal dialogue: the religious justification to the strategic changes it underwent, claiming and adopting the role of the protectors of Lebanon, seemingly adapting to the Lebanese political system, and sensitivity to Shi'ite public opinion.

The implementation of the Taif Agreement forced Hezbollah to adapt itself to a new format, but it didn't make it fall in line like the rest of the Lebanese powers allowing the organization to develop and build up its military capabilities and conduct a war of attrition against Israel. This "independence" has been a source of friction between Hezbollah and the Lebanese government and caused multiple waves of violence that disrupted Lebanese life and the government plans to promote its agenda.

Moreover, **Hezbollah's use of violence as a tool to achieve political goals is part of its strategic plan to take control of the political system.** For example, in 2005 Hezbollah assassinated Rafic Hariri, the main opposition to the Syrian involvement in Lebanon. That same year, Gebran Tueni, a Christian member of parliament and publisher of Al-Nahar newspaper, who called on the Lebanese government to take control over the country, disarm Hezbollah

and enforce its sovereignty all over the Lebanese territory, was also assassinated. Tueni argued that **Hezbollah implemented in Lebanon an independent policy to serve Syrian and Iranian interests**¹.

Hezbollah has been notorious for creating crises in governments whenever the policies or resolutions were not aligned with its interests. In 2006, Hezbollah led a political campaign to topple the government through resignation of opposition ministers, presenting the government as illegitimate and conducting political assassinations (most of which have not been solved) of prominent figures in the anti-Syrian camp, including the assassination of Wissam Said, a senior police investigator who broke the Rafiq Al Hariri assassination case. The campaign peaked in May 2008 when Hezbollah took over neighborhoods in western Beirut and caused the death and injury of dozens of people.

The Lebanese government's inability to "tame" Hezbollah apparently comes from a combination of lack of levers (be it political, economic or military), a lack of desire to confront it (either because of public opinion or concerns about worsening the situation in Lebanon) and the support Iran provides Hezbollah.

HEZBOLLAH'S MILITARY STATUS

- ▶ During the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah's operational concept in southern Lebanon was typified by defensive activity on the ground coupled with the launching of missiles and rockets to deter Israelis. The main contributors to this concept had intimate familiarity with the southern Lebanese terrain, the existence of operational and logistical infrastructure, a camouflaged subterranean network and the ability to blend into the local population. The fighting in Syria posed a different challenge to Hezbollah, as it was forced to adopt an offensive strategy in unfamiliar terrain (e.g. urban warfare), against a local enemy with intimate familiarity of the terrain and close ties to the potentially hostile local population. Additionally, **Hezbollah had to work with Russian, Iranian and Syrian forces as well as various Shi'ite militias (Afghani, Pakistani and Iraqi). Such an operational challenge enhances Hezbollah's capabilities and is applicable to future hostilities with Israel.** Nasrallah in various speeches and videos expressed Hezbollah's plans to conquer the Galilee.
- ▶ The operational cooperation between Hezbollah, Russia, Iran, and Syria exposed the organization to advanced weaponry, wide scale operations, operational planning, intertwined battle and advanced command and control systems. **The operational experience gained during the years of fighting in Syria enhances Hezbollah's organizational, professional and command capabilities** to include, among others, management of long-term fighting, upgrading low and high intensity fighting and operation of advanced systems.
- ▶ **Hezbollah lost many combatants in Syria. It also had to cut down salaries and reduce payments to the families of dead combatants. That said, it keeps attracting new recruits while lowering its standards.** Additionally, Hezbollah increased the scope of its target audience and formed a Christian battalion and attempted to recruit Palestinians and foreign fighters from Kuwait, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq.
- ▶ With Russian and Iranian support Hezbollah managed to increase its arsenal to include ground to air missiles, ground missiles, anti-aircraft guns, and anti-tank weapons. It also acquired various armored vehicles, including U.S.-made tanks and APCs. It should be noted that it gained experience in deploying UAVs as well, with direct exposure to advanced weapons systems, some at the level of those owned by western countries, Israel included.

WEAPONS BY NUMBERS²

- ▶ **Personnel:** approx. 45,000 combatants, less than 50% of which are regularly serving. Its elite unit, Radwan Force is approx. 2,500 strong³.
- ▶ **Missiles, rockets and mortars:** estimated to range between 100,00 - 150,000⁴, divided as follows: tens of thousands are short range (up to 40 kilometers), thousands are mid-range (up to 75 kilometers) and hundreds that are long range (200-700 kilometers). Recently Hezbollah launched a project to upgrade its arsenal in terms of accuracy and the latest assessments talk about 20-200 missiles with a 50 meters range accuracy⁵.
- ▶ **Remotely controlled aircraft:** in recent years Hezbollah expanded its use of remotely controlled aircraft alongside an upgrade of their capabilities. To date, Hezbollah owns hundreds of such aircraft from drones through intelligence gathering photography through attack aircraft (either "suicide" aircraft or grenade launchers).
- ▶ **Shore to ship missiles:** Hezbollah owns various kinds of such missiles, among them C-802 and a handful of Yakhont systems.
- ▶ **Anti-Tank missiles:** Hezbollah owns thousands of anti-tank missiles including a third-generation systems that can penetrate most of the IDF and western armies' armory.
- ▶ **Anti-aircraft missiles:** the estimate is that in addition to portable missile systems such as SA-7 and SA-14, Hezbollah owns advanced systems such as SA-8, SA-17 and SA-22.
- ▶ **Vehicles:** during the civil war in Syria it has been revealed that Hezbollah combatants have been trained and operated various Russian made tanks such as T-55, T-62 and T-72. Additionally, they have been trained in various APCs including types owned by the Lebanese army. Further, Hezbollah owns mounted mobile units who use Jeeps, ATVs and motorbikes.

1. <http://www.memri.org.il/memri/LoadArticlePage.asp?enttype=4&entid=1260&language=Hebrew>
<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtPE.jhtml?itemNo=790866>
 2. <https://www.haaretz.co.il/st/c/prod/global/lebanon2/2/>
 3. <https://www.haaretz.co.il/st/c/prod/global/lebanon2/2/>
 4. <https://www.mako.co.il/pzm-magazine/Article-07ad7e003b31861006.htm>
 5. <https://www.mako.co.il/pzm-magazine/Article-07ad7e003b31861006.htm>

HEZBOLLAH TAKING CONTROL OF LEBANON:

2005 Hariri Death	2006 - 2007 Second Lebanon War	2008 Doha Accord	2009 - 2010 Hariri's "Unity Government"	Jan 2011 Opposition Bloc Resignation	May 2013 Mikati Out	Feb 2014 Tammam Salam Government	Dec 2016 Hariri Government	May 2018 Elections	Jan 2019 Hariri Government
				Jun 2011 Najib Mikati Government		2014 - 2016 Presidency Crisis			