

LEBANON HEZBOLLAH

Party Portrait

Hezbollah (the “Party of God”) sees itself as the legitimate representative of the historically oppressed Shia community in Lebanon and the wider Middle East. Its narrative is woven around the notion of resistance against oppression and injustice. Since inception, the party has looked to Iran for its religious and ideological leadership, financial and military support. Hezbollah’s identity has also been defined by its opposition to Israel. It emerged in the backdrop of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon. The 2000 Israeli withdrawal of forces from Southern Lebanon was portrayed as the triumph of the Hezbollah-led resistance movement and further boosted support for the party and its charismatic leader, Nasrallah, within and outside Lebanon. Hezbollah has used the on-going threat of Israeli aggression in its political narrative, thereby justifying being the only political group to retain military capabilities post the end of the civil war. Hezbollah’s traditional conflict narratives adapted in light of its direct intervention in the Syrian conflict. Albeit Nasrallah’s speeches in relation to the Syrian civil war paint the “US-Israeli axis” as “occupying forces” dividing the region, they have also emphasized the sectarian nature of the conflict by highlighting the destruction of religious shrines in Syria. The threat to Shia and Christian minority populations from Sunni jihadists forms the ideological basis of Hezbollah’s fight against ISIS.

Key Interests

- Retain legitimacy as the representative of the historically oppressed Shia communities across the Middle East and conversely, contain the dominance of Sunni political and armed groups.
- Undermine Israel's military and political power in the region; deter Israel's military advances into Lebanon.
- Enhance the power of the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis which in turn will guarantee uninterrupted arms supply through Syria and Syrian territory serving as military bases for Hezbollah (including storage of military stockpiles).
- Increase Hezbollah's share of political power, influence and representation within Lebanon's domestic politics.

Sources of Leverage

Political - The Lebanese government formed by Saad Hariri in December 2016 is dominated by pro-Hezbollah factions that control two-thirds of the cabinet.
Military - Hezbollah's military arm, the Islamic Resistance, has military capabilities that are comparable with a medium-sized state army and superior to that of the Lebanese Army.
Convening Powers - Hezbollah exerts ideological influence in the Middle East. In the past (e.g. 2006 war against Israel), it has formed a symbol of pan-Arab resistance to Israel. It also serves as a “bullets plus ballots” model for other militant organizations such as Hamas.

Regional Strategy

Hezbollah's regional strategy involves signaling its willingness and preparedness to respond to Israeli aggression with an escalation to war; build military capabilities to deter Israeli military advances and fight wars in the event of perceived aggression. It also seeks to strengthen regional resistance to Israel by supporting groups such as Hamas. Hezbollah also seeks to provide direct military support to the Assad regime in Syria in order to strengthen the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis, which would have been at great risk if a non-Assad regime came into power in Syria. Preservation of a sympathetic Syrian regime also ensures uninterrupted routes for arms supply and access to Syrian territory that can serve as military bases and arsenal for Hezbollah.

Powerful Individuals

Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah Secretary General

Potential Negotiation Moves

Syrian Military Support - Extend direct military support to Assad regime in Syria
Strengthen Axis - Strengthen the Iran - Syria - Hezbollah axis
Fight Sunni jihadist groups in Syria

Internal Conflicts

Hezbollah leads the March 8 alliance of political parties and groups that stand in opposition to the Sunni-led March 14 coalition in Lebanon.

Memberships

N/A

Allies

IRAN

Partners

PALESTINE Hamas, SYRIA Government

Rivals

PALESTINE Fatah

Adversaries

ISRAEL, ISIS, SYRIA Other Opposition Groups, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED STATES, GCC

Active Armed Opponents

N/A

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

IRAN

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

N/A