

# Hezbollah

10 Things You Need To Know

Plus an extra one and a list of resources



Elia Ayoub

Following the most recent Israeli attacks in Lebanon against Hezbollah as well as civilians there has been a lot of 'what is Hezbollah' or 'who is Nasrallah' posts being shared. Most outlets mention only what fits in their existing editorial policies, and a lot of the online comments I have been seeing follow a similar enough patterns. Those who hate the group tend to downplay the severity of Israeli crimes and overplay Hezbollah's culpability. Those who support the group effectively focus exclusively on the former while avoiding analysing Hezbollah's actual culpability, particularly its war crimes in Syria.

I will try and be as nuanced as I can, but you should also know my biases. I want to make this very clear from the beginning because I genuinely believe the myth of 'objectivity' has caused a lot of damage to the discourse, and not just on this topic. Follow this footnote<sup>1</sup> to understand where I am coming from

---

<sup>1</sup>I am a Lebanese post-doctoral researcher who grew up in postwar Lebanon and I have a PhD on post-war Lebanon (from the University of Zurich). My fields of expertise include sectarianism/sectarianization in Lebanon (including party historiographies and warlords hagiographies, including Hezbollah), post-2011 Syria (including Hezbollah's role), Israel-Palestine, and Zionism. I also know a lot about Hezbollah's 'cinema' — that's how ridiculously niche it gets. As I'm an Arab of Lebanese-Palestinian descent with an obvious bias here, it may make you feel better to know my MA (from SOAS University of London) thesis was on the role of Hebrew and Yiddish in 20th century Jewish politics debates vis-a-vis Zionism and anti/post/non-Zionism, and one of my book chapters (on Black-Palestinian solidarities) is part of a book<sup>2</sup> that received the Judaica Reference and Bibliography Award awarded by The Association of Jewish Libraries. The media collective I co-founded<sup>3</sup> includes an upcoming podcast dedicated to intra-Jewish conversations on decolonial thinking and the podcast I founded<sup>4</sup> has platformed Israeli citizens critical of their government. Lastly, I have gotten threats from the party's more extreme elements due to my opposition to the Assad regime and their role in propping him up in Syria, and I have written on Hezbollah multiple times for multiple outlets (archived here<sup>5</sup>). Also: I took part in the 2005 uprising against Syrian troops (I was 14, so 'took part' means 'I was there'), I was an undergrad student at the American University of Beirut between 2010 and 2013 which is how I first got involved in anti-sectarian politics, I was one of the organisers of the 2015 uprising, I was on the streets of Beirut in October 2019 when Nasrallah sent his thugs to beat us up, and I have direct or indirect connections to leftists who were killed by Hezbollah/Assad in Lebanon and exiled, tortured and/or killed by Assad in Syria. I am currently writing a piece on the recent round of violence for the Israeli-Palestinian leftist outlet 972mag. Two of my three existing pieces on 972mag are on Hezbollah. All of this to say, this is my world. I spend way too much time thinking about Hezbollah. (It has not been good for my mental health because this shit is hard, so y'all better take advantage of this.) I'm not exactly their biggest fans, but I also think the way they are talked about is, most of the time, just wrong.

<sup>2</sup><https://utorontopress.com/9781487588069/social-justice-and-israelpal-estine/>

<sup>3</sup><https://fromtheperiphery.com/>

<sup>4</sup><https://thefirethesetimes.com/>

<sup>5</sup><https://iwritestuff.blog/?s=Hezbollah>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.972mag.com/writer/elia-ayoub/>

on this, and try your best to apply your own critical thinking skills. Hopefully by doing so I make it clear that while I do believe I have the background and expertise to do this explainer, I do not know everything nor am I claiming that everything I write is free from mistakes.

If interested, my co-host Ayman and I did an episode talking about this article and going more in-depth on From The Periphery premium (Patreon<sup>7</sup> or Apple Podcasts<sup>8</sup>).

Anyway, the following segments are mostly self-contained so there may be repetitions. Recommended readings are available in the footnotes as well.

## 1) Hezbollah came out of the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon

You cannot understand Hezbollah without knowing that from 1982 to 2000 south Lebanon was military occupied by Israel and their proxy militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), starting during the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil wars.<sup>9</sup> Before retreating to south Lebanon, Israel besieged Beirut between June 14th and August 21st and oversaw the Sabra and Shatila massacre (September 16th-18th) by its allies at the time, the Phalangists. The occupation was extremely brutal, and is perhaps best symbolised by the torture site that was Khiam prison<sup>10</sup> near the border and by the 1996 Qana massacre.<sup>13</sup>

This is a big part of Hezbollah's own self-mythologizing. Like Lebanon's other sectarian parties, Hezbollah has a entire storytelling infrastructure in which it is the central character. This on its is not particularly unique to Lebanon. What is specific, and must be understood, is how sectarianism works in Lebanon, how it is reproduced, maintained, challenged, and so on. The process is called sectarianization, but more on that later.

You can say that four things defined Hezbollah's growth:

---

<sup>7</sup><https://www.patreon.com/fromtheperiphery>

<sup>8</sup><https://podcasts.apple.com/us/channel/from-the-periphery/id650224364>

<sup>9</sup>It is more common to refer to them in the singular but I prefer the plural to emphasize that there were multiple battles, invasions, shifting alliances, and so on.

<sup>10</sup>Here's footage<sup>11</sup> of a sit-in by Palestinian and Lebanese families in front of Khiam prison shortly before the withdrawal of Israeli and SLA forces. Here's a 1999 documentary called 'the prison on shame'<sup>12</sup> on the prison.

<sup>11</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAK8Gff0\\_vw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAK8Gff0_vw)

<sup>12</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pI3ZAVAIsKc&pp=ygUQa2hpYW0gbG1iZXJhdGlvbG%3D%3D>

<sup>13</sup>The Israeli shelling of a UN compound which killed 116 Lebanese civilians and 4 Fijian UN peacekeepers.

1. The 1975-1990 Lebanese civil wars
2. The 1976-2005 Syrian occupation
3. The 1979 theocratic revolution in Iran
4. The 1982-2000 Israeli occupation

By the 1990s, as the civil wars were officially over, Hezbollah became the dominant fighting force against the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon, which is why they claim the title of 'the resistance' (al moqawameh). This has been so successful that even anti-Hezbollah people use the term al moqawameh to refer to them. May 25th is Resistance and Liberation Day in Lebanon, and it is a national holiday (meaning even anti-Hezbollah parties observe it — unhappily, I'm sure). This history is why they were the only party not to be officially required to disarm after the Ta'if agreement officially ended the wars (click the footnote for the TLDR<sup>14</sup>). More on that later.

As the resistance to the Israeli occupation was actually a cross-sectarian and cross-ideological endeavor, which changed greatly between 1982 and 2000, the liberation of south Lebanon also allowed Hezbollah to place itself alongside other actors such as Amal or the Communists, even though Hezbollah and Amal murdered one another during the civil wars<sup>15</sup> and same goes for the communists (Hezbollah even assassinated prominent Shia Marxist intellectuals like Mahdi Amel and Hussein Mroué in 1987.) This was particularly convenient for Hezbollah as, by the 1990s, the previously dominant resistance alliances, which were largely leftwing-secular in orientation<sup>16</sup> were largely crushed by Israel and/or the Assad regime. Some of their remnants later allied with Hezbollah against the Israeli occupation. More details in the footnote.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Syrian dictator Hafez Al-Assad imposed that condition in the hope of keeping his connection to Hezbollah after 'his' side, Amal, lost to Iran in the Amal-Hezbollah wars — these actors all became buddies later, because nothing matters apparently.

<sup>15</sup>It was called Harb al-Ikhwa, or 'war of brothers', in some articles at the time. This wasn't the first time alternative names were given to bloody battles.

<sup>16</sup>The secular Lebanese National Movement (LNM) the Palestinian and Palestinian-aligned factions (most notably the Palestinian Liberation Organization, or PLO) and/or the various communist groups.

<sup>17</sup>In 1976, the Assad regime invaded Lebanon to, among other reasons, protect the rightwing Maronite Christian regime and to crush the PLO and LNM. In 1977 Assad assassinated Kamal Jumblatt, the LNM's leader. The LNM/PLO alliance had by then won the majority of battles against the rightwing Christian militias, threatening to install in Lebanon a government that sympathised with the Palestinian cause and install broadly socialist economic policies. Assad's invasion crushed those hopes. This wasn't enough to entirely crush the resistance, however, which is why the Israelis jumped on the opportunity

The occupation of south Lebanon occurred during the term of multiple Israeli administrations, from Shimon Peres to Yitzhak Shamir to Yitzhak Rabin to Benjamin Netanyahu to Ehud Barak. This is good to keep in mind to understand why anyone who lived through this has no reason to believe there is any difference between the main Israeli parties.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the routine tortures at Khiam by the SLA under Israeli supervision, that period was defined by multiple Israeli war crimes such as the aforementioned Qana massacre as well as the widespread use of cluster munitions throughout south Lebanon, thousands of which remained unexploded until random civilians walked over them and were killed for years afterwards.

Although the south was liberated in 2000, a 'low-level' conflict continued until 2006 over the Shebaa Farms, a 'disputed territory' located on the (Israeli-occupied, Syrian) Golan Heights–Lebanon border. This culminated in Hezbollah launching cross-border raids into Israel and kidnapping IDF soldiers, which was the trigger for the devastating 2006 war.<sup>19</sup> I bring this up here as a prelude to an upcoming section on the complicated question of Hezbollah's weapons.

## 2) Hezbollah is intimately tied to Iran, which doesn't make it any less Lebanese

The post-1979 theocratic regime in Iran is a core component of Hezbollah's politics, and is the reason why Hezbollah was able to carve itself out of the Amal movement during the Lebanese civil wars (TLDR here).<sup>21</sup> Nasrallah, as both Hezbollah's leader as well as a Shia cleric aligned with the Ayatollah, is simultaneously the most prominent Lebanese politician today while also being a high-ranking member of Iran's patriarchal-religious hierarchy, despite not being Iranian. Nasrallah is on record saying<sup>22</sup> "we are open about the fact

---

afforded by the assassination attempt of an Israeli diplomat in London to invade Lebanon in 1982, with the stated goal of destroying the PLO (even though the assassination attempt was by the Abu Nidal Organization, an enemy of the PLO). The aforementioned siege of Beirut would lead to the exile of the PLO to Tunis and (shortly after the Sabra and Shatila massacre by the Phalangists under Israeli protection) to the withdrawal to south Lebanon, where Israeli forces would remain until 2000. By the 1980s, as the Left/Secular alliances were weakened by Syria and then Israel. Following the post-1979 Iranian theocratic rulebook of suppressing leftists after their participation in the uprising against the Shah, Hezbollah launched the assassination campaigns against prominent Shia leftwing thinkers as mentioned.

<sup>18</sup>The 2006 war was under Ehud Olmert as Israeli PM, yet another one.

<sup>19</sup>You can check out: 33 Day War Israel's War on Hezbollah in Lebanon and Its Consequences by Gilbert Achcar, Michel Warschawski.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup><https://libgen.is/search.php?req=33+Day+War+Israel%27s+War+on+Hezbollah+in+Lebanon+and+Its+Consequences>

that Hezbollah's budget, its income, its expenses, everything it eats and drinks, its weapons and rockets, are from the Islamic Republic of Iran." Indeed, he regularly says crap like that because Hezbollah is the strongest member of Iran's 'axis of resistance,' part of the latter's wilayat al-faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. TLDR: there's a hierarchy and the Ayatollah is on top.)

The above does not mean that Hezbollah is just an Iranian proxy, as many would like to believe, that somehow managed to grow within Lebanese politics for decades and become the most powerful party today. I can't really blame people, especially if they've been victimized by Hezbollah or Iran (or Assad etc), for believing this, but I think doing so plays into their hands as they want to portray themselves as having an endless supply of resources that they can deploy whenever they want. They don't, and they can't. The recent Israeli attacks, besides exemplifying Israel's savagery, demonstrated pretty effectively that Hezbollah has a lot of weaknesses that are being exploited by its enemies. The aforementioned hierarchy, in my opinion, is part of that weakness, but I doubt they're reading this newsletter so I digress.

Hezbollah is a core component of the Lebanese sectarian system. It is the most powerful one — having thousands of heavily armed and battle-hardened men will do that to a party, shockingly enough — but it also depends on other parties. That's why they can't just take over the country militarily. That's why they regularly appeal to Lebanese nationalism to praise the Lebanese army, or to scapegoat Syrian refugees, for example, a popular Lebanese past time. Doing the former is fairly convenient as it allows them to sidestep the question of their weapons ("if you're so pro-army, why are you a separate fighting force?")

---

<sup>21</sup> Amal, which means hope in Arabic (it's an acronym of Lebanese Resistance Regiments in Arabic), was founded in 1974. I won't get into them as much here, but suffice it to say that Amal was more 'nationalist' in its politics (despite being backed by Hafez's Syria) and, post-1979, some of its more Islamism-oriented members start progressively branching out until we officially got Hezbollah in 1985. Amal was viewed, rightly so in my opinion, as too complacent and even complicit with both Syrian and Israeli occupations. Amal even battled Palestinian groups at a time when Israel was stepping up its crackdown on them. This latter fueled resentment that helped Hezbollah's growth. Its defenders will say that Amal was more pragmatic than Hezbollah, but I don't think that's fair. As mentioned, they were initially enemies of Hezbollah before becoming allies.

(As an interesting added tidbit that I don't often see mentioned in English-language media, Amal's founder, Musa Al-Sadr, was kidnapped by Gaddafi's regime during a visit to Libya in 1978, and was never seen or heard from again. This is why (in my humble opinion) Lebanon was (with France and the UK) the one who proposed United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 to establish a No-Fly Zone over Libya and prevent Gaddafi's forces from capturing Benghazi.)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/6/25/hezbollah-to-send-more-fighters-to-syrias-aleppo>

you may reasonably ask).

Hezbollah coordinate with the Lebanese army when it suits them, and don't when it suits them. They regurgitate sectarian rhetoric when it suits them, and are all about cross-sectarian #livelebanon mosques-hugging-churches when it suits them. They are the 'party of the people' when it suits them, and the primary backers of corrupt oligarchs and bankers when it suits them. They are, in short, a very Lebanese party, and particularly a very post-1990<sup>23</sup> Lebanese party.

Like other sectarian parties, Christian, Sunni, Shia or Druze, Hezbollah navigates and shapes Lebanese sectarianism, one of the defining characteristics of the Lebanese state (alongside capitalism, patriarchy, and a structural opposition to any form of Palestinian freedom — a story for another time). They will make deals with rightwing Christian parties like the Lebanese Forces and Phalangists. They will cozy up to pro-American and pro-Saudi businessmen like the Hariris (who are both Lebanese citizens and Saudi subjects), and to other billionaire oligarchs like Najib Miqati, who is a Sunni Muslim like the Hariris. Their main rightwing Christian ally, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), was founded by Michel Aoun, the man whose entire thing was how he defied Hafez Al-Assad's army and was forced into exile for 15 years, before coming back and then becoming besties with Hezbollah. The FPM is also one of the most rabidly anti-Palestinian parties in Lebanon today, which has made zero difference to Hezbollah or, evidently, its credibility as the 'pro-Palestine' party to its supporters.

If these details exhaust you, that's my point. There's so much more that can be written, but the point is that it is a Lebanese political party with its own interests and priorities, which shift like any other party. It gets more attention for obvious reasons, but forgetting where they come from and the context in which they operate leads to very stupid online takes.

### 3) Hezbollah's popularity grows when Israel bombs civilians. The best thing Israel can do for Hezbollah is a ground invasion.

This should not be rocket science, but it bears repeating: the legitimate grievance of people who grew up under the Israeli occupation or who suffered

---

<sup>23</sup>Before the 1990s, they were not even involved in direct governance but that progressively changed, primarily through their political alliance with Amal and its leader, Nabih Berri (who has been speaker of parliament for my whole life).

in the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war creates a zero-sum game. You could have issues with Hezbollah, you may have even vocally opposed them and took part in the 2019 uprising against the Lebanese state (in which Hezbollah is a very powerful player), but when Israel threatens to exterminate you and everyone you know, you have no other recourse but to depend on Hezbollah and hope that they can protect you. This is particularly glaring now that we have witnessed nearly a year of genocide in Gaza with no one forcing the Israelis to stop slaughtering children. Again, this should not be difficult to understand. Even myself, with all of my baggage against Hezbollah, cannot in good conscience oppose any retaliation by the group if Israel invades. There would be no moral argument against supporting anyone in Lebanon doing whatever they need to do to stop an advancing army. Even if you want to ignore Israel's past *18 year-long* occupation, you have to understand that everyone in Lebanon has seen what the IDF does in Gaza and the West Bank. Even some of the most ideologically hardcore opponents of Hezbollah will shut the f- up if the IDF is at their doorsteps.

#### 4) The south, Dahieh and Bekaa are not "strongholds"

You will often see the phrase 'Hezbollah stronghold' used to describe three parts of Lebanon in particular: south Lebanon, Dahieh (one of Beirut's suburbs — Dahieh just means 'suburb' in Arabic) and the Bekaa Valley. This implies that Hezbollah holds a total monopoly on these areas, which is not the case. They are, by far, the most powerful armed group in those areas, but they rely on complicated alliances and understandings including with foes, especially in the south and the Bekaa. Dahieh being a Beirut suburb also means that Hezbollah developed Beirut-specific politics. Again, this shouldn't be too difficult to understand if you remember that it is a political party in a country defined by its own brand of sectarianism.

It benefits Hezbollah to claim that these are 'Hezbollah strongholds'. You make it sound like Hezbollah has eyes and ears absolutely everywhere and that no one is able to do anything but bow to their masters. It doesn't work that way. If that were true, Hezbollah wouldn't have had to murder Lokman Slim, who lived and worked in Dahieh, in February of 2021. If Hezbollah was so confident in its power, it would not have started off assassinating Mehdi Amel and Hussein Mroué and it would not have collaborated with the Assad regime to assassinate prominent anti-Assad figures including leftists like Samir



Kassir and George Hawi. Behind the projection of omnipotence lies a rigidly patriarchal party with a shit ton of internal contradictions that its members navigate on a daily basis.

Hezbollah evidently uses threats and force to maintain hegemony for periods of time, but that alone are not sufficient to do so in the long-term. It's been 24 years since the end of the Israeli occupation in the South. The party still wins elections<sup>24</sup> and the 'strongholds' include anti-Hezbollah parties that also get MPs elected to parliament.

It also benefits the anti-Hezbollah sectarian parties to claim that these areas are 'strongholds', as they can use that to spread fear of an impending Hezbollah invasion of 'our areas'. This especially harms independent non-sectarian parties who do not have the resources to challenge Hezbollah compared to the anti-Hezbollah sectarian parties who can rely on much larger sums of money from the diaspora as well as Saudi Arabia and other lovely regimes.

It even benefits the Israeli political establishment to make that claim as multiple politicians and high-ranking IDF members have long claimed that any part of Lebanon is a legitimate target, that Lebanon will "pay the full price,"<sup>25</sup> and so on.

It pretty much benefits all the worst people, and no one else. Apologies for repeating myself here, but isn't this straightforward? Those with power have more resources, and it benefits them to focus on one another instead of dealing with the real challenge of having an independent party compete. The Lebanese establishment has 30+ years of doing this. Mortal enemies always make peace when the alternative is some uni teacher or some architect who is like hey I just want to build houses for the poor and shit. Mortal enemies even take photo-ops and cut stupid cakes together<sup>26</sup> while congratulating themselves for saving Lebanon from themselves. People in power wanna stay in power, folks. Mind-blowing.

Ok sorry, got carried away. My point is just this. The Lebanese sectarian parties are led by warlords and oligarchs — all men — who see themselves as the center of history. It's like instead of having one Stalin or one Assad Lebanon was cursed with 8-9 men who, because they constantly fight for dominance, seek compromises when possible. This is the 'miracle' of Lebanese sectarianism,

---

<sup>24</sup>In dubious circumstances filled with censorship and fear, yes, but that is par for the course in Lebanese elections.

<sup>25</sup><https://www.timesofisrael.com/liberman-in-future-war-lebanon-will-pay-full-price-for-iran-ties/>

<sup>26</sup><https://globalvoices.org/2016/01/26/aoun-and-geagea-are-sitting-on-a-tree-lebanese/>

the myth of cross-sectarian tolerance that our government loves to promote.

Anyway, where were we? Oh right —

## 5) Hezbollah's arms are a nightmarish clusterfuck of a headache

As mentioned above, Hezbollah is the only major party that was not forced to disarm after the official end of the civil wars in 1990. This was ostensibly because south Lebanon was still occupied by Israel and by then Hezbollah had become the dominant armed force in the wider resistance. After the liberation in 2000, many in Lebanon argued — rightly so, in my opinion — that it was time for Hezbollah to disarm (and be absorbed into the Lebanese army, like the others did-ish).

This is why Hezbollah maintained their claims over the Shebaa farms. It wasn't because they suddenly developed a patriotic passion for that tiny strip of land. They did that for six more years until 2006, when a full-blown war erupted with Israel. After that, Hezbollah used their 'victory' over Israel (both sides declared victory) as proof that they need the weapons. Then came 2008. Three years after the prime minister Rafik Hariri was killed by Hezbollah and the Assad regime, the Lebanese government (then dominated by a Saudi-aligned anti-Hezbollah coalition) attempted to dismantle Hezbollah's telecommunication system. This led Nasrallah to declare war on the Lebanese state — yes, just two years after declaring victory over Israel *in the name of Lebanon* — and in a matter of days militarily took over parts of Beirut and Mount Lebanon with their allies.<sup>27</sup>

Barely three years later, in 2011, the Arab Spring broke out and comes to Syria, threatening the Assad regime for the first time in its history — at least to this degree. This freaked Hezbollah out, as they need Assad's control of Syria to maintain the shipment of weapons from Iran via Iraq (where they also have powerful Iran-backed allies). Not too long after, especially as of 2012 and 2013, Hezbollah increased its military presence in Syria, fighting against the then-secular pan-Syrian group the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and alongside the Assad regime, Iran-backed Iraqi militias and the Iranian army (and later Russia, of course).

That being said, you may pick up a clear pattern with regards to Hezbollah's weapons. They are more directly questioned when Israel is not concerned.

---

<sup>27</sup>This is why you can still find today the swastika-inspired flag of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party in Beirut's Hamra neighborhood, for example see here: <https://qifanabki.com/2011/08/04/the-ssnps-fiefdom-in-hamra/>

When Israel is concerned, it is very difficult to argue against them. The actual Lebanese army, in case that thought crossed your mind, does not have the capacity to fight Israel, and it is a barely kept open-secret that Hezbollah is stronger than them, despite the latter having the USA as its main funder (add that to the long list of US victories in the Middle East).<sup>28</sup>

This is why the single best thing that can happen to Hezbollah's monopoly on violence in Lebanon is Israeli aggression, especially if they repeat the horrors they committed in 2006 (or between 1982-2000) and *especially* if they include a ground invasion.

## 6) Syria changed everything

Hezbollah's role in Syria is particularly important to understand for leftist campists<sup>29</sup> whose knowledge of the party has apparently not been updated since 2000 or 2006. Hezbollah militarily intervened in Syria and committed war crimes to support the Assad regime. This is important for four main reasons:

1. They support one of Lebanon's two former military occupiers, Syria, while claiming to be 'the resistance' against the other military occupier, Israel. This creates a contradiction which means that, for the first time
2. Hezbollah has had to justify its weapons in a way that it didn't have to before. It was much easier for them to say we need the weapons against Israel than it was for them to say we need them to save Bashar Al-Assad, the dictator widely seen (correctly so) as the assassin, with Hezbollah, of multiple anti-Assad figures on both the Left and the Right from Gebran Tueni to George Hawi to Samir Kassir to Pierre Gemayel Jr to Mohamad Chatah to Lokman Slim, among others. Hezbollah even tried to claim that 'the road to Jerusalem passes through Aleppo', as in the road to liberating Palestine passes through Aleppo (east Aleppo was the largest city liberated from Assad and then besieged by Assad, Hezbollah, Russia and their allies in Syria until the city's downfall in December of 2016). Finally,
3. Hezbollah's intervention in Syria served as a prelude to them becoming the single most aggressive backers of the extremely corrupt status quo

---

<sup>28</sup>Is it difficult to see why a US-backed army may have some hesitation fighting against the state that gets the most US funding and weapons on Earth?

<sup>29</sup><https://www.redpepper.org.uk/global-politics/war/left-analyses-of-imperialism-must-stand-against-campism/>

in Lebanon. It's not complicated to see why: if they were willing to sacrifice Syrians to Assad to maintain their land access to Iraq and Iran, why wouldn't they be willing to sacrifice the Lebanese?

4. Hezbollah has many enemies, not just Israel. Some of those enemies have their own reasons to oppose Hezbollah, reasons I oppose. But others have very legitimate reasons, particularly anti-Assad Syrians who have seen the party that calls itself the resistance invade their country to destroy their resistance against the Assad regime. This is why you'll see many Syrians celebrate the death of Hezbollah leaders. It sometimes comes with downplaying civilian suffering and deaths in Lebanon, which is very sad to see, but it comes from a place of pain that needs to be reckoned with. Ignoring that reality, which is what usually happens, just leads more people to 'enemy of my enemy is my friend' cynicism, which isn't great.

## 7) Hezbollah is not just an armed militia

The recent attacks by the Israeli state using pagers, walkie-talkies and other devices led to the usual online shit show of people confusing reality with movies (and not even hiding it, as we saw with the popular use of references to spy movies). The most generous interpretation I can muster for at least some of these people is that they believed that these attacks exclusively targeted members of Hezbollah, and that these members of Hezbollah were all somehow combatants.

Let's put aside the obvious crime of blowing up thousands of electronic devices anywhere in Lebanon at the same time, which led to thousands of injured and dozens of dead so far, including children, and people thinking that merely being a member of a party at war makes you a legitimate target anywhere and at any time (really bad news for, what, 80% or something of Israeli Jews who have served in the IDF?), a clear problem here is that many simply do not know that Hezbollah is not just an armed militia.

As mentioned ad nauseam, Hezbollah is a political party. In the context of Lebanon, this means that it provides social services such as healthcare, education, debt relief, food and so on. This does not make them 'good' as the only reason they have that role to play is because the Lebanese state, after decades of neoliberal capture, has been hollowed out, with social services virtually non-existent. Hezbollah has been part of that neoliberal capture, like the other

majority sectarian parties.<sup>30</sup> This makes them a very Lebanese phenomenon, which goes back to the previous point.

This also complicates the picture with regards to its 'membership', which is often not even a formal one. You also need to understand this to let go of the notion that those living in 'their' areas are all either hardcore supporters or hardcore opponents. Many, maybe even most people, are just there. They just live in south Lebanon, Dahieh and the Bekaa. Many will have family connections to the party — which, again, is very common among Lebanese sectarian parties. It is a core feature of sectarianization, or how sectarianism is created and reproduced.

There's nothing particularly unique about Hezbollah here. Many people will be deemed 'members' because a cousin found them a gig as a bodyguard, or a neighbor found them a gig as a grocer, or taxi driver, and so on. Lebanon has been facing one of the world's worst economic crisis since 2019-2020, and very few people have the luxury to turn down jobs. If finding yourself 'in' Hezbollah's civilian wing forfeits your life, this means anyone is a legitimate target, even children, even some random mom, some random grandpa, some random aunt. This is what we are seeing in so much of online discourse today, which is truly terrifying.

## 8) Hezbollah is an ultra-conservative party. It is not leftwing.

I feel silly writing this. Nasrallah has ranted against feminism and LGBTQI Lebanese. He has called for gay people to be murdered, multiple times (most recently last year<sup>31</sup>). Like the other major parties, Hezbollah is an extremely patriarchal party. Of the only 8 women MPs in parliament, none are from Hezbollah. Even their ally Amal, led by an 86 year old warlord, managed to get one in parliament. They oppose reproductive rights (like all of the others, last I checked) and have one of the worse, if not the worst, track record on allowing underage marriage of girls with older men (no, I am not joking<sup>32</sup>). It's not unfair to argue that Hezbollah has consistently had the most anti-women

---

<sup>30</sup>To name but a few: The Future Movement (which is past-oriented), the progressive Socialist Party (which is neither socialist nor progressive), the Lebanese Forces (the other party that calls itself 'the resistance', by the way), the Phalangists/Kataeb (named after the Spanish fascists of Franco's era), the Amal Movement (Amal means hope, which is why it's a hopeless party), and so on.

policies in Lebanon, and the bar is very low.

Their leader, Hassan Nasrallah, is not just a militia leader, but he is also a religious cleric, which is why he's called 'Sayyid', or Al-Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah. He's sometimes referred to as just 'Al Sayyid.' As with the term 'moqawameh' (resistance) described above, this speaks to Hezbollah's success in capturing important words.<sup>33</sup> This makes it more difficult for folks, particularly if they're from the same community and/or are particularly religious, to treat him as just another political leader (although many do). Their religiosity alone doesn't make Hezbollah rightwing of course. I mention this because Nasrallah uses his religious credentials to promote his specific brand of religious authoritarianism.

Hezbollah has no class analysis (lol). Whatever lip service they pay to working class concerns is subsumed within the logic of 'the resistance'. There have been people within the movement who have tried to use that logic against corrupt elites (a resistance against corruption etc), but they haven't managed to succeed. This has made particularly difficult because:

## 9) Hezbollah supports the Status Quo

Hezbollah is the main guardian of the corrupt, sectarian status quo in Lebanon today. In 2019, during the October uprising, the Lebanese leftwing writer, Elias Khoury described Hezbollah as "the covenant and protector of the thieves' government" in a "letter to Samir Kassir,"<sup>34</sup> the aforementioned leftwing journalist who was murdered by the Assad regime. This was in reference to Hassan Nasrallah, shortly after the uprising started, condemning us as foreign agents and dismissing the entire movement, and encouraging his most extreme supporters to go down to the streets, beat us up, destroy protest tents, and threatened anyone who dares speak against al sayyid.

Hezbollah would soon prove itself to be the single most-dedicated defender of the corrupt status quo, from their backing of the billionaire prime minister Saad Hariri (whose father, Rafik Hariri, also a billionaire prime minister, was killed by the Assad regime) to their backing of the other billionaire prime

<sup>31</sup><https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230729-hezbollah-chief-in-new-attack-on-same-sex-relations-1>

<sup>32</sup><https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/lebanon/>

<sup>33</sup>There are more examples like this: 'al-hezb' itself is associated with Hezbollah even though it just mean 'the party' and can mean most of the other parties (hezb al-kataeb, hezb al-takaddomi al-ishtiraki, etc). If you say 'the party' on its own, we know you mean Hezbollah.

<sup>34</sup><https://iwritestuff.blog/2019/10/22/elias-khoury-letter-to-samir-kassir/>

minister, Najib Mikati, to their backing of the 1993-2023 Banque du Liban governor and Botox aficionado, Riad Salameh (also probably a billionaire, not sure). You may sense a pattern here.

## 10) Hezbollah is not anti-Christian

I also feel stupid writing this but this is particularly dedicated to American readers because I have seen this really idiotic take circulated. I am sure it's been featured on Fox News and, if this escalates, would become a core feature of pro-Israel propaganda.

Under the sectarian system, Hezbollah has had two major allies: Amal, which is also Shia, and the Free Patriotic Movement, which is Christian. Nasrallah and FPM founder Aoun have had a memorandum of understanding (Mar Mikhael Understanding) since 2006.<sup>35</sup> Hezbollah also has Sunni and Druze allies.

Sectarianism is complicated.<sup>36</sup> It's easier to think of it as power-sharing agreements by elites that carve out a country. Allegiances shift, and so do ideologies. I don't face any particular threats as a non-Shia Lebanese going to neighborhoods where Hezbollah is popular. If anything I am safer than anti-Hezbollah Shia Lebanese because going after someone likes me looks bad. It might look sectarian as I am not Shia. It's easier for them to attack 'their own community', which is where the term 'embassy Shias'<sup>37</sup> comes from (as in paid by foreign embassies. Get it? It's very clever). Similarly, me going against the sectarian Christian parties makes me particularly vulnerable if they conclude that I'm too much of a threat.

---

<sup>35</sup>Which was important because Aoun had been in exile from 1990 to 2005 for opposing the Assad regime, before reconciling. Again — nothing matters.

<sup>36</sup>This goes back to the particularity of Lebanese nationalism. Historically, Lebanese nationalism was dominated by Maronite Catholics. I won't go through the entire thing, but it goes back to the 1860s Maronite-Druze civil war, the Ottoman empire's complicated politics towards Maronites (and Shias, by the way, who were also directly targeted by the Ottomans), and the equally-complicated relationship between Maronite elites and the French empire at the time. The TLDR: after the collapse of the Ottoman empire a Lebanese state was progressively carved out from the Mount Lebanon and Beirut areas of Ottoman Syria. An informal agreement between, especially, urban Sunni and Christian elites effectively created the state's early political infrastructure. Druze elites were later tagged along. Shias, notably, were largely excluded as they were overwhelmingly working class. This created an understandable grievance that Hezbollah was later able to exploit.

<sup>37</sup><https://daraj.media/en/34789/>

## Bonus: Is Hezbollah a terrorist organization?

Hezbollah has committed acts of terror, multiple times. It is, however, insufficient to stop there.

Two simple reasons:

1) They do not view themselves like that. They also come from a different ideological lineage than the Sunni extremists ala Al Qaeda or ISIS (both of whom are mortal enemies of Hezbollah). Unlike those others, Hezbollah doesn't partake in some 'global jihad' against random civilians in Western cities. It is not building a caliphate.<sup>38</sup>

As mentioned, they actively seek out non-Shia alliances. I'd argue that they even prefer alliances with Christians, because Christian elites in Lebanon continue to have a disproportionate influence (to the percentage of the general population) on Lebanese politics. It also 'looks good' and allows them to rebuke pro-Israel propaganda. Again, it's a political party.

This does not mean that they have not committed acts of terror, and during the civil war they developed a reputation for kidnapping and killing western journalists and diplomats.<sup>39</sup> While true, it is still not useful because:

2) Although there are objective definitions of terrorism, being accused of being a 'terrorist organisation' is always a political decision, not a legal one. I will tell you that the Zionist Irgun militia bombing the King David Hotel in 1946 and murdering 91 people is terrorism, or that the very foundation of the state of Israel relied on the systematic and methodical application of widespread terrorism against Palestinian civilians, including massacres (enjoy this Wikipedia article listening the towns and villages that Zionist militias depopulated,<sup>40</sup> including through massacres), which is why we call it Al-Nakba, literally "the catastrophe."

I will tell you that the IDF has declared policies and doctrines ranging from the Dahieh doctrine,<sup>41</sup> ie the destruction of civilian infrastructure in order to 'pressure hostile regimes,' to the current plan to liquidate northern Gaza<sup>42</sup> to the policy of eradicating *entire* family trees,<sup>43</sup> to the mass extermination of

---

<sup>38</sup>Note: Nasrallah did support the establishment of an Islamist state in the past, but shifted gears decades ago to integrate Lebanese sectarianism.

<sup>39</sup>Americans who think everything is about them will also tell you that Hezbollah blew up some 250 US and 50 French soldiers in 1983 Beirut barracks bombings (that was actually the Islamic Jihad Organization, Hezbollah's precursor — Hezbollah didn't officially exist yet — but IJO's leader was Imad Mughnieh who later became Hezbollah's number 2 before the Israelis killed him in 2008, so whatever).

<sup>40</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_towns\\_and\\_villages\\_depopulated\\_during\\_the\\_1947%E2%80%931949\\_Palestine\\_war#Table](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_towns_and_villages_depopulated_during_the_1947%E2%80%931949_Palestine_war#Table)



Palestinian babies on an industrial scale,<sup>44</sup> to the routine threats of sending Lebanon “back to the stone age”<sup>45</sup> and turning “Beirut into Gaza”<sup>46</sup> to simultaneously blowing up thousands of pagers and walkie-talkies used by low-level operatives living with random civilians, injuring over 3,250 people in two separate instances and killing 30+ (at the time of writing) throughout Lebanon — that these are all policies of terrorism. Israel utilises state terrorism as a *routine practice*. It is not the exception to the norm, it is the norm.

Any accusations of Hezbollah being a terrorist organization that doesn't include a thorough denunciation of the only nuclear-armed US-backed *state* in this 'conflict' that deploys terrorism as a *routine practice* is not just meaningless but, at best, reckless and, at worst, complicit in Israel's crimes against humanity. Anyone who ignores these facts are not weakening Hezbollah, but simply reveal that the terrorism accusation is meaningless — letting Hezbollah off the hook in the process, ironically.

## Resources dump

I will add many more in the coming week. It's going to take time to put them all here, but I wanted to publish it now given the time-sensitive nature of this topic.

But for now:

- Joseph Daher, the Swiss-Syrian Marxist academic, has written on Hezbollah a lot. Here are some of them: his book<sup>47</sup> / Jacobin interview<sup>48</sup> / Hezbollah, Neoliberalism and Political Economy<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup><https://imeu.org/article/the-dahiya-doctrine-and-israels-use-of-disproportionate-force>

<sup>42</sup><https://www.972mag.com/northern-gaza-liquidation-scenario-eiland-rabi/>

<sup>43</sup><https://time.com/6330210/israel-hamas-gaza-families-amnesty-international/>

<sup>44</sup><https://www.972mag.com/palestinian-infants-killed-gaza-2024/>

<sup>45</sup><https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/27/israel-warns-can-send-lebanon-back-to-stone-age-as-un-seeks-de-escalation>

<sup>46</sup><https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-777132>

<sup>47</sup><https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745336893/hezbollah/>

<sup>48</sup><https://jacobin.com/2023/10/hezbollah-israel-palestine-lebanon-ira-history>

<sup>49</sup><https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-religion/article/abs/hezbollah-neoliberalism-and-political-economy/3D8D800FDCEA909CD9801976C2C7BE91>

- Interview with Elias Khoury on Hezbollah on Megaphone (2018)<sup>50</sup> — I published an English translation on my blog.<sup>51</sup> Speaking of: Megaphone news is a Lebanese leftist independent media outlet that distinguishes itself by taking authoritarianism seriously, meaning it doesn't whitewash Hezbollah or the Assad regimes. Follow them wherever: Instagram,<sup>52</sup> Threads,<sup>53</sup> TikTok,<sup>54</sup> YouTube,<sup>55</sup> X,<sup>56</sup> Facebook,<sup>57</sup> Website.<sup>58</sup> Give them money if you can<sup>59</sup> (full disclosure: I donate to them).
- My pieces on Hezbollah: Hezbollah couldn't ask for a better enemy than Israel<sup>60</sup> / Hezbollah's Resistance™ against resistance<sup>61</sup> / Israel left Lebanon 20 years ago. We're still fighting for our liberation<sup>62</sup>
- Hezbollah's channel is called Al Manar. I won't link to it in case this breaks some law, but you can just google it.

---

<sup>50</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxTXrGHPXhE>

<sup>51</sup><https://iwritestuff.blog/2018/03/01/elias-khoury-on-the-lebanese-political-system-and-the-prospects-of-challenging-it/>

<sup>52</sup><https://www.instagram.com/megaphonenews/>

<sup>53</sup><https://www.threads.net/@megaphonenews>

<sup>54</sup><https://www.tiktok.com/@megaphonenews>

<sup>55</sup><https://www.youtube.com/megaphonenews>

<sup>56</sup>[https://x.com/megaphone\\_news](https://x.com/megaphone_news)

<sup>57</sup><https://facebook.com/megaphone.news>

<sup>58</sup><https://megaphone.news/>

<sup>59</sup><https://donorbox.org/support-megaphone>

<sup>60</sup><https://www.972mag.com/hezbollah-israel-lebanon-symbiotic-enemies/>

<sup>61</sup><https://iwritestuff.blog/2021/02/11/hezbollahs-resistance-against-resistance/>

<sup>62</sup><https://www.972mag.com/lebanon-liberation-day-hezbollah-israel/>





# Scrappy Capy Distro

Written by Elia Ayoub in September 2024

[www.hauntologies.net/p/hezbollah-10-things-you-need-to-know](http://www.hauntologies.net/p/hezbollah-10-things-you-need-to-know)

Layout and republication by Scrappy Capy Distro in October 2024  
[scrappycapydistro.info](http://scrappycapydistro.info)