Lebanon: Hezbollah, including areas of operation, political involvement, military activity, recruitment practices, mistreatment of citizens and state protection.

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

General


Hezbollah, led by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah since 1992 (CFR 15 July 2010; The Christian Science Monitor 22 Nov. 2009), was founded after Israel's 1982 invasion of southern Lebanon (ibid.; CFR 15 July 2010; Al Jazeera 13 Dec. 2007). Hezbollah is credited with liberating the south of Lebanon from Israeli occupation in 2000 (Al Jazeera 31 Oct. 2010; IPS 20 July 2006). Sources indicate that Hezbollah has ties with Iran and Syria (CFR 18 July 2006; Al Jazeera 13 Dec. 2007). According to The Christian Science Monitor, after Lebanon's civil war ended in 1990, Hezbollah was the only militia that was allowed to keep weapons in order to continue resisting the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon (22 Nov. 2009).

According to GlobalSecurity.org, Hezbollah's goal is to "oppose Israel and its allies" (n.d.). The Christian Science Monitor states that one of Hezbollah's goals has been to seek the end of the state of Israel, although Hezbollah has stated that Palestinians must be their own leaders in the quest for freedom (The Christian Science Monitor 22 Nov. 2009). Media sources indicate that although historically, Hezbollah wanted to form an Islamic state in Lebanon, the group has become more inclusive (ibid.; IPS 20 July 2006).

Hezbollah has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States government (CFR 15 July 2010; Al Arabiya 24 Jan. 2011) and by the Canadian government (Canada 22 Dec. 2010). The Inter Press Service (IPS) reports that most of the "Arab and Muslim worlds," however, consider Hezbollah to be a "legitimate resistance movement" (20 July 2006). Within Lebanon, the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR) suggests, support for Hezbollah is polarized, since "one usually hears either high praise or total contempt for Hezbollah" (IWPR 25 Jan. 2011).
According to The Christian Science Monitor, Hezbollah's support is mainly found among the Shiite community in Lebanon, as well as from the group's political allies in parliament (ibid.). The IWPR reports that some Sunnis and Christians also support Hezbollah (25 Jan. 2011). In 2007, Al Jazeera reported that support stems from Hezbollah's assistance to families after "Israel's overwhelming military assault" in 2006 (12 Dec. 2007). Sources indicate that Hezbollah provides social services such as schools, hospitals and social programs for Shiites in Lebanon (Al Jazeera 13 Dec. 2007; CFR 15 July 2010; IPS 20 July 2006).

Areas of Operation

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (Centre libanais des droits humains, CLDH), a Lebanese non-political human rights organization that monitors the human rights situation in Lebanon, provides rehabilitation to victims of torture, and "fights against enforced disappearance, impunity, arbitrary detention, and racism," indicated that the zones under Hezbollah control are "mainly in the southern suburbs of Beirut, and large parts of South Lebanon and the Bekaa region" (CLDH 7 Oct. 2011). However, the President of the CLDH added that they do not have a thorough mapping of zones partially or fully controlled by Hezbollah (ibid.).

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), “an independent, nonpartisan membership organization, think tank, and publisher” on international and US foreign policy (CRF n.d.), corroborates that Hezbollah's base is in "Shiite-dominated areas," including sections of Beirut, southern Lebanon, and the Bekaa Valley (CFR 15 July 2010). According to Jane's Intelligence Review, since 2006, Hezbollah's "deployment and infrastructure work has extended the length of the country from the border district to the wooded mountains west of Hermel in the northern Bekaa Valley" (13 Oct. 2011). Jane's Intelligence Review also reports that by 2008, Hezbollah's military wing was in "full control" of the Qotrani-Ain al-Tineh region (13 Oct. 2011).

In May 2008, the Lebanese government ordered Hezbollah to shut down its communications network (CFR 15 July 2010; Al Jazeera 31 Oct. 2008; BBC 9 May 2008). In reaction, Hezbollah and its allies engaged in a fight against their political opponents and took over the western half of Beirut (ibid.; Globalpost 25 Jan. 2011). According to The Christian Science Monitor, when Hezbollah and allies "briefly overran the western half of Beirut," this caused the "worst internal clashes since the civil war and left more than 100 people dead" (22 Nov. 2009). The Economist indicates that Hezbollah invaded central Beirut, which forced the government to accept a "power-sharing deal" (11 Nov. 2010). Information on Hezbollah's presence in western Beirut and central Beirut as of November 2011 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The President of the CLDH stated that "Hezbollah members or allies, as well as a number of other militias' members, can circulate and potentially operate throughout Lebanon" (7 Oct. 2011).

The CFR states that according to US intelligence, there are Hezbollah cells in North America, South America, Europe, and Africa (15 July 2010). In addition, GlobalSecurity.org lists Iran and Syria as areas of operation (n.d.).

Political Involvement

Media sources indicated that in 2009, Hezbollah led a parliamentary alliance mostly consisting of Shiites and Christians (Plus News Pakistan 11 Nov. 2009; The Christian Science Monitor 22 Nov. 2009), but also including Sunnis and Druze (ibid.). In January 2011, Hezbollah resigned from the coalition cabinet (MRG July 2011, 210; Haaretz 12 Jan. 2011; Globalpost 25 Jan. 2011) and brought down the

According to the Lebanese political system, the President must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister must be a Sunni, and the Parliament Speaker must be a Shiite (AP 13 Jan. 2011; BBC 25 Jan. 2011). On 25 January 2011, Najib Mikati, supported by 68 members of Parliament, was appointed as Prime Minister (ibid.; Globalpost 25 Jan. 2011). Media sources indicate that Mikati was backed by Hezbollah and its allies (BBC 25 Jan. 2011; AP 3 July 2011). Jane's Intelligence Review states that Hezbollah steers policy and is "the power" behind Mikati's government (13 Oct. 2011). According to the BBC, Mikati stated that although he recognizes that Hezbollah's support brought him to power, he is independent from Hezbollah (25 Jan. 2011). Media sources indicate that as of 2011, the government was dominated by Hezbollah allies (AP 3 July 2011; RFE/RL 13 June 2011). Sources also report that when Mikati was appointed as Prime Minister (IWPR 25 Jan. 2011), protests were led by thousands of Saad Hariri supporters (BBC 25 Jan. 2011) and Sunni rivals who declared a "day of rage" and accused Hezbollah of staging a "coup" by bringing down the government and imposing its candidate as Prime Minister (ibid.; Al Arabiya 24 Jan. 2011). According to the BBC, Sunnis are "alarmed by Hezbollah's growing political power" (25 Jan. 2011).

**Military Activity**

The Associated Press (AP) reports that Hezbollah is the "most powerful political and military force in Lebanon" (3 July 2011). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, expressing his personal assessment of Hezbollah, indicated that Hezbollah is "very influential" and "can do what it wants" (Director 4 Oct. 2011). Jane's Intelligence Review indicates that Hezbollah is "arguably militarily and politically stronger now than at any other time in its 30-year history, yet it is also facing some of its greatest ever challenges" (13 Oct. 2011). Jane's Intelligence Review also states that Hezbollah is Lebanon's "dominant military and political actor" (13 Oct. 2011).

Hezbollah's military wing is called Islamic Resistance (Jane's Intelligence Review 13 Oct. 2011; Al Jazeera 13 Dec. 2007). According to Jane's Intelligence Review, Islamic Resistance is "one of the most formidable non-state military forces in the world," and has reportedly "expanded enormously" since the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon (13 Oct. 2011). Referring to US government estimates, the CFR indicates that Hezbollah has "several thousand militants and activists" (CFR 15 July 2010). Jane's Intelligence Review explains that expansion has occurred in manpower, armaments, deployment, strategies and means of communication (13 Oct. 2011).

The CFR states that according to the New York Times, in December 2009, the Lebanese Parliament permitted Hezbollah to keep its weapons (CFR 15 July 2010). The Economist reports that it is believed that Hezbollah has approximately 50,000 rockets (13 Jan. 2011). Jane's Intelligence Review states that in 2011, during the uprising in Syria, the transfer of armaments from Syria to Lebanon "accelerated" (13 Oct. 2011).

**Recruitment to Hezbollah**

According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), a service offering policy and legal analysis to the United States Congress (US n.d.), Hezbollah's "Jihad Assembly" is in charge of recruitment (US 3 Jan. 2011, 10). The CRS also states that full party membership to Hezbollah is offered to recruits based on their allegiance to Hezbollah's ideology (ibid.).
Speaking in a personal capacity, the Director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut stated that although Hezbollah exerts "general political and social influence to encourage people to join," Hezbollah does not "forcibly recruit members" (Director 4 Oct. 2011). The President of the CLDH said that the CLDH has not received any cases of violations against people who refused to become members of Hezbollah (CLDH 5 Oct. 2011).

Treatment and State Protection

According to the President of the CLDH, "Hezbollah conducts arrests, investigations and detentions in a number of zones under its control" (5 Oct. 2011). The President of the CLDH indicated that these practices should be considered contrary to Lebanese law (ibid.). A report written by the CLDH indicates that at times, Hezbollah “tortures” detainees that are suspected of collaboration with Israel before giving them to the Lebanese authorities (CLDH et al. Jan. 2011, 25). The report also states that it is impossible to assess the prevalence of allegations of torture conducted by Hezbollah (ibid., 29).

The President of the CLDH also explained that "... people suspected by Hezbollah of actively undermining the resistance to Israel (alleged spies, alleged armed activists...) are at risk of being arbitrarily arrested, investigated and possibly tortured and detained by Hezbollah" (5 Oct. 2011). The BBC reports that on Al-Manar Television in Beirut, a Hezbollah operated television station (CFR 15 July 2010; Haaretz 12 Jan. 2011), Shaykh Na'im Qasim, the Deputy Secretary General of Hezbollah, asked the government to execute spies, saying "the issue of the Israeli spying activities needs a radical solution through execution in the first place for those who deserve to be executed. This would put an end to spying" (Al-Manar 2 July 2010).

The Director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, expressing his personal assessment, indicated that "although [Hezbollah is] very powerful, they generally don't threaten or interfere with people on an individual basis; unless that person is a security threat to them, or has done something to one of their members, etc." (Director 4 Oct. 2011). The Director also stated that an individual may fear Hezbollah due to a "previous clash or conflict with them, or [with] one of their members" (ibid.). Furthermore, in his personal view, if Hezbollah is "after" someone, there is "no protection in Lebanon" (ibid.). According to the President of the CLDH, "the Lebanese state implicitly acknowledges the practices of Hezbollah and does not offer any protection to people that fear that they will be victims of violations perpetrated by Hezbollah" (CLDH 5 Oct. 2011). The President also states that "[t]here are no safeguards to protect the detainees at the hands of Hezbollah from torture and other ill-treatments" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Al Arabiya [UAE]. 24 January 2011. "'Day of Rage' in Lebanon as Mikati Set to be Next PM." (Factiva)


Response to Information Request LBN103846.E

[Links to various sources are provided, including websites and articles discussing Hezbollah's activities and political influence in Lebanon, as well as references to sources containing information about Hezbollah's potential involvement in human rights violations.]


Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral Sources:** Attempts to contact an author, a journalist with The Daily Star, a professor at the American University of Beirut, and representatives of AlKarama for Human Rights, and the Institute for War & Peace Reporting were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sites, including:** Factiva, European Country of Origin Information Network, International Crisis Group, United Nations — Refworld and United States — Department of State.
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