

**HEZBOLLAH:
TEHRAN'S MOST
POWERFUL
PROXY**

LFI POLICY BRIEFING

**LABOUR
FRIENDS
OF ISRAEL** 

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WORKING TOWARDS A TWO STATE SOLUTION

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MARCH 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hezbollah is the jewel in the crown of the “axis of resistance”, which Iran has long wielded in order to advance its ideological goal of destroying Israel and asserting its hegemony across the Middle East.

- The most powerful and loyal of Iran’s regional proxies – in 2018, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies [labelled](#) it “the world’s most heavily armed non-state actor” – Hezbollah is responsible for bringing bloodshed and terror far beyond the Middle East – including to Europe and South America.
- Its decision to launch attacks on Israel immediately after the outbreak of the conflict with Iran – mirroring its assault on 8 October 2023 – comes despite the Lebanese government’s commitment to the terror group’s disarmament. It also comes despite Israel having severely degraded Hezbollah’s military capabilities during the 2023-24 conflict between the Jewish state and the Iranian proxy.
- That Hezbollah has been able to instigate a new attack on Israel – plunging Lebanon back into war – stems from Tehran’s huge effort to restock and replenish its military arsenal, while also asserting its ultimate control.
- Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps further embedded itself in Hezbollah’s command structure and strategic planning process following the group’s 2024 defeat.
- Iran has exploited additional financial service platforms, maritime routes, and third-country smuggling networks to transfer money and arms to Hezbollah, with the US Treasury Department concluding that Tehran transferred \$1bn to its proxy during the course of 2025.
- As this paper notes: “In resuscitating Hezbollah, the Iranian regime had all but guaranteed the next cycle of war and bloodshed.”



Hezbollah fighters/ IDF Spokesperson's Unit / CC BY-SA 3.0

TEHRAN'S MOST POWERFUL PROXY

INTRODUCTION: LOYAL TO THE AYATOLLAHS

- Iran played an instrumental role in the formation of Hezbollah within the Shia population of Lebanon in the early 1980s. Hezbollah seeks to minimise the influence of western powers in the region, eliminate Israel and dominate Lebanon.
- Led by Hassan Nasrallah for more than three decades until his assassination by Israel in 2024, Hezbollah is religiously and ideologically aligned with the regime in Tehran, and its founding manifesto declared its loyalty to the supreme leader. “Hezbollah is first and foremost an instrument of the Iranian regime,” the Counter Extremism Project [suggests](#).
- Hezbollah fought a guerrilla campaign against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon and fired rockets into northern Israeli towns until Israel’s withdrawal in 2000. Less than six months later, Hezbollah ambushed and murdered three Israeli soldiers in the Golan Heights.
- Hezbollah became the most powerful sectarian actor in the weak and fractured multi-confessional Lebanese state. Since the 1990s, it has participated in Lebanese electoral politics, holding seats in parliament and the Lebanese government. With more powerful forces than the official western-backed Lebanese armed forces, Hezbollah was able to act with impunity, especially in its strongholds in southern Lebanon and the Dahiya neighbourhood of Beirut. Hezbollah operatives carried out the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut, which also killed 21 others.
- In return for its slavish loyalty, Iran showered Hezbollah with weapons and cash. The US Treasury [suggested](#) in 2018 that Hezbollah received \$700m a year from Tehran, amounting to 70 percent of its revenue. Although this figure dropped when the US reimposed sanctions on Iran in 2018, the State Department’s 2023 Country Reports on Terrorism [stated](#) that Hezbollah “continues to receive most of its funding, training, weapons, and explosives, as well as political, diplomatic, monetary, and organisational aid, from Iran”. It noted too that “the Assad regime in Syria has provided training, weapons, and diplomatic and political support”. Hezbollah, in turn, helped train and support Iran’s other proxies, including Hamas, the Houthis and Shia militias in Iraq.



Aftermath of the 1994 AMIA bombing / IDF Spokesperson's Unit / CC BY-SA 3.0

INTERNATIONAL TERROR AND CRIME

Hezbollah is responsible for many notorious terrorist attacks against international targets:

- It orchestrated the 1983 bombing of a US Marine and French paratrooper barracks in Beirut, killing 299 servicemen.

- It perpetrated terror attacks around the world. These include the 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29; the 1994 attack on the AMIA Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires that killed 85; and the 2012 Burgas bus bombing that killed five Israeli tourists and their driver. In 2023, the Brazilian authorities [disrupted](#) Hezbollah's attempt to target the Jewish community and exposed its recruitment efforts in the country.
- In 2015, UK security forces [uncovered](#) a stockpile of explosives in a Hezbollah bomb factory in London. In 2019, the UK proscription of Hezbollah's military wing was expanded to include the organisation in its entirety.
- A 2022 Europol report [stated](#): "The network of collaborators built by Hezbollah in the EU is suspected of managing the transportation and distribution of illegal drugs into the EU, dealing with firearms trafficking and running professional money laundering operations."
- Referring to its activities in South America, the US State Department [noted](#) in 2024: "Hezbollah supporters seek to generate funding through licit and illicit activity and then transfer it to the group's headquarters to enable Hezbollah to advance its malign agenda. In recent years, Hezbollah supporters and members have been identified in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Panama, Peru, and the United States."

“Hezbollah operates a global criminal-financial network trafficking drugs in Europe, as well as Africa and Latin America.”

THE SECOND LEBANON WAR AND THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

On 12 July 2006, Hezbollah [launched](#) a cross-border raid into northern Israel, killing eight Israeli soldiers and capturing two others. While Israel responded with targeted attacks on Hezbollah positions and assets, the terror group then proceeded to unleash a barrage of rockets aimed at Israel's northern cities, including Kiryat Shemona, Haifa and Safed. In all, more than 4,000 rockets were indiscriminately launched into northern Israel over the course of the conflict, which lasted 34 days, killing more than 160 Israelis and driving 400,000 from their homes. Hezbollah also conducted cross-border raids on Israeli villages and military installations. An estimated 1,000 Lebanese civilians and Hezbollah combatants were killed.

Hezbollah subsequently played a critical role, alongside Iran and Russia, in shoring up the Assad regime in Syria during the brutal civil war. Russia and Hezbollah later moved from a purely military alliance to engaging in [“unprecedented joint sanctions evasion activities”](#).

HEZBOLLAH ON THE EVE OF THE 7 OCTOBER ATTACKS

- Following the 2006 war, Hezbollah repeatedly flouted UN security council resolution 1701 which ended the conflict. The resolution called for the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon and the prevention of forces other than the Lebanese army and UN Interim Force in Lebanon – which is tasked with preventing violence on the border and stopping armed terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah, from operating next to Israeli territory – from crossing the Litani River.
- After 2006, Hezbollah restocked and massively expanded its arsenal. On the eve of the 2006 war, it was [believed](#) to have held around 15,000 rockets and missiles. By 2023, it was [estimated](#) to have more than 150,000 rockets, missiles, and drones, some of them precision-guided, capable of carrying warheads weighing up to 450kg and delivering them up to 1,000km. Many of the weapons were hidden in houses and civilian sites in villages across southern Lebanon.
- Hezbollah was also [estimated](#) to have 50,000 or more fighters, including the elite Radwan Force.

- As the State Department noted in its 2023 report, Iran played a critical role in rebuilding Hezbollah’s military strength. “Since the end of the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah conflict, Iran has supplied Hezbollah in Lebanon with thousands of rockets, missiles, and small arms in violation of UNSCR 1701. Israeli security officials and politicians expressed concerns that Iran was supplying Hezbollah with advanced weapons systems and technologies, as well as assisting the group in creating infrastructure that would permit it to produce its own rockets and missiles, thereby threatening Israel from Lebanon and Syria. Iran has provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support of Hezbollah and trained thousands of its fighters at camps in Iran.”
- During this period, Hezbollah’s leaders repeatedly threatened Israel, with Nasrallah [singling out](#) power stations; air force bases; perceived nuclear sites; the Haifa oil refinery and ammonium factory; the Ministry of Defence and IDF Headquarters in central Tel Aviv; and Israel’s offshore natural gas platforms.

HEZBOLLAH’S 8 OCTOBER 2023 ATTACK AND THE ENSUING CONFLICT

- One day after the 7 October massacre, Hezbollah [initiated](#) a new deadly conflict with Israel by launching a volley of missiles into northern Israel.
- Over the next several months, the group [launched](#) nearly 2,500 separate attacks on civilian homes, local infrastructure and military posts in northern Israel. More than 30 Israeli soldiers and civilians were killed as a result, while 61,000 Israelis remained displaced from their homes.
- On 27 July 2024, 12 children were [killed](#) in a Hezbollah missile attack on the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. Three days after the Golan Heights attack, Israel struck back, killing Fuad Shukur – [a senior Hezbollah commander](#) tagged with a \$5m US State Department bounty for his role in the 1983 Beirut barracks bombings. On 25 August, Hezbollah [responded](#) by attempting a large-scale aerial assault, which was met by increasingly ambitious Israeli military actions over subsequent weeks. During this period, Israel remotely detonated thousands of pagers equipped by Hezbollah operatives and undertook an extensive air campaign, together with limited ground manoeuvres, designed to target Hezbollah terror infrastructure and eliminate a large number of senior officials, including Nasrallah.
- By late November, an estimated 3,800 terror operatives were killed, with thousands more wounded. Hezbollah’s tunnel networks menacing Israel’s northern border were demolished, and its Iranian-supplied weapons arsenal was significantly reduced. According to Israeli military [estimates](#), about 70 percent of Hezbollah’s “strategic weapons”, including long-range, anti-aircraft, and anti-ship missiles were destroyed, in addition to approximately 75 percent of its short-range rocket launchers. US damage estimates were somewhat more modest, [assessing](#) that Israel dismantled half of Hezbollah’s weapon stockpiles.
- Shaken by the scale of its losses, Hezbollah approved a 27 November 2024 ceasefire deal between Lebanon and Israel. The signed agreement [reaffirmed](#) earlier UN security council resolutions calling for the “disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon,” while creating new, overlapping commitments obligating Hezbollah to halt its illicit weapons smuggling and dismantle its military infrastructure, starting in southern Lebanon. The agreement also provided Israel operational freedom to target Hezbollah assets and manoeuvres occurring in violation of the ceasefire.

“Israel had wreaked havoc on Hezbollah’s command-and-control network and severely degraded its military capabilities.”

HEZBOLLAH: DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Beyond Israel's military achievements, a combination of encouraging regional developments appeared to further weaken Hezbollah. The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria [signalled](#) a weakening of Hezbollah's traditional supply lines, which stretched from Iran through Syria to Lebanon. Within Lebanon itself, political dynamics turned increasingly unfavourable to Hezbollah. Joseph Aoun's appointment to the presidency unwound a key political deadlock, affording the Lebanese state a newfound opportunity to assert control over its territory and borders. Aoun, a former commander of the Lebanese armed forces, [pledged](#) to restore the state's monopoly on the use of violence, quickly [deployed](#) the Lebanese armed forces to southern Lebanon to begin disarming Hezbollah, and [banned](#) Iranian flights from Lebanon – which are often used to carry cash shipments for the group.



Aftermath of the Majdal Shams attack by Hezbollah, 29 July 2024, which killed 12 Druze children/ IDF Spokesperson's Unit / CC BY-SA 3.0

However, in the lead up to the Iran war, Israeli security officials [expressed](#) surprise at the pace of recovery. Israel's foreign ministry [warned](#) that "Hezbollah is rearming faster than it is being disarmed."

“The speed of Hezbollah’s rearmament blazed past expectations.”

While regional changes and military setbacks initially caused Hezbollah a serious supply crunch, Iran scrambled to open new financial and military channels. Tehran [shifted](#) to exploiting additional financial service platforms, maritime routes, and third-country smuggling networks to transfer money and arms. By the end of 2025, the US Treasury Department concluded Iran had transferred \$1bn to Hezbollah since the start of the year. Meanwhile, the Lebanese armed forces' gains on disarmament were viewed as insufficient by both [US](#) and [Israeli](#) officials. In resuscitating Hezbollah, the Iranian regime had all but guaranteed the next cycle of war and bloodshed.

HEZBOLLAH'S DECISION TO JOIN THE IRAN CONFLICT

- While Hezbollah evinced no intention of disarming in compliance with the 2024 ceasefire agreement, it carefully avoided prematurely provoking another round of fighting and declined to act during last summer's 12-day conflict between Israel and Iran. As Israel worked to block weapons shipments and prevent the group's military build-up, Hezbollah opted for strategic restraint, largely foregoing retaliatory action in favour of quietly replenishing its weapons stockpiles.
- This posture changed following the outbreak of the conflict in Iran. After [launching](#) several rockets and drones at the northern Israeli city of Haifa, Hezbollah [issued](#) its first declaration of responsibility for an attack on Israel since the 2024 ceasefire. Na'im Qassem, the group's secretary general, [justified](#) the assault as a response to the killing of the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and continuing Israeli military actions in Lebanon.

- In response, the IDF returned fire, [attacking](#) targets in Hezbollah's southern Beirut stronghold. IDF chief of staff Eyal Zamir [announced](#) the start of a new offensive campaign targeting the terror group. Hezbollah has unleashed additional indiscriminate barrages on northern Israel and [mounted](#) its first long-range missile attack since the signing of the 2024 ceasefire.
- At the time of writing, the IDF has [said](#) that it has killed over 570 Hezbollah operatives, including 220 members of the terror group's elite Radwan Force, since Hezbollah renewed its attacks on Israel. More than 2,000 Hezbollah targets in Lebanon have also been struck, including 120 command centres, 100 weapon depots, and 130 missile launchers, according to the IDF.

Hezbollah's decision to reopen hostilities with Israel has sparked debate about its calculations. As noted, last summer, the group remained passive throughout the Israel-Iran war, and it has yet to fully recover from its previous stand-off with Israel. However, compared to the 12-day war, the US-Israeli campaign in Iran goes further to threaten the Islamic Republic's future and its continued patronage of the terror group. After billions of dollars invested in the Shia faction, Tehran may have [forced](#) Hezbollah's hand, demanding intervention on its behalf. Indeed, [reports](#) indicate the IRGC further embedded itself in Hezbollah's command structure and strategic planning process following the group's 2024 defeat. But the Lebanese faction may have also acted independently, seeking to divert Israeli military assets away from its chief sponsor. Another possibility is that Hezbollah's leadership failed to accurately [assess](#) the severity of Israel's response when deciding to strike after Khamenei's killing, or [assumed](#) an Israeli offensive against the group to be inevitable.

“THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT LEBANON”: HEZBOLLAH'S INCREASING DOMESTIC ISOLATION

Hezbollah's decision to begin bombing Israel following the confirmed death of Khamenei created a [deep sense of betrayal](#) in the Lebanese government and particularly the Lebanese armed forces.

Recognising the country was being plunged into another bout of fighting and destruction, Lebanon's political leadership struggled to contain its exasperation. The prime minister, Nawaf Salam, condemned Hezbollah's behaviour as “irresponsible” and [announced](#) his government was banning all its military activities. At a cabinet meeting, the group's main political ally – the Amal Movement, led by the speaker of the parliament, Nabih Berri – voted in favour of the ban. The unprecedented decision bars Hezbollah from all security and military functions in the country, ordering the armed group to only act as a political party. The cabinet instructed the judiciary to arrest those who fired the rockets at Israel and told the army to prevent any more rockets from being launched from Lebanese territory at other countries. However, it is less clear if Lebanon's armed forces have acted against Hezbollah.

The Lebanese state has also taken action against the IRGC. The IRGC's extraterritorial Quds Force, in particular, has embedded itself in a more active way in supporting Hezbollah's restructuring following the group's debilitation in the 2023-24 war. The Quds Force has been providing operational, logistical and technical support – including direct coordination with Iran's own operations against Israel, in response. The Aoun government [banned](#) the IRGC's activities in Lebanon.

The government has also [expelled](#) Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, giving him five days to leave the country.

As when Hezbollah brought war to Lebanon following its attacks against Israel in 2023, the Lebanese people are [increasingly turning against Hezbollah](#) – including Lebanese Shias who are the terror group's traditional base. Hezbollah has long relied on political support in predominantly Shia areas, particularly in south and east Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut, where it supplanted the Lebanese government as the main provider of basic services, including education, loans, health care and housing. With more than one million Lebanese having fled their homes in recent weeks, mainly from the south of the country, anger against Hezbollah is eroding its remaining support base.

A poll [conducted](#) in January 2026 by the Council for a Secure America found that 73 percent of Lebanese strongly or somewhat support the president’s efforts to disarm Hezbollah, while only nine percent said they strongly or somewhat oppose the process.

Lebanon’s new government is no friend of Hezbollah. Aoun’s administration [began](#) taking steps against Hezbollah in the weeks following its creation, including calling for the group to disarm and bluntly asserting the state’s sole monopoly on the use of force. Under the terms of the 2024 ceasefire, the Lebanese military was to disarm and remove the threat from Hezbollah in the south. Despite some progress in the south of the country, the Lebanese army lacked both the capacity and the political will to fully confront Hezbollah – which may have risked another civil war. Such was the growing frustration with the delay in implementing disarmament that US envoy Tom Barrack – himself of Lebanese descent– urged Lebanon to “stop with the bullshit” on disarming Hezbollah.

However, there are signs that the current war is further emboldening Lebanon’s government to act against the terrorist group. This could result in internationally backed security arrangements which further debilitate and constrain Hezbollah.

Aoun has [labelled](#) Hezbollah’s entry into the war a “trap” – an attempt to either force the Lebanese state to confront Israel itself, or back down and leave the field to Hezbollah as the only force capable of defending the state. However, this could prove a grave miscalculation if the Lebanese state continues to turn against this parasitic terrorist group.

“Aoun and Salam have publicly spoken of Lebanon’s readiness to engage in formal negotiations with Israel under international auspices.”

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