

Why Would Hezbollah Never Integrate in the Lebanese Army?

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Hezbollah's militia cannot be absorbed into the LAF because of its confessional nature, its deeply religious, pan-Islamic ideology, its current outside involvement in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, and the LAF's western orientation and armaments.

Integration of Hezbollah in the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has been a topic of many discussions. Former Lebanese President Michel Suleiman, also former commander of the LAF, called for and conducted a national dialogue about Lebanon's defense strategy in 2012 that [hinted at](#) the possibility of, first, such integration and, second, Hezbollah's interest in it. Now that Hezbollah has become the *de facto* dominant political force in the country, backed by a powerful militia, such a proposition can be both naïve and delusional. More specifically, pursuing the integration of Hezbollah in the LAF at the present time invites the dismantlement of whatever is left of the Lebanese state, weak as it is, and the potential return to a sectarian civil war. This is due to the fact that the Lebanese state currently suffers from a near collapse of political institutions, as well as the economy, coupled with the nature of the country's social fabric. Instead, Hezbollah's military arm will only be dismantled when its Shia popular base decides that its future

lies with a reconstituted secular state that monopolizes security functions instead of a military force pledging at least part of its allegiance to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It is hard to definitively know how many soldiers Hezbollah has or how many among its supporters are capable of serving in its ranks. It also has partisans and allies in other sectarian communities, including the Sunnis, the Druze, and the Christians. Its material assets are also a mystery to outside observers; but credible estimates put [the number](#) of Hezbollah fighters at 20,000 to 30,000, buttressed by a large popular base. Nevertheless, regardless of the size of Hezbollah's militia, it cannot be absorbed into the LAF because of its confessional nature, its deeply religious, pan-Islamic ideology, its current outside entanglements in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, and the army's western orientation and armaments.

Hezbollah's Confessional Nature

Despite its attempts at branding itself as an inclusive party dedicated to national defense only, Hezbollah is exclusively a Shiite force that advances Shiite interests vis-à-vis those of other confessions in the country. While it has acted since the early 1980s as a committed resistance movement—indeed, it inflicted serious harm and losses on the Israeli forces and helped end their occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000—it has maintained itself as the striking arm of the country's Shia. Since its May 2008 [military assault](#) on other Lebanese political forces in Beirut and elsewhere, it has succeeded in making itself—together with its Shiite ally, the Amal Movement—the ultimate arbiter of Lebanese politics. Its integration in the LAF is thus likely to put the Shia—only one component of Lebanon's multi-sectarian politics—in a much more powerful position vis-à-vis other confessional groups and irrevocably upset the current sectarian-institutional balance in the country.

Ideology

Hezbollah minces no words in promoting its pan-Islamic, specifically Shiite, religious identity and in [pledging allegiance](#) to the ideals of the Islamic revolution in Iran. As a creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp in the early 1980s, and as a political and military movement led by a religious elite, the party is, for all intents and purposes, an element among the Islamic Republic's geopolitical assets and an embodiment of its ideology. This has dire implications for Lebanon and stands in contradiction with the LAF's main purpose, i.e. defending the Lebanese territory. If one day Hezbollah's armed wing is integrated in the LAF, the LAF ranks will be filled with members of an ideologically and religiously aligned political movement and militia beholden to the interests and foreign policy preferences of another country at the expense of the nation it is purportedly defending. Lebanon then likely becomes fully hostage to conditions and

circumstances outside of its borders and will be expected to support Tehran's preferences and choices, rather than Beirut's.

External Involvement

As part of the "axis of resistance," which is a group of nations and movements that purportedly fights imperialism and Zionism under the leadership of Iran, Hezbollah's regional agenda has led to its involvement in affairs and conflicts outside of Lebanon's borders. In Yemen, the party [plays a role](#) in assisting the Houthis' military challenge to authority and their attacks on neighboring countries. Additionally, Hezbollah's leaders are on [excellent terms](#) with pro-Iran militias and political forces in Iraq. But its most prominent role was, and remains, its involvement in the Syrian civil war since it acted as one of the ruling Syrian political order's [auxiliary forces](#), and in fact provided crucial support at critical times to become one of the key factors that led to the survival of Assad's political regime.

As an institution of the Lebanese state, the army's *esprit de corps* is nonpolitical and noninterventionist; it does not intervene outside of the borders of Lebanon and is dedicated only to the defense of the Lebanese nation. Regionally entangled as it is, Hezbollah is not ready to abandon its role and will by default be committing the Lebanese army to its own foreign agenda, a situation that will be both dangerous and untenable.

The LAF's Armaments and Orientation

Finally, there remains serious issues of relevance to the LAF's armament, training, and funding. The United States is arguably the LAF's main supplier of arms, [providing](#) some \$2.5 billion in materiel, logistics, and training since 2006. France is another supplier, albeit in [limited amounts](#). Gulf countries, mainly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, previously under-wrote the LAF but have since 2016 [cut off](#) all assistance because of Lebanon's policy of appeasing the Islamic Republic of Iran under Hezbollah's influence.

Moreover, most, if not all, of the LAF's suppliers and supporters consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization and are unlikely to continue arming and supporting it should it integrate Hezbollah's fighters within its ranks. To be sure, integrating the party's armed wing within LAF's ranks may very well spell the complete abandonment of what for a long time has been a pillar of the western-oriented Lebanese state.

Conclusion

It is these four interrelated and important factors that prevent the integration of Hezbollah into the Lebanese army. There may still probably be some in Lebanon who wish that the party can add its military might and experience to the army's capabilities.

But that wish is misplaced as Hezbollah continues to present itself as a more sectarian and ideological organization beholden to a foreign state than is desired by most Lebanese.

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