



## Public Criticism in Lebanon of Hezbollah Activity along the Israel-Lebanese Border

March 8, 2024

### Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ Hezbollah joined the fighting against Israel on October 8, 2023, the second day of the Operation Iron Swords, in support of the Palestinians. The fighting in south Lebanon, and especially the damage caused to the area, led the Lebanese public to criticize Hezbollah, especially for dragging Lebanon into a war which did not concern it.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ The main criticisms of the war have been that it is a war being fought by the Palestinians, not the Lebanese; Hezbollah is not "protecting Lebanon," although it represents itself as such, but rather it is destroying Lebanon; Hezbollah serves the interests of the Iranian regime; even without a war, Lebanon is undergoing a serious economic and political crisis, and Hezbollah is sending the country into the abyss; Hezbollah operates in the Christian, Sunni and Druze towns and villages in south Lebanon to force local residents to migrate to other areas inside the country.
- ▶ Critics include public figures and politicians, mainly Christians, and the Lebanese street, especially the residents of the south, who are the main victims of the war. There is also criticism from Shi'ite elements in south Lebanon, where Hezbollah's center of support is located and which has taken the brunt of the fighting. However, incidents of criticism have been relatively few, and in most cases the critics express their protest orally or in writing, mainly on social networks. So far there are no signs of organized protest, since in some instances speaking out or being active against Hezbollah could be fatal.
- ▶ Hezbollah is trying to moderate the criticism against it, mainly with the help of promises to restore south Lebanon after the war and help local residents. Senior organization figures claim Hezbollah operates not only for the Shi'ite population but for all Lebanese citizens.

### Criticism Voiced by Public and Political Figures

<sup>1</sup> Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the December 2023 ITIC report, "[The hostilities in south Lebanon have driven tens of thousands of local residents to flee to the northern areas.](#)"

► Since Hezbollah joined the fighting on October 8, 2023, public figures and party leaders, mainly Christians, have often been harshly critical of its activities, especially its mobilization for the Palestinian interest, which is irrelevant to Lebanon's security:

◆ **Gebran Bassil**, the chairman of the Free National Movement in Lebanon, said his party opposed Lebanon's being responsible for the "liberation of Palestine" because that was the Palestinians' responsibility. He said they were also opposed to the "unity of the arenas," or connecting Lebanon to other fronts, and in particular linking the cessation of hostilities in south Lebanon to the cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip. He also stated that his party opposed the use of Lebanon as a base from which to attack Israel, and that by itself Lebanon was unable to pay the price of obtaining the Palestinians' rights on behalf of all Arabs. He added that Lebanon had to show support for what the Palestinians wanted and were in favor of a just, comprehensive peace, but whoever decided to go to war had to bear the responsibility alone (Gebran Bassil's X account, February 20, 2024).

◆ On another occasion, Bassil complained Hezbollah had not committed to a national defense strategy that would put its weapons under the authority [of the Lebanese army], despite the legitimacy of the Lebanese state. He claimed they understood Hezbollah's justification for participating in the fighting in Syria near the Lebanese, it was intended to protect the country threats of terrorism and ISIS, but that did not mean it was necessary to go as far as Yemen and meddle in the affairs of the Gulf countries (Arabic independent, March 5, 2024).

◆ **Naji Hayek, the deputy chairman of the Free National Movement**, appealed to Nasrallah and said that Hezbollah had joined the Lebanese and Gazan fronts and that the entire Lebanese public opposed opening a Lebanese front in solidarity with the Gaza Strip. He wondered why Hezbollah called its casualties "martyrs on the way to Jerusalem" and not "martyrs for Lebanon," and added that personally, he was against liberating Jerusalem, and the Palestinians should be allowed to liberate Jerusalem [by themselves without involving Lebanon] (Gaby Mardini's X account, February 15, 2024).

◆ **Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces Party**, said Hezbollah's highest national interest concerned Iran, not Lebanon (Lebanese Forces X account, January 26, 2024). The Lebanese Forces Party said in an official statement that since the beginning of the war the situation in Lebanon had been the worst in its history, adding

that because of Hezbollah, Lebanon had no important allies standing by it. According to the announcement, Hezbollah's situation was currently more serious than after the Second Lebanon War in 2006, and that Hezbollah's real goal in fighting was not to destroy Israel, but to fully control Lebanon (Lebanese Forces Party Facebook page, February 22, 2024).

◆ On February 20, 2024, **The Phalanges, a party headed by Samy Gemayel**, published a statement accusing Hezbollah of giving Israel reasons to attack in south Lebanon. Moreover, Hezbollah's theory, that attacks from Lebanon would divert Israel from its activities in the Gaza Strip, had borne no fruit and harmed Lebanon (Phalanges website, February 20, 2024).

◆ **Ghassan Hasbani, a member of the Lebanese Parliament and of the strong republican faction in Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces Party**, said Hezbollah caused Lebanon and the Lebanese great destruction with the war. He added that so far the war had cost more than the funds the International Monetary Fund was supposed to deposit in the state's treasury. He said Hezbollah was not pragmatic, and that while it had made the decision to enter the war, apparently someone else would make the decision for leaving it. He said Hezbollah had led Lebanon in a dangerous circle, which might force it, unnecessarily, to be part of a regional war (Ghassan Hasbani's X account, February 29, 2024).

◆ The heads of the Christian parties in Lebanon opposing Hezbollah claimed that Hezbollah was carrying out its attacks on Israel from Christian, Sunni and Druze towns and villages in south Lebanon, and not from Shi'ite settlements, and causing Israel to attack them and destroy their homes. The discovery that Hezbollah had placed its rocket launchers near the homes of the residents of the Christian town of Rmeish, close to the border and frequently attacked during the fighting, intensified the criticism. **Bechara Boutros al-Ra'i, the Maronite Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch**, and the leaders of the Christian parties, the Lebanese Forces Party, the Free National Movement and the Phalanges condemned Hezbollah, accused it of endangering the lives of the town's residents and demanded the rocket launchers be removed from the southern villages (Nidaa al-Watan, December 31, 2023).



**Rocket launchers located in the Christian town of Rmeish (Nidaa al-Watan, December 31, 2023)**

◆ **Dr. Ali Khalifa, one of the founders of the Tahrir (Liberation) Movement, a Shi'ite movement that opposes Hezbollah**, said that the movement opposed war and the decision to go to war or achieve peace rested solely with the state, and that required popular support. He also noted that "no wars are entertainment and their results are disastrous." He emphasized the enormous economic and social cost resulting from the displacement of the residents of south Lebanon and noted that "Hezbollah, which declared war, abdicated its responsibility [for the residents]." He also reminded Hezbollah, which calls itself "the resistance," that [international] laws do not recognize in the existence of permanent resistance. Resistance is a situation that arises from the people. When there is no occupier, no one can monopolize the discourse in the name of "resistance." During meetings with Shi'ite residents, he said, they witnessed an evident anxiety regarding the feasibility of continuing the war, while the villages were being destroyed and people are being displaced inside their homeland (Sada al-Araz, February 22, 2024).

## Criticism in the Media and Social Networks

► Criticism of Hezbollah is also published in the Lebanese media and social networks:

◆ Lebanese civilians living in the towns and villages near the border were quoted as criticizing Hezbollah for attacking Israel from within their communities. They claimed attacks near their homes put them in danger, pushing them to abandon their homes and leave the area free for Hezbollah. Some of the residents claimed that some of the rockets that hit the villages in south Lebanon were actually launched by Hezbollah (Nidaa al-Watan, November 21, 2023).

◆ **Olina Isma'il**, a TikTok influencer with 7,362 followers, posted that that residents of south Lebanon could not dream and live, they were doomed to live forever in war, death, destruction and dust. She wrote, "Either the war ends or we end" (Olina Isma'il's TikTok account, February 11, 2024).

◆ **Ali Hamada, a Lebanese journalist**, wrote an article on the al-Nahar al-Arabi website (affiliated Lebanon's Free National Movement), entitled "The Paradox: Lebanon is racing toward war with Israel." He attacked Hezbollah, which, he said, was leading the country into an all-out war with Israel. He compared Hezbollah to someone who drives a car with passengers into a concrete wall and commits suicide. He also mourned that the fate of the country depended on the decision of an armed militia, and criticized the Lebanese government and its officials, who collaborated with Hezbollah, provided it with legitimacy to fight Israel and ignored the victims and the enormous damage caused to the residents of south Lebanon. He claimed that Hezbollah's fighting against Israel to engage the Israeli army on another front did not benefit Hamas either (al-Nahar al-Arabi, February 14, 2024).

◆ **Husam Jundi**, whose X account has 86,200 followers, strongly criticized Hezbollah, stating there was no sane person who did not know the Israeli "occupation" was destroying south Lebanon, but there was also no sane person who did not know that the Satanic Party [a nickname for Hezbollah by the organization's opponents]<sup>3</sup> was helping Israel to do it. He said it was similar to what Hamas terrorists were doing to the residents of the Gaza Strip. They are terrorists and those who support them are also terrorists. "Enough!" (Husam Jundi's X account, February 16, 2024).

◆ **Raymond Hakim**, a Lebanese activist for implementing Resolution 1701, whose X account has about 80,000 followers, published a video showing of the hardships of refugees from south Lebanon entitled, "Nasrallah lied to the families of south Lebanon when he told them 'I will not leave you and protect you,' and then left [them to their fate]" (Raymond Hakim's X account February 20, 2024). He later wrote that 80% of the Lebanese people did not recognize Hezbollah and considered its presence in Lebanon as "a cancer," and not as "resistance" (Raymond Hakim's X account, February 28, 2024).

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<sup>3</sup> Calling Hezbollah the Satanic Party is not new but has recently begun to be used increasing by Lebanese civilians on the social networks.

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لا يعترف بحزب الله  
ويعتبر وجوده في لبنان  
سرطان  
وليس مقاومة

**Raymond Hakim's post: 80% of the Lebanese people do not recognize Hezbollah and consider its presence in Lebanon a cancer, not "resistance" (Raymond Hakim's X account, February 28, 2024)**

► **Walid Ghanem**, a Lebanese social activist whose X account has about 15,000 followers, related to Israel's counterattacks in Ba'albek on February 26, 2024, claiming that the war in Lebanon was expanding day by day. He expressed his despair and called for the implementation of Resolution 1701. He used the hashtags "#Hezbollah\_terrorist" and "#Lebanon\_does\_not\_want\_war" (Walid Ghanem's X account, February 26, 2024).

► **Abd al-Jalil al-Sa'id**, a Lebanese publicist who lives in Sweden whose X account has about 275,000 followers, published a video in which he claimed that Hezbollah operatives entered houses in south Lebanon and used the residents as human shields. He claimed that when Israel harmed civilians it served Hassan Nasrallah because then he represented himself as a victim deserving of sympathy. He said in that way Nasrallah was collaborating with Israel (Abd al-Jalil al-Sa'id's X account, February 18, 2024).

► **Samir Sakaf**, a Lebanese political commentator, said Lebanon was paying too high a price for the war. He said Hezbollah continued operating according to "equations," but in practice Lebanon was paying a price much higher than the one paid by Israel because of Israel's significant military advantage. He added that while Hezbollah claimed that its operatives were killed as "martyrs on the way to Jerusalem," in reality they were killed by Israeli weapons and UAVs which destroyed houses and entire neighborhoods, even in areas 70 kilometers away from the border (Sada al-Arz, February 22, 2024).

► **Dana Kyriakos**, a political activists who opposes Hezbollah and whose X account has 14,400 followers, posted photographs of the destruction in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon after the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and wrote, "This is how Hamas defeated Israel by destroying the Gaza Strip, as the Satanic Party defeated Israel in July 2006" (Dana Kyriakos' X account, March 2, 2024).



**The destruction in Gaza now (top) and in Lebanon in 2006 (bottom): Hamas and Hezbollah claim "victory" (Dana Kyriakos' X account, March 2, 2024)**

## Hezbollah's Response

► In response to the criticism, senior Hezbollah officials are careful to represent the organization as protecting all Lebanese citizens and as the only entity in Lebanon capable of deterring Israel. In addition, it promises to repair the destruction in south Lebanon.

► **Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general**, to justify Lebanon's involvement in the war, tried to convince the Lebanese public that he was acting "responsibly," especially towards the residents of south Lebanon. In a speech he delivered on February 13, 2024, he claimed that the organization acted out of national and regional responsibility, and opening a front with Israel was a "national interest," primarily to defeat Israel. He claimed that in the absence of an Israeli defeat, the people of Lebanon and "the rest of the Middle East" would be fated to surrender to Israel, the United States and the West. He "supported" the residents of South Lebanon by saying that those who currently bore the main burden of the Lebanese front were the residents of south Lebanon, and Hezbollah stood by them. He also promised that the houses in south Lebanon which had been destroyed would be rebuilt and would be "better" than those which destroyed (al-Manar, February 13, 2024).

► During an event organized by Hezbollah in the town of Boudai and attended by religious scholars, politicians and a large general audience, **Hussein al-Musawi, Nasrallah's political advisor**, represented Hezbollah as the only entity in Lebanon capable of standing up to Israel and as fighting for all the people of Lebanon. He said that despite the claims of some Lebanese, Hezbollah was fighting to protect all the Lebanese and to preserve their lives. He

claimed it was also fighting on other fronts in the defense of the [Islamic] nation in Syria, Iraq, "Palestine," Yemen and Lebanon, and added they claimed that the Lebanese might live without fighting, bombing, destruction or sacrifice in Lebanon, "Palestine" and elsewhere, but the situation would not last a month, two months or a year, because what Israel did in the Gaza Strip, it would do in Lebanon or other places and even more so, if it could (lebanondebate.com, February 24 2024).

► **Nabil Qaouq, a member of Hezbollah's Central Council**, represented Hezbollah as deterring Israel and attacking it for its [alleged] "massacres of Lebanese civilians." He claimed Israel's greatest fear was a confrontation with Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Israelis tried to hide but Hezbollah surprised them and hit their hidden tanks with its "high-quality missiles." In addition, he claimed that Hezbollah's response to the "massacre" in Nabatiyeh and Souaneh<sup>4</sup> would be harsh and that Hezbollah's rocket attack on the city of Kiryat Shmona was only an initial response (al-Nashra, February 19, 2024).

► In light of the public opposition in Lebanon to Hezbollah's involvement in the war, Hezbollah downplayed the importance of the concept of the "unity of the arenas." For example, **Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general**, claimed that when Hezbollah's senior figures talked about the "unity of the arenas," there were people who mistakenly thought that "unity" meant "the same activity of all the arenas." He claimed, however, that what they actually meant was "the same positions and vision with a willingness to face common challenges," but each arena acted independently for its own reasons, according to the capabilities, preparations and effects [of each arena] vis-à-vis Israel (Na'im Qassem's X account, February 22, 2024).

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<sup>4</sup> On February 15, 2024, a UAV attack on an apartment in the center of Nabatiyeh, about 12 kilometers northwest of Metula, was reported. It killed the civilian Hussein Ahmed Dhaher Barjawi and his family members (*al-Nashra*, February 15, 2024). On the same day, according to reports three people were killed in an attack in the village of Souaneh in south Lebanon: a boy named Hussein Muhsen, his brother Amir and his mother Rua al-Muhammad (Voice of Beirut International, February 15, 2024). Hezbollah claimed that in response it fired rockets at Kiryat Shmona.