



Hezbollah: Background and Issues for Congress

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Summary

Lebanon's Hezbollah is a Shiite Islamist militia, political party, social welfare organization, and U.S. State Department-designated terrorist organization. Its armed element receives support from Iran and Syria and possesses significant paramilitary and unconventional warfare capabilities. In the wake of the summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah and an armed domestic confrontation between Hezbollah and rival Lebanese groups in May 2008, Lebanon's political process is now intensely focused on Hezbollah's future role in the country. Lebanese factions are working to define Hezbollah's role through a series of "National Dialogue" discussions.

Hezbollah and other Lebanese political parties have long emphasized the need to assert control over remaining disputed areas with Israel. However, current Hezbollah policy statements suggest that, even if disputed areas were secured, the group would seek to maintain a role for "the resistance" in providing for Lebanon's national defense and would resist any Lebanese or international efforts to disarm it. Hezbollah continues to define itself primarily as a resistance movement and remains viscerally opposed to what it views as illegitimate U.S. and Israeli intervention in Lebanese and regional affairs. It categorically refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist and opposes all concluded and pending efforts to negotiate resolutions to Arab-Israeli disputes on the basis of mutual recognition, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Given these positions, most observers believe that prospects for accommodation and engagement between the United States and Hezbollah are slim, even as the group's close relationships with Syria and Iran, its pivotal role in Lebanese politics, and reinvigorated U.S. engagement in regional peace efforts increase Hezbollah's potential influence over stated U.S. national security objectives. The Obama Administration is requesting \$246 million in FY2011 foreign assistance to continue a multi-year program specifically designed to increase the central authority of the Lebanese state and deter the use of force by non-state actors. Since FY2006, the United States has provided more than \$1.35 billion in assistance for Lebanon. Key issues facing U.S. policy makers and Members of Congress include:

- **Assessing the goals and effectiveness of U.S. assistance programs**—Assessing the goals of U.S. assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF) and deciding whether to tailor pending assistance programs to create or improve them. Understanding the key political and organizational obstacles to the further expansion or improvement of Lebanon's security forces and developing strategies to overcome them.
- **Managing relations with other external actors**—Preventing destabilizing actions by regional parties that could renew conflict. Limiting the transfer of sophisticated weaponry to Hezbollah. Recognizing and seizing opportunities for the United States and its allies to influence the decisions of regional actors in support of U.S. objectives in Lebanon. Safeguarding Israeli security.
- **Influencing Lebanon's National Dialogue**—Determining the preferred versus likely outcomes of the current Lebanese National Dialogue discussions about a national defense strategy and Hezbollah's weapons. Deciding if and how the United States should seek to influence these discussions and identifying potential pitfalls. Preparing for potential negative consequences including the potential for return to civil conflict in Lebanon.

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Overview and Key Issues

Lebanon's Hezbollah¹ ("Party of God") is a Shiite Islamist militia, political party, social welfare organization, and U.S. State Department-designated terrorist organization. Its armed element (referred to by many in Lebanon as "the resistance") receives support from Iran and Syria and possesses significant paramilitary and unconventional warfare capabilities that rival and in some cases exceed those of Lebanon's armed forces and police. The United States government holds Hezbollah responsible for a number of kidnappings and high-profile terrorist attacks against U.S., European, and Israeli interests since the early 1980s.²

In the wake of the summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah and an armed domestic confrontation between Hezbollah and rival Lebanese groups in May 2008, Lebanon's political process is now intensely focused on Hezbollah's future role in the country's political system and security sector. Despite its status as a U.S.-designated terrorist organization, Hezbollah politicians won 10 seats out of 128 in parliament in the 2009 national elections, and Hezbollah currently controls the Agriculture and Administrative Reform ministries in the cabinet. Hezbollah's militia also is firmly entrenched in areas it controls, making it unlikely that any domestic security force could uproot it by force.

Hezbollah has traditionally defined itself and justified its paramilitary actions as legitimate resistance to Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory and as a necessary response to the relative weakness of Lebanese state security institutions. However, Israel's withdrawal from Lebanese territory in May 2000 and the strengthening of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces (ISF) with international and U.S. support since 2006 have undermined these arguments and placed pressure on Hezbollah to adapt its rhetoric and policies. The current government's platform asserts "the right of Lebanon, through its people, army and resistance, to liberate or recover the Shib'a Farms,³ Kfar Shouba Hills and the Lebanese part of the occupied village of Al Ghajar and to defend Lebanon against any assault and safeguard its right to its water resources, by all legitimate and available means."⁴

Hezbollah and other Lebanese political parties have long emphasized the need to assert control over remaining disputed areas with Israel. However, current Hezbollah policy statements suggest that, even if disputed areas were secured, the group would seek to maintain a role for "the

¹ The spelling "Hezbollah" is used in this memorandum to transliterate the Arabic words *hezb Allah*, literally 'party of God.' Common alternate English transliterations include Hizballah, Hizbullah, Hezballah, and Hizb`allah.

² The U.S. government holds Hezbollah responsible for a number of attacks and hostage takings targeting Americans in Lebanon during the 1980s, including the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in April 1983 and the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in October 1983, which together killed 258 Americans. Hezbollah's operations outside of Lebanon, including its participation in bombings of Israeli and Jewish targets in Argentina during the 1990s and more recent training and liaison activities with Shiite insurgents in Iraq, have cemented the organization's reputation among U.S. policy makers as a capable and deadly adversary with potential global reach. Hezbollah has been designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department since 1995 and remains on Foreign Terrorist Organization and Specially Designated Terrorist lists. See Report of the Department of Defense Commission on the Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act - October 23, 1983, December 20, 1983.

³ The withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in May 2000 left several small but sensitive border issues unresolved, including the Shib'a Farms, a ten-square mile enclave near the Lebanon-Syria-Israel tri-border area. For more information see "Shib'a Farms and Other Disputed Areas" below.

⁴ As cited in U.N. Security Council Document S/2010/193, "Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004)," April 19, 2010.

resistance” in providing for Lebanon’s national defense and would resist any Lebanese or international efforts to disarm it as called for in the 1989 Taif Accord⁵ that ended the Lebanese civil war and more recently in United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Hezbollah continues to define itself primarily as a resistance movement and remains viscerally opposed to what it views as illegitimate U.S. and Israeli intervention in Lebanese and regional affairs. It categorically refuses to recognize Israel’s right to exist and opposes all concluded and pending efforts to negotiate resolutions to Arab-Israeli disputes on the basis of mutual recognition, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Given these positions, most observers believe that prospects for accommodation and engagement between the United States and Hezbollah are slim, even as the group’s close relationships with Syria and Iran, its pivotal role in Lebanese politics, and reinvigorated U.S. engagement in regional peace efforts increase Hezbollah’s potential influence over stated U.S. national security objectives. The Obama Administration is requesting \$246 million in FY2011 foreign assistance to continue a multi-year program specifically designed to increase the central authority of the Lebanese state and deter the use of force by non-state actors. Since FY2006, the United States has provided more than \$1.35 billion in assistance for Lebanon. Of that amount, the United States has invested more than \$690 million to improve the capabilities of the LAF and ISF. (See **Table 1** below.)

It is doubtful that, barring an unforeseen crisis, Lebanon’s fractious political leadership could, on their own, solve the dilemma of Hezbollah’s militia. National Dialogue consultations on a national defense strategy were renewed in March and April 2010, but appear to remain at an impasse amid what some observers contend is a prevailing political paralysis. Prime Minister Saad Hariri and other leaders insist that discussions over Hezbollah’s weapons are sensitive and should remain private, even as the United States and regional actors such as Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Israel continue to seek to influence Lebanon’s internal politics with varying degrees of success.

Key issues facing U.S. policy makers and Members of Congress include:

- **Assessing the goals and effectiveness of U.S. assistance programs**—Identifying the most urgent capabilities that are still lacking among the LAF and ISF and deciding whether to tailor pending assistance programs to create or improve them. Understanding the key political and organizational obstacles to the further expansion or improvement of Lebanon’s security forces and developing strategies to overcome them.
- **Managing relations with other external actors**—Preventing destabilizing actions by regional parties that could renew conflict. Limiting the transfer of sophisticated weaponry to Hezbollah. Recognizing and seizing opportunities for the United States and its allies to influence the decisions of regional actors in support of U.S. objectives in Lebanon. Safeguarding Israeli security.
- **Influencing Lebanon’s National Dialogue**—Determining the preferred versus likely outcomes of the current Lebanese National Dialogue discussions about a national defense strategy and Hezbollah’s weapons. Deciding if and how the United States should seek to influence these discussions and identifying potential

⁵ The full text of the Taif Agreement is available online at <http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/327/taif.txt>.

pitfalls. Preparing for potential negative consequences including the potential for return to civil conflict in Lebanon.

Critics of U.S. policies aimed at weakening Hezbollah argue that while the United States has taken measures to support the Lebanese state, it has not simultaneously taken direct action to limit the influence of Hezbollah in Lebanon and in the region, to stop the flow of weapons to Hezbollah, or to disarm its militant wing. While U.S. policy focuses on building state institutions in Lebanon in an effort to create the political space for the Lebanese government to manage its own internal security threats and develop its own national defense strategy, analysts and policy makers have posited a number of other potential diplomatic, assistance, and security-related measures that could potentially weaken Hezbollah. For more information see “Issues for Congressional Consideration: Potential Options for Weakening Hezbollah” below.

Table I. U.S. Assistance to Lebanon, FY2006-FY2011

Regular and supplemental appropriations; current year \$ in millions

Account	FY2006	FY2007 ^a	FY2008	FY2009 ^a	FY2010 (estimate)	FY2011 (request)
ESF	\$39.60	\$334.00	\$44.64	\$67.50	\$109.00	\$109.00
FMF	\$30.00 ^b	\$224.80	\$6.94	\$159.70	\$100.00	\$100.00
INCLE	—	\$60.00	\$0.50	\$6.00	\$20.00	\$30.00
NADR	\$2.98	\$8.50	\$4.75	\$4.60	\$6.80	\$4.80
1206 (DoD)	\$10.60	\$30.60	\$15.10	—	—	—
IMET	\$0.75	\$0.91	\$1.20	\$2.28	\$2.50	\$2.50
CIPA	—	\$184.00	—	—	—	—
DA	\$2.00	—	—	—	—	—
Total	\$86.21	\$843.85	\$73.13	\$125.70	\$229.00	\$246.30

Source: U.S. Department of State, Congressional Budget Justifications for Foreign Operations. Includes funds from the following accounts: Economic Support Fund (ESF), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement Assistance (INCLE), Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, De-mining, and Related funding (NADR), International Military and Education Training (IMET), Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) and Development Assistance (DA). Funding for ‘1206’ refers to the Department of Defense Global Train and Equip program, originally authorized by Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 (P.L. 109-163).

Notes

- a. FY2007 and FY2009 numbers include regular and supplemental appropriations.
- b. Includes reprogrammed funds. ‘FY2009 Bridge’ refers to the \$66 billion in total request for the Defense Department included in the FY2008 Spring Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (P.L. 110-252, June 30, 2008), constituting a “bridge fund” sufficient to allow services to carry out day-to-day peacetime activities and military operations overseas until the middle of 2009.

Recent U.S. Government Assessments of Hezbollah’s Capabilities and Intentions

In February 2010, Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair delivered the U.S. intelligence community’s most recent unclassified assessment of Hezbollah’s capabilities and intentions as a

component of his annual global threat assessment testimony before Congress.⁶ Director Blair stated:

We judge that, unlike al-Qa'ida, Hizballah, which has not directly attacked U.S. interests overseas over the past 13 years, is not now actively plotting to strike the Homeland. However, we cannot rule out that the group would attack if it perceives that the United States is threatening its core interests.... Hizballah is the largest recipient of Iranian financial aid, training, and weaponry, and Iran's senior leadership has cited Hizballah as a model for other militant groups.

In August 2010, the Obama Administration reported that Hezbollah is “the most technically-capable terrorist group in the world” and stated that the group has “thousands of supporters, several thousand members, and a few hundred terrorist operatives.”⁷ According to the Administration, Hezbollah receives financial support from Lebanese Shiite expatriates around the world and “profits from legal and illegal businesses,” including some illegal drug activity.⁸ The Administration reports that Hezbollah receives “training, weapons, and explosives, as well as political, diplomatic, and organizational aid from Iran, and diplomatic, political, and logistical support from Syria.” In turn, Hezbollah reportedly provides material, financial, and political support to “several Palestinian terrorist organizations, as well as a number of local Christian and Muslim militias in Lebanon.” The Administration also reported in 2009 that Hezbollah operatives have provided training to Iraqi Shiite insurgents, including training on “the construction and use of shaped charge IEDs [improvised explosive devices] that can penetrate heavily-armored vehicles,” a tactic that killed and injured U.S. military personnel in Iraq.⁹

In early April 2010, multiple reports surfaced suggesting that Syria may have transferred Scud missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon.¹⁰ Syria has denied the charges. Unnamed U.S. officials have acknowledged that they believe that Syria intended to transfer long-range missiles to Hezbollah, “but there are doubts about whether the Scuds were delivered in full and whether they were moved to Lebanon.”¹¹ The State Department issued a statement saying, “The United States condemns in the strongest terms the transfer of any arms, and especially ballistic missile systems such as the Scud, from Syria to Hezbollah.... The transfer of these arms can only have a destabilizing effect on the region, and would pose an immediate threat to both the security of Israel and the sovereignty of Lebanon.”¹² Subsequent Israeli press reports have cited Israeli military officials as stating that the missiles transferred to date have been M-600s, a ballistic missile with a 185-mile range and half-ton payload.¹³

⁶ “Drug trafficking also provides support to other terrorists, such as Hizballah.” Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair, “Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” February 2, 2010.

⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism – 2009*, August 5, 2010.

⁸ Blair, “Annual Threat Assessment,” February 2, 2010.

⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism – 2009*, August 5, 2010.

¹⁰ U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Report GMP20100411184001, “Syria Sends Scud Missiles to Hizballah, Israel Threatens War,” *Al Ra'y Online* (Kuwait), April 11, 2010.

¹¹ “U.S. Says Unclear if Hezbollah Took Scuds to Lebanon,” *Reuters*, April 16, 2010.

¹² “U.S. Speaks to Syrian Envoy of Arms Worries,” *New York Times*, April 19, 2010.

¹³ Jonathan Lis and Amos Harel, “Syria gave advanced M-600 missiles to Hezbollah, defense officials claim,” *Haaretz* (Israel), May 5, 2010.

In June 2010, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, in his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Central Asian Affairs, stated that “While we recognize that Hizballah is not directly targeting the United States and U.S. interests today, we are aware that could change if tensions increase with Iran over that country’s nuclear program.”¹⁴

Figure I. Map of Lebanon



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS.

¹⁴ Testimony of Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs and Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, June 8, 2010. Available online at <http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/060810%20Feltman-Benjamin%20Testimony.pdf>.

Figure 2. Israel-Lebanon-Syria Tri-border Area



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS.

Background

Hezbollah's Origins¹⁵

Hezbollah emerged during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in the early 1980s.¹⁶ Its ideological roots stretch back to the Shiite¹⁷ Islamic revival centered in southern Iraq during the 1960s and 1970s, and its early membership was drawn from a range of domestic Shiite groups.¹⁸ These groups were inspired and led by revivalist, Najaf-educated clerics and students who returned to Lebanon from Iraq during the 1970s and spurred the political mobilization of the country's historically marginalized Shiite community. The outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, Israel's invasion of Lebanon targeting Palestinian militants in 1978, the disappearance of Imam Musa Sadr in Libya in 1978, and the Iranian revolution of 1979 were pivotal events that shaped the politics and views of Shiite groups and leaders during this period.

Lebanon's Shiite leaders split along fundamental lines in response to the Israeli invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon in 1982. Leaders favoring a militant response and supporting the long-term creation of an Iranian-style Islamic republic in Lebanon broke away from the then-leading *Amal* movement and formed the *Al Amal al Islamiya* (commonly referred to as Islamic Amal) organization.¹⁹ By leveraging direct support from Iran's Revolutionary Guards and recruiting from other revolutionary Shiite groups, Islamic Amal was the vanguard of the religiously inspired groups that would later emerge under the rubric of Hezbollah. Considerable financial and training assistance from Iran allowed Islamic Amal/Hezbollah to expand from its base of operations in the Bekaa valley of eastern Lebanon to the southern suburbs of Beirut and the occupied Shiite hill towns of the south. Attacks on Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and U.S. military and diplomatic targets allowed Islamic Amal and other Iran-supported Shiite militants to portray themselves as the leaders of resistance to foreign military occupation, while their social and charitable activities in Shiite communities solidified further popular support.

¹⁵ For detailed analysis of Hezbollah's origins and evolution, see Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007, and Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1997. For a historical analysis from Hezbollah's perspective, see Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem's account: Naim Qassem, tr. Dalia Khalil, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within*, SAQI, London, 2005.

¹⁶ In June 1982, Israel re-invaded Lebanon (following its 1978 invasion) with the goal of expelling the leadership and fighters of the Palestine Liberation Organization once and for all. The 1982 invasion was launched in response to the attempted assassination of Israel's ambassador to the United Kingdom by the PLO-rival group led by Sabri al Banna (aka Abu Nidal). Israel withdrew from Beirut and its environs to southern Lebanon in 1985, but did not fully withdraw its forces from Lebanon until 2000.

¹⁷ Common alternate English transliterations include Shi'i and Shia.

¹⁸ Hezbollah's current Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, was a member of a pre-Hezbollah Lebanese underground movement known as *Al Dawaa al Islamiya* (The Islamic Call) that took its spiritual guidance from Iraqi cleric Mohammed Baqir al Sadr (great uncle of Iraq's Muqtada al Sadr). The movement was explicitly modeled on its Iraqi counterpart, which has since evolved into the *Al Dawaa al Islamiya* party led by Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki.

¹⁹ *Amal* is both the Arabic word for "hope" and the Arabic acronym for the Lebanese Resistance Brigades. Amal was established in 1975 as the militia of Imam Musa Sadr's Movement of the Dispossessed, and was an important Shiite militia during the civil war. It remains a prominent political party and currently holds eight seats in parliament, including the Speakership, and three of the opposition's cabinet ministry positions—Foreign Affairs, Youth and Sports, and Health.

Hezbollah remained loosely organized and largely clandestine until 1985,²⁰ when it released a manifesto outlining a militant, religiously conservative, and anti-imperialist platform. The document served as one of the movement's defining ideological statements until November 2009, when Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah issued a new political manifesto (see below).²¹ Echoing the ideology of Iranian Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Hezbollah's 1985 statement identified the United States and the Soviet Union as Islam's principal enemies and called for the "obliteration" of Israel.²² The document also called for the "adoption of the Islamic system on the basis of free and direct selection by the people, not the basis of forceful imposition, as some people imagine." Shiite Islamists' violent attacks against Lebanese communists and their strict enforcement of conservative Islamic social codes in areas under their control had long suggested otherwise to many Lebanese.

Continuing Hezbollah-Amal differences over tactics and political goals contributed to persistent tension and occasional armed clashes between the groups, which intensified during the end of the civil war. By the war's end in 1989, Hezbollah and its rivals in Amal maintained their competition for the mantle of leadership in a now-mobilized Lebanese Shiite community, while claiming credit for having forced Israel to redeploy to the border region of southern Lebanon. The Taif Accord that ended the civil war called for the disarmament and dismantling of militia groups on all sides, and, in response, Hezbollah rebranded its armed elements as an "Islamic resistance" force dedicated to ending Israel's occupation.

Debate over the role, responsibilities, and future of this so-called "resistance" force has remained at the center of Lebanese politics ever since. Hezbollah continued its military campaign against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and its ally, the Southern Lebanese Army (SLA), during the 1990s, and large-scale Israeli military operations in 1993 and 1996 in response to Hezbollah attacks failed to destroy Hezbollah or dislodge it from its enclaves in the south and east of the country. Hezbollah ultimately claimed credit for forcing Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, which was completed in June 2000. A 10-square-mile enclave known as the Shib'a Farms near the Israeli-Lebanese-Syrian tri-border area has remained in dispute since the Israeli withdrawal (see **Figure 2** above). Hezbollah has used the continuing Israeli presence in the Shib'a Farms and other areas as a central justification for its possession of weapons in support of resistance to Israeli occupation.²³ (For more information, see "Shib'a Farms and Other Disputed Areas" below.)

Subordinating Hezbollah to state institutions and eliminating its "state within a state" may rely in part on the eventual erosion of Hezbollah's popular support, which most observers agree is strong

²⁰ According to Norton, "Although its leading members refer to 1982 as the year the group was founded, Hezbollah did not exist as a coherent organization until the mid-1980s. From 1982 through the mid-1980s it was less an organization than a cabal." Nevertheless, Islamic Amal and similar or affiliated groups received military training and organizational support from Iran during this formative period and are credited with a series of terrorist attacks and guerrilla operations, including the 1983 bombing of the United States Marine barracks.

²¹ Since 1992, Hezbollah's electoral platform statements have described the group's ideological and political positions in detail. Frequent speeches and statements by Hezbollah officials also have illustrated the group's views. In 2005, Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem published a history of Hezbollah that presents in-depth analysis of the organization's positions on key domestic and international issues. Naim Qassem, tr. Dalia Khalil, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within*, SAQI, London, 2005.

²² The 1985 manifesto is translated in Appendix B of Augustus R. Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*, 1987, pp.167-87.

²³ For more information on the Shib'a Farms, see CRS Report RL31078, *The Shib'a Farms Dispute and Its Implications*, by Alfred B. Prados.

among Lebanese Shiites and in areas historically controlled by Hezbollah. Hezbollah's popularity is based on a number of factors—its military campaign against Israel, its Lebanese character, its role as an advocate for historically marginalized Shiites, its respect for religious piety, and its vast social services network. Many of its Lebanese supporters view Hezbollah's military capability to be irrelevant and endorse the organization as a political party largely for its social services or religious piety, or for some combination of these and other factors. The legitimacy that this popular support provides compounds the challenges of limiting Hezbollah's influence by consensus.

Hezbollah Today

Political and Military Profile

Hezbollah continues to pursue parallel political, social, and military programs and to characterize itself primarily as a resistance movement. Its decision to participate in the 1992 national elections marked the beginning of the group's transition to the active role in Lebanese politics that it plays today. As advocates for an "Islamic system" of clerical governance and as long-standing critics of what they termed the corruption of Lebanon's confessional political arrangements, Hezbollah members engaged in debates over the terms and advisability of electoral participation during the early 1990s.²⁴ With political endorsement from Iran, Hezbollah participated in the 1992 elections, winning eight seats in parliament. The group continues to field candidates in national and municipal elections, and it has achieved a modest, variable, yet generally steady degree of electoral success. In the 2009 national elections, Hezbollah won 10 seats in parliament and now holds two cabinet posts for the Ministries of Agriculture and Administrative Reform.

On the domestic front, Hezbollah, like other Lebanese confessional groups, vies for the loyalties of its Shiite constituents by operating a vast network of schools, clinics, youth programs, private business, and local security—which many Lebanese refer to as "a state within the state." Though the organization's policies promote a distinct Shiite religious identity, over time, even Hezbollah has had to accommodate its fundamentalist religious messaging to a pluralistic culture in which piety and modernity exist side-by-side. This has required a gradual shift from the group's Khomeinist roots toward a more contemporary Islamist nationalist approach.²⁵

Hezbollah has maintained robust conventional and unconventional military capabilities, which it demonstrated by launching thousands of rockets into Israel and withstanding a blistering Israeli counterassault during the 2006 summer war.²⁶ Hezbollah's deployment of a land-to-sea anti-ship

²⁴ The terms of this debate and subsequent debates about participation in the cabinet and municipal elections are recounted from an insider's perspective in Qassem, pp. 187-205.

²⁵ Hezbollah's November 2009 political statement made no mention of the desirability of an Islamic order in Lebanon. It included a lengthy description of "consensual democracy" as a guiding principle for the Lebanese state. "Consensual democracy is an appropriate political formula for everyone's genuine participation, and a factor of confidence that reassures the homeland's components..." See OSC Report GMP20091130644002, "Nasrallah Holds News Conference, Announces Hizballah's New 'Political Document,'" *Al Manar* Television (Beirut), November 30, 2009. The written Arabic text of the document is available on Hezbollah's official website at: <http://www.moqawama.org/essaydetailsf.php?eid=16245&fid=47>.

²⁶ For more information, see CRS Report RL33566, *Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict*, coordinated by Jeremy M. Sharp.

missile and long-range rockets surprised Israeli military leaders, and the group's use of civilian areas for command and control, storage, and shelter confounded Israeli attempts to limit civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure. Hezbollah forces also successfully deployed sophisticated anti-armor weaponry and tactics against Israeli ground forces.

Current international assessments of Hezbollah's military capabilities reflect concern that the organization has replenished and improved its arsenal and capabilities since 2006. In April 2010, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reported that he continues "to receive reports asserting that Hezbollah has substantially upgraded and expanded its arsenal and military capabilities, including sophisticated long-range weaponry."²⁷ He also noted that "Hezbollah itself does not disavow such assertions and its leaders have repeatedly claimed in public that the organization possesses significant military capabilities, which they claim are for defensive purposes." In testimony before the Israeli Knesset (parliament) on May 4, 2010, IDF Military Intelligence research director Brigadier General Yossi Baidatz stated that:

Hezbollah has an arsenal of thousands of rockets of all types and ranges, including long-range solid-fuel rockets and more precise rockets.... The long-range missiles in Hezbollah's possession enable them to fix their launch areas deep inside Lebanon, and they cover longer, larger ranges than what we have come across in the past. Hezbollah of 2006 is different from Hezbollah of 2010 in terms its military capabilities, which have developed significantly.²⁸

Organizational Structure²⁹

Hezbollah has a unified leadership structure that oversees the organization's complementary, partially compartmentalized elements. Full party membership is offered to applicants and recruits on the basis of allegiance to the organization's ideological program. Specialized recruiting bodies exist for women and youth. Hezbollah's leadership rests in the hands of its seven-member Majlis al Shura (Consultative Council), which selects the group's secretary general for a three-year term. Current Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah was elected in May 1993 following the assassination of Hezbollah founder and then-Secretary General Abbas al Musawi in 1992. The council subsequently amended its rules to allow a secretary general to extend his candidacy beyond two consecutive terms. Five sub-councils or assemblies oversee different aspects of Hezbollah's activities and report to the Consultative Council:

1. The Political Assembly monitors and manages relations with domestic political actors;
2. the *Jihad* Assembly manages "resistance activity"³⁰ including "oversight, recruitment, training, equipment, security" and other activities;
3. the Parliamentary Assembly manages Hezbollah's activities in parliament and provides legislative analysis and constituent services;

²⁷ U.N. Security Council Document S/2010/193, "Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004)," April 19, 2010.

²⁸ Amnon Meranda, "Military Intelligence: Hezbollah Scuds tip of iceberg," Ynet News Online (Israel), May 4, 2010.

²⁹ Information in this section is drawn from Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem's description of the organization's structure and activities along with other recent press accounts. See Qassem, 2005, pp. 59-86, and OSC Report FEA20090714870107, "Overview of Hizballah Officials' Biographic Information, Organizational Structure," July 13, 2009.

³⁰ Qassem, 2005, p. 63

4. the Executive Assembly oversees political party and organizational management, including social, cultural, and educational activities; and,
5. the Judicial Assembly provides religious rulings and conflict mediation services for Hezbollah members and communities.

The assassination of Hezbollah militia commander and intelligence director Imad Mughniyah in February 2008 in Damascus was viewed as an important blow to the organization's leadership. Mughniyah was on several U.S. and international most wanted lists for his participation in numerous terrorist attacks as well as his roles as Hezbollah's military commander and intelligence chief. Other important figures in Hezbollah's leadership include Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem, Consultative Council member and Nasrallah political advisor Hussein al Khalil, Political Assembly Chairman Ibrahim Amin al Sayyid, Executive Assembly Chairman Hashim Safi al Din, Consultative Council member and logistics coordinator Mohammed Yazbik, and military commander Mustafa Badr al Din.

Ideology and Policies

The basic worldview outlined in Hezbollah's 1985 manifesto continues to guide the organization, although its leaders have updated their positions to reflect changes in domestic and international politics. Drawing on Shiite religious and cultural traditions and building on the ideology of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini and other Shiite Islamist clerics, Hezbollah portrays itself as a defender of the oppressed and the weak against what it regards as the injustice of the strong. Specifically, Hezbollah defines itself in direct opposition to what it views as a basic imbalance in global and regional power in favor of the United States and Israel. Hezbollah leaders consider recent U.S. foreign policy as driven by an urge to consolidate U.S. economic and political hegemony under the guise of combating terrorism. Historically, Hezbollah has sought to justify its actions as legitimate resistance to the occupation of Lebanese territory by Israel and as opposition to U.S. intervention in Lebanese and regional affairs. However, recent events, including the 2006 war with Israel, the May 2008 armed clashes between Hezbollah and other Lebanese groups, and the delivery of increased international assistance and training to the LAF and ISF have created a shifting political landscape that complicates Hezbollah's appeal for legitimacy beyond its core supporters.³¹

Recent statements by Hezbollah's leaders illustrate the group's desire to restate its positions and address these new realities. Most notably, on November 30, 2009, Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah appeared at a televised press conference and read a lengthy political document "meant to highlight Hizballah's political vision," along with the group's "hopes, aspirations, and concerns."³² The speech was considered an update to the long-standing 1985 manifesto, and included statements on the following key issues:

On the United States, Israel, and the international system:

³¹ While Lebanese citizens routinely condemn the scale of Israel's retaliatory attacks in 2006, many simultaneously blame Hezbollah for starting the fighting. Similarly, press accounts and anecdotal reporting suggest that many Lebanese resent Hezbollah's use of weapons against its domestic rivals in early 2008, and indicate that many citizens are taking pride in the development of state security forces with U.S. and other international support.

³² OSC Report GMP20091130644002, "Nasrallah Holds News Conference, Announces Hizballah's New 'Political Document,'" *Al Manar* Television (Beirut), November 30, 2009. The written Arabic text of the document is available on Hezbollah's official website at: <http://www.moqawama.org/essaydetailsf.php?eid=16245&fid=47>.

The course of U.S.-Israeli tyranny and arrogance ... is witnessing military defeats and political failures, which showed a successive failure of the U.S. strategies and plans one after another. All this has led to a state of confusion, retreat, and inability to control the course of developments and events in our Arab and Islamic world. These facts are integrated within the framework of a larger international scene, which, for its part, contributes to exposing the U.S. predicament and the retreat of the control of the unipolar system in favor of pluralism, whose features have not become stable yet.... We are witnessing historic transformations heralding the retreat of the United States as a hegemonic power, the disintegration of the hegemonic unipolar system, and the start of the formation of the accelerating historic eclipse of the Zionist entity.

On Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

Our stand toward the settlement of the Palestinian issue has been, continues to be, and will always remain a firm and unchanging ideological stand because it is based on clear and deep-rooted rights. Our stand toward the settlement and the agreements that were produced along the Madrid negotiations track, through the Wadi al Arabah agreement and its annexes, the Oslo Agreement and its annexes, and before that the Camp David Agreement and its annexes has been, continues to be, and will always remain a firm and categorical rejection of the principle and option of a settlement with the Zionist entity—an option based on recognizing the legitimacy of its existence and conceding to it what it has usurped from the Arab and Islamic land of Palestine. This stand is a firm, permanent, and final and it does not tolerate any retreat or compromise even if the entire world recognizes Israel.

On Iran:

Iran has formulated its political ideology and built its vital space on the basis of the centrality of the Palestine cause, hostility to Israel, confronting U.S. policies, and integration with the Arab and Muslim environment, and should be met with cooperation and a fraternal will. Iran should be dealt with as a base of awakening and motivating others; a center of strategic influence; a model of sovereignty, independence, and liberation that supports the independence-seeking and contemporary Arab-Islamic project; and as a power that renders the states and peoples of our region stronger and more impregnable.

On Syria:

Syria has taken a distinguished and steadfast stand in the conflict with the Israeli enemy. It has supported resistance movements in the region and stood by them in the most difficult circumstances, and sought to unite Arab efforts to safeguard the interests of the region and face the challenges. We emphasize the need to maintain the distinguished relations between Lebanon and Syria, for they are a common political, security, and economic need dictated by the interests of the two countries and the two peoples, the needs of political geography, and the requirements of Lebanon's stability and the confrontation of common challenges. We also call for an end to the entire negative climate that blemished relations between the two countries in the past few years, and we call for restoring those relations to their normal state as soon as possible.

On Hezbollah's role in providing for Lebanon's security:

...in light of the existing imbalance of power, the constant Israeli threat necessitates that Lebanon should consolidate a defensive formula based on a union of popular resistance that contributes to defending the homeland in the face of any Israeli invasion, and a national army that protects the homeland and maintains its security and stability in an integrated process

that proved its success in the previous stage in managing the conflict with the enemy, achieved victories for Lebanon, and provided it with means of protection.

The success of the resistance's experience in confronting the enemy, and the failure of all schemes and wars to eliminate, besiege, or disarm the resistance, and the continued and persisting Israeli threat to Lebanon, makes it incumbent on the resistance to strive tirelessly to acquire the means of strength and to bolster its capabilities and resources so as to enable it to carry out its duty and undertake its national responsibilities, in order to contribute toward completing the task of liberating the part of our territory that remains under occupation in the Shib'a Farms, the Kfar Shouba Hills, and the Lebanese town of Al Ghajar, retrieve the remaining prisoners, missing persons, and the martyrs' remnants, and to participate in the task of defending and protecting the land and its people.

Implications for Lebanon

As noted above, the nature of "the resistance" and the roles Hezbollah will play in Lebanon's future political and security arrangements are the focus of intense public debate in Lebanon. Hezbollah's new political statement and the adoption of the newly elected government's ministerial statement in late 2009 marked important attempts to define the terms of the current debate.³³ Within this framework, Hezbollah seeks to maintain its armed capabilities in "union"³⁴ with the national army, and the majority March 14³⁵ coalition and its allies seek to circumscribe the role of "the resistance" within the boundaries of specific territorial disputes with external parties. Hezbollah's fundamental opposition to Israel as outlined in its November 2009 statement suggests that potentially irreconcilable differences could emerge within Lebanon's political leadership, particularly in the event that the resolution of outstanding Lebanese or Syrian disputes with Israel over specific territories improves the prospects for bilateral peace agreements.

When asked in November 2009 about the issue of Hezbollah's military capabilities persisting alongside or in combination with national security forces, Hassan Nasrallah emphasized Hezbollah's view that the need for a "union" of Hezbollah and state forces would persist "as long as the balances of power are upset and as long as the strong and able state is absent."³⁶ He added, "if we have a strong and able state, there will be no need even for such a combination; the state will shoulder the responsibility and defend the country in this case." Nasrallah and other Hezbollah leaders often state their belief that the Lebanese state, even with the support of the United States and others, will be politically precluded from developing military capabilities that would allow it to effectively deter potential external aggression, particularly potential military

³³ For more information, see CRS Report R40054, *Lebanon: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Casey L. Addis.

³⁴ The Arabic word used in the written statement is 'muzawaja' which means 'pairing' or 'union' and is derived from the root word for marriage. Some Lebanese critics of the statement made light of what they considered Hezbollah's proposal for an "illegitimate marriage" between the LAF and "the resistance."

³⁵ The March 14 coalition is led by Prime-Minister Saad Hariri and his Sunni party Future Movement. It consists largely of Sunni and Christian parties. The opposition March 8 Alliance is led by Lebanon's largest Shiite party Amal and the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement. It also includes Hezbollah. These alliances developed in 2005 following Syrian withdrawal from Lebanese territory and were reshuffled (to a degree) following the 2009 parliamentary elections. Most analysts agree that, while based partly on shared ideology, these alliances are not static. In Lebanon's sectarian political system, alliances often change based on changing perceptions of political power or anticipated changes in the status quo.

³⁶ OSC Report GMP20091130644002, "Nasrallah Holds News Conference, Announces Hizballah's New 'Political Document,'" *Al Manar* Television (Beirut), November 30, 2009.

intervention by Israel. As such, Nasrallah's advocacy of a "union until sufficiency" approach may amount to an argument for preserving the status quo indefinitely based on the expectation that state forces will never have capabilities that are sufficient in Hezbollah's view to remedy the imbalance of power with Israel.

The majority March 14 movement and its allies continue to walk the line of paying lip service to nationalist opposition to Israeli occupation and over-flights of Lebanese territory while seeking to maintain political pressure on Hezbollah through public debate and the mechanism of the National Dialogue. Multiple critiques of Hezbollah's "union" proposal have been aired in recent months, with several majority figures warning of Hezbollah's intention to maintain its "state within a state." In response to increasingly heated rhetoric from both sides, Prime Minister Saad al Hariri emphasized on April 29, 2010, that:

...the Lebanese disagree these days over the issue of Hezbollah's weapons, and a dialogue must be held over these weapons, given that the language of dialogue is the one which we want to triumph over any other considerations.... Any decision we take will be consensual and a dialogue is ongoing these days. We do not disclose the nature of the deliberations held on the dialogue table since this issue is sensitive and has some sort of uniqueness. This is why this issue will remain within the framework of the dialogue table and the fact of raising it is of paramount importance.³⁷

As such, observers closely monitored statements by Prime Minister Hariri and others in the run-up to the June 17 and August 19 National Dialogue sessions. The sessions, as usual, did not produce an agreement on national defense or other issues. The next session is scheduled for October. Some observers continue to warn about the potential for political paralysis similar to the stalemate that prevailed from 2006 through 2008 and fueled sectarian tension. Others note that such paralysis already exists. Meanwhile, the ostensibly apolitical bodies of the LAF, ISF, and presidency continue to engage with the United States and other external parties on a number of capacity-building programs designed to strengthen state institutions vis-à-vis a range of non-state actors, including Hezbollah.

Subordinating Hezbollah to state institutions and eliminating its "state within a state" may rely in part on the eventual erosion of Hezbollah's popular support, which most observers agree is strong among Lebanese Shiites and in areas historically controlled by Hezbollah. Hezbollah's popularity is based on a number of factors—its military campaign against Israel, its Lebanese character, its role as an advocate for historically marginalized Shiites, its respect for religious piety, and its vast social services network.³⁸ Many of its Lebanese supporters view Hezbollah's military capability to be irrelevant and endorse the organization as a political party largely for its social services or religious piety, or for some combination of these and other factors. The legitimacy that this popular support provides compounds the challenges of limiting Hezbollah's influence by consensus.

³⁷ OSC Report GMP20100501158001, "PM Al-Hariri on Hizballah's Weapons, Ties With Syria, Mideast Peace Process" *Al Watan* (Doha), April 29, 2010.

³⁸ For a discussion of Hezbollah's "Social Unit," see Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hezbollah*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 2004, pp.49-58.

Shib'a Farms and Other Disputed Areas

Most third parties have long maintained that the Shib'a Farms are part of the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights and are not part of the Lebanese territory from which Israel was required to withdraw under U.N. Security Council Resolution 425 (1978).³⁹ Lebanon, supported by Syria, asserted that this territory is part of Lebanon and should have been evacuated by Israel when the latter abandoned its self-declared security zone in southern Lebanon in 2000. Some observers have argued that by certifying Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in June 2000, then-U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan implied that, in the view of the United Nations, the Shib'a Farms are not part of Lebanon. However, the certification report stressed that the United Nations had "not established any legally binding or relevant precedents concerning this part of the border [the Farms] between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic."⁴⁰ (See **Figure 2** above.)

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) called on the U.N. Secretary-General to develop a proposal for the delineation of Lebanon's international borders including in the disputed Shib'a Farms enclave. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's October 2007 report on the implementation of Resolution 1701 included a "provisional definition" of the Farms based on the work of an expert survey team.⁴¹ The Secretary-General continues to urge Israel, Syria, and Lebanon to formally respond to the "provisional definition" of the Farms in the interest of advancing the border demarcation process and defusing the ongoing dispute over whether Israel is occupying Lebanese or Syrian territory in the area. The U.N. Secretary-General repeated his call for a response from the parties most recently in his April 2010 report on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559.⁴²

In the past, Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Shaikh Naim Qassem has welcomed international intervention in the dispute "if the whole of Shib'a Farms is returned to Lebanese sovereignty," but has warned that "this does not mean, however, that we [Hezbollah] need to disarm—the question of our arms is not linked to the issue of Shib'a Farms or a prisoner exchange" with Israel.⁴³ In 2008, then-Prime Minister Fouad Siniora appeared to embrace this view by arguing that Lebanon "must completely separate the issue of Israel's withdrawal from the issue of Hezbollah's weapons," and adding his view that, "there are two different issues: The Israeli withdrawal from the Farms and placing it under the supervision of the U.N. until Syria and Lebanon decide on the borders ... and the debate on the defensive strategy, which is to be decided by the Lebanese amongst themselves."⁴⁴

Current Prime Minister Saad al Hariri has taken a similar approach and recently reiterated his call for Israel's withdrawal from the northern half of the village of Al Ghajar, arguing that it "is a

³⁹ See Michael Slackman, "Shabaa [variant spelling] Farms at Center of Tension for Lebanon, Syria and Israel," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2001.

⁴⁰ U.N. Security Council Document S/2000/590 and Corr. 1, "Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978)," June 16, 2000.

⁴¹ For the detailed provisional territorial definition, see U.N. Security Council Document S/2007/641, "Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)," October 30, 2007, paragraph 58.

⁴² U.N. Security Council Document S/2010/193, "Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004)," April 19, 2010.

⁴³ *Daily Star* (Beirut), "Shebaa Moves Into Local, International Spotlights," June 22, 2008.

⁴⁴ OSC Report GMP20080620644012, June 20, 2008.

Lebanese area within the territories we took back in 2000.” The northern half of Al Ghajar was placed within Lebanese territory by the U.N. demarcation of the Blue Line in 2000 and became the focus of several Hezbollah attacks on Israeli military personnel. In 2006, the IDF recaptured the northern areas of Al Ghajar and has conducted regular military patrols there since. In 2007, the U.N. Secretary-General stated that “so long as the Israel Defense Forces remain in northern Al Ghajar, Israel will not have completed its withdrawal from southern Lebanon in accordance with its obligations under Resolution 1701 (2006).”⁴⁵ Israel has since proposed to withdraw from the northern portion of the village, which some locals oppose because it would result in the division of their community between Lebanon and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. The parallel dispute over the nearby Kfar Shouba hills further complicates matters in the tri-border area.

Special Tribunal for Lebanon

More than five years after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) at The Hague, Netherlands, has yet to issue indictments against any alleged perpetrators. The only suspects ever named in the ongoing investigation, a group of four generals who headed Lebanon’s security services at the time of the assassination and were detained in 2005, were released in 2009. According to one Lebanese observer, “Foreign governments fear the instability that might ensue if Mr. Bellemare [STL Chief Prosecutor] issues indictments, so few will regret it if he doesn’t. But the United Nations pushed for the Hariri investigation; its integrity is tied up with a plausible outcome. If that’s impossible, there is no point in insulting the victims by letting the charade continue.”⁴⁶ In March 2010, STL Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare questioned several Hezbollah officials, including Hajj Salim, who heads the Special Operations Department, Mustafa Badreddine, head of the counter-intelligence unit, and Wafiq Safa, chief of security.⁴⁷ Then, in May 2010, STL President Antonio Cassese stated that “Prosecutor Bellemare announced that he is likely to issue an indictment between September and December of this year.” Numerous media reports in July and August 2010 speculated that high-ranking members of Hezbollah may be indicted.⁴⁸

As the deadline for indictments approaches, Hezbollah appears to be mounting a public relations campaign aimed at discrediting the tribunal. From 2009 to 2010 Lebanese security forces arrested dozens of Lebanese citizens and government officials, many of whom worked in or had access to the telecommunications sector, on charges of spying for Israel. Hezbollah’s leadership has sought to link the alleged spy networks with a broader scheme to exploit the STL investigation to create discord in Lebanon.⁴⁹ On August 9, 2010, Nasrallah held a press conference in which he claimed to have evidence that implicates Israel in the Hariri assassination. He also characterized the STL as an “Israeli project” and called for an internal Lebanese commission to investigate the assassination. He said:

We have definite information on the aerial movements of the Israeli enemy the day Hariri was murdered. Hours before he was murdered, an Israeli drone was surveying the Sidon-

⁴⁵ U.N. Security Council Document S/2007/641, “Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006),” October 30, 2007, paragraph 16.

⁴⁶ “All fall down,” *The Middle East*, May 1, 2010.

⁴⁷ Op.cit.

⁴⁸ “UN Hariri court to file charges by year’s end,” *Middle East Online*, May 17, 2010.

⁴⁹ OSC Report GMP20100721966025, “The Daily Star: Baroud Refuses to Take Part in Debate Over Spy Probes,” *The Daily Star Online*, July 21, 2010.

Beirut-Jounieh coastline as warplanes were flying over Beirut.... This video can be acquired by any investigative commission to ensure it is correct. We are sure of this evidence or else we would not risk showing it.... However, if the Lebanese government is willing to form a Lebanese commission to investigate the matter, we will cooperate.... There are some who spent \$500 million in Lebanon to distort the image of Hezbollah. That's why we're engaging ourselves in a battle for public opinion, especially that some are working night and day to defend Israel's innocence.⁵⁰

Since his address, the March 14 coalition and the opposition have exchanged criticisms in the press, and recent statements have led some observers to speculate that Hezbollah's media campaign may be affecting the March 14 coalition and Prime Minister Hariri's commitment to the process. In an interview with *As-Sharq Al-Awsat* on September 6, 2010, Hariri appeared to walk back his accusation that Syria is responsible, a position that he had maintained since 2005:

I have opened a new page in relations with Syria since the formation of the government.... One must be realistic in this relationship and build it on solid foundations. One should also assess the past years, so as not to repeat previous mistakes. Hence, we conducted an assessment of errors committed on our behalf with Syria, and I felt for the Syrian people, and the relationship between the two countries. We must always look at the interest of both peoples, both countries and their relationship. At a certain stage we made mistakes. We accused Syria of assassinating the martyred premier, and this was a political accusation.... I do not want to talk much about the tribunal, but I will say that the tribunal is not linked to the political accusations, which were hasty.

Hariri's statements have raised concerns that the political costs of supporting the STL may be increasing, and that Hezbollah and the opposition's campaign has upped the ante for indictments; some analysts have questioned whether they will be issued at all. Bellemare has repeatedly stated that he will not allow the investigation to be influenced by Lebanese politics, "I am not influenced by what is said on TV. If I was to gauge my investigation along this, then I would be politicized. I have to go through the steps to make sure the result is a credible (step). And that the people—the victims and their relatives—will have an outcome they are able to believe."⁵¹ U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon responded to the recent exchanges between Hariri and Nasrallah by saying that he does not believe that the future of the STL is at stake: "The Special Tribunal on Lebanon has been working and making progress. This is an independent judiciary process, so that should not be linked with any political remarks by whomever, by any politicians."

Syria

Obama Administration assessments of Syria's continuing relationship with Hezbollah have been uniformly negative. In February 2009, DNI Blair stated that "Syrian military support to Hizballah has increased substantially over the past five years, especially since the 2006 Israel-Hizballah war." In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on April 21, 2010, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman stated:

⁵⁰ OSC Report GMP20100810637004, "Al-Manar: Sayyed Nasrallah: Israel Behind Hariri's Assassination," *Beirut Al-Manar TV Online*, August 10, 2010

⁵¹ OSC Report GMP20100908966046, "Rare Bellemare, An Assessment," *Beirut NOW Lebanon*, September 8, 2010.

Whereas the late Syrian President Hafez al-Asad seemed to view Hezbollah as a point of leverage he could use with Israel, President Bashar al-Asad's unprecedented political and military support for the organization speaks to a different and even more troubling relationship. The Syrian Army's 2005 withdrawal from Lebanon and Hezbollah's 2006 conflict with Israel deepened the strategic interdependence between the Syrian state and Hezbollah. Hezbollah's actions in Lebanon and abroad contravene Security Council Resolution 1701, are inconsistent with Lebanon's democratic processes, stoke sectarian tensions, and threaten to spark renewed conflict in the region. Time and again, we have seen that Hezbollah's weapons and Syria's support for its role as an independent armed force in Lebanon are a threat, both to Israel, and to Lebanon itself, as well as a major obstacle to achieving peace in the region.

In summary, Ambassador Feltman argued that "Syria's relationship with Hezbollah and the Palestinian terrorist groups is unlikely to change absent a Middle East peace agreement." The Obama Administration has pursued a policy of limited engagement with Syria in order to more clearly communicate U.S. views and interests to Damascus. According to U.S. officials, the limited engagement strategy also seeks to convince Syrian leaders that their support for Hezbollah ultimately destabilizes the region and makes it less likely that they will secure their core national security objectives, including the return of the occupied Golan Heights from Israel.⁵² Recent reports concerning the possible transfer of "increasingly sophisticated ballistic weapons" from Syria to Hezbollah underscored the importance of clear bilateral communication. Administration officials have recounted their efforts to convince the Syrian government of the gravity of the situation with limited apparent result.⁵³

In February 2010, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that, "The effective management of the borders of Lebanon continues to be affected by the lack of demarcation of the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and by the continued presence of Palestinian military bases which straddle the border between the two countries."⁵⁴ Syrian-Lebanese relations appeared to improve with the visit of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al Hariri to Damascus in late December 2009. However, since that time, no announcements have been made regarding the demarcation of a common border. The joint visit of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hezbollah Secretary General Nasrallah to Damascus in February 2010 also cast doubt on the willingness of Syrian leaders to fundamentally shift their positions regarding Lebanese sovereignty and security.

⁵² In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on March 16, 2010, U.S. Ambassador-designate to the Syrian Arab Republic Robert Ford said: "...we feel very strongly that Syria could take steps, and it should take steps. Hezbollah has rearmed since 2006, and it does present a real threat to Israel and it presents a real threat to regional stability. And I do not see how instability in the region serves Syrian interests."

⁵³ In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia on April 21, 2010, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman said: "On February 26th I asked the Syrian ambassador, Imad Moustapha, to come see me in my office because we were so concerned with the information we had that Syria was passing increasingly sophisticated ballistic weapons to Hezbollah. On March 1st, a couple days later, the NSC [National Security Council] delivered a similar message to the Syrian ambassador. On March 10th, [Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Ambassador] Bill Burns delivered a similar message to the Syrian ambassador, who then has gone public and said we've never delivered such a message. Either [Moustapha] is not listening, or he's not delivering the message to his capital, or something else, but it reinforces the point that when we have an issue of this urgency, we need to be having access to the leadership in Syria to express our concerns."

⁵⁴ U.N. Security Council Document S/2010/105, "Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)," February 26, 2010.

The Obama Administration is supporting Lebanon's efforts to assess its border management needs and improve its capabilities. For example, in late April 2010, a State Department anti-terrorism assistance team visited Beirut's port and the border checkpoint at Masnaa on the main Beirut-Damascus highway to assess existing programs and determine the needs of Lebanese forces. At present, Lebanese authorities have prioritized the training and equipping of a new 700-person, joint LAF-ISF Common Border Force to patrol Lebanon's eastern border with Syria. According to the U.N. Secretary-General's February 2010 report, "in order to become fully operational, the Common Border Force II will require equipment and the realization of necessary infrastructure works in its area of responsibility."

Iran

According to U.S. officials, the Islamic Republic of Iran is Hezbollah's principal source of external material, financial, and political support. The Obama Administration's 2010 report on Iran's military power states:

Iran has been involved in Lebanon since the early days of the Islamic Republic, especially seeking to expand ties with the country's large Shia population. The IRGC played an instrumental role in the establishment of Lebanese Hizballah (LH) in 1982 and has continued to be vital to the development of the organization. The IRGC-QF [Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – Quds Force] provides financial, weapons, training, and logistical support to Lebanese Hizballah. In turn, Lebanese Hizballah has trained Iraqi insurgents in Iraq, Iran and Lebanon, providing them with the training, tactics and technology to conduct kidnappings, small unit tactical operations and employ sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs), incorporating lessons learned from operations in southern Lebanon.

... Iran, through its longstanding relationship with Lebanese Hizballah, maintains a capability to strike Israel directly and threaten Israeli and U.S. interests worldwide. With Iranian support, Lebanese Hizballah has successfully exceeded 2006 Lebanon conflict armament levels. On 4 November [2009], Israel interdicted the merchant vessel *FRANCOP*, which had 36 containers, 60 tons, of weapons for Hizballah to include 122mm katyushas [Soviet-style short-range rockets], 107mm rockets, 106mm antitank shells, hand grenades, light-weapon ammunition. The IRGC-QF operates training camps in Lebanon, training as many as 3,000 or more LH fighters. Additionally, Iran also provides roughly \$100-200 million per year in funding to support Hizballah.⁵⁵

Experts are divided over the extent to which and means by which Iranian officials influence Hezbollah's decisions about its security posture and engagement in Lebanon's political process. Some observers contend that Iran's considerable and seemingly irreplaceable material and financial support are such that Hezbollah figures are not in a position to resist demands from Iran. Others argue that Hezbollah maintains a significant degree of independence by virtue of its indispensability to its Iranian supporters. According to this view, Iran's ability to influence political and security developments on Israel's northern border would be much diminished without Hezbollah's support, giving Hezbollah leaders significant leverage in discussions with their Iranian benefactors.

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, Annual Unclassified Report on Military Power of Iran, Required by Section 1245 of the FY2010 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 111-84), April 2010.

Iranian influence over Hezbollah also may vary with regard to different elements of the organization and in different political contexts. The close relationship between the IRGC and Hezbollah's "resistance" elements may afford Iran a level of influence it does not enjoy with Hezbollah's political cadres, who, by Hezbollah's accounts, are compartmentalized from the decision making process for the organization's intelligence and military training activities. Recent events suggest that Hezbollah's domestic political interests and the transnational security priorities shared by Iranian and Hezbollah security officials create competing pressures in some cases. For example, in 2008, Hezbollah's armed response to Lebanese government efforts to assert control over Beirut airport security and national communication networks damaged the group's image as nationalist resistance fighters among some groups even as it may have preserved the organization's operational effectiveness as a potential Iranian military proxy.

Hezbollah's International Activities

Hezbollah's network and activities extend beyond Lebanon and the Levant, though experts are divided over their extent and nature. In September 2006, in a hearing before Congress, then-Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department Frank Urbancic, Jr. stated that:

Looking globally, Hezbollah's support network extends into the Middle East, where it performs various fundraising activities. It has supported terrorist activities in the Palestinian territories since at least 2000 by providing financial, training, and logistical support to Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian terrorist groups. Although there is little credible evidence of operational Hezbollah cells in Latin America currently, Hezbollah does have supporters and sympathizers throughout the Arab and Muslim communities in that region, and these are involved primarily in fundraising. Hezbollah's supporters and sympathizers are also involved in a number of illegal activities, as has been mentioned by several Members of the Subcommittees. Hezbollah receives a significant amount of financing from the Shiite diaspora of West Africa and Central Africa.⁵⁶

Since 2006, analysts have speculated about the nature of Hezbollah's international patronage networks. Most agree that the vast majority of these criminal enterprises are ethnic Lebanese in South America, North America, Europe, and West Africa who support Hezbollah for religious, ideological, or personal reasons and voluntarily remit money through couriers or electronic transfers.⁵⁷ Some, however, have vocalized concerns that these networks also might provide logistical support or function as "sleeper cells" should Hezbollah decide to attack U.S. or Israeli interests abroad.

- **The Middle East.** While Hezbollah's most robust presence remains in the Levant, its support network extends well beyond, including into the Gulf, where Hezbollah performs various fundraising activities. Hezbollah has supported terrorist activities in the Palestinian territories since at least 2000, by providing

⁵⁶ Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, House Committee on International Relations, September 28, 2006. Transcript available online at <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/archives/109/30143.pdf>.

⁵⁷ See Frank C. Urbancic, "Hizballah's Global Reach," testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, and Subcommittee on Middle East and Central Asia," September 28, 2006; Doug Farah, "Hezbollah's External Support Network in West Africa and Latin America," International Assessment and Strategy Center, August 4, 2006.

financial, training, and logistical support to Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and other Palestinian terrorist groups. The April 2009 conviction of a Hezbollah cell in Egypt for spying, plotting attacks on resorts frequented by tourists, and arms smuggling illustrates Hezbollah's growing regional reach and ambitions. Since at least 2004, Hezbollah has provided training to select Iraqi Shia militants, including the construction and use of shaped charge improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that can penetrate heavily armored vehicles.⁵⁸

- **West and Central Africa.** Hezbollah receives a significant amount of financing from the Shiite Muslim diaspora of West and Central Africa. The Lebanese diaspora is active in West Africa's commercial sector with extensive business networks throughout the region and extending beyond. In many cases these businesses have significant control over basic imported commodities, such as rice and chicken. Lebanese traders are also very active in diamond exports, both as a business and in criminal exploitation. Contributions, which often take the form of religious donations, are often paid in cash and are collected by Hezbollah couriers transiting the region. These groups provide safe haven for Hezbollah fighters.⁵⁹ It is important to note that the Lebanese community in West Africa is not monolithically Muslim nor completely supportive of Hezbollah, but mirrors the same religious and political divisions present in Lebanon.
- **Latin America.** Although there is little credible evidence of the present activity of operational Hezbollah cells in Latin America, Hezbollah has numerous supporters and sympathizers throughout Arab and Muslim communities in the region who are involved primarily in raising funds for the terrorist group by licit and illicit means. Hezbollah supporters and sympathizers are involved in a number of illegal activities, including smuggling, drug and arms trafficking, money laundering, fraud, intellectual property piracy, and other transnational crime. Hezbollah also was implicated in the attacks on the Israeli Embassy in Argentina in 1992 and on the Argentine-Israelite Mutual Association in Buenos Aires in 1994. A number of independent reports have raised questions about Hezbollah's ongoing activities in Latin America, particularly in the tri-border area between Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. For example, Paraguayan investigators estimate that Lebanese immigrant Assad Barakat funneled to Hezbollah about \$6 million a year between 1999 and 2003 from his extensive smuggling and counterfeiting operation.⁶⁰
- **North America.** In the United States, associates of terrorist organizations have used alleged Middle East charitable organizations to funnel money back home to support various terrorist organizations. The FBI, with its partners in the Department of the Treasury, Department of State, and the rest of the Department of Justice, works closely to have these organizations that are providing material support to terrorists shut down and have those knowingly engaged in such

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism – 2009, August 5, 2010.

⁵⁹ Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, House Committee on International Relations, September 28, 2006. Transcript available online at <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/archives/109/30143.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Michael P. Arena, "Hizballah's Global Crime Operations," *Global Crime*, Vol. 7, No. 3, August 2006, p. 60.; and Rensselaer Lee, "The Triborder-Terrorism Nexus," *Global Crime*, Vol. 9, No. 4, November 2008, p. 334.

conduct criminally charged.⁶¹ In June 2002, two men in North Carolina were tried and convicted for providing material support to Hezbollah through racketeering and conspiracy to commit money laundering by channeling profits from cigarette smuggling to purchase military equipment for Hezbollah.⁶² In July 2007, the Department of the Treasury declared that Goodwill Charitable Organization, Inc. in Dearborn, MI, was a fundraising front for Hezbollah, closed the offices, and froze the organization's assets in U.S. financial institutions.⁶³

U.S. Efforts and International Efforts to Combat Hezbollah

To date, the United States has used official terrorist designations and listings to impose financial and immigration sanctions on Hezbollah and its supporters, including the blocking of assets under U.S. jurisdiction, a prohibition on U.S. citizens providing financial or material support to or engaging in financial transactions with designated parties, and a prohibition on entry into the United States and authorization of deportation for Hezbollah associated individuals. In 1995, the United States listed Hezbollah as a Specially Designated Terrorist (SDT).⁶⁴ The Department of State designated Hezbollah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in 1997.⁶⁵ In 2001, the U.S. government designated Hezbollah as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) pursuant to Executive Order 13224. In support of the designations of Hezbollah as an organization, the U.S. government has designated several affiliated individuals and entities as SDGTs, including Hezbollah spiritual adviser Sayyid Hussayn Fadlallah, Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, late intelligence chief Imad Mugniyah, former Secretary General Subhi Tufayli, financial facilitators Qasem Aliq and Hussain and Ahmad al Shami, and others involved in Hezbollah's support networks in Africa and South America. Organizations and entities designated include Hezbollah financial conduits such as the Islamic Resistance Support Organization, the *Bayt al Mal* (House of Finance); the Yousser Company for Finance and Investment; Al Qard al Hassan (an investment firm); the Martyrs Foundation in Iran and Lebanon; Hezbollah's construction arms "*Jihad al Binaa*" and the Waad Project; and Hezbollah communication entities Lebanese Media Group, Radio Al Nour, and Al Manar Television.

⁶¹ Statement of John Kavanagh, Section Chief, International Terrorism Operations Section II, Counterterrorism Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, House Committee on International Relations, September 28, 2006. Transcript available online at <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/archives/109/30143.pdf>.

⁶² Remarks of Under Secretary Jimmy Gurule, 2002 National Money Laundering Strategy Roll Out, U.S. Department of the Treasury Press Release, July 25, 2002. Available online at: <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/po3287.htm>.

⁶³ Paul Egan, "Feds Tie Dearborn Charity to Terror: Group accused of being a front for Hezbollah," *Detroit News*, July 25, 2007, and "U.S. Treasury Bans Dealings with Hezbollah Supporters," *Reuters*, July 24, 2007.

⁶⁴ The designation was made pursuant to Executive Order 12947 of January 23, 1995, which targeted parties threatening the Middle East peace process. The statutory authority for the designation cited in the executive order is the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701 et seq., IEEPA) and the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.).

⁶⁵ The FTO designation was made pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act as amended by the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA, P.L. 104-132). See U.S. Department of State, Public Notice 2612, Designation of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, October 2, 1997 - Federal Register, Volume 62, Number 195, October 8, 1997, pp. 52649-52651.

The United States also has targeted supporters of Hezbollah in Iran and Syria with financial sanctions:

- In 2004, President Bush issued Executive Order 13338, which targets individuals involved with Syria's provision of safe haven and support to U.S.-designated terrorists. Among those designated pursuant to E.O.13338 for providing assistance to Hezbollah are Military Intelligence Director Assef Shawkat and the late Ghazi Kanaan, then-Syrian minister of interior. Both individuals allegedly oversaw the provision of material support to Hezbollah and coordinated Syrian-Hezbollah security cooperation in Lebanon.
- In 2007, President Bush issued Executive Order 13441, which targets individuals acting to undermine "Lebanon's democratic processes or institutions, contributing to the breakdown of the rule of law in Lebanon, supporting the reassertion of Syrian control or otherwise contributing to Syrian interference in Lebanon, or infringing upon or undermining Lebanese sovereignty." A number of Syrian officials have been designated pursuant to this executive order including Muhammad Nasif Khayrbik, who the Department of the Treasury described as having "coordinated Syrian and Hezbollah positions during regular meetings with Hassan Nasrallah."
- In September 2006, the Office of Foreign Assets Control amended the Iranian Transactions Regulations (31 CFR part 560) to exclude Iran's Bank Saderat from the U.S. financial system in part for having been "a significant facilitator of Hizballah's financial activities" and serving "as a conduit between the Government of Iran and Hizballah."

The United States has backed United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for the disarmament of non-state actors in Lebanon (Resolution 1701) and the prevention of weapons trafficking from Iran to other states, including Lebanon (Resolution 1747). The U.S. Navy has taken enforcement action against suspected shipments of Iranian-origin weaponry to the Levant: In January 2009, U.S. Navy personnel boarded and searched the *MV Monchegorsk* in the Red Sea. The ship subsequently was monitored before being detained in Cypriot waters for inspection. The United Nations Sanctions Committee on Iran established pursuant to Resolution 1737 later determined that that "military ordnance" and "raw materials used for the assembly of munitions" found on board the ship violated the embargo on arms shipments from Iran.

European governments have taken a varied approach to Hezbollah. While the militaries of European Union member states play a leading role in international efforts to restrict the flow of weaponry to Hezbollah and their governments have backed U.N. resolutions calling for its eventual disarmament, many Europeans have resisted calls to designate the organization as a terrorist group. Some governments, including the former Labor government of Gordon Brown in the United Kingdom, have considered Hezbollah to have distinct political and military wings and pursued engagement with Hezbollah political representatives while supporting broader efforts to isolate Hezbollah militarily. However, not all governments avoid contact with Hezbollah's security elements: Germany's intelligence services have engaged in several prisoner and casualty exchange negotiations as an intermediary between Hezbollah and Israel since the mid-1990s.

Members of Congress have long called for individual EU member states and the European Union as a whole to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in order to target Hezbollah's recruiting, media, and fundraising activities in Europe. While some EU representatives have supported this position, others have not, and a consensus in favor of isolation has not emerged. At

present, EU officials appear committed to a conditional engagement approach based on Hezbollah's participation in Lebanon's national government. In June 2009, then-EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana met with elected Hezbollah officials and said, "Hezbollah is part of political life in Lebanon and is represented in the Lebanese parliament." His successor, Catherine Ashton, did not meet publicly with elected Hezbollah representatives or cabinet officials during her visit to Lebanon in March 2010.

Issues for Congressional Consideration: Potential Options for Weakening Hezbollah

At present, clear solutions to the challenges that Hezbollah poses to the governments of Lebanon, Israel, and the United States are not evident. Administration reports state that Hezbollah has rearmed and expanded its arsenal in defiance of United Nations Security Council resolutions and in spite of international efforts to prevent the smuggling of weaponry from Iran and Syria into Lebanon. Lebanese border and maritime security capabilities remain nascent, and long-standing political conflicts continue to prevent the clear delineation of boundaries between Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. Administration reports state that Iran continues to provide Hezbollah with weapons, training, and financing, thereby sustaining the organization's ability to field an effective military force that threatens Israel's security and the sovereignty of the Lebanese government. Hezbollah's electoral success in the 2009 national elections and its seats in Lebanon's cabinet complicate U.S. and other international efforts to engage with Beirut on security issues and a number of key reform questions. Lebanon's domestic political environment appears fractured by sectarian and political rivalries, and its leaders remain at an impasse with regard to the overarching questions of the country's security needs and the future of Hezbollah's weapons.

Critics of U.S. policies aimed at weakening Hezbollah argue that while the United States has taken measures to support the Lebanese state, it has not simultaneously taken direct action to limit the influence of Hezbollah in Lebanon and in the region, to stop the flow of weapons to Hezbollah, or to disarm its militant wing. While U.S. policy focuses on building state institutions in Lebanon in an effort to create the political space for the Lebanese government to manage its own internal security threats and develop its own national defense strategy, analysts and policy makers have posited a number of other potential diplomatic, assistance, and security-related measures that could potentially weaken Hezbollah.

Possible Diplomatic Strategies

Undermine Hezbollah's "National Resistance" Credentials

Hezbollah's legitimacy is based on an ideology that promotes resistance to foreign "occupiers," particularly Israel, and the organization has styled itself as the defender of Lebanon against those occupiers. Hezbollah often cites historical grievances against Israel as the justification for its weapons arsenal. Some analysts have suggested that Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Al Ghajar village and limiting or ending Israeli overflights of southern Lebanon could serve to reduce tensions and undermine Hezbollah's "national resistance" credentials by eliminating the

historical Lebanese grievances with Israel.⁶⁶ Advocates of this approach argue that the organization would have no choice but to refocus its efforts on domestic Lebanese issues if its historical grievances against Israel were remedied and that statements by the organization's leadership support this assertion. In 2008, Nasrallah stated that:

We are ready to draw up a defence strategy for Lebanon, have the prisoners released, and liberate the Shebaa Farms and the Kfar Shuba Hills in order to close the liberation file. As Lebanese, we will discuss the other file called the defence of Lebanon. The Israelis commit violations, level threats, and harbour ambitions in water.... This means that Lebanon remains under threat.... If we have another means to defend our country, if we no longer need the resistance and its weapons, and if it is better for us to send young men back to their schools, homes, and families, then we will have no problem. We have never said that our resistance is eternal or that we will keep our weapons forever.... Some people say that we will not accept any proposal.... The southern villagers have paid a high price over the past 30 years and since the establishment of the [Israeli] entity in 1948. Let us try to persuade the southerners of some defence strategy—and this is a new proposal—so that they can return to their homes.... We do not consider ourselves an alternative to the state or any other body.... Let others defend and protect the country. We have no problem with that at all.⁶⁷

This strategy depends on Israel's willingness to concede these changes and/or on the ability of the United States to exact concessions from Israel. Israel fears that Hezbollah will characterize any concessions as "victories" and use them to consolidate public support, as it did both in 2000 following Israeli withdrawal and again after the war in 2006. Others argue that any short-term gain by Hezbollah in terms of popular support would be outweighed by the eventual erosion of its legitimacy.

Engage Hezbollah

Some analysts, observers, and former U.S. government officials have argued that the current U.S. approach to Hezbollah is antiquated and that engagement may be the best way to contain and eventually disarm Hezbollah. In his testimony before Congress, retired Ambassador Ryan Crocker advocated that the U.S. reconsider its policy:

We should talk to Hezbollah. One thing I learned in Iraq is that engagement can be extremely valuable in ending an insurgency. Sometimes persuasion and negotiation change minds. But in any case we would learn far more about the organization than we know now—personalities, differences, points of weakness. We cannot mess with our adversary's mind if we are not talking to him. This does not need to be styled as a dramatic change in policy; simply a matter of fact engagement with those who hold official positions as members of parliament or the cabinet. Hezbollah is a part of the Lebanese political landscape, and we should deal with it directly.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See, for example, Nicolas Noe, "Re-Imagining the Lebanon Track: Toward a New U.S. Policy," Century Foundation 2009, available online at <http://www.tcf.org/publications/internationalaffairs/Noe.pdf>.

⁶⁷ "Lebanese Hezbollah Chief Delivers Speech, Addresses News Conference," BBC Monitoring Middle East, July 3, 2008.

⁶⁸ Testimony of Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker to the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, June 8, 2010. Transcript available online at <http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/060810%20Crocker%20Testimony.pdf>.

Critics of this approach argue that Hezbollah is still fundamentally a violent organization and that it remains committed to war with Israel and to challenging U.S. interests in the region.⁶⁹

Observers recently have questioned whether the Obama Administration may be open to such an approach. In May 2010, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan stated that “There are [sic] certainly the elements of Hezbollah that are truly a concern to us what they’re doing. And what we need to do is to find ways to diminish their influence within the organization and to try to build up the more moderate elements.”⁷⁰ The Administration has since walked back these comments, and officials at all levels have reiterated that the United States does not engage with terrorist organizations.⁷¹ For the time being, U.S. policy makers at all levels appear to reject this option.

Pressure Syria and Iran

Syrian and Iranian support for Hezbollah is well documented (see “Syria” and “Iran” above), and some analysts have argued that, given that reality, engaging directly with Hezbollah will have little effect on the organization’s willingness to renounce violence, recognize Israel, or disarm, because the power center of the organization and its primary arms supplier are located, respectively, in Tehran and Damascus. In order to persuade the leadership in Iran and Syria, the United States could increase the costs of support for Hezbollah in a number of ways. Some analysts have argued that the United States should pursue U.N. sanctions against Syria for clear violations of Security Council Resolution 1701 and against Iran for violating Resolution 1747.⁷² Such a campaign may be perceived as an attempt to legitimize potential airstrikes against Syrian facilities along the Lebanon border should transfers of Scud missiles or other sophisticated weapons continue, and this perception could fuel regional instability by putting Syria and Iran on the offensive.

Others argue that the United States may be able to entice Syria to slow or stop its material support for Hezbollah and/or its interference in Lebanon by easing existing sanctions or brokering a peace agreement with Israel. Such an agreement could break the current alliance between Syria and Iran and eliminate or significantly diminish Syria’s need for Hezbollah as a line of defense against perceived Israeli aggression. Since taking office, the Obama Administration has worked to normalize U.S.-Syria relations through direct engagement with Damascus. Syria’s willingness to

⁶⁹ Ash Jain, “U.S. Policy on Hizballah: The Question of Engagement,” Policy Watch #1679, The Washington Institute, July 14, 2010.

⁷⁰ “U.S. Wants to Build Up Hezbollah Moderates – Advisor,” *Reuters*, May 19, 2010. Brennan made similar comments in at a conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in August 2009. The transcript is available online at http://csis.org/files/attachments/090806_brennan_transcript.pdf.

⁷¹ In his June 2010 testimony, Assistant Secretary Feltman stated that, “Should Hizballah truly desire to join the ranks of Lebanon’s other political groups in its democratic system, its path would be clear: it would fully disarm, like all other militias, renounce terrorism and political intimidation, and acknowledge the authority of the Government of Lebanon (GOL) and that government’s right, like other governments, to a monopoly on the use of force. Under those circumstances we could reconsider the group’s status.” Testimony of Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs and Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, June 8, 2010. Available online at <http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/060810%20Feltman-Benjamin%20Testimony.pdf>.

⁷² Jain. *Op. Cit.*, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1747 (adopted March 24, 2007) prohibits, among other things, the transfer of arms by Iran. Three violations have been referred to a UN sanctions committee, but with no follow-up action. The full text of the resolution is available online at http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/laeaIran/unsc_res1747-2007.pdf

cooperate with the United States depends primarily on the extent to which it credits the U.S. ability to exact concessions from Israel, particularly over the disputed Golan Heights. Recent events indicate that the Administration lacks domestic political support to expand engagement with Syria, as indicated by the still-unconfirmed ambassadorial nomination of Robert Ford to Damascus. Analysts have also questioned whether the United States has the necessary leverage to bring Israel to negotiations over disputed territories.⁷³

Possible Assistance Strategies

Improve Government Services in Southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley

The United States has provided economic assistance to Lebanon in increasing quantities since Syria withdrew its occupation force in 2005 (see **Table 1** above). The policy reflects a U.S. commitment to build state institutions and promote political and economic reforms that might eventually move Lebanon from sectarianism to a more pluralistic democracy, and creating political space for the Lebanese government to address more complex, politically sensitive issues like a strategy for national defense. While Economic Support Funds (ESF) assistance levels have been on par with military assistance in recent years, some observers question whether the U.S. assistance strategy is too focused on the security sector.

Building municipal capacity in areas historically controlled by Hezbollah could allow Lebanon's Shia community to develop political alternatives to Hezbollah and increase confidence in the government's capacity to deliver services and security. Conditional assistance from the international community might target NGOs and government efforts to provide alternatives to extremism through social services, public education, and economic growth activities. Services in the south targeted to provide an alternative to Hezbollah's social services would have to be balanced by assistance in other areas of the country or the United States and the international community could be perceived as abandoning a population that has been historically sympathetic to the West.⁷⁴

Promote Structural Political Reform

Regardless of the focus of U.S. assistance, some analysts argue that it should be tied more closely to or contingent upon structural political reforms designed to address instability and the underlying problem of Lebanese confessionalism. They assert that Hezbollah is a symptom of a broken political process and only structural change can unlock the sectarian system and create a more pluralistic democratic system. Key components of any such reform program would likely include the creation of a bicameral legislature and elections based on proportional representation.

⁷³ For more information, see CRS Report RL33487, *Syria: Issues for the 112th Congress and Background on U.S. Sanctions*, by Jeremy M. Sharp.

⁷⁴ Ambassador Crocker argued in favor of this approach in his testimony on June 8, 2010: "A corollary is a concerted Lebanese government effort, with foreign assistance, to improve economic and social conditions in Shia areas. Shia mistrust of the state is rooted in generations of alienation fostered by a sense of economic marginalization and neglect. Much of Hezbollah's strength is the product of the state's weakness. Taken together, these two initiatives could bring about a recalculation by the Shia of the relative costs and benefits of an ongoing state of military confrontation with Israel. At present, the benefits are perceived as far outweighing the costs."

Both prospects have been met with strong opposition from Lebanon's current political leaders based on entrenched sectarian interests.⁷⁵

Increase Military Assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces

Current U.S. policy toward Lebanon and U.S. security assistance to Lebanon is designed to advance two goals: state institution building and the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Critics of this policy argue that the current assistance program is not sufficient to meet those goals and that the United States should provide Lebanese security forces with more sophisticated equipment in order to enable them to take up the mantle of national defense, which Hezbollah has historically claimed. Observers have identified the need for more sophisticated equipment and more extensive training to encourage LAF leadership to cooperate and coordinate more closely with UNIFIL and for border security.⁷⁶

If a goal of U.S. policy is to increase the capacity of the LAF to such an extent that it could compel Hezbollah to give up its weapons, then the LAF would first need to pass the political test of convincing the Lebanese that it could credibly defend the country against regional threats. This political reality raises questions about whether U.S. security assistance to the LAF is consistent with expressed U.S. policy goals in Lebanon, and whether U.S. policy fully considers the political position of the Lebanese and their elected leaders on issues of national defense.

On August 3, 2010, the LAF opened fire on an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) unit engaged in routine brush-clearing maintenance along the Blue Line,⁷⁷ alleging that it had crossed over into Lebanese territory. Two Lebanese soldiers, a journalist, and an Israeli officer were killed in the confrontation. Soon after the incident, UNIFIL issued a report confirming that the IDF had not been in Lebanese territory. While the incident appears to have been isolated despite initial fears that it would escalate to broader conflict, the incident called attention to U.S. assistance to the LAF, leading some analysts and some Members of Congress to question the effectiveness of U.S. security assistance to Lebanon and the integrity of the LAF. Most analysts agree that U.S. policy makers are unlikely to expand U.S. security assistance to Lebanon under current circumstances. The United States is caught in a catch-22; it cannot equip a Lebanese army capable of confronting Hezbollah militarily without altering the military balance in the Levant and possibly affecting Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME). Furthermore, many analysts question whether the LAF, even with more advanced training and equipment, possesses the political will to confront Hezbollah. They might argue that the LAF and Hezbollah are, to a certain degree, natural allies, bound by a common threat perception and a regional outlook that is not shared by the United States.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Mona Yacoubian, "United States Institute for Peace Briefing: Lebanon's Unstable Equilibrium," November 2009. Available online at http://www.usip.org/files/resources/lebanon_equilibrium_pb.pdf.

⁷⁶ Noe. Op. Cit.

⁷⁷ The Blue Line is a U.N.-determined border used to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2001. It is not the internationally recognized border between Israel and Lebanon. Israel also erected a technical fence in the border area. It also is not the internationally recognized border nor is it the same as the Blue Line. For more information, see UNIFIL's official website at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unifil/index.shtml>.

Possible Security Strategies

Disarm Hezbollah by Force

Should the security situation in Lebanon or the region deteriorate, Israel or the United States may choose to disarm Hezbollah by force. Most policy makers, analysts, and observers agree that this option is categorically undesirable, and may even be unattainable, and that any military strike of the scale required to eliminate Hezbollah's militia would have significant political costs.⁷⁸ Some analysts and U.S. policy makers may have hoped that Israel would destroy Hezbollah in 2006, but most agree that any military campaign of that scale would be destructive to Lebanon and escalate into a broader regional war involving Syria and Iran.⁷⁹

Still, some analysts assert that another war between Israel and Hezbollah is inevitable, citing increased anti-Israeli rhetoric on the part of Hezbollah, increased Israeli statements about Hezbollah and Iran, and heightened levels of Israeli military and defense preparedness as indicators. These analysts also speculate that Israel may view any provocation as an opportunity to attempt to eliminate Hezbollah's military capability entirely.⁸⁰

Most analysts agree that a war between Hezbollah and Israel could escalate into a regional conflict and most certainly would be costly in human and material terms. Recent official Israeli statements indicate that it will not distinguish between the Lebanese government and other armed actors in future conflict. The Israeli cabinet reportedly decided in 2008 to hold the Lebanese government responsible for any attacks against Israel emanating from Lebanese territory, including those perpetrated by Hezbollah.⁸¹ Hezbollah's leadership has also adopted a more aggressive posture since 2006. On May 25, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah marked the 10th anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon with a lengthy speech in which he warned Israel that, "In any upcoming war you want to wage against Lebanon, if you besiege our coast, shores, and ports, all the military, civilian, and cargo ships that are heading to the ports of Palestine alongside the Mediterranean will be within the range of the rockets of the Islamic resistance."⁸² Even if the next regional war effectively destroyed Hezbollah's military capability, it would be difficult to guarantee that the organization could not rebuild, especially if a state of civil war or even civil disarray ensued in Lebanon.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of possible scenarios and outcomes, see "Drums of War: Israel and the 'Axis of Resistance'," Middle East Report n. 97, International Crisis Group, August 2, 2010, available online at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/97%20Drums%20of%20War%20-%20Israel%20and%20the%20Axis%20of%20Resistance.ashx>.

⁷⁹ See Michael Abramowitz, "Tough Words from this Cheney on U.S. Mideast Policy," *Washington Post*, June 9, 2008, and "Bolton Admits Lebanon Truce Block," *BBC News*, March 22, 2007.

⁸⁰ See Daniel Kurtzer, "A Third Lebanon War," CPA Contingency Planning Memorandum N. 8, Council on Foreign Relations, July 2010.

⁸¹ Barak Ravid, Israel: Lebanon is responsible for Hezbollah's actions: Cabinet declaration marks change from Israel's firm separation of Hezbollah and Lebanese government," *Haaretz.com*, August 8, 2008.

⁸² OSC Report GMP20100525644009, "Lebanon: Nasrallah Vows To Attack Israel-Bound Ships if Lebanese Shores Besieged," Al-Manar Television (Beirut), May 25, 2010.

Integrate Hezbollah into the LAF

Most Lebanese militias were integrated into the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) following the Taif Accord in 1989, which set out the power sharing agreement between Lebanon's confessional sects that ultimately ended the civil war. Many observers consider this an important precedent and argue that the same model could be used for Hezbollah in the context of Lebanon's National Dialogue and suggest that the United States should seek to influence these discussions in that direction. Hezbollah officials outwardly oppose the idea and there are no indications of a domestic Lebanese appetite for such an approach. This option also could complicate the U.S. policy of treating Hezbollah solely as a terrorist organization, creating the perception that the United States is willing to distinguish between the political wing of Hezbollah and its terrorist/militia component.

While most analysts agree that some variation of this option, as an outcome of some domestic Lebanese political process, may be the best-case scenario for resolving the issue of Hezbollah, some have expressed concerns that the end result would be a state security apparatus that is heavily influenced, if not completely controlled by Hezbollah. Others have dismissed this claim, noting that integration would represent a de facto subordination of its militia to the state command and control structure.

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