Criticism of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Objections to the War with Israel

May 13, 2024

Overview[1]

▸With the ongoing fighting along the Israel-Lebanon border, criticism of Hezbollah continues in Lebanon, including the claim that the organization dragged Lebanon into an unnecessary war which does not serve the country's national interests and exacerbates Lebanon's already problematic internal situation. According to the claims, Hezbollah serves the interests of Iran, not Lebanon, Hezbollah is not "the protector of Lebanon," as it represents itself, but is dragging the country into the abyss of a severe economic-political crisis. Some of the organization's critics state that the only way to resolve the situation is by implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which calls for the removal of Hezbollah from south Lebanon and replacing it with Lebanese army forces.

▸For the most part the criticism comes from a handful of public figures and politicians, mostly Christians who serve as opposition to Hezbollah, and from a small number of Lebanese residents, mainly the Christian residents of the south, who are the main victims of the war. A number of web surfers also voice their criticism on social networks. A few expressions of criticism also reach the public through billboards or open confrontations.[2] In most cases the protestors are content to express their criticism in writing, mainly on social networks, or orally. Some of them are very careful about what they say because they fear retaliation from Hezbollah which could endanger their lives. At the moment there are virtually no signs of any organized or public protest.

Criticism from Politicians

▸Criticism is voiced mainly from the Christian side of the political map, which opposes Hezbollah. Critics continue to accuse Hezbollah of dragging Lebanon into a war which brings

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

[2] This report continues the March 7, 2024 ITIC report, "Public Criticism in Lebanon of Hezbollah Activity along the Israel-Lebanese Border."

benefit to none and only hurts the Lebanese. They criticize Iran's involvement in Lebanon and call for the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions dealing with the Lebanon-Israel border. Some also complained about the waste of money and loss of national funds. Najib Mikati, the prime minister of the interim government in Lebanon, announced that his government would compensate every civilian who was harmed by the IDF strikes. He was severely criticized by the Christian parties for Hezbollah's dragging the country, which is suffering from a severe economic crisis, into unnecessary expenses.

- Walid Jumblatt, who until recently headed the Progressive Socialist Party, and his son Taymur, who replaced him, oppose Lebanon's being drawn into a war with Israel, but for the time being they do not directly criticize Hezbollah. Their position has been criticized by the Lebanese public on the grounds that they act out of narrow personal interests. Joseph Abu Fadell, a journalist, lawyer and political commentator, called Jumblatt a politician acting in his own personal interest and therefore tending to align himself with Hezbollah (*al-Nashra*, February 15, 2024; al-Jadid, 27 in April 2024).
- As for criticism from Shi'ites, if it exists, apparently so far Hezbollah has successfully suppressed it and any Shi'ite opposition. The Tahrir (Liberation) Movement, a recently formed Shi'ite movement opposed to Hezbollah, is apparently not yet organized enough to constitute a Shi'ite opposition to Hezbollah, and has apparently been suppressed (al-Kalima Online, May 2, 2024).

Calls for the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701

- On April 27, 2024, Samir Geagea, the chairman of the Lebanese Forces Party, held a meeting to which he also invited opposition figures, to formulate a common position regarding the situation. At the meeting, whose title was "1701 for the defense Lebanon," he harshly criticized Hezbollah for carrying out military operations under the guise of supporting the Gaza Strip without informing the Lebanese government, and that nothing occurring in south Lebanon benefited the Gaza Strip in any way. He said that no one in Lebanon had the right to involve the Lebanese people in a war except for the Lebanese government, and that the residents of south Lebanon were paying the price for an Iranian military presence on Israel's border. He accused Hezbollah of running a country within a country. While he stated he hoped they would conquer Tel Aviv, he added that Hezbollah was unable to defend Lebanon and that the

current situation should be resolved by implementing Security Council Resolution 1701, whose objective is the withdrawal of Hezbollah forces from south Lebanon and replacing them with Lebanese army forces (*al-Nashra*, April 27, 2024; Newsgate, April 28, 2024; Sawt Beirut International, April 27, 2024).

The gathering of the opposition to Hezbollah under the title, "1701 for the defense of Lebanon" (Newsgate, April 28, 2024)

Samy Gemayel, chairman of the Phalanges Party, said international effort had to be invested to extricate Lebanon from its current situation. He said the problem in Lebanon was not local and therefore international solutions were necessary. He said the international community had to exert pressure for international decisions to be implemented, starting with Security Council Resolutions 1701 and 1559,[3] according to which "armed militias" [Hezbollah] had to be disarmed (Kon Mowaten, April 3, 2024). 2024). He added that the Lebanese army should be deployed and allowed to ensure security along the border (Phalanges website, April 5, 2024).

The war [allegedly] serves Israel's interests

Gebran Bassil, chairman of the Free Patriotic Movement in the Lebanese parliament, gave a speech in Jbeil in which he said he did not know how Israel could be defeated when Lebanon was collapsing, its economic situation was terrible, government institutions were crumbling and national unity was threatened. He stated that the Lebanese did not want a war, and neither did the United States or Iran [sic], the only party which did want war was the Israeli government, and there was no reason to allow it to kill and destroy. He could not understand, he said, a situation in which Lebanon conducted a war which was not in its own interest

[3] UN Security Council Resolution 1559 was adopted on September 2, 2004 and called for Lebanon's independence and sovereignty to be respected, the end of the Syrian military presence in the country, and the disbanding of the militias, led by Hezbollah. Syria's military presence in Lebanon ended on April 26, 2005.

(Gebran Bassil's X account, April 6, 2024; Lebanese News Agency, April 6, 2024). Commentators claimed he was trying to please the Christian camp [to which he belongs] by weakly criticizing Hezbollah, but at the same time he was careful not to anger Hezbollah, since he wants its support for his candidacy for the presidency (LEBANESE SURVIVOR YouTube channel, April 30, 2024).

The war criticized as a waste of money

- Nadim al-Gemayel, a Phalanges Party representative in the Lebanese Parliament, was indignant that the country had to pay compensation to the residents because of the destruction that Hezbollah was bringing upon the country by joining the war against Israel (Sawt Beirut International, March 22, 2024). On another occasion, he said that the state should not have to provide compensation for damage and destruction because Hezbollah dragged Lebanon into its "adventures" (Nadim al-Gemayel's X account, March 24, 2024). Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces Party also said in a statement that since Hezbollah declared war, it should be held responsible for the families of the victims and for those whose homes were destroyed, and that the government did not have the right to foot the bill for the war waged by Iran and its proxy by taking money out of Lebanese pockets (Lebanese Forces X account , March 22, 2024).
- On May 1, 2024, the Phalanges Party's political bureau said in a statement that "the bill Lebanon has to pay due to the war is higher than it can bear" in terms of the number of victims and material and moral damage. According to the statement, the Lebanese people and government did not want the war and Hezbollah was heading to a loss of control (Lebanese News Agency, May 1, 2024).

Criticism on the Social Networks and Media Outlets

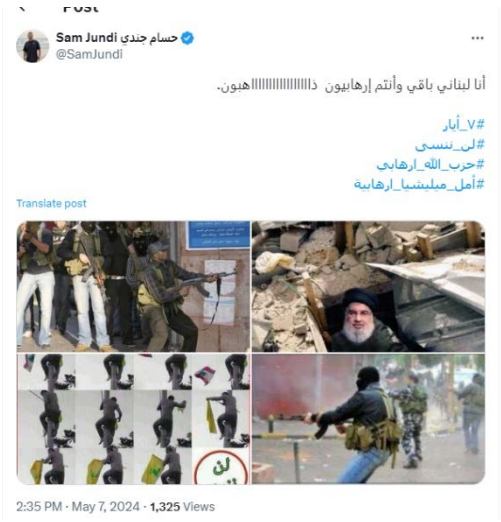
The social networks

- The criticism on the social networks is a little sharper than oral statements and in the media, and many people upload pictures and cartoons condemning Hezbollah. The social media was also extremely critical of the Lebanese government's intentions to compensate the victims of the war in south Lebanon.

The Lebanese Rebel Organization, an opposition group whose X account has 8,500 followers, has published many posts rejoicing over the death of Hezbollah operatives in the war. A post dated May 7, 2024, expressed satisfaction with the entry of IDF forces into Rafah and hope for the collapse of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The post read, "The Israeli army announced full control of the Rafah crossing and the Philadelphia Axis, and the closing of the border between Egypt and Gaza. The Hamas movement has been eliminated," followed by a smiley. The happiness apparently stemmed from the Lebanese opposition's prediction that the end of the fighting in the Gaza Strip would bring an end to the war in south Lebanon, adding that Hamas was responsible, along with Hezbollah, for dragging Lebanon into the war (Lebanese Rebel Organization X account, May 7, 2024).

The Lebanese Rebel Organization hopes for the collapse of the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip (Lebanese Rebel Organization X account, May 7, 2024)

Sam Jundi, whose X account has 86,200 followers, spoke out harshly against Hezbollah, saying, "I am Lebanese and stay and you are terrorists who leave." He attached photos showing a Hezbollah operative replacing a Lebanese flag with one of the organization's, Hezbollah operatives shooting in the streets of Lebanon, and a photo of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general, peeking out from the bunker where he is hiding while the surrounding destruction is visible (Sam Jundi's account X, 7 May 2024).



The photos posted by Sam Jundi (Sam Jundi's account X, 7 May 2024)

Fadi Ghosn, whose X account had 10,000 followers, narrated a video documenting the destruction in south Lebanon, saying, "This is Lebanon, not Gaza, where the Iranian party [derogatory nickname for Hezbollah] is located. The question arises: why was a media blackout imposed [on south Lebanon], as long as the Iranian party [claims it] is winning?" (Fadi Ghosn's X account, April 30, 2024).

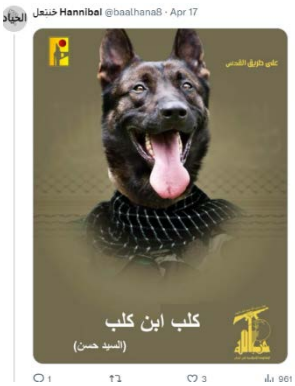
The destruction in south Lebanon (Fadi Ghosn's X account, April 30, 2024)

Raymond Hakim, an activist who works for implementing Resolution 1701 and whose X account has 87,000 followers, uploaded a picture of a boot stepping on a snake. The knife [Lebanon, according to the flag] is going to be used cut the head off the snake [Iran, according to the flag]. The caption reads, "Toxic relationships have to be cut off. It's a crime to be generous to a snake." He also asked his followers, "Do you agree?" (Raymond Hakim's X account, April 27, 2024).

The picture posted by Raymond Hakim (Raymond Hakim's X account, April 27, 2024)

Tony Bouloss, a Christian-Lebanese journalist who opposes Hezbollah and whose X account has 66,000 followers, asked a number of rhetorical questions harshly criticizing Hezbollah, which he said was leading Lebanon to the brink of war. He asked, "Who told Hezbollah that the Lebanese agreed that Iran could use their country for its regional wars?" "By what right and according to what constitution does Na'im Qassem [Hezbollah deputy secretary general] declare that he is prepared for a war with Israel?" Bouloss also stated that Hezbollah was an Iranian occupation force in Lebanon and used the Lebanese people as fuel for its wars to export the Khomeini revolution to the Arab world (Tony Bouloss' X account, April 26, 2024).

A Lebanese Christian known as "Hannibal," whose X account has 200 followers, published a mourning notice that Hezbollah usually publishes for its dead, and instead of the photo of the dead operative he photoshopped a dog's head dressed in a Hezbollah uniform, with the inscription "Dog son of a dog – Sayid Hassan [Nasrallah]" ("Hannibal's" X account, April 17, 2024).



"Dog son of a dog – Sayid Hassan [Nasrallah]" ("Hannibal's" X account, April 17, 2024)

Carmen Joukhadar, a Lebanese journalist and social activist whose X account has 15,600 followers, uploaded a cartoon in which the audience is asked "Who wants war with Israel?!" No hands are raised, but when the question is, "Who wants a civil war?" everyone happily raises a hand (Carmen Joukhadar's X account, April 9, 2024).

A cartoon depicting the opposition of the Lebanese to the war with Israel (Carmen Joukhadar's X account, April 9, 2024)

Dana Kyriakos, a political activist who opposes Hezbollah, whose X account has 14,400 followers, was outraged that Najib Mikati, the interim Lebanese prime minister, promised compensation to the families of the victims in the south, while the victims of the August 2020 Beirut port explosion have not yet been compensated. She added, "We did not ask to fight for Gaza from the beginning, we say that Lebanon does not want war, and you [Mikati] did not move or open your mouth! Won't you give $20,000 to the family of every victim killed in the port explosion?" (Dana Kyriakos' X account, March 20, 2024).

The Lebanese media outlets

The Lebanese news website Janoubia, which opposes Hezbollah, published an article claiming that Hezbollah was drowning Lebanon in mud with its support for Iran and the Gaza Strip. According to the site, the war is becoming "endless" and as a result Israel is expanding its attacks deep into Lebanon. The site noted that after six months of war, Hezbollah refused to back down and was paying with Lebanese victims and assets. However, according to the website, the war will not progress and turn into an extensive war against the United States and Israel (Janoubia, April 7, 2024).

Karen Boustany[4] expressed her opposition to Lebanon's joining the circle of fighting against Israel while directing sharp criticism against Hezbollah. She told an interviewer she wondered why Lebanon had entered a war which was irrelevant to it when the country was already in a state of collapse. She said that Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon were the only countries participating in the fighting because they were all Iranian proxies. She wondered if Hezbollah knew of a case where someone had attacked Israel and profited from it. She said that damages to agriculture alone amounted to $2.5 billion and people had also been killed. According to her, the simple question was, "What do we gain from this? What did we gain from the war 'on the way to Jerusalem?'" (MTV channel, posted on Manar Melhm's TikTok account, April 4, 2024).

Karen Boustany (MTV Channel, posted on Manar Melhm's TikTok account, April 4, 2024)

Dr. Makram Rabah, historian and political scientist at Beirut University, said in an interview that Hezbollah was not the "protector of Lebanon," but a group of Captagon drug dealers who had dragged Lebanon into a war with Israel, a war that has nothing to do with Lebanon. He said Hezbollah was leading to the destruction of Lebanon and had started the fighting on October 8, 2023, and therefore any attack in response from Israel was considered justified by international law. He added that he was not afraid to speak against the organization, even though Hezbollah used the country's executive and judicial authorities against those in Lebanon who expressed their opinion freely. After the interview, Makram Rabah was arrested by Lebanon's general security apparatus on charges of collaboration with Israel and he was released after three hours of interrogation. The incident provoked criticism in Lebanon by

[4] Karen Boustany is a Christian Lebanese journalist, writer, businesswoman, director and producer. She was a candidate for the seat on behalf of the Maronites in the local elections with the support of the Lebanese Forces party of Samir Jaja, known for its opposition to Hezbollah.

people who claimed Hezbollah was trying to silence the Lebanese people (al-Hurra, al-Hadath, 24.ae, March 20, 2024).

Makram Rabah, Lebanese political scientist (24.ae, March 20, 2024)

Criticism in South Lebanon

- According to the Lebanese website al-Janoubia, as a result of the war relations between Hezbollah and the residents of the towns and villages in south Lebanon had worsened, especially in places not identified with Hezbollah or Amal [i.e., the Christian towns and villages], in light of the destruction of homes and the displacement of residents from the area. The residents blame Hezbollah for attacking Israel from their settlements and exposing them to counterattacks. A source who monitors the issue told the website about the growing concern of local residents, who needed guarantees that they would be compensated for the damages they incurred, otherwise tensions would increase and could lead to an open conflict, either on the ground or in the media arena (al-Janoubia, May 2 2024).
- One example is the Christian town of Rmeich in south Lebanon, where criticism against Hezbollah is particularly prominent, since its operatives use the village territory for attacks against Israel. One of the residents interviewed stated, "Israel is our enemy, but we do not want our homes to be destroyed and our children to be killed because of [Hezbollah's] irresponsible actions." Another resident said, "We, in Rmeich, don't want anyone to expose us to danger. I had ten Syrian laborers who worked in agriculture and they fled. Who will compensate me for that? What interests them [Hezbollah] is fighting Israel, but they do not care about the consequences of the war. I left for a month, but we have no money and neither the state nor Hezbollah takes care of anything [for the evacuees]." Another resident noted that life in Rmeich was impossible in the shadow of the war. A townswoman said they expected the state and the Lebanese army to protect them (al-Hadath, March 30, 2024).

Resident of Rmeich: "We do not want our houses to be destroyed and our children to be killed because of [Hezbollah's] irresponsible actions" (al-Hadath, March 30, 2024)

Right: A resident of Rmeich claims that Hezbollah does not care about the consequences of the war. Left: A resident of Rmeich says she expects the state and the Lebanese army to protect the residents (al-Hadath, March 30, 2024)

Public Criticism in Lebanon

- Very little of the criticism of Hezbollah's conduct has invaded the public sphere. For the time being, there have been no widespread demonstrations or protests, but only local criticism:
  - Rami Naim, a Lebanese journalist, whose X account has 2,600 followers, posted pictures of billboards in Beirut which were meant to promote a campaign on social networks against the war with the hashtag "Lebanon does not want war." Similar billboards appeared as early as November 2023. The signs read, "So that the past does not repeat itself #Lebanon does not want war" and "The implementation of international resolutions will strengthen stability #Lebanon does not want war" (Rami Na'im's X account, April 21, 2024).

Billboards that read "So that the past does not repeat itself #Lebanon does not want war" (Rami Naim's X account, April 21, 2024)

- In the al-Karantina area, in the northeast of Beirut, there were reports of clashes between Hezbollah operatives and Christian civilians, apparently resulting from criticism of Hezbollah. In a video of the event, dozens of Hezbollah operatives riding on motorcycles chant slurs against the Christians. According to evidence they also threw rocks at cars with Christian symbols (Lebanese Rebel Organization, April 17, 2024). The opposition group, the Lebanese Rebel Organization, which published the video, stated in a post that "Hezbollah thugs are throwing rocks at every car with a cross in it in the al-Karantina area and chanting insulting sectarian slurs against the Christians. Where is the Lebanese army? The boys in the area vowed to kill them" (Lebanese Rebel Organization, April 17, 2024).

Hezbollah operatives riot against Christians in the al-Karantina area in the northeast of Beirut Lebanese Rebel Organization, April 17, 2024)