

# Hizbollah Determined to Stick with Assad, but It's a Disastrous Policy

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## The group's backing of the Syrian regime has led to significant losses on the battlefield and rapidly diminishing support among the Lebanese people.

**A**ny air strikes targeting the Syrian regime will undoubtedly impact on Damascus's partner-in-crime, Hizbollah -- but how? The terrorist organisation has intensified its support for the Assad regime, even since bombs started going off in the Dahiyeh, the Hizbollah-dominated neighbourhood in southern Beirut.

Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was crystal clear: "If you are punishing Hizbollah for its role in Syria, I will tell you, if we want to respond to the Dahiyeh explosion, we would double the number of fighters in Syria -- if they were 1,000 to 2,000, and if they were 5,000, they would become 10,000."

Indeed, Hizbollah -- and Nasrallah himself -- have cast their lot in with Assad to the end. "If," Nasrallah added, "one day came, and required that Hizbollah and I go to Syria, we will do so."

By extension, if the terror outfit sees itself so tightly connected to the Assad regime, might a Western strike on Syria be perceived by Nasrallah as an attack on Hizbollah as well?

Some Hizbollah statements suggest that might be the case.

Pro-Hizbollah Sheikh Afif Nabulsi warned that "any [US] strike against Syria would be met by harsh responses against US interests in the region and against Israel directly." But a source close to Hizbollah told Beirut's *Daily Star*: "If the Western attack is limited to certain targets in Syria, then Hizbollah will not intervene," but, "in the event of a qualitative strike that aims to change the balance of power in Syria, Hizbollah will fight on various fronts," including "the inferno of a war with Israel," the source said, clearly referring to the possibility of the terror group firing rockets into Israel. Indeed, Hizbollah has reportedly mobilised troops in southern Lebanon.

At the end of the day, the likelihood of a reprisal attack by Syria, Iran or Hizbollah depends in large part on the scale,

duration and impact of a Western strike. If the air campaign is seen as punishment for using chemical weapons and an attempt to deter their future use, reprisal attacks are far less likely.

Hizbollah needs little excuse to lob a few rockets at Israel, so that remains possible, and the group is already trying to carry out attacks targeting Israelis around the world, so that could happen at any time as well. But, unless it feels it has no other choice, Hizbollah is not eager to start an "inferno" war with Israel just now.

Nasrallah's army has taken significant losses on the battlefield in Syria, and, even more importantly, has lost considerable support among the Lebanese for dragging an increasingly sectarian war from Syria into Lebanon. Lebanon does not want war with Israel, even if Hizbollah does.

However far Western air strikes weaken the Assad regime, all indications are that Hizbollah will stick with its erstwhile ally to the end. The writing is on the wall for Hizbollah, and that end is coming, sooner or later.

In strategic terms, the Syrian conflict is a disaster for Hizbollah in its long-term standing in both Lebanon and the region.

*Matthew Levitt directs The Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence and is author of [Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-the-global-footprint-of-lebanons-party-of-god) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-the-global-footprint-of-lebanons-party-of-god>). ❖*

*Jewish Chronicle*

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