

# 5.1 Hezbollah

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Hezbollah (party of God in Arabic) is a political and military group in Lebanon,[295] led by Naim Qassem, [296] who was appointed on 29 October 2024 as the group's new secretary-general.[297] The group, mainly composed of Shia Muslims, emerged following the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 that shaped the Shia community dynamics in the Middle-East,[298] and later after Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982.[299] In 1982, Hezbollah was founded by members of the Amal movement with the supervision and training of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).[300] Hezbollah officially announced its existence in 1985 for the purpose of ending Israeli occupation of South Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.[301] Daher stated, in an interview with the EUAA, that 'Hezbollah also established the Lebanese Brigades to Resist the Israeli Occupation (LBRIO), which includes Sunnis, Christians, and Druze as reservists who assist during confrontations with Israel whenever needed'.[302] Founded in November 1997, the LBRIO is also known as the Lebanese Resistance Brigades or *Saraya al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniya*.[303] As of 20 October 2024, Hezbollah reportedly claimed having 100 000 fighters[304] including its Radwan Force commando, which is operating in southern Lebanon.[305] Daher further indicated that 'women are active in organisational and administrative functions of Hezbollah, notably through the Women's Committee of the party, but they are not deployed in fighting roles and largely remain as backups'.[306] Daher stated that 'Hezbollah has a strong presence in certain areas including southern Lebanon, parts of the north-east, and Beirut's southern suburbs'.[307] For more information on Hezbollah's territorial control, see section 6.3 Areas controlled by different actors.

Lebanon's civil war, which lasted between 1975 and 1990,[308] ended with the Taif Agreement, negotiated in Taif, Saudi Arabia.[309] Since then, Hezbollah has become a major political and military force, justifying its arms by citing the right to resist Israel.[310] Daher stated that 'since 2006, Hezbollah has significantly expanded its military capabilities to counter Israel,'[311]and as of 2012, it had been involved over prolonged years in the Syrian civil war, backing the Assad regime and gaining further battlefield experience.[312] However, regional shifts, the Assad regime's declining capacity, and Iran's economic distress have eroded its ability to sustain its arsenal and overall military readiness.[313]

While Israel's Prime Minister claimed to have weakened Hezbollah by killing its secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah and several senior commanders[314] including Ali Karaki, head of the group's southern front, in a 27 September 2024 strike on Hezbollah's central headquarters,[315] and by 'breaking the Axis of Resistance,'[316] Hezbollah quickly restructured its command and continued

operations near the Lebanon-Israel border, using fortified tunnel networks as part of its military strategy.317

On 29 October 2024, the group appointed longtime deputy leader Naim Qassem as its new secretary-general,318 who asserted that Hezbollah retains 'thousands of trained fighters capable of holding their ground, with the resources to sustain a prolonged confrontation'319 underscoring the group's resilience despite the losses.320

Many Lebanese, particularly those who experienced humiliation or personal loss during Israeli occupation (between 1982 and 2000), chose to join the resistance, with some aligning with Hezbollah or affiliated groups like the Lebanese Resistance Brigades, taking on roles in combat, logistics, and intelligence.321 Hezbollah has been recruiting members from within its stronghold in the Shia dominated areas, including in the southern Lebanon region.322 As of December 2024, Hezbollah has started recruiting 'new fighters and was trying to find ways to rearm through domestic production and by smuggling materials through Syria'.323 However, Daher stated that 'Hezbollah does not actively recruit members; instead, individuals seek to join, and there are usually more volunteers than available positions. Joining the group and leaving is done on volunteer basis.'324

Daher further noted that 'the group's legitimacy, particularly for its fight against Israel's occupation and annexation of the south of the country (1978-2000) and continued bombings, alongside the rise of Hassan Nasrallah as a leader (1992-2024), has strengthened recruitment dynamics'.325 According to an October 2024 study by UMAM Documentation and Research, Hezbollah recruited and indoctrinated children through its 18 Al Mahdi Schools, mosques, *hussainiyas* (Shia religious centres) and *hawzat* (seminaries) in areas under its control.326 However, Daher stated that 'Hezbollah does not recruit children, and that Hezbollah leadership has issued fatwas explicitly prohibiting the recruitment of child soldiers'.327 The source further noted that 'recruitment is carried out through personal networks and word of mouth, and that there have been isolated cases of Druze and Christians converting in order to join Hezbollah'.328

Between 15 August and 21 September 2025, Israel reportedly killed at least five Hezbollah members in southern and eastern Lebanon, with the IDF reporting the killing of one Hezbollah member on 22 August 2025, two on 19 September, one on 20 September, and one on 21 September 2025.329 As of 27 September 2025, Hezbollah is seen as significantly weakened with major losses in leadership, command and control, and external support, yet it continues to resist calls for disarmament while recalibrating its strategy toward smaller tactical operations, political signalling, and efforts to recover influence inside Lebanon, even as pressure grows for its full disarmament.330 For more information on Hezbollah's disarmament, see section 6.2 Overview of security dynamics related to recent developments with Israel.

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