

Hezbollah

AT A GLANCE

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SUMMARY

Formed: April 9, 1983.

Disbanded: Group is active.

First Attack: April 9, 1983: A group called Islamic Jihad, which would later become Hezbollah, claimed responsibility for the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, which killed sixty-three. The attack brought global attention to the group for the first time (63 killed, unknown wounded).¹

Last Attack: September 1, 2019: Hezbollah militants fired anti-tank missiles at an Israeli military base in Northern Israel. No casualties were reported. Hezbollah stated that the attack was conducted in response to attacks its members received in Syria (0 killed, 0 wounded).²

OVERVIEW

Hezbollah is a Shia military and political group based in Lebanon. Hezbollah was created during the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon in 1982. In its 1985 manifesto, Hezbollah professed its goals were to destroy Israel and expel Western influences from Lebanon and the wider Middle East. In 1992, Hezbollah created its own political party in Lebanon. As of September 2021, Hezbollah's political and military wings are both active within the country and take part in elections. Hezbollah has a close relationship with both Syria and Iran. Iran provided critical support for Hezbollah's foundation and remains the group's primary patron. During the Syrian civil war, Hezbollah acted as one of Bashar al-Assad's greatest allies and provided thousands of troops for his regime.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Hezbollah is a Shia political and militant organization based in Lebanon. In its early days, the organization was a loose collection of underground terrorist cells. Over the last thirty years,

Hezbollah has evolved into a hybrid organization woven into the structure of Lebanese society. It provides social services and actively participates in politics, while also engaging in international terrorist attacks and regional military operations.³

When Lebanon gained its independence in 1943, Shiites became an economically and politically marginalized group.⁴ After the Lebanese civil war broke out in 1975, several Islamic revivalist movements took root in Lebanon, fueled by mounting Shia discontent in the country. The Amal movement – from which Hezbollah would one day split – emerged during this time and became the most prominent Shia militia during the Lebanese civil war. The group's objectives were to gain greater respect for Lebanon's Shia population and to increase the share of governmental resources allocated to the southern, Shia-dominated region of Lebanon.⁵

In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon to counter Palestinian militants in this southern, Shia-dominated region.⁶ Some Shiites initially supported the Israeli forces because of the security they provided against Palestinian militants. However, popular opinion against Israel began to turn as civilian death tolls rose.⁷ Several incidents eroded support for Israeli forces. In September 1982, the Israeli Defense Force was complicit in allowing a Christian Lebanese militia to massacre at least 800 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.⁸ Later in 1983, an Israeli patrol accidentally crashed through a Shia festival; when observers began throwing stones, the patrol responded with gunshots and grenades, killing several in the crowd.⁹

Following these incidents and amidst growing anti-Israeli sentiment, several Shiite Amal movement leaders broke away from the militia. Led by Husain al-Musawi, these militants formed a new organization espousing a more militant response to the occupation, which they named Islamic Amal.¹⁰ The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) was essential in supporting the formation of the Islamic Amal. Several thousand members of the IRGC were dispatched to support Islamic Amal, and the financial backing of Iran strengthened the group.¹¹ With the support of Iran, Islamic Amal quickly gained momentum by recruiting of members from other revolutionary Shia organizations, such as the Muslim Student Union and the Dawa Party of Lebanon.¹² The group first attracted international attention with the 1983 bombings of the U.S. Embassy and the American and French military barracks in Beirut.¹³

In 1985, Islamic Amal published a manifesto under the new name of Hezbollah. It remains unclear whether a group of Islamic Amal members split away from the larger group to form Hezbollah or if Islamic Amal was simply an earlier iteration of Hezbollah.¹⁴ In the manifesto, Hezbollah outlined several of its key goals: to destroy Israel; to expel Western influences from Lebanon and the wider Middle East; and to combat enemies within Lebanon, particularly the Phalanges Party. Hezbollah asserted that an Islamic state was the only legitimate option for the Lebanese government. The manifesto also denied Israel's right to exist.¹⁵

Until 1985, Hezbollah, Amal, and Palestinian guerrillas took part in resistance operations against Israel in Southern Lebanon. From 1984 to the Israeli withdrawal in 1985, the vast majority of attacks against Israeli forces were carried out by Hezbollah.¹⁶ These attacks boosted the image of Hezbollah as the most prominent actor in compelling Israeli's retreat.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Hezbollah pursued its goal of combatting Israel and the West through militant means. Hezbollah carried out twelve suicide attacks against Israeli forces and their allies during the occupation, in addition to several other military assaults.¹⁷ The group's attacks killed an average of twenty-five Israeli soldiers per year throughout the occupation.¹⁸ Groups linked to Hezbollah also kidnapped several high-profile foreigners throughout the 1980s, including American Journalist Terry Anderson and U.S. Marine Lt. Colonel William R.

Higgins.¹⁹

During this time, Hezbollah cultivated Shia support and became the Amal movement's main competitor for the leadership of the Shia community. While Hezbollah was the strategic ally of Iran, Amal was more closely aligned with Syria. Hezbollah's more militant, anti-Israel stance led to bloody clashes with Amal from 1985 to 1989.²⁰ The 1988 kidnapping of Lt. Colonel Higgins, for example, sparked conflict between the two groups. Hezbollah orchestrated the kidnapping, while Amal opposed the operation. It was in favor of maintaining a stable relationship with the United Nations, which would be complicated by the kidnapping of American servicemen. Amal attempted and failed to free Higgins, resulting in renewed clashes between Hezbollah and Amal.

From 1985 through the 1990s, Hezbollah also maintained an active global presence. The External Security Organization (also known as the Islamic Jihad Organization or the External Services Organization) was a specific branch of Hezbollah that was responsible for planning and executing attacks outside of Lebanon. In 1985, members of this branch hijacked TWA Flight 847 from Cairo to Athens. Hezbollah militants held hostages from the flight for weeks and killed one passenger to draw attention to the Lebanese prisoners held in Israel.²¹ After the Israeli government released 300 Lebanese prisoners, the hijackers freed the remaining hostages.²² In March 1992, Hezbollah operatives carried out a truck bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing twenty-nine and wounding hundreds. In July 1994, the group was accused of bombing the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association, which killed nearly 100 and wounded more than 200. Hezbollah denied responsibility for the attack.²³ In June 1996, the group bombed the American Khobar Towers housing complex in Saudi Arabia, killing 19.²⁴

In addition to Hezbollah's militant agenda both abroad and at home, the group also invested in the social landscape of southern Lebanon. Shia groups in the region had a history of providing social services to the local population. Hezbollah was among the most professional and extensive providers of these services, which included infrastructure construction and health care. After the civil war, Hezbollah continued its day-to-day social service efforts and provided assistance in times of crises. For example, the group rebuilt the homes and businesses of Christian families returning to southern Beirut after the war.²⁵ Hezbollah also led the reconstruction process after a 1996 Israeli bombing campaign in southern Lebanon, reportedly rebuilding 5,000 homes and repairing roads and infrastructure. The group claimed to have provided compensation to 2,300 farmers in the area.²⁶

In 1989, Hezbollah embraced a shift in ideology and tactics. The 1989 Taif Agreement, which ended the Lebanese Civil War, opened the door for Hezbollah to join the Lebanese political process as an official party. The transition from militancy to politics was favored both by Hezbollah Secretary-General Sayyid Abbas al Musawi and by Iranian president Hashimi Rafsanjani.²⁷ Hezbollah competed in its first Lebanese national elections in 1992 and won eight seats in Parliament. Hezbollah also participated in national elections in 1996, 2000, 2005, 2009, and 2018.

Throughout its time as a political party, Hezbollah has often been at odds with the sitting Lebanese government. After the 2005 elections, Hezbollah strongly opposed the U.S.- and Saudi-backed government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. In December 2006, in an attempt to force the sitting government to resign, it led the opposition in a sit-in that resulted in eighteen months of political deadlock.²⁸ Tensions between the group and national government erupted again in May 2008, when the government announced a plan to shut down Hezbollah's private telecommunications network. Violence broke out between government supporters and Hezbollah on the streets of Beirut, while the Lebanese army largely sat out the conflict. Within days,

Hezbollah and its supporters had taken over parts of Beirut. There was speculation that the violence would lead to a coup, but this concern diminished when the Arab League brokered a settlement between the government and Hezbollah.²⁹ The settlement, called the Doha Agreement, granted Hezbollah veto power in the government and pledged that no political group would use weapons for within-country disputes.³⁰

Though Hezbollah had become a mainstream political party, it also continued to carry out terrorist attacks against Israeli forces.³¹ Israel's departure in 2000 was widely attributed to Hezbollah, increasing the group's popularity amongst the Lebanese population.³² After a period of relative calm from 2000 to 2006, the group kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others in July 2006. The conflict resulted in a month-long war with Israel.³³ The war killed both civilians and combatants; 153 Israeli citizens and soldiers died, and an estimated 1,287 Lebanese civilians perished.³⁴ Supporters lauded Hezbollah's endurance and supposed victory against Israel, while others accused the organization of instigating an unnecessary and highly destructive war.³⁵

Following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Hezbollah began supporting anti-American forces in the region by establishing Unit 3800. According to U.S. intelligence, Unit 3800 was a specialized branch of Hezbollah which exclusively trained and supported Iraqi Shia militant groups targeting U.S. forces in Iraq.³⁶ Unit 3800 also supplied Shia militants with funds and weapons. These Hezbollah-sponsored groups were instrumental in planning several attacks in Iraq, including the 2007 attack on the Karbala Joint Coordination Center, which killed five Americans.³⁷ Later in 2014, Hezbollah also provided resources to Iraqi groups in their fight against the Islamic State, an armed group that had taken control of territory in Iraq and Syria.³⁸

In 2011, Hezbollah began sending military advisors to aid the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria's increasingly bloody civil war. In June 2013, Hezbollah officials confirmed that the organization had also deployed combat forces to fight alongside Assad's troops, Russian forces, and other allied Shia organizations. Hezbollah entered the war with two primary objectives. The first was to protect the Assad regime. Assad has served as a vital regional ally to Hezbollah, and the group leadership believed that maintaining Assad's hold over Syria was necessary to prevent Israeli forces from re-entering Lebanon.³⁹ Another critical goal included preserving and expanding group's access to Syrian territory, as this land provided routes for transporting Iranian missile parts and weapons.⁴⁰

At first, Hezbollah forces in Syria were mainly concentrated in the city of al-Qusayr on the border of Syria and Lebanon. However, by 2015, Hezbollah operations had spread to other areas of Syria. This included the northwest cities of Idlib and Aleppo, in the south near Daraa, and in central and eastern Syria.⁴¹ Hezbollah played a critical role in the Aleppo Offensive in late 2016, assisting Assad forces in retaking control of the city.⁴² Beyond sending Lebanese militants to fight in the Syrian civil war, Hezbollah also trained and organized Syrian Shia militias and recruited thousands of foreign fighters.⁴³ Bolstered by external aid, the Assad regime regained some of its influence in Syria, and it reasserted control over many Shia militias by 2017.⁴⁴

Throughout the war, Hezbollah fought alongside both Iranian and Russian troops as well as other pro-Assad militant groups. Hezbollah militias were considered the most professional and effective fighting force in the country. The group's most common opponents were the Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, and elements of the Free Syrian Army.⁴⁵ After 2018, fighting subsided in most areas of Syria, and Hezbollah leaders decided to bring much of its personnel home. However, a number of Hezbollah troops remained stationed near Damascus, in Deir al-Zour, and throughout southern Syria.⁴⁶

Though Hezbollah militias were very effective in the Syrian civil war, they suffered serious casualties. Of the 7,000-10,000 Hezbollah troops deployed to Syria, an estimated 1,600-2,000 died in action.⁴⁷ Based on these estimates, more Hezbollah fighters died in Syria than during the eighteen-year Israeli occupation of Lebanon.⁴⁸ Additionally, several top Hezbollah commanders, such as Abu Jaafar and Ali Fayyad, were killed while serving in Syria.⁴⁹

In addition to these casualties, Hezbollah's reputation also suffered from the group's participation in the Syrian civil war. Hezbollah was once considered one of the most popular sub-state Arab movements in the region, winning support from both Shiites and Sunnis. However, Hezbollah's aid to the Assad regime has alienated much of the Middle East's Sunni population.⁵⁰ Opposition to the group's participation in the war has helped to fuel the radicalization of Sunni populations in Tripoli and near the northern Lebanon-Syria border.⁵¹ This growing unpopularity is believed to have been a key factor behind the decisions by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Arab League, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in the spring of 2016.⁵²

Despite its consequences, the war in Syria greatly increased Hezbollah's fighting capabilities and weapons stockpile. The group has received significant amounts of high-tech military equipment and weaponry from Russia and Iran.⁵³ Hezbollah militants have also gained experience fighting other non-state actors, such as the Islamic State, and operating in dense urban environments.⁵⁴ Additionally, reports suggest that the group's recruiting capabilities in Lebanon have expanded significantly since 2011 as a result of Hezbollah's participation in the civil war.⁵⁵

Starting in 2014, Hezbollah also sent militants and resources to support Houthi insurgents in the Yemeni Civil War. Initially, Hezbollah primary activities in the civil war were transferring funds and training insurgents.⁵⁶ As the war progressed, Hezbollah began sending militants to the region to support the Houthi militants. In 2018, eight Hezbollah members were killed in northwest Yemen, a stronghold of the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.⁵⁷

During the Syrian civil war, Hezbollah's attention was largely diverted away from Israel. In 2018, Assad forces regained control of the Syrian-administered portion of the Golan Heights, a region bordering Israeli-occupied territory. After Assad's victory, Hezbollah began establishing cells and militias in the region.⁵⁸ The group has located substantial weapons and rockets in Golan Heights neighborhoods in close proximity to Israeli-controlled territory. It has also recruited hundreds of local Syrian men to form new militias.⁵⁹

Since 2019, Hezbollah has faced severe financial constraints. U.S. sanctions on Iran – Hezbollah's primary patron – considerably affected Iran's ability to finance the group. As a result, Hezbollah has shut many offices around the country and cut the pay of its employees and militants.⁶⁰ The continuation of U.S. sanctions may create more serious obstacles for Hezbollah in the future.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Hezbollah is run by a seven-member Shura Council. The council oversees both regional and

functional committees, which address issues related to ideology, finances, policy, military affairs, social affairs, and legal affairs. The council is also charged with selecting the secretary-general, a leadership position which had been given to an Iranian until 1989. In the early 1990s, Hezbollah added a political council and a jihad council, as well as a political wing to coordinate operations in parliament.⁶¹ Due to the group's emphasis on security and secrecy, little is known about the command structure within the organization's military wing.⁶²

Sayyad Abbas Musawi (unknown - February 16, 1992): Musawi was Hezbollah's cofounder and first secretary-general. He was killed in 1992 by an Israeli helicopter strike that also killed six other militants.⁶³

Hassan Nasrallah (1992 - current): Nasrallah is Hezbollah's current secretary-general. During the 1975 Lebanese civil war, Nasrallah joined the Amal movement at age fifteen. In 1982, Musawi left Amal, and Nasrallah followed him to help form Hezbollah.⁶⁴ Nasrallah took over Hezbollah's leadership at the request of Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei after Musawi's assassination in 1992. Under Nasrallah's leadership, Hezbollah became a serious opponent of the Israeli forces in southern Lebanon; he is credited for significantly affecting Israel's decision to withdraw from Lebanon in 2000.⁶⁵ In 2013, Nasrallah pledged his support for the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war. He has sent thousands of Hezbollah troops to fight in Syria.⁶⁶ Since 2018, Nasrallah has made few public appearances, giving rise to worries about his current health condition.⁶⁷

Imad Mughniyeh (1983 - February 12, 2008): Mughniyeh was Hezbollah's senior military commander and was reportedly responsible for a number of overseas attacks. He was killed in a car bombing in 2008 that was allegedly carried out by Israeli intelligence in coordination with the CIA.⁶⁸

Mustafa Badr al-Din (2008 - May 10, 2016): Badr al-Din allegedly replaced Imad Mughniyah as military commander of Hezbollah in 2008. Badr al-Din was killed in Syria on May 10, 2016 in an explosion at the Damascus airport. The circumstances surrounding the explosion are somewhat unclear; some sources allege that it was the result of rebel artillery while others have blamed an Israeli missile strike. Hezbollah has released a statement that it is investigating both possibilities.⁶⁹

Naim Qassem (1992 - present): Qassem was appointed to serve as the deputy chief of Hezbollah in 1992. He has been affiliated with the organization since 1982.⁷⁰ In 2004, Qassem published a history of Hezbollah that included an autobiographical account of his role in the organization, which has since been translated into numerous languages.⁷¹ He is widely credited with being Hezbollah's leading media personality. Since 2018, Hezbollah leader Nasrallah has reduced his public appearances, and Qassem has adopted a greater public leadership.

Talal Hamiyah (unknown - present): Hamiyah leads the group's External Security Organization (ESO), which is the branch of Hezbollah that plans and executes attacks outside of Lebanon. This branch was formerly run by Mughniyah.⁷² Hamiyah is believed to have been behind Hezbollah's 1994 attack on a Jewish center in Argentina that killed 85.⁷³ There have not been any attacks specifically attributed to the ESO since 1994. However, Israel believes Hamiyah may be recruiting global Hezbollah cells in Europe, South America, and Africa.⁷⁴ Hamiyah has also been responsible for sending Al-Qaeda volunteers to Iraq via Syria. According to reports from Lebanese sources, he traveled to Iraq regularly and was in contact with the leaders of the Shia militias fighting against U.S. forces.⁷⁵ On October 10,

2017, the U.S. government offered a reward of up to \$7 million for information on Hamiyah.⁷⁶

Ali Musa Daqduq (1983 - present): Daqduq – also known under the alias Abu Hussein Sajed – leads Hezbollah’s efforts to build an offensive campaign in the Golan Heights. He was involved in fighting against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Southern Lebanon in 1983. Daqduq was later sent to Iraq to assist the Shia militias in operations against U.S. forces.⁷⁷ He is wanted by the United States for orchestrating an attack in Karbala, Iraq in 2007 that resulted in the deaths of five U.S. soldiers.⁷⁸ As of 2019, Daqduq serves as commander of the Hezbollah network in the Syrian Golan Heights.

B. NAME CHANGES

Hezbollah first announced its existence as a cohesive group in 1985. Before that, its members were part of organizations like Islamic Amal, which many analysts deem an early iteration of Hezbollah.⁷⁹ The U.S. government considers Islamic Jihad, the name that the group used to claim its first attack, to be an alias of Hezbollah.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 2006: 3,000 full time and part time fighters (Jane’s Intelligence Review)⁸⁰
- 2008: About 1,000 core members and between 3,000 and 10,000 reserve fighters (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism)⁸¹
- 2015: Hezbollah MP Nawwaf Moussawi went on record to say that the group’s membership had “increased significantly” since the 2006 war against Israel⁸²
- 2017: 25,000 fully trained and active combatants with an estimated 20,000-30,000 reservists (Jane’s Intelligence Review)⁸³
- 2019: 7,000-10,000 fighters in Syria alone (Center for Strategic and International Studies)⁸⁴

D. RESOURCES

Hezbollah is supported by Iran, Syria, and fundraising networks around the world, especially within the Arabian Peninsula, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States.⁸⁵ Much of its funding comes from private donations and business profits.⁸⁶ Some of these businesses are legitimate, while others are illegal. For example, groups and individuals have supported Hezbollah from abroad with revenues from the blood diamond trade in Sierra Leone and credit card fraud in the United States.⁸⁷

Although most members of Hezbollah are Lebanese Shiites, the organization recruits globally. Foreign-born recruits and Arab Israelis living abroad were especially sought after in the early 2000s. Their passports allowed them to pass through Israeli security more easily, which would allow Hezbollah to carry out terrorist operations inside Israeli borders. Some Hezbollah members abroad serve as logistical or financial operatives instead of militants, performing functions like fundraising and recruiting.⁸⁸ Hezbollah also recruited thousands of foreign Shiites to form independent militias to fight in the Syrian civil war, drawing heavily from Pakistani and Afghan volunteers.⁸⁹

Since Hezbollah was established, Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have played a large role in training, supplying, and funding the group. The IRGC has trained thousands

of Hezbollah militants and continues to provide the group with supplies, as evidenced by the 2009 Israeli seizure of a navy ship carrying 400-500 tons of weapons destined for Hezbollah from Iran.⁹⁰ Iran is a key state sponsor of Hezbollah and, according to a 2005 report, has given financial and material support to the group in the range of \$100 million to \$200 million per year.⁹¹ However, more recent estimates from other Western sources believe that Iran's support of the group is greater at around \$700 million per year.⁹²

After the United States left the Iran Nuclear Deal in May 2018, U.S. sanctions on Iran have significantly impacted Hezbollah's finances. The group has frozen all financing, merged several institutions, and closed hundreds of offices and apartments in Lebanon.⁹³ Hezbollah's social services budget has also decreased, following an early reduction in 2013. Militants have complained about losses in their wages; married fighters are being paid only half of their expected salaries (which typically range from \$600 - \$1,200 every month). Single militants are only receiving \$200 per month.⁹⁴ In March 2019, Hassan Nasrallah made a public plea for donations to Hezbollah to support the group's activities and combat U.S. sanctions.⁹⁵ Hezbollah also hopes to use public resource finances to satisfy its community; since gaining control of three Lebanese government ministries in the January 2019 elections, Hezbollah may use ministry money to support those affected by recent budget cuts.⁹⁶ Hezbollah has also increasingly engaged in smuggling along the Lebanon-Syria border as a means to finance its operations.⁹⁷

The Syrian government has historically played a key role as an intermediary between Iran and Hezbollah, shuttling arms and intelligence between the two parties.⁹⁸ In addition to facilitating weapons transport from Iran, Syria has also provided weapons directly to the group.⁹⁹ One of Hezbollah's primary objectives in the Syrian civil war was preserving – and potentially expanding – the use of Syrian territory as a route for transporting Iranian missile parts and other material.¹⁰⁰ Since Russia began participating in the Syrian civil war, the Syrian government has given Hezbollah a number of advanced Russian anti-aircraft weapons. Among these systems are a number of SA-17 Buk missile batteries, which can directly target Israeli aircraft operating over Northern Israel and Syria.¹⁰¹

Hezbollah is estimated to have amassed a vast arsenal of relatively sophisticated weapons over the past several decades. AIPAC – a pro-Israel lobby group – recently suggested that Hezbollah has stockpiled 120,000-150,000 rockets and missiles of a variety of ranges and sizes.¹⁰² In June 2019, Nasrallah announced at a rally in Beirut that Hezbollah had acquired precision missiles that could strike every town, city, and military installation in Israel.¹⁰³ According to a 2019 estimate, Hezbollah has the resources to launch 1,500 rockets per day, compared with 120 per day in 2006.¹⁰⁴ In addition, Hezbollah has developed drone capabilities far more advanced than any other terrorist group in the world. In 2018, it was estimated that the group had destroyed numerous Islamic State targets in Syria using Karrar armed drones over the course of several years.¹⁰⁵

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

Hezbollah is based in southern Lebanon, and its headquarters are located in the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon.¹⁰⁶ While the group conducts the majority of its planning, logistical, and military operations in Lebanon, it also operates cells globally. Militant members abroad fundraise, recruit, or plan operations for the group.¹⁰⁷ For example, Hezbollah deployed dozens of commanders to

Iraq in 2003; Hezbollah militants helped train and establish Shia militias in Iraq to fight against U.S. and Coalition forces.¹⁰⁸ From 2014-2019, Hezbollah also deployed militants to Yemen to support the Houthi insurgency. Hezbollah has also formed cells in the West; in 2017, the U.S. intelligence community identified and arrested a Hezbollah sleeper cell operating in New York City. The cell had plans to create a stockpile of weapons and target prominent Israelis in the city.¹⁰⁹

Beginning in 2013, Hezbollah also deployed significant troops in Syria to fight alongside the forces of Bashar al-Assad.¹¹⁰ Hezbollah forces were initially concentrated in the city of al-Qusayr, on the border of Syria and Lebanon. By 2015, Hezbollah operations had spread to other areas of Syria, including in the northwest cities of Idlib and Aleppo, in the south near Daraa, and even in the central and eastern parts of the country. In 2018, the group participated in offenses near the Deir Ezzor province in eastern Syria.¹¹¹

In 2019, Israeli forces discovered Hezbollah cells in border villages on the Syrian Golan Heights. After Syrian government forces took control of the Syrian Golan Heights in 2018, Hezbollah took advantage of the victory to establish infrastructure there to threaten Israel near the border.¹¹² In 2019, Hezbollah operatives recruited hundreds of men from the Golan Heights to assist in their fight against Israel. The fighters received monthly wages and were given small arms, explosives, and missiles.¹¹³ This recent development has challenged Assad's long-standing understanding with Israel to leave the Golan front alone in accordance with a 1974 armistice agreement. In response, Israel declared that Hezbollah's operations to build a military capacity in Syria would not stand; since May of 2018, Israel has carried out strikes on Hezbollah units in the Golan Heights.¹¹⁴

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY & GOALS

According to Hezbollah's 1985 manifesto, its original goals were to destroy Israel, to expel Western influences from Lebanon and the wider Middle East, and to combat its enemies within Lebanon, particularly the Christian Phalanges Party. The group would "permit" Lebanese people to choose their own government, with the caveat that "only an Islamic regime can stop any further tentative attempts of imperialistic infiltration into [the] county."¹¹⁵ The group deemed the international system and the 1985 Lebanese government to be subject to imperial influences and hostile to Islam, and it denied Israel's right to exist.¹¹⁶ As Hezbollah's constituency broadened to include more moderate Shiites, organization leaders like Hassan Nasrallah and Naim Qassem suggested that the manifesto was becoming more disconnected from the group's operations and goals.¹¹⁷

In the early 1990s, Hezbollah transformed from a non-state revolutionary group to a hybrid state actor, employing both political and violent means to achieve its goals. Hezbollah began to consider the established Lebanese political system an appropriate channel through which to gain influence. Today, Hezbollah's activities and structure encompass many state-like characteristics.¹¹⁸

A new 2009 manifesto reflected large shifts in Hezbollah's ideology since 1985. The 2009 manifesto emphasized national unity, denounced sectarianism, and did not single out Islamic governance as the only option for Lebanon's future. However, not all of Hezbollah's goals had

changed. The group still sought to liberate Palestine, and the manifesto highlighted its continued opposition to the United States and commitment to fight Israeli expansion and aggression.¹¹⁹

In 2011, the group vocally supported many of the Arab Spring uprisings.¹²⁰ In Syria, however, Hezbollah also aimed to protect the Assad regime, one of its key allies in the region. The group has sent troops to support the Assad government in Syria and expel extremist Sunni militias from the country.¹²¹ In 2016, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah vowed to continue the group's military support of the Assad regime until it regained control of Syria.¹²²

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Hezbollah is active in Lebanese politics as a political party known as the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc. This political party was formed following the 1989 Taif Agreement, which ended the Lebanese Civil War. Before joining Lebanese politics in 1989, Hezbollah used the media to participate in national political discourse. In 1984, the group began publishing a weekly newspaper, *al-Ahad*, and started broadcasting two radio stations soon thereafter. In 1989, Hezbollah created its own television station, al-Manar. These media outlets published political commentary, news, cultural and Islamic programs, and propaganda associated with the organization's fight against Israel and Western forces.¹²³

After the 1989 Taif Agreement, Hezbollah militants had extensive internal debates about whether to enter the Lebanese political system. The organization eventually created a party that would act within the Lebanese political system but would also employ violence and the threat of violence as a tool in its political dealings. It ran in national elections for the first time in 1992 and won eight seats in the parliamentary elections.¹²⁴ Hezbollah also participated in the 1996, 2000, 2005, 2009, and 2018 national elections. The political party has focused largely on nonreligious themes, but officials say that Hezbollah members are required by Islamic law to support the party.¹²⁵

In December 2006, Hezbollah's political party led the opposition in a sit-in that resulted in eighteen months of political deadlock.¹²⁶ Tensions between the group and national government erupted again in May 2008, when the government began to follow through with a plan to shut down Hezbollah's private telecommunications network. Violence broke out between government supporters and Hezbollah on the streets of Beirut while the Lebanese army largely sat out the conflict. Hezbollah and its supporters took over parts of Beirut, and there was speculation that the violence would lead to a coup. These worries were quelled when the Arab League brokered a settlement between the government and Hezbollah.¹²⁷ The settlement, called the Doha Agreement, granted Hezbollah veto power in the government and pledged that no political group would use weapons for domestic disputes.¹²⁸ During this political period, Hezbollah and the Amal party created the March 8th Alliance, a coalition of mostly Shiite Muslim and Syrian-backed parties.¹²⁹ Through the March 8th Alliance, Hezbollah consistently won a minority of parliament seats until the coalition's collapse in 2013.

Hezbollah supported some Arab Spring movements but opposed the uprisings in Syria. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is a critical ally and supporter of Hezbollah. His fall subsequently would jeopardize Hezbollah's power and security in the region, as well as weaken Hezbollah's geographical access to Iran.¹³⁰ To help maintain Assad's power, Hezbollah heavily invested in the Syrian civil war, sending nearly ten thousand troops and training dozens of Shia militias to fight against Syrian opposition forces.

In 2018, the March 8th Alliance emerged victorious from the Lebanese general election. The

coalition – which included Hezbollah, the Shia Amal Movement, the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), and allied parties – won 68 of 128 seats in parliament. Hezbollah itself secured 13 of the 68 coalition seats, neither gaining nor losing any seats won in the previous election.¹³¹ The coalition secured enough seats to ensure a majority. The election notably weakened the U.S.-backed prime minister, Saad Hariri, and his supporters.¹³²

In the 2018 elections, Hezbollah also gained control of three of the 30 ministries in the Lebanese governments, including the Ministry of Health.¹³³ In February 2019, U.S. officials warned that Hezbollah may exploit these ministries to funnel money or undertake terrorist activity throughout the region.¹³⁴

Since 2019, the United States has increasingly put pressure on other countries to designate Hezbollah’s political wing as a terrorist organization. The United Kingdom added Hezbollah’s political wing to its list of terrorist groups in February 2019.¹³⁵ In July 2019, the U.S. Treasury added two top Hezbollah political leaders to its list of sanctioned individuals. This was the first instance the United States had designated a member of Lebanon’s government on a terrorist sanctions list.¹³⁶

C. TARGETS & TACTICS

Hezbollah has targeted Israeli and Western military personnel and citizens, particularly in the Middle East. Most recently, the group has targeted the Syrian Sunni opposition forces and the Islamic State in the Syrian civil war. Hezbollah has also fought against government forces in Yemen in support of the Houthi rebels.

Hezbollah’s tactics have evolved since its creation. Beginning in the 1980s, the group commonly kidnapped foreigners and locals as leverage to bargain with the West and Israel.¹³⁷ Other forms of violent attacks against Israel during the occupation of Lebanon were largely limited to military targets.¹³⁸ In the 1980s and 1990s, Hezbollah engaged in large-scale attacks on Western and Israeli targets, which resulted in hundreds of casualties and drew attention to the group. In recent years, Hezbollah has developed elements of a more traditional military force, though it still engages in acts of terrorism. The group demonstrated its capabilities as a high functioning military in the Syrian civil war.¹³⁹ Hezbollah militias were considered by many as the most organized and effective fighting force in Syria. Despite its official opposition toward the U.S., the group has not explicitly targeted U.S. assets since the 1990s.¹⁴⁰

After the 2000 Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, an extensive internal debate reportedly took place within Hezbollah concerning whether to focus on Lebanese politics at the expense of countering Israel. Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah reportedly consulted with Iranian Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on the decision. The group chose to continue carrying out attacks against Israeli military targets. Between 2000 and 2006, Hezbollah attacks along the “Blue Line” and in contested farming areas in the south killed seventeen Israeli soldiers. Six Israeli civilians were also killed in this period, five of whom were killed in a Palestinian operation that may have received assistance from Hezbollah.¹⁴¹

Hezbollah’s focus on Israel diminished during the Syrian civil war. Instead, the group’s resources were directed toward training Syrian militias and fighting for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In 2018, Hezbollah turned its attention back to Israel and has since been preparing for future conflict. The group began setting up cells and recruiting militants in the Syrian Golan Heights.¹⁴² Later that year, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) also discovered systems of underground tunnels

that would allow Hezbollah militants to enter Israel undetected.¹⁴³ In 2019, Hezbollah Secretary-General Nasrallah also announced that Hezbollah's missile capabilities were advanced enough to reach any Israeli town or city.¹⁴⁴

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

Hezbollah is known for its attention-grabbing attacks worldwide, many of which are listed below. However, it should be noted that authorities have foiled a number of Hezbollah operations. A plan to attack the Israeli Embassy in Azerbaijan was stopped before it reached fruition, as was a 2008 plan to target Israeli tourists and ships in the Suez Canal. Other disrupted plots may be unknown to the public.¹⁴⁵

November 1982: Hezbollah member Ahmad Qasir carried out a truck bombing against an Israeli headquarters in Tyre, killing at least 75 Israelis and fourteen Arab prisoners (89+ killed, unknown wounded).¹⁴⁶

April 19, 1983: A suicide bombing on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut killed 63 people. The attack was attributed to militants of the Islamic Jihad, an early alias of Hezbollah (63 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁴⁷

October 23, 1983: Hezbollah carried out a suicide bombing on French and American military barracks in Beirut, killing 241 American and 58 French servicemen.¹⁴⁸ While it never claimed responsibility, analysts typically agree that Hezbollah carried out the attack.¹⁴⁹ The attack prompted U.S. President Ronald Reagan to withdraw all U.S. Marines from Lebanon (299 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁵⁰

June 14, 1985: Hezbollah members hijacked TWA flight 847, holding hostages for weeks. The group killed one hostage before ultimately freed the rest in exchange for the release of 300 Lebanese prisoners in Israel (1 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁵¹

March 17, 1992: Hezbollah operatives carried out a truck bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing twenty-nine and wounding 242 (29 killed, 242 wounded).¹⁵²

July 18, 1994: Hezbollah was implicated in the bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association, which killed 85 people and wounded more than 200. The group denied responsibility (85 killed, 200+ wounded).¹⁵³

June 25, 1996: Hezbollah bombed the American Khobar Towers housing complex in Saudi Arabia, killing 19 (19 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁵⁴

February 14, 2005: In 2011, the United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon indicted four members of Hezbollah for the February 2005 car bomb assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. The attack also killed 20 others (21 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁵⁵

July 12, 2006: Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed eight more, sparking a month-long war with Israel (8 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁵⁶

January 2007: In January 2007, a Shia militant group attacked the Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Iraq, killing five American soldiers. The United States claims that Hezbollah helped plan and provide resources for the attack (5 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁵⁷

May 2008: Hezbollah took over parts of Beirut after the government called for the group to disarm, giving rise to street violence and causing over 60 deaths.¹⁵⁸ The government then entered negotiations with Hezbollah, and the resulting agreement gave Hezbollah veto power in the national cabinet (60 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁵⁹

May 2011: Hezbollah carried out two attacks against United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon in late May 2011 (0 killed, 11 wounded).¹⁶⁰

July 18, 2012: Hezbollah's international wing bombed an Israeli tour bus in Bulgaria, killing five Israelis and the Bulgarian bus driver. This was the first successful attack in a campaign to increase global operations beginning around 2008. Hezbollah has denied responsibility for the bombing (6 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁶¹

May 29, 2013: Hezbollah collaborated with and led the Syrian Army in their attack on al-Qusayr, a rebel stronghold. This was the group's first major activity in the Syrian civil war after months of rumored involvement. Hezbollah and the Syrian Army were victorious, marking a turning point in the war in which Assad began to regain control of key strategic territory (casualties unknown).¹⁶²

January 28, 2015: Hezbollah fired anti-tank missiles at Israeli soldiers in the disputed Har Dov area between Lebanon and Syria, killing two. In a separate border incident on the same day between Israel and Hezbollah, a United Nations Interim Force member was killed (3 killed, 7+ wounded).¹⁶³

May 2015: During the final two weeks of May 2015, Hezbollah forces were engaged in heavy fighting against Jabhat al-Nusra and Islamic State forces across the Qalamoun mountain range in western Syria. By early June, Hezbollah had recaptured much of the mountain range and reopened a path from Lebanon into Syria (casualties unknown).¹⁶⁴

April 2, 2016: Hezbollah and Syrian government forces clashed with Syrian rebel troops belonging to Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, and the Free Syrian Army near the village of Tal al-Ais outside of Aleppo. Eight Hezbollah troops were killed in addition to 25 pro-Assad forces and 18 rebels (51 killed, unknown wounded).¹⁶⁵

November 2017: Hezbollah led an offensive against the Islamic State in Syria's Deir Ezzor province, inflicting heavy civilian casualties. Hezbollah fought alongside Iran-sponsored Iraqi Shia militias supported by Russian air strikes (50+ killed, unknown wounded).¹⁶⁶

February-April 2018: Hezbollah and Syrian forces launched an assault on Ghouta, Syria. Hezbollah reportedly sent at least 3,000 troops to fight, at least 100 of which were killed. As of March 2018, 1,100 civilians had been killed in the fighting (1,200+ killed, unknown wounded).¹⁶⁷

June 2018: A senior Hezbollah field officer executed 23 Syrian soldiers near the town of Hirbat Ghazala. The soldiers had refused to cross "Death Bridge" where they would have been vulnerable to rebel fire (23 killed, 0 wounded).¹⁶⁸

September 2019: Hezbollah militants fired anti-tank missiles at an Israeli military base in Northern Israel. Hezbollah stated that the attack was conducted in response to attacks its members received in Syria.¹⁶⁹

August 25, 2020: Hezbollah snipers fired shots at Israeli troops across the Lebanon-Israel border, using the positions of United Nations Peacekeepers stationed along the border for cover. Israel responded the next day by carrying out strikes against Hezbollah observation posts in Lebanon. There were no reported casualties from Hezbollah's gunfire or Israel's strikes (0 killed, 0 wounded).¹⁷⁰

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

The designations listed below largely focus on Hezbollah and not its political wing, the Loyalty to the Resistance Block. Since 2019, the United States has increasingly put pressure on other countries to designate Hezbollah's political wing as a terrorist organization. The United Kingdom added Hezbollah's political wing to its list of terrorist groups in February 2019.¹⁷¹ In July 2019, the U.S. Treasury added two top Hezbollah political leaders to its list of sanctioned individuals. This was the first instance the United States had designated a member of Lebanon's government on a terrorist sanctions list.¹⁷²

It should also be noted that Lebanon does not consider Hezbollah to be a terrorist organization¹⁷³

- U.S. State Department: October 8, 1997 to present¹⁷⁴
- Government of Canada: December 10, 2002 to present¹⁷⁵
- Australian National Security designated Hezbollah's External Security Organization (ESO) as a terrorist entity: June 5, 2003 to present¹⁷⁶
- Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans stated that the Government of the Netherlands considered Hezbollah a terrorist organization on June 2, 2013¹⁷⁷
- New Zealand Police designated the "military wing" of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization: October 11, 2010 to present¹⁷⁸
- Government of Bahrain: April 9, 2013 to present¹⁷⁹
- The European Union designated the "military wing" of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization: July 22, 2013 to present¹⁸⁰
- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): March 2, 2013 to present¹⁸¹
- Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including Saudi Arabia, placed 10 Hezbollah leaders on their government terrorism lists: May 17, 2018 to present¹⁸²
- Arab League: March 11, 2016 to present¹⁸³
- The Government of the United Kingdom designated Hezbollah's External Security Organization as a terrorist group: 2001 to present¹⁸⁴
- The Government of the United Kingdom designated "the whole of Hizballah's military apparatus, namely the Jihad Council and "all the units reporting to it" as a terrorist group: 2008 to present¹⁸⁵
- The Government of the United Kingdom designated the entirety of Hezbollah as a terrorist group: March 2019¹⁸⁶
- Government of Argentina: July 18, 2019 to present¹⁸⁷

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

After World War II, Shia Muslims became a marginalized group in Lebanon. They bore the brunt of the struggle with Israel, suffered poor economic conditions, and traditionally wielded little political power.¹⁸⁸ The Lebanese government also regularly ignored civilian needs in the Shia-dominated south.¹⁸⁹ The state grew particularly ineffective as a service provider during the Lebanese Civil War. It was during this time that civil service organizations, including Hezbollah, developed a reputation for providing necessary services to Shiite Lebanese citizens.¹⁹⁰

While the exact date Hezbollah first became involved in social services is not known, it earned a reputation as a movement of the poor early in the 1980s.¹⁹¹ Hezbollah is now deeply engrained in Lebanese Shia society. It has used social outreach to cement the political support of the Shia community, recruit new members, and spread its interpretation of Islam.¹⁹² Hezbollah has provided a number of social services throughout Lebanon, most of which have been concentrated in the south. The group has operated schools, clinics, and hospitals. It has also collected garbage, provided credit assistance, and delivered drinking water.¹⁹³ In 2006, it was estimated that Hezbollah's schools assisted about 14,000 students.¹⁹⁴

Hezbollah's social services sector is composed of multiple non-governmental organizations (NGOs) grouped under three branches: the Social Unit, the Islamic Health Unit, and the Education Unit. The work of the Social Unit spans across a number of areas, from the construction of neighborhood infrastructure to the assistance of the families of killed Hezbollah militants. The Islamic Health Unit operates a number of hospitals, clinics, and social health programs. The Education Unit oversees schools and provides tuition scholarships to gifted students.¹⁹⁵

Hezbollah has also built local trust by providing humanitarian assistance in the wake of Israeli attacks. In 1996, the group claimed to have rebuilt 5,000 homes in 82 villages after an Israeli attack. After the 2006 war with Israel, the group suspended its military efforts to provide reconstruction and social services to Lebanese citizens. Hezbollah has often advertised their health services to the Lebanese population after an Israeli attack and has received heightened media coverage in turn.¹⁹⁶ While Hezbollah targets the Shia community with its services, the organization's efforts also reach members of other Lebanese sects.¹⁹⁷

Though its relations with the Shia population remain positive, Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian Civil War has worsened its relationship with Lebanon's Sunni population. Many Lebanese Sunnis initially supported the Syrian opposition, most of which was composed of Sunni militias. Hezbollah's support of the Assad regime has driven many Lebanese Sunnis to turn away from Hezbollah. Some Sunnis near Tripoli have adopted a radicalized, anti-Hezbollah agenda and mounted attacks in Hezbollah territory. The most recent of these attacks took place in November 2015 and resulted in the deaths of 43 people.¹⁹⁸

Recent 2018 sanctions on Iran—Hezbollah's primary patron—have affected the group's ability to serve the Lebanese population. The group has frozen all financing, merged several institutions, and closed hundreds of offices and apartments in Lebanon.¹⁹⁹ Hezbollah's social services budget has also decreased, following an early reduction in 2013. Although Hezbollah gains support from the community by providing social services, it has also been criticized by many in Lebanese society for its role in inciting Israeli attacks.²⁰⁰

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

Hezbollah has had a complicated relationship with Amal since it originally splintered from the group. As Hezbollah expanded, it came into direct competition and conflict with Amal. Whereas Amal operated as a secular and reformist organization, Hezbollah mirrored Iran's model of clerical rule.²⁰¹ Amal also chose to cooperate with the Maronite and Sunni factions from northern Lebanon, while Hezbollah preferred to work outside the existing political system. Finally, whereas Amal received the majority of its funding from the Assad Regime in Syria, Hezbollah was financed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and clashed with the Syrian-backed Christian and Sunni groups from northern Lebanon. Competing over the support of the southern Lebanon's Shia population, Amal and Hezbollah came into direct conflict during the 1980s. The most prominent conflict arose in 1988 when they clashed over the kidnapping of U.S. Marine Lt. Colonel William R. Higgins, leading to a lasting feud between the two groups.²⁰²

The end of the Lebanese civil war shifted the nature of the relationship between Amal and Hezbollah. Amal surrendered its arms following the civil war, while Hezbollah remained the only armed Lebanese militia. This changed the relationship between the two groups; Hezbollah's decision to remain armed allowed them to become the most important non-state actor in the region, passing Amal. Since the 1990s, the groups have often worked together in politics. For example, an Amal-Hezbollah bloc won all parliamentary seats in southern Lebanon in the 2000 national elections.²⁰³ Although signs of traditional competition and rivalry remain between the two groups, necessary alliance and accommodation is required to face mutual political opponents.

Hezbollah has trained and assisted Palestinian terrorist organizations, including Al-Aqsa Martyrs and Hamas. Hezbollah has a special unit – Unit 1800, or the “Nun Unit” – solely responsible for supporting Palestinian militants.²⁰⁴ It also maintains close ties with Hamas, providing financial support and military training to its armed branch. Some analysts claim that Hezbollah has acted as “a role model” for Hamas due to its own political success.²⁰⁵ In 2019, Hezbollah financed a radio tower based in Hamas-controlled Gaza in 2019 with the power to broadcast into Israeli territory.²⁰⁶

Hezbollah has had a troubled relationship with Sunni militant groups. In April 2006, Al Qaeda attempted to assassinate Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah because of his frequent condemnations of AQ attacks.²⁰⁷ In 2013, Hezbollah began sending fighters to Syria to assist Assad's army in the fight against Sunni rebel groups, including the Islamic State, Ahrar al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, and elements of the Free Syrian Army.²⁰⁸

In Iraq, Hezbollah has sustained relationships with several Shiite militant groups, including the Mahdi Army (now known as the Peace Brigades), the Dawa Party, and the Badr Organization.²⁰⁹ These groups have significant experience training and cooperating with Hezbollah. Hezbollah was particularly instrumental in training the initial members of these groups following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.²¹⁰ Hezbollah created Unit 3800 in 2003 with the purpose of supporting Iraqi Shiite militant groups targeting U.S. forces. According to U.S. intelligence, Unit 3800 sent personnel to Iraq with the purpose of training hundreds of Shia militants.²¹¹ Hezbollah supplied the militants with funds and weapons. The Hezbollah sponsored groups were instrumental in planning several attacks in Iraq, including the 2007 attack on the Karbala Joint Coordination Center, which caused deaths of five Americans.²¹²

After 2014, Hezbollah also became increasingly involved in the insurgency in Iraq, sending aid and military advisors to Iranian-backed Shiite paramilitaries. The two most prominent recipients of Hezbollah aid in Iraq were Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) and Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH).²¹³

Hezbollah has helped finance and train both KH and AAH since their inception in the mid-2000s. Hezbollah has also fought alongside AAH and KH militants in the Syrian civil war.²¹⁴

Since 2014, Unit 3800 has primarily been put to work in Yemen. There, Hezbollah militants have helped the Houthis, a Shiite rebel group, conduct an insurgency against Yemen's government.²¹⁵ Hezbollah was initially involved in transferring funds and training Shiite insurgents.²¹⁶ Hezbollah later began sending militants to the region as the war progressed. In 2018, eight Hezbollah militants were killed in northwest Yemen, a stronghold of the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.²¹⁷ Houthi-affiliated radio stations in Yemen have collected donations for Hezbollah, with some campaigns raising over \$130,000.²¹⁸ These donations are meant to counter recent U.S. sanctions on Hezbollah and Iran.

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Although Hezbollah has close ties to Iran and the Syrian government, its relationship to both nations has fluctuated over time. The level of financial support that Hezbollah receives from Iran has largely depended on those in power in Iran's government. For example, Iranian funding to Hezbollah was generous under Ayatollah Khomeini, who is often credited with Hezbollah's inception. However, funding for Hezbollah decreased dramatically for a period after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989.²¹⁹ The 2018 U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran have also recently hindered the country's ability to finance Hezbollah.²²⁰

Hezbollah has also had a complicated relationship with Syria. During the Syrian occupation of Lebanon in the 1980s, Hezbollah and Syrian Army units clashed multiple times in the border areas between Lebanon and Syria.²²¹ Hezbollah also often came into conflict with the Shia group Amal, which was financed and supported by Syria. After Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, however, Hezbollah believed its relationship with Syria was crucial to its continued resistance against Israel.²²² Hezbollah's 2013 participation in the Syrian civil war awarded them the upper hand in their relationship with Assad. These have exploited this advantage by pursuing political aims in Syria, such as establishing terror cells in the Golan Heights.²²³

MAPS

- Global Islamic State
- Syria
- Iraq
- Aleppo

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