



What is Hezbollah?

Considered a terrorist organization by the United States and more than 60 other countries, Hezbollah – which translates as “Party of God” – is both a powerful militant group and a political party in Lebanon. It was established by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the 1980s. Hezbollah is committed to the destruction of the state of Israel and opposed to the presence of Western powers in the Middle East.

Hezbollah has a large network of schools, medical clinics, and social services in Lebanon that helped it gain political power and seats in the Lebanese government. It’s sometimes referred to as a “state within a state,” and has control of southern Lebanon, which borders Israel.

Hezbollah is estimated to currently have between 120,000 and 200,000 missiles and rockets, a much larger stockpile than Hamas. The weapons are also much more sophisticated, including Scud missiles that have a range of 300-500 km, as well as surface to air missiles and attack aircraft.

Hezbollah has a history of committing terrorist attacks around the world, such as the 1994 deadly bombing of a Jewish community center in Argentina that killed 85 people and the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Tower housing complex in Saudi Arabia, killing 19 US Airmen and injuring more than 400 others. In 2008, it bombed a U.S. Embassy vehicle in Beirut and then, in 2012, it killed six in a bus bombing in Bulgaria. Most recently, it has been firing rockets into Israel on almost a daily basis, with hundreds of strikes since October 7, 2023.

Hezbollah’s main benefactor is Iran, which provides funding, weapons, directives and even the assistance of Iranian Revolutionary Guards. For all practical purposes, Hezbollah is a proxy of the Tehran regime. Hezbollah also is a stalwart ally of the Assad regime in Syria. During the Syrian civil war, it sent thousands of fighters to support the Syrian government.

The Syrians and Iranians support Hezbollah for different reasons. Syria is a secular dictatorship, while Iran is a Shi’ite Islamist theocracy. Yet, these two regimes find common cause in their support of Hezbollah because it provides them both with leverage to spread their influence.

While Hezbollah is Shia and Hamas is Sunni (different sects in Islam that have often been in conflict with each other), both US-designated terrorist groups are connected through Iran and have supported each other's actions against Israel. Hezbollah has also reportedly helped arm and train Hamas members.

In recent years, the Lebanese public has become more divided and skeptical of Hezbollah as the country has suffered from political and economic problems.

Conflict with Israel

Israel has a long and complicated history of conflict with Lebanon and Hezbollah. In 1982, Israel entered Lebanon to deal with escalating artillery and cross-border attacks on civilians in northern Israel by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which had established military bases there, and in response to an attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador in London. After gradually withdrawing troops, the Israeli military maintained a security zone along the border in southern Lebanon until 2000, when it pulled all its troops out. The Israeli withdrawal was conducted in coordination with the UN and, according to the UN, constituted Israeli fulfillment of its obligations under Security Council Resolution 425 (1978).

UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which was adopted in 2004, called for all Lebanese militias to disband and disarm. That has not happened, and in fact, the UN Force in Lebanon (called UNFIL) has looked on while Hezbollah has amassed a great number of arms, dug an extensive and sophisticated underground tunnel network, and committed acts of violence against Israel.

In 2006, in an unprovoked attack, Hezbollah terrorists launched a salvo of Katyusha rockets and mortars into Israeli towns, farms and villages. At the same time, Hezbollah terrorists crossed Israel's internationally recognized border with Lebanon, and attacked an Israeli patrol, killing three soldiers and kidnapping two more. This led to a war that lasted one month and was known as the Second Lebanon War. Despite promises and the presence of a UN mission in Southern Lebanon, Hezbollah has been allowed to rearm and continue its presence in the area.

Similar to its current attacks against Israel, the 2006 attack came on the heels of a Gaza crisis, touched off when several Palestinian organizations, led by Hamas, carried out a well-planned, bloody attack on an Israeli military emplacement at Kerem Shalom adjacent to the southern Gaza Strip.

Since October 7

Since the October 7 terrorist attack by Hamas against Israel and resulting war, Hezbollah has fired thousands of rockets and mortars toward Northern Israel. Tens of thousands of Israelis remain evacuated from their homes because of these attacks and there has been widespread

damage to structures as well as devastating fires. Israel has responded by targeting Hezbollah military assets and officials. On July 27, a Hezbollah rocket, made by Iran, landed on a soccer field in the Druze town Majdal Shams, killing 12 children and injuring many more, a tragedy that led to the assassination by Israel of the commander responsible for the strike and has prompted concerns about a major escalation.

References and Further Reading

- [Council on Foreign Relations](#)
- [US State Department Country Reports on Terrorism 2023](#)
- [US Embassy in Argentina](#)
- [United States Air Force](#)
- [CNN: weapons capacity](#)
- [UN Security Resolution 425](#)
- [New York Times](#)
- [Times of Israel](#)
- [United Nations](#)
- [Washington Institute](#)
- [Washington Institute](#)
- [My Jewish Learning](#)
- [PBS Backgrounder](#)
- [Opinion in The Forward](#)
- [Opinion from CSIS](#)