

My Sources For “The Strongest Militia in the Middle East”

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Since war broke out on Israel’s southern frontier with Gaza in October 2023, the country’s forces have also faced daily skirmishes with Lebanese Hezbollah to the north. Despite the limited geographical scope of these border clashes, many observers worry that their trajectory is one of dangerous escalation, with several Hezbollah attacks pushing beyond the normal rules of engagement, making greater use of advanced weapons (such as antitank missiles), or hitting different military targets.

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/mapping-clashes-along-israel-lebanon-border>

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Analysts estimate Hezbollah has between 130,000 and 150,000 rockets and missiles, more than four times as many as its ally Hamas was believed to have stockpiled before the war in Gaza. And the Lebanese group says it commands more than 100,000 soldiers, well over double the high-end estimates of Hamas’s prewar fighting force.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/07/10/hezbollah-weapons-israel-war-border-nasrallah/>

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3:41

In July 1922 the League of Nations approved the texts of the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon. Lebanon had already, in August 1920, been declared a separate state, with the addition of Beirut, Tripoli, and certain other districts, to the prewar autonomous province. Politically, “Syria” henceforth acquired a narrower meaning; it referred to what was left of geographical Syria once Transjordan, Lebanon, and Palestine had been detached from it.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria/The-French-mandate>

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3:52

It was drawn unilaterally by the French after they used force to take control of Lebanon and Syria in 1920. They added Sunni, Shia, Druze and Orthodox Christian areas to the Maronite heartland on Mount Lebanon to create a viable, Maronite-dominated state which they hoped to isolate from the spread of Arab nationalism. It was one of the many acts by the mandatory powers that have contributed to today's instability in the Middle East.

<https://www.caabu.org/news/news/french-unilaterally-drew-lebanese-syrian-border-letter-caabu-board-member-john-mchugo-ft>

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The constitution provides that Christians and Muslims be represented equally in parliament, the cabinet, and high-level civil service positions, which include the ministry ranks of secretary general and director general. It also provides that these posts be distributed proportionally among the recognized religious groups. The constitutional provision for the distribution of political power and positions according to the principle of religious representation is designed to prevent a single

confessional group from gaining a dominant position. The 1943 "National Pact" stipulates that the president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament be Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shia Muslim, respectively. This distribution of political power operates at both the national and local levels of government.

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/171739.pdf>

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4:43

On November 29, 1947 the United Nations adopted Resolution 181 (also known as the Partition Resolution) that would divide Great Britain's former Palestinian mandate into Jewish and Arab states in May 1948 when the British mandate was scheduled to end. Under the resolution, the area of religious significance surrounding Jerusalem would remain a corpus separatum under international control administered by the United Nations.

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/creation-israel#:~:text=On%20November%2029%2C%201947%20the,mandate%20was%20scheduled%20to%20end.>

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Successive waves of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon have led to a stateless population of up to about 270,000 people, who live in 12 camps across the nation.

It started with the Nakba of 1948, when 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from Palestine during the creation of Israel, and has continued since, as resistance leaders and refugees alike sought shelter from Israeli attacks.

But while Lebanon has hosted these refugees, they have faced systemic discrimination – and the Palestinian community and its leaders have constantly lived under the threat of Israeli attacks.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/6/why-is-lebanon-home-to-so-many-palestinian-refugees-and-leaders>

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5:04

The underrepresentation of Shiites was mirrored in the Lebanese government. Empirical

studies on Lebanese bureaucracy during the period preceding the second civil war show that the Shiites were the most poorly represented in the administration. But its underrepresentation in the civil service was not the only Shiite grievance; an additional

source of unhappiness was that the greatest portion of the Shiite population lived in the

areas bordering Israel. For many years, Shiites complained that they were abandoned by the state to their fate in the face of Israeli retaliatory operations, first against the Palestinian guerillas and then during the military occupation in the late 1980s and 1990s.

<https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/middle-east-briefs/pdfs/1-100/meb37.pdf>

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A major turning point in Lebanese-Palestinian relations, the Cairo Accords granted the PLO guerrillas the right to attack Israel from Lebanon, with their transportation and supply lines facilitated by the Lebanese army. PLO units were allowed to have specific posts in south Lebanon and to independently run their refugee camps away from Lebanese authorities.

By 1971, Lebanon became the sole base for PLO fighters after a major violent crackdown by Jordan, referred to as the Black September events of 1970, eradicated their presence in the kingdom.

Gradually, PLO authority stretched to areas outside refugee camps in Beirut and south Lebanon. Some areas of the south became known as "Fatah Land", while the "Fakhani Republic" emerged in west Beirut, in reference to the neighbourhood of the capital where the main PLO headquarters was located.

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/lebanon-palestine-contentious-history-armed-resistance>

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6:04

6:13

All governments in Damascus since independence have propagated the concept that Syria in its present borders is a rump state. Whether it is the "Greater Syria" ideal or an enhanced regional role for the "throbbing heart of Arabism" (as Damascus sometimes portrays itself), dominating Lebanon is the first step of all such ambitious enterprises.

This last bout of Syrian interference in Lebanon's internal affairs led to the breakdown of the Lebanese state in 1975, a power vacuum which Syria's military soon filled. A quarter century later, Syria still controls Lebanon through a direct military presence and indirect political hegemony. Repeated and official Lebanese government

calls for Syria's departure have not reduced this hegemony, nor did the Israeli invasion of 1982, nor the aborted "war of liberation" waged in 1989 by Lebanon's then-prime minister Michel Aoun.

<https://www.meforum.org/MiddleEastForum/media/MEFLibrary/pdf/Lebanon-Study-Guide.pdf>

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Israel let the Syrian government know what Israel would and would not permit Syrian forces to do there. Israel's principal concern was the south of Lebanon, which abutted Israel's border. The collapse of Lebanese government authority in 1975, and the subsequent breakup of the Lebanese army, gave Israel the opportunity to present itself as the "protector" of three Christian enclaves just inside Lebanon on the other side of the Israeli border. These enclaves became areas of de facto Israeli control during 1976. Wishing to maintain and extend the enclaves, Israel warned Syria not to send its forces to south Lebanon.

In March 1978, after a seaborne Palestinian commando raid against Israel which killed 34 Israelis on the Tel Aviv-Haifa coastal highway, Israeli forces invaded south Lebanon up to the Litani River. About 100 Palestinian guerrillas, the ostensible targets of the operation, were killed. In comparison, there were over 2,000 Lebanese and Palestinian civilian deaths. The invasion created over 200,000 refugees, damaged 82 villages and almost completely destroyed six more.

<https://merip.org/1982/09/israel-in-lebanon-1975-1982/>

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1982: On June 6, 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon under the pretence of stopping PLO raids across its border. The Israeli forces, however, progressed as far north as the capital Beirut, laying siege to the largely pro-Palestinian West Beirut.

The invasion led to the eventual departure of the PLO from Lebanon under the supervision of a multinational peacekeeping force on September 1.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/17/beyond-hezbollah-the-history-of-tensions-between-lebanon-and-israel>

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7:24

Seeing an opportunity to expand its influence in Arab states, Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) provided funds and training to the budding militia, which adopted the name Hezbollah, meaning "The Party of God." It earned a reputation for extremist militancy due to its frequent clashes with rival Shiite militias, such

as the Amal Movement, and its attacks on foreign targets, including the 1983 suicide bombing of barracks housing U.S. and French troops in Beirut, in which more than three hundred people died. Hezbollah became a vital asset to Iran, bridging Shiite Arab-Persian divides as Tehran established proxies throughout the Middle East.

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah>

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7:45

Hezbollah bills itself as a Shiite resistance movement, and it enshrined its ideology in a 1985 manifesto that vowed to expel Western powers from Lebanon, called for the destruction of the Israeli state, and pledged allegiance to Iran's supreme leader. It also advocated an Iran-inspired Islamist regime, but emphasized that the Lebanese people should have the freedom of self-determination.

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah>

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8:02

In August 1982, the governments of the United States, France, Italy, and Great Britain deployed a multinational peacekeeping force to Lebanon in an effort to stabilize the country and stop the fighting between Syria, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Israel. The contingency—including the first 800 U.S. Marines from the 32nd Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU)—agreed to oversee the PLO's evacuation and by 10 September through high-level diplomacy, the PLO left the port of Beirut.

[https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/middle-east/lebanon.html#:~:text=In%20August%201982%2C%20the%20governments,\(PLO\)%2C%20and%20Israel.](https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/middle-east/lebanon.html#:~:text=In%20August%201982%2C%20the%20governments,(PLO)%2C%20and%20Israel.)

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On October 23, 1983, Hizballah killed 241 U.S. military personnel, including 220 Marines, 18 sailors, and three soldiers in a terrorist bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. Minutes later, a second suicide bomber killed 58 French paratroopers. Six innocent Lebanese civilians also lost their lives. The abhorrent and shocking attack on the Beirut barracks remains to this day the single deadliest day for the U.S. Marine Corps since the Battle of Iwo Jima.

<https://www.state.gov/40th-anniversary-of-the-beirut-marine-corps-barracks-bombing/>

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Defense minister Ariel Sharon tried to engineer the installation of a friendly government in Beirut, but that effort was ended by an assassin's bomb. In 1985, after the PLO and Syria had been pushed out — with Hezbollah emerging in the resulting vacuum — Israel withdrew its forces from most of Lebanon, settling on a security zone designed to keep Palestinian terrorists away from the border.

The buffer zone was meant to be managed and secured by the South Lebanon Army, a Christian militia backed by Israel, with a minimal IDF presence. But when the SLA started to collapse in the face of Hezbollah attacks, Israel could not help being sucked in. The next 15 years of conflict against Hezbollah would cost hundreds of Israeli lives, and the trauma is still palpable today, 21 years after the IDF's humiliating withdrawal.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/two-decades-on-israel-confronts-legacy-of-forgotten-south-lebanon-occupation/>

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9:05

The 1989 Taif Agreement, which formally ended Lebanon's civil war, stated that all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias in the country would be disbanded. It also stated that the national army would be strengthened, and that: 'The armed forces intelligence shall be reorganized to serve military objectives How Hezbollah holds sway over the Lebanese state exclusively. However, as Lebanon at the time was still under Israeli occupation, a further clause in the agreement stated that Lebanon would be '[t]aking all the steps necessary to liberate all Lebanese territories from the Israeli occupation, to spread state sovereignty over all the territories ...'. Although the agreement did not explicitly refer to Hezbollah or use the word 'resistance' - which Hezbollah came to later adopt as its own (exclusive) alternative name - the Lebanese government used the clause concerning Israeli occupation to give Hezbollah exception

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-06-30-how-hezbollah-holds-sway-over-the-lebanese-state-khatib.pdf>

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Hezbollah's hybrid status as a pseudo government actor and also a militia group described in greater detail by this paper.

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/06/how-hezbollah-holds-sway-over-lebanese-state>

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Various terror attacks committed by Hezbollah detailed here.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/target/etc/cron.html>

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10:08

His last term in office ended in 2004, after which he aligned himself with the

opposition in parliament and supported calls for Hezbollah's backer Syria to withdraw its forces from Lebanon.

On 14 February 2005, Hariri was travelling in a motorcade past the St George Hotel in downtown Beirut when a bomb hidden in a van exploded, killing him and 21 other people.

The assassination brought tens of thousands of demonstrators onto the streets in protest against the pro-Syrian government, with the finger of blame for the assassination pointed at Lebanon's neighbour. The government resigned two weeks later and Syrian troops pulled out that April.

After collecting evidence, the UN and Lebanon set up the Netherlands-based STL in 2007 to investigate the bombing. Four Hezbollah operatives were ultimately put on trial in absentia - Ayyash, Merhi, Oneissi and Assad Hassan Sabra. A top Hezbollah military commander, Mustafa Badreddine, was also indicted until he was killed in Syria in 2016.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-60691507>

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As part of the 1989 Taif agreement ending the war, Syria was to withdraw from Lebanon in two stages over two years. But more than 15 years later, it still maintained a highly visible presence in Lebanon, and last September, the United Nations passed resolution 1559 calling for, among other things, Syria's immediate withdrawal. When former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated on Feb. 14, a furor over Syria's alleged involvement in the murder raised international pressure on Syria to get out.

"Syria has now fulfilled that demand and has also complied with its portion of the 1989 Taif agreement," the chief of Syria's military, Gen. Ali Habib, said. "Syria never had any desires or ambitions in Lebanon except to preserve its unity."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/26/international/middleeast/syrian-troops-leave-lebanon-after-29year-occupation.html>

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10:20

2005: Former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was murdered, which triggered the Cedar Revolution against the pro-Syrian government of Prime Minister Omar Karami and the Syrian troops in Lebanon. The government collapsed, and Syrian forces withdrew. In subsequent parliamentary elections, Hezbollah won 14 seats. It formed the March 8 Alliance with six other political parties, including Amal, a predominantly Shiite party, and the Free Patriotic Movement, a Christian party. Hezbollah joined the government for the first time. In a national unity government, Hezbollah members were appointed to be minister of labor and minister of energy and water.

2006: Months after the 34-day war between Hezbollah and Israel, the Shiite party withdrew from the Lebanese government over attempts to curtail its military and amid calls for a tribunal to investigate the Hariri assassination. Nasrallah called for

nationwide protests. The political crisis, and sporadic pro- and anti-government protests, continued well into 2007.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/hezbollahs-record-war-politics>

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Hezbollah sided with the Assad regime within weeks of the first protests in Syria, Hassan Nasrallah publicly declared his organization's backing of Assad in May 2011, even before the uprising turned violent.¹⁰ Hezbollah rhetorical support for Syrian regime has remained constant throughout the conflict; however, the group's involvement on the ground has evolved as the fighting has protracted.

Hezbollah's activities in Syria in the early years of the conflict were limited in size and scope primarily to advisory and support roles. This was likely a result of the organization's reluctance to get drawn into the fighting in Syria for fear of its consequences for detrimental effects that such involvement might have for Lebanon's stability and for Hezbollah's standing.

https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf

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11:10

The role of Hezbollah in Syria shifted dramatically in early 2013 from what was primarily an advisory mission to one in which Hezbollah forces assumed a direct combat role, operating in larger numbers alongside Syrian military and paramilitary forces. They also expanded their efforts to train a reorganized pro-Assad paramilitary force.

The beginning of April 2013 saw Hezbollah's involvement in Syria shift with the decision to lead the ground assault on al-Qusayr, a primarily Sunni town in Homs province not far from the border with Lebanon. The Qusayr offensive was a departure from Hezbollah's previous involvement in Syria. Not only did Hezbollah operate in much larger, more concentrated numbers than ever before, but the group also controlled the planning and conduct of the operation.

https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf

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11:51

Among approximately 60,000 Israelis evacuated from northern Israel after months of cross-border fighting, Partush and her children are staying temporarily in another

kibbutz, and she isn't sure if she wants to return to Malkiya. Nearly 91,000 people from south Lebanon have also been displaced.

<https://apnews.com/article/israel-lebanon-hezbollah-evacuees-gaza-war-1841834d89af938a8445821567640aea>

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