

# Hezbollah's Influence in Lebanon

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**COUNTER  
EXTREMISM  
PROJECT**

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### Executive Summary

[Hezbollah](#) has evolved significantly from its origins as a guerilla group in the early 1980s into a major political and military force. In defiance of U.N. resolutions and international agreements demanding its disarmament, Hezbollah has used its military strength, political power, and grassroots popularity to integrate itself into Lebanese society. Hezbollah has also created its own educational and social institutions that run parallel to the Lebanese state. As a result of these efforts, Hezbollah today wields significant influence across Lebanon's various sectors.

As head of Lebanon's pro-Syrian parliamentary bloc, Hezbollah wields tremendous sway over the direction and stability of the government. The Hezbollah-led parliamentary coalition—referred to as March 8—has held 57 of Lebanon's 128 parliamentary seats since the 2009 elections. After Lebanon elected Hezbollah ally Michel Aoun to the presidency in October 2016, March 8 received 17 of 30 cabinet positions, thus cementing Hezbollah's continued influence in the country.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah's military entanglements in Syria and with Israel risk drawing all of Lebanon into regional conflicts. Although the United Nations has tasked Lebanon's military with supervising Hezbollah's disarmament, Hezbollah has managed to build up its military capabilities and presence in Lebanon under the watchful gaze of the Lebanese army. Hezbollah and the Lebanese military have also coordinated against Syrian rebel groups.

Hezbollah has also created its own parallel institutions within Lebanon's educational, social, and economic sectors. Hezbollah-run schools indoctrinate Shiite youth while its network of social

services provide Shiite citizens with health care, utilities, groceries, and construction services. But because of international sanctions, Hezbollah-linked hospitals, charities, and other businesses risk inviting devastating economic sanctions. International aid organizations wary of inviting sanctions must also navigate around Hezbollah when partnering with local Lebanese organizations. International sanctions targeting Hezbollah have also complicated the Lebanese economy due to Hezbollah's involvement in the Lebanese business sector.

In this report, CEP tracks the history of Hezbollah's entrenchment into Lebanese society and highlights the widespread influence Hezbollah has accrued in virtually every major Lebanese sector. Hezbollah's integration into Lebanon threatens the country's stability and regional and international security.

### **Lebanon: A Divided Country**

Lebanon is a deeply sectarian country with 18 distinct religious groups.<sup>1</sup> Hezbollah has exploited these sectarian fault lines to bolster its own standing, primarily through outreach to Lebanon's Shiite population.

According to 2017 CIA demographic data, Shiites made up approximately 27 percent of Lebanon's approximately 6.2 million population. Sunni Muslims made up another 27 percent, while Christians comprised 40.5 percent.<sup>2</sup> Shiites are concentrated in Beirut's southern suburbs, the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, and southern Lebanon beneath the Litani River. Hezbollah itself is also concentrated in these areas. According to June 2017 Israeli military estimates, Hezbollah has a military presence in 240 villages in southern Lebanon.<sup>3</sup>

Lebanon's government requires a division of power between its main religious streams. The roles of president, prime minister, and parliamentary speaker are, respectively, guaranteed to a Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shiite Muslim.<sup>4</sup> The extent of Syria's influence in Lebanon further divides the country. Syria occupied Lebanon in 1976 at the beginning of the country's civil war. Mass protests for and against Syria preceded the country's 2005 disengagement, giving rise to dueling political factions in Lebanon's parliament. Hezbollah's political party heads a largely pro-Syrian parliamentary bloc, the March 8 movement, whose main opposition is the anti-Syrian March 14 coalition.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The World Factbook: Lebanon," Central Intelligence Agency, last updated June 21, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "The World Factbook: Lebanon," Central Intelligence Agency, last updated June 21, 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Tom O'Connor, "Israel's Next War on Lebanon Will Kill Civilians, Air Force Commander Says," *Newsweek*, June 22, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/israel-next-war-lebanon-kill-civilians-air-force-628321>.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Perry, "Geagea reshapes Lebanese politics, backs rival Aoun," Reuters, January 18, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-lebanon-idUSKCN0UW24V>; "5 Things to Know About Lebanon's Government," *Wall Street Journal*, August 27, 2015, <https://blogs.wsj.com/briefly/2015/08/27/things-to-know-about-lebanons-government/>.

<sup>5</sup> Liam McLaughlin, "Lebanon: The forgotten revolution," *New Statesman* (London), March 3, 2011, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/03/lebanon-syria-hariri-hezbollah>.

Lebanese opinions on Hezbollah are largely divided along sectarian lines. According to a 2014 Pew Research Center poll, 86 percent of Lebanese Shiites held favorable views of Hezbollah, compared with 31 percent of Lebanese Christians and only 9 percent of Lebanese Sunnis.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, a 2014 Beirut Center for Research and Information survey found that approximately two-thirds of Lebanon's Christians believe Hezbollah is protecting the country from ISIS. The survey also found that 66 percent of Christians supported Hezbollah's intervention in Syria, compared with only 39 percent in June 2013.<sup>7</sup>

Some Lebanese Sunni militants, such as Sheikh Ahmad Assir, have accused Hezbollah of using its weapons to "subjugate Lebanon to its will."<sup>8</sup> Through 2012 and 2013, Assir-led protests against Hezbollah drew thousands of Lebanese Sunnis. Assir's followers have violently clashed with both Hezbollah and the Lebanese military, accused by Assir of protecting the terrorist group.<sup>9</sup> Assir was arrested in 2015 and faces the death penalty on terrorism charges.<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding Assir's supporters and poll numbers, Hezbollah Executive Council chief Sheikh Nabil Qaouk believes that many Lebanese Sunnis will willingly join Hezbollah in its next conflict with Israel.<sup>11</sup>

Hezbollah has wide support in the Shiite community, but some dissent does exist. Sheikh Ali al-Amine, the Shiite mufti of the Jabal Amel district of south Lebanon and a former teacher of Hezbollah leader [Hassan Nasrallah](#), criticized Hezbollah after its 2006 war with Israel for seeking to "capture all the Shiite sect and push it into the unknown."<sup>12</sup> Subhi al-Tufayli, Hezbollah's first secretary-general, has routinely criticized the group he once led for exploiting Lebanese sectarianism at Iran's behest. Hezbollah and Iran have promoted the message that

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<sup>6</sup> "Concerns about Islamic Extremism on the Rise in Middle East," Pew Research Center, July 1, 2014, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/01/concerns-about-islamic-extremism-on-the-rise-in-middle-east/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Two-thirds of Lebanon's Christians believe Hezbollah is protecting country," Al-Akhbar English, October 21, 2014, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/22129>.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "Lebanese Sunnis Unwilling To Challenge Hezbollah," Al-Monitor, July 1, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/lebanons-sunnis-angry-and-bitter.html>; Pierre Abisaab, "In Solidarity with Al-Jadeed TV to Avoid 'Seeing Stars,'" Al-Akhbar English, June 26, 2012, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/8953>.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver Holmes, "Shootout throws spotlight on Lebanon's sectarian tinderbox," Reuters, November 12, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/12/lebanon-clashes-idUSL5E8MC8J920121112>; Jean Aziz, "Kidnapped Lebanese soldiers are spared despite arrest of Salafist cleric," Al-Monitor, August 24, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/lebanon-general-security-arrest-assir.html>; "Lebanon faces tumult after deadliest Syria-related clashes," Reuters, June 24, 2013, <http://www.trust.org/item/20130624230100-g8f2k/?source=hptop>.

<sup>10</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Lebanon charges radical Islamist with 'terrorism,'" Al Arabiya, August 26, 2015, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/08/26/Lebanon-charges-radical-Islamist-with-terrorism-.html>.

<sup>11</sup> "Top Hezbollah Official: Shi'ites and Sunnis Will Unite to Fight Israel in Next Battle," *Jerusalem Post*, January 4, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Top-Hezbollah-Official-Shiites-and-Sunnis-will-unite-to-fight-Israel-in-next-battle-386645>.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "In Lebanon, Hizbulloh's rise provokes Shiite dissent," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 15, 2006, <https://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1215/p01s02-wome.html>.

Shiites are an endangered minority outside of Iran, Tufayli said in a 2016 interview.<sup>13</sup> He has further accused Iran of “only investing in Lebanon’s Shia to serve its own interests.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Hezbollah: A Dangerous and Destabilizing Force**



With financial, material, and moral support from the Iranian regime, Hezbollah has carried out deadly terrorist attacks and criminal activities in the Middle East and around the world. As a result, Hezbollah has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and several other countries and intergovernmental organizations, including the Arab League.<sup>15</sup>

### *Lebanon*



Hezbollah has been implicated in several political assassinations in Lebanon. On February 14, 2005, a bombing in Beirut killed anti-Syrian former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 other Lebanese citizens and wounded 226.<sup>16</sup> On August 18, 2020, the U.N.-backed Special

<sup>13</sup> Karim El-Bar, “They exploited sectarianism’: Former Hezbollah leader Tufayli talks Iran, Syria,” Middle East Eye, last updated December 30, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/they-exploited-sectarianism-former-hezbollah-leader-tufayli-talks-iran-syria-154451209>.

<sup>14</sup> Mohamed Kawas, “Former Hezbollah chief: ‘Tehran is only investing in Lebanon’s Shia to serve its own interests,’” *Arab Weekly* (London), May 8, 2016, <http://www.thearabweekly.com/Opinion/5001/Former-Hezbollah-chief:-%E2%80%98Tehran-is-only-investing-in-Lebanon%E2%80%99s-Shia-to-serve-its-own-interests%E2%80%99>.

<sup>15</sup> For a full list, see the Designations section of CEP’s Hezbollah report, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/hezbollah#designations>.

<sup>16</sup> Nada Bakri, “4 Indicted in Killing of Rafik Hariri, Ex-Leader of Lebanon,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/01/world/middleeast/01lebanon.html>.

Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) convicted Hezbollah member [Salim Ayyash](#) in absentia of leading the assassination team that orchestrated the bombing.<sup>17</sup> The STL sentenced Ayyash in absentia to five consecutive life sentences on December 11, 2020.<sup>18</sup> The STL had initially indicted a second Hezbollah member, senior commander [Mustafa Badreddine](#), but chose not to pursue the case against Badreddine after his May 2016 death in Syria.<sup>19</sup> On October 19, 2012, a car bomb killed senior Lebanese intelligence official General Wissam al-Hassan, who had investigated Hezbollah's role in the 2005 Hariri assassination and reportedly supported rebel forces in the Syrian civil war.<sup>20</sup> On December 27, 2013, former Lebanese finance minister and ambassador to the United States Mohamad Chatah died in a Beirut car bombing. Chatah had prominently voiced opposition to Hezbollah. Hours before the bombing, Chatah had tweeted that Hezbollah had been "pressing hard to be granted similar powers in security & foreign policy matters that Syria exercised in Lebanon for 15 yrs."<sup>21</sup> There were no claims of responsibility, but former Prime Minister Saad Hariri blamed Hezbollah for Chatah's murder.<sup>22</sup>

In announcing its conviction-in-absentia of Ayyash, the STL specifically acknowledged it did not find direct evidence that Hezbollah's leadership played a role in the 2005 bombing, but the STL acknowledged Hezbollah did have a motive to eliminate Hariri.<sup>23</sup> While Hezbollah's direct involvement in the Hariri, Hassan, or Chatah political assassinations has not been conclusively proven, Hezbollah has been documented using violence to further its political goals in Lebanon. In May 2008, Hezbollah launched bloody street battles against Lebanese forces after a government decision to dismantle the group's private telephone network, which Hezbollah called a declaration of war.<sup>24</sup> Hezbollah fighters captured sections of western Beirut and attacked media offices affiliated with the governing Future Movement in clashes that killed 62 people across the country.<sup>25</sup> The Lebanese government called Hezbollah's actions "an armed and bloody coup,"

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<sup>17</sup> "The Prosecutor v. Salim Jamil Ayyash, Hassan Habib Merhi, Hussein Hassan Oneissi, Assad Hassan Sabra – Summary of Judgement," Special Tribunal for Lebanon, August 18, 2020, 5, <https://www.stl-tsl.org/crs/assets/Uploads/20200818-F3840-PUBLIC-Summary-of-Judgment-FILED-EN-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> "Hezbollah militant Salim Ayyash given life sentences for Hariri killing," BBC News, December 11, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55271428>.

<sup>19</sup> "Mustafa Amine Badreddine – former Accused (deceased)," Special Tribunal for Lebanon, accessed August 6, 2020, <https://www.stl-tsl.org/en/the-cases/stl-11-01/accused/mustafa-amine-badreddine>.

<sup>20</sup> Max Fisher, "Why Wissam al-Hassan matters for the Middle East," *Washington Post*, October 19, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2012/10/19/why-wissam-al-hassan-security-official-killed-in-beirut-blast-matters-for-the-middle-east/?utm\\_term=.6e6340438166](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2012/10/19/why-wissam-al-hassan-security-official-killed-in-beirut-blast-matters-for-the-middle-east/?utm_term=.6e6340438166).

<sup>21</sup> Saad Abedine, Holly Yan, and Yousuf Basil, "Lebanon's Mohamad Chatah -- U.S. friend, Hezbollah foe -- killed in blast," CNN, December 28, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/27/world/meast/lebanon-explosion/index.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Samia Nakhoul and Stephen Kalin, "Beirut bomb kills Lebanese ex-minister who opposed Assad," Reuters, December 27, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-beirut-bomb-idUSBRE9BQ01H20131227>.

<sup>23</sup> "The Prosecutor v. Salim Jamil Ayyash, Hassan Habib Merhi, Hussein Hassan Oneissi, Assad Hassan Sabra – Summary of Judgement," Special Tribunal for Lebanon, August 18, 2020, 15, <https://www.stl-tsl.org/crs/assets/Uploads/20200818-F3840-PUBLIC-Summary-of-Judgment-FILED-EN-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Nadim Ladki, "Hezbollah says Beirut government declares war," Reuters, May 8, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL08466882.CH.2400>.

<sup>25</sup> Robert F. Worth and Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut From U.S.-Backed Lebanese Government," *New York Times*, May 10, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/world/middleeast/10lebanon.html>; "Hezbollah rocks eastern villages," BBC News, May 11, 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7394853.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7394853.stm); Robert F.



while international media reported the worst sectarian fighting in Lebanon since the end of the civil war.<sup>26</sup> The fighting ended with a Qatari-negotiated agreement that brought Hezbollah into a national-unity government and gave its political minority veto power in a new cabinet.<sup>27</sup>

Hezbollah has directly engaged in violence against Lebanese citizens on a smaller scale as well. Hezbollah reportedly maintains non-sectarian military units in Sunni and Christian areas to maintain security, particularly in southern Lebanon where government security forces are not as active.<sup>28</sup> These security patrols and Hezbollah fighters have, however, at times turned their weapons on Lebanese citizens and government forces. In June 2013, Hezbollah fighters clashed with followers of the radical Sunni cleric Ahmad al-Assir in the city of Sidon, leaving more than a dozen wounded and at least one person dead.<sup>29</sup> In October 2016, a Lebanese Internal Security Forces patrol in Sidon suspected two Hezbollah members sitting in a car of preparing a suicide attack. Hezbollah members attacked the patrol after it confronted the two men.<sup>30</sup>

Hezbollah has also endangered the Lebanese population by using Lebanese population centers, particularly in Beirut, for storing weapons storage and conducting other illegal activities. On August 4, 2020, an explosion in Beirut's port killed at least 200 people, wounded more than 6,000 others, and destroyed much of the port. Lebanese officials suspect the explosion was caused by negligence in the storage of the explosive fertilizer chemical ammonium nitrate.<sup>31</sup> Hezbollah allegedly used multiple buildings in the port for illegal drug smuggling and other criminal activities, including the storage of weapons, which led to some suspicions that a fire at one of the Hezbollah warehouses may have sparked the explosions.<sup>32</sup> In 2013, Iran reportedly supplied Hezbollah with hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate.<sup>33</sup> Hezbollah has also reportedly sought to use Lebanon's agricultural ministry to import ammonium nitrate into Lebanon from

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Worth and Nada Bakri, "Deal for Lebanese Factions Leaves Hezbollah Stronger," *New York Times*, May 22, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/world/middleeast/22lebanon.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Tom Perry, "Lebanon government denounces Hezbollah "coup" in Beirut," Reuters, May 9, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-conflict-idUSL0742599820080509>; Robert F. Worth and Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut From U.S.-Backed Lebanese Government," *New York Times*, May 10, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/10/world/middleeast/10lebanon.html>.

<sup>27</sup> "Lebanon Rivals Agree Crisis Deal," BBC News, May 21, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7411835.stm>.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Galey, "Hizbullah calls for ISF back-up in deteriorating south Beirut," *Daily Star* (Beirut), November 17, 2009, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2009/Nov-17/55308-hizbullah-calls-for-isf-back-up-in-deteriorating-south-beirut.ashx>.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell Prothero, "Sunni-Shiite violence hits Lebanese city of Sidon," McClatchy. June 18, 2013, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24750154.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, "Hezbollah men attack Lebanese police patrol," Gulf News, October 10, 2016, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/lebanon/hezbollah-men-attack-lebanese-police-patrol-1.1909796>.

<sup>31</sup> Bassem Mroue, Zeina Karam, and Sarah El Deeb, "Negligence probed in deadly Beirut blast amid public anger," Associated Press, August 5, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/global-trade-ap-top-news-international-news-middle-east-lebanon-4475998de078a93bbe91b7ac9d43ada2>.

<sup>32</sup> Hollie McKay, "Beirut blasts likely accidental – but Hezbollah activities at the port under scrutiny," Fox News, August 4, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/beirut-blast-hezbollah-port-under-scrutiny>.

<sup>33</sup> "Report: Iran sold Hezbollah hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate in 2013," Times of Israel, August 20, 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-iran-sold-hezbollah-hundreds-of-tons-of-ammonium-nitrate-in-2013/>.

Syria.<sup>34</sup> Hezbollah has also stored ammonium nitrate at depots throughout Europe.<sup>35</sup> On September 22, 2020, a Hezbollah arms depot exploded in the village of Ain Qana in south Lebanon. Reuters reported there were multiple people wounded in the blast. Hezbollah blamed the explosion on a “technical error” at the depot and denied any casualties.<sup>36</sup>

### *Israel*



With Iranian training and financing, Hezbollah regularly attacked Israeli forces during Israel’s 18-year occupation from 1982 through 2000. Notable confrontations include the Grapes of Wrath operation, a 16-day conflict with Hezbollah in April 1996 in response to a wave of deadly attacks on Israeli soldiers in Lebanon and rockets into Israeli territory.<sup>37</sup> Israel withdrew from Lebanon in May 2000, for which Hezbollah claimed credit.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, Hezbollah continued to attack Israeli positions across the blue line, the U.N.-recognized border between Israel and Lebanon. In July 2006, Hezbollah killed eight Israeli soldiers and captured two others in a cross-

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<sup>34</sup> Seth J. Frantzman, “Nasrallah threatens to blow up Israel with same chemicals as Beirut blast,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 8, 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/nasrallah-threatened-to-blow-up-israel-with-same-chemicals-as-beirut-blast-637582>.

<sup>35</sup> Julian Borger, “US accuses Hezbollah of stockpiling weapons and ammonium nitrate across Europe,” *Guardian* (London), September 17, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/17/us-accuses-hezbollah-weapons-ammonium-nitrate-iran>.

<sup>36</sup> “Arms depot of Iran-backed Hezbollah explodes in Lebanon, source says,” Reuters, September 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis-south-fire/arms-depot-of-iran-backed-hezbollah-explodes-in-lebanon-source-says-idUSKCN26D1P1>; “Lebanon: Hezbollah arms depot blast caused by ‘technical error,’” Al Jazeera, September 22, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/22/blast-reported-in-hezbollah-stronghold-in-south-lebanon>.

<sup>37</sup> “Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (for the period from 22 January 1996 to 20 July 1996),” U.N. Security Council, July 20, 1996, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N96/180/47/IMG/N9618047.pdf?OpenElement>; “1996: Israel launches attack on Beirut,” BBC News, accessed June 16, 2017, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/11/newsid\\_4828000/4828386.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/11/newsid_4828000/4828386.stm); “Hezbollah fires rockets into northern Israel,” CNN, March 30, 1996, [http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9603/israel\\_lebanon/30/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9603/israel_lebanon/30/index.html); “Israeli soldier dies in suicide bombing,” CNN, March 20, 1996, [http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9603/israel\\_lebanon/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9603/israel_lebanon/index.html).

<sup>38</sup> Marjorie Miller, John Daniszewski, and Tracy Wilkinson, “Israel Leaves South Lebanon After 22 Years,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2000, <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/may/24/news/mn-33497>.



border raid that sparked a 34-day war. During the course of the war, Hezbollah fired approximately 4,300 rockets at Israeli population centers, killing 39 civilians and 120 soldiers.<sup>39</sup>

The war devastated Lebanon, leaving 130,000 Lebanese homes destroyed and tens of thousands of people homeless.<sup>40</sup> More than 1,100 Lebanese people—the majority of whom were civilians—died in the conflict. An American Jewish Congress report blamed the disproportionately high casualty count on Hezbollah’s use of civilians as human shields.<sup>41</sup> Human Rights Watch also reported a “handful of instances” of Hezbollah using Lebanese civilians as human shields.<sup>42</sup> U.N. humanitarian relief coordinator Jan Egeland accused Hezbollah of “cowardly blending” among Lebanese civilians and of being “proud because they lost very few fighters and that it was the civilians bearing the brunt of this.”<sup>43</sup>

Although Israel and Hezbollah have declared their desire to avoid a new war, Hezbollah has repeatedly issued several statements threatening a new conflict. In February 2016, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah threatened to strike Israel’s ammonia storage facility in Haifa, which would have the effect of a nuclear blast, according to Israeli experts.<sup>44</sup> A year later, Nasrallah threatened Israel’s nuclear reactor and warned that his group would observe “no red lines” in its next battle with Israel.<sup>45</sup> Israeli leaders have threatened to hold the Lebanese government responsible for Hezbollah’s actions and strike a broad range of Lebanese targets in the next

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<sup>39</sup> Associated Press, “Lebanese Clear Away the Rubble From War,” *Washington Post*, September 2, 2006, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/02/AR2006090200662\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/02/AR2006090200662_pf.html); Yaakov Katz, “What is Hezbollah Planning for the Third Lebanon War?” *Jerusalem Post*, April 20, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editors-Notes-The-looming-third-Lebanon-War-488526>; Amy Teibel, “Hezbollah Accused of Using Human Shields,” *Washington Post*, December 5, 2006, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/05/AR2006120500446\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/05/AR2006120500446_pf.html).

<sup>40</sup> Associated Press, “Lebanese Clear Away the Rubble From War,” *Washington Post*, September 2, 2006, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/02/AR2006090200662\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/02/AR2006090200662_pf.html).

<sup>41</sup> Amy Teibel, “Hezbollah Accused of Using Human Shields,” *Washington Post*, December 5, 2006, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/05/AR2006120500446\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/05/AR2006120500446_pf.html); “Israel accused over Lebanon war,” BBC News, September 6, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6981557.stm>.

<sup>42</sup> “Why They Died Civilian Casualties in Lebanon During the 2006 War,” Human Rights Watch, September 5, 2007, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/09/05/why-they-died/civilian-casualties-lebanon-during-2006-war>.

<sup>43</sup> Associated Press, “Officials: 7 killed by Israeli missile,” *USA Today*, July 25, 2006, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-07-24-lebanon-israel\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-07-24-lebanon-israel_x.htm).

<sup>44</sup> Roi Kass, “Nasrallah: Ammonia plant in Haifa is my atomic bomb,” YNet, February 16, 2016, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4767144,00.html>; Sharon Udasin and Udi Shoham, “Israeli Ammonia Tank Set to Close Following Hezbollah Threat,” *Jerusalem Post*, February 8, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Judge-orders-temporary-closure-of-Haifa-ammonia-tank-480973>.

<sup>45</sup> Laila Bassam and Angus McDowall, “Harsh Hezbollah words aim to draw ‘red lines’ for Trump: source,” Reuters, February 17, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-lebanon-hezbollah-idUSKBN15W2G5>.

conflict.<sup>46</sup> That May, the Israeli military began building replicas of Lebanese villages in order to train for urban warfare against Hezbollah.<sup>47</sup>

A new regional war would have devastating consequences for both Lebanese and Israelis. In 2017, Israeli military officials spoke publicly about plans to evacuate northern Israeli communities during the next confrontation with Hezbollah. One former IDF officer expressed hope that the Lebanese government was making the same contingency plans, predicting that the “next war will be pretty bloody for both sides.”<sup>48</sup>

### Syria



Syria is part of what Hezbollah and Iranian leaders refer to as the “resistance axis” against the United States and Israel.<sup>49</sup> The Syrian regime has acted as a throughway for Iranian support to Hezbollah. Hezbollah joined Syria’s civil war on behalf of the government in 2012.<sup>50</sup> By January 2016, Hezbollah reportedly had an estimated 7,000 to 9,000 fighters in Syria.<sup>51</sup> In November 2016, Hezbollah held a public parade in the Syrian city of Qusair, during which the terror group

<sup>46</sup> Tamar Pileggi, “IDF chief says Lebanon responsible for next conflict with Hezbollah,” *Times of Israel*, March 19, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-chief-says-lebanon-responsible-for-next-conflict-with-hezbollah/>; Yonah Jeremy Bob, “Is Israel Planning to Strike More Lebanese Sites in Next Hezbollah War?” *Jerusalem Post*, April 25, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Is-Israel-planning-to-strike-more-Lebanese-sites-in-next-Hezbollah-war-488907>.

<sup>47</sup> Judah Ari Gross, “With eyes to Hezbollah, IDF unveils ‘Lebanese village’ training center,” *Times of Israel*, May 29, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/with-eyes-to-hezbollah-idf-unveils-lebanese-village-training-center/>.

<sup>48</sup> “Israel plans mass evacuation if war erupts again,” Associated Press, March 21, 2017, <https://apnews.com/44c8332fd5a645478fbec7d4732a8fc5/Israel-plans-mass-evacuation-if-war-erupts-again>; Anna Ahronheim and Seth J. Frantzman, “‘The Next War Will be Bloody’: A Trip Along Israel’s Tense Northern Border,” *Jerusalem Post*, June 28, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/The-next-war-will-be-bloody-A-trip-along-Israelis-tense-northern-border-498169>.

<sup>49</sup> Sara Taha Moughnieh, “Sayyed Nasrallah: Resistance Axis Triumphs,” *Al Manar TV*, March 18, 2017, <https://www.english.almanar.com.lb/216049>; “Iran Must Lead ‘Resistance Axis’ to Fight US Influence in Mideast, Khamenei Aide Says,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 16, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iran/Iran-must-lead-resistance-axis-to-fight-US-influence-in-Mideast-Khamanei-aide-says-412255>.

<sup>50</sup> “Hezbollah Promises Syria ‘Victory,’” *BBC News*, May 25, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22669230>.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Monitor, “Meet one of Hezbollah’s teen fighters,” *U.S. News & World Report*, January 29, 2016, <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-01-29/meet-one-of-hezbollahs-teen-fighters>; Robin Wright, “Having Tea With Hezbollah’s No. 2,” *New Yorker*, December 13, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/having-tea-with-hezbollahs-no-2>.

showcased U.S. and Russian armored personnel carriers and tanks.<sup>52</sup> At least 2,000 Hezbollah fighters have reportedly been killed in the war, and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has tied the group's survival to the political fate of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.<sup>53</sup> In September 2018, Nasrallah declared that Hezbollah would remain in Syria indefinitely with the Syrian government's permission.<sup>54</sup>

Hezbollah has used the Syrian war to transform into what regional military analysts consider a full-fledged army, increasing its stockpiles of rockets, guns, drones, anti-tank weaponry, and anti-aircraft weaponry.<sup>55</sup> Hezbollah has also successfully captured and held territory, elevating the group beyond the capabilities of a local militia. In June 2017, for example, Hezbollah claimed it and the Syrian army jointly controlled approximately 70 miles along the Syrian-Lebanese border.<sup>56</sup> In June 2013, Hezbollah and the Syrian army jointly captured the Syrian city of Qusayr from rebel forces, which reportedly said "the blatant intervention of Hezbollah" forced their retreat.<sup>57</sup> In November 2016, Hezbollah deputy leader [Naim Qassem](#) declared Hezbollah had become a "highly-trained, heavily-armed standing army."<sup>58</sup>

Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has renewed sectarian divisions in Lebanon, where Shiites have largely supported Hezbollah and Sunnis have supported Syrian rebels. Retired Lebanese general-turned-university-professor Elias Hanna told the BBC in 2013 that Hezbollah's involvement in Syria risked reigniting Lebanon's own civil war.<sup>59</sup> In April 2013, two extremist Lebanese Sunni clerics urged their followers to go to Syria to fight Hezbollah on behalf of Sunni rebels.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Sirwan Kajjo, "Hezbollah Stirs Controversy with Military Parade in Syria," Voice of America, November 18, 2016, <http://www.voanews.com/a/hezbollah-controversy-military-parade-syria/3603047.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Roi Kais, "Nasrallah: If Assad falls, Hezbollah falls," YNet, May 5, 2015, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4653868,00.html>; Al-Monitor, "Meet one of Hezbollah's teen fighters," *U.S. News & World Report*, January 29, 2016, <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-01-29/meet-one-of-hezbollahs-teen-fighters>; Robin Wright, "Having Tea With Hezbollah's No. 2," *New Yorker*, December 13, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/having-tea-with-hezbollahs-no-2>.

<sup>54</sup> Dahlia Nehme and Laila Bassam, "Hezbollah leader says group will stay in Syria until further notice," Reuters, September 19, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-nasrallah/hezbollah-leader-says-group-will-stay-in-syria-until-further-notice-idUKKCN1LZ2KX>.

<sup>55</sup> Amos Harel and Gili Cohen, "Hezbollah From Terror Group to Army," *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), Amos Harel, "Israel's Military Now Sees Hezbollah as an Army in Every Sense," *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), March 4, 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.706956>.

<sup>56</sup> Leith Fadel, "Syrian Army, Hezbollah control 113 km of Lebanon's border," *Al-Masdar Al-'Arabi*, June 5, 2017, <https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-hezbollah-control-113-km-lebanons-border/>.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Chulov, "Syrian town of Qusair falls to Hezbollah in breakthrough for Assad," *Guardian* (London), June 5, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/05/syria-army-seizes-qusair>.

<sup>58</sup> Wassim Seif al-Din, "We have become full-fledged army: Lebanon's Hezbollah," Anadolu Agency, November 16, 2016, <http://aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/we-have-become-full-fledged-army-lebanon-s-hezbollah/687102>.

<sup>59</sup> Jeremy Bowen, "Syrian conflict's sectarian shadow over Lebanon," BBC News, June 20, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22968851>.

<sup>60</sup> Abigail Hauslohner, "Hezbollah's role in Syrian civil war drives sectarian tension in Lebanon," Reuters, April 27, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/hezbollahs-role-in-syrian-war-drives-sectarian-tension-in-lebanon/2013/04/27/942ae1ac-ae5c-11e2-a986-ee837b1888b\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c09c670a166a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/hezbollahs-role-in-syrian-war-drives-sectarian-tension-in-lebanon/2013/04/27/942ae1ac-ae5c-11e2-a986-ee837b1888b_story.html?utm_term=.c09c670a166a).

Foreign terror groups such as [al-Qaeda](#), the [Nusra Front](#), and [ISIS](#) have directly targeted Lebanese civilians in Hezbollah strongholds in retaliation against the group.<sup>61</sup> For example, in November 2015, twin ISIS suicide bombings in the Shiite-majority Beirut district of Burj al-Barajneh killed more than 40 people.<sup>62</sup> The al-Qaeda-linked Abdullah Azzam Brigades has also killed dozens in multiple bombings in Lebanon, including a November 2013 bombing of the Iranian embassy and twin bombings in Beirut in February 2014. The group claimed that it would end its campaign against Lebanon only when Hezbollah withdraws from Syria.<sup>63</sup> Also that month, a Nusra Front suicide bomber killed four people in Hermel, a Hezbollah stronghold in eastern Lebanon.<sup>64</sup> In the course of one day in June 2016, eight suicide bombers killed five people in the Lebanese Christian village of Qaa near the Syrian border.<sup>65</sup>

Hezbollah deputy leader Naim Qassem has defended Hezbollah's involvement in Syria as necessary to protect Lebanon from the chaos of a collapsed Syrian state.<sup>66</sup> But Hezbollah's losses have begun to foster dissent even among its fighters. In 2015, a group of some 60 Hezbollah reserve fighters refused to return to the Syrian battlefield. The fighters subsequently lost Hezbollah financial benefits to their families.<sup>67</sup> In a 2017 interview with the *Nation*, a Hezbollah commander called Abu Hussein said that Lebanese families are questioning why Lebanese people are dying for Syria. A Hezbollah fighter identified only as "Jaafar" told the newspaper that fighters "feel like we are puppets of the international community."<sup>68</sup>

## **Hezbollah and Lebanon's Government**

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<sup>61</sup> Max J. Rosenthal, "Beirut Bombings Pull Lebanon Further Into Syrian War," Huffington Post, November 19, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/19/beirut-bombings-lebanon\\_n\\_4302889.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/19/beirut-bombings-lebanon_n_4302889.html); Anne Barnard, "Hezbollah's Role in Syria War Shakes the Lebanese," *New York Times*, May 20, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/21/world/middleeast/syria-developments.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Kareem Shaheen, "Isis claims responsibility as suicide bombers kill dozens in Beirut," *Guardian* (London), November 12, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/12/beirut-bombings-kill-at-least-20-lebanon>.

<sup>63</sup> Erika Solomon, "Al Qaeda-linked group claims Beirut bombings," Reuters, February 19, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-blast-idUSBREA1I0BQ20140219>.

<sup>64</sup> "Jabhat al-Nusra claims deadly Lebanon bombing," Al Jazeera, February 1, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/02/al-nusra-front-claims-deadly-lebanon-bombing-201421221112955650.html>.

<sup>65</sup> "Lebanon: Second wave of suicide bombings hits Qaa," Al Jazeera, June 27, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/deadly-suicide-bombing-rocks-village-eastern-lebanon-160627032403154.html>; "Eight suicide bombers target Lebanese Christian village," Reuters, June 26, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-lebanon-idUSKCN0ZD09C>.

<sup>66</sup> Robin Wright, "Having Tea With Hezbollah's No. 2," *New Yorker*, December 13, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/having-tea-with-hezbollahs-no-2>.

<sup>67</sup> Jesse Rosenfeld, "Hezbollah Fighters Are Fed Up With Fighting Syria's War," *Daily Beast*, December 30, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/hezbollah-fighters-are-fed-up-with-fighting-syrias-war>.

<sup>68</sup> Jesse Rosenfeld, "How the Syrian Civil War Has Transformed Hezbollah," *Nation*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-the-syrian-civil-war-has-transformed-hezbollah/>.





*The Lebanese Parliament in Beirut. (Source: [Flickr](#))*

Hezbollah has used Lebanon’s democracy to insert itself into the country’s government. Because Lebanon’s parliamentary system often requires opposing parties to join in political coalitions, Hezbollah has been a staple in Lebanese coalitions since 2008, giving the group influence over the stability, direction, and makeup of Lebanon’s government. In 2008, former CIA analyst Daniel L. Byman called Hezbollah “the most powerful single political movement in Lebanon.”<sup>69</sup>

Despite serving in Lebanon’s parliament, Hezbollah’s members pledge their allegiance to the Iranian regime and place that loyalty above the welfare of Lebanon. Hezbollah adheres to *vilayat-e faqih*, the Khomeinist doctrine that a single Islamic jurist should lead the state’s political and religious spheres. In 1985, Hezbollah pledged its allegiance to Iranian Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini as its *faqih*, or supreme Islamic jurist. More than 30 years later, Hezbollah and its parliamentarians maintain their loyalty to the Iranian supreme leader’s successor, [Ali Khamenei](#), above that of the Lebanese government in which they serve.<sup>70</sup>

As such, Hezbollah has on multiple occasions thrust Lebanon into political crisis. Hezbollah is suspected of assassinating former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005.<sup>71</sup> In 2011, the terror group’s politicians quit the governing coalition, causing it to collapse.<sup>72</sup> In November 2017, anti-Hezbollah and anti-Syrian Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned and fled to Saudi Arabia, alleging

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<sup>69</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, “Hezbollah: Most Powerful Political Movement in Lebanon,” Council on Foreign Relations, May 29, 2008, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/hezbollah-most-powerful-political-movement-lebanon>.

<sup>70</sup> Nadim Ladki, “Hezbollah cuts Islamic rhetoric in new manifesto,” Reuters, November 30, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-hezbollah-idUSTRE5AT3VK20091130>.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholas Blandford, “Rafik Hariri: In Lebanon, assassination reverberates 10 years later,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 14, 2015, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2015/0214/Rafik-Hariri-In-Lebanon-assassination-reverberates-10-years-later>.

<sup>72</sup> Alistair Lyon, “Analysis: Lebanon heads for more turmoil after cabinet falls,” Reuters, January 12, 2011, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-analysis-idUSTRE70B4RE20110112>.

that Hezbollah had attempted to assassinate him.<sup>73</sup> Hariri returned to Lebanon later that month and rescinded his resignation.<sup>74</sup>

Elected in October 2016, Michel Aoun is the first Lebanese president to openly align himself with Hezbollah, but other Lebanese presidents have also praised the terror group. Ten days into 2006's 34-day war between Hezbollah and Israel, then-President Emile Lahoud praised Hezbollah as Lebanon's "main liberator" from Israel's 18-year occupation.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, when Michel Suleiman took office in 2008, he praised Hezbollah's anti-Israel stance while calling for dialogue about the group's disarmament.<sup>76</sup>

A key point of contention between Hezbollah's supporters and detractors in the Lebanese government is the party's continued possession of weaponry in defiance of international resolutions. Aoun argued in 2009 that "Hezbollah's weapons will no longer be a problem when the causes behind its existence disappear...."<sup>77</sup> That November, the Lebanese parliament voted to allow Hezbollah to keep its weapons and enter a new coalition government led by Prime Minister Saad Hariri. A cabinet policy statement the following month affirmed the right of "Lebanon, its government, its people, its army and its resistance"—a direct reference to Hezbollah—to liberate all Lebanese territory.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, Hezbollah released an updated political manifesto, which declared the necessity of its arms.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, Hariri has reaffirmed Lebanon's commitment to international resolutions calling for Hezbollah's disarmament.<sup>80</sup>

Sunni Arab leaders have also begun to sanction Lebanon in retaliation against Hezbollah. In February 2017, Saudi Arabia's King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud canceled an upcoming trip

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<sup>73</sup> Anne Barnard, "Hezbollah Urges 'Patience and Calm' Amid Lebanon's Political Crisis," *New York Times*, November 5, 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/world/middleeast/lebanon-hassan-nasrallah-saad-hariri.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/world/middleeast/lebanon-hassan-nasrallah-saad-hariri.html?_r=0).

<sup>74</sup> "Lebanon's Hariri takes critical line on Hezbollah," Reuters, November 25, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-politics/lebanons-hariri-takes-critical-line-on-hezbollah-idUSKBN1DP0HC>.

<sup>75</sup> "Lebanon president: We will fight invaders," CNN, July 22, 2006, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/21/cnna.lahoud/index.html>.

<sup>76</sup> "Lebanon president praises Hizbollah's fight against Israel," *Telegraph* (London), May 26, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/lebanon/2029169/Lebanon-president-praises-Hizbollahs-fight-against-Israel.html>.

<sup>77</sup> "Hezbollah choice at center of Lebanon vote," CNN, June 7, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/06/05/lebanon.vote/>.

<sup>78</sup> "Lebanese Cabinet Approves Policy Statement," Voice of America, November 1, 2009, <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-2008-08-05-voa9/402043.html>; Associated Press, "Lebanon Vote Lets Hezbollah Keep Weapons," *New York Times*, December 10, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/11/world/middleeast/11lebanon.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Nadim Ladki, "Hezbollah cuts Islamic rhetoric in new manifesto," Reuters, November 30, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-hezbollah-idUSTRE5AT3VK20091130>.

<sup>80</sup> Dov Lieber, "Lebanese PM criticizes Hezbollah over press tour on Israel border," Times of Israel, April 21, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/lebanese-pm-criticizes-hezbollah-over-press-tour-on-israel-border/>.



to Lebanon after Aoun made a series of pro-Hezbollah statements.<sup>81</sup> After Hezbollah condemned a May 2017 Bahraini domestic counterterrorism raid, Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa warned that the Lebanese government would be held “responsible for statements made by its partner Hezbollah and its aggressive terrorist leader that insults the Kingdom of Bahrain.”<sup>82</sup> Later that month, Saudi Arabia blocked the website of Aoun’s FPM.<sup>83</sup>

Despite their disagreements, Hezbollah’s domestic political opponents find common ground with the terror group on the subject of Israel. In April 2017, Hariri lambasted Israeli strikes against Hezbollah in Syria and described quarrels with Hezbollah as a “political dispute” that “doesn’t affect the management of the country.”<sup>84</sup> Hariri’s ascension to the premiership in exchange for supporting a Hezbollah ally as president is proof to the contrary.

### *Milestones of Hezbollah’s Rising Political Influence*



*Hezbollah flags line the streets of Baalbek, Lebanon.* (Source: [Aotearoa](#) at [Polish Wikipedia](#) via [Wikicommons Media](#))

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<sup>81</sup> Joseph Kechichian, “Saudi king cancels Lebanon trip after Aoun defends Hezbollah weapons,” *Gulf News*, March 6, 2017, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-king-cancels-lebanon-trip-after-aoun-defends-hezbollah-weapons-1.1989041>.

<sup>82</sup> “Bahrain foreign minister blasts Lebanon over Hezbollah statement,” *Daily Star* (Beirut), May 24, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/May-24/407143-bahrain-foreign-minister-blasts-lebanon-over-hezbollah-statement.ashx>.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Haboush, “FPM website suddenly blocked in Saudi Arabia,” *Daily Star* (Beirut), May 25, 2017, <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/May-25/407196-fpm-website-suddenly-blocked-in-saudi-arabia.ashx#>.

<sup>84</sup> “Hariri: Israel, not Hezbollah looking for war,” *Daily Star* (Beirut), April 3, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Apr-03/400314-hariri-israel-not-hezbollah-looking-for-war.ashx>.

Hezbollah has for years been a fixture in Lebanese governing coalitions, first entering Lebanon's parliament in 1992, when it won eight of 128 seats in the country's first elections since 1972.<sup>85</sup> Hezbollah has since managed to exert its influence over the direction, makeup, and stability of the Lebanese government.

### 2005: The Cedar Revolution

Lebanon's Cedar Revolution was a series of protests that ended Syria's 29-year occupation, while also leading to the creation of a Hezbollah-led pro-Syrian faction in the government. On February 14, 2005, Hezbollah members allegedly assassinated former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, known for his anti-Syrian positions. In response, Lebanese protesters demanded the end of Syria's occupation of the country.<sup>86</sup> Hezbollah organized a massive pro-Syrian counter-protest in Beirut on March 8, 2005. On March 14, a larger anti-Syrian protest took place to demand an end to the Syrian occupation.<sup>87</sup>

Dubbed the Cedar Revolution, the competing protests resulted in Syria's withdrawal that April and the formation of pro- and anti-Syrian parliamentary factions named for the dates of the protests. Hezbollah now leads the pro-Syrian March 8 alliance, while the Future Movement leads the anti-Syrian March 14 alliance.<sup>88</sup> In February 2006, Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) signed a memorandum of understanding, forming a political alliance and adding FPM's parliamentary seats to March 8's.<sup>89</sup>

### 2008: Hezbollah's Attempted Coup

In May 2008, Hezbollah waged violent street battles against the Lebanese government until a Qatar-negotiated agreement ended the fighting. Hezbollah launched the conflict after Prime Minister Fouad Siniora banned its private telecommunications network.<sup>90</sup> As a result of the Doha Agreement, Hezbollah entered a coalition government with the Future Movement. Hezbollah and

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<sup>85</sup> Jonathan Masters and Zachary Laub, "Hezbollah (a.k.a. Hizbollah, Hizbu'llah)," Council on Foreign Relations, January 3, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/lebanon/hezbollah-k-hizbollah-hizbullah/p9155>; Dalal Saoud, "Hezbollah claims election win in Lebanon," United Press International, August 24, 1992, <http://www.upi.com/Archives/1992/08/24/Hezbollah-claims-election-win-in-Lebanon/9335714628800/>.

<sup>86</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "Rafik Hariri: In Lebanon, assassination reverberates 10 years later," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 14, 2015, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2015/0214/Rafik-Hariri-In-Lebanon-assassination-reverberates-10-years-later>.

<sup>87</sup> Liam McLaughlin, "Lebanon: The forgotten revolution," *New Statesman* (London), March 3, 2011, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/03/lebanon-syria-hariri-hezbollah>.

<sup>88</sup> Liam McLaughlin, "Lebanon: The forgotten revolution," *New Statesman* (London), March 3, 2011, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/03/lebanon-syria-hariri-hezbollah>.

<sup>89</sup> "Aoun: FPM alliance with Hezbollah kept Lebanon safe," *Daily Star* (Beirut), February 6, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Feb-06/286684-aoun-fpm-alliance-with-hezbollah-kept-lebanon-safe.ashx>; "New government announced under PM Saad al-Hariri," Al Jazeera, December 18, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/12/lebanon-announces-government-saad-al-hariri-161218201145680.html>.

<sup>90</sup> Tom Perry, "Lebanon government denounces Hezbollah 'coup' in Beirut," Reuters, May 9, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-conflict-idUSL0742599820080509>; "Lebanese voices on agreement," BBC News, May 27, 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking\\_point/7413428.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/7413428.stm).

its political allies received 11 seats in the 30-seat cabinet and Hezbollah received veto power.<sup>91</sup> Lebanese international law researcher Yara Saab described the conflict as a “prime indication” of Hezbollah’s “readiness to use violence in order to achieve political gains.”<sup>92</sup>

### 2009: Parliamentary Elections

Hezbollah won 10 parliamentary seats in 2009, while the Hezbollah-led March 8 opposition bloc increased its number of seats by one, from 56 to 57.<sup>93</sup> The March 14 movement won 71 seats in the election, but political disagreements forced the creation of a coalition government that allowed Hezbollah to retain power in a March 14-dominated government.<sup>94</sup> Parliamentarians are elected to four-year terms, but political disputes delayed new elections until May 2018.<sup>95</sup>

### 2011-2013: The “Hezbollah Government”

In January 2011, while Prime Minister Saad Hariri met with U.S. President Barack Obama in Washington, D.C., 11 government ministers from Hezbollah and its allied parties resigned en masse, collapsing the government.<sup>96</sup> The resignations came shortly before the U.N.-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) announced its indictment of Hezbollah-affiliated suspects in the 2005 assassination of Hariri’s father, Rafik. Hezbollah had threatened retaliation if any of its members were indicted. The U.S. government condemned Hezbollah for trying to “subvert justice” by causing the Lebanese political crisis.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> “Lebanon Rivals Agree Crisis Deal,” BBC News, May 21, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7411835.stm>.

<sup>92</sup> Tom Perry, “Lebanon government denounces Hezbollah “coup” in Beirut,” Reuters, May 9, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-conflict-idUSL0742599820080509>; “Lebanese voices on agreement,” BBC News, May 27, 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking\\_point/7413428.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/7413428.stm).

<sup>93</sup> See Appendix A; Yusri Hazan, “The Shiite Community in Lebanon: From Marginalization to Ascendancy,” Brandeis University Crown Center for Middle East Studies, June 2009, 1, <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB37.pdf>; “Pro-West bloc retains control in Lebanon,” CNN, June 8, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/06/08/lebanon.vote/index.html?s=PM:WORLD>; “Profile: Lebanon’s Hezbollah movement,” BBC News, March 15, 2006, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-10814698>.

<sup>94</sup> Yara Bayoumy, “Hezbollah accepts election loss, U.S. backs allies,” Reuters, June 8, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/06/08/us-lebanon-election-idUSTRE55609720090608>; Nadim Ladki, “Lebanon’s Hariri forms unity government with Hezbollah,” Reuters, November 9, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-government-list-idUSTRE5A84B620091109>.

<sup>95</sup> Haytham Mouzahem, “Once again, disputes delay Lebanese elections,” Al-Monitor, March 27, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/03/lebanon-elections-law-parliament-extension.html>; Lisa Barrington, Issam Abdallah, and Ellen Francis, “Lebanon cabinet approves electoral law, expects May election,” Reuters, June 14, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-politics-election-idUSKBN1951LS>; Ben Hubbard and Hwaida Saad, “Lebanon Elections Boost Hezbollah’s Clout,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/07/world/middleeast/lebanon-election-hezbollah.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Alistair Lyon, “Analysis: Lebanon heads for more turmoil after cabinet falls,” Reuters, January 12, 2011, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-analysis-idUSTRE70B4RE20110112>.

<sup>97</sup> Laila Bassam, “Hezbollah and allies resign, toppling Lebanon government,” Reuters, January 12, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-hariri-resignation/hezbollah-and-allies-resign-toppling-lebanon-government-idUSTRE70B26A20110112>.

Later that month, Hezbollah nominated businessman Najib Mikati as the new prime minister. Then-President Michel Suleiman appointed Mikati to the position.<sup>98</sup> Hezbollah received two portfolios in the new 30-member government, while its political allies received 14 portfolios. Hariri labeled the new cabinet a “Hezbollah government.”<sup>99</sup> In November 2011, Mikati threatened to resign when Hezbollah and its political allies in the cabinet threatened to block Lebanon’s €30 million allocation for the U.N.-backed STL, though he later pushed through the funding.<sup>100</sup> Mikati resigned in March 2013 after a dispute with Hezbollah over delayed parliamentary elections and Hezbollah’s refusal to extend the tenure of Lebanon’s Sunni national police chief.<sup>101</sup> Hezbollah alleged that external pressures caused Mikati’s resignation.<sup>102</sup>

#### 2014: The Rise and Fall of the Unity Government

In April 2013, the Lebanese parliament elected parliamentarian Tammam Salam as the new prime minister.<sup>103</sup> After a 10-month delay, Salam formed a new 24-minister unity government in February 2014, awarding eight portfolios each to the March 8 and March 14 blocs. The remaining eight portfolios went to parties unaligned with either bloc. The agreement was meant to ensure that neither side could veto the other. Among other roles, Hezbollah controlled the foreign and industry ministries.<sup>104</sup>

After Lebanese President Michel Suleiman’s term ended in May 2014, Hezbollah admittedly blocked the appointment of a new president for more than two years because it wanted FPM founder Michel Aoun to fill the role.<sup>105</sup> Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi resigned in February 2016, blaming Hezbollah for Lebanon’s political impasse.<sup>106</sup> That August, Hezbollah and the FPM

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<sup>98</sup> “Hezbollah picks Mikati for PM,” Al Jazeera, January 24, 2011,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/2011124135831876987.html>.

<sup>99</sup> “Lebanon: Hezbollah dominates new cabinet of PM Mikati,” BBC News, June, 13, 2011,

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13750628>.

<sup>100</sup> Reuters, “Lebanon PM Threatens to Resign Over Hariri Probe,” *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), November 25, 2011,

<http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/lebanon-pm-threatens-to-resign-over-hariri-probe-1.397692>; Reuters,

“Beirut to Finance Its Portion of ‘Hariri’ Tribunal,” *Jerusalem Post*, November 30, 2011,

<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Beirut-to-finance-its-portion-of-Hariri-tribunal>.

<sup>101</sup> Laila Bassam, “Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati resigns,” Reuters, March 22, 2013,

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-mikati-idUSBRE92L0TG20130322>.

<sup>102</sup> Nasser Chararah, “Hezbollah Says External Pressures Forced the Mikati Resignation,” Al-Monitor, April 2,

2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/hezbollah-mikati-resignation.html>.

<sup>103</sup> “Lebanon picks Salam as new prime minister,” Al Jazeera, April 6, 2013,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/04/20134611941967963.html>; Dominic Evans, “Hezbollah bloc,

rivals back Salam for Lebanon premier,” Reuters, April 5, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-government-idUSBRE9340QN20130405>.

<sup>104</sup> “Lebanese PM Unveils National Unity Cabinet,” Al Jazeera, February 15, 2014,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/02/lebanese-pm-unveils-national-unity-cabinet-2014215112754343666.html>.

<sup>105</sup> “Hezbollah admits being behind obstruction of Lebanon presidential election,” *Ya Libnan*, September 18, 2016, <http://yalibnan.com/2016/09/18/hezbollah-admits-being-behind-obstruction-of-lebanon-presidential-election/>.

<sup>106</sup> John Davison and Laila Bassam, “Lebanese justice minister resigns, blames Hezbollah over deadlock, court case,” Reuters, February 21, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-lebanon-idUSKCN0VU0EL>.

announced they would boycott cabinet meetings, claiming the government had made decisions without their consultation.<sup>107</sup> By September, the unity cabinet had deadlocked.<sup>108</sup>

### 2016: Election of Michel Aoun

Hezbollah stalled the election of a new president until it could ascertain the election of a political ally.<sup>109</sup> In June 2015, Qassem told Lebanese media that the only option other than Aoun was continuous political vacuum.<sup>110</sup> In October 2016, Lebanon's political parties acceded to Hezbollah's demands in a power-sharing agreement that led to Aoun's election and the appointment of Saad Hariri as prime minister.<sup>111</sup> Aoun publicly thanked Nasrallah and Hezbollah for aiding his election.<sup>112</sup> Qassem declared that Aoun's ascendancy signaled that the Lebanese government was "working toward achievements for the benefit of the country ... including us."<sup>113</sup> Iranian President Hassan Rouhani issued a statement expressing his certainty that "the resistance movement will be strengthened" as a result of Aoun's election.<sup>114</sup>

### 2018: Lebanese Parliamentary Elections

In May 2018, Lebanon held parliamentary elections for the first time since 2009. Hezbollah's parliamentary representation remained steady at 13 seats, but Hezbollah and its allies altogether won a total of 70 of the parliament's 128 seats. The anti-Hezbollah ruling Future Movement saw a decrease from 33 to 21 seats, though its leader, Hariri, maintained his role as prime minister.

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<sup>107</sup> "Salam insists on Thursday Cabinet meeting, Hezbollah indecisive on boycott," *Daily Star* (Beirut), August 24, 2016, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/Aug-24/368718-fpm-boycott-wont-stop-cabinet-from-meeting-thursday-pharaoh.ashx>; Tom Perry, "Lebanon's Hezbollah, Christian allies boycott government meeting," Reuters, August 27, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis-idUSKCN0QW0KT20150827>.

<sup>108</sup> Tom Perry, "Lebanon dialogue suspended as Christian party pulls out," Reuters, September 5, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-lebanon-politics-idUSKCN11B26U>.

<sup>109</sup> "Janjani blames Hezbollah for presidential vacuum," *Daily Star* (Beirut), October 15, 2016, <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/Oct-15/376547-janjani-blames-hezbollah-for-presidential-vacuum.ashx>; Media Line, "Hezbollah's ploy for more power in Lebanon," *Jerusalem Post*, October 7, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Hezbollahs-ploy-for-more-power-in-Lebanon-469638>.

<sup>110</sup> "Hezbollah official to March 14: Elect Aoun or face indefinite vacuum," *Daily Star* (Beirut), June 8, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jun-08/301118-hezbollah-official-to-march-14-elect-aoun-or-face-indefinite-vacuum.ashx>.

<sup>111</sup> "Michel Aoun elected president of Lebanon," Al Jazeera, October 31, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/michel-aoun-elected-president-lebanon-161031105331767.html>; Laila Bassam, "'Vacuum' looms as Lebanese lawmakers fail to choose a president," Reuters, May 7, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-lebanon-elections-idUKKBN0DN0VX20140507>.

<sup>112</sup> "Aoun thanks Nasrallah for efforts to end deadlock," *Daily Star* (Beirut), October 24, 2016, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/Oct-24/377892-aoun-thanks-hezbollah-chief-for-efforts-to-end-presidential-crisis.ashx>.

<sup>113</sup> Ali Rizk, "Hezbollah's No. 2: US strike on Syria mere 'muscle flexing,'" Al-Monitor, April 13, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/04/lebanon-hezbollah-syria-war-israel-us-military-strikes.html>.

<sup>114</sup> Zeina Karam and Philip Issa, "Hezbollah ally elected Lebanon's new head of state," Associated Press, October 31, 2016, <https://apnews.com/61e231af4c89477f9907ceed0905d85/tight-security-measures-beirut-ahead-presidential-vote>.



Hezbollah leaders spoke of a larger influence in an as-yet-to-be-formed government coalition.<sup>115</sup> Nasrallah called the results “a political and moral victory” for Hezbollah that would guarantee the protection of “the resistance.”<sup>116</sup>

### 2020: A New Hezbollah Government Rises and Falls

Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned in October 2019 after two weeks of nationwide protests against government corruption.<sup>117</sup> Aoun appointed academic and former education minister Hassan Diab as the new prime minister in December 2019. On January 22, 2020, Diab announced the formation of a government that included two Hezbollah ministers and members of Hezbollah-allied parties. Hezbollah received the portfolios for the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Industry. Hariri’s Future Movement and other pro-Western parties remained outside of the cabinet, drawing international concern that Hezbollah’s agenda would dominate Lebanon’s new cabinet.<sup>118</sup>

Diab dissolved the government on August 10, 2020, after two days of anti-government protests following an August 4 explosion at Beirut’s port that killed at least 200 and wounded more than 6,000.<sup>119</sup> Later that month, the Lebanese parliament nominated Lebanon’s ambassador to Germany, Mustapha Adib, to be the new prime minister.<sup>120</sup> Though Adib had wide support from the Lebanese parliament and the endorsement of French President Emmanuel Macron, he was unable to form a new government. Adib wanted to build a government of technocrats, which

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<sup>115</sup> Ben Hubbard and Hwaida Saad, “Lebanon Elections Boost Hezbollah’s Clout,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/07/world/middleeast/lebanon-election-hezbollah.html>; Laila Bassam and Tom Perry, “Hezbollah eyes bigger role in next Lebanon government,” Reuters, May 23, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-election-hezbollah/hezbollah-eyes-bigger-role-in-next-lebanon-government-idUSKCN1I0300>.

<sup>116</sup> “Hezbollah’s Nasrallah says Lebanon results are ‘victory’ for the resistance,” Reuters, May 7, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-election-hezbollah/hezbollahs-nasrallah-says-lebanon-results-are-victory-for-the-resistance-idUSKBN1I81PU>.

<sup>117</sup> Tamara Qiblawi, Ben Wedeman, and Ghazi Balkiz, “Lebanon’s Hariri resigns after nearly two weeks of nationwide protests,” CNN, October 29, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/29/middleeast/lebanon-saad-hariri-resigns-intl/index.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Ben Hubbard and Hwaida Saad, “Lebanon, Mired in Crises, Turns to a Professor as Prime Minister,” *New York Times*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/19/world/middleeast/lebanon-prime-minister-hassan-diab.html>; Associated Press, “Riots in Lebanon’s capital leave more than 150 injured,” NBC News, January 18, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/riots-lebanon-s-capital-leave-more-150-injured-n1118461>; Tom Perry and Ellen Francis, “Facing economic crisis, Lebanon’s government weighs options,” Reuters, January 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis/facing-economic-crisis-lebanons-government-meets-for-first-time-idUSKBN1ZLOJW>; Sami Moubayed, “Who are the ministers in Lebanon’s new government?,” Gulf News, January 22, 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/world/mena/who-are-the-ministers-in-lebanons-new-government-1.69174412>.

<sup>119</sup> Michael Georgy and Ellen Francis, “Lebanese government quits amid fury over Beirut blast,” Reuters, August 10, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-security-blast/lebanon-government-set-to-resign-amid-outrage-over-beirut-blast-minister-idUSKCN2560XY>; Ted Regencia, Arwa Ibrahim, and Farah Najjar, “Second day of protests as anger over Beirut explosion grows: Live,” Al Jazeera, August 9, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/hundreds-protesters-injured-anger-simmers-beirut-live-200808234355971.html>.

<sup>120</sup> Tamara Qiblawi, “Lebanese diplomat Mustapha Adib named Prime Minister-designate ahead of Macron visit,” CNN, August 31, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/31/middleeast/lebanon-new-prime-minister-intl/index.html>.



Hezbollah and its Shiite parliamentary ally, the Amal party, reportedly blocked to gain more influence for themselves. Adib resigned on September 26, just days after Aoun noted the urgency to form a new government to prevent Lebanon from descending “to hell.”<sup>121</sup>

### **Hezbollah and Lebanon’s Military**

According to Lebanese Hezbollah media reports, there is “almost daily” coordination between the LAF and Hezbollah against Syrian rebel groups.<sup>122</sup> In the June 2013 Battle of Abra, for example, Hezbollah and the LAF cooperated during two days of fighting against followers of Sunni cleric Sheikh Ahmad Assir in Sidon, Lebanon, which killed more than 50 people. In June 2017, Hezbollah praised the LAF, which it says “integrates with the resistance [Hezbollah] operations at the eastern borders to prevent terrorism from infiltrating Lebanon.”<sup>123</sup>

The Lebanese government has appointed Hezbollah allies to oversee the LAF. Lebanon’s defense minister, Yaacoub Sarraf, belongs to the Hezbollah-aligned Free Patriotic Movement of Lebanese President Michel Aoun.<sup>124</sup> In March 2017, the Lebanese cabinet appointed Staff Brigadier General Joseph Aoun as the new head of the LAF. Tony Badran of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies has accused Aoun of having a history of coordinating with Hezbollah during his previous assignment maintaining security in southern Lebanon.<sup>125</sup>

According to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah and the LAF form a multilateral defense of Lebanon.<sup>126</sup> This cooperation has been particularly noticeable during skirmishes along the Lebanese-Syrian border. In July 2017, for example, Hezbollah and the Syrian army fought against the Nusra Front in the border area, eventually expelling the group from the mountainous Lebanese territory of Jund Aarsal. Though the Lebanese army did not officially participate in the fighting, the army did shell Syrian rebel forces across the border. One Hezbollah fighter declared that the group had protected “the Lebanese army’s back.”<sup>127</sup> Nasrallah praised the army for

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<sup>121</sup> “Lebanon’s PM-designate Adib fails to form new government after blast,” BBC News, September 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54307896>; “Lebanon’s Aoun says country heading ‘to hell’ if gov’t not formed,” Al Jazeera, September 21, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/21/lebanons-aoun-says-country-heading-to-hell-if-govt-not-formed>.

<sup>122</sup> Hanan Khaled, “Hezbollah will not impose veto law: Nasrallah,” *Daily Star* (Beirut), May 2, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/May-02/404216-lebanon-security-has-improved-nasrallah.ashx>; “Lebanese Army Challenges Israeli Provocative Actions on Border,” Al-Manar, February 27, 2017, <http://english.almanar.com.lb/201760>.

<sup>123</sup> “Hezbollah Hails the Lebanese Army Raids in Aarsal, Calls for Unifying Efforts,” Al-Manar, June 30, 2017, <http://english.almanar.com.lb/296287>.

<sup>124</sup> Leila Bassam, Lisa Barrington, and Angus McDowall, “Lebanon forms new government: televised statement,” Reuters, December 18, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-government-idUSKBN1470UZ>.

<sup>125</sup> Tony Badran, “Lebanon’s New Army Chief has History of Coordination with Hezbollah,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, March 9, 2017, <http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/badran-tony-lebanons-new-army-chief-has-history-of-coordination-with-hezbollah/>.

<sup>126</sup> Hanan Khaled, “Hezbollah will not impose veto law: Nasrallah,” *Daily Star* (Beirut), May 2, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/May-02/404216-lebanon-security-has-improved-nasrallah.ashx>.

<sup>127</sup> Agence France-Presse, “‘Difficult’ fight for Hezbollah on Lebanon-Syria border,” Yahoo News, July 26, 2017, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/difficult-fight-hezbollah-lebanon-syria-border-173753283.html>.

disarming suicide bombs in the area and announced that Hezbollah would turn over captured Lebanese territory to the army.<sup>128</sup> The Hezbollah leader also called the LAF's contributions "key" to Hezbollah's victory.<sup>129</sup>

The U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has charged the LAF with ensuring that southern Lebanon is free of all unauthorized weapons, but Hezbollah has relied on either the support or willful ignorance of the Lebanese military to facilitate its rearmament.<sup>130</sup> In February 2017, UNIFIL monitors reported that they had not witnessed the "entry of weapons" into southern Lebanon since 2006.<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, according to April 2017 Israeli estimates, Hezbollah possessed approximately 130,000 rockets and missiles and the capability to launch 1,000 projectiles per day in a war with Israel. In contrast, Hezbollah possessed approximately 15,000 rockets and fired approximately 130 per day during the 2006 war.<sup>132</sup>

An LAF-chaperoned press tour of Hezbollah's military positions in April 2017 highlighted the LAF's abrogation of its responsibility.<sup>133</sup> International media photographed Hezbollah fighters carrying rocket-propelled grenades and other artillery, in violation of U.N. resolutions and Lebanon's own agreements. When an Italian UNIFIL officer reportedly tried to clear the group from a restricted area near an Israeli listening post, an LAF officer instead escorted the UNIFIL officer away.<sup>134</sup> Hezbollah clarified afterward that it had coordinated the event with the LAF, which alerted UNIFIL shortly beforehand.<sup>135</sup>

Lebanon's leadership has at times openly acknowledged the bond between the LAF and Hezbollah. In February 2016, eight months before assuming Lebanon's presidency, Michel Aoun described Hezbollah as a necessary component of Lebanon's border defense because the LAF

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<sup>128</sup> Nazih Osseiran, "Nasrallah says victory certain whether by force or by deal," *Daily Star* (Beirut), July 27, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Jul-27/414133-nasrallah-says-victory-certain-whether-by-force-or-deal.ashx>.

<sup>129</sup> "Summary: Aرسال outskirts fight to continue until 'threats' deterred says Nasrallah," *Daily Star* (Beirut), July 26, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Jul-26/414099-arsal-outskirts-fight-to-continue-until-threats-deterred-nasrallah.ashx>.

<sup>130</sup> "UNIFIL given little notice of Hezbollah's south Lebanon media tour: statement," *Daily Star* (Beirut), April 21, 2017, <https://dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Apr-21/402839-unifil-given-little-notice-of-hezbollahs-south-lebanon-media-tour-statement.ashx>.

<sup>131</sup> Avi Issacharoff, "All is not quiet on Israel's northern front," *Times of Israel*, February 12, 2017, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/all-is-not-quiet-on-the-northern-front/>.

<sup>132</sup> Yaakov Katz, "What is Hezbollah Planning for the Third Lebanon War?" *Jerusalem Post*, April 20, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editors-Notes-The-looming-third-Lebanon-War-488526>.

<sup>133</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "Hezbollah's defiant signal to Israel, Lebanon, and the UN," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 25, 2017, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2017/0425/Hezbollah-s-defiant-signal-to-Israel-Lebanon-and-the-UN>.

<sup>134</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "Hezbollah's defiant signal to Israel, Lebanon, and the UN," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 25, 2017, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2017/0425/Hezbollah-s-defiant-signal-to-Israel-Lebanon-and-the-UN>.

<sup>135</sup> "UNIFIL given little notice of Hezbollah's south Lebanon media tour: statement," *Daily Star* (Beirut), April 21, 2017, <https://dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Apr-21/402839-unifil-given-little-notice-of-hezbollahs-south-lebanon-media-tour-statement.ashx>.

“does not have the equipment or numbers to defend the border.”<sup>136</sup> As president in February 2017, Aoun reaffirmed that Hezbollah is “a major part of Lebanon’s defense” that “complements” the Lebanese army.<sup>137</sup> That June, Lebanon’s interior minister, Nouhad Machnouk, told Egyptian TV that Lebanon’s “defense strategy should determine how to benefit from Hezbollah’s arms, to fend off any [future] Israeli aggression.”<sup>138</sup>

### *The Threat of Hezbollah-LAF Complicity*

In February 2017, former deputy national security adviser under U.S. President George W. Bush and CEP Advisory Board Member Elliott Abrams warned against Aoun’s continued legitimization of “Hezbollah’s military role.”<sup>139</sup> By allowing Hezbollah to continue building its military presence in Lebanon, the Lebanese army is complicit in Hezbollah’s military operations, and acting in violation of international agreements.<sup>140</sup> This behavior endangers the LAF’s reputation and its operational capabilities.

The 1989 Taif Agreement ending Lebanon’s civil war stipulated the disarmament of all militias in the country, including Hezbollah.<sup>141</sup> The U.N. Security Council has issued multiple resolutions reaffirming the need for disarmament. Its 2006 Resolution 1701 specifically called for the LAF to “take steps toward” the removal of all militant weapons south of Lebanon’s Litani River.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> “FPM, Hezbollah Celebrate Alliance’s 10th Anniversary,” Tasnim News Agency, February 8, 2016, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2016/02/08/994516/fpm-hezbollah-celebrate-alliance-s-10th-anniversary>.

<sup>137</sup> Amos Harel, “With Lebanon No Longer Hiding Hezbollah’s Role, Next War Must Hit Civilians Where It Hurts, Israeli Minister Says,” *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), March 13, 2017, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.776419>; Ellen Francis, “Aoun, Hariri’s Hezbollah comments lay bare Lebanon’s political divide,” Reuters, February 14, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-politics-hariri-hezbollah-idUSKBN15T2FX>.

<sup>138</sup> “Lebanon should integrate Hezbollah militarily: Interior minister,” PressTV, March 17, 2017, <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/03/17/514678/Lebanon-interior-minister-Machnouk-Hezbollah-integration>.

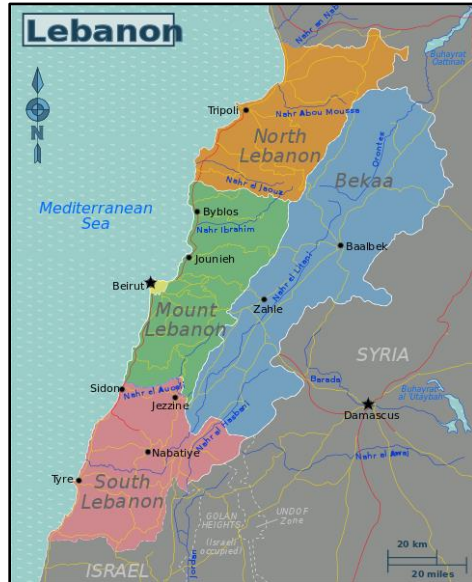
<sup>139</sup> Elliott Abrams, “Elliott Abrams: The U.S. is Flirting with Danger in Lebanon,” *Newsweek*, February 24, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/elliott-abrams-us-flirting-danger-lebanon-560517>.

<sup>140</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>141</sup> *Taif Agreement*, United Nations, accessed April 30, 2017, [https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the\\_tauf\\_agreement\\_english\\_version\\_.pdf](https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_tauf_agreement_english_version_.pdf).

<sup>142</sup> “U.N. Security Council Res. 1701,” United Nations, August 11, 2006, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1701\(2006\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1701(2006)).

## COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT



The U.N. Security Council has mandated the Lebanese Armed Forces to enforce a weapons-free zone south of Lebanon's Litani River. (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

LAF-Hezbollah cooperation endangers the LAF's supply of international military aid, as demonstrated when Saudi Arabia halted a \$3 billion aid package to the Lebanese army in 2016 because of Hezbollah's influence on the government.<sup>143</sup> Lebanon is the fifth largest recipient of U.S. military aid, which totaled more than \$220 million in 2016 and more than \$1 billion since 2006. In August 2016 alone, the United States provided the LAF with 50 armored vehicles and 50 grenade launchers in order to counter Syrian militant groups.<sup>144</sup>

During a November 2016 Hezbollah military parade in Syria, the group showcased U.S.-made M113 armored personnel carriers (APCs), the same type that the U.S. military supplied to the LAF.<sup>145</sup> The following month, the U.S. Department of Defense denied that the LAF had supplied the vehicles to Hezbollah.<sup>146</sup> But Aoun's February 2017 declaration that Hezbollah

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<sup>143</sup> "UN condemns attack on Saudi embassy in Iran," BBC News, January 5, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35229385>; "Saudi Arabia halts \$3 billion package to Lebanese army, security aid," Reuters, February 19, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-lebanon-idUSKCN0VS1KK>.

<sup>144</sup> Alaa Kanaan and Angus McDowall, "New U.S. aid delivery to Lebanon army to counter militant threat," Reuters, August 9, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-military-usa-idUSKCN10K0XI>;

<sup>145</sup> Anna Ahronheim, "Hezbollah shows off US-made weaponry as IDF warily eyes explosive border," *Jerusalem Post*, November 17, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Hezbollah-shows-off-US-made-weaponry-as-IDF-warily-eyes-explosive-border-472904>.

<sup>146</sup> Isabel Kershner and Ben Hubbard, "Hezbollah Is Using U.S.-Made Military Vehicles in Syria, Israel Says," *New York Times*, December 21, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/21/world/middleeast/hezbollah-us-made-apc-syria-lebanon.html>; Barbara Opall-Rome, "US Refutes Israelis Claims of Lebanese APC Transfers to Hezbollah," *Defense News*, December 22, 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/articles/us-refutes-israeli-claims-of-lebanese-apc-transfers-to-hizbollah>.

“complements” the Lebanese army further elevates the prospect that Hezbollah could employ U.S. weaponry against a U.S. ally.<sup>147</sup>

The U.S. government has traditionally viewed aid to the LAF as a bulwark against extremist groups.<sup>148</sup> But some U.S. officials have questioned the value of continued aid in light of apparent cooperation between Hezbollah and the LAF. In April 2016, U.S. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen denounced Hezbollah’s increased “presence within and partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces.”<sup>149</sup> That December, U.S. Representative Ed Royce called for Congress to reevaluate military assistance to Lebanon.<sup>150</sup> In early 2017, the House began discussing a draft amendment to the 2015 Hezbollah sanctions act that targets any “agency or instrumentality of a foreign state” that “has acted or purported to act on behalf” of Hezbollah, which could theoretically target the LAF.<sup>151</sup>

### **Hezbollah and Lebanon’s Economy**

Hezbollah members invested in the Lebanese banking sector and Lebanese businesses have exposed those institutions to damaging financial sanctions.<sup>152</sup> The U.S. government continues to issue new financial sanction bills against Hezbollah, such as the December 2015 Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA), which targeted Lebanese banks.<sup>153</sup> Lebanese businesses that have not been sanctioned have still felt Hezbollah’s negative effect on Lebanon’s foreign relations, particularly through the tourism industry. U.S. officials insist sanctions target Hezbollah’s global financial activities, not Lebanon or the Shiite community.<sup>154</sup> Yet, Hezbollah’s ties to a range of Lebanese businesses exposes all of Lebanon to the risk of financial sanctions.

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<sup>147</sup> Maariv Hashavua, “The Lebanese army will fight alongside Hezbollah in a war with Israel,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 4, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/The-Lebanese-Army-will-fight-alongside-Hezbollah-in-a-war-with-Israel-483178>.

<sup>148</sup> “New U.S. aid delivery to Lebanon army to counter militant threat,” Reuters, August 9, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-military-usa-idUSKCN10K0XI>; “U.S. Central Command Commander General Joseph L. Votel Statement at Dahr Al Jabl Overlook (Arsal, Lebanon),” U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, June 7, 2017, <https://lb.usembassy.gov/u-s-central-command-commander-general-joseph-l-votel-statement-dahr-al-jabl-overlook-arsal-lebanon/>.

<sup>149</sup> “Hezbollah and Iranian Influence in Lebanon Endangers U.S. Assistance and Regional Allies,” Office of Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, April 28, 2016, <https://ros-lehtinen.house.gov/press-release/hezbollah-and-iranian-influence-lebanon-endangers-us-assistance-and-regional-allies>.

<sup>150</sup> Jenna Lifhits, “House Foreign Affairs Chairman Calls for Reevaluation of Military Assistance to Lebanon,” *Weekly Standard*, December 23, 2016, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/house-foreign-affairs-chairman-calls-for-reevaluation-of-military-assistance-to-lebanon/article/2006008>.

<sup>151</sup> “The first full draft of the new Sanctions bill against Hezbollah,” *Russia Now*, April 21, 2017, <http://russia-now.com/en/202636/full-first-draft-new-sanctions-bill-hezbollah/>.

<sup>152</sup> Laila Bassam, “Lebanese charity says unfairly hit by U.S. anti-Hezbollah law,” Reuters, May 21, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-usa-hezbollah-cleric-idUSKCN0YCODL>.

<sup>153</sup> Robert Rampton, “Obama signs into law tougher sanctions on Hezbollah - White House,” Reuters, December 18, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-hezbollah-sanctions-idUSKBN0U12K020151218>; Rebecca Shimoni Stoil, “Obama signs Hezbollah sanctions bill into law,” *Times of Israel*, December 19, 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/obama-signs-hezbollah-sanctions-bill-into-law/>.

<sup>154</sup> “U.S. Treasury Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing Daniel Glaser Visits Lebanon,” U.S. Embassy in Lebanon, May 28, 2016, <https://lb.usembassy.gov/u-s-treasury-assistant-secretary-terrorist-financing-daniel-glaser-visits-lebanon/>.



## *Sanctions*

After HIFPA's passage, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah defiantly responded that Hezbollah's members were not invested in Lebanese financial systems.<sup>155</sup> But Hezbollah parliamentary leaders simultaneously warned that sanctions could push Lebanon toward bankruptcy and cause a "wide rift" in the country if Lebanese citizens stop patronizing Lebanese banks out of fear of sanctions.<sup>156</sup> One member of a Lebanese parliamentary delegation that met with U.S. officials after HIFPA's passage warned that sanctions on Lebanon's banking sector could cause "a total collapse of the Lebanese state."<sup>157</sup> In April 2017, Lebanese President Michel Aoun warned that sanctioning Hezbollah and Lebanese institutions "will greatly harm Lebanon and its people."<sup>158</sup>

The U.S. government alone has designated more than 100 Lebanese financial institutions, commercial entities, and individuals linked to Hezbollah since 2001.<sup>159</sup> For example, in February 2011, the Treasury designated Lebanese Canadian Bank for facilitating money laundering on behalf of Hezbollah. The bank subsequently closed.<sup>160</sup> In March 2017, U.S. authorities arrested Lebanese businessman [Kassim Tajideen](#) in Morocco for allegedly contributing tens of millions of dollars to Hezbollah through Lebanese and African business networks.<sup>161</sup> In February 2016, Saudi Arabia barred four Lebanese businesses, which the United States had previously designated as "procurement agents" to purchase drone technology, engines, and other electronics from global vendors on behalf of Hezbollah.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Jean Aziz, "How Lebanese banks are handling US sanctions on Hezbollah," Al-Monitor, January 12, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/us-sanctions-lebanon-banks-hezbollah.html#ixzz4fwW8oBuJ>.

<sup>156</sup> Laila Bassam, "Lebanese charity says unfairly hit by U.S. anti-Hezbollah law," Reuters, May 21, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-usa-hezbollah-cleric-idUSKCN0YC0DL>.

<sup>157</sup> Jean Aziz, "Will US restrictions on Hezbollah lead to collapse of Lebanon?" Al-Monitor, March 3, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/03/lebanon-delegation-visit-us-restrictions-hezbollah.html>.

<sup>158</sup> "Hezbollah sanctions hurt the whole of Lebanon, warns President," Albawaba News, April 25, 2017, <http://www.albawaba.com/news/hezbollah-sanctions-hurt-whole-lebanon-warns-president-967092>.

<sup>159</sup> Laila Bassam, "Lebanese charity says unfairly hit by U.S. anti-Hezbollah law," Reuters, May 21, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-usa-hezbollah-cleric-idUSKCN0YC0DL>; "Publication of the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015 Related Sanctions Regulations; Counter Terrorism Designations Updates; Syria Designations Updates," U.S. Department of the Treasury, April 15, 2016, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20160415.aspx>.

<sup>160</sup> "Treasury Identifies Lebanese Canadian Bank Sal as a 'Primary Money Laundering Concern,'" U.S. Department of the Treasury, February 10, 2011, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1057.aspx>; Jean Aziz, "How Lebanese banks are handling US sanctions on Hezbollah," Al-Monitor, January 12, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/us-sanctions-lebanon-banks-hezbollah.html#ixzz4fwW8oBuJ>.

<sup>161</sup> "Lebanese businessman appears in US court in sanctions case," Associated Press, March 24, 2017, <https://apnews.com/03f79b22bea84d5fb3a019bd3402f91b/Lebanese-businessman-appears-in-US-court-in-sanctions-case>; "Treasury Targets Hizballah Network in Africa," U.S. Department of the Treasury, May 27, 2009, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg149.aspx>.

<sup>162</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, "Saudi Arabia blacklists firms, expels several Lebanese nationals," Gulf News, February 26, 2016, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/lebanon/saudi-arabia-blacklists-firms-expels-several-lebanese-nationals-1.1679947>; "Treasury Sanctions Hizballah Procurement Agents and Their Companies," U.S. Department of the Treasury, November 5, 2015, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0255.aspx>.



The Lebanese Central Bank has directed Lebanese financial institutions to comply with U.S. sanctions.<sup>163</sup> Most Lebanese legitimately fear isolation from the global economy, according to Lebanese parliamentarians.<sup>164</sup> Lebanese media reported in early 2016 that some banks had refused to open new accounts for suspected Hezbollah supporters.<sup>165</sup> That June, the Central Bank announced the pending closure of 3,000 Hezbollah-linked accounts.<sup>166</sup>

The Lebanese government is actively working to “limit” the effect of new sanctions on Hezbollah, according to Lebanese Minister of Economy and Trade Raed Houry. Aoun has also called on the U.S.-based American Task Force for Lebanon to lobby Congress against additional sanctions.<sup>167</sup> In April 2017, Prime Minister Saad Hariri told Lebanese reporters that the government would work with U.S. authorities to minimize new sanctions.<sup>168</sup> That May, a Lebanese banking and political delegation traveled to Washington, D.C., and reportedly warned that additional sanctions could turn Lebanon into a failed state. The delegation returned reportedly believing it had convinced members of Congress to consider softer sanctions in light of the economic impact on Lebanon as a whole.<sup>169</sup>

In October 2018, the U.S. government passed the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act in October 2018, legalizing sanctions against government agencies and foreign persons that knowingly support the terror group. The law also targets Hezbollah’s affiliated transnational criminal networks.<sup>170</sup> In July 2019, the U.S. government for the first time imposed financial sanctions on two Hezbollah members of Lebanon’s parliament, Amin Sherri and Muhammad Raad. Hezbollah Lebanese officials called the designations an assault on Lebanon’s

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<sup>163</sup> Laila Bassam, “Lebanese charity says unfairly hit by U.S. anti-Hezbollah law,” Reuters, May 21, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-usa-hezbollah-cleric-idUSKCN0YC0DL>; “Lebanon braced for fallout of US law on Hezbollah,” Al Jazeera, May 18, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/law-targeting-hezbollah-worries-lebanon-160518215124772.html>.

<sup>164</sup> Caroline Topouzoglou and Sunniya Rose, “Lebanese businesses squeezed as US sanctions hit Hezbollah,” Middle East Eye, July 21, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanese-businesses-us-sanctions-hezbollah-1400176448>.

<sup>165</sup> Jean Aziz, “How Lebanese banks are handling US sanctions on Hezbollah,” Al-Monitor, January 12, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/us-sanctions-lebanon-banks-hezbollah.html#ixzz4fwW8oBuJ>.

<sup>166</sup> Youssef Diab, “Lebanon Closes 100 Hezbollah Bank Accounts...3,000 Others on the Way,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 10, 2016, <http://english.aawsat.com/youssef-diab/news-middle-east/lebanon-closes-100-hezbollah-bank-accounts3000-others-way>.

<sup>167</sup> Caroline Akoum, “Lebanon interferes to Spare Further Sanctions on Hezbollah,” *Asharq al-Awsat* (London), April 25, 2017, <http://english.aawsat.com/caroline-akoum/news-middle-east/lebanon-interferes-spare-sanctions-hezbollah>.

<sup>168</sup> “Hariri aims to curb sanctions impact,” *Daily Star* (Beirut), April 28, 2017, <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Apr-28/403649-hariri-aims-to-curb-sanctions-impact.ashx>.

<sup>169</sup> Osama Habib, “Lebanon on mission to curb further sanctions,” *Daily Star* (Beirut), April 26, 2017, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Business/Local/2017/Apr-26/403343-lebanon-on-mission-to-curb-further-sanctions.ashx>; Lisa Barrington, “As U.S. targets Hezbollah, Lebanon lobbies against more sanctions,” Reuters, June 2, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-sanctions-idUSKBN18T1S4>.

<sup>170</sup> Maegan Vazquez, “Trump signs new sanctions against Hezbollah,” CNN, October 25, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/25/politics/donald-trump-hezbollah-sanctions/index.html>.

government but pledged that they would not affect the government's work.<sup>171</sup> The United States has also continued to levy sanctions against Hezbollah-linked companies throughout Lebanon. In February 2020, for example, the Treasury Department imposed financial sanctions on three Lebanese individuals and 12 entities affiliated with or controlled by the Iran-based Martyrs Foundation. The designated companies included Atlas Holding for being owned or controlled by the Martyrs Foundation. Atlas and its subsidiaries had conducted financial transactions for Hezbollah through the previously designated Jammal Trust Bank, which the United States accused of facilitating hundreds of millions of dollars in transactions through the Lebanese financial system and aiding Hezbollah officials in evading scrutiny from Lebanese financial authorities.<sup>172</sup> In July 2020, U.S. Department of State spokesperson Morgan Ortagus declared the United States would continue to apply "severe economic pressure" on Hezbollah.<sup>173</sup>

### *Foreign Investment and Tourism*

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has sought to limit Iranian influence in the Middle East in part by targeting Hezbollah. Economic ties between Lebanon and the Gulf countries—as well as businesses unrelated to Hezbollah—have accordingly suffered, as Hezbollah continues to entrench itself in the country. In February 2016, Saudi Arabia warned its citizens against visiting Lebanon. The United Arab Emirates then barred travel to Lebanon completely.<sup>174</sup> Tourism in Lebanon from the Gulf had reportedly frozen by August 2016.<sup>175</sup>

In 2016, Gulf countries represented 25 percent of Lebanon's exports, which made up 1.5 percent of the country's gross domestic product. In 2015, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were Lebanon's two largest trading partners in the Gulf.<sup>176</sup> In May 2015, the Syrian war severed on-the-ground routes for Lebanese exports to the Gulf.<sup>177</sup> New GCC actions against Lebanon further have threatened to destabilize Lebanon's export industry as well as its foreign-exchange reserves.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ellen Francis, "Lebanon PM: US sanctions won't affect government," Reuters, July 10, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-lebanon-hezbollah/lebanon-pm-us-sanctions-wont-affect-government-idUSKCN1U50Z0>.

<sup>172</sup> "Treasury Designates Martyrs Foundation Companies and Officials as Global Terrorists," U.S. Department of the Treasury, February 26, 2020, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm917>.

<sup>173</sup> "US to put 'severe economic pressure' on Hezbollah," Arab News, July 22, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1708361/middle-east>.

<sup>174</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, "Saudi Arabia blacklists firms, expels several Lebanese nationals," Gulf News, February 26, 2016, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/lebanon/saudi-arabia-blacklists-firms-expels-several-lebanese-nationals-1.1679947>; "Treasury Sanctions Hizballah Procurement Agents and Their Companies," U.S. Department of the Treasury, November 5, 2015, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0255.aspx>.

<sup>175</sup> Majd Bou Mjehed, "Lebanon's tourism sector suffers with lack of Gulf tourists," Al-Monitor, August 9, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/business/2016/08/lebanon-tourism-sector-lack-gulf-tourists.html>.

<sup>176</sup> Elena Holodny, "Saudi Arabia is putting the squeeze on Lebanon's economy," Business Insider, March 9, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/saudi-arabia-squeezes-lebanons-economy-2016-3>.

<sup>177</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Last overland route closure chokes off Lebanon exports," *Jordan Times* (Amman), May 3, 2015, <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/business/last-overland-route-closure-chokes-lebanon-exports>.

<sup>178</sup> Babu Das Augustine, "Tensions with GCC could adversely impact Lebanon's banking sector," Gulf News, March 13, 2016, <http://gulfnews.com/business/sectors/banking/tensions-with-gcc-could-adversely-impact-lebanon-s-banking-sector-1.1689097>.

In December 2014, international investment service Moody's downgraded Lebanon's international credit rating and affirmed a negative outlook for the country. Moody's cited Lebanon's frozen presidential and parliamentary elections, both of which have been attributed—at least partially—to Hezbollah.<sup>179</sup> In a demonstration of the importance of the Gulf relations to Lebanon in March 2017, financial analysis company Standard & Poor Global projected a 3 percent growth in Lebanon's economy between 2017 and 2020 based on reports of reconciliation with the Gulf countries.<sup>180</sup>

### **Hezbollah and Lebanon's Non-Profit/Social Services Sector**

Hezbollah operates its own network of charitable groups and non-governmental organizations, often as an alternative to state-provided services.<sup>181</sup> In this way, Hezbollah has ingratiated itself with Lebanon's Shiite population and increased its grassroots popularity. For example, during the 2006 war with Israel, Hezbollah provided emergency relief services and distributed water, food, and medicine to Lebanese Shiites and Christians. One Lebanese Shiite told CNN, "Hezbollah is doing all the things for the people. I don't know where the government is."<sup>182</sup> The provision of essential services such as garbage collection and health care has set Hezbollah apart as a viable alternative to the Lebanese state, boosting the group's domestic popularity.

#### *Misuse of Lebanese Charitable Services*

Hezbollah has created a network of charities in Lebanon and abroad that act to fundraise and recruit for the organization under the guise of charitable work. A prime example of this is the Martyrs Foundation, a network of Iranian-sponsored charities created to support the families of deceased fighters from Iran's terrorist proxies. Iran created the Lebanese branch of the charity in 2006 to compensate the families of Hezbollah fighters killed during that year's war with Israel.<sup>183</sup> In 2007, the U.S. Treasury designated the Martyrs Foundation in Lebanon, accusing it of raising funds for Hezbollah by establishing global charitable fronts such as the Michigan-based Goodwill Charitable Organization.<sup>184</sup> In April 2014, Germany outlawed the charity

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<sup>179</sup> "Rating Action: Moody's downgrades Lebanon's rating to B2 from B1; outlook negative," Moody's Investors Service, December 16, 2014, [https://www.moodys.com/research/Moodys-downgrades-Lebanons-rating-to-B2-from-B1-outlook-negative--PR\\_314633](https://www.moodys.com/research/Moodys-downgrades-Lebanons-rating-to-B2-from-B1-outlook-negative--PR_314633).

<sup>180</sup> "Republic of Lebanon 'B-/B' Ratings Affirmed; Outlook Stable," Standard & Poor Global, March 3, 2017, [https://www.standardandpoors.com/en\\_US/web/guest/article/-/view/type/HTML/id/1809788](https://www.standardandpoors.com/en_US/web/guest/article/-/view/type/HTML/id/1809788).

<sup>181</sup> Shawn Teresa Flanigan and Mounah Abdel-Samad, "Hezbollah's Social Jihad: Nonprofits as Resistance Organizations," Middle East Policy Council, Summer 2009, <http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/hezbollahs-social-jihad-nonprofits-resistance-organizations?print>.

<sup>182</sup> Henry Schuster, "Hezbollah's secret weapon," CNN, July 25, 2006, [http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/24/schuster.hezbollah/index.html?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/24/schuster.hezbollah/index.html?_s=PM:WORLD).

<sup>183</sup> Con Coughlin, "Tehran fund pays war compensation to Hizbollah families," *Telegraph* (London), August 4, 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1525593/Teheran-fund-pays-war-compensation-to-Hizbollah-families.html>.

<sup>184</sup> "Twin Treasury Actions Take Aim at Hizballah's Support Network," U.S. Department of the Treasury, July 24, 2007, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp503.aspx>.

Lebanon Orphan Children Project, accusing it of transferring money to the Martyrs Foundation in Lebanon.<sup>185</sup>

Hezbollah has also allegedly used NGOs and their causes to disguise its own militant activities. In June 2017, the Israeli army revealed video of Hezbollah surveillance outposts along the Lebanese-Israeli border. The outposts were disguised as field offices of a purported environmental NGO called Green Without Borders. Hezbollah had been flying the NGO's banner over the outposts since at least April 2017, according to the army.<sup>186</sup> UNIFIL inspectors were reportedly turned away from one of the outposts that April.<sup>187</sup> A Lebanese NGO called Green Without Borders has been active in the country since at least 2014.<sup>188</sup>



Hezbollah has allegedly disguised spy outposts along the Lebanese-Israeli border as outposts of an environmental NGO called Green Without Borders. (Source: [Jerusalem Post](#))

Hezbollah has appropriated environmental causes in the past, particularly tree planting. In October 2010, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah encouraged Lebanese to plant more trees as a matter of national security. He claimed that Hezbollah's U.S.-designated construction arm, Jihad al-Binah, had planted one million tree saplings.<sup>189</sup> Green Without Borders participated with other Lebanese NGOs in a 2014 campaign called "A Tree for Every Citizen" to plant one million new

<sup>185</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Germany outlaws support group with Hezbollah ties, raids offices nationwide," Deutsche Welle, April 8, 2014, <http://www.dw.com/en/germany-outlaws-support-group-with-hezbollah-ties-raids-offices-nationwide/a-17551285>.

<sup>186</sup> "Watch: Hezbollah Operates on Lebanon Border Under Guise of Fake Environmental NGO," *Jerusalem Post*, June 22, 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Hezbollah-497650>.

<sup>187</sup> "Israel demands UN intervention after disguised Hezbollah outposts found," *Times of Israel*, June 22, 2017, [http://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/israel-demands-un-intervention-after-disguised-hezbollah-outposts-found/](http://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/israel-demands-un-intervention-after-disguised-hezbollah-outposts-found/).

<sup>188</sup> Mohammed Zaatari, "Project aims to plant a million trees in south Lebanon," *Daily Star* (Beirut), November 25, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Nov-25/278793-project-aims-to-plant-a-million-trees-in-south-lebanon.ashx>.

<sup>189</sup> Alistair Lyon, "Go green, Hezbollah guerilla chief tells Lebanese," *Reuters*, October 11, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ba-lebanon-hezbollah-trees-idUSTRE69A2TW20101011>.

cedar trees in Lebanon. Among other Lebanese politicians, Hezbollah parliamentarians Mohammad Raad and Hassan Fadlallah attended the campaign's inaugural event.<sup>190</sup>

### *Success at the Polls*

Hezbollah's outreach efforts have helped it build support among Lebanon's Shiite population, resulting in success at the polls. A 2001 Lebanese survey found that more than 50 percent of Lebanese citizens prioritized candidates' provision of social services.<sup>191</sup> Hezbollah has effectively leveraged its provision of social services into political and popular support among Lebanese Shiites. A November 2006 Gallup poll found that 64 percent of Lebanese believed Hezbollah to be stronger politically following its war with Israel earlier that year, though the war largely devastated Lebanon.<sup>192</sup> Hezbollah claimed it spent \$300 million for its construction arm, Jihad al-Bina, to repair damaged or destroyed homes.<sup>193</sup> The U.S. Treasury sanction-designated Jihad al-Bina in 2007, accusing it of fundraising for Hezbollah by bidding for international projects otherwise off limits to the terror group.<sup>194</sup> In the 2009 parliamentary election, 93.1 percent of Shiites voted for Hezbollah.<sup>195</sup>

Hezbollah's outreach is primarily targeted to the Shiite community, though it has made inroads with Lebanese Christians in recent years as well. Ahead of the 2009 election, pundits believed that Hezbollah could win a majority in the Lebanese parliament with the help of Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, the only Christian party aligned with Hezbollah. Aoun argued against disarming the group, stating that "Hezbollah's weapons will no longer be a problem when the causes behind its existence disappear, including the borders' issues."<sup>196</sup>

### *Hezbollah's Subversion of Lebanese NGOs*

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<sup>190</sup> Mohammed Zaatari, "Project aims to plant a million trees in south Lebanon," *Daily Star* (Beirut), November 25, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Nov-25/278793-project-aims-to-plant-a-million-trees-in-south-lebanon.ashx>.

<sup>191</sup> Melani Cammett, "How Hezbollah helps (and what it gets out of it)," *Washington Post*, October 2, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/10/02/how-hezbollah-helps-and-what-it-gets-out-of-it/?utm\\_term=.b870fb62a20a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/10/02/how-hezbollah-helps-and-what-it-gets-out-of-it/?utm_term=.b870fb62a20a).

<sup>192</sup> Richard Burkholder, "Lebanese See Hezbollah as Politically Stronger After Conflict With Israel," Gallup, November 17, 2006, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/25489/lebanese-see-hezbollah-politically-stronger-after-conflict-israel.aspx>.

<sup>193</sup> Shawn Teresa Flanigan and Mounah Abdel-Samad, "Hezbollah's Social Jihad: Nonprofits as Resistance Organizations," Middle East Policy Council, Summer 2009, <http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/hezbollahs-social-jihad-nonprofits-resistance-organizations?print>; Alistair Lyon, "Lebanon's postwar reconstruction far from complete," Reuters, July 9, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-war-reconstruction-idUSL0922501920070709>; Associated Press, "Lebanese Clear Away the Rubble From War," *Washington Post*, September 2, 2006, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/02/AR2006090200662\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/02/AR2006090200662_pf.html).

<sup>194</sup> "Treasury Designates Hizballah's Construction Arm," U.S. Department of the Treasury, February 20, 2007, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp271.aspx>.

<sup>195</sup> Randa Slim, "Lebanon's Dangerous Sunni-Shiite Divide Widens," *Al-Monitor*, May 29, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/lebanons-dangerous-sunni-shiite.html>.

<sup>196</sup> "Hezbollah choice at center of Lebanon vote," CNN, June 7, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/06/05/lebanon.vote/>.



Following the 2006 war, several international NGOs reportedly had difficulty avoiding Hezbollah, which had links with NGO partners in Lebanon. One Lebanese man told the *New York Times* in 2006 that “everything coming in, Hezbollah puts an eye on it, makes sure it is all given out in the proper way. It is all in the hands of Hezbollah.”<sup>197</sup>

Hospitals and other Hezbollah-linked non-profits directly risk U.S. sanctions, endangering the flow of vital services to the Lebanese people. Fearful Lebanese banks have also preemptively punished charities that have not been directly designated by the U.S. government. In June 2016, Lebanese banks reportedly closed the accounts of Al-Rasoul al-Aazam Hospital in the Burj al-Barajneh suburb south of Beirut, known as “the resistance hospital” because of its treatment of Hezbollah fighters returning from Syria.<sup>198</sup> The banks also targeted Baalbek Hospital, West Bekaa Hospital, and other institutions linked to Hezbollah.<sup>199</sup>

A 2010 Canadian Broadcasting Company investigation of the 2005 Hariri assassination traced Hezbollah cellphone usage that day back to the Hezbollah-owned Al-Rasoul al-Aazam Hospital in Beirut.<sup>200</sup> The hospital works directly with the Lebanese Ministry of Health and the Social Security Fund, as well as private insurance companies and medical equipment companies. Citing the hospital’s ties to the government and private sector in a May 2016 interview with Al-Monitor, Fares Soueid of the March 14 alliance’s General Secretariat unit said that Hezbollah’s infiltration of Lebanon’s charitable networks puts all of Lebanese society at risk.<sup>201</sup>

## **Hezbollah and Lebanon’s Education Sector/Youth Services**

By targeting Lebanon’s youth, Hezbollah attracts new recruits and builds domestic support responsible for its electoral successes. To facilitate this, Hezbollah has infiltrated all levels of Lebanon’s educational system, as well as its youth camps and religious programming.

### *Education*

Hezbollah has employed a two-pronged strategy to control Lebanon’s educational sector. Its schools offer well-funded educational opportunities that, like Hezbollah’s provision of social services, offer services to the Lebanese Shiite population that state-affiliated schools cannot

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<sup>197</sup> Robert F. Worth and Hassan M. Fattah, “Relief Agencies Find Hezbollah Hard to Avoid,” *New York Times*, August 23, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/23/world/middleeast/23lebanon.html>.

<sup>198</sup> Youssef Diab, “Lebanon Closes 100 Hezbollah Bank Accounts...3,000 Others on the Way,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), June 10, 2016, <http://english.aawsat.com/youssef-diab/news-middle-east/lebanon-closes-100-hezbollah-bank-accounts3000-others-way>.

<sup>199</sup> Joseph A. Kechichian, “Lebanese banks close Hezbollah accounts,” *Gulf News*, June 8, 2016, <http://gulfnews.com/news/mena/lebanon/lebanese-banks-close-hezbollah-accounts-1.1842453>.

<sup>200</sup> Neil Macdonald, “CBC Investigation: Who killed Lebanon’s Rafik Hariri?” *CBC News*, November 21, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/cbc-investigation-who-killed-lebanon-s-rafik-hariri-1.874820>.

<sup>201</sup> Jean Aziz, “Will US terrorism finance law do more harm than good in Lebanon?” *Al-Monitor*, May 11, 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/05/us-act-against-hezbollah-impact-lebanon-banks.html#ixzz4g3KIR3x0>.



match. The second prong of Hezbollah's strategy is to use its influence across Lebanon's political, cultural, and media spheres to exert its influence over non-Hezbollah schools. The result is the infusion of a Hezbollah-approved narrative across Lebanon's educational system.

Hezbollah has created its own schooling system as an alternative to state-provided public schooling, and its members are present throughout the university level. "It's like a complete system, from primary school to university," Lebanese University analyst Talal Atrissi told the *New York Times* in 2008.<sup>202</sup> This system enables Hezbollah to inculcate its propaganda among the Lebanese population, but it also risks attracting international sanctions against Lebanese educational institutions.

In March 2017, U.S. government alleged that the American University of Beirut used U.S. aid money to provide support to Hezbollah.<sup>203</sup> Representatives from Hezbollah's Al-Nour radio and Al-Manar TV allegedly attended U.S.-funded training workshops at the university between 2007 and 2009. According to U.S. attorneys, the university accepted grant money from USAID for years without ensuring against the provision of material support to U.S.-designated entities. Prosecutors also accused the university of linking its website to Hezbollah's U.S.-designated construction arm. In that same month, the university settled the claims for \$700 million.<sup>204</sup>

Hezbollah is also represented in Lebanese university student councils. Student council elections have at times erupted in violence between Hezbollah's supporters and others. In 2012, for example, students supporting Hezbollah and the Christian party Kataeb began a fistfight at the University of St. Joseph (USJ) in Beirut.<sup>205</sup> In November 2013, student supporters of Hezbollah at USJ again violently clashed with student supporters of the March 14 movement. Some 150 Hezbollah members reportedly surrounded the university in response to the student confrontation.<sup>206</sup> In January 2007, riots by opposing student-supporters of Hezbollah and the Lebanese government resulted in arson, attacks by stone- and club-wielding students, and the deaths of four people. A cafeteria fight between pro-Hezbollah Shiites and pro-government Sunnis reportedly sparked the riots.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Robert F. Worth, "Hezbollah Seeks to Marshall the Piety of the Young," *New York Times*, November 20, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/world/middleeast/21lebanon.html>.

<sup>203</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Lebanon university settles US lawsuit over Hezbollah," *Peninsula* (Doha), March 25, 2017, <http://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/25/03/2017/Lebanon-university-settles-US-lawsuit-over-Hezbollah>.

<sup>204</sup> Alex Dobuzinkskis, "American University of Beirut settles U.S. lawsuit for \$700,000," Reuters, March 24, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-security-university-idUSKBN16V1X4>.

<sup>205</sup> *Daily Star* (Beirut), "Supporters of Hezbollah, Kataeb, LF clash at USJ," University of St. Joseph, May 24, 2012, [http://photos.usj.edu.lb/pdf/pdf\\_1094-1670.pdf](http://photos.usj.edu.lb/pdf/pdf_1094-1670.pdf).

<sup>206</sup> "Students clash at Saint Joseph University in Beirut," NOW, November 25, 2013, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/archive/522422-students-clash-at-saint-joseph-university-in-beirut>.

<sup>207</sup> Alfonso Serrano, "Beirut On Lockdown After Deadly Clashes," CBS News, January 25, 2007, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/beirut-on-lockdown-after-deadly-clashes/>; Associated Press, "Reports: 4 Dead, Dozens Injured in Student Clashes at Beirut University," Fox News, January 25, 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2007/01/25/reports-4-dead-dozens-injured-in-student-clashes-at-beirut-university.html>.

On the primary school level, Hezbollah's Islamic Institution for Education oversees the Mahdi schools, a network of private schools that teach the core subjects of math, history, and science while also inculcating Hezbollah's ideology. Hezbollah first opened the schools in 1993 in southern Lebanon. By 1997, 1,000 Shiite students attended six Mahdi schools across southern Lebanon.<sup>208</sup> By 2006, approximately 14,000 students attended Hezbollah's schools.<sup>209</sup> And by 2013, the schools were present throughout the country as well as in the Iranian city of Qom.<sup>210</sup>

Approximately two-thirds of Lebanese students reportedly attend private schools.<sup>211</sup> Hezbollah attracts students by offering funding and expedited services with which the state cannot compete. The schools offer modern facilities such as computer labs and swimming pools, while Hezbollah members quickly carry out repairs that might take days or weeks in state-affiliated schools. Hezbollah also offers tuition assistance, further drawing pupils away from less sectarian private schools.<sup>212</sup>

Each of Hezbollah's schools reportedly features pictures of the late Iranian Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and instills allegiance to both.<sup>213</sup> During Israel's occupation of Lebanon, charity boxes in the schools collected money to support Hezbollah's militant activities.<sup>214</sup> Since Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah has continued to use the schools to promote its terrorist agenda. For example, a senior Hezbollah official announced during a 2013 school function that the terror group had recently acquired missiles that could strike the southern Israeli city of Eilat.<sup>215</sup> Girls are taught to marry Hezbollah

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<sup>208</sup> Marjorie Miller, "Hezbollah's Schools of Thought," *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/nov/28/news/mn-58553>.

<sup>209</sup> Zvi Bar'el, "Hezbollah: An Empire Worth Millions," *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), July 26, 2006, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/hezbollah-an-empire-worth-millions-1.193784>.

<sup>210</sup> Thanassis Cambanis, "Hizbollah Mahdi schools mix maths with doctrine," *Financial Times* (London), October 20, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/e0be1122-2695-11e3-9dc0-00144feab7de>; Henry Schuster, "Hezbollah's secret weapon," CNN, July 25, 2006, [http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/24/schuster.hezbollah/index.html?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/24/schuster.hezbollah/index.html?_s=PM:WORLD).

<sup>211</sup> John Davison, "In Lebanon, getting Syrian children in school a huge task," Reuters, October 7, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-lebanon/in-lebanon-getting-syrian-children-in-school-a-huge-task-idUSKCN12719T>; Ghinwa Obeid, "Education in Lebanon mired in problems: Bou Saab," *Daily Star* (Beirut), April 8, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Apr-08/293669-education-in-lebanon-mired-in-problems-bou-saab.ashx#>; "Lebanon promotes 'back to public school' drive," *Arab Weekly* (London), October 15, 2017, <https://thearabweekly.com/lebanon-promotes-back-public-school-drive>.

<sup>212</sup> Thanassis Cambanis, "Hizbollah Mahdi schools mix maths with doctrine," *Financial Times* (London), October 20, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/e0be1122-2695-11e3-9dc0-00144feab7de>; Henry Schuster, "Hezbollah's secret weapon," CNN, July 25, 2006, [http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/24/schuster.hezbollah/index.html?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/24/schuster.hezbollah/index.html?_s=PM:WORLD).

<sup>213</sup> Thanassis Cambanis, "Hizbollah Mahdi schools mix maths with doctrine," *Financial Times* (London), October 20, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/e0be1122-2695-11e3-9dc0-00144feab7de>.

<sup>214</sup> Marjorie Miller, "Hezbollah's Schools of Thought," *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/nov/28/news/mn-58553>.

<sup>215</sup> Thanassis Cambanis, "Hizbollah Mahdi schools mix maths with doctrine," *Financial Times* (London), October 20, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/e0be1122-2695-11e3-9dc0-00144feab7de>.

fighters and support the party.<sup>216</sup> Many male graduates go on to university and careers, but also stand ready to fight in Hezbollah's reserve army.<sup>217</sup>

Lebanese schools generally avoid teaching modern Lebanese history because of the potential for inflaming sectarian divisions. Hezbollah has capitalized on this and used its position in the Lebanese government to impose its own values on Lebanon's state educational system.<sup>218</sup> In 2009, Lebanese Labor Minister Mohammed Fneish—a Hezbollah party member—reportedly pressured Beirut secondary school International College to censor a U.S. textbook called “Modern World History” because it classified Hezbollah as a terrorist group. Though the school had used the book for seven years, it removed the offending pages after being pressured by the education ministry.<sup>219</sup> A month later, Hezbollah launched a media campaign against a private English-language school in Beirut. The school, which was not publicly identified, used a textbook called “The InterActive Reader Plus,” which included excerpts of “The Diary of Anne Frank.” Hezbollah accused the textbook of promoting Zionism by focusing on the persecution of the Jews. As a result, the school reportedly removed the book from its curriculum.<sup>220</sup>

### *Hezbollah Youth Programs*

In 1985, Hezbollah created a central part of its youth wing called the Mahdi Scouts. The Lebanese education ministry licensed the movement in 1992, and the Mahdi Scouts later joined the Lebanese Scout Federation.<sup>221</sup> The scouts offer outdoor recreational and educational programs such as fishing, camping, and environmental lessons. But the movement also provides religious and ideological instruction, inculcating devotion to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Hezbollah.<sup>222</sup>

Some 60,000 youths and leaders participate in the Mahdi Scouts. At age 16, Mahdi Scouts typically join training programs to become Hezbollah fighters, according to scout leaders.<sup>223</sup> Hezbollah fighters as young as 16 have reportedly been killed in the Syrian conflict.<sup>224</sup> The

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<sup>216</sup> Hannin Ghaddar, “Hezbollah's Women Aren't Happy,” *Tablet*, October 12, 2016, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/215483/hezbollah-women>.

<sup>217</sup> “Hezbollah's Youth,” *Asharq Al-Awsat* (London), July 21, 2007, <https://english.aawsat.com/theaawsat/features/hezbollahs-youth>.

<sup>218</sup> “History lessons stymied in Lebanon,” *BBC News*, April 8, 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7988399.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7988399.stm).

<sup>219</sup> Associated Press, “Lebanese School Rips Pages From Textbook Critical of Hezbollah,” *Fox News*, October 20, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2009/10/20/lebanese-school-rips-pages-from-textbook-critical-hezbollah.html>.

<sup>220</sup> Agence France-Presse, “Anne Frank diary offends Hezbollah,” *YNet*, November 6, 2009, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3801302,00.html>.

<sup>221</sup> Andrew Coombes, “Hezbollah's Scout Brigade,” *Al Jazeera*, January 28, 2009, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2007/12/20085251919830843.html>.

<sup>222</sup> Robert F. Worth, “Hezbollah Seeks to Marshall the Piety of the Young,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/world/middleeast/21lebanon.html>.

<sup>223</sup> Robert F. Worth, “Hezbollah Seeks to Marshall the Piety of the Young,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/world/middleeast/21lebanon.html>.

<sup>224</sup> “16-year-old boy among five Hezbollah fighters killed in Syria,” *Al Arabiya*, July 10, 2017, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2017/07/10/16-year-old-boy-among-five-Hezbollah-fighters-killed-in-Syria-.html>.

movement has since spread to Syria as well.<sup>225</sup> Scouts display pictures of Khomeini and Khamanei, and pledge their allegiance to Hezbollah and the Iranian supreme leader. Guest speakers at the camps have included armed Hezbollah fighters and then Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.<sup>226</sup> Like other scouting programs, activities include computer programming, weight lifting, and homework help. But the Mahdi Scouts also teach what they call “Islamic values,” such as “jihad against Israel” and martyrdom. In 2009, one 14-year-old scout told Al Jazeera that the group “told us to be martyrs defending our land from all the countries that attack us.”<sup>227</sup>

Lebanese Shiite girls are also included in Mahdi Scout programming and are similarly indoctrinated to Hezbollah vision of how Shiite Islamic women should behave. Scout leaders hold the *Takleef Shara’ee* ceremony for 8-to-9-year-old girls to mark the first time they put on *hijabs*, Islamic headscarves. The ceremonies are marked by religious speeches by Hezbollah clerics.<sup>228</sup> Female Mahdi Scouts have paraded throughout Lebanon with banners declaring support for Hezbollah’s actions in Syria.<sup>229</sup> Like their male cohorts, the female Mahdi Scouts are instilled with Shiite and Hezbollah ideology.

In 2003, Hezbollah launched *Mahdi* magazine, a colorful monthly publication targeting Lebanese youth. It includes cartoon depictions of deceased Hezbollah fighters and stories of suicide bombings and other attacks against Israel. The magazine emphasizes Shiite identity, building a connection to Iran and instilling further division in Lebanon’s already sectarian society. According to general manager Abbas Charar, the magazine seeks to “teach children the values of the resistance.”<sup>230</sup> Charar’s defense of *Mahdi* to Agence France-Presse seemed to summarize the entirety of Hezbollah’s youth strategy: “We tell them: ‘Just as these great people resisted and were victorious, so too can you resist and be victorious, and that starts with your education’.”<sup>231</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>225</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, “Syria’s Civil War Produces a Clear Winner: Hezbollah,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/syrias-civil-war-produces-a-clear-winner-hezbollah-1491173790>.

<sup>226</sup> Thanassis Cambanis, “Hezbollah’s Boy Scouts,” *Foreign Policy*, October 13, 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/13/hezbollahs-boy-scouts-2/>; Robert F. Worth, “Hezbollah Seeks to Marshall the Piety of the Young,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/world/middleeast/21lebanon.html>.

<sup>227</sup> Andrew Coombes, “Hezbollah’s Scout Brigade,” January 28, 2009, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2007/12/20085251919830843.html>.

<sup>228</sup> Robert F. Worth, “Hezbollah Seeks to Marshall the Piety of the Young,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/world/middleeast/21lebanon.html>.

<sup>229</sup> Agence France-Presse, “Hezbollah vows to keeping fighting on in Syria,” Al Arabiya English, March 22, 2016, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/03/22/Hezbollah-vows-to-keeping-fighting-on-in-Syria.html>.

<sup>230</sup> Agence France-Presse, “Hezbollah kids magazine mixes cartoons with armed ‘resistance,’” *Times of Israel*, December 2, 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hezbollah-kids-magazine-mixes-cartoons-with-armed-resistance/>.

<sup>231</sup> Agence France-Presse, “Hezbollah kids magazine mixes cartoons with armed ‘resistance,’” *Times of Israel*, December 2, 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hezbollah-kids-magazine-mixes-cartoons-with-armed-resistance/>.

Hezbollah has used its political leverage and military capabilities to subvert Lebanon's sovereignty, incorporating itself into virtually every major sector of Lebanese society through its political wing and the creation of its own parallel institutions. The group's interference in Syria, including the devastation wrought by foreign terror groups retaliating against Hezbollah, have further endangered the Lebanese people. Lebanon's Gulf neighbors have in recent years recognized Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, while Saudi Arabia has already twice punished Lebanon's government over Hezbollah's influence. Lebanon faces further political and economic isolation if the Lebanese people cannot extricate themselves from Hezbollah's influence.

Some Lebanese have begun to recognize the threat Hezbollah poses to their country. In March 2017, Lebanese journalist Maria Maalouf used Twitter to call on Israel to assassinate Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and "rid us of him..."<sup>232</sup> A month later, Lebanese journalist Baria Alamuddin lamented the Lebanese people's acceptance of Hezbollah in the 1980s and '90s, which has now translated into Hezbollah's domination of Lebanon. "In our naivety, I and other Lebanese supported Hezbollah's endeavors to push Israel out of Lebanon. We believed their platitudes about putting Lebanese interests first — until it was far too late," she wrote.<sup>233</sup>

Despite the political and physical damage Hezbollah has inflicted on Lebanon, Hezbollah's leaders openly boast of the group's influence and ability to subvert Lebanese sovereignty. During a Quds Day speech in June 2017, Nasrallah threatened to bring "hundreds of thousands of fighters from all around the Arab and Islamic world" to fight alongside Hezbollah if Israel attacked either Lebanon or Syria.<sup>234</sup> Hezbollah deputy leader Naim Qassem told the *New Yorker* in 2016, "In the eyes of the people, the political powers, the countries—whether friends or foes—we are an actual regional power because our positions have regional consequences."<sup>235</sup> For the Lebanese people, however, these consequences have been disastrous.

## **Appendix A:**

[Memorandum of Understanding between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement](#): February 2006 agreement that politically aligned Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement of Lebanese President Michel Aoun.

## **Appendix B: International Agreements and Resolutions Calling for Hezbollah's Disarmament**

[Taif Agreement \(1989\)](#): Agreement that ended Lebanon's civil war. Calls for the disarmament of all militant organizations inside Lebanon.

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<sup>232</sup> "Lebanese journalist sues Hezbollah's Nasrallah on murder, rape allegations," Al Arabiya English, March 25, 2017, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/television-and-radio/2017/03/25/Lebanese-journalist-sues-Hezbollah-s-Nasrallah-on-murder-rape-allegations.html>.

<sup>233</sup> Baria Alamuddin, "The stealthy Hezbollahization of Iraq," Arab News, April 23, 2017, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1089271>.

<sup>234</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Hezbollah says 'thousands' of fighters to respond if Israel attacks," Al-Monitor, June 23, 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/afp/2017/06/israel-palestinians-conflict-quds-hezbollah.html>.

<sup>235</sup> Robin Wright, "Having Tea With Hezbollah's No. 2," *New Yorker*, December 13, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/having-tea-with-hezbollahs-no-2>.



**COUNTER  
EXTREMISM  
PROJECT**

[U.N. Security Council Res. 1559 \(2004\)](#): Calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

[U.N. Security Council Res. 1680 \(2006\)](#): Expresses regret over Lebanon's failure to implement the disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias per Res. 1559. Reiterates call for full implementation of 1559.

[U.N. Security Council Res. 1701 \(2006\)](#): Resolution that ended the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel. Restricts Hezbollah's presence south of the Litani River and asserts the authority of the Lebanese army in southern Lebanon. Asserts that there shall be no weapons in Lebanon "without the consent of the Government of Lebanon."

[Baabda Declaration \(2012\)](#): Agreement by Lebanon's National Dialogue Committee to enforce and respect the Taif Agreement and Res. 1701.