

THE NORTHERN FRONT – WHO ARE HEZBOLLAH AND ITS REGIONAL ALLIES?

KEY POINTS:

SINCE OCTOBER 8TH 2023 HEZBOLLAH HAS LAUNCHED ABOUT 10,000 ROCKETS, DRONES AND MISSILES INTO ISRAEL, CAUSING DOZENS OF DEATHS OF SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS, THE EVACUATION OF MORE THAN 60,000 ISRAELIS FROM THEIR HOMES, DAMAGES TO COMMUNITIES, AS WELL AS BUSH FIRES.

ESCALATION SINCE SEPTEMBER 2024 INCLUDES AN IDF GROUND INVASION ALONGSIDE AIRSTRIKES IN LEBANON, WHICH AIM TO ELIMINATE HEZBOLLAH'S CAPABILITIES AND TO ENABLE THE RETURN OF ISRAELIS TO THEIR HOMES.

A CEASEFIRE DEAL BETWEEN ISRAEL AND LEBANON HAS COME INTO EFFECT ON 27 NOVEMBER 2024, ALTHOUGH SERIOUS CONCERNS REMAIN ABOUT HEZBOLLAH'S COOPERATION.

Further Resources:

- [Al Jazeera backgrounder on Hezbollah from Al-Jazeera](#)
- [Al Jazeera item on Hezbollah's alliance with Hamas and threat to Israel](#)
- [IDF spokesman's statement on Israel's response to Hezbollah's threats](#)
- [BICOM podcast on the northern border](#)
- [FDD briefing on Hezbollah](#)

THE LEBANESE BORDER

Who are Hezbollah?

Over the past 30 years, Hezbollah ('the Party of God'), a Shia paramilitary organisation, proscribed by the UK and other states as a terrorist group, has become increasingly entrenched in Lebanon, a country suffering from decades of sectarian and political instability. In recent years, Hezbollah has become its leading political faction. As a radical Shia paramilitary organisation, it is closely allied to – and largely dependent on – Iran. Its ideology is anti-American and, especially, anti-Israeli and antisemitic. It shares with Iran and its other proxies in the so-called Axis of Resistance (including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Houthis) the aim of destroying the state of Israel. It has a long history of international terrorism including the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community centre in Argentina that killed 85 people and injured hundreds.

Hezbollah took credit for the unilateral withdrawal of the IDF from southern Lebanon in 2000 but provoked a war with Israel in 2006 in which it suffered heavy losses. Following that war, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1701 calling on all armed forces to withdraw from the area south of the Litani river, a demand that Hezbollah has ignored. Until the current war with Israel, Hezbollah's military capabilities had been restored to the point where its battle-hardened manpower was believed to be between 50,000 and 100,000 fighters who control a sophisticated armoury including over 150,000 precision guided missiles aimed at all of Israel's main population centres.

What did Hezbollah do after 7th October 2023?

On 8th October, Hezbollah launched its first attacks on Israeli border communities 'in solidarity' with Hamas, presumably in an attempt to distract IDF attention from Gaza. Until summer 2024, Hezbollah had fired about 2,500 rockets into Israel, killing dozens of Israeli soldiers and civilians, and causing the evacuation of about 60,000 Israelis from their homes, along with severe damage to kibbutzim and towns (including Kiryat Shemona), as well as vast bush fires.

Escalation since Summer 2024

In July 2024 a Hezbollah fired rocket killed 12 children and injured 34 more on a football pitch in the Druze town of Majdal Shams in the Golan Heights. In the following months, the fighting on both sides has escalated:

- A multiple pager explosion attack on Hezbollah local commanders in Lebanon on September 17th and 18th, attributed to Israel, reportedly killed 27 people and injured a further 4,450.
- During the following weeks, Israeli air strikes were carried out deeper into Lebanon and in the Dahieh suburb of Beirut, the location of the Hezbollah headquarters and underground weapon production sites, and killed senior Hezbollah commanders, including the group's secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah.
- In October 2024, the IDF launched a ground incursion into southern Lebanon, alongside its air strikes, carrying out targeted operations against Hezbollah members and infrastructures, often embedded in communities throughout southern Lebanon. Israel's proclaimed aim is to achieve Hezbollah's withdrawal from the border and north of the Litani river, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (see above), to enable evacuated civilians to return to their homes in northern Israel. Since the beginning of the ground invasion, 67 Israelis have been killed, including 16 civilians.
- The IDF has urged civilians to evacuate from areas in southern Lebanon, the Beqaa Valley and parts of Beirut, to avoid being harmed in the fighting. According to the UN, by the end of October about 1.4 million Lebanese were displaced from their homes. The Lebanese Health Ministry reported more than 3,000 dead (of which, according to the IDF, about 2,250 were Hezbollah fighters), and more than 13,000 injured.
- In parallel the Israeli air force has attacked specific targets throughout Syria in order to stop the development and storage of weapons, supported by Iranian experts who transport them to Hezbollah.

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Ceasefire Deal with Lebanon November 2024

After two months of ceasefire talks, on 26 November 2024 Israel and the Lebanese government (although not Hezbollah) signed a ceasefire deal promoted by the US and is effective from 27 November. The deal stipulates that both sides stop the fighting, Hezbollah retreat north of the Litani River and the Lebanese army gradually deploy in South Lebanon while the IDF retreats from these areas. Internationally monitored, the US has also given Israel a guarantee that it may act in Lebanon in case of a breach in the ceasefire conditions. After an interim phase of 60 days, the deal will become permanent and act as the basis for negotiating the land border between the two countries. There remains serious concern about the Lebanese political and military capability of guaranteeing Hezbollah's cooperation, conditioned mainly by Iran.

The Iran Front

- Iran has for about two decades armed, financed and trained its proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, as well as Hamas, in an attempt to tighten the so-called 'ring of fire' around Israel. In the last decade, hostilities between Israel and Iran have been carried out mainly via these proxies and in the shadows, with Israel supposedly attempting to slow down Iran's nuclear project by targeting scientists and via cyber-attacks.
- In 2024, Iran for the first time attacked Israel directly, first in April (allegedly in response to Israel's attack on its consulate in Syria) with more than 330 drones and missiles, and again in October (following further escalation in Lebanon and the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniye in Teheran, attributed to Israel) with about 200 missiles. On both occasions, most of the missiles were intercepted with the help of both Israel's own defence systems and those of allies. Nonetheless, there was some damage to IDF air force bases and in civilian areas. The G7, including US, the UK and European partners, condemned the attack as a serious threat to regional stability and stressed Israel's right to self-defence. Israel responded to the April and October attacks by Iran with air strikes that aimed to weaken Iran's weapons arsenal (ballistic and nuclear) and air-defence systems, both within Iran and Syria.

The current position remains dangerous and unstable.