



Lebanon & Hezbollah Fact Sheet

Government

Lebanon is a non-functioning Republic, where 3 prominent offices are divided amongst the different religious groups. The President must be a Christian, the Prime Minister is a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Assembly is a Shia Muslim. There is a unicameral National Assembly, with 128 seats and members directly elected in multi-seat constituencies by majority vote. Assembly members serve 4-year terms and seats are apportioned among the Christian and Muslim denominations. In Oct of 2016, Christian, former general, and ally of Iran, Michel Aoun [was chosen](#) as President. In 2019, Prime Minister Saad Hariri [organized](#) a government after Hezbollah allies were given two ministries and a ministry of state, including for the first time the Ministry of Health, which has one of the country's largest budgets.

Population

Lebanon's population [totals](#) 6.1 million (including refugees). It is 54% Muslim (roughly evenly divided between Sunni and Shia), 40.5% Christian (broken down further into 21% Maronite Catholic, 8% Greek Orthodox, 5% Greek Catholic, 6.5% other Christian), 5.6 % Druze, and other. There are [450,000](#) Palestinian refugees and [1,500,000](#) Syrian refugees in Lebanon.



Maps courtesy of CIA World Factbook

The Modern History of Lebanon

In the 1920's, the French carved off the nation now called Lebanon from Syria to create a Christian majority Arab nation. However, because of emigration and higher birthrates, Muslim Lebanese now make up a solid majority. (The Shia in particular had a higher birthrate.) Post-1948, a large group of Palestinian Arabs – mostly Sunni Arab – also moved to Lebanon. In 1975, a full-scale civil war broke out in Lebanon, as various Christian, Muslim and Druze groups pushed for greater power within the nation. This civil war lasted until 1990. Both Syria and Israel intervened, with Israel at one point setting up its own zone in Southern Lebanon, and Syria eventually becoming the occupying power over the entire country. After 1990, all of the various militia groups were disarmed, except for Hezbollah. Post-2005, the Cedars Revolution, a series of popular demonstrations for Lebanese independence from Syria and favoring more democracy, resulted in Syrian troops leaving the nation. However, since then, Hezbollah has come to exercise power over the country.

U.S. Assistance

Since 2005, the U.S. [has given](#) more than \$1.7 billion to the Lebanese Army, providing weapons, equipment, and training. In 2016, the aid to Lebanon amounted to \$85.9 million. In 2017, the United States [provided](#) over \$250 million in security assistance to Lebanon, including \$121 million in Foreign Military Financing. In

2018, the U.S. [sent](#) more than \$90 million worth of military equipment to help the Lebanese army protect its borders and said it would complete the delivery of a \$340 million aid package. In 2019, the U.S. provided more than \$100 million in upgrades to tanks and attack helicopters. The U.S. [has given](#) Lebanon A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft, MD530G light attack helicopters, and M2A2 Bradleys.

Hezbollah

The Hezbollah – or “Hizbullah”, meaning “The Party of God,” and sometimes [using](#) the cover name of “Islamic Jihad” – militia “[has](#) effectively taken over the Lebanese government” and [has become](#) the “most powerful non-state armed force on the planet.” As a result, the State Department has listed Lebanon as a terrorist safe haven. [For example](#), Hezbollah controls sites that are off limits to Lebanese security and army forces; its members are immune from judiciary and security agencies; Hezbollah has a free hand in bringing in goods and people through Lebanese ports, border crossings and Beirut airport — no taxes paid, no questions asked; Hezbollah is capable of preventing elections from taking place in Lebanon and imposing its own candidate, and it can shut down the government. Hezbollah is strong enough that it has been able to [override a ban](#) by the Lebanese government to allow an Iran-backed Iraqi militant commander to visit the Lebanon-Israel border. It is increasingly [intertwined](#) with the Lebanese Armed Forces; Israel has said that Hezbollah “[controls](#)” Lebanon’s conventional military. U.S. military aid [seems likely](#) to have been given by the LAF to Hezbollah. President Aoun [has given](#) Hezbollah the legal authority to operate as a military force. This is in violation of UN Resolution 1701, which was adopted in 2006 at the end of the Second Lebanon War, and which [mandates](#) “the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, so that...there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State.” It also is [increasingly infiltrating](#) the Lebanese government. In the last elections it and its allies [became](#) the biggest bloc.

Hezbollah is a Shiite Islamist political party and designated terrorist organization, which was founded in the 1980’s by Iran. It was originally created to oppose Israel and the West. Iran funds Hezbollah annually, [\\$700 million \(or less\)](#) to [\\$1 billion](#). Hezbollah also fundraises in Europe, and raises money through its criminal activities, possibly as much as [\\$1 billion a year](#). Hezbollah maintains an extensive security apparatus, political organization, and health and social services network in Lebanon, with a payroll of around 80,000. Hezbollah’s Islamic Health Unit [has more](#) than three hospitals and 12 health centers. Hezbollah’s schools serve around 15,000 students, many of whom receive financial assistance and scholarships. Hezbollah controls the Lebanese Satellite television network *Al-Manar*, whose [budget](#) alone is at least \$15 million per year. *Al-Manar* was [designated](#) by the U.S. Department of Treasury as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity” in 2006. Recently, [because](#) of the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions on Iran, Hezbollah has had to cut its social services budget. Hezbollah holds many seats in the Lebanese National Assembly, dominating the Shia majority areas. [Hassan Nasrallah](#) has led Hezbollah as general secretary since 1992, although the Iranian Supreme Leader, now Ayatollah Khamenei, [serves](#) as Hezbollah’s ultimate source of authority.

Hezbollah has long been an effective proxy for Iran. Iran has sent Hezbollah fighters to [Iran](#), [Iraq](#), Syria, and [Yemen](#). Hezbollah [offers](#) fighters a two-year contract consisting of \$500-\$1,200 in monthly salary plus benefits. Hezbollah [has](#) 25,000 active-duty members, in addition to 20,000 to 30,000 reserve fighters. When its fighters are killed, Hezbollah’s Martyrs’ Foundation [provides](#) financial assistance and health and social services to the families. Hezbollah pays his family between \$25,000 and \$45,000. Also, the Foundation for the Wounded provides assistance to those who have been injured during combat. [Hezbollah’s Unit 3800](#) is modelled on the Iranian Quds Force, whose operatives are highly educated, with most able to speak in the native tongue of those they are training, and just like their Quds Force counterparts, are sworn to uphold the Iranian regime’s quest to spread its revolution to foreign lands. At Hezbollah’s insistence, Lebanon’s Central Bank [has allowed](#) Iran to use the country’s banking sector to evade U.S. sanctions.

Hezbollah Involvement in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen

Hezbollah had as many as [9,000 fighters](#) in Syria, but now is down to about [4000-5000 troops](#), where they are working to defend the Assad regime. Hezbollah is [strong enough](#) that in the South it is giving Syrian troops orders. Hezbollah’s involvement in the Syrian civil war has alienated some of its [Lebanese Shia constituents](#)

and [Sunni Muslims](#) in Lebanon and across the Middle East. The former [is exacerbated](#) because the poor Shia neighborhoods are providing fighters while the upper middle class and rich neighborhoods are benefiting from the war. Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has also resulted in rampant small crime, drugs, and prostitution among the Shia, and directly led to a decline in the benefits provided by the group to the poor. It is estimated that Hezbollah has lost [2000 – 2500](#) fighters in Syria, and suffered [4000 – 7000](#) wounded. Much of the casualties [come from](#) the elite forces, and have included dozens of high-ranking commanders, which has greatly hurt morale. In addition to fighting in Syria, Hezbollah has also been tasked with training other pro-Assad forces. However, because of Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, it has been [transformed](#) from a terror group to a [full-fledged army](#). Hezbollah fighters have become familiar with advanced Russian weaponry and military strategies. In response to Hezbollah involvement in Syria, both Sunni Islamist groups ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra have conducted cross border assaults into Lebanon. These groups [have been](#) responsible for abductions of Lebanese soldiers and civilians, attacks against Lebanese personnel and local policemen, and suicide bombings in civilian areas. Hezbollah is also involved in the fighting in Iraq and [Yemen](#). In Yemen, it [fired](#) a ballistic missile at Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, and it has been [involved in attacks](#) against the U.S. Navy and other ships.

The Hezbollah Threat to Israel

Hezbollah, which most recently fought Israel in 2006 during the Second Lebanon War, continues to prepare for another war with the Jewish State. A report [stated](#) that a renewed war with Israel is “inevitable,” and is certain to be “more violent and destructive” than previous conflicts. Another report [said](#) “Hezbollah possesses more firepower than 95 percent of the world's conventional militaries, and more rockets and missiles than all European NATO members combined.” It has [moved](#) the bulk of its military infrastructure into the Shiite villages in southern Lebanon and has a “vast network of advanced tunnels” along the border. Hezbollah [has promised](#) to assist poor Shiite villagers “on the condition that at least one rocket launcher would be placed in one of the house's rooms or in the basement, along with a number of rockets, which will be fired at predetermined targets in Israel when the order is given.” Hezbollah has [approximately](#) 150,000 rockets that can strike in northern Israel, thousands of rockets capable of hitting Tel Aviv, and several hundred that can reach anywhere in Israel. Hezbollah could fire probably [1,000 a day](#). These missiles may include “[highly accurate](#)” missiles; Iran [has been increasing](#) its shipments of advanced weaponry to Hezbollah, deliveries that now include Global Positioning System components to make previously unguided rockets into precision guided-missiles. Hezbollah [may have](#) chemical weapons. Hezbollah [also manufactures weapons](#) in Lebanon, producing drones and guided missiles, amongst other systems. And it has [dug attack tunnels](#) into Israel, which [violates](#) UNSCR 1701. The up to 15,000 UN Interim Force in Lebanon is meant to prevent a war between Israel and Hezbollah. Instead it has [been supportive](#) of the LAF and Hezbollah. Funding for UNIFIL is [\\$500 million a year](#).

Hezbollah's Terrorism

The U.S. State Department [designated](#) Hezbollah a Foreign Terrorist Organization in Oct. 1997. It has conducted terror attacks all over the world. Hezbollah has murdered more Americans than any other terror group than al-Qaeda. Nicholas Rasmussen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, [has testified](#) that “the group seeks to develop and maintain a global capability to carry out acts of terror”. The U.S. has [imposed sanctions](#) on three senior Hezbollah members of Lebanon's Parliament.

Some prominent examples of Hezbollah attacks on U.S. interests:

- 1983: [U.S. Embassy bombing](#): This bombing in Beirut killed 63 people, mostly embassy and CIA staff members, several soldiers and 1 Marine. 17 of the dead were Americans.
- 1983: [Marine barracks bombing](#): This bombing killed 241 U.S. marines and 6 civilians at the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut. On May 30, 2003, Judge Royce Lamberth [found](#) Iran legally responsible for providing Hezbollah, with financial and logistical support that helped them carry out the attack.
- 1984: [U.S. Embassy Annex bombing](#): Following the earlier Embassy attack, the embassy was moved to a supposedly more secure location in East Beirut. However, on September 20, 1984, another car bomb exploded at this embassy annex, killing 20 Lebanese and 2 U.S. soldiers.

- 1996: [Khobar Towers bombing](#): Resulted in the deaths of 17 U.S. servicemen in Saudi Arabia.
- 2000's: [Hezbollah Training of Iraqi & Afghani Terror Attacks](#): Hezbollah provided training and EFP's to both Shia and Sunni insurgents against U.S. troops during the 2003 Iraq War and the Afghani War. This resulted in more than 1000 U.S. deaths, and thousands of injuries.

Hezbollah's criminal networks in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America have trafficked in cigarettes, drugs, weapons and used cars but diamonds, commercial merchandise and even human slaves.

Hezbollah's Activities in the Americas

The DEA [has said](#) that Hezbollah's "has leveraged relationships with corrupt foreign government officials and transnational criminal actors ... creating a network that can be utilized to move metric ton quantities of cocaine, launder drug proceeds on a global scale, and procure weapons and precursors for explosives." Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah [has amassed](#) a net personal worth of around \$250 million due to his organization's illegal drug smuggling operations. It has [been involved](#) in global money-laundering, drug-trafficking operations, arms smuggling, cigarette smuggling and counterfeiting of currency. Hezbollah [created](#) a special financial unit called the "Business Affairs Component," to oversee the criminal operation, and it was run by Hezbollah military commander Imad Mughniyeh, until his death in 2008. Since then, Adham Tabaja, a Lebanese businessman, and Hashem Safieddine, the head of Hezbollah's Executive Council, which [oversees](#) the group's social and economic activities, and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist, have run this unit. Hezbollah has been [active inside the U.S. for decades](#), engaging in a range of activities that include fundraising and money laundering. Among the most profitable was a cigarette smuggling ring based in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 2001, international intelligence sources identified Lebanese residents operating for Hezbollah in South America's tri-border area ([Argentina](#), [Paraguay](#) and [Brazil](#)). That area [has come to be](#) a major source of funding for Hezbollah's terror activities. In January 2011, one of the largest Hezbollah narcotics trafficking and money laundering schemes was [disrupted](#). A DEA investigation revealed that Hezbollah laundered as much as \$200 million a month from the sale of cocaine in Europe and the Middle East. "In the [past decade](#), Hezbollah's growing involvement in transnational organized crime has evolved into a multi-billion dollar global enterprise endorsed and coordinated by the group's top leaders. Hezbollah's involvement in producing and selling counterfeit medicines such as Captagon — a powerful amphetamine — [is well documented](#) and so is its growing involvement in [cocaine trafficking](#)."

Venezuela, under Chavez and Maduro, has been allied with Hezbollah and Iran. Venezuela [has provided](#) state support in terms of immigration and banking to Hezbollah. The Venezuelan government [would provide](#) Hezbollah and Iranian operatives with fake identities and travel documents, and allowed them to establish training camps for Shiite militias. The U.S. has designated Venezuelan Vice President Tareck Aissami as a global narcotics kingpin, and he is widely thought to be Hezbollah's man in Venezuela. Also, retired general and former chief of intelligence Hugo Carvajal "[was the main man](#) between Venezuela and Iran, the Quds force, Hezbollah and the cocaine trafficking." Bolivia, and Ecuador [have also been](#) very helpful to Hezbollah.

Hezbollah has also been involved in terror attacks in South America. In 1994, Hezbollah operatives [blew up](#) the [AMIA Jewish community center](#) in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people and injured hundreds more, and sent a suicide bomber to take down a flight on [Alas Chiricanas Airlines](#), a Panamanian airliner carrying 21 mostly Jewish passengers, including several Americans. In 2015, Hezbollah and Iran [may have assassinated](#) Argentinian prosecutor Alberto Nisman, who was supposedly about to reveal more proof of Iranian and Hezbollah involvement in the Buenos Aires bombing. In 2017, a joint [FBI-NYPD investigation](#) led to the arrest of two individuals who were allegedly acting on behalf of Hezbollah. At the direction of their Hezbollah handlers, one person allegedly "conducted missions in Panama to locate the U.S. and Israeli Embassies and to assess the vulnerabilities of the Panama Canal and ships in the Canal," according to a Justice Department press release. The other allegedly "conducted surveillance of potential targets in America, including military and law enforcement facilities in New York City."

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