

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

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29 October 2015

### **LBN105332.E**

Lebanon: Recruitment practices of Hezbollah, including forced recruitment, such as Shi'ite youth; consequences for those that refuse to join; availability of state protection; regions controlled by Hezbollah, including ability to locate a person wanted by the group who returns to Lebanon; presence of Hezbollah spies or informers in areas outside the organization's control; whether Lebanese Shi'ite students returning from international study are considered spies upon returning to the country (2013- October 2015)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### **1. Recruitment Practices**

For background information on Hezbollah, including its creation and mandate, see Response to Information Request LBN103846.

##### **1.1 Forced Recruitment**

According to sources, Hezbollah does not "forcibly" recruit its members (Professor of political science 20 Oct. 2015; Professor of politics 21 Oct. 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of politics at the University of Otago, New Zealand, whose research focuses on the history and politics of Lebanon, stated that to his knowledge, Hezbollah has not engaged in forced recruitment since 2013, despite their loss of manpower due to casualties in the Syrian conflict (Professor of politics 21 Oct. 2015). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a professor of political science at Florida Atlantic University, whose research focuses on political Islam in the Middle East, also indicated that forcing individuals to join Hezbollah is not part of the organization's recruitment strategy (Professor of political science 20 Oct. 2015). Sources reported that Hezbollah uses a system of "enticements" when conducting membership drives within Lebanon's Shi'a community (Professor of Politics 21 Oct. 2015; Professor of political science 20 Oct. 2015). The Professor of political science stated that Hezbollah holds mobilization campaigns where speeches are delivered to members of Lebanon's Shi'a population, including university students (ibid.). The same source indicated that during speeches, Hezbollah emphasizes the benefits that it can provide to its members, including financial assistance for university tuition, loans for small business owners, and government job placements (ibid.). The Professor of political science further noted that Hezbollah has their own student unions within Lebanese universities which regularly promote these enticements to students (ibid.). According to the Professor of politics, Hezbollah "are able to offer reasonable salaries in local terms" (Professor of politics 21 Oct. 2015).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of international history at the London School of Economics and Political Science, who researches armed conflict in the Middle East, stated that there is "anecdotal evidence" that Hezbollah "has started forcibly recruiting since it has become more involved in the Syrian conflict" (Professor in international history 22 Oct. 2015). The same source noted that many Lebanese Shi'a "feel Lebanese and not Syrian" and are therefore reluctant to join Hezbollah to "fight for Asad" (ibid.).

According to the Professor of international history, forced recruitment occurs mainly in rural areas where Hezbollah has strong influence such as southern Lebanon and the Beqaa valley (ibid.). The source also indicated that there are "talks of disappearances" of those individuals who refuse to join Hezbollah but that to the source's knowledge, no reports have arisen in which family members of said individuals have been subject to harassment (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

## **1.2 State Protection from Recruitment**

According to the US Department of States' *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014*, "[g]overnment forces were usually unable to enforce the law in the predominantly Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut" (US 25 June 2014, 18). Further and corroborating information for state protection services available for those individuals resisting Hezbollah recruitment could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

## **2. Regions Controlled by Hezbollah**

According to sources, Hezbollah has a strong influence in southern Lebanon, the Beqaa valley, and parts of Beirut (Professor of international history 22 Oct. 2015; Professor of political science 20 Oct. 2015; CFR 3 Jan. 2014). The Professor of politics indicated that "Hezbollah has direct security and street control in all Shia areas (the south, the northern Bekaa, southern Beirut, and Shia villages near Jubayl), and substantial influence throughout the country through its penetration and steerage of much of the Lebanese official security apparatus" (Professor of politics 21 Oct. 2015). The Professor of political science similarly stated that Hezbollah has direct control over southern Lebanon, the Beqaa, and areas close to the Israeli border while also maintaining a support base country-wide, since many Lebanese Shi'a are sympathizers of Hezbollah's cause (Professor of political science 20 Oct. 2014).

### **2.1 Capacity to Locate a Wanted Individual and Presence of Spies/Informers Outside of Hezbollah's Areas of Control**

According to a 2014 paper published by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a non-partisan American think tank and publisher which focuses on foreign policy issues pertinent to the United States (n.d.), "[w]ith significant support from Iran and Syria, Hezbollah maintains an extensive security apparatus, political organization, and social services network in Lebanon" (CFR 3 Jan. 2014). Michael Young, the opinion editor of Beirut's *Daily Star* newspaper (*The Globe and Mail* 23 Aug. 2012), similarly states in his book *The Ghosts of Martyrs Square: An Eyewitness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle*, a political history of Lebanon, that Hezbollah possesses "extensive intelligence capabilities" (Young 2010, 33). According to *Country Reports*, Hezbollah "used informer networks and telephone monitoring to obtain information regarding their perceived adversaries" in 2014 (US 25 June 2015, 12).

Sources reported that Hezbollah does possess the ability to locate wanted individuals within Lebanon (Professor of Political Science 20 Oct. 2015; Professor of Politics 21 Oct. 2015). The Professor of politics indicated that, in his opinion, "Hezbollah would have almost no problem locating a person, if they were serious about the matter. They have supporters throughout the country, including support from Aounists [Lebanon's dominant Christian party, the Free Patriotic Movement, led by General Michel Aoun (Alakhbar English 31 May 2013)] in Christian areas" (ibid.). The same source stated that "Hezbollah dominates security at the airport, so the group would be able to track anyone directly from entry to Lebanon" and also notes that "the only major arm of official security that isn't coordinated by Hezbollah or its Christian Aounist ally is *al-amn-dakhili*, a Sunni holdout under the Interior Ministry" (ibid.). The Professor of political science similarly indicated that "Hezbollah has the capacity to locate wanted individuals" by working with partner intelligence agencies, Christian allies, and Shi'a informants who are supportive to the party (Professor of political science 20 Oct. 2015). The same source noted that if the wanted individual is perceived as a "real threat," the party will do "whatever it takes" to locate the individual, adding however that this is a "rare occurrence" (ibid.).

According to the Professor of international history, "[w]hether a person can be located depends to some extent on where that person is within Lebanon's religious geography. Some areas/communities are more difficult for Hezbollah [to track a wanted person], such as the Maronite or Druze heartlands" (Professor of international history 22 Oct. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

## **3. Whether Lebanese Shi'ite Students Returning from International Study Are Considered Spies upon Return**

Sources reported that whether or not a returning student would be considered a spy would depend on several factors (Professor of politics 21 Oct. 2015; Professor of political science 20 Oct. 2015; Professor of international history 22 Oct. 2015). According to the Professor of international history, a returning student could "potentially" be considered a spy depending on "which country the student was studying in, what he was studying, what his political views were more broadly, and whether this student was already on Hezbollah's radar screen" (ibid.). The Professor of politics similarly stated that Hezbollah's interest in a returning student would depend on the individual's background as well as their family background, and his or her area of study (Professor of politics 21 Oct. 2015). The same source stated that "the returning student would certainly be at risk of surveillance and possibly harassment or interrogation" if they or their family members have engaged in activity to arouse Hezbollah's suspicion (ibid.). The Professor of political science also stated that a returning individual may be treated as a spy if members of their family have acted in a way to arouse Hezbollah's suspicion or if they return to Lebanon and begin asking sensitive questions (Professor of political science 20 Oct. 2015). The same source noted, however, that many Lebanese students do go on international exchanges and return home without any problems (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

Alakhbar English. 31 May 2013. Ghassan Saoud. "Lebanon's Aounists: Hollow Election Victory." <<http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15967>> [Accessed 29 Oct. 2015]

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Professor of International History, London School of Economics and Political Science. 22 October 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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Professor of Politics, University of Otago, New Zealand. 21 October 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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Young, Michael. 2010. *The Ghosts of Martyrs Square*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Assistant Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the American University of Paris; Associate Professor of Political Science at Chapman University; Associate Professor of Political Science at Lebanese American University; Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Windsor; the Century Foundation; Lecturer in Comparative Politics of the Middle East at King's College London; Professor of Middle Eastern Politics and Conflict Studies at King's College London; Professor of Politics at Queen's University Belfast.

**Internet sites, including:** Al Jazeera; AllAfrica.com; Amnesty International; Atlantic Council; BBC; Brookings Institution; eoi.net; Factiva; Fair Observer; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; *The New York Times*; *Political Handbook of the World*; The Small Arms Survey; *The Washington Post*; Woodrow Wilson Centre for Scholars.

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